Producing The New Regressive Left

The Case of the Pan-Arab News TV station al-Mayadeen

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PRODUCING *THE NEW REGRESSIVE LEFT*: THE CASE OF THE PAN-ARAB NEWS TV STATION AL-MAYADEEN

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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen for his belief in the project, insightful comments, and continued encouragement. This process would not have been as instructive, challenging, and creative, had it not been for you. Thank you! I would also like to thank my co-supervisor Christa Salamandra for her willingness to engage in this project from afar and for reminding me of its importance when I, at times, started to doubt. At ToRS, I would like to thank Ehab Galal for his guidance during my teaching obligations as well as for always keeping 'a considerate eye' on me; Saer El-Jaichi for our cooperation when teaching, and not least, for important talks about work and life; and Andreas Bandak, my neighbour opposite, for being such a great colleague and generous source of inspiration and advice. Thanks!

Furthermore, I would like to thank Sune Haugbølle at Roskilde University, both for sparking in me the idea to write a PhD in the first place, and for supporting me throughout the process when it became a reality. Thanks for inviting me in on your work at SIME, thanks for taking the time to be my pre-defence opponent, and thanks for showing interest and commitment. I also send my warm regards to the rest of the SIME group – thanks for including me in your discussions.

I dare not think what my three years at ToRS would have been like without my great PhD-colleagues – especially my office maids from both 3rd and 4th floor. A special thanks to Martin Schou Madsen, Marie Ørum Wikman, Thomas Christiansen, Mark Philip Stadler, Kim Frederichsen, Aiysha Abu Laban, Anne Mette Jørgensen, Jes Heise Rasmussen, and Nikolaos Olma for highly appreciated comments and conversations through the years – and, not least, for putting up with all my noise. Thanks Niko, for reminding me on a daily basis about how easy laughing can be. Outside the walls of ToRS, I would like to thank Sawsan Kassab for her invaluable help and support with the transcriptions of the broadcasts and much more – I treasured our meetings during the busy work weeks enormously. Thanks to Manni Crone, Nina Mollerup, and Sidsel Nelund for reading drafts and providing moral support and much-appreciated encouragement.

One thing is for sure: this project would not have been the same without the staff members at al-Mayadeen who took a chance, and the time to meet with me. I hope I did justice to their voices, even though our views may differ on some of my arguments. Also a very special and warm thanks to Ninette Jallov Assentoft and Camilla Maya Dam, who both – at very short notice – agreed to join me in Beirut in 2014 in order to take care of my two children while I was working. Ninette, who joined us again a year later, practically became part of the family – and I hope you will remain so!

Finally, all my love to my family – to my father, who has helped me again and again, and read through drafts at all stages; to my mother, who again and again took care of my children while I was busy working; to Bachar; and, not least, to Rita and Isak, for joining me in Beirut and for reminding me every day that there is more to life than the writing of a thesis.

Abstract

Producing the New Regressive Left: The Case of the Pan-Arab TV Station al-Mayadeen is the first comprehensive research work conducted on the Beirut based TV station, an important representative of the post-2011 generation of Arab satellite news media. The launch of al-Mayadeen in June 2012 was closely linked to the political developments across the Arab world in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, and can be seen as a direct reaction to the editorial line that al-Jazeera followed in covering those very events. Drawing on a wide variety of programmes from the station's first four seasons on air, as well as interviews conducted with several of the station's staff members, this thesis investigates a growing political trend and ideological discourse in the Arab world that I have called *The New Regressive Left*. On the premise that a media outlet can function as a forum for ideology production, the thesis argues that an analysis of this material can help to trace the contexture of *The New Regressive Left*.

If the first part of the thesis lays out the theoretical approach and draws the contextual framework, through an exploration of the surrounding Arab media- and ideoscapes, the second part is an analytical investigation of the discourse that permeates the programmes aired on al-Mayadeen. Through five chapters, I investigate the public celebration of the former Algerian resistance fighter Jamila Bouhired; the station's approach to Palestine and its relaunch of a heroic resistance narrative; the cultural talk show Bayt al-Qasid and the discussion of what it means to be a committed artist, and how that translates into supporting al-Assad's rule in Syria; the Ramadan programme Harrir Aqlak's attempt to relaunch an intellectual renaissance and to promote religious pluralism; and finally, al-Mayadeen's cooperation with the pan-Latin American TV station TeleSur and its ambitions about establishing a media network across 'the revolutionary global South'. All of this shows, I argue, the contextures of an ideological discourse that promotes progressive values inherited from a leftist tradition, although it often translates this heritage into regressive political realities.

What becomes clear from the analytical chapters is the emergence of the new cross-ideological alliance of *The New Regressive Left*. This emerging coalition between Shia Muslims, religious minorities, parts of the Arab Left, secular cultural producers, and the remnants of the political, strategic resistance coalition (Iran, Hizbollah, Syria), capitalises on a series of factors that bring them together in spite of their otherwise diverse worldviews and agendas. *The New Regressive Left* is united by resistance against the growing influence of Saudi Arabia in the religious, cultural, political, economic and military spheres alike; the depicture of Syria and *bilad ash-Sham* as the manifestation of this resistance; the rejection of the 'Arab Spring'; the belief that a global outlook is a necessary strategy to counterbalance Western imperialism; and, not least, fear for the future. This fear is rooted in the self-perception of the entities that form *The New Regressive Left*; they all see themselves as minorities constantly under threat and thus opt for the preservation of the status quo.

Dansk resume

Producing The New Regressive Left: The Case of the Pan-Arab TV Station al-Mayadeen er det første forskningsprojekt om den Beirut-baserede TV-station, al-Mayadeen – en vigtig repræsentant for arabiske satellitnyhedsmedier post-2011. Lanceringen af al-Mayadeen i juni 2012 var tæt forbundet med de politiske udviklinger i den arabiske verden efter oprørene i 2011 og kan ses som en direkte reaktion på al-Jazeera's redaktionelle linje i dækningen af disse begivenheder. Baseret på en bred vifte af programmer fra stationens første fire år samt på interviews gennemført med flere af stationens ansatte undersøger denne afhandling en vigtig og tiltagende politisk trend og ideologisk diskurs i den arabiske verden, som jeg betegner *Den Nye Regressive Venstrefløj*. På baggrund af forudsætningen om, at et medie kan fungere som et forum for produktion af ideologi, argumenterer jeg i afhandlingen for, at der gennem en analyse af dette materiale tegner sig konturen af *Den Nye Regressive Venstrefløj*.

Mens den første del af afhandlingen redegør for den teoretiske tilgang og opridser den kontekstuelle ramme gennem en udforskning af de omgivende arabiske media og ideo*scapes*, er den anden del en analytisk undersøgelse af den diskurs, som gennemsyrer programmerne på al-Mayadeen. Gennem fem kapitler undersøger jeg fejringen af den tidligere algeriske modstandskvinde Jamila Bouhired; stationens tilgang til Palæstina og dens genlancering af et heroisk modstandsnarrativ; det kulturelle talkshow Bayt al-Qasid og diskussionen af, hvad det vil sige at være en engageret kunstner, og hvorledes dette udmønter sig i støtte af al-Assad; ramadanprogrammet Harrir Aqlaks ønske om at lancere en intellektuel renæssance og promovere et budskab om religiøs pluralisme; og til sidst al-Mayadeen's samarbejde med den pan-latinamerikanske TV-station TeleSur og stationens ambitioner om at etablere et medienetværk på tværs af 'det revolutionære syd'. Jeg argumenterer for, at dette tilsammen etablerer en ideologisk diskurs, som promoverer traditionelle venstreorienterede progressive værdier, samtidig med at omsætningen af disse værdier til politiske virkeligheder ofte tager form af regressive politiske positioner.

Den ideologiske diskurs *Den Nye Regressive Venstrefløj*, som træder frem gennem de analytiske kapitler, er resultatet af en ny tværgående ideologisk alliance (cross-ideological alliance). Denne spirende ideologiske koalition af shiamuslimer, religiøse minoriteter, dele af venstrefløjen, sekulære kulturskabere samt resterne af den strategiske modstandsalliance (Iran, Hizbollah, Syrien) forenes på tværs af verdenssyn og agendaer. *Den Nye Regressive Venstrefløj* bygger således på en fælles modstand mod Saudi-Arabiens voksende indflydelse – både religiøst, kulturelt, politisk, økonomisk og militært; fremstillingen af Syrien og *bilad ash-Sham* som et symbol på modsætningen til denne indflydelse; afvisning af 'det arabiske forår'; troen på, at et globalt udsyn er en nødvendig strategi for at kunne modstå vestlig imperialisme; samt ikke mindst frygten for fremtiden. Denne frygt bunder i selvopfattelsen blandt grupperingerne i *Den Nye Regressive Venstrefløj* – de ser sig selv som truede minoriteter, der lever i konstant fare, og derfor foretrækker de status quo fremfor forandringens iboende usikkerhed.

Transliteration and quotations

In this thesis, I primarily transliterate Arabic words and titles in accordance with the system adopted by the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (INJMES), as shown below. The first time a title or word appears, it will feature in my English translation followed by the transliteration from Arabic in brackets. Subsequently, it will only appear in the English translation form. In the cases of central concepts, I have chosen to use a transliteration of the Arabic word throughout the thesis in order to underscore the exact Arabic concept. These words are:

- Iltizam [commitment]
- Multazim [committed]
- Muqawama [resistance]
- Mumana'a [literally 'opposition' or 'resistance' but used as a term for Arab regimes rejecting the US hegemony in the region]
- Ṣumud [steadfastness]
- Taqaddumi [progressive]
- Nahda [renaissance]
- Munaḍil(a) [a struggler]

Arabic words which have found their way into the English language will be written in accordance with the conventional English spelling. Likewise, I report the names of people in the conventional way that they are referred to in English (such as Gamal Abdel Nasser or Hizbollah), or in the way they present themselves (on e.g. a business card or Facebook page).

The short vowels are accounted for by a, i, and u, while the nisba-endings are represented by iyya:

ا = a	خ = kh	ص = ṣ	غ = gh	ن = n
ب = b	د = d	ض = ḍ	ف = f	ه = h
ت = t	ذ = dh	ط = ṭ	ق = q	و = w
ث = th	ر = r	ظ = ẓ	ك = k	ي = y
ج = j	ش = sh	ع = '	ل = l	ء = 'a/u/i
ح = ḥ	ش = sh		م = m	ة = ah
				ة = a

When I quote literature, I mark the quotations with "". When I quote my empirical material, whether broadcast material or interview, I write the quotations in *italic*. This also means that quotations written in italic should not be taken as an expression of my voice but rather the voice of my empirical sources.

PART I

Introduction

This study is the first comprehensive research work to be conducted on the Beirut-based pan-Arab TV station al-Mayadeen – an important representative of the post-2011 generation of Arab satellite news media. It draws on a wide variety of programmes from the station's first four years on air. I argue that an analysis of this material traces the development of an ideology that I call *The New Regressive Left,* a significant development in contemporary Arab political life. Furthermore, it is my hope that this study illustrates how ideology is produced and performed in contemporary Arab public life.

Al-Mayadeen was launched on June 11, 2012, and its establishment was closely linked to the political developments in the Arab world following the uprisings of 2011. The name, al-Mayadeen – which in Arabic means both squares and battlefields – contains several contextual references. The station was born at a time where city squares around the region played a central role for popular revolts; it promotes itself as a meeting point for all Arab citizens, just as it takes an active part on the political battlefields sweeping the region in recent years. More concretely, al-Mayadeen must be understood as a reaction to the editorial line of al-Jazeera in its coverage of the Arab uprisings, and not least, to the policy behind this editorial line.

The fact that there is a strong political ambition behind al-Mayadeen has been clear from the beginning. By re-launching Palestine as *the* Arab focal point, and by using a strong anti-imperialistic rhetoric, al-Mayadeen represents the classical *muqawama* [resistance] discourse, which has traditionally united leftist, Arab nationalists and pro-Hizbollah Islamists – in several ways, in line with the position of al-Jazeera up until 2011. However, the evident support for the Syrian regime, the outspoken rejection of Sunni Islamism and Salafism, the clear sympathy for Iran, and the prioritisation of Middle Eastern Christians and other religious minorities place al-Mayadeen in clear opposition to the mainstream pan-Arab news channels based in the Gulf – including, but not limited to, al-Jazeera.

Using this news network as a case study, this thesis demonstrates how, in a mediatised world, a TV station can serve as a forum – or even an agent – for the development of ideological discourses. The image of a politically and philosophically enlightened person, who sits alone in his study formulating new ideologies in the shape of political manifestos and dogmatic theories, seems long outdated, if indeed it ever was a reality. So where and how do new ideological transformations take place? As I argue throughout this thesis, and as I believe the case of al-Mayadeen illustrates, a TV station is not only a platform for the dissemination of already established political ideologies, or for the promotion of existing worldviews; it can equally be a forum where new ideological trends are

brought into existence. Or, in other words, through the composition of different types of programming conveying different messages, ideological concepts can be rearranged and reinterpreted, together engendering new ideologies. Thus, in the present thesis, I investigate how ideology at al-Mayadeen is being produced through broadcasts, practices, and aesthetic experiences, and how the re-composition of already existing ideological discourses establishes a new ideological stream.

I engage with the question of how images, music, cultural icons, symbols, discourses and well-known topics of discussion are used in order to create a shared ideological cosmos, where certain political views make sense. More concretely, I investigate how *The New Regressive Left* is taking form at al-Mayadeen, and how this ideological discourse challenges our tendency to divide the world into black and white – or good and bad. Thus, this thesis will equally be an exploration of the ideological ambivalence or paradox of the station's promotion of itself as the protector of modernity, political progressiveness, and civilised patriotism, as well as culture in general and committed art in particular, while its translation of these values into contemporary realpolitik results in the defence of oppressive political systems.

Lisa Wedeen showed in her ground-breaking study *Ambiguities of Domination* (Wedeen 1999) that "politics is not merely about material interests but also about contests over the symbolic world, over the management and appropriation of meanings" (Wedeen 1999, 30). Lina Khatib makes a similar argument in her 2013 book, *Image Politics in the Middle East* (Lina Khatib 2013), namely that "symbolism [is] becoming an established means of conveying political messages" (Lina Khatib 2013, 6). It is this "contest over the symbolic world" which I here explore, in order to render visible a contemporary political ideological phenomenon, *The New Regressive Left*. Thus, in line with the tradition of cultural studies, a premise for this study is to see culture as political expression, and thus the cultural sphere as an arena for ideological battles, political ambitions, and cultural wars.

The Arab uprisings in 2011 took many by surprise – the protesters on the streets, the general international public, and Middle Eastern scholars alike. The immediate reaction of many observers was unreserved enthusiasm for the young progressive activists with their democratic outlook, inspiring courage and peaceful approach. In the media as well as in academic work, a transformed and more 'modern' Arab world was depicted – Hamid Dabashi even talks about "a new worldliness", and sees the Arab Spring as the awaited end of post colonialism (Dabashi 2012, 10). After the initial academic discussions on the role of social media in the uprisings died away, the enthusiasm translated, in the academic world, into a number of (important) research projects on activist environments.[1] As things developed on the ground – in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, as well as

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[1] The first months of 2011 were dominated by discussions over the role of Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones etc. See, e.g., Rasha Abdulla: "The Revolution Will Be Tweeted" (Abdulla 2011), Jon B. Alterman: "The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted" (J. B. Alterman 2011), Francesca Comunello and Giuseppe Anzera: "Will the revolution be tweeted? A conceptual framework for understanding social media and the Arab Spring" (Comunello og Anzera 2012).

in Syria – the previous fascination over the newly discovered Arab progressiveness was replaced by the well-known preoccupation with Islamism, both among the Western public and in academia.

The present study examines an underexplored phenomenon in the contemporary Arab world, one with neither the charm of the activists nor the staged horror of Islamic terror groups, but one that nevertheless – I am convinced – will play an important role in political developments in the region in the years to come. What at one point seemed a deathblow to authoritarianism in the Arab world might in reality be the beginning of its – at least temporary – revival. Today, as the 'Arab Spring' seems increasingly remote, undemocratic regimes gain new momentum. Not only does the (relative) stability of pre-2011 provided by the authoritarian regimes attract parts of local populations, but also the international community has become less firm in its rejection of authoritarian regimes, whether new (Sisi) or old (al-Assad), as chaos and religiously motivated terrorism seem to make up the most plausible alternative.

When I embarked on this project in the autumn of 2013, I was often met with surprise or even indignation when fellow researchers learned that for the next three years I would be analysing a TV station which they perceived as being counter-revolutionary and pro-authoritarian. How could I justify focusing on an outlet representing not only an outdated but inhuman and brutal political position, when an armed conflict raged between 'good' and 'evil', they asked. In the article "Reflections on Not Writing about the Syrian Conflict", Christa Salamandra discusses the polarisation among scholars over the conflict in Syria, and concludes by stating: "Yet how to describe, let alone advocate, in a context where ethnographic empathy – understanding the Others' point of view – feels inappropriate and appears unethical? Nuance invites accusations of complicity. To evoke a perception is to be associated with it" (Salamandra 2014). Not only do I not "associate" with the editorial line but I insist on the importance of engaging with a topic even though it is highly politicalised and emotionally charged. Thus, I insist on the relevance of academic investigations of different "nuances" and "perceptions" – even those that contrast with our own political inclinations.[2] This study is not a promotion of any political agenda; rather, it is an examination of the worldview of "the Other" – in this case, the worldview of *The New Regressive Left*.

While working with a politically positioned institution such as al-Mayadeen, I have often – both in Copenhagen, Beirut and beyond – been met by fast categorisations like, *Oh isn't that the Syrian station?* Or, *Oh yes, they are funded by Iran, right?* Or, *I have heard of that station, that's the Shia one …* In the first years, I most often encountered a perception of al-Mayadeen as a pro-Assad outlet; the Shia-component became more pronounced later on. In contrast, I argue here that al-Mayadeen's ambition transcends the Syrian conflict and should be seen as a comprehensive vision of Middle Eastern and international politics. Likewise, the station has the ambition of – and is successful in – appealing to Arab audiences beyond a particular Shia community.

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[2] See e.g. Ghassan Hage's reflections on the same dilemma though in the context of Palestinian suicide bombers in the article "'Comes a time we are all enthusiasm': understanding Palestinian suicide bombers in times of exighophobia" (Hage 2003).

Al-Mayadeen offers a distinct worldview in the remaking. Not a coherent or consistent one, but rather a flexible and unbounded perception of the world, which develops over time and adapts to changing political contexts. The network's ambivalence and ambiguity is ever present, as is the resurrection of old icons, ideals and ideological concepts. Idealistic, humanistic, and democratic values are promoted together with pragmatic, populist and repressive principles. Through the combination of different types of programmes, discussions of varying topics and themes, and the employments of songs, images and icons, an ideological mini-cosmos is created, with its own rules and logics. Here, apparent contradictions are bridged – most importantly, secular voices find a much-needed space in the public, while the Sunni-Shia divide forms an important pillar of the station's foundation.

I introduce in this thesis the term *The New Regressive Left* as a central concept by which I try to capture the essence of the ideological discourse of al-Mayadeen. With the word *regressive,* I want to point at three elements. First of all, I use the term in order to make a conceptual contrast with the group of activists and revolutionaries that initiated the Arab uprisings and that, in general, is perceived as *progressive.* Secondly, by *regressive* in the meaning 'a return to a previous state', I point to an ideological return to the acceptance of compromising individual democratic rights in order to obtain certain collective political developmental goals.[3] Finally, *regressive* embraces the general tendency to look back in time rather than forward, to glorify the bygone days and apply them as the standard by which the present is measured and the future envisioned – or, in other words, the predominant role of nostalgia. It is important, though, to underscore that the term *regressive* obviously – and perhaps in a provocative way – contradicts the self-perception at al-Mayadeen, which – both at an institutional and individual staff member level – is one of being *taqaddumi* [progressive].

By the other half of the term – *the Left* – I don't imply affiliation with a specific political leftist party; rather, I refer to *the Left* as both "a political and cultural denomination" (Haugbolle 2013c, 429). On the one hand, this does include the employment of several core leftist ideological values such as anti-imperialism, anti-sectarianism and anti-neoliberalism; on the other hand, I equally use the term understood as a cultural signifier. In the case of al-Mayadeen, the songs, poems, cultural icons, etc., that the station celebrates and draws on are often part of a leftist cultural heritage, which al-Mayadeen consciously seeks to be embedded with.

It is my hope that this study captures the messiness and ambivalence of the station and, thus, the complexity of performed ideology, while at the same time proving that these different messages and views together can form an ideological stream, namely that which I identify as *The New Regressive Left.* What follows is an academic investigation of this political orientation and ideological position through an analysis of selected al-Mayadeen broadcasts, supplemented with interviews with al-

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[3] This stands in opposition to the general trend within the (Arab) Left, which during the past decades has confronted its own undemocratic past and tried to formulate new and more democratic values. I elaborate on this in Chapter 3, "Exploring Arab Ideoscapes".

Mayadeen staff members. As I hope will be clear at the end of this thesis, *The New Regressive Left* is not a unique post-2011 Arab phenomenon; rather, it is a global ideological current with strong links to a not so distant past.

My point of departure

My initial interest in al-Mayadeen was sparked by the station's pan-Arab rhetoric and heavy use of nostalgic symbols from the heydays of Arab nationalism. This well-known phenomenon in the Arab world – invoking the bygone golden era of Abdel Nasser as a unifying sentiment or shared (secular) frame of reference – has always fascinated me. Through changing times, Nasser has remained a symbol in the Arab world of "hope, unity, national purpose, social stability, and achievement" (Gordon 2000) – an icon in the Arab public memory as well as an important figure in popular culture, used to represent the Arab dream of unity and social justice (Haugbolle 2013a, 234). Yet I was puzzled by al-Mayadeen's revival of nostalgic Nasser-sentiments – what role were they to play in a post-2011 Arab world? Thus, in a time marked by public uprisings and seemingly profound political change, where new heroes had been born and the hope for a brighter and more democratic Arab future still prevailed, al-Mayadeen appeared in 2012 with a strong message about holding on to the values of the past. Nasser was referenced and a well-known rhetoric about Palestine being the key issue for the region was invoked. Al-Mayadeen seemed to rewind time and undo the uprisings. I became fascinated with the network's invocation of old ideological slogans, and set out to investigate how they were re-launched, used and promoted. Was this post-2011 Arab nationalism?

Thus, when I began this project I aimed to identify and describe *the* ideology of al-Mayadeen. One of the first sources I discovered was a list of the network's values published on its website.[4] To my immediate satisfaction, *Arab unity* ranked as the number one value. At first, I thought I had found a neat and simple point of access into al-Mayadeen's ideology – and evidence, not least, of its Arab nationalistic values – but as I delved more into the ethnographic material, I realised that it was not that simple. When I confronted al-Mayadeen staff members with the fact that Arab unity was the first value on the list, they were often surprised; they saw the project of Arab unity as either idealistic but too unrealistic or as downright undesirable. Likewise, for many, the second value on the list – *Solidarity with the Islamic world* – seemed surprising, as they expected a more secular agenda. Official values, I discovered, did not always harmonise with personal or political

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[4] http://www.almayadeen.net/ar/Home/AboutUs
- Arab unity
- Solidarity with the Islamic world
- Refusal of extremism and terrorism
- Culture of tolerance and dialogue
- Pluralism, diversity and the right to difference
- Citizenship
- Equality
- Social Justice
- The right of people to determine their own lives; to self-determination
- The right of a people to resist and refuse foreign interference or hegemony

motivations among the staff, a fact that at first challenged my assumed object for investigation, namely, al-Mayadeen as one homogeneous or coherent entity.

The potential discrepancies between the financers' agendas, the administrators' implementations, and the interpretation of the staff could not be ignored – and led me to a methodological quandary: how could I examine *the* ideology of *the* institution when none of them seemed to be coherent units, but rather to be pointing in several directions? Given this complexity, an approach that focuses on how ideology is performed or lived, rather than how it is intellectually or officially formulated, offered new possibilities. Thus, I began to examine how ideology emerges, adapts to changing contexts, and develops over time – with the TV screen as the main arena. When working with a fluid ideology concept that perceives ideology as a lived practice rather than a theoretical thought, I draw on developments within ideology studies which have evolved in recent decades.

Louis Althusser's insistence on ideology as being part of reality – not as something obscuring reality, as traditional Marxist thinking would have it – and as being "something that happens *in* us and *to* us" (Freeden 2003, 30), together with Clifford Geertz's anthropological approach to the concept of ideology, are two important starting points for the development of a contemporary ideology concept. They paved the way for seeing ideology as an embodied practice which is part of a lived reality, rather than merely a description of a thought reality. In this thesis, I place myself within this tradition, drawing on the work of Michael Freeden and Siniša Malešević. Within Middle Eastern studies, this means following the lines of Asef Bayat, Sune Haugbølle, Michaelle Browers, Christoph Schumann, or Samuli Schielke, who have all in different ways opened up our understanding of ideology as a lived concept, which therefore needs to be studied as a lived phenomenon – transformable, ambiguous and fluid. Or, in the words of Schumann, who urges us to "question the alleged unity and consistency of the ideological discourses and to look at the concrete experiences and everyday contexts of political activism and thought rather than taking the pretensions of political ideologues at face value" (Schumann 2008, 415). This also means redirecting the focus from "the level of political or intellectual discourses, with their preoccupation with putting things neatly in their place" to "the level of lifeworlds" (Schielke 2015, 16).

The broadcast productions that constitute the core empirical material in the thesis are of course constructed, composed and edited in order to convey a specific message in a *consistent* and *neat* way. Nevertheless, through programme analysis of selected broadcast material combined with fieldwork in Beirut, I hope to move beyond the immediate surface and into the messiness of performed ideology. In chapter one, I elaborate further on my theoretical approach, and explore points of access into how ideology comes into existence.

My approach (methodology, research design and empirical material)

I originally planned to combine programme analysis with ethnographic fieldwork at the station, but, as I explain below, difficulties with gaining access prompted a change in research design. The broadcast productions of al-Mayadeen, thus, have come to comprise the focal point of my study. I

complement programme analysis with interviews of staff members in order to get as nuanced and broad an understanding as possible. Choosing to focus on programme analysis entails the exclusion of other, potentially fruitful approaches, such as audience reception, production analysis or the perspectives of the journalists.[5]

Existing research on Arab media offers different methods and theoretical approaches. In her pioneering work *Dramas of Nationhood* (Abu-Lughod 2004), Lila Abu-Lughod applies a multi-sited ethnography on the culture of national television and its effect on identity in Egypt, in which she, inspired by George Marcus, follows 'the thing'. This approach takes her from television viewers in an Upper Egyptian village to urban media professionals in Cairo, and back to impoverished women household workers in Cairo, in order to follow the life of a drama serial. Christa Salamandra, on the other hand, combines in her works on Syrian drama formal analysis of the series with ethnographic fieldwork "behind the scenes" among producers, directors and script writers, looking more closely at the industry's workings, the uncertainty of the market and at the cultural producers themselves (Salamandra 2005).

Another ethnographic approach is provided by Amahl Bishara in her 2012 book, *Back Stories: U.S. News Production and Palestinian Politics* (Bishara 2012), where she offers an on-the-ground perspective of news production. Studying Palestinian journalists at work in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nablus, and on the tense roads that connect these cities, Amahl Bishara shows how US news during the second Palestinian Intifada was produced. In *Channels of Resistance in Lebanon* (Harb 2011), Zahera Harb, herself a former journalist, investigates Lebanese journalism's culture and the performance of Tele Liban and al-Manar in covering Israeli military violence in Lebanon by combining text analysis of news reports with interviews with journalists and editors.

What unites these different studies is the combination of ethnographic fieldwork with the analysis of media productions and/or audience reception, though with varying emphasis and focus. What none of them, on the other hand, offers is an institutional approach. The Arab media institution which has been studied most intensively, basically without compare, is al-Jazeera. What characterises much of this work, though, is the debate over the network's role in creating a new Arab public sphere, and thus its potential for steering democratisation in the Arab world. Less attention has been paid to actual programme analysis, or ethnographic analyses of production or reception.[6] One exception worth mentioning is Mohamed Zayani's and Sofiane Sahraoui's *The Culture of Al Jazeera* (Zayani and Sahraoui 2007), which is an investigation of the organisational culture of the network, conducted through interviews with former and current staff members within

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[5] See e.g. *Anthropology and Mass Communication* (Peterson 2003) or *The Anthropology of News and Media* (Bird 2010) for an introduction to different anthropological approaches to the study of media. See e.g. *Advancing Media Production Research: Shifting Sites, Methods, and Politics* (Paterson et al. 2016) for an introduction to the study of media production.

[6] One of the more interesting studies is Marc Lynch: *Voices of the New Arab Public* (Lynch 2006). The edited volume *The al-Jazeera Phenomenon* (Zayani 2005) also offers a critical perspective. For an example of a rather uncritical fascination in al-Jazeera, see Mohammed al-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar: *Al-Jazeera, how the free Arab news network scooped the world and changed the Middle East* (El-Nawawy and Iskander 2002).

the network.[7] Another exception is Jens Hanssen's and Hicham Safieddine's article, "Lebanon's al-Akhbar and Radical Press Culture" (Hanssen and Safieddine 2016), in which they demonstrate how an investigation of a news outlet as an institution can inform us about ideological developments and intellectual history. My prioritisation in studying the productions of only one media institution, focusing on programme analysis and interviews with staff members, renders other useful areas beyond the scope of this study. It is my hope that my decision has generated a nuanced, deep and interesting investigation into the production and performance of ideology in contemporary Arab media.

After deciding on my approach and objects of analysis, my most challenging task was the selection of programmes and episodes. A logical choice of material when studying a news station is, of course, the newscasts. Yet in order to move beyond a superficial description of **what** the political agenda of the station appears to be, I believe it is necessary to move deeper and investigate what Wedeen referred to as the "contests over the symbolic world", in order to investigate the ideological core. Newscasts might offer a fast insight into the political stance on specific events, but they are less informative of an overall worldview, the ideological mini-cosmos in which a certain political analysis seems the only logical one.

I use cultural or societal programmes and media events as my "kitchen entrance" (Jespersen et al. 2012) with the purpose of understanding **how** "structures of feeling" (Williams 1977) make this political position relevant. Consequently, I analyse: a public celebration of the former Algerian resistance fighter Jamila Bouhired; the cultural talk show Bayt al-Qasid [The Essence]; small political spots produced during the Gaza war in 2014; the Ramadan program Harrir Aqlak [Free Your Mind]; and finally the monthly programme Poder (in Spanish)/Nastaṭyʻa (in Arabic) [We Can] that is co-produced with the pan-Latin American TV station TeleSur. Through these programmes, I explore the use of icons, the use of cultural figures, the use of images and slogans, the use of intellectual capital, the use of religious pluralism as a cultural identity marker, and the use of a Third World discourse – a Southern voice of solidarity.

In spite of al-Mayadeen's relatively recent vintage, it has already generated an enormous amount of material. Although the afternoon programming includes rebroadcasts, new material is added daily, swelling the amount of material available for analysis. Thus, it has been a challenge for me to delineate a timeframe – every time I decided not to add more material, another episode or programme was broadcast which I felt the urge to include. The material I work with, though, is productions from Mayadeen's first three years – from its launch in June 2012 to the summer of 2015[8] (the more precise timeframe of each case study will be stated in the respective chapter).

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[7] In a non-Arab context, the study by Georgina Born of the BBC, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC* (Born 2004), is an important contribution to the study of media combining a long period of fieldwork at the media organization with programme analyses.

[8] One exception is Chapter 8, analysing the cooperation with TeleSur – in this chapter I have widened the timeframe to include the autumn of 2015 and the winter of 2016 in order to get enough material (the first monthly episode was broadcast in June 2015).

When selecting the broadcast material for analysis, I have sought events or programmes that evoke the essence of al-Mayadeen's worldview, while at the same time also revealing its complexity and ambivalence. Thus, the selected material, I believe, provide an insight into the ideological logic of *The New Regressive Left* and help us understand the reasoning, deductions, ideals, and values which together form this ideological current – or, in other words, how the past is read and the future perceived. I have prioritised material that draws on cultural productions or cultural figures such as poetry and music, or artists and intellectuals, as this can inform us about which cultural tradition al-Mayadeen places itself within. I believe the selected material represents what is essential to al-Mayadeen's ethos, and informs us about the station's stance on central concepts such as religious pluralism, resistance, humanism and the idea of a revolutionary South. The latter is of importance as this helps us to place the station – as well as the ideological current – within an ideological tradition. In each of the five analytical chapters, selected broadcasts constitute the basic empirical material and, thus, programme analysis the methodology. In all of them, the spoken word is central but the extra elements television media offers – sound effects, background setting, clothing, use of image, songs, a nervous laugh or a shy glance – are included whenever I considered that they would add a significant dimension to my analysis.

The field and challenge of access

When I laid out my initial project design in the summer of 2013, my intention was to conduct ethnographic fieldwork at al-Mayadeen. I hoped to gain access to the daily practices of the staff in order to get more intimate knowledge about the editorial discussions and production processes. I wanted to investigate the shared values, negotiations, compromises, and disagreements among the staff, as I imagined it would enlighten us on how a mediated ideological discourse is created. I still believe that it would have been a valuable complement to the analysis of broadcasts; however, in practice, gaining access to this field turned out to be a bigger challenge than I hoped.

When I arrived in Beirut in December 2013 for a first short pilot study, I had no contacts among the city's media-makers, save a promise from one central figure at al-Mayadeen that he would take the time to meet with me. It had been my strategy to seek out high-ranking staff as an entrance point, as I needed a person with power to allow me the access I was hoping for, and I was confident that my contact person would do exactly that. Nevertheless, things changed quickly when a kind secretary called me while I was in a taxi on my way to the meeting in order to tell me that the appointment had been cancelled. As compensation, she suggested that I could meet with one of the journalists – an offer I of course accepted. My first visit to al-Mayadeen, thus, turned out slightly differently than planned, but nevertheless resulted in an actual meeting. I was politely welcomed and given the opportunity to talk to the appointed journalist as well as a guided tour of the premises. Still, I left with a feeling that recurred throughout the fieldwork – namely, that the meeting had closed rather than opened a door. Even though the journalist was very welcoming and did his best to assist me, by the end of our meeting when we shook hands and said goodbye I had been unable to schedule any future appointments. On the contrary, I had the clear message that further access would not be easy.

The problem of gaining access as a researcher to a media outlet has already been dealt with in the literature, as this seems to be a recurring phenomenon when working with news media.[9] In regards to conducting fieldwork in a specific Arab media context, Mohamed Zayani and Sofiane Sahraoui note in the preface of their book *The Culture of Al Jazeera: Inside an Arab Media Giant*: "An independent researcher is usually received cautiously unless introduced and recommended by inner circles or members of the network. Even so, it is hard for researchers to scratch beyond the surface if they rely on the organisation itself for providing them with sources of information" (Zayani and Sahraoui 2007, 7–8).

Denied regular access to the station, I redesigned my project and returned in November 2014 with the aim of conducting interviews with people at and around al-Mayadeen – though I quickly discovered that this, too, would be challenging, for example when my first scheduled interview at the station turned out to be an hour and a half-long interrogation of me and my project – a somewhat different type of data-gathering than I had planned. Afterwards, I was taken on another guided tour through the premises and was politely escorted to the exit; once again, it was as if a door was being closed rather than opened. Zayani's and Sahraoui's reflections once again are in parallel with my experiences. They write: "When we sought some help and assistance in facilitating our visit and talking to some staff in the network, we felt that Al Jazeera was not prepared to deal with us. It was acceptable and expected to visit or call, but when it came to a long and focused visit which involved interviews, data collection and observations, the reaction was not the same" (Zayani and Sahraoui 2007, 8). Thus I quickly realised that official facilitation would not take me very far and that I would have to work my way in through other contacts. Fortunately, I had collected a few names and telephone numbers of current or previous staff members, which made it possible for me to snowball into a wider set of interlockers.

My general experience was that the higher ranking the person was, the more freely he or she would talk to me. At one point, I was in contact with a young producer who was extremely hospitable when I called him over the phone. I was welcome to meet him anytime at his office, he could help me with anything, provide other contacts etc. But when, later that same day, I went to meet him at al-Mayadeen, he was reticent; it would be better for me to talk to his boss, he preferred not to say too much, and he never gave me the promised contacts. He had clearly revised his initial openness or even been overruled by someone higher in the system. Likewise, one person who in different ways had tried to avoid talking to me was told by a higher ranking person that not only was it okay for her to meet with me, in fact she was actually required to do so to avoid leaving a bad impression. I did get an interview with the cagey person – but when I came back a couple of days

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[9] For a general discussion of this challenge, see: Peterson and Zoellner: "The efficacy of professional experience in the ethnographic investigation" (Paterson and Zoellner 2010), Paterson et al.: *Advancing Media Production Research* (Paterson et al. 2016) especially Michael B. Munnik's contribution: "When You Can't Rely on Public or Private: Using the Ethnographic Self as Resource", Born: *Uncertain Vision* (Born 2004). Sherry Ortner likewise deals with the topic in her book *Not Hollywood, Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream* (Ortner 2013).

later for the follow-up meeting she had promised me, her colleagues told me that she was ill and not at work.

Once again, Zayani's and Sahraouni's experiences at al-Jazeera are relevant. They write: "Overall, it was extremely hard to meet with people and when we did manage to talk to members of the network staff, we were often met with some suspicion which naturally affected the level of cooperation. (…) Many of the network staff we talked to were not forthcoming and some of them were reluctant to speak; even when they talked to us frankly and openly, we could feel that they were taking some unnecessary risks" (Zayani and Sahraoui 2007, 8–9).

Over a period of two years, I travelled to Beirut four times. The first visit was in November 2013 and the last in December 2015. My longest stay was a six-week period in November and December 2014. This is far from the classic anthropological ideal of long-term fieldwork, yet it proved effective. In their article "Composing Ethnography", Tom O'Dell and Robert Willim argue that seeing ethnographic work as an editing process where the researcher is composing ethnography by continually writing and rewriting, "a practice that might be referred to as a form of serial ethnography – of immersion and re-immersion in the field" (O'Dell and Willim 2011, 34) has some advantages. I believe the interrupted but continued travels to the field allowed me periods of reflection on what I hoped to gain from my next visit as well as strategies to open up the field, ideas on the topics and angles I wanted to uncover, and the important questions to be asked. Sometimes the sheer distance from the field provided clarity; at other times, it was discussions with colleagues back in Copenhagen, the exchange of experience or just some supportive words that helped me rethink my approach or rekindle my belief in the project. In addition to the concrete interviews that I conducted, my stays in Beirut added the necessary ethnographic context, which I hope will be reflected throughout the thesis.

During my research visits in Beirut, I conducted interviews with central staff members at the station – producers, talk shows hosts, journalists, and leaders of different departments. Furthermore, I had informal talks with former staff members or others associated with the station as well as with a few journalists from other news media. Some interviewees have been fluent in, and comfortable with, English and thus, doing the interview in English felt most natural for both of us; others preferred Arabic, in which cases the interview was conducted in Arabic. Likewise, some situations lent themselves to recording, whereas in others I decided against introducing a Dictaphone. On the one hand, recording the interviews captured every word and in some cases helped me signal the seriousness and sincerity of my interest to the interviewee; on the other hand, recording created a more formal atmosphere, which in situations where the interviewee was uncomfortable talking to me would have only made the atmosphere tenser. Obtaining the interviews was difficult; therefore I tried to conduct each interview in the way that made the interviewee feel most comfortable.

Thesis outline

The thesis is divided into an introduction, eight chapters and a conclusion. The eight chapters fall into two parts: Part I consists of three chapters: the first provides an outline of the theoretical framework with regards to the concept of ideology, the second draws the line of the Arab ideoscape while the third chapter discusses the Arab mediascape, which includes an introduction to al-Mayadeen; Part II consists of five analytical chapters on selected broadcast material from al-Mayadeen.

PART I

In chapter 1, **Ideology, Media and Cultural Productions – a theoretical framework**, I present theoretical approaches to the study of ideology relevant to this study; more precisely, I look into approaches to the study of ideology within popular culture and media as well as into how ideology is being studied in a Middle Eastern context. I underline that in this current study I investigate the production of political ideology rather than the disseminating of a hidden ideological superstructure in society, as has been the predominant approach in previous studies of ideology in media. I introduce rhetoric, emotions and aesthetic as central elements for the study of how an ideology is produced.

In chapter 2, **Exploring Arab Ideoscape,** I introduce Arjun Appadurais's notion of media- and ideoscape as a frame for the second and third chapter. Afterwards, I sketch out the historical context of the Arab Left – from its formative years to the debates following the collapse of the USSR. This is followed by four short sections in which I zoom in on important actors for the development of *The New Regressive Left*, namely the Syrian Ba'ath Party, The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), Hizbollah and Iran. I end the chapter by investigating the contemporary ideological disagreements dividing the Arab Left, focusing on how the Syrian conflict has deepened already existing divides. This leads me to present a typology for categorising the main currents within the post-2011 Arab Left.

In chapter 3, **Exploring Arab Mediascapes,** I provide a historical overview of the introduction of satellite media in the Arab world, focusing on the role played by al-Jazeera followed by an outline of the post-2011 Arab mediascapes. Likewise, I discuss how, in recent decades, the transnational pan-Arab public has turned into an important arena for an ongoing battle between religious and secular forces. These different contexts lead up to presenting al-Mayadeen, its history, its main staff and programmes, and its position in the contemporary Arab mediascapes. I discuss the issues of economic funds and ownership of al-Mayadeen. Furthermore, I provide some new audience statistics made for this thesis by the research company Ipsos.

PART II

In the first empirical chapter, **The Creation of an Icon: the Case of Jamila Bouhired**, I use al-Mayadeen's celebration of Jamila Bouhired, the former Algerian female freedom fighter, as a case study to investigate the use of cultural icons in the formation and communication of an ideology. The celebration of Bouhired was a huge public event, in which the young station invested a lot of

time and energy. With billboards in the streets of Beirut, intense promotion of the event on the TV screens and regional and international guests flown in for the evening event, a lot was clearly at stake. This was a central move in the station's strategy for legitimacy. I demonstrate how the event enabled al-Mayadeen to present itself as a guardian of national resistance against imperialism, and of progressive pan-Arab values. I also argue that the setup of the celebration functioned as an iconisation of Bouhired, and that the reinvention of her as an icon was used to legitimise and strengthen the contemporary militant resistance movement, Hizbollah.

In the second case study, Chapter 5, **Celebrating the *Muqawama* through Words, Images, and Songs: the Case of Palestine**, I examine how the question of Palestine is narrated by al-Mayadeen, using music videos, flashes and the launch of Handala animations as my focal point. In its approach to Palestine, the station deliberately breaks from the victimised discourse that has been predominant in the Arab public in recent decades, and instead opts for a more heroic narrative of the Palestinians – and Arab history more broadly. A noticeable way of making Palestine visible at all times is the intensive use of short spots with clear political messages. Here images, slogans, poems, and songs function as *aesthetic acts* and *aesthetic expressions* in the dramatization of a certain ideological discourse: namely, the promotion of the heroic and resisting Arab. Likewise, the broadcasting of Naji al-Ali's famous drawings of Handala turned into short animations is used as an instrument to boost the perception of Palestinians – and to revitalise the time of Handala. I end the chapter by including the marking of the one-year occasion of the Gaza 2014 war, where al-Mayadeen ran a campaign called *The same confrontation,* referring to Israel and Islamic State. I discuss how this juxtaposing establishes a certain ideological logic by reading contemporary conflicts through the lens of a historical well-established enemy image.

The third empirical case, **Re-launching *Iltizam* through Leftist Cultural Figures: the Case of the Cultural Talk Show Bayt al-Qasid,** is an analysis of the weekly cultural talk show, Bayt al-Qasid. I investigate how the longstanding virtue of *iltizam* [commitment] is revived and used as a quality marker when identifying authentic art or artists – and how al-Mayadeen sees itself as offering a media platform for these artists. In Bayt al-Qasid, the host Zahi Wehbe creates an intimate space in which a rhetoric argument for supporting Bashar al-Assad is build up. Track records of the artists' progressiveness are established, and seemingly sincere discussions of ideological doubts and dilemmas, as well as personal grief, unfold. Through personal reflections and recognitions by these cultural figures – which qualify as *multazim* [committed] – a life-long or sudden support for the al-Assad rule is conveyed. The overall narrative is not a blind celebration of al-Assad or a glorification of his role in the Syrian war, but rather an ambivalent and emotional argument for why a committed, progressive – and often leftist – intellectual finds it necessary (or natural) to support him. Thus, the public esteem of the guests and the nostalgic idealistic values connected with *iltizam* are employed in order to legitimise support of Bashar al-Assad.

In the fourth analytical chapter – Chapter 7 – **Walking a Tightrope: the Role of Religion,** I examine the ambivalent role that Islam has at al-Mayadeen, and how the station at the same time underplays, criticises and promotes Islam. Equally, I look into how religious minorities and the

concept of religious pluralism is used as a benchmark for how civilised a society is, and thus undergirds from yet another angle the progressiveness of political systems that confront (militant) Sunni Islamism. My point of departure is the Ramadan programme from 2015, Harrir Aqlak, which stars the Kuwaiti thinker and writer Abdel Aziz al-Qattan, but I also touch on religious broadcasting more generally at al-Mayadeen, not least the weekly show about Christians and Christianity in the region, Ajras al-Mashreq [The Bells of the Levant]. The format of the 30 episodes of Harrir Aqlak is simple: al-Qattan, wearing his traditional Gulf costume and placed in different beautiful Lebanese nature settings, lectures for 20 minutes without any interference. Al-Qattan's identity as a progressive man from the Gulf is an important element in building up his legitimacy, while his employment of the Quran as the main point of reference offers a religious authority to his intellectual reflections. Two central messages of the programme are the establishment of Sunni Islamism in general and Saudi Wahhabism in particular as the ultimate enemy (pointing back at the previous chapter and the juxtaposing of Israel and IS in relation to the Gaza war in 2014) and the discussion of change versus stability (pointing forward to the following chapter and the Latin American example of true revolutionary change).

In the sixth and final analytical chapter, **The Re-launch of Third Worldism: the Voice of the Global South and the Cooperation with TeleSur**, I turn to how al-Mayadeen positions itself in a globalised world. While nostalgic pan-Arab sentiments were predominant in the first couple of years, al-Mayadeen promotes itself to a growing extent as part of an international anti-imperial movement ranging from Latin America, through Russia to Africa. In this picture, Latin America in general plays a central role as an important location for the resistance against Western imperialism, while the pan-Latin American TV station TeleSur (based in Venezuela), and Cuban state TV constitute the central axes of an emerging network of Southern TV stations. The monthly programme Poder, a co-production between al-Mayadeen and TeleSur, and my interviews with, respectively, Wafy Ibrahim, the central figure of the cooperation, and Wafa Saraya, the hostess of Poder, form the point of departure of this chapter. I show how a certain narrative about a revolutionary South fighting against an imperialistic West is established, and how the two channels see the West as continuing its old colonial practices, only through new strategies. Likewise, the cooperation with TeleSur strengthens the leftist discourse of al-Mayadeen, as Latin America is portrayed as a role model for the realisation of contemporary socialism; thus, an outspoken Left-Right dichotomy finds its way into al-Mayadeen. Through the cooperation with Latin America, al-Mayadeen buys into a new version of Third Worldism while globalising its ideological discourse. In this way, the struggle against Israel, the failure of the Arab uprisings and the revival of leftist values are all elevated from specific Arab phenomena to being elements of a global struggle against imperialism and neo-liberalism.

PART I

Ideology, Media and Cultural Production – a theoretical framework

In this study, I am looking at the production and performance of the political ideology *The New Regressive Left* in a contemporary Arab media context, and, more precisely, at how it is playing out on the Arab satellite news TV station al-Mayadeen. This chapter places the present thesis within the already existing literature on ideology and ideology in cultural productions and presents the theoretical framework which this thesis lies within.

The strong tradition within media studies and cultural studies of studying ideology by investigating media's replication of existing power structures in society peaked in the 1970s, and was followed by a tendency to avoid the concept of ideology altogether – often replacing it with a focus on identity.[10] Thus, while there is a comprehensive amount of older literature analysing ideology in media but employing a rather different concept of ideology that the one I seek to engage with in the present thesis, while studies on media and ideology of a more recent date are surprisingly rare (Downey, Titley, and Toynbee 2014). Consequently, I have found it necessary to look beyond the obvious academic literature on ideology and media in my search for a theoretical base and concept clarification. Drawing on theoretical developments within political science, sociology and anthropology and, not least, ethnographically and empirically grounded studies of ideology in a Middle Eastern context (though not necessarily a media context), I here present my applied theoretical approach.

Ideology is a concept which, in line with, e.g., culture, has been defined, understood, and studied in various ways through the years. Overall, ideology has come to mean two separate things within different scholarly traditions and has been investigated in accordance with these meanings, namely, descriptively and critically (Corner 2016; Storey 2015; Malešević 2002). Within political science, the concept of ideology has traditionally been understood as a body of systems of (political) beliefs concerning the ideal organisation of society, which can be described, named, and distinguished from other opposing systems of belief. Within cultural studies, media studies, and other disciplines employing critical analysis, the concept of ideology, on the other hand, has been used to explore the super-structural organisation of society or to expose the (underlying) power relations within society (class, gender, race etc.).

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[10] See e.g. Toby Miller (ed.): *Television Studies* (Miller 2002), for a review of the study of television.

In accordance with the concept of ideology applied within political science (which I will refer to as political ideology), Marxism is merely one of several 'isms' describing a coherent worldview, in clear contrast with other ideologies such as Liberalism, Socialism, Fascism, etc. In regards to the critical ideology concept, Marxism plays a special role as it provides the theoretical base; the understanding of ideology as an (unconscious and negative) superstructure of society is the fundamental point of departure for critical analysis. What both understandings share, nevertheless, is a concept of ideology which is fixed, coherent, and absolute. What I wish to discuss in this chapter is the renewed understanding of ideology which has risen from the dust of the deconstruction of postmodernism, one in which ideology is understood as a fluid, fragmented and transformable concept without clear boundaries, beginnings or ends. I also look at how to apply this concept when studying mediated ideology today.

In the remains of this chapter, I first discuss new approaches to the study of ideology within political science and, thus, new ways of perceiving the concept of ideology – namely as fluid, adaptable, and ever-evolving – and how these new trends are becoming visible in the study of ideology in a Middle Eastern context. I continue by looking into how ideology has been understood and studied within cultural studies and media studies and how the new approaches within political science are also visible within these two academic traditions. Finally, drawing together these different trends, I sketch out how I approach the production of everyday ideology in a media context.

New approaches

During the postmodern turn, with the end of grand narratives and deconstruction as the mantra, the concept of ideology understood as big universal rigid systems was challenged if not overruled entirely by concepts such as identity and discourse. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the bipolar world system only further challenged the survivability of the then notion of ideology. Books such as Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) or Karl Dietrich Bracher's *The Age of Ideology* (1985) are examples of how scholars approached ideologies as a grandiose, coherent, often frightening phenomenon – and, to different degrees, something of the past.

In recent years, the study of ideology within political science has been – and still is – experiencing a revival, or maybe even a rebirth, as the contemporary understanding of ideology, and thus the approach to it, is significantly different than in the past. Siniša Malešević's book *Identity as Ideology: Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism* (2006) is an example of this attempt to reintroduce ideology. Malešević writes in the introduction: "Clinging to the concept of ideology is highly uncool given the vogue in multiple identities, identity crisis and identity politics. My aim in this book is to be distinctly uncool by opting for ideology over identity" (Malešević 2006, 3). The reason behind this decision is, in accordance with Malešević, that "identitarian discourses often soothe, naturalise and normalise the ideological currents of our everyday social reality" (Malešević 2006, 4) and may fail to see the outward structural, historical and ideological underpinnings.

What scholars of social science like Malešević are incorporating into the concept of ideology as they re-launch it is the insight gained from the cultural turn of the 1970s and '80s, represented and initiated by, e.g., Clifford Geertz's influential volume *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (1973). Geertz's work led to a reconfiguration of theory and method in the study of culture "from explanation to interpretation and 'thick description'" (Bonnell and Hunt 1999a, 2) and had – together with other important scholars of that time[11] – a profound effect on the study of society and the social.

In the same book, Geertz also laid some of the foundation stones for a more fluid and symbolic understanding of ideology, outlined in his reflections on the concept of ideology in the essay "Ideology as a cultural system" (Geertz 1973, originally published in 1966). Here, he put forward an anthropological understanding of ideology by applying his overall notion of culture – thus, ideology becomes systems of symbolic meaning, or "systems of interacting symbols, as patterns of interworking meanings" which "transform sentiment into significance and make it socially available" (Geertz 1973, 207). By introducing *ideology as a cultural system,* Geertz breaks away from a reductionist as well as functionalist employment of the concept, and instead opens the field up for a symbolic reading of the concept (LaCapra 1988, 377).

It is this academic contribution that sociologist Siniša Malešević builds on when he attempts to liberate the concept of ideology from its functionalist and structuralist heritage. In his rehabilitation of the concept, he poses three needed steps of action: to move from structure-centred approaches to actor-centred approaches; to shift focus from function to form; and finally, to apply these two tools to the study of the different articulations of ideology (Malešević 2002, 100). Malešević calls for studies of content and form rather than functionality, but a content analysis that moves beyond the descriptive level by differentiating between the normative (official) level and the operative (practised) level. In order to capture the second level, Malešević continues, we have to move the attention from party programmes and manifestos and include mass media, school text books, political rallies etc. (in relation to this present thesis, this means moving beyond the official statements – such as the list of values on the website – and engaging with the actual productions and the people working at the TV station). With this actor-oriented approach, Malešević argues that the emphasis is no longer on whether particular ideas or values are true, "but rather on what they consist of, what kind of feelings and emotions they provoke, what kind of language they use, what they offer to their followers, what kind of action they provoke, and how they operate on normative and operative levels" (Malešević 2002, 107).

Another development of fundamental importance for the new understanding of ideology are the contributions of the three Marxist theorists Karl Mannheim, Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, who, according to Michael Freeden, have "transformed our conception of ideology from the

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[11] Other important names are: Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. For a further discussion of the 'cultural turn', see Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt's introduction to the volume *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Bonnell and Hunt 1999b).

transient epiphenomenon Marx and Engels had made it out to be into a permanent feature of the political and opened the way to removing some of its pejorative connotations" (Freeden 2003, 12). Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) modified the Marxist understanding of ideology by shifting the concept away from being merely a tool of the state to a practice within society (Woolcock 1985; Freeden 2003, 19-25). Louis Althusser (1918-1990) adopted and further developed Gramsci's idea of 'ideological state apparatus' as consisting of and exercising power through churches, schools, media, culture, military, and family, and he insisted that economic, political and cultural factors are all determining elements in gaining ideological hegemony (Freeden 2003, 25-30). Likewise, he further developed Gramsci's idea of ideology being a social practice and, according to Stuart Hall, Althusser then presents ideology as a conceptual framework "through which men interpret, make sense of, experience and 'live' the material conditions in which they find themselves" (Hall about Althusser, in Hall 1980, 32).

Like Malešević, the political scientist Michael Freeden has, through much of his work, insisted on the continuing relevance of the concept of (political) ideology, which he sees as mapping the political and social world for all of us. Further developing the thoughts of Althusser and others, he argues that we are all ideologists and that "we produce, disseminate and consume ideologies all our lives, whether we are aware of it or not" (Freeden 2003, 1). At the same time, he introduces a new and more flexible understanding of ideology and argues for the notion of ideological "core concepts", which can be composed and combined in endless and ever-changing ways. He writes: "an ideology is like a set of modular units of furniture that can be assembled in many ways (…) Through diverse arrangements of the furniture we can create very different rooms, even by using the same units. That is why identical political concepts can serve as the building blocks of an entire series of disparate ideologies, for the same unit (concept) may have different roles (or meanings) in two separate rooms (or ideologies)" (Freeden 2003, 52).

Furthermore, Freeden push for a break away from "the 'great men' or 'great books' approach", where political thought is celebrated as "the product of elites" and "the construction of holistic and comprehensive systems of thought" (Freeden 2007, 12). Instead, he wants to direct attention towards the "laying bare of the thought-processes and thought-practices that societies exhibit" (Freeden 2007, 14). This shift of attention towards the mapping of thought-practices in society, and the perception of ideology as an ever-present and natural aspect of social life, has parallels to cultural studies, which I return to later. First, however, I discuss below how these new theoretical approaches have been applied in a Middle Eastern context.

The study of ideology in a Middle Eastern context
In a Middle Eastern context, the same development in the understanding of ideology is visible. In recent years, scholars have tried to break away from the rigid understanding of ideology as whole and comprehensive systems of ideas stated in manifestos or theoretical writings, and most often

studied on the basis of intellectual history.[12] The former approach to ideology was clearly manifested in the classical narration of the ideological developments of the 20th century, as a struggle for political influence and public support between two competing and incompatible movements, namely, secular Arab nationalism and religiously based Islamism. With this approach, the 1950s and '60s are described as the heydays of secular Arab nationalism, the military defeat to Israel in 1967 as the turning point, and the 1970s and '80s as the decades where Islamic revivalist ideologies gained the hegemonic position in both political and public life.[13]

This narrative is today undergoing revision; an important example of a rereading of the specific Arab nationalism-Islamism schism is Sami Zubaida's article "Islam and Nationalism: Continuities and Contradictions" (2004).[14] Here, Zubaida argues against the simplified narrative of two clashing and mutually exclusive movements, and instead points to the historical similarities between the two. Not only are they born out of the same historical events – the encounter with European colonialism and collapse of the Ottoman Empire – the founders of the two movements have, in various ways, insisted on an interrelation: where secular Arab nationalists "lauded Islam as the peculiar genius of the Arab nation and the crowning glory of its history", Islamists assigned the Arab language a distinguished role (Zubaida 2004, 409-10; Browers 2009). As a result, the two movements share several "core concepts" – to use Freeden's expression – such as anti-imperialism and transnational ideals. An indication of the movements' attempts to address the same issues is the fact that a noticeable number of followers 'converted' from secular ideologies to Islamism after 1967 – which additionally ensured an exchange of not only ideas, but also individuals. Zubaida's point of ideological interconnectedness is an important principle for the understanding of al-Mayadeen, where different ideological elements from different movements are brought together.

The rigid description of Islamism replacing Arabism was furthermore challenged by the fact that a shared Arab identity was still very much alive after 1967, a fact that was only reinforced by the growing pan-Arab media landscape, which developed through the 1990s.[15] An alternative approach suggested that Arab nationalism had transformed from a political ideology to a cultural identity (as

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[12] Albert Hourani's *Arab Thought in the Liberal Age* (1962) is the classic study of Arab intellectual history which has formed the basis for the study of Arab intellectual life for decades. See also Suzanne Kasab: *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (Kassab 2010) and Ibrahim Abu-Rabi': *Contemporary Arab Thoughts* (Abu-Rabi' 2003).

[13] See, e.g., Adeed Darwisha: *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (2003), Fouad Ajami: *The Arab Predicament* (1981) and *The Dream Palace of the Arabs* (1998), Bassam Tibi: *Arab Nationalism: Between Islam and the Nation-State* (1997). An alternative analysis is found in Michael Barnett's *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiation in Regional Order* (1998), in which he appoints the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and not the defeat in 1967 as the final blow to Arab nationalism – until 1990, he writes, Arab nationalism was still "the rules of the game of regional politics" (Barnett 1998, 236).

[14] Examples of new approaches to the understanding of nationalism and thus also to Arab nationalism are: James Gelvin: "Modernity *and* its discontents: on the durability of nationalism in the Arab Middle East" (1999) or James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (ed.): *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (1997).

[15] See, e.g., Shibley Telhami: *The World through Arab Eyes* (2013) for surveys on the identity feelings of Arab populations. See e.g. Marc Lynch: *Voices of the New Arab Public* (Lynch 2006) for an analysis of al-Jazeera's role in creating a feeling of shared identity among Arab populations.

Malešević pointed out as a general academic trend). Christopher Philips's book *Everyday Arab Identity: The Daily Reproduction of the Arab World* (2012) is an example of this new 'identity approach', and he employs the terms 'Old Arabism' and 'New Arabism' to differ between the two perceptions. Philips investigates how Syrian and Jordanian state TV both reproduce an Arab identity (alongside, not in opposition to, state and religious identities) by "flagging" a pan-Arab identity.

Where Philips focuses on Arabism as an identity, other scholars, inspired by theoretical developments outside the regional studies, have insisted on the relevance of the concept of ideology – though in its renewed version. Christoph Schumann, Michaelle Browers, Sune Haugbølle and Samuli Schielke[16] are all important examples of how scholars have been able to grasp the complexity and ambiguity of lived ideologies by moving away from merely looking at theoretical manifestos and instead combining different types of material, such as ethnographic fieldwork, biographies, media, cultural productions, or cultural icons.

In her ground-breaking book, *Political Ideology in the Arab World* (2009), Michaelle Browers shows how Arab nationalists, Islamists, socialists and liberalists have tried to find common ground in their opposition to the then-authoritarian ruling regimes. In this connection, she introduces the term *cross-ideological alliance* as central for understanding the political and ideological landscape in the Arab world. Using the Kifaya movement in Egypt and the Joint Meeting Parties in Yemen as her case studies, she concludes that – in a pre-2011 Arab world – there were signs of significant (pragmatic) attempts of rapprochement and accommodation between the different ideological movements as well as important limitations to the level of cooperation (Browers 2009, 16).

Browers is not alone in pointing out these emerging *cross-ideological alliances* which – in spite of the historical hostility – saw the light in the 2000s, especially in Egypt. Dina Shehata and Maha Abdelrahman, for example, have also pointed out how different ideological groups were motivated to meet around a democratic discourse (in opposition to the authoritarian regimes), resistance towards Western military dominance in the region, and an anti-Israeli/pro-Palestinian agenda, in fluid and continually negotiated cross-ideological alliances (Shehata 2010; Browers 2009; Abdelrahman 2009). These studies have been important contributions to a more flexible understanding of ideology, to a moving away from ideas of fixed and clearly opposing ideological groups towards looking for complex and ambivalent ideological exchanges and cooperation. Likewise, the late Christoph Schumann has pushed for an updated ideology concept in his work on liberal ideology in the Arab world. In his article "The 'Failure' of Radical Nationalism and the 'Silence' of Liberal Thought in the Arab World", he urges us to "question the alleged unity and consistency of the ideological discourses and to look at the concrete experiences and everyday contexts of political activism and thought rather than taking the pretensions of political ideologues at face value" (Schumann 2008, 415).

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[16] Schielke uses the term *grand schemes* rather than ideology, and is less concerned with political ideology and more with the "lifeworlds" of individuals than the three other mentioned.

Echoing this, Sune Haugbølle argues that "we must abandon the idea that ideologies are finite and cohesive, and instead study the processes of boundary making between them and the re-reading and re-writing of history that contributes to the formulation of new ideological positions. This can be done most productively through a combination of ethnography and analysis of mass-mediated texts and images. Simply put, if we want to comprehend how ideology is formed, we must look at life-worlds, ontologies, and the public spheres in which they are shaped, examining a variety of public culture that informs public debate, as well as less public formations such as political parties, fan cultures, and media with limited circulation" (Haugbolle 2012). Thus, while Haugbølle argues that in spite of the drastic changes in Arab political culture after the uprisings in 2011, it still makes sense to "retain the big families of Arab ideologies: leftism, liberalism, Islamism and (Arab) nationalism", he also insists on the need to reform ideology studies in the Middle East by "a marriage between the traditions of what Michael Herzfeld has called 'cultural ideology' and more traditional intellectual history and political science" (Haugbolle 2012).

Another attempt to present a more flexible way of capturing people's worldviews is outlined by Samuli Schielke in his outstanding book, *Egypt in the Future Tense* (2015). Here, he employs the notion of *grand schemes*[17], by which he refers to "persons, ideas, and powers, that are understood to be greater than one's ordinary life, located on a higher plane, distinct from everyday life, and yet relevant as models for living" (Schielke 2015, 13). By this notion, he wants to shift the focus from political or intellectual discourse, where ideas are coherently articulated, to a focus on the lifeworlds of contemporary Egyptians in order to investigate "what people try to accomplish by taking a discourse seriously, pursuing an idea, embodying a rationality, and with what consequences" (Schielke 2015, 13, 16). Schielke's approach is enlightening because it not only insists on acknowledging ambivalence and ambiguity as part of life, but also because with *grand schemes,* he introduces a concept that has enough coherency to form a "model for living" while at the same time having an in-built demand for incoherency. He writes "we should take the less perfect stories very seriously, and claims to harmony, unity, and perfection should strike our curiosity and compel us to explore what such claims actually entail" (Schielke 2015, 19).

These four scholars constitute important pillars in my approach to ideology in an Arab context. Schuman's insistence on using alternative empirical material and looking beneath the surface, Browers' concept of 'cross-ideological alliances', Haugbølle's integration of cultural production and cultural figures as being central for ideological formations, and Schielke's acknowledgement of the imperfect as a fundamental premise are all important points of inspiration. In the following section, I turn to the concept of ideology within cultural studies and discuss how the concept has been used when studying popular culture in general and media in particular.

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[17] He introduced this notion in 2010 in "Second thought about the anthropology of Islam, or how to make sense of grand schemes in everyday life" (Schielke 2016) and expands further on the concept, together with Liza Debevec, in their edited book *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes. An Anthropology of Religion* (Schielke og Debevec 2012).

The study of mediated ideology – ideology in mass media

The new approaches to the study of everyday ideology described at the beginning of this chapter point to mass media as an obvious field for the study of ideological formations and everyday practices. The idea of turning to popular culture as a space for studying ideology in society was, in fact, already introduced in the late 1950s with the publication of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and Raymond William's *Culture and Society* (1958). Both Hoggart and William had a background in English literary studies but were interested in including popular culture as valuable source material, and experimented with employing their methods of textual criticism from the field of literary studies onto popular culture in order to study the structures of ideology through which society reproduces itself. These theoretical and methodological initiatives developed through the following decades into the inter-disciplinary school of thought, cultural studies.

The scholarly tradition of cultural studies was from the outset strongly inspired by critical Marxism and especially Gramsci's and Althusser's respective contributions to the development of traditional Marxist ideology understanding. They paved the way for an understanding of ideology as a social practice, a practice which is also exercised through culture. The school of cultural studies used these theoretical contributions to argue that culture is neither simply dependent on nor independent of economic relationships. Rather, cultural and economic factors interact, and together with political realities, shape a society. It is these social practices, or these more or less unconscious superstructures in society, reflected in cultural expressions, which cultural studies has explored and exposed through critical analysis.

In spite of the fact that many studies conducted within the tradition of cultural studies have had a tendency to depict a rigid or even dogmatic perception of ideological superstructures, Raymond Williams had already dealt with the importance of a more subtle and complex approach to ideology by 1977. In his book *Marxism and Literature* (1977), he problematised the perception of ideologies as finished products – dogmatic, coherent and static systems – that do not reflect the real world, which is always fluid and in motion. He is "concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs are in practice variable (…)" (Williams 1977, 132). New sets of ideas are taking form while others slowly – or sudden – are ebbing away. Williams captures this social (not individual) experience in the notion "structures of feeling". Williams, thus, added an important dynamics and sensibility to the concept of ideology, which is important if we want to move closer to an understanding of **how** ideology takes form through lived lives and everyday-practices rather than **what** is proclaimed to be lived or believed. This sensitivity towards reflecting the ever-changing sentiments of life rather than promoting politicalised dogmatic analyses is important, and talks to both Freeden's and Malešević's stress on an understanding of ideology as a phenomenon which is in constant motion, adapting to changing contexts, exchanging ideals and values with other thought-systems etc. Thus, it is this (to some extent overlooked) tradition within cultural studies which I find inspiring and relevant for the present study.

The insistence on popular culture as relevant empirical material has made mass media an important research field within cultural studies. However, the new theoretical and methodological approaches offered by cultural studies also had an important impact on media studies both theoretically and methodologically. A central example of this scholarly exchange is Stuart Hall's article "Encoding, decoding", on how messages are produced, circulated, consumed and reproduced, which has played a central role in the revision of the role of the audience as active readers rather than passive receivers of a message. In the article, Hall furthermore introduces ideology as an explanatory factor of why a media consumer does not necessarily *decode* the intended or *encoded* message of the media producer, or what he refers to as 'systematically distorted communication'. Hall, thus, aims to break away from "the lingering behaviourism which has dogged mass-media research for so long" (Hall 1980, 131) and instead open up a more complex understanding of the consumption of messages.[18]

During the 1970s and '80s, a strong tradition of studying and exposing the presence of ideology developed within media studies. Ideology was approached though critical analysis, with little inspiration from the descriptive tradition of political science (Corner 2016, 266). Media scholars studied magazines, TV programmes, newspapers, news, commercials and other types of mediated content in order to explore the conscious or unconscious replication of societal power structures. It was argued that media institutions' and media productions' portrayals of e.g. women, black, working class, or minority groups in general, fed into already existing power structures in society, and thus supported oppression, inequality or discrimination.[19] Though the ideology concept employed in many of these studies was far from the descriptive one of political science, it was dominated by some of the same rather rigid and static qualities.

Later on, through the 1990s – probably as part of a larger tendency of academia retreating from leftist perspectives – ideology critique in media studies, as in cultural studies, vanished (Corner 2001; Thompson 1990, 6). This happened to such an extent that John Downey (et al.) in an article from 2014 on ideology in media studies noted: "There's no ideology critique!" (Downey, Titley, and Toynbee 2014). Downey then tried to counteract this by reemploying Stuart Hall's article "The rediscovery of 'ideology': return to the repressed in media studies". With few exceptions, the study of political ideology in media has on the other hand throughout all the years, been a neglected field.[20]

Today, two of the most important (and interlinked) contributions of cultural studies are connected to empirical and methodological strategies. The insistence on the relevance of studying popular culture in line with fine art was an important opening of the field, and the insistence on 'reading' all different types of cultural products – even social practices or institutions – as 'texts' in line with the traditions of literary studies broadened out and reformed a methodology (Turner 1996, 81). It is

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[18] Hall introduces three modes of reception: the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position, and the oppositional position.

[19] See e.g. Todd Gitlin:"Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment" (1979).

[20] An example of an exception from this trend is Jeffrey Jones: "Fox News and the Performance of Ideology" (2012).

these theoretical developments which lie behind the possibility of treating broadcast productions – and even al-Mayadeen as an institution – as readable texts.[21] In the following section, I give an outline of the theoretical frame of the thesis, building on the approaches described above. I present how I reconnect ideology and media, as I see media productions and institutions as spaces not only for the reproduction of existing ideology but also for the transformation and creation of new ideological formations.

Producing ideology through practices and performances – methodological considerations

In order to pursue the theoretical framework outlined above and to investigate ideology as a lived and performed phenomenon, when engaging with the broadcast and fieldwork material in the analytical chapters of this thesis I investigate how central (ideological) concepts are discussed and perceived, and how this relates to former perceptions within a Arab leftist tradition. I focus on the use of cultural productions, symbols and figures that are part of a shared (leftist) Arab cultural heritage and I consider the use of rhetoric, emotions, and aesthetics as central for the understanding of an ideological current. The theoretical premise for using this "kitchen entrance" (Jespersen et al. 2012) is that all of these elements not only tell us descriptively about the ideology; they are also integrated parts of what make up the ideology. Tod Gitlin writes in his article "Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment", from 1979, that "Commercial culture does not *manufacture* ideology; it *relays* and *reproduces* and *processes* and *packages* and *focuses* ideology that is constantly arising both from social elites and from active social groups and movements throughout the society (as well as within media organisations and practices)" (Gitlin 1979, 253). I want to challenge this statement – that commercial culture does not manufacture ideology – and instead argue that mass media and popular culture are doing exactly that, i.e., producing ideology, because the way that ideology is mediated is not only a communication strategy but part of what makes up the ideology itself, as Alan Finlayson argues in his article "Rhetoric and the Political Theory of Ideologies" (2012).

Finlayson shows that the way, or **how**, an ideology is communicated forms an important element of the ideology itself. He writes: "the rhetorical acts that emerge are not merely manifestations or expressions of the ideology but part of what it is" (Finlayson 2012, 759). In order to fully understand an ideology, one has to investigate the means by which it is communicated and include that aspect in the identification of the ideology; thus, he argues for the relevance of integrating aspects of the rhetorical tradition into the political theory of ideology and introduces the three classical modes of persuasion within rhetoric, namely Ethos (credibility of the sender), Pathos (appealing to the emotions), and Logos (appealing to the logic), and shows how each mode contributes to the composition of ideology.

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[21] For a further discussion of what constitutes a text, see: *Anthropology and Mass Communication* (Peterson 2003, 59-85).

Ethos relates to how to invite audiences to accept an argument because of who is making it, and to who can fill the role as the carrier of authority. Or, put differently, who is the personification or embodiment of an ideology? *Pathos* relates to the role of emotions, and how emotional tenor is part of what makes up an ideology. So the ways in which each ideology employs different emotions, and how the emotional tone distinguishes one ideology from another, is actually part of what makes up the ideology. Finally, *Logos* refers to the strategy of employing realities taken for granted, or of presenting certain pictures of a situation (stressing some parts, while playing down others) – or, in other words, part of an ideology is how it convinces an audience that certain conclusions follow naturally from certain premises. Finlayson argues that together these three elements form important strategies for the composing and promotion of an ideology, which, in line with 'concepts' (the morphological analysis of Michael Freeden) and 'signifiers' (the discourse analysis of Ernesto Laclau), need to be understood as part of the nature of an ideology.

Finlayson's stressing of emotions (or Pathos) as "important elements of ideologies" is important, and is in line with Freeden, who also argues for the importance of including emotions when understanding an ideology. Freeden writes in his article "Editorial: Emotions, ideology and politics" (2013): "Emotions perform three morphological functions for political thought. First, they arrange the space available for a particular concept through emphasising it (…) Second, emotions discriminate among existing or legitimate concepts through according them relative salience (…) Third, emotions weld concepts together or prise them apart, that is, they augment or diminish the cohesion, even equivalence, among them" (Freeden 2013, 4-5).

My point of departure is to look at media not only as places for the dissemination of ideology but equally as spaces where ideology comes into existence and is continually being developed, or, in the words of Sune Haugbølle: "This production [of ideology] takes place on multiple levels of society but involves, crucially, the circulation of discourse, sounds, and images in mass media" and he continues "people form thought patterns promoted by the enjoyment of the aesthetic and moral qualities of cultural production such as songs. In the process they not only internalise ideologies, but remake – produce – ideologies" (Haugbolle 2015, 181). Jeffrey Jones also includes the aesthetic element – or what he terms *aesthetic acts* and *aesthetic expressions* – in his analysis of Fox News's employment of ideology (Jones 2012; Jones 2013). Aesthetic expressions are "the stylistics or poetics that dramatize (…) ideological thinking" and he argues that the network's morning talk show Fox & Friends "routinely brings ideology to life through its dramatic performances" (Jones 2013, 188). Not only is a cultural icon of importance through his or her *ethos,* but a cultural production itself – whether a TV programme or a piece of music or poetry – becomes central for the production of ideology as its *aesthetic* expression constitutes an integrated element of the ideological current.

In this context, Althusser's notion of 'interpellating' is of relevance. This is a notion which he introduced in 1972 in order to describe the constitutive process "where individuals acknowledge and respond to ideologies, thereby recognizing themselves as subjects" (Nguyen 2016). Thus, the notion of interpellation is part of Althusser's disintegration of ideology as a constant superstructure,

and his introduction of ideology as the result of an ongoing circular relationship between the individual and external structures. In accordance with Matthew Sharpe, the aesthetic experience can be seen as both a "prototype of and ideal for ideological interpellation", given that the individual before the work of art "feels her/himself as part of a community" (Sharpe 2006, 117), and part of a shared ideological cosmos.

Just as rhetoric, aesthetics and emotions are elements of what constitute an ideology, so is the medium through which it is communicated. The medium of TV suggests certain opportunities and limitations for what can be communicated and how – format, interaction with audience, etc. Likewise, the fact, that al-Mayadeen is a news network and not, e.g., an entertainment TV channel or a fashion magazine, offers the possibility of creating a particular ideological realm. Jeffery Jones argues in his article "Fox News and the Performance of Ideology" (2012), that the news genre itself is vitally important in making statements into facts – in another context, political (or other types of) statements would remain merely opinions. Thus, there is an important reciprocal relation between the newscast and the programmes at al-Mayadeen – while the newscast creates a context of a factual and provable reality, the thematic programmes broaden out this political reality through discussions, interpretations and statements on other aspects of society – and together they have the potential to form a whole ideological cosmos.

Applying Dominick LaCapra's statement about media's role in shaping culture – "media such as television and film are not simply neutral technologies but active forces in shaping and transforming culture; the product they create is distinctive" (LaCapra 1988, 384) – onto ideology implies that the TV medium and what it offers in terms of the possibilities and limitations in regards to format, use of sounds and images, space for rhetoric, dissemination of emotions etc. is an active force in shaping and transforming ideology. Jon Alterman writes about the TV medium: "As a medium, television has a tendency toward strong story lines that integrate words and images. Television is emotional and engaging in a way that few media can be, and despite being heavily edited, television gives the impression of spontaneity and verisimilitude, giving it even greater impact" (Alterman 2011, 111).

These considerations over what actually contributes to the making of an ideology have methodological implications, as they allow me to use the rhetoric, the emotions, and the aesthetic expressions which are communicated in the broadcasts (of a TV medium) as entrance points to the investigation of an ideological current. Thus, e.g., al-Mayadeen's heavy use of nostalgic sentiments is not only external wrapping, but a core internal component of *The New Regressive Left* – and central to the quality of the regressive element of the ideology. In the following, I examine the notion of nostalgia further, both because it constitutes a key element of the discursive setting or ideological sentiment at al-Mayadeen, and also because it is a recurring notion throughout the analytical chapters, which binds together the different analytical elements.

Nostalgia

A central example of an *aesthetic expression* or a *discursive setting* at al-Mayadeen is the station's play with nostalgia. A romantic longing for the past, for a 'golden age', is ever present in the different programmes – whether that 'golden age' is the days of the prophet Muhammed, the days of Abdel Nasser, the days of Arab imperialism represented by the image of Andalusia, the days of a more secular society with more liberated women, more Arab solidarity, more culture, a stronger state, political art – or just the longing for a time where one still expected better things to be waiting in the future rather than to be a memory of the past. As I will elaborate on in the analytical chapters, these nostalgic emotions are evoked through different (aesthetic) strategies, including by the use of images, songs, cultural figures, themes of discussion, and narratives.

This *structure of feeling* towards the past is evoked as a strategy to legitimise or delegitimise the present, and as Esra Özyürek writes in her thought-provoking book, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (2006), "the representation of the past became an arena for struggle over political legitimacy and domination. (…) nostalgia can become a political battle ground for people with conflicting interests (…) by creating alternative representations of an already glorified past, they [marginalized groups] can make a claim for themselves in the present" (Ozyurek 2006, 154). Thus, nostalgia is more than anything about the present, in spite of its immediate concern with the past. As will be clear in the analytical chapters, the struggle over how symbols and concepts of the past can be read in the present is a central and ongoing element for the production of ideology at al-Mayadeen, in questions like: what does the legacy of Jamila Bouhired imply today? Who owns the right and ability to revitalise the intellectual *nahda* [renaissance] of the late nineteenth century? How can one guard and stay loyal to ideals such as *muqawama* [resistance] *taqaddumiya* [progressiveness], *iltizam* [commitment], or *thawra* [revolution]? As al-Mayadeen forms answers to these questions, an ideological current takes shape.

Svetlana Boym writes in her important book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) that nostalgia is paradoxical, as it simultaneously unites and divides people. She writes "*algia* – longing – is what we share, yet *nostos* – the return home – is what divides us". She continues, "it is the promise to rebuild the ideal home that lies at the core of many powerful ideologies today" (Boym 2001, xvi). Thus, al-Mayadeen or *The New Regressive Left,* claims to know how to rebuild this ideal society, how to bring us back to a modernity of past values.

Svetlana Boym differentiates between *restorative nostalgia* and *reflective nostalgia:* she argues that "restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming" (Boym 2001, xviii). During the celebration of Jamila Bouhired, the al-Mayadeen host Kamal Khalaf asks rhetorically why the station has chosen to celebrate this old icon from the past, and adds *is it a reawakening of history in order to get some warmth it in this cold Arab time and get into nostalgia? Or is it to shake the dust off the current reality in an attempt to re-comprehend the concepts of today and to correct the path by reconsidering consciousness?* In other words, is it reflective or restorative nostalgia? In al-Mayadeen's productions, I argue, both types of nostalgia are present –

sometimes the glory of the past is invoked merely as a pacifying fast fix, at other times the past serves as a guiding point for the reestablishment of a potential future. In both cases, though, it keeps an overall retrospective *aesthetic expression*.

Returning to Özyürek's work, she argues that "contemporary Turkish modernists experience the present as a decay of a former modernity" (Ozyurek 2006, 11). The political struggle in the 1990s in Turkey, between secularists and Islamists, meant that the two opposing groups "utilized different discourses of modernity in order to prove themselves modern". For the former group, the longing for a Kemalist modernity created a nostalgic take on modernity. This nostalgic modernity, Özyürek argues, "is a political ideology, as well as a discursive and a sentimental condition" (Ozyurek 2006, 19). In the work of Christa Salamandra, this same longing for a past that was more progressive than the present is also important. In her article "Creative compromise: Syrian television makers between Secularism and Islamism", she introduces the term 'structural nostalgia in reverse', with reference to Michale Herzfeld's notion of *structural nostalgia*[22] (Salamandra 2008a, 181, 182; Herzfeld 2005). She uses this term to describe the Syrian drama makers longing for a strong state, for the Baathist socialist project, and not least for the regulation and state support which served as protection against the uncertainty of the (Saudi-dominated) market. As is the case in Özyürek's analyses in a Turkish context, the past comes to represent modernity in the shape of a strong secular state – an idealisation of the past, or rather a sentimental construction of one specific reading of the past. The same longing for the modernity of the past is ever present at al-Mayadeen – the artists were more committed or *multazim* (see Chapter 6), the religious tolerance higher (see Chapter 7), the resistance against imperialism stronger (see Chapter 4 and 8), and the Islamic thinkers more progressive (see Chapter 7).

The emotion of nostalgia is not, if we follow the thoughts of Finlayson and Freeden, merely a communication tool used to promote an ideology, but a constituting element of the ideology itself. The fact that 'history without guilt'[23] – as Michael Kammen describes the phenomenon of nostalgia – is consciously integrated in the broadcasting of al-Mayadeen is illustrated by the reflections of a journalist from the station, Zainab as-Saffer, on the past and the present: *At this specific moment and this watershed or so to say, where everybody is talking about extremism and the takfiri* [accusing others of being unbelievers] *trend, or whatever. It's good to talk about this from the current affairs point of view (…). But it is also good to let the people remember the times, the good times when we used to have people like Jamila Bouhired, and we used to have people like Gamal Abdel Nasser, we used to have people like many others. I think they are very fundamental in our lives. Those who have paved the way for resistance, for facing oppression, persecution – in a very solid way, standing on a solid basis. It is not a matter related to sectarianism, confessionalism, denomination, or whatever, or any kind of faith or religion, it is related to nationalism. To this ideology, that you know, moved the person, and let the people come together (…). This is the most*

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[22] By the term "structural nostalgia", Herzfeld refers to the longing for an age before state intervention became a necessity to sustain decent social lives – for a time in "which the balanced perfection of social relations has not yet suffered the decay that affects everything human" (Herzfeld 2005, 147).
[23] Cited by Boym (Boym 2001, xiv) from Michael Kammen: *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 1991, p. 688.

important. It is a humanistic perspective. It is a perspective relating to the values of the people (personal interview, Beirut, 13.11.2014). Thus, in the guiltless past, humanistic values flourished and it is a declared ambition of the station to make people remember these golden times. Throughout the analyses, it will become clear that for *The New Regressive Left* the past provides the ideals, inspiration, and the models for the future.

Conclusion

The scholarly tradition of studying media and ideology is heavily connected with the predominance of Marxism within academia in the 1970s. My study is not situated within this tradition; rather, it is an attempt to suggest an alternative approach, inspired by the latest developments within ideology studies. I draw on both descriptive and critical approaches to the study of ideology, but hope to move beyond this schism by focusing on the everyday practices of ideology. That al-Mayadeen is a political institution brought to life in this world by its funders in order to promote a certain political agenda is beyond doubt, but my argument is that what comes into existence day-by-day, broadcast after broadcast, is more complex and more comprehensive than the original ambitions. Rather than merely promoting a certain political stance on a specific political event, the composition of different programmes, the use of ideological concepts, cultural heritage, rhetoric, emotions and aesthetics together forms a whole – an ideological cosmos. This is not an unambiguous whole. On the contrary; lived ideology is fluid, adaptable and contradictory.

As I mentioned in the introduction, very early in this project it became clear for me that I would have to move beyond merely the official ideological statements (the normative level, to use Malešević terminology) in order to capture what is at work at al-Mayadeen, and instead investigate the operative level through analyses of broadcast material (Malešević 2002). Employing Freeden's flexible construction approach in the study of a media outlet means a break away from looking for one hegemonic and unique ideology, whether on a descriptive or a structural level, but rather identifying and investigating ideological *modular unites of furniture* and *building blocks* and trying to understand **how** ideologies are produced through everyday practices and mediated performances.

In a Middle Eastern context, scholars such as Browers, Haugbølle, Schumann and Schielke have in different ways contributed to a renewal of the study of ideology, breaking down former rigid expectations of ideologies as being clearly defined and accessible through theoretical documents and official manifestos. Today, it is obvious that ideology is part of everyday life, a practised and lived phenomenon which needs to be studied through everyday practices, cultural productions, or lived political lives. With this study, I hope to contribute to this literature, just as I hope to show that by studying a news TV station one can come to understand an ideological current which has come into existence in recent years.

The ideology which I am trying to capture is not a coherent, well thought-through product which only needs to be communicated to the awaiting audience; rather, it is being created through compositions and communication. With reference to Finlayson, the communication strategy itself is

part of what makes up the ideology. Political developments on the ground, reactions from viewers, the skills and personal beliefs of staff members, and good or bad luck are all unknown and, to a certain degree, uncontrollable factors, which all play their part in the ideological composition and development. My choices of material as well as my focus in the analyses move beyond a merely descriptive analysis. I look for everyday practices of ideology in, e.g., the use of iconic figures, art productions, cultural concepts, nostalgic images, or discourse settings. I do not consider these mediated practices merely ways of communicating an already existing ideology, but rather, I see them as part of what makes up the ideology itself. Thus, mediated practises and performances together form an ideological whole, which I call *The New Regressive Left*.

The building blocks being employed at al-Mayadeen are well-known ideological concepts, many of them closely connected to the heritage of the Arab Left, such as *muqawama* [resistance], *iltizam* [commitment], *al-a'dalah al-'ijstimaiya* [social justice], or *taqaddumiya* [progressiveness]. In order to appreciate this ideological heritage, in the following chapter, I provide a short historical overview of the Arab Left, and not least its relation to different forms of Islam.

Exploring Arab Ideoscapes

This current chapter and the following one, "Exploring Arab Mediascapes", together draw the outlines of (selected) contemporary Arab ideo- and mediascapes, which al-Mayadeen is a part of and manoeuvres within. After a brief discussion of Arjun Appadurai's concept of -*scapes*, the focus of the present chapter is the Arab Left. I present a short historical outline of the formation and development of the Arab Left, followed by a discussion of four central actors – for al-Mayadeen and *The New Regressive Left* alike – namely the Syrian Ba'ath Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), Hizbollah, and Iran. I conclude the chapter by zooming in on the post-2011 Arab leftist ideoscapes, and try to sketch a typology for the contemporary Arab Left.

The concept of -*scapes* was originally introduced by Appadurai in *Modernity at Large* (1996), in order to capture the "the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes" in a globalised world (Appadurai 1996, 33). In accordance with Appadurai, *mediascapes* refer both to "the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios) (…) and to the images of the world created by these media" while *ideoscapes* are concatenations of images which are "often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of the states and the counterideologies of the movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it" (Appadurai 1996, 35, 36). *Imagined communities* today thrive across national borders and are no longer only reflected in national states, as Benedict Anderson[24] saw them; as a consequence, Appadurai talks about *imagined worlds*, of which mediascapes and ideoscapes form dimensions or building blocks.[25]

The trans-nationalisation of media and ideas is a global phenomenon, but in an Arab context the existence of a shared language and a shared cultural identity has the potential to bind people together across national borders to an extraordinary level, and thus, must be encountered theoretically. While the academic research on Arab media over the past two decades has been dominated by the concept of the *public sphere* – often with reference to Habermas[26] – I opt for Appadurai's notion of -*scapes* as it captures the contemporary global flow of culture, media, ideas, and money.[27] This allows us to move beyond the academic discussions of how to adjust Habermas'

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[24] Anderson writes: "The convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation" (Anderson 1993, 46).

[25] The three other dimensions are ethnoscapes, technoscapes and financescapes.

[26] Jürgen Habermas: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1989, originally published in German in 1962).

[27] After al-Jazeera "scooped the world and changed the Middle East" (El-Nawawy and Iskander 2002), Middle Eastern scholars found a renewed interest in studying Arab media – not least from a perspective of a *New Arab Public Sphere*. An overwhelming fascination of the so-called al-Jazeera phenomenon amongst Western scholars combined with a frustration over the continued survival of the authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, when other parts of the world were being swept by 'a wave of democratization', led many observers to pin their hopes onto the democratizing prospects of Arab satellite TV in general, and al-Jazeera in specifically (Hafez 2008, 2; Sakr 2001, 3–8). Marc Lynch is one scholar who has contributed to this discussion of democracy and the new Arab public sphere. In *The Voice of the*

public sphere concept to the present time and space – and whether his concept is (or is not) limited by his original democratic, European national state, and bourgeois class-bounded context.[28] Likewise, the ideological current *The New Regressive Left* is not coming into existence as an isolated Arab phenomenon; rather, it has links to a global tendency and talks to global ideoscapes, as my last chapter, "The Re-launch of Third Worldism: the voice of the global South and the cooperation with TeleSur", clearly illustrates. Furthermore, the fluid and complex quality of *-scapes* captures the fragmented post-2011 Arab media and ideology realm and talks to the ideology concept that I introduced in the previous chapter. Finally, Appadurai's notion offers an opportunity to place the ideological and the media realms within the same conceptual frame and, thus, helps to make visible the interconnectedness between the two.

Before continuing, a few words on the notion of the 'Arab Left' are necessary, as it is both a vague and broad concept. It is a notion that includes a variety of ideological currents, political movements, and individuals often opposing each other and in internal struggles – just as it covers different national specific circumstances. Additionally, it is a notion that involves not only regional and national Arab contexts; being leftist also means being part of an international ideological movement with additional ideological and political splits and developments. In the context of this thesis, I use the notion of the Arab Left as a broad notion to include a variety of different movements such as Arab nationalists, socialists, Nasserists, Ba'athists and communists that adhere to any leftist ideology, just as both individuals and groups with or without party affiliations are included.

Jens Hanssen and Hicham Safieddine write about the notion that "Ideologically, the term 'the Arab left' designates a broad progressive position in Arab politics, both transnational and local, that historically coalesced around secularism, anti-imperialism, class struggle, Arab unity, and the liberation of Palestine. While most self-identified Arab leftists agree with these principles, myriads of differences have persisted regarding the meaning of each of the above progressive principles as well as questions of priority, timing, velocity, tactics, and strategy" (Hanssen and Safieddine 2016). It is within this multi-faceted context that I argue that a concept such as *The New Regressive Left* makes sense – challenging the progressiveness of parts of this ideological group. In the following, I outline the relevant historical context of the Arab Left for the understanding of *The New Regressive Left*.

New Arab Public (2006), he rejects the idea that al-Jazeera can bring about democracy to the region, but nevertheless insists that it played a leading role in the creation of a "genuine public sphere" (Lynch 2006, 33, 247). Lynch, like many others, relates to the notion of public sphere from a Habermas perspective. Applying Habermas' concept on a contemporary Arab context, though, is not unproblematic – the supposed democratic setting is not there and the arena of the public sphere is not limited to the borders of one nation state. These circumstances make Lynch add that the Arab public is "a weak Public" as it "remains cut off from any viable means of directly influencing policy outcomes" (Lynch 2006, 248).

[28] For a critique of Habermas' concept of being Eurocentric see: Muhammad Ayish: *The New Arab Public Sphere* (2012); for a introduction of counter-publics, see: Nancy Fraser: "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" (Fraser 1990); for a discussion of his concept in a globalised world, see: Nancy Fraser: "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: on the legitimacy and efficacy of public opinion in a post-Westphalian world" (Fraser 2007).

The formative years

The birth of the Arab Left has links stretching back to intellectual developments which took shape during *al-Nahda* [the renaissance] period in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century (see Chapter 7 for a further introduction to *al-Nahda*). Over the following decades, these intellectual and theological reformations developed into two main opposing streams, namely, secular nationalism and Islamism, with the former paving the way for the birth of leftist ideology (Hourani 1983). Growing Arab self-awareness and aspiration for greater autonomy during the end of the Ottoman Empire, and direct experience with European imperialism following World War I, made anti-colonial struggles and the concept of Arab nationalism important elements for secular intellectual thinking. The Bolshevik revolution in 1917, furthermore, became a source of inspiration. Thus, from the beginning, an important interconnectedness – though not necessarily friendship – between leftist ideology and Arab nationalist movements was a given.

During the following decade, communist parties were established in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan, Iraq and Palestine (Haugbolle 2016a), but Marxism in the Arab world was from the outset, and to a large extent, an intellectual, upper class phenomenon, that soon came to struggle with the rigid dogmatism coming out of Moscow, especially after Stalin came to power. The ideological restraints of Marxist-Leninist thinking made it difficult to adapt the ideology to local conditions, such as colonialism, societies dominated by farmers rather than workers, the important role of Islam etc. Nevertheless, leftist political organisations in general came to play an important role for political developments in the post-World War I Arab world, not least due to their engagement in the struggle against colonialism – an engagement that also meant that French and British mandate powers did their best to suppress the rise of these new political groups. Likewise, worker unions came to play an important role in organising the growing local workforces in their struggle for improved rights (Halperin 2005).[29]

The heyday of the Arab Left as a broad political current is traditionally seen as the period between the end of World War II, with the gain of national independence, and the Arab military defeat to Israel in 1967. In accordance to Hisham Bustani, the discourse of the Arab Left "was formed in the era of Third World national liberation movements in the wake of World War II" (Bustani 2014, 35). During these decades, different combinations of nationalism and socialism played very important roles in political life, as they seized power in several countries – Nasser in Egypt, the Ba'ath party in Iraq and Syria, Front de Libération Nationale (FNL) and Ben Bella in Algeria and, later, Qaddafi in Libya – but also in Jordan, Palestine and Yemen leftist ideologies stood strong. Thus, in these important and formative years, secular and leftist ideologies shaped Arab political life and dominated both the ideo- and the mediascape. In spite of this seeming success, the Arab Left has from early on in its development been internally divided and marked by political competition in the struggle for power. Not only does the Left consist of many different fractions and groups, but ruling

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[29] For an investigation of the establishment of the Communist movement as well as the growing influence of the worker unions in Egypt in the years between the First and the Second WW, see Tareq Y. Ismael and Rifāʿat al-Saʿīd: *The Communist Movement in Egypt, 1920-1988* (Ismael and Saʿīd 1990).

regimes (often leftists) have in many cases also deliberately played different leftist groups off against each other by to co-opting some and eliminating others.[30]

The achievements of the Left in gaining power were not without problems. The way to power had often been through military coups and the strategies employed for consolidating power, together with the prioritisation of socio-economic modernisation discourse, meant a disregard towards democratic values.[31] This led to an important split, initiated by a group of leftist intellectuals from Palestine, Lebanon and Syria in the early 1960s. They were inspired by the British New Left and motivated by frustration over the authoritarian character of Nasser and the Ba'ath Party in general, and the USSR-loyal ideological style laid out by Khaled Bakdash, the leader of the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon, in particular (Haugbolle 2016a, 67). These ideological reflections turned out to be a foretaste of what the disappointment in 1967 would bring about at full speed.

The defeat of 1967 and the exposure of the failure of the ruling regimes – not only militarily but also politically more broadly – stimulated different ideological and political developments within the Left. For many intellectuals and politically engaged people, a common denominator was a strong feeling of the importance of breaking with the ruling Arab regimes. For some, this meant a turn to the rising Islamist movements; for others, it meant a radicalisation of their leftist beliefs – a current often referred to as the New Arab Left. For the latter case, the revival of the fight for Palestine was central, and soon the civil war in Lebanon also became an important and concrete military scene (Hanssen and Safieddine 2016, 197). In contrast with the ruling regimes' rhetorical support for Palestine and promotion of leftist values, these new groups – such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Organisation for Communist Action in Lebanon – fought for their beliefs "gun-in-hand" (Haugbolle 2016a, 68). Not everybody abandoned the ruling parties, though; part of the Left felt the threat of the growing influence of Islam, and saw the secular state as the best protection against the Islamisation of society. In this way, important ideological divisions were established; divisions which are still relevant today.

Even though the oft-told story about how 1967 was *the* turning point leading to the death of Arab Nationalism and secular ideologies more general, and to the rise of Islamism, is certainly in need of some adjustments, important ideological transformations did take place in the following decades. During the 1970s and '80s, the Islamist revivalism in society at large had profound effects on

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[30] In general, communists in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and beyond lived under suppression and prosecution by ruling regimes, whether led by Nasser, al-Assad or Hussein (Jabar 2001, 95). In Syria more specifically, the strategy employed by Hafiz al-Assad was, in 1972, to establish the Progressive National Front (PNF) – an institutionalized coalition of the Ba'ath party with a group of tolerated, smaller (leftist) parties. The remaining leftist parties were banned (Perthes 1997, 3). This strategy not only co-opted a potential opposition but, furthermore, divided the Left over the question of whether to cooperate with the state or not – a dilemma which is still haunting the Left today. An important example of this division was the departure from the Syrian Communist Party (SCP) of a sizeable faction headed by Riad at-Turk who refused to join the PNF – they continued working under the name SCP-Political Bureau (George 2003, 87).

[31] This neglect of democratic values was to a large extent in line with the dogma of the Soviet Union. The USSR not only delivered the ideological goods of the Arab communist parties, but also played an important role as the ally of several Arab countries during the Cold War.

ideological and political life, which a secular Arab Left had to relate to. In spite of the fact that communist groups reached their peak during the Lebanese Civil War, Palestinian leftist resistances groups experienced an international reach, and Arab nationalism remained "the rules of the game of regional politics" until 1990 (Barnett 1998, 236), the superiority of secular values was no longer taken for granted. On the contrary, Islamist groups succeeded in appealing to the broad public in ways which the Left never had, and the ruling regimes feared the political Islamist opposition movements to the extent that they tried to adapt to the religious sentiments on a rhetorical level. This changing environment challenged the previous legitimacy of the secular leftist ideologies, and (further) alienated the two main opposition streams of the ruling powers (leftists and Islamists) from each other – a conflict that was further underwritten by an oft-used strategy of ruling powers, playing the two groups off against each other.

The next blow (or release, one might argue) for the Arab Left was the collapse of the USSR. The USSR's downfall was naturally felt by leftist individuals and parties around the world, but the traditionally strong connection between the Arab communist parties and Moscow left this part of the Arab Left in a fundamental search for identity. In particular, the Left in the Levant was affected by events, Faleh Jabar argues, as the Magreb had been under the influence of Western European critical Marxist thinking the previous decades to a larger degree (Jabar 2001, 101). This existential crisis of the international Left was, in an Arab context, further challenged by the defeat of the Lebanese National Movement[32] in the Lebanese Civil War (Haugbolle 2016a, 68). On top of that, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 pushed into the ideological discussion a question over which ideals to prioritise – anti-authoritarian or anti-imperialist.

Together, these different developments left the remains of an ideological current in a deep state of self-reflection. Whereas the defeat in 1967 had led to a radicalisation of parts of the Left, the collapse of the USSR in general initiated discussions over the importance of political democracy, rather than socio-economic transformations (Jabar 2001, 91). For a number of individuals, this resulted in leaving their party – some stayed engaged in politics but as independent intellectuals, others withdrew from political life altogether, in favour of a career in the growing industry of civil societies and NGOs. What was central in both cases, though, was a search for liberal and democratic values. A third group similarly left politics, disillusioned, and saw in the cultural and media field a space for promoting their secular and socially progressive beliefs (Sing 2015, 155, 164). This development is important, as it strengthened the secular character of the cultural sphere at a time where religious values were increasingly finding their way into the field of cultural production, and thus intensified the cultural sphere as a battlefield site between religious and secular values. I return to this conflict in the following chapter, in the section "Religious broadcasting in a secular space?".

During the 2000s, a new and interesting rapprochement between different oppositional groups – including, but not limited to, leftist and Islamist groups – took place on both an ideological and

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[32] The Lebanese National Movement (LNM) was a coalition during the Lebanese Civil War, made up by leftist, Muslim, and Palestinian forces based in West Beirut.

political level, described by Michaelle Browers as *cross-ideological alliances*. Leaning on a democratic discourse and motivated by the lack of alternative strategies for challenging the existing powers, these groups joined forces. More or less pragmatic alliances were formed on the basis of a shared resistance against both the ruling authoritarian regimes and Western-Israeli imperialism. On an ideological level, Arab nationalists and leftists more broadly had to acknowledge the importance of Islam as well as the Islamists' success in gaining support from the public. The Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS)[33] is an illustrative example of how leftist intellectuals have adjusted former rigid insistences on secular values and embraced Islam. During the 1990s and 2000s, the centre hosted five big conferences under the title of the National-Islamic Conference, bringing together a wide spectrum of leftists and Islamists from "Hizbullah to the Lebanese Communist Party, from Hamas to the PLO and PFLP, and from the heads of writers' and lawyers' syndicates to university professors from various Arab countries" (Browers 2009, 81). The controversial as well as pragmatic nature of this attempted cooperation meant that sensitive issues such as the status of women or religious and ethnic minorities and secularism versus the role of Islam in society were neglected in favour of anti-imperialistic, anti-Zionistic and anti-globalisation discourses, and an agreement over the importance of preserving the *umma* [nation] (Browers 2009, 101).

As sketched out above, the Arab Left has from the very beginning been a complex, internally divided and changing body. Developments from 2011 have only underscored already existing disagreements and often created new ones as well. Old discussions over what it essentially means to be a leftist, and how this is translated into political priorities and lived lives, have once again been brought to the surface. At the end of this chapter, I return to investigating the contemporary leftist ideoscapes, but before that, I zoom in on four central actors in this context: namely the Syrian Ba'ath party, the SNNP, Hizbollah, and lastly Iran. These actors are of central importance as together they provide the "ideological core concepts" (to use Freeden's terminology) of al-Mayadeen – the secular and progressive leftist values and the resistance and anti-imperialistic struggle combined with an acceptance of authoritarian principles in the name of preserving the two former values. All four actors – the Ba'ath party, the SSNP, Hizbollah, and Iran – are suppliers of these three ideological pillars, though in different shapes and to different extents. It is this heritage that I – in the following four sections – lay out, before in the last section of this chapter, zooming in on the post-2011 Arab Left and trying to sketch out a typology that can help us understand the contemporary leftist ideoscapes.

The Ba'ath Party
Al-Mayadeen's promotion of core leftist ideological values is beyond dispute, but it focuses on a certain current within the Arab Left – one that, to a large extent, draws on the heritage of the Syrian Ba'ath Party. The Arab Ba'ath Party was founded in Syria in 1940 by Michel 'Aflaq, a Greek Orthodox Christian, and Salah al-Din Bitar, a Sunni Muslim, in 1953, it merged with the Arab

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[33] The Center was founded in 1975 and is based in Beirut. It brings together academics and intellectuals who share a belief in Arab unity – over the years this is, to a growing extent, understood as a federal construction in line with the EU.

Socialist Party and adopted the name The Arab Baʿath Socialist Party. The Baʿath ideology spread to most Arab countries but only in Syria and Iraq did it come to play an important and ruling role in political life – in Syria, the Baʿath Party became the second largest party in the election in 1954, and it has been in power since 1963. Due to ideological disagreements, the party spilt into two branches – an Iraqi and a Syrian – which until 2003 and the US-led invasion of Iraq had been in an irreconcilable conflict.

Baʿath in Arabic means renaissance or resurrection, and the party has from its outset built on a combination of Arab Nationalism, Arab Socialism and the struggle against imperialism as its ideological core, wrapped in romantic and nostalgic language. In accordance with Nikolaos Van Dam, the Baʿath "wanted a united secular Arab society with a socialist system, i.e. a society in which all Arabs would be equal, irrespective of their religion" (Dam 2011, 17). Though the ideological discourse seemed clear from the outset, the actual policy was challenged – not only by ideological disagreements (cf. the Syrian-Iraqi split) – but by changing political realities. The progressive ideals of socialism, secularism, Arab nationalism and resistance against imperialism have all remained important rhetorical slogans, but have equally been overrun by political pragmatism.

In spite of socialism being an official component of Baʿathism, after gaining power in 1970 Hafez al-Assad introduced the so-called Correctionist Movement, which maintained socialism as a tenet in the rhetoric of the ruling party but in fact actually meant a shift to state capitalism (Perthes 1997, 3). Throughout the 1970s and ʿ80s new initiatives, further underpinned the move away from socialism and culminated with the investment law of 1991, widening the scoop for private investments (Perthes 1997, 50-59). When Bashar al-Assad inherited the presidency from his father in 2000, economic liberalisation was top of his political agenda and a focal point of his modernisation discourse (Perthes 2004, 32). In spite of the continued steps towards a liberalisation of the Syrian economy, self-sufficiency, staying free from the economic reform programmes of the World Bank and the IMF, and providing the remains of a social state offering hospital service, education programmes, and subsidies of basic goods for its citizens have remained part of the Baʿath identity.

The secular values of the Baʿath ideology did not mean discharging Islam all together; on the contrary, but rather than seeing Islam as an Arab national religion, it was cherished as a central part of Arab national cultural heritage, of importance for Muslim as well as Christians. Like other leftist parties advocating secularism and pan-Arab sentiments, the Baʿath Party had a strong appeal within religious minorities as the stressing of Arab identity rather than Muslim identity was seen as having the potential to give them higher equality of status. During his years of rule, though, Hafez al-Assad had to realise that Islam in Syria was more than merely a cultural shared heritage – it was equally a vital political force which, by the end of the 1970s, was the main opposition movement. The strategy employed in order to counteract the challenge was to "blur the borders between state and society so as to transform the conflict from one between an allegedly corrupt and authoritarian clique and Sunni Islam to one between moderate Islam and a de-stabilizing, reactionary and extremist Islam" (Khatib 2011, 232). Thus, the secularism of the 1960s was replaced with a state

seeking to take control over Islamic revivalism by boosting and co-opting selected religious groups, and promoting a state-authorised Islamic message. This strategy was only further exploited by Bashar al-Assad during his first decade of rule, confirming the fall of Ba'athist secularism. In spite of this clear political strategy, secular values and the image of Syria as a safe-haven for all religious minorities remains a component of the Syrian state's self-perception.

A central element of not only Ba'ath ideology but of Syrian self-perception at large has been the image of Syria as the "beating heart of Arabism" (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami 2002, 142) as well as the bearer of the legacy of *Bilad ash-Sham* [Greater Syria][34]. The idea of Syria being the guardian of the lost components of *Bilad ash-Sham* – Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan – has had political consequences for all four countries. Support for the Palestinian struggle against foreign imperialism has throughout the years been central not only for the foreign policy of Syria and what was considered Syrian national interests, but also for Ba'athist ideology. Likewise, political life in Syria and Lebanon has been interconnected throughout the years. In spite of the continued pan-Arab idealism, the pragmatic political style of the late al-Assad also meant compromising with the Arab nationalistic element of Ba'athism, for example when Hafiz al-Assad opted for supporting Iran over Iraq in the first Gulf war and later participated in the US-led invasion of Iraq in the second Gulf war of 1991. The close partnership with Iran has only been further deepened during Bashar al-Assad's rule, an alliance which has placed Syria firmly within the 'axis of resistance' and ensured that he inherited from his father the image of being *mumana'a*[35] [literally 'opposition' or 'resistance' but used as a term for Arab regimes rejecting US hegemony in the region]. Throughout the years, as Christopher Phillips has shown in his study *Everyday Arab Identity* (2012), the Syrian Ba'athist state has promoted a pan-Arab identity alongside a Syrian national identity – the two have not been in opposition, but rather mutually reinforcing. In recent years, the isolation of Syria within the Arab world has undermined the pan-Arab rhetoric and made Bashar al-Assad on the one hand prioritise a strong Syrian national discourse, and on the other hand, reinvent the old notion of *Bilad ash-Sham*.

SSNP

The Ba'ath Party has been the all-dominating official political ideology in Syria for decades and other leftist (as well as other) parties have either been banned or co-opted into the Progressive National Front (PNF)[36] leaving almost no room for an alternative leftist ideology or political

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[34] Bilad ash-Sham, literally meaning the countries of Damascus, is an old name referring to the geographic area of what today constitutes Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. See chapter 6 for a further discussion of the term and how it is used at al-Mayadeen.

[35] For discussions of the term see e.g. Fawwaz Traboulsi: "The Crisis of the Politics of Mumana'ah – Statehood & Participation" (Traboulsi 2014).

[36] PNF consists of five parties aside from the Ba'ath Party itself, namely:
- The Syrian Communist Party (SCP), both the Khalid Bakdash faction and the Yousef Faisal faction. The two factions came into existence over disagreements over how to relate to Soviet perestroika.
- The Arab Socialist Union (ASU), the Syrian branch of Nasser's party.
- The Movement of Socialist Unionists (MSU), a Ba'athist faction that broke away in 1961 due to the breakdown of the union with Egypt.
- The Democratic Socialist Unionist Party, a MSU faction that split off in 1974.

programme. One party, though, seems to have not only survived as an independent voice but also to be experiencing some kind of revival – namely the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). The SSNP was founded in 1932 by Antun Sa'adeh, a Lebanese Greek Orthodox, with its main political goal the reestablishment of *Bilad ash-Sham* (in the broadest interpretation of the notion). The party was central in transforming the idea of the existence of a Syrian nation into a coherent political ideology, and thus Adel Beshara refers to Sa'adeh as "the architect of Syrian nationalism" (Beshara 2011).

Whether to categorise the SSNP as a right-wing or a left-wing party is up for discussion. It has from its beginning contained fascist elements, and according to Albert Hourani, the party was "rigidly organised on the lines of the fascist parties common in Europe in the 1930s, with a strict hierarchy and a sole and virtually all-powerful leader" (Hourani 1983, 317). Likewise, its strong focus on Syrian nationalism[37] also contains elements of mystical nationalism and other imports from Nazi Germany (such as the party's symbol, a curved swastika called 'the red hurricane') and up until 1945, the party attracted fascists and Nazi sympathisers (Pipes 1988, 304).[38] While Sa'adeh was clearly inspired by the fascist movements in Europe, and the name, Syrian Social Nationalist Party, seemingly has a close resemblance to the Nazi ideology of National Socialism, one should be careful to equating SSNP with Nazism. First of all, though Social Nationalist and National Socialism might seem closely related in English, this is not the case in Arabic (respectively *ijtima'i* and *ishtiraki*). But, more importantly, as Abdel Beshara underscores, the SSNP did not adopt an idea about a single 'Syrian race' – rather, it saw the Syrian superiority as being connected to its multiracial society. Thus, for SSNP, "the Syrian racial mix, while interacting with its natural environment, produced an advanced civilization" (Beshara 2011, 348). While fascist ideology was a source of inspiration for Sa'adeh, the party has, according to John Rolland, since the 1960s moved towards the Left, and during the Lebanese Civil War several SSNP members joined the Lebanese National Movement (Rolland 2003, 148). Likewise, Daniel Pipes argues that the party has "abandoned fascist doctrines and adopted a more acceptable rhetoric of the Left" (Pipes 1988, 310).

In addition to the aim of re-establishing *Bilad ash-Sham* and the partially fascist-inspired ideology, an important component of the SSNP cosmos is secularism, with the separation of religion and state a declared goal (http://www.ssnp.com/new/ssnp/en/ssnp.htm). This has, as was the case with the Ba'ath party, attracted religious minorities to the party, especially Christians in Syria and Shi'ites in Lebanon.[39]

- The Arab Socialist Party, a Ba'athist faction from 1964.
(George 2003, 87)

[37] E.g., the first basic principle is: "Syria is for the Syrians and the Syrians are a complete nation", while the eighth and last principle is: "Syria's interest supersedes every other interest" (http://www.ssnp.com/new/ssnp/en/ssnp.htm).

[38] Until the end of the Second World War, Nazi Germany not only offered its Arab sympathizers a particular political ideology but also an opportunity to side against Britain and France, the two former mandate powers ruling in *Bilad ash-Sham*.

[39] In a survey about 'preferred political parties' conducted in 1993 among Shi'ites in Lebanon, the SSNP figured among the top three parties with 16%, while 31% preferred Amal, and 41% preferred Hizbollah (Harik 1996, 50).

The SSNP has played a role in both Syrian and Lebanese political life – in Syria, together with the Syrian Communist Party, it was the main competitor to the Ba'ath Party during the 1940s and '50s, just as Adib Shiskakli – who ruled Syria 1949-54 – was a former member of SSNP, with continuous relations to the party (Pipes 1988). In 1955, the party was banned in Syria and stayed so until 2005 where it was legalised, and obtained an observer seat at the NPF; in 2007 it participated in the parliamentary election, and in 2014 supported the re-election of Bashar al-Assad as president. Since the outbreak of the war in Syria, SSNP has been gaining political ground by organising militias fighting – rather successfully – on the side of the regime. In Lebanon, the party has been arguing for subsuming Lebanon into Syria. It participated actively in the Lebanese Civil War on the side of the Palestinians and against Israeli occupation, and has had seats in parliament since after the end of the Civil War. Lebanese members of SSNP seem, equally, to be participating actively in the battleground in Syria, just as the party is experiencing a revival in Lebanon (Choufi 2014). Thus, the ongoing war in Syria has sent the SSNP right back into the arms of the Syrian regime, and today it is fighting alongside the Assad government against what it sees as a sectarian threat against the unity of Syria.[40] At the same time, the toning-down of the pan-Arab rhetoric of the Syrian regime, replaced by a renewed promotion of Syria – both as a nation state and as the notion of *Bilad ash-Sham* – have brought the two parties closer together.

Hizbollah – the Islamism of the Left

The fact that the connection between Hizbollah and al-Mayadeen is strong is obvious on several levels. First and foremost, Al-Mayadeen has from day one been uncompromising in its support for Hizbollah (as I elaborate on in the analytical chapters – see especially Chapter 4), secondly, al-Mayadeen and Hizbollah have organised events together. At the same time, Hizbollah represents a source of controversy for the Arab Left; it is one of the landmarks that separates the two main camps within the Left, and provokes all the most sensitive points – secularism versus Islamism, resistance versus democracy, etc.

Hizbollah is a product of the Lebanese Civil War, and grew up in order to safeguard Iranian interests. Originally, the movement appealed narrowly to the Shia population in Lebanon, but as the movement after the Civil War transformed into a national militant resistance movement with a strong anti-Israeli discourse, it developed ambitions in – and had success with – appealing to a broader Lebanese public. When Israel was forced out of the South of Lebanon in 2000, rather than dissolving itself, Hizbollah opted to include the Palestinian cause into its struggle. This move, combined with the impressive and concrete result of the movement's military performance (the end of the Israeli occupation), transformed Hizbollah from a Lebanese to an Arab phenomenon. Thus, in 2000, Hizbollah was able to unite most of the Arab world across national borders and sectarian divisions, and in connection to the war with Israel in 2006, the organisation's regional popularity

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[40] The two parties are not necessarily ideologically strongly opposed. Rather, there has been a continued ideological and political exchange, not least in regards to the difference between Ba'ath's Arab nationalism and SSNP's Syrian nationalism – cf. Pipe, who argues that after 1961 "the SSNP talked like the Ba'ath, the Ba'ath acted like the SSNP" (Pipes 1988, 317).

peaked to a level where Hassan Nasrallah was one of the three most popular Arab leaders, together with Bashar al-Assad and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Lob 2014, 3). Similarly, its satellite TV station al-Manar reached a broad popularity and was listed as one of the top four news stations in the Middle East in a report from 2006 (Baylouny 2006, 7).

Hizbollah's image as the ultimate – actual as well as symbolic – challenger of Israeli occupation of Arab land facilitated political sympathy and ideological alliances across traditional divisions. As has been the case with other Islamist movements, Hizbollah draws on much the same rhetoric and ways of thinking as Arab nationalists have done historically. Hizbollah's impressive military success, public popularity, and its emphasis on national resistance along the tradition of the Arab nationalists and other leftist groups have opened the doors for sympathy and support from groups that would not necessarily sympathise with Hizbollah's religiously founded ideology, but who are, nevertheless, loyal to its role as a resistance movement (cf. e.g. CAUS).

Another element that Hizbollah and (parts of) the Left can unite around is an anti-capitalistic and anti-neoliberalistic agenda. Hizbollah represents the Shia community in Lebanon, which has historically been politically, socially and economically marginalised. This is reflected in al-Manar, where "This pro-poor and anti-materialistic theme is communicated (…) and appeals to a wide swathe of the public that cannot afford the upper class lifestyle widely promoted in Beirut. That lifestyle is also viewed as promoted by international capitalism and the US, making its rejection one of the main perceived differences marking the boundaries of the other" (Baylouny 2006, 6). That Hizbollah ideologically draws on the leftist tradition is also a point for As'ad AbuKhalil, who in his article "Ideology and Practice of Hizballah in Lebanon: Islamization of Leninist Organizational Principles" (1991) argues that Hizbollah borrows a Leninist global outlook by splitting "the world into two camps, the exploited and the exploiters. According to its vision, Lenin's 'international imperialism' becomes 'international arrogance', in reference to the USA" (Abukhalil 1991, 396).[41]

The seeming success of Hizbollah as the great uniter has, however, been challenged over the past decade. Although the war in 2006 on a regional level mostly added to Hizbollah's heroic status, the destruction and death experienced in Lebanon sparked critics, also within leftist circles.[42] On top of that, the movement's confrontation with its national political opponents on the streets of Beirut in 2008 damaged its image as a movement representing the whole Arab world. Instead, its own political ambitions were exposed, and the sectarian aspect of the conflict alienated parts of the

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[41] For more about the Shi'ites of Lebanon and the role of respectively leftist secular ideology and Islamism see Rula Asisaab and Malek Abisaab: *The Shi'ites of Lebanon* (Abisaab and Abisaab 2014).

[42] This leftist critique was e.g. reflected in the mediascape. The Lebanese newspaper as-Safir has traditionally been the representative of the secular leftist Arab intelligentsia, opposed to Western imperialism and loyal to pan-Arab ideals. Until 2006, the newspaper had been a strong supporter of Hizbollah's resistance against Israel, but the war on Lebanon, partly provoked by Hizbollah itself, led to a more critical stance towards the movement. This shift in the editorial line provoked a faction to break out and establish a new newspaper, al-Akhbar. The war in Syria has further confirmed this ideological split, as as-Safir has represented a much more critical voice in relation to the regime in Damascus and not least Hizbollah's support of it, while al-Akhbar has stressed the anti-imperialistic narrative of the conflict and Assad's Syria as the last bastion of pan-Arab resistance against Israeli (as well as Western) colonialism.

Sunni population across the Arab world. These cracks have only deepened after Hizbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict. The movement's decision to not only support Bashar al-Assad rhetorically, but also militarily, has been the final undermining of its pan-Arab appeal, and firmly placed it within the ongoing political and sectarian power struggle in the region.

Iran and the export of authoritarianism

Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran has had a strained relation with most of its Arab neighbours, in that its revolutionary Shia identity has been conceived as a direct threat to power stability, not least by the Sunni monarchies in the Gulf. Nevertheless, Iran has cultivated relations with religious, ideological or political allies in its neighbouring Arab countries: the sponsoring of Hizbollah in Lebanon and the alliance with (Alawi-ruled) Syria have both been central. The Syrian alliance is built on mutual bad relations with the US (and consequently international isolation), a strong anti-Israeli rhetoric, and a tense relation with conservative Sunni nations. Hizbollah plays a central role in this alliance, and is one of Iran's strongest components in its regional and international political strategy. After the downfall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the political upheaval since 2011, Iran has found new possibilities for promoting its interest in the region while fighting a battle over power and influence with Saudi Arabia – a battle that has developed into one of the most important conflicts in the region, creating divisions along sectarian lines (Sunni-Shiʿites) and national political interests, just as it is reflected in international alliances (the US-Russia).

Seen from an international perspective, 1979 – the year which brought Khomeini to power – challenged Iran's former positive relations with the West, and instead led to a new interest in developing relations with the Third World. This Third World strategy continued through the 1980s and '90s and during Ahmadinejad's period as president Sub-Sahara Africa and Latin America became focal points for Iranian foreign diplomacy (Pirsalami 2013, 82, 93). In accordance with Steven Heydemann, "Iran's alliance strategy reflects a deep pragmatism" and alliances are nurtured across political and ideological differences in order to counterbalance US and Western power in the international system (Heydemann 2010). Iran has, roughly put, aimed at counteracting US hegemony on three different fronts: US unipolarism (e.g. alliance with Russia), US neoliberalism (e.g., alliances with leftist populist governments in Latin America) and US imperialism (e.g., supporting the Arab struggle against Israeli occupation). In spite of the immediate ideological difference between the Bolivar Revolution of Venezuela and the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the two nations have found common interests, and throughout the 2000s, Venezuela has been one of the most important allies of Iran.[43]

In her book *Promoting Authoritarianism Abroad* (2012), Rachel Vanderhill investigates the phenomenon of authoritarian regimes exporting this ideology, using Russia, Venezuela, and Iran as her case studies. She points out that all three nations are regional but not global powers, with

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[43] This alliance also has an important economic side. During the 2000s, Iran became the second-largest investor in Venezuela, after the US (Karmon 2009, 5).

ambitions to expand their influence; all three have a desire to challenge the global dominance of the US, which they view as tied to the spread of democracy; and they are able to finance these two ambitions through their oil and natural gas wealth (Vanderhill 2012, 6). Thus, Tehran uses the active promotion of authoritarianism abroad as a strategy to counter US influence and secure its own international allies. At the same time, Iran is trying to stage itself as a progressive state internationally, not least in Syria and Lebanon. Through broadcast media, aid programmes and cultural programmes, the Iranian state attempts to present itself as a well-functioning Islamic state, committed to the struggle for Palestine, to the empowerment of women, and to democratic values (Lina Khatib 2013, 94).

The media is, in general, a central element of Iran's public diplomacy. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the new regime reformed the existing state broadcast media and created the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). Today, IRBI is not only providing services to a national audience but operates four international news television channels and six satellite television channels for international viewers, and disseminates its programmes in twenty-seven languages (Pahlavi 2012, 23). In accordance with Pierre Pahlavi, since the launch of the news channel al-Alam in 2003, Iran has intensified its use of media as part of its public diplomacy – supporting its foreign policy objectives and promoting an image of being a moderate and modern Islamic country (Pahlavi 2012, 24). Together with Al-Kawthar TV[44], al-Alam targets an Arab audience, whereas Press TV[45] targets an English-speaking audience. Furthermore, Iran has year-long media cooperation with Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela, and has previously had ambitions about opening a pan-Latin American TV station in Bolivia (Karmon 2009).

In the past four sections, I have sketched out the four central actors of importance for al-Mayadeen's political positioning: the Syrian Ba'ath Party, SSNP, Hizbollah, and Iran. These four actors together form an ideological triangle in which al-Mayadeen finds its ideological inspiration, as well as its boundaries. The four share a strong anti-imperialistic rhetoric with the struggle against Israeli occupation as the pivot point. Secondly, they unite around a fear for Sunni Islamism and thus promote religious pluralism – whether due to secular values, being representatives of a religious minority or due to religious rivalry. A third and important common value is the resistance against Western-led economic liberalism. The Ba'ath Party's socialist heritage, Hizbollah's traditional representation of an economically marginalised part of Lebanon's population, and Iran's attempt to counterbalance US hegemony – also in the economic sphere – all meet in an anti-neoliberalistic rhetoric.

In the following section, I return to the notion of the Arab Left and investigate which internal ideological splits are of importance in post-2011 Arab ideoscapes. I argue that the Arab Left today is best understood as being divided into four main camps – the anti-imperialistic, the anti-authoritarian, the radical Left, and the compromising Left.

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[44] Launched in 2006, a religious channel promoting Shia Islam.
[45] Launched in 2007, a 24/7 news channel in English

Internal disagreements and core ideological concepts in the post-2011 Arab ideoscapes

From the outset up to the present day, **social justice** (and the struggle against **capitalism**) and **national independence** (and the struggle against **imperialism** and **foreign intervention**) have constituted two ideological core concepts for the Arab Left – though read in different ways depending on the time and place. At the same time, the relation to, respectively, the national state and Islam have been of fundamental importance – not to say the root of disagreements and divisions within the Left. Whereas the **national state** by some has been seen as the **safeguard against Islamism,** others have rejected it due to its **authoritarian** character. Likewise, the role of **Islam** in society has been up for dispute; where some see **secularism** (and fighting **sectarianism**) as being of fundamental importance, others have seen prospects in cooperation with Islamists, due to the popularity of Islamic movements within the populations, and an appreciation of the religious tradition. Furthermore, a fundamental disagreement over the prioritisation of the **individual** against the **collective,** or '*the* cause', runs through the ideological discussions.

These well-known ideological disagreements are still haunting the contemporary Arab Left and the uprisings in 2011 only deepened the splits – not least the situation in Syria, which has served as the ultimate divider of an already divided Left. While leftist environments struggling for secular and liberal values were important as the initial push for the uprisings (Massouh 2013, 55), and leftist currents and pan-Arab sentiments (Phillips 2014, 142) at one point in time seemed to be an important ideological trend revitalised by the uprisings, the reality rather quickly proved more complex. Whether in Egypt, Syria or elsewhere, the Islamisation of the uprisings not only contributed to undermining the previous cross ideological-alliances of the 2000s, but also challenged the Left with the ideological dilemmas of realpolitik.

The majority of secular activists in Egypt felt confronted with the schism of how to relate to the election of the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate for presidency and, ultimately, who to stand with in the military coup against Mursi, just as the leftist groups in Syria found themselves choosing between two evils – brutal (though secular, and a supporter of *al-muqawama*) authoritarian rule, or an Islamist alternative, in which terror networks such as al-Qaida, Jabhat al-Nusra and later ISIS were coming to play a bigger role. The dilemma was not new but more acute than ever: how to measure leftist ideals against each other? On the one hand, should leftists side with a secular non-democratic rule that could be perceived as a safeguard against an Islamist takeover – or should a dictator be fought by all means necessary, even if that meant alliances with Islamist groups? In the Syrian case, the schism was further underlined by the (partly tarnished) image of the Syrian regime as the last bastion fighting for Arab interests and resisting US imperialism – in other words, the last bastion of *mumana'a*. What did it mean to be a leftist in a post-2011 Arab world?

The dilemmas cutting through the Arab Left are neither new nor unique. On a global level, the Left has been challenged by the same principle questions over ideological priorities. Alex Callinicos, the editor of the magazine International Socialism, argues that part of the international Left is undergoing a revival of the Cold War phenomenon of 'campism', referring to the phenomenon of

supporting states "that, because they resist the US geopolitically, are seen as in some sense progressive" (Callinicos 2014). This trend is globally evident, e.g., in the crisis in Ukraine, but in a Middle Eastern context, Callinicos continues, "campism takes the form of support for the alliance orchestrated by the Islamic Republican regime in Iran, including notably the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria and Hizbollah, the Shiite Islamist movement that dominates Lebanon" (Callinicos 2014). Likewise, Firas Massouh argues that part of the international Left – what he refers to as "the Stalinoid Left" – turns a blind eye to the popular uprisings and "instead see the crisis in Syria in terms of Western/Turkish/Gulf states-backed Sunni Islamist militants" and by doing that "echoes the [Syrian] regime's narrative to the letter" (Massouh 2013, 57).

This international campism is also visible within the Arab Left, which – Bassam Haddad argues – can be divided into two camps: namely, anti-authoritarian and anti-imperialist (Haddad 2012). Where the first gives priority to the fight for democracy and human rights (even if it means foreign intervention), the second holds the struggle against Israel and Western imperialism in general as the fundamental starting point (even if it means accepting authoritarian rule). In other words, the anti-imperialist would consider themselves representatives of ideals such as *muqawama* and *mumana'a*. Likewise, Nicolas Dot-Pouillard outlines two main groups, one that continues "to support the Syrian regime in the name of the struggle against Israel and resistance to imperialism. Others stand staunchly with the opposition, in the name of revolution and the defence of democratic rights" (Dot-Pouillard 2012). These factions were, according to Hanssen and Safeddine, founded in connection with the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1990, but the conflict in Syria has surely made the splits more urgent and confrontations inevitable (Hanssen and Safieddine 2016, 198).

In particular, the discussion over the US intervention in Syria has caused a strong reaction within both Arab and international leftist circles. The former managing editor of the Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar, Khalid Saghieh, expresses his frustration with the international leftist anti-war movement, which he accuses of siding with the Right as well as working for the interests of Bashar al-Assad when it campaigns against foreign intervention in Syria. With reference to the article "Syria is a pseudo-struggle" by the post-Marxist thinker Slavoj Žižek[46], Saghieh claims that the international Left has betrayed the Syrian uprising, and he objects to the logic that "the revolutionary Syrians do not deserve to be redeemed because they have not proven their radical qualifications and secular-democratic orientation, so we should not interfere on their behalf" (Saghieh 2013).

On the other side, Amal Saad-Ghorayeb argues in an article in al-Akhbar, that "supporting Assad's struggle against this multi-pronged assault is supporting Palestine today because Syria has become the new front line of the war between Empire and those resisting it" (Saad-Ghorayeb 2012). Her contribution demonstrates full-hearted support for al-Assad based on "the big picture" and seen through a "strategic lens". At the same time, Saad-Ghorayeb regrets the emergence of a "third way

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[46] While arguing that Bashar al-Assad is "a bad dictator", Žižek describes in the article the ongoing struggle in Syria as "a false one" and regrets the lack of a third and more progressive alternative in Syria, making him call for "a strong radical-emancipatory opposition" (Žižek 2013).

camp" which is "comprised of intellectuals and activists from academia, the mainstream media and NGOs, support elements in the home-grown opposition, reject the Syrian National Council (SNC) on account of its US-NATO-Israeli-Arab backing, and reject the Assad leadership on account of its repression of dissent and its alleged worthlessness to the Resistance project" (Saad-Ghorayeb 2012). She sees this approach as lacking an overall strategic understanding of the conflict and argues with reference to Lenin that there are only two positions, bourgeois or socialist ideology, and that the "third-wayers" are buying into the liberal democratic popular wave of the imperial powers.

What characterises both stances is the uncompromising attitude, leaving almost no space for any type of 'third-wayers'. In spite of this hostile trench warfare, different alternative voices do still exist. Nicolas Dot-Pouillard talks about a group that, from a distance, supports a middle way "between showing solidarity with the protesters' demand for freedom, and rejecting foreign interference: they advocate some kind of national reconciliation" (Dot-Pouillard 2012). An example of this group could be the leftist Syrian intellectual and human rights activist, Haytham Manna. He lives in Paris and is the deputy head of the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change (NCC), and the body's representative abroad. He has expressed deep concern over the growing sectarianism and militarisation of the uprising. He has been very outspoken and uncompromising in his rejection of any type of foreign intervention in Syria, including an exclusive GGC force (Carnegie 2016), while arguing for a peaceful political solution and rejecting the idea that a military solution is possible (Manna 2013) – positions which mean he is still able to still travel in and out of Damascus.[47]

Sune Haugbølle likewise refers to an alternative ideological grouping as "the New New Left", in which he places figures such as the Lebanese communist Fawwaz Traboulsi and the late Lebanese revolutionary socialist Bassem Chit (Haugbolle 2016a, 69). Others refer to the same current as "the far Left" and list the Syrian Revolutionary Left (Massouh 2013, 51) and Trotskyist groups such as the Socialist Forum in Lebanon and the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt (Dot-Pouillard 2012) as examples of this current. This grouping builds on the ideological heritage of the New Arab Left which came into existence in the 1960s (see above), including its rejection of the authoritarian style of the communists' party organisation and leadership, critiquing Lenin, USSR and the Arab socialism of Nasser and the Ba'ath Party, while at the same time insisting on the importance of democratic values and revolutionary socialist ideals. As was the case in the 1960s, the struggle for radical ideals also includes – as a last option – resorting to force of arms. This is also the case with regards to the Syrian uprising, which they support wholeheartedly, even when it began to be militarised. Thus, the New New Left insists on exactly that which Saad-Ghorayeb rules out, namely a struggle against both authoritarian rule and imperial interests.

The New New Left, which Haugbølle refers to, took shape in Lebanon during the 2000s when its followers increasingly transformed former student activities and intellectual debates into activism, organising protests and demonstrations. As a reaction to former bureaucratic organisation, this

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[47] Manna very often appears on al-Mayadeen and is one of the most used al-Assad-opposition figures at the station. I touch upon this issue again in the following chapter in the introduction to al-Mayadeen.

movement did not crystallise into traditional political parties but instead worked in networks and relied on activism rather than engaging with the (corrupt) state (Haugbolle 2016a, 69). Similarly, the movement saw a need for a bottom-up renewal of Arab Socialism and a break away from former patterns of thought, as Traboulsi argues: "This also presupposes that there are elements within the Left who are ready to transcend two currents still active in their midst: a leftist current that continues to support despotic regimes on the pretext of giving priority to the 'national question' and a leftist current that is counting on external intervention for paving the way to democracy" (Traboulsi 2012).

The ideological and political disagreements also cut through the cultural sphere (I discuss this topic further in Chapter 6). Renowned artists and cultural figures shocked parts of the public when siding for or against, e.g., Hizbollah, Bashar al-Assad, or the Egyptian president al-Sisi. A telling example is the Lebanese composer and singer Ziad Rahbani (son of the diva Fairouz), who has a lifelong affiliation with the Lebanese Communist Party. Sune Haugbølle describes in his article "The Leftist, the Liberal, and the Space in Between: Ziad Rahbani and the everyday Ideology" (2016) how Rahbani during the Lebanese civil war became "a cultural legitimation of the Lebanese left" (Haugbolle 2016b, 177) and how he enjoys a special status among young Lebanese leftists even today. Through his music, he challenges the political and cultural establishment and speaks the voice of the ordinary people. For years, his sympathy for Hizbollah has been public knowledge, and to a large degree in sync with his fans. He has sided with the March 8 alliance[48] and runs a regular column in al-Akhbar (Hanssen and Safieddine 2016, 209). However, since 2011 his political stance has to a growing degree attracted a lot of criticism. In September 2012, he appeared on al-Mayadeen in a two-part interview with Ghassan bin Jeddo himself.[49] The interview got a lot of attention, not only because Rahbani in general has avoided the press for many years, but also because of what was said. Rahbani revealed his personal stance towards the situation in Syria – his concern over the uprising and his support for the Syrian opposition figure Haytham Manna, and thus his reluctance to wholeheartedly support the uprising in Syria.[50]

The leftist ideoscapes are complex and ambiguous but, as described above, the contexture of certain camps does seem to appear from the ideological messiness. Below, I have sketched out a typology of four different camps in the post-2011 Arab Left. I believe they can provide a useful overview as well as the necessary context for the present thesis. The complexity of the Arab Left is, of course,

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[48] A coalition of Lebanese parties which as a reaction to the Cedar Revolution (that demanded Syria withdraw from Lebanon) took to the streets on March 8, 2005 in order to thank Syria its role in ending the Lebanese Civil War. It was headed by Hizbollah and, after February 2016, the Christian leader Michel Aoun (who since October 31 2016 has been the president of Lebanon) also played a central role.

[49] Part 1, 28.09.2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B791086b0W8&index=28&list=PL2shxz5r2g-8Eb_aAf9ssRLKd-YkWt_aO and part 2, 05.10.2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRfGjX7xr78&list=PL2shxz5r2g-8Eb_aAf9ssRLKd-YkWt_aO&index=27

[50] Haytham Manna was equally one of the selected guests in Bin Jeddo's programme serial *Fi al-Mayadeen* [At al-Mayadeen]. He appeared twice, on 29.03.2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTQD1PLs9Rc&index=10&list=PL2shxz5r2g-8Eb_aAf9ssRLKd-YkWt_aO and on 09.11.2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbDPZ3lwIb4&index=23&list=PL2shxz5r2g-8Eb_aAf9ssRLKd-YkWt_aO

also reflected in this typology: the groups are not homogenous and should not be understood rigidly.

1. The Anti-imperialists

The anti-imperialist camp is characterised by advocating an anti-imperialist agenda. Whereas Saudi Arabian influence in general, and the promotion of its version of Islam, Wahhabism, in particular, are seen as a threat against modernity and progressiveness, Islamist resistance movements fighting against Israel are accepted. While this group has carried on the heritage of 'New Left' of the 1960s in the shape of its radical support for resistance and the Palestinian cause, it seems ready to sacrifice the democratic current of the 'New Left' and (often with regret) accept authoritarianism in the struggle against imperialism – thus, the collective cause is prioritised over the rights of the individual body. Concepts such as *muqawama* and *mumana'a* are central. This group includes figures such as Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, Abdel Bari Atwan, Bouthana Shaaban, and Ibrahim al-Amine, and would typically be supportive of continued al-Assad rule in Syria. The SNNP and the Syrian Ba'ath Party itself would also be placed within this camp.

2. The Anti-authoritarians

In this camp, democratic principles and human rights discourses are strong, and leftist ideology is often overruled by liberal values. In order to pursue its agenda of democratisation, it will often be ready to accept foreign intervention in Arab conflicts - thus, the individual body is given higher priority than the collective ideas or '*the* cause'. This group will typically have a critical stance towards Hizbollah and consider the movement's military power as a bigger problem than its resistance struggle against Israel. Likewise, this camp represents a clear rejection of al-Assad rule in Syria and argues for foreign intervention in the war. Examples of voices from this group are Khaled Saghieh (after leaving a-Akhbar) and Elias Khury.

3. The Radical Left or The New New Left

This camp tries to insist on advocating a democratic and anti-imperialist agenda at the same time – thus placing the individual body and collective ideas side by side. It refuses foreign intervention but is ready to accept the people's use of military means in popular uprisings; again, links to the New Left of the 1960s are visible. Furthermore, the ideological heritage from the '60s is evident in the choice of theoretical inspiration in regards to Marxist readings (Mao, Trotsky). It is activist-driven and relies on popular mobilisation. Important individuals and organisations in this group include Fawwaz Traboulsi, Bassem Chit, the Syrian Revolutionary Left, the Socialist Forum in Lebanon, and the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt. Though this group rejects foreign intervention in Syria as a mean to remove al-Assad from power, it is no less opposed to his continued rule than the anti-authoritarians.

4. The Compromising Left

This group brings together individuals and groups which, in different ways, have been part of the Arab Left's move towards having a more democratic and inclusive agenda in recent decades, but which nevertheless are today in an ambivalent situation. These voices advocate a democratic

discourse, accept Islamist resistance movements, and acknowledge Islam as both important cultural heritage and contemporary public social movement. While this camp rejects foreign intervention, in line with The New New Left, it also rejects the militarisation of the current public uprisings. The compromising elements are several – compromises of strong leftist agendas have in different ways taken place over the past few decades for this group, just as they seek to solve the current situation in Syria through compromises – for example, though they are not outspoken supporters of al-Assad, this camp is calling for negotiation with the government in Damascus. In general, the individual body is placed over collective ideas but this could also be compromised if necessary. An important example of this intellectual trend is the Center for Arab Unity studies (CAUS)[51] in Beirut, which has for decades been working to incorporate democratic values and the acceptance of Islam, as an important component of Arab identity, into the Arab nationalistic movement – a message which is to some extent in line with the anti-authoritarian group – though its insistence on the importance of values such as *muqawama* and *mumana'a* makes it reject foreign intervention and support both Hizbollah and al-Assad. Haytham Manna and Ziad Rahbani are equally important representatives of this group.

As will become evident throughout the analyses of al-Mayadeen, representatives of both the anti-imperialist camp and the 'Compromising Left' are to be found at the station whereas the other two groups never – or almost never – appear. While the anti-imperialist positions are rather obvious – and typically in line with what one would find in Syrian state TV – the voices of the Compromising Left blur the picture and add to the complexity by giving al-Mayadeen more nuances. I will discuss this further throughout the thesis.

Conclusion

Employing Appadurai's concept of -*scapes*, I have in this chapter outlined the ideoscapes which al-Mayadeen is situated within. In this context, the historical and contemporary Arab Left – including the Syrian Ba'ath Party and SSNP – plays a central role, just as Hizbollah and Iran do. The Arab Left is an ambiguous and complex notion including many different currents and groups. What unites the Arab Left is the belief in certain core progressive values such as secularism, anti-imperialism, class struggle, Arab unity, and the liberation of Palestine; what divides the Arab Left, on the other hand, is how to reach these goals and in which order. Is the struggle against Western imperialism more important than the civil rights of the individual? Are Islamists potential allies, or is the safeguarding of secular values more important?

Since the formation of the Arab Left in the post-World War I period, leftist ideologies have played an important role in ideological, political, and cultural life in the Arab world, though in changing ways and with changing impact. Important political events such as the defeat to Israel in 1967, the death of Nasser in 1970, the Lebanese Civil War, the fall of the USSR, the Iraq invasion of Kuwait, the US-led wars on Iraq in 1991 and 2003, the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006, or the popular uprisings in 2010-2011 have all been catalysts for ideological transformation, and thus also for

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[51] Cf. the section "The formative years" in the previous chapter.

ideological splits and disagreements. The establishment of al-Mayadeen and the production of ideology taking place through its broadcasts is an example of how new ideological formations take shape in the slipstream of big, important political developments, and this has to be understood within the historical and contemporary surrounding ideoscapes.

Al-Mayadeen is situated in the field of tension between progressive and regressive values, or between progressive ideals and regressive pragmatism. The fear of a religious Islamist takeover has pushed parts of the (leftist) secular groups into the arms of the authoritarian regimes. They have nostalgic feelings for a past (before Saudi dominance of public life), where secular values dominated not only political life but also the media and cultural spheres. Shia Muslims, led by Iran, equally look at the growing influence of Sunni Islamism (and Saudi Arabia) with concern. This emerging coalition between religious and secular groups resembles previous alliances across beliefs – cf. Browers' concept of 'cross-ideological alliances'. This time, though, it is Sunni Islamism rather than authoritarian regimes that constitutes the uniting enemy.

This new alliance unites around the resistance discourse. The anti-imperialist camp, which is ready to accept authoritarian rule in the name of the resistance against Israel (arguing that true democracy in the Arab world will never come into existence before all land is free from occupation), finds in Iran a strong ally that through the years has shown that its rhetorical support for Palestine has been accompanied with substantial support in the shape of Hizbollah and to some extent Hamas. At the same time the Iranian state's authoritarian ideology is not seen as a hindrance. Overall, *The New Regressive Left* in general and al-Mayadeen in particular are a collection of different ideological modular units held together by the shared fear of Sunni Islamism, support for the resistance against Israel, and the acceptance of authoritarian rule.

Exploring Arab Mediascapes

Al-Mayadeen is part of and operates within the new Arab media reality, which has come into existence since the launch of transnational satellite TV in the region at the beginning of the 1990s. Until 1990, media in the Arab world had in one way or another been regulated by the state, and in particular radio and television were under tight state control. Today, the situation is more complex. Though most states continue to employ various strategies to control the national and regional media scene – not least the news production – transnational flows of information have undermined previous domination. The number of Arab satellite stations has passed 1,000 and many different types of ownership and financial models exist – states, media moguls, political parties, and religious movements are engaged in the field of media for political, ideological or business reasons. Likewise, the development of the internet and the mobile phone challenge the former modes of controlling information, distribution and communication flows.

In this chapter, I look at what the introduction of satellite TV has meant for the development of shared Arab mediascapes and what in particular the launch of al-Jazeera has done for Arab news production; furthermore, I discuss how religious and secular values to a growing extent are competing in the mediascapes. Finally, I move on to sketch out the Arab mediascapes post-2011, before introducing al-Mayadeen – the funding, the staff, viewership and audience.

The al-Jazeera era

Before the introduction of satellite TV, Arab news media was known mainly for its censure, lack of professionalism, abundance of 'red lines' – on political as well as social taboos – and endless reports on the whereabouts of national kings or presidents. One of the first systematic attempts to understand the modern Arab media reality is provided by William Rugh, in his book *The Arab Press: News Media and Political Process in the Arab World* (1979). In this book, he suggests three typologies or media systems:[52] 'the mobilizing press', 'the loyal press', and 'the diverse print media'.[53]

Roughly summarised, Rugh argues that in the Arab revolutionary socialist republics, the media is owned by the state and used strategically to promote the revolutionary ideologies of the governments, to mobilise the public and to build a national identity; thus, the press is *mobilising*. In traditional monarchies, on the other hand, the media is not formally state-owned, but in practice *loyal* connections between the state and the media owners ensure that only on a rhetorical or

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[52] He argues that the then-dominating media systems originally put forward by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in their book *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert 1956) did not reflect the media situation in the Arab world, which is why he attempts to present media systems that are sensitive to the political reality they exist within.

[53] In 2004, Rugh published an updated version *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics* (2004) where he introduced a fourth category, 'the transitional press', in order to capture the political changes which had taken place in, for instance, in Egypt and Jordan.

stylistic level do the two media systems differ. The *diverse* media is primarily a description of the media situation in Lebanon, which distinguishes itself by its plural but partisan national press.

This was roughly the state of Arab media when, in 1990, not only American soldiers but also the American media landed in the Saudi Arabian desert in order to force Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. Although the Arab League had signed the first agreement about creating the Arab Satellite Communications Organization (ArabSat) back in 1976, not much had happened to develop the flow of information – in fact, it took several days before the news of the Iraqi invasion could be read in the Saudi press. But this was soon to change; the second Gulf war turned out to be an important catalyst for the development of Arab media in general and of satellite media in particular. Provoked by the propaganda coming out of Iraq targeting, among others, Arab soldiers on the frontline, in 1991 Egypt launched the first Arab satellite channel in order to deliver counter-information to its soldiers.[54] At the same time, Arab viewers with access to satellite TV were – together with the rest of the world – able to follow the war on CNN (Sakr 2001, 8-16).

The struggles over media coverage and the new possibilities for accessing alternative news sources made it clear that states would no longer be able to control the flow of information to the same degree as they had previously, and more proactive strategies would be needed in order to stay on top of things – and to ensure that one's own political stances were represented. In the following few years, a number of Arab satellite channels were launched by both Arab states and private businessmen, just as the size of the audience able to watch satellite TV increased dramatically. In 1996, the emir of Qatar, Hamad bin Khalifa, decided to follow suit and invested heavily in his new ambitious media strategy, al-Jazeera – a project that would fundamentally change Arab news production and consumption.

Al-Jazeera astonished the Arab world with its new and daring news coverage. Backed by the emir both economically and politically, al-Jazeera set out to transform the Arab media scene, provoke both regional and international powers – and to place Qatar on the world map. This was done from the main headquarters in Doha through controversial and heated live debates, as well as on the ground through investigative reports and live coverage of developments around the Arab world. Not least the talk shows, with their controversial debates, surprised and amazed an audience that was unused to the concept. Taboo topics were suddenly openly discussed in heated live debates, red lines were crossed, telephone lines were open for viewers to call in – and the casting of the guests was done to ensure the passionate and fiery exchange of opinions.

Al-Jazeera's controversial style has through the years caused conflict with most Arab nations. Its journalists have been expelled or jailed and its offices periodically shut down due to critical coverage or provocative statements. Likewise, the relation with the US and other countries beyond the region has also been tense. In particular, the coverage of the war in Afghanistan – and later in Iraq – caused big controversies between the American administration and the news network, to such

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[54] The very first satellite TV transmit – of the Islamic pilgrimage Hajj – took place in 1985 (Skovgaard-Petersen 2013, 49; Sakr 2001, 10).

an extent that the American bombing of al-Jazeera's office in Kabul in November 2001 was considered by some to be intentional (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1653887.stm). With a stated ambition to show the other side of the story, al-Jazeera sought to challenge the Western monopoly on news coverage and break the hegemony of the regional state-controlled media (Lynch 2006, 57).

The period from 1997–2002 is often named 'the al-Jazeera Era' (Lynch 2006, 128), and not without good reason. The network's coverage of the second Palestinian Intifada as well as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq changed the way the Arab news media worked, by offering live reports from the ground and open debates about Arab dilemmas in relation to the conflicts. In contrast with the situation a decade earlier, in 2001 it was now an Arab media organisation that provided footage from inside the war in Afghanistan to the rest of the world, as al-Jazeera happened to be the only international media outlet in the country at the time war broke out. During this period, al-Jazeera enjoyed an almost hegemonic status with regards to news production and dissemination in the Arab world (Telhami 2013, 41).

The style of broadcasting introduced by al-Jazeera has, however, not been unproblematic. Critics have pointed to the aggressive and uncompromising atmosphere in the talk shows, accusing al-Jazeera hosts of deliberately seeking out the most extreme voices with the aim of generating sensational shows rather than achieving its stated ambitions of initiating dialogue and genuine political debates (Zayani 2005, 19). Likewise, the economic dependency on the emir of Qatar has given others reason to question the independence of al-Jazeera. Not only has the channel been conspicuously restrained when covering Qatar-related issues, it also seems that the editorial line of al-Jazeera has occasionally taken shape to fit the interests of Qatari foreign relations (Alterman 1998, 24; Zayani 2005, 10).

The situation where al-Jazeera was the media that "virtually everyone watched – and that everybody knew that others had seen – creating a real sense of a single, common Arab 'conversation' about political issues" (Lynch 2006, 23), of course, didn't last. Even before 2011, during the 2000s, the mediascape was transforming dramatically as hundreds of satellite media were established while the role of the internet equally came to play a pluralising role. In spite of serious competitors such as al-Arabiya,[55] until 2011 al-Jazeera continued to be the main shared point of reference in the Arab mediascape and succeeded in appealing to Arab viewers across political, religious and ideological differences (Telhami 2013).

An important factor in keeping al-Jazeera as the public meeting point in a pluralised mediascape has been its ability to bring together many different ideological and political currents. Muhammed El Oifi argues in his article "Influence without Power: Al-Jazeera and the Arab Public Sphere" that in

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[55] Al-Arabiya was launched in 2003 by the Saudi Arabian king. Other important transnational and national channels which have all added to the pluralisation of the mediascapes are e.g. MBC, ART, Dubai TV, Abu Dhabi TV, Dream TV, al-Manar, Futur TV, New TV, and LBC, together with the foreign-owned stations such as al-Hurra (US-owned) BBC Arabic (UK-owned), and al-Alam (Iranian owned) (Hafez 2008, 20).

the heydays of al-Jazeera the three most important ideological positions in the Arab political world were all represented at the station through different hosts and programmes; namely, Arab nationalism (e.g. Faisal al-Kasim: The Opposite Direction), Islamism (e.g. Ahmad Mansour: Without Borders, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi: Shari'a and Life), and liberalism (e.g. Sami Haddad: More Than One Opinion) (Oifi 2005, 72-73). What united these three groups was "a radical and often sarcastic critique of Arab regimes and a commitment to both democratic claims and national sovereignty, all of which contributes to the success of Al Jazeera" (Oifi 2005, 73). Thus, in al-Jazeera the different ideological streams found a shared platform for the promotion of one "single, common, ongoing political argument" (Lynch 2006, 35) about the failure of the regimes and lack of democracy in the region.

This analysis corresponds to Browers's concept of cross-ideological alliances, presented in the previous chapter, and al-Jazeera could thus be seen as a mediated reflection of the (attempted) cooperation between Islamists and Arab nationalists, and to some extent leftists and liberals in general, which Browers considers central for the development of Arab political ideology during the 2000s. This was an alliance built on a shared anti-American and anti-Israeli discourse and common views on topics like the fight for Palestine, opposition to the existing authoritarian regimes, demands for socially just societies and the promotion of oneself as the democratic alternative.

After discussing religious broadcasting in the following section, I return to al-Jazeera and look more closely at how events at the beginning of 2011 challenged both the integrity of the network as an independent news outlet and its ideological inclusiveness. In particular, events in Syria have caused ideological and political divisions which are reflected in the Arab mediascapes – and which have made space for the voice of al-Mayadeen.

Religious broadcasting in a secular space?

Over the past few decades, Arab mediascapes have been an important arena for encounters between different ideological movements, including religious and secular forces, not only with regards to news media but in cultural productions more broadly. Or, in other words, once again the changing ideoscapes are reflected in the changing mediascapes. Whereas secular political ideologies – often linked together with Arab nationalistic ideals and the then-newly independent authoritarian nationalist states – were already being challenged at the end of the 1960s by an Islamic revivalism in political life, the media and the cultural sphere had until recently remained the bastions of secular values. As described earlier, the cultural sphere had been a refuge for leftist and secular intellectuals and political activists who, for different reasons, became disillusioned with political life. Intellectuals and political activists found spaces in the media and culture where they could promote their secular beliefs and modernisation ideals – values often in sync with the regimes in power. So, while it was detached from political influence through the 1970s and '80s, the cultural industry still remained a space for a secular project.

The cultural industry no longer provides the same haven for secular ideals. The spread of satellite TV has, among other factors, played an important role in opening up mediated spaces for religious ideologies. However, still, many Arab artists and cultural producers see the cultural industries as the last bastion of Arab secularism; although this awareness of a secular cultural production, Haugbølle argues, only underlines that it is being challenged – as it "only becomes a relevant analytical category with the Islamic revival in the late twentieth century (…) In other words, 'secular art' only becomes visible once it no longer occupies the entire ocular field, and this only happens once something else – namely the *tathqif* agenda (dominance of the cultural field) of the Islamic trend – begins to crowd it out of the frame" (Haugbolle 2013a, 236).

Since the introduction of television transmissions in the Arab world in the late 1950s, Islam has had a role to play in TV broadcasting. But in the earliest decades, when TV was still exclusively produced by a state broadcasting to its nation, the religious features in the programming were often limited and "carefully injected and politically calculated, mostly to furnish an Islamic image to the eyes of the public of secular and corrupt regimes" (Hroub 2012, 5). So, it was not before the growth of transnational satellite TV from the late 1990s that a new arena began to be offered for the manifestation of the Islamic revival that had been a political and societal factor since the 1970s. With the launch of the first Islamic channel, the private Iqraa Channel in 1998, the general Islamisation of society started to transform into a media phenomenon as well (Skovgaard-Petersen 2014).

In a continuation of the scholarly discussions over a new Arab public sphere (cf. the reflections on the use of Habermas in the previous chapter), the rise of Islamic sentiments in the public has made scholars talk about 'Islamic counterpublic(s)' (Hirschkind 2006, 106; Lynch 2006, 83-88), but, as Ehab Galal argues, rather than seeing Islamic satellite channels as distinct and in opposition to what he refers to as "the liberal civil public sphere", one should investigate the important processes of dialogue (Galal 2009, 34). In this way, the religious channels should be understood as yet another component of the Arab mediascapes rather than as separate and isolated entities. Likewise, Khaled Hroub points out that it is not only the general Islamisation of society which has reached the media scene, but that equally the "rising levels of religiosity in the region owed much to the years-long influence of these channels, as did rising levels of support for Islamist movements" (Hroub 2012, 284). Or in other words, the media- and ideoscapes are reflecting and reinforcing each other in an interactive relationship.

The religious trends on satellite TV also brought about the phenomenon of traditional *ulama* appearing on TV shows, where they guide viewers on how to live a good life in accordance with Islam, with the issuing of fatwas as an important component. In this category, al-Jazeera's talk show Shari'a and Life, launched in 1997 and starring the famous *ulama* Yusuf al-Qaradawi[56], is a central example. Another important feature that the Islamic TV industry has brought about is a new group of media celebrities, namely the *da'iya* [TV preacher]. In the battle for viewers, many channels are

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[56] See *Global mufti, the Phenomenon of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī* (Gräf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2009) for more about al-Qaradawi and the programme Shari'a and Life.

eager to present their own Islamic media star who can attract viewers by communicating Islam in a modern format that suits the TV media. Rather than the stiff style of the traditional *ulama*, these (often) young preachers master the communications skills needed to make it in show business, even though their religious educational background might not be up to traditional standards. The Egyptian preacher 'Amr Khalid is the first and biggest star but certainly not the last (Skovgaard-Petersen 2009, 295-300). In Chapter 7, I investigate these issues further in an al-Mayadeen context.

The growing presence of Islamic ideological sentiments in the public is manifested in many different shapes, whether as television preachers promoting *al-fann al-hadif* [purposeful art] (Winegar 2008), Syrian drama creators (writers, directors, producers etc.) negotiating adaptions with conservative market demands (Salamandra 2008a), or Egyptian 'repentant' artists stepping down and in some cases reappearing veiled or in other ways clearly converted (Nieuwkerk 2008b). Thus, whereas the public space was previously occupied by the secularists' use of art for their pedagogical projects about national development and modernisation, or to combat Islamic revivalism, today phenomena like "'the clean cinema', 'Islamic tourism', 'Islamic stand-up comedy' and 'Islamic heavy metal' attest to the growing influence of Islamic sensibilities" (Nieuwkerk 2008a, 174). This continued growing influence of Islamic sentiments (often in the shape of Saudi Arabian money) in the cultural and media industry has made cultural producers painfully aware of these spaces as the last stronghold of Arab secularism (Haugbolle 2013a, 236). They feel that they are struggling to counteract the "moralization of public space, the imposition of ritual observance, and the censorship of cultural and entertainment products" as Sami Zubaida describes modern Islamism's attempt to impose religious authority on culture and society (Zubaida 2002, 19).

Islam in media started in the 1950s and '60s as a political legitimisation strategy used by the states and developed during the 1990s and 2000s into a religiously motivated ambition for the moralisation of public space. Today, in the post-2011 Arab mediascapes, a "speedy politicisation" of the religious channels has, in accordance to Khaled Hroub, taken place (Hroub 2012, 283). While most owners of religious channels, often Arab businessmen or business consortiums, shied away from political topics before the uprisings in 2011, this seemed to have changed in the years after. In a Saudi Arabian context, this has often meant Salafi religious channels supporting the public uprisings that are supported by the Saudi regime; a tendency which to some extent has taken a sectarian expression – in particular, the conflict in Syria has given way to a Sunni-Shia (Alawi) polarisation (Hroub 2012, 283). In the following section, I look further into the situation of the Arab mediascapes post-2011.

Arab mediascape post-2011

Just as the uprisings in 2011 changed the Arab ideoscapes and splintered the ideological cross-alliances, they too affected the composition and balance of the mediascapes. At the same time, media outlets themselves are, to a growing extent, turning into political actors in ongoing political battles. In her book *Image Politics in the Middle East* (2013), Line Khatib talks about how "often

there is no longer a distinction between the cultural and the political spheres; it is not just that popular culture and politics feed off each other – very often, popular culture is politics" (Lina Khatib 2013, 3). Thus, the Arab mediascapes offer themselves as political and ideological battlefields.

Whereas the outbreak of the uprisings could be seen as the climax of Browers's cross-ideological alliances, the aftermath exposed the weaknesses of the alliances within political groups, on the ground, and within the media platform of al-Jazeera. The political reality divided former allies, whether on the streets of Cairo, on the editorial board at al-Jazeera, or in the Arab media landscape at large. In addition to and partly as a consequence of this collapse of cross-ideological alliances, in the years after 2011 there has been a shift towards more partisan media openly promoting the agendas of their financiers, while viewers tend to seek out like-minded sources (Lynch 2012). Whereas the previous two decades saw a period of pluralisation in the Arab media world, the post-2011 period has been characterised by a fragmentation of both public opinion and the mediascapes. Marc Lynch, e.g., argues that "the media became a primary arena for political conflict and a key source of polarization, fear and uncertainty that undermined democratic transition" (Lynch 2015).

During the first months of the uprisings in 2011, al-Jazeera played its usual central role, and once again proved to be the centre point for the Arab public. Through intense and proactive coverage, al-Jazeera acted out its own slogan of being "the voice of the voiceless" and confirmed its role as a political actor that stood side-by-side with the people in the streets (Alterman 2011; Khatib 2013, 170-75). But, as Lina Khatib points out, the idealism had its limits; as soon as events conflicted with Qatar's political interests, things became more complicated. In the case of Egypt, it took a couple of days and a change of Qatari policy towards Egypt before al-Jazeera went all in, and in the case of Bahrain a similar passionate solidarity with the uprising never unfolded (Khatib 2013, 174-75; Lynch 2012). Also, on the question of foreign intervention in Libya, the political interests of Qatar (and the Gulf in general) were reflected in al-Jazeera's coverage – in spite of this being a controversial topic dividing Arab publics, al-Jazeera seemed to be in favour (Telhami 2013, 53). Qatar had obviously grown to become a political player with its own interests, deeply involved in regional politics and conflicts, leaving al-Jazeera less space for independent manoeuvring.

Syria, though, was the case that caused the deepest divisions across the Arab world and the mediascapes at large, as well as individual media outlets. As was the case with Egypt, the editorial line of al-Jazeera changed during the first weeks of the uprising, from neglect to a proactive commitment. Though, the later position was in line with the majority of the Arab public, a not irrelevant minority felt betrayed and alienated by al-Jazeera's stance. The image of Syria as the last Arab nation still standing strong against the Israeli occupation of Arab land made the government in Damascus a political symbol worth supporting in the eyes of parts of the Arab public. The two incompatible narratives of events in Syria – as either US imperialism in the shape of foreign terrorists trying to destroy the country of resistance, or a dictator terrorising his own population in order to stay in power no matter the human costs – competed for adherents. As the Syrian uprising turned into a military conflict, a mediated war was unfolding at the same time in print, broadcast

and online media (see e.g. "Violence and Visibility in Contemporary Syria: An Ethnography of the "Expanded Places" (Ratta 2015)). These political and ideological splits over Syria also divided the staff at al-Jazeera, and its editorial line triggered the resignations of several journalists – in general, mainly among those staff members who represented the Arab nationalist element of the network's ideological composition. Other media outlets faced the same internal discrepancies: at the Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar, the managing editor Khaled Saghieh left the paper he had helped set up due to its lack of support for the uprising in Syria (Dot-Pouillard 2012; Hanssen and Safieddine 2016).

The respective editorial lines not only divided staff but also viewers – and readers. The two Lebanese media outlets al-Manar and al-Akhbar are important examples of media that were challenged by events in Syria. Al-Manar had, since the liberation of Southern Lebanon in 2000, succeeded in transforming itself from a Lebanese Shia outlet to being a pan-Arab voice of resistance (Ajemian 2008; Houri and Saber 2010) – during the heydays of Hizbollah, the station enjoyed a previously unseen popularity and was one of the top four news stations in the Middle East in 2006 (Baylouny 2006, 7). Al-Akhbar, a media manifestation of the political "alliance between the Lebanese left and the Hizballah-led coalition in Lebanon" had since its establishment in 2006 built up a reputation for delivering "fiery and unapologetic attacks on authority", and had won recognition in Lebanon and beyond for its committed and investigative journalism (Hanssen and Safieddine 2016). Both outlets found themselves fundamentally challenged by the popular uprising in Syria and their decision to openly support al-Assad's rule in Damascus severely undermined their integrity.

As Qatar found itself moving politically closer to the other Gulf countries, and as relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia grew warmer, so al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya began to take closer positions, a development which created space in the mediascape for new voices to fill some of the vacuum that al-Jazeera's repositioning and the marginalisation of al-Manar had left. Though al-Jazeera (and Qatar) in general has been associated with supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Arabiya (and Saudi Arabia) with Salafi movements, the two stations found common ground when dealing with Sunni-Shia related issues. The sectarian Sunni-Shia dynamic had already been triggered in connection to Bahrain, but events in Syria divided the Muslim public further. Not only could the conflict in Syria be explained within political and ideological lines – such as democracy versus authoritarian rule, and imperialism versus foreign intervention – a sectarian reading of the conflict was gaining ground.

The political developments after 2011 have led to redeployments in the Arab ideo- and mediascapes. The collapse of the ideological cross-alliance necessitated – to use the image provided by Michael Freeden (Freeden 2003, 52) – a reassembling and rearrangement of the ideological modular units of furniture. These processes have created new ideological 'rooms', or ideoscapes, as well as mediascapes. More concretely, the post-2011 editorial line of al-Jazeera – which meant the sacrifice of some Arab nationalist voices and the strengthening of the Sunni Islamist, and to some extent, liberal voices – together with the marginalisation of al-Manar into an outlet that, once again, catered mainly to a Shia community, together paved the way for al-Mayadeen, and thus the

production of *The New Regressive Left*. In the following section, I introduce al-Mayadeen: its establishment and its vision, as well as its staff, programmes and viewers.

Introducing al-Mayadeen

On April 23 2011, the Lebanese newspaper as-Safir announced that Ghassan bin Jeddo had decided to resign from al-Jazeera. Bin Jeddo was one of al-Jazeera's most prominent figures, and had been with the station almost from its beginning – hosting the talk show Open Dialogue [Ḥuar Maftuḥ] and from 2004 heading its news office in Beirut as well. Being a well-known face in the public, his resignation caused quite a lot of media attention while discussions were further sparked by his reasoning for leaving the network. He stated, e.g., *that al-Jazeera has put an end to an entire dream of professionalism and objectivity, where its objectivity has deteriorated to the bottom after al-Jazeera stopped being a media outlet, and turned to serve as an operations room for incitement and mobilisation* (As-Safir 2011).

Bin Jeddo made it clear that he could not accept al-Jazeera's coverage – and in the case of Bahrain, *lack* of coverage – of the Arab uprisings in general, and of events in Syria in particular. The same frustration has later been put forward by other former al-Jazeera staff members who opted for work at al-Mayadeen.[57] Thus, since the first official announcement of the plans for a new pan-Arab news station at the press conference in July 2011, Ghassan bin Jeddo and the management of al-Mayadeen have tried to frame the new network as a serious competitor to al-Jazeera – promoting it as being more professional than other media outlets, and working for the interests of the Arab people, not particular Arab (or foreign) governments.

The articulated frustration over the lack of professionalism in the coverage of the Arab uprisings – in Arab media in general and in al-Jazeera in particular – has from the beginning been a central theme in the legitimation strategy of al-Mayadeen. In a promotional brochure presenting the station, Ghassan bin Jeddo writes: "Unfortunately, for some the media has become a cheap commodity subject to bidding, buying and selling. To others, it has become a platform to incite terrorism, and even to falsify reality and cheat public opinion… Here lies the importance of Al-Mayadeen" (official booklet from the Radio and TV Festival in Cuba 2013). Likewise, at the press conference in June 2012, in connection with the launch, Jeddo presented al-Mayadeen as "a free and independent media project"[58] and the stated promise is to present "reality as it is" [*al-waqa'a kamma hua*], as the slogan of the station proclaims. But despite objectivity and professionalism

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[57] The journalists Sami Kleib and Ali Hashem, programme host Lina Zahr Eddine, and former managing director of al-Jazeera's office in Beirut (now foreign bureaus manager at al-Mayadeen) Hassan Chaaban are examples of central al-Jazeera staff who left to go to al-Mayadeen on the same account as bin Jeddo. About Ali Hashem see e.g.: http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/4941 and http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=8106, about Lina Zahr Eddine see e.g.: http://assafir.com/Article/243998/Archive, about Hassan Chaaban see e.g.: https://www.rt.com/news/al-jazeera-loses-staff-335/

[58] http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/8056

constituting central themes in the promotion of al-Mayadeen, its image as an independent media outlet has from the outset been difficult to sustain – as I return to below.

In parallel with the framing of al-Mayadeen as being closer to reality than its competitors, the network equally presents itself as *the* representative of the Palestinian cause, and stresses its commitment to *al-muqawama*. The expression of Palestine being 'the compass' of the network is evoked again and again, and al-Mayadeen insists on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as the main important issue for the whole region in spite of political developments the past five years. An example of the focus on Palestine is the station's animation and broadcasting of Naji al-Ali's famous political cartoons with the character Handala from the 1970s and '80s. This was done to honour Naji al-Ali, to teach a new generation about its cultural heritage, and not least to remind an Arab public of the historically strong commitment to the Palestinian cause (personal interview with Saleh Hassan, account manager of al-Mayadeen, at the multimedia and communication agency Mentis, 30.04.2015). I elaborate on this project in the chapter "Celebrating Resistance through Words, Images and Songs: the Case of Palestine".

Using Palestine as a banner is not a new invention; rather, it continues a long tradition though the years of political parties, leaders and movements, as well as media, artists and other cultural producers, who have obtained political legitimacy and public sympathy by invoking the Palestinian cause. Both al-Jazeera and al-Manar are examples of media that have boosted their regional viewership by intense and pro-Palestinian coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What is remarkable in this case, though, is the fact that al-Mayadeen, in the midst of the political turbulence of post-2011, once again – as if nothing really had changed – returned to the same old parole. The example of the relaunch of Handala underscores how this Palestinian strategy is drawing heavily on narratives of the past and how al-Mayadeen insists on reading the present situation in the Arab world as a direct continuation of the past many decades.

The style of the debate programmes also looks back in time for inspiration. Several times, staff members explained to me that at al-Mayadeen they wanted to avoid the famous heated debate culture from al-Jazeera, as that would only feed into the division of the Arab world. Thus, rather than opposing each other, the guests often complement each other at al-Mayadeen. Thus, al-Mayadeen's slogan 'the reality as it is' contrasts with al-Jazeera's 'one opinion and the other', not only in words, but also in actions. Whereas al-Jazeera aimed to present opposing viewpoints in its debate programmes and consciously featured controversial guests or radically contradicting voices, al-Mayadeen clearly has other ambitions. Similarly, unlike al-Jazeera, al-Mayadeen does not feature Israeli officials in its debates and programmes as a symbolic declaration of its wholehearted support for Palestine.

Furthermore, al-Mayadeen promotes itself as a progressive voice, in contrast to what the station sees as the regressive values advocated by the Gulf and Islamist groups on the one hand, and the imperialistic ambitions of the West on the other hand. Al-Mayadeen likes to regard itself as representing the *humanistic perspective* (personal interview with Zainab as-Saffar, 13.11.2014,

Beirut. See also Khas al-Mayadeen, 5.3.2015) and presents itself as *ailam multazim* [a committed media]. Al-Mayadeen promotes itself – according to bin Jeddo's words in a promotional brochure about the station – as "a voice in the revolutionary southern world", which is "biased towards the South". This committed activism is reflected in projects like the cooperation with TeleSur and Cuban State TV, or the establishment of a Southern media network to counter the US-dominated news stream (see chapter 8). Another example of how al-Mayadeen actively promotes and represents certain ideals is in the annual event, Worthy of Life (see Chapter 4). On this occasion, the station pays tribute to an iconic living personality from the past who is seen to be an inspiring role model for the future. So far, the former Algerian freedom fighter Jamila Bouhired (see Chapter 4), the former Lebanese prime minister Salim al-Hoss, and the late president of Cuba, Fidel Castro, have been celebrated. The three owners of the title Worthy of Life are chosen (personally, by bin Jeddo) as representatives of the values which al-Mayadeen wants to promote – resistance against occupation, national unity across sectarian division, and revolutionary Third Worldism countering US imperialism.

In March 2015, al-Mayadeen celebrated its first 1,000 days of broadcasting with a small series of spots, each showing a staff member noting with satisfaction one of the things that had been accomplished: "1,000 days of refusing the terrorists", "1,000 days of being with Palestine", "1,000 days of being with the woman", "1,000 days of being with the reality", "1,000 days of being with freedom", "1,000 days of being with the human", "1,000 days of being with the owner of the truth", "1,000 days of communicating the voice", "1,000 days of being with the resistance". The nine accomplishments roughly sum up how the network perceives itself – or, at least, how it would like to be perceived by its audience: promoting progressive values, being the voice of Arab resistance, and broadcasting trustworthy news.

Financial and political connections

At the first al-Mayadeen press conference in Beirut on 28 July 2011, three central figures in the new project were present in order to launch their joint future endeavour: Ghassan bin Jeddo, managing director and chief executive officer (CEO), Sami Kleib[59] head of news, and Neyef Krayem[60], general manager. What did not become clear during the afternoon, though, was who would be funding the ambitious project, and speculations, rumours, and accusations followed immediately. The standard answer from al-Mayadeen is that 'anonymous Arab businessmen'[61] are providing the

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[59] Sami Kleib stayed as head of news until spring 2014, after which bin Jeddo took over the role.

[60] Former chairman of the board and general manager of al-Manar TV (1995-2003). After a period at Dubai TV, he returned to Lebanon in May 2010 with a plan to launch a new TV channel, al-Ittihad [The Union]. Krayem has explained that his ambition with al-Ittihad was to unite the Arabs – the channel would be pro-Palestinian and focus on the Palestinian and Lebanese struggle against Israeli occupation. In June 2011, Jeddo made contact with Krayem in order to get him on board with the al-Mayadeen project. Jeddo had the funds but not the infrastructure; Krayem, on the other hand, had already built up an organisation and was ready to go on air later that same year. They decided to join forces. However the cooperation only lasted until April 2012, when Krayem withdrew (personal interview with Krayem, Beirut, November 2015).

[61] See an interview illustrating this, with Sami Kleib, here: http://www.beirutreport.com/2013/08/who-owns-al-mayadeen_12.html#!/2013/08/who-owns-al-mayadeen_12.html

necessary funds, but ongoing discussions in both Arab and English-language media point out that Iran, Syria, or Hizbollah are the most plausible funders. An example of the theories that have been circulating comes from Omar Ibhais, a Lebanese TV producer, who claims to know that al-Mayadeen is a joint venture between the Iranian state and the Syrian businessman and cousin of Bashar al-Assad, Rami Makhlouf.[62]

The rumours started even before al-Mayadeen went on air, and were nurtured by factors such as bin Jeddo's previous sympathy with Hizbollah, Kleib's marriage to Bashar al-Assad's media advisor Luna al-Chebel, and Krayem's previous position as general manager at al-Manar. Speculation about the funding only grew after al-Mayadeen started broadcasting, as the network's editorial line added accusations about being politically biased in support of Iranian interests and the regime in Damascus. The lack of financial transparency prevails until today, and the official secrecy concerning the economic setup undermines the potential credibility of al-Mayadeen.

The location of al-Mayadeen's main office in the Levant, in Beirut, in Bir Hassan – a Shia-dominated district – is loaded with political and ideological messages. The fact that al-Mayadeen is based in the Levant and not in the Gulf – as opposed to its two main competitors, al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, as well as the majority of the regional media businesses in general – is not coincidental, but talks to the on-going political struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran for regional dominance. At an ideological level, the location is a symbolic resistance to the growing influence of Gulf oil money in the region, and a symbolic reminder of the Levant as the traditional cultural and intellectual centre of the Arab world (together with Egypt), and Beirut as the heart of Arab media and journalism. On a political level, the concrete address in Bir Hassan, a Southern district of Beirut which connects Beirut with the famous Hizbollah dominated southern suburb Dahye, points to the station's political patrons. Lebanon has, for decades, been an important entrance point for Iranian influence in the Arab world due to a growing Shia population in the country and the weak nation state – as al-Mayadeen's physical position between the Iranian cultural centre and the Iranian embassy clearly illustrates. The first time I went to the premises of al-Mayadeen, I was stopped at a checkpoint at the entrance road, staffed by two guards, while the main building is surrounded by a high brick wall, away from the main road. These security precautions might not be so surprising when taken it is into consideration that both the Iranian cultural centre and embassy have been hit by suicide bombers in recent years.

In the streets around al-Mayadeen, several Iranian-funded TV stations are located, which further underlines the suggestion that al-Mayadeen is part of an Iranian media sphere. During my stays in Beirut, I often encountered people suggesting that the location of al-Mayadeen itself was proof of the involvement of Iranian money. One time, e.g., I asked a former media professional from the station about the funding issue. His reply was an account of which other TV stations are located in the neighbourhood of al-Mayadeen: Iran's English-speaking satellite station, al-Alam; Hizbollah's TV station, al-Manar; Hamas's TV station, al-Aqsa, Palestinian Islamic Jihad's TV station,

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[62] http://www.france24.com/en/20120612-al-mayadeen-new-anti-al-jazeera-channel-media-lebanon-syria/

Palestine al-Youm; Nabih Berri's TV station, NBN; alongside several Bahraini and Yemeni oppositional media. What he meant to imply was that they all enjoyed economic support from the same funder; namely, Iran. He even pointed out to me that if I visited the different stations in the area I would notice that the furniture and equipment was the same – yet another way of underscoring that the backer was the same (personal interview, Beirut, November 2014).

Another indication of Iran's involvement in al-Mayadeen is the station's connection with the Iranian-funded media organisation, the Union Center for Media Training (UCMT)[63], which offers media training to staff members of the Union's 226 or so Islamic media members. At UCMT, I was informed that they had provided the training of all media related staff at al-Mayadeen. Al-Mayadeen is not a member of the Union and at UCMT they didn't consider al-Mayadeen an Islamic media organisation, as such – but Ghassan bin Jeddo is a close personal friend of the director and has positive ties to the Union. Whether al-Mayadeen receives economic support from the Union was not known at UCMT, but the director thought it was unlikely, as 'Ghassan bin Jeddo has such a strong name and is so well-connected that he is independent and thus able to provide funds from outside the Union' (personal interview with director of UCMT, Haj Ali Aresaln, Beirut, 28.04.2015).

The main office of al-Mayadeen is not very impressive, and often when I visited, I was told that they were just about to move to a bigger place, any time soon. Similarly, I was told that the station did not have the same budget as its competitors in the Gulf. Nevertheless, the funder(s) of al-Mayadeen must have invested an enormous amount in the project. From day one, the station has been broadcasting its own productions 24/7 with almost no advertisements[64]; it has presented many new faces (less expensive salary-wise), but also boasts many well-established journalists such as Sami Kleib, Ali Hashem, and Lina Zahreddine in its ranks, not to mention the controversial figure and former British parliament member George Galloway, all names that will require high salaries; plus the design and layout is convincingly professional – all of which demands a capital flow of a certain size.

Many indications point in the direction of the Iranian state being the funder or co-funder of the station, though this will remain only a qualified guess from my side. The identity of the funder is, of course, always of relevance for understanding a media outlet; yet, I believe, not essential for this project. That al-Mayadeen promotes a certain political agenda is beyond doubt, but that the majority

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[63] UCMT is initiated and funded by Iran with offices in Tehran, Baghdad and Beirut – not far from al-Mayadeen's location. It is an organisation which offers media training to all its members – more than 200 media outlets with Shia Islam as the shared point of reference – as well as external clients. Furthermore, it develops teaching materials and holds an annual fair where the union members meet in order to buy and sell products, and as the latest offspring of its business, it offers the service of approving productions *halal* if the meet the given criteria. In accordance with staff members at UCMT, it is important to stress that the Islamic media which they represent is about much more than religion. It is about culture and values, media outlets that produce and broadcast productions made on "our own cultural conditions so they are more authentic" (personal interview with UCMT staff member, 28.04.2015).

[64] The phenomenon of media not generating revenue is not unusual in an Arab context. On the contrary, most media are not self-sufficient and rely on political money for survival. For more on this topic, see Naomi Sakr: *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalization & the Middle East* (Sakr 2001), especially page 27-65.

of the staff members are committed to the project for other reasons than supporting Iranian interests is equally clear. What interests me is the actual ideological discourse that al-Mayadeen propagates, and through which engaged staff members attempt to appeal to an Arab audience in an Arab context. While the funder – Iranian or not – surely has its own political agenda, the actual product is more complex than that (see the Introduction for further reflections on this issue).

The people of al-Mayadeen – staff members and guests

Ghassan bin Jeddo is effectively the figurehead of al-Mayadeen, both through his engaged personality and his strong political positioning. Several staff members referred to him as 'almost like a father' and programme hostess Zainab as-Saffar, e.g., appreciates his high level of commitment and sees him *more as a guidance than as a boss* (personal interview with as-Saffar, Beirut, 13.11.2014). He takes on a role that goes beyond what is normally expected from a CEO. Most decisions are taken with him on board – from the naming of programmes to the choosing of talk show guests and the employing of new staff members. A strong illustration of the engaged – or, some might say, top-down – style of bin Jeddo's way of managing al-Mayadeen is the shrinking size of the al-Mayadeen leadership. While there had been three representatives of the station at the press conference in 2011, at the second press conference in June 2012, only Ghassan bin Jeddo and Sami Kleib were present to announce the launch of al-Mayadeen a couple of days later. Neyef Krayem had withdrawn from the project two months before going on air. Two years later, in 2014, Sami Kleib resigned as head of news. He did not leave the station, but continued as host of his weekly programme, La'abat al-Umma. Both resignations, according to a former employee, were caused by bin Jeddo's controlling style of leadership, leaving no room for responsibility for his management group (personal interviews, Beirut, December 2014). This might not be the whole explanation – I have talked to others close to the station who have pointed to political disagreements – but one thing is for sure, and that is that bin Jeddo is omnipresent, the all-pervading actor at al-Mayadeen.

At al-Mayadeen's office in Beirut, there are staff from all over the Arab world. It has been a conscious strategy by bin Jeddo to ensure a pan-Arab profile of the employee group in order to represent the whole Arab world and materialise the pan-Arab vision (personal interview with director of production, Rashid Kanj, Beirut, 12.11.2014 and personal interview with Zainab as-Saffar, Beirut, 13.11.2011). Besides al-Mayadeen's main office in Beirut, there are regional offices in Palestine, Damascus, Tunis, Cairo, and Tehran, as well as offices in Moscow and Washington. Furthermore, there are reporters in several other countries, for example Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UK, constituting a network of journalists covering big parts of the world. By the end of 2013, there were 35 correspondents employed at al-Mayadeen (personal interview with Ali Hashem, December 2013). The staff members are a mix of experienced media workers and newcomers, as it is an ambition for bin Jeddo to present new (unspoiled) faces on al-Mayadeen, just as it has also been important to have well-known names on board in order to boost the project and attract viewers from day one.

The level of commitment and loyalty of the staff varies. I have, over time, come to know staff members at al-Mayadeen who truly believe that working at this TV station is a way of changing the world to make it a better and more humane place, just as I have met some that are disillusioned and disappointed with the station. Some employees are less concerned with al-Mayadeen's editorial line or stated vision, but appreciate the career opportunity. Others have resigned from the station in frustration over the work culture or conditions, or due to political disagreements. However, what unites most staff members across nationalities, ideological or religious beliefs, I was told repeatedly, is the Palestinian cause.

"Support the Palestinian cause" only ranked as the eighth most important in the list of journalistic roles in a survey conducted between 2005 and 2006 among 601 Arab journalists (Pintak and Ginges 2008).[65] I have no numbers indicating the ranking of the question of Palestine within al-Mayadeen's journalists, but my clear impression is that Palestine is considered to be *the* uniting topic. Even former employees, who have left al-Mayadeen over disagreements with the general editorial line (often the outspoken support of the Syrian regime in Damascus), still recognise and appreciate the pro-Palestinian stance of al-Mayadeen, as it corresponds with their own political priorities. Thus, more than anything, the ambition of repointing *the compass* towards Palestine in the midst of political turbulence across the Arab world is an important profile feature of the typical al-Mayadeen journalist.

During the interviews that I conducted with al-Mayadeen staff members, I asked if al-Mayadeen could be said to have a leftist leaning, to which everybody replied *no,* with several adding *this is not a political party*. Nevertheless, in most cases the interviewee would later on tell me that she or he came from a leftist background, or considered him or herself to be a leftist. Wafy Ibrahim, the manager of Latin American-related affairs, underlined for me that a broad variety of religions and sects were represented within the staff group. Nevertheless, when listing the different political groups she suggested that *Nasserites, Ba'athists, communists, and socialists* all are represented at the station (personal interview, Beirut, 03.12.2015).Or, put differently, a broad spectrum of the Arab Left are represented. She later added that one of the technicians comes from an *extreme right-wing family* – an addition which somehow only underscored the general leftist leaning of the staff. Thus, even though the station, of course, is not a political party as such, leftist ideological discourses predominate within the staff.

As mentioned earlier, bin Jeddo didn't leave al-Jazeera alone, but brought with him a group of colleagues to al-Mayadeen. The Saudi newspaper Asharq al-Awsat could even cite a "well-informed Al-Jazeera TV source" in reporting that al-Jazeera's Beirut bureau (until that time headed by bin Jeddo) witnessed "something like a mass defection from Al-Jazeera to Al-Mayadeen" (Asharq al-Awsat 2012). Similarly, there has been a movement of staff members from al-Manar to al-Mayadeen, but in contrast with the employees coming from, e.g., al-Jazeera or the Lebanese TV station al-Mustaqbal (Future TV), the former al-Manar staff didn't relocate because of political

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[65] After, e.g., "Political reforms", "Educate the public", "Voice of the poor".

disagreements over the editorial line. The case of Zainab as-Saffar illustrates this. As-Saffar had a strong profile on al-Manar, first as a news anchor and later as host of the talk show In their Eyes, but is today hosting *Min al-Dakhil* [From the Inside] at al-Mayadeen. When explaining to me why she decided to join al-Mayadeen, she underlined that she never left al-Manar, but at the moment considers al-Mayadeen a better platform for her work as the international listing of al-Manar as a terror organisation has complicated her work with international guests (personal interview, Beirut, 13.11.2014).

During the first few years at al-Mayadeen, an inner circle of guests who participate in different programmes and events has been established. The former chief editor of al-Quds al-Arabi, Abdel Bari Atwan; the political and media advisor of Bashar al-Assad, Buthaina Shaaban; and a representative of the Syrian opposition who argues against foreign intervention, and for negotiations with Bashar al-Assad, Haytham Manna, are obvious central personalities who appear again and again in different contexts. Bashar al-Assad and Hassan Nasrallah are examples of important political figures, usually difficult to get an interview with, but who have appeared on al-Mayadeen more than once. Furthermore, a character that gets time on air is the leftist intellectual or cultural figure – Julia Boutrus, Ziad Rahbani and Samih Qasim are important examples.

The audience – who, where and how many?

Al-Mayadeen broadcasts live through satellite and on the internet. On the homepage, all the programmes are available in an online archive. Al-Mayadeen is also active on Facebook and Twitter, and in 2014 additionally launched a website in Spanish rather than in English, a clear political and ideological prioritisation. The newscasts naturally make up the major component of the daily programing, but daily or weekly programmes are equally an important and complementary element – political debate programmes, investigative documentaries, cultural talk shows – but no fiction, drama, or entertainment shows. Some of the central shows, which have been running since the launch of al-Mayadeen, are: the political debate program *La'bt al-Umam* [The Game of the Nations], hosted by Sami Kleib; *Min al-Ard* [From the Ground], hosted by Ugarit Dandash; *Min al-Dakhil* [From the Inside] where Zeinab al-Saffar conducts interviews with international guests; *Alif Lam Mim (ALM)*, hosted by Yahya Abu Zakariya – a programme discussing Islam and promoting "a moderate Islamic position as an alternative to radical Islam" (cf. Chapter 7); and the former British member of parliament George Galloway's talk show *Kalimat Hurra* [Free words] (cf. Chapter 8).

Reliable statistics in the Arab world are often difficult to find, not least when it comes to audience ratings. Judging from the growing numbers of likes[66] on al-Mayadeen's Facebook page – surpassing 5,000,000 in March 2016 – the network is a growing success. In spite of the possible inaccuracy, I asked the international research company Ipsos to make a small audience survey on al-Mayadeen in the following nine countries: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan,

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[66] 1,630.070 likes on 20.04.2014, 2,010.870 likes on 27.06.2014, 2,376.651 likes on 26.08.2014, 3,200.000 likes on 12.03.2015, 4,000.000 likes on 07.10.2015.

Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. The reach of al-Mayadeen was found to be very different between the countries, but overall it confirms the likes on Facebook – al-Mayadeen does have a growing viewership. Syria and Lebanon are the two countries where the network enjoys the biggest audience, and in 2015 it even surpassed both al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya in these countries. Furthermore, Palestine and Bahrain are countries where al-Mayadeen is succeeding in attracting a growing audience. In other countries, like, e.g., Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the network plays hardly any role.

In October 2012, the average daily viewership in Syria was 212,619 (the numbers for al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya respectively were 808,684 and 888,612), while in October 2015, the number of daily viewers had passed 1,000,000 (where al-Jazeera had 411,617 and al-Arabiya 575, 541). Not only had the number of viewers watching al-Mayadeen gone up by a factor of five, al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya had both lost approximately half of their audiences. The same development is visible in Lebanon, though less pronounced. In March 2013, the number of daily viewers watching al-Mayadeen in Lebanon reached 92,893 (whereas al-Jazeera enjoyed 314,871 viewers and al-Arabiya 328,457), while two years later, in March 2015, al-Mayadeen had surpassed both al-Jazeera (180,659 viewers) and al-Arabiya (204,766 viewers) and reached 212,368 daily viewers. In Bahrain and Palestine, the size of the audience has also grown (respectively, doubling and increasing by a factor of five), but al-Mayadeen still remains the little brother in these countries compared with its two main competitors.

That Syria and Lebanon are the two countries with the biggest share of audience is not surprising; neither is the relative success in Palestine and Bahrain. First of all, Syria and Palestine have been at the top of the agenda at al-Mayadeen, just as talk show guests often (but certainly not always) come from Lebanon or neighbouring countries and the cultural references to a high degree are connected to *Bilad ash-Sham*. Likewise, the secular and leftist values that al-Mayadeen propagates, strongly draw on Levantine cultural heritage and thus aims at that audience as well. Thus, while al-Mayadeen has proclaimed pan-Arab ambitions, the audience of the Levant will often feel more 'at home' watching the debates and programmes.

Secondly, the political line of al-Mayadeen obviously talks to the groups of the public who feel positively about Bashar al-Assad and Hizbollah, again pointing towards Syria and Lebanon. Furthermore, in Syria, the question of access to TV also plays an important role – whereas the population living in, e.g., Damascus, Latakia, or Tartous still enjoy this possibility, the same might not be the case for those parts of the population living in combat zones or areas that are under siege

etc. Thirdly, al-Mayadeen's priority of promoting religious minorities and its strong position against Sunni Islamism potentially talk to a Levant population – the traditional home of religious minorities in the region – as well as to a country like Bahrain, with a Shia majority population (and a Sunni rule). The reason for the poor numbers of Egyptian viewers, I believe, is not the lack of a potential audience in sync with the ideology of al-Mayadeen, but rather the strong Egyptian tradition for following national news media.

The statistics on age profiling are very limited, and only include Iraq, Palestine and Bahrain. The numbers for all three countries, though, point towards the tendency that the typical viewer of al-Mayadeen is slightly older than the typical al-Jazeera or al-Arabiya watcher. The rating of the most viewed programme in the different countries points in so many different directions that it is difficult to see any predominant trend. In Syria (October 2015), the country with the biggest audience for al-Mayadeen, the weekly programme on the political situation in Israel, *Khalef al-Jidar* [Behind the Wall] ranks both as number one and two, while *Harrir Aqlak* [Free Your Mind] is the seventh most watched programme, Poder number eleven and *Bayt al-Qasid* [The Essence] number sixteen. Thus, while a political programme such as Khalef al-Jidar might attract the most viewers; other types of programmes also bring in audience – which is an important fact to keep in mind when turning our attention to the actual programme analyses in the remaining chapters.

Conclusion

As described in the previous chapter, the uprisings in 2011 led to a collapse of former *cross-ideological alliances* and deepened already existing divisions within the Arab Left. Furthermore, secular cultural producers, whether intellectuals, journalists or artists, have in recent years and decades seen how religious values – often financed by Saudi Arabia – have come to play an ever greater role across the Arab world, putting secular ideals under pressure. These movements within the Arab ideoscapes are also visible in the mediascape. Al-Jazeera has 'sacrificed' the old-style Arab nationalists – the group that would prioritise values such as *muqawama* and *mumana'a* above all – from its inclusive ideological composition, in favour of strong support for the public uprisings (with the exception of Bahrain). Al-Manar, on the other hand, with its strong resistance discourse, has lost its pan-Arab appeal due to Hizbollah's support for Bashar al-Assad, and finds itself marginalised and back in its role as the 'Shia-station'.

These developments together have created the space for the launch of a TV station with a profile such as al-Mayadeen's; a TV station that carries on the strong resistance discourse of al-Manar and al-Jazeera but without the strong Iranian-Shia brand of al-Manar and without the Gulf rapprochement and 'betrayal' of al-Jazeera. Al-Mayadeen tries to cater for the group of the public that still wants to see Palestine as the number one cause on the agenda, and which worries about growing (Gulf-funded) Islamism. Here, secular groups and religious minorities – not least Shia Muslims – find common ground. Al-Mayadeen, thus, serves as a central case study for this new ideological constellation that is coming into existence, brought about by the three main tensions among the Arab public: the secular-religious, the sectarian Sunni-Shia, and the anti-authoritarian-

anti-imperialist. Al-Mayadeen was launched as a pan-Arab media network, but to a large degree it is targeting viewers in *bilad ash-Sham* while aiming at the same time to become part of a global Southern voice.

The previous three chapters together set the theoretical frame and the contextual scene for the remains of this thesis. In the following five chapters I move into my empirical material and investigate the ideological discourse of al-Mayadeen further. I analysis *how,* through the celebration of Jamila Bouhired, al-Mayadeen presents itself as the guardian of old national resistance values combined with women's rights and pan-Arab ideals; *how* the cultural talk show Bayt al-Qasid develops an intellectual 'spine' for the network's political line; *how,* through short political spots, songs, and animations, al-Mayadeen promotes a break from the victimhood discourse of the Palestinians and re-launches the longstanding heroic narrative; *how* the Ramadan programme Harrir Aqlak invokes intellectual renaissance within Islam to counteract Saudi Wahhabism and Sunni Islamism while it – alongside Ajras al-Mashreq – advocates an agenda of religious pluralism; and finally *how*, through the prioritisation of Latin America in general and the cooperation with TeleSur in particular, al-Mayadeen offers a possible way forward by looking towards the international South for inspiration, collaboration, and solidarity.

PART II

The Creation of an Icon: the Case of Jamila Bouhired

In this chapter, I explore al-Mayadeen's celebration of Jamila Bouhired, a former Algerian freedom fighter who participated in the Algerian war of independence against the French colonial power. Jamila Bouhired – who was a renowned public figure in the Arab world in her youth – had been almost forgotten by the media by 2013, when Ghassan bin Jeddo decided to bring her back into the spotlight, orchestrating a big public celebration of her life. I show that Jamila Bouhired was celebrated as an embodiment of a certain time in history, a certain set of values, and a certain ideological position. Furthermore, I argue that al-Mayadeen's intention in re-launching this heroine from the past was to create an icon that could promote the contemporary political visions of the station.

A big public entertainment show was organised at the UNESCO Palace in downtown Beirut on 3 December 2013. Artists and activists from the Arab world and beyond contributed to the celebration on stage and many more prominent names from the region travelled to Beirut in order to attend the show. The following day, an additional though smaller ceremony was held in the former Hizbollah command centre in the South Lebanese village Mlita. The two events were, of course, broadcast live by al-Mayadeen. In the weeks leading up to the event, a number of short spots about Jamila Bouhired and the Algerian war also promoted the upcoming show, building up expectations and educating the viewer about this historical figure. During the week of the show, Arab female fighters in general were a reoccurring theme in the debate programmes and talk shows whenever suitable. Afterwards, al-Mayadeen created the website www.djamila-bouhired.com, where most of the related material was available for a longer period.[67]

The celebration of Bouhired launched a new initiative for al-Mayadeen, the so-called Worthy of Life [*Jadarat al-Ḥayat*]. The concept is a yearly recurring event where al-Mayadeen celebrates a living person that it finds *worthy of life*. The honouring of Bouhired was the first in a row of several tributes to important figures. In 2014, the former Lebanese prime minister Salim al-Hoss was

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[67] The broadcast material of the show in the UNESCO building (five parts) is available at:
http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/episode/8691/%D8%AD%D9%81%D9%84-
%D8%AA%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A9-
%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AF
The broadcast material of the MLITA event (three parts) is available at:
http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/episode/8686/%D8%AA%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%85-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A9-
%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%A7

celebrated as Worthy of Life, though on a much smaller scale than the previous year's event. In 2015, the former president of Cuba, Fidel Castro, was given the title and celebrated by al-Mayadeen at an event in Cuba. A small pamphlet made for the launch of the concept in 2013 describes the idea of Worthy of Life:

"Honoring" is basically an intellectual act, a goal and a message ... To honor someone is also an expression of choice and identity ... To honor a figure is to evoke a bright history ... a valuable reality ... a constructive vision (...) Our message behind "honoring" is to declare appreciation to eminent personalities in their history, their values, their ideas, their deeds, their achievements and their influence ... Persons who left a mark ... persons who have become role models that we take pride in presenting as an example to be followed and a beacon for a revolutionary struggle approach, for a resistive, intellectual and cultural, media, political or principle approach ... It is "Worthy of Life" (quotation from the English edition of the pamphlet uploaded on the former website www.djamila-bouhired.com).

In accordance with this statement, the tribute to Bouhired was not thought of as random entertainment, but as an occasion to celebrate a role model for society and, thus, the ideals he or she represents. It was an occasion to reflect upon the values of the past and find inspiration for the present; an orchestration of a collective longing for the ideals of the past, which need to be re-established. Here, Svetlana Boym's differentiation between melancholia and nostalgia is of relevance. Boym argues that: "Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory" (Boym 2001, xvi). Thus, the celebration of Bouhired plays exactly on nostalgic sentiments, as it was about reviving *the biography of groups or nations,* and inciting *collective memories* through an *individual biography.*

The size of the event and the amount of money and work hours spent on it indicate that the celebration was a high priority for the young station. In addition to being a PR stunt, I see the event as a clear example of a personification or embodiment of an ideology, or, rather, of **how** an ideology is produced through the creation of a legitimate authority (Finlayson 2012). Thus, looking more closely at the Bouhired celebration informs us about the ideology of al-Mayadeen and points to how the station reads the past, understands the present and envisions the future. In the following, I investigate how al-Mayadeen re-launched Bouhired as an icon, and why the station chose to bring this grand old lady from the past back into the spotlight. This case study of a living Arab icon furthermore illustrates how symbols are created, and are open for different interpretations.

The concept of the secular icon
The concept of icons has historically been connected to religious traditions of worship but in contemporary times it has gained a broader, and more secular, meaning. Today – in ways facilitated by our mass-mediated society – non-religious images, songs, cultural figures and political leaders have obtained icon-like status. David Scott and Keyan G. Tomaselli (2009) argue that cultural icons

today work or take shape in three different ways. First, in the original understanding, in which they carry religious significance. Second, as secular icons from real life that through time obtain a "certain exemplary status". Third, as constructed icons, which are products of the commercialised modern world created in order to sell merchandise (Scott and Tomaselli 2009, 18). Of course, the categories should not be understood rigidly and even though in the case of Jamila Bouhired, the commercialised icon is not without relevance, I refer in the remains of this chapter to icons or cultural icons as they are defined in the second category.[68]

Bishnupriya Ghosh investigates in her book *Global Icons: Apertures to the Popular* (2011) how living people can develop into highly visible public figures, capable of moving the public and sometimes even of initiating social change. The public figures, which she refers to as "bio-icons", transform from being ordinary people into symbols or "powerful signs", and thus function as sources of inspiration. Ghosh underlines the importance of mass media, which offers a platform for these bio-icons to be shaped, promoted and conceived. She writes: "Here, bio-icons, whose images and lives saturate mass media, play a particular role. They are not just significant as powerful signs; they also bear an indexical charge for collectivities that place social demands through them. Their 'life story' the formalised bios, inductively focalises the sign and renders it representative of the ordinary; the icon appears to have been just like us once, a long time ago, despite her later excellence" (Ghosh 2011, 12).

In a Middle Eastern context, secular cultural icons or bio-icons have played an important role in political life in the twentieth century. Charismatic state cult leaders like Hafez al-Assad (Wedeen 1999) and Kemal Atatürk (Ozyurek 2006); leaders like the late Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, Michel Aoun (Lefort 2015), and Bashir Gemayel (Haugbolle 2013b); cultural figures such as Fairouz (Stone 2008) and Ziad Rahbani (Haugbolle 2016b); and resistance leaders such as Hassan Nasrallah (Lina Khatib, Matar, and Alshaer 2014) and Yassir Arafat have, in different ways, formed "a pivotal point in the production of various kinds of mass-mediated publics" (Haugbolle and Kuzmanovic 2015, 5). In contexts where secular powers have attempted to counteract religiously identified opposition movements in particular, the iconization of secular figures has been a significantly employed political strategy (Bandak and Bille 2013, 15–16).

An important aspect of an icon is its detachment from concrete contemporary political developments. An icon is above ongoing political power struggles, empty of specific political content, but is, yet, a symbol of certain values or qualities which can be interpreted in different ways depending on agendas and world views. In this connection, Laleh Khalili notes, "Iconization transforms a concrete event, object, or being into a symbol. It is the process by which an event is decontextualized, shorn of its concrete details and transformed into an abstract symbol, often empty, which can then be instrumentalized as a mobilizing tool by being 'filled' with necessary ideological rhetoric" (Khalili 2009, 153). In the case of Bouhired, the years that have passed since she was active on the battlefield and the centre of the media's attention have erased former concrete political

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[68] See also Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille: *Politics of Worship in the Contemporary Middle East* (Bandak and Bille 2013)

affiliations and left her as a symbol of *certain values or qualities,* a representative of nostalgic sentiments for an idealised past.

Furthermore, an icon that represents a specific period of time or virtue of the past can facilitate a specific reading of the past. In connection with the Arab Left's use of secular icons, Sune Haugbølle notes: "Maintaining the possibility of a secular reading of history is one of the challenges facing the Arab left (…) such readings make use of icons that refer back to a time when secular readings of history were taken for granted" (Haugbolle 2013b, 256). Likewise, using Bouhired as a symbol of resistance and true revolution also supports a certain reading of the past. I return to this aspect later in the chapter as I explore al-Mayadeen's orchestrated iconization of Bouhired and the era that she represents. In the context of this study, the use of Bouhired as an icon is significant as she becomes part of the ideology of al-Mayadeen. The forgotten Bouhired functions as the empty shell, which, during the celebration, is refilled with an ideological narrative; an ideological narrative which did not exist independently of her. Bouhired becomes the embodiment of an ideology, the ethos or the authority through which an ideology can gain legitimacy. Thus, as an icon, Bouhired can function as the master signifier or the 'quilting point' that ties a political community together (Sharpe 2006, 117).

The framing of the icon

In the weeks leading up to the event at the UNESCO Palace, around ten small spots about Bouhired and *the revolution of a million martyrs* [thawrah al-miliyun shahid] were broadcast over and over again.[69] Together, they told the life story of Bouhired or 'the formalized bio'(Ghosh 2011), and justified her as being *worthy of life*. When looking more closely at these spots, three main themes stand out as central: namely, the glorification of armed struggle against (international) imperialism, praise of personal sacrifice for the homeland (which is underscored by Bouhired's gender), and the greatness of the past. These themes are of fundamental importance for the whole event. In the following, I analyse three selected spots. The first features Che Guevara and introduces his daughter Aleida Guevara; the second tells the story of Bouhired as an activist; and the third evokes the time of Abdel Nasser.

In the spot about Che Guevara, old footage of Guevara is mixed with clips from Cuba today, shown to the sound of Guevara's voice as he talks about the revolution: *enough is enough, and it will continue its powerful march forward and not stop until it has obtained true independence which many have died for and often in vain* and later on: *we cannot ever trust Imperialism, not even a tiny bit*. The spot ends with some very charming clips of Guevara as a smiling family man together with his children, while a female voice, supposedly Aleida Guevara, declares (in Spanish): *My father is the man who taught me to live with dignity*.

Brining in Che Guevara and Cuba in the initial framing of Bouhired is important as it places her and the struggle for Algerian independence in an international context. In general, Cuba has an exalted

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[69] These spots are no longer available online after the homepage www.djamila-bouhired.com was closed in 2016.

role at al-Mayadeen as *ard al-thawra* [the land of the revolution] (see Chapter 8), and the mixing of time and generations in the clips underscores the timeless aspect of the struggle. Furthermore, Che Guevara's words are emphasised by the fact that he died for the cause; he actually sacrificed his own life in the fight against colonialism. His sympathetic appearance proves that he is not an exotic radical. On the contrary, he is a respectable and loveable man representing a just fight. The statement from his daughter furthermore tells us that his family supports his mission in spite of the great personal cost. The spot ends by greeting Aleida Guevara with the words: *Bienvenida Compañera* [welcome fellow].

Thus, Aleida Guevara – combined with the legacy of her father – is from the beginning placed at the centre of the media event. Later, she participated as the guest of honour both at the UNESCO Palace and in Mlita. Her qualities, as a politically and socially engaged woman from the Third World, promoting her father's spirit of resistance, made her the perfect figure to spread international female stardust on the event. Her own image of being an outspoken supporter of the Palestinian cause and her previous meeting with Hizbollah officials[70] only added to her suitability.

In the second spot, another significant figure appears: Gamal Abdel Nasser. Although he only appears very briefly, he is nevertheless present throughout, as the audio element is a clip from the old pan-Arab operetta "The Greater Nation" [al-Watan al-Akbar]. This musical production was made in 1962 by Abdel Halim Hafez as a salute to Nasser and his vision of Arab unity. It is the closest the Arab world gets to a collective anthem, and even today it still has a unique ability to evoke a nostalgic longing for a golden past of (an imagined) Arab solidarity and shared aspirations. The song was originally performed by Halim Hafez himself together with five female singers from Lebanon, Egypt and Algeria. The part used in the spot is performed by the Algerian singer Warda:

My homeland, oh revolution against their colonialism / Fill your Algeria with fire to destroy them / The rocks of our mountains will destroy them / Colonialism will end by our hands / Its epoch and time will disappear from the world / Not in Algeria and not in Oman / The revolution ceases the tyranny / Solely by the pulse of the Arab people.

The visual element of the spot is a mix of old, original footage from the Algerian revolution, and clips from the Italian movie *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), together with a few short cuts from the performance of "The Greater Nation". At the end of the spot, Nasser's support for the Algerian war of independence and endorsement of Jamila Bouhired is visualised, with footage of their meeting in Cairo in October 1962. The images of the young Bouhired together with Nasser himself – the ultimate Arab symbol of the greatness of the past and the struggle against imperialism – underline her historical importance and show that it is not just al-Mayadeen that finds her *worthy of life*.

The third and last example tells the story of how Bouhired became actively engaged in the fight against French colonialism, and how she felt the price of resistance on her own body. The clip

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[70] Aleida Guevara met with Hizbollah officials during her visit to Lebanon in 2010, see:
http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/guevara301010.html.

begins by showing a schoolgirl sitting in a classroom with her classmates, while the teacher writes on the blackboard in Arabic: تاريخ امرأة من وطني [*The history of a woman from my home country*]. Then a movie is turned on. The movie features another schoolgirl, Bouhired, as she walks to the blackboard to delete the writings of her teacher – *La France est notre mère* [*France is our mother*] – and replace it with الجزائر أمنا [*Algeria is our nation*]. Back in the classroom in contemporary Algeria, the schoolchildren are clearly affected by the movie when they (and we) watch Bouhired being beaten up in jail. Switching between the two girls, and thus the two periods of time, we learn how children today enjoy the results of the struggles of earlier generations – national independence and freedom from imperialism did not come without great personal sacrifices. The weight of the sacrifice is highlighted by the fact that it is a young female body that is being tortured – a clear acknowledgement of the importance of prioritising *the* cause over the individual body, in line with the anti-imperialist camp, is communicated. Furthermore, as the struggle of the past is imported into the present, we are reminded of its continued relevance.

Around seven other spots complimented the message of the three above-mentioned examples. Together they promoted the event, told the story of Jamila Bouhired, and placed her within a specific narrative. By evoking her famous statement while under torture in French custody – *I know that you will sentence me to death (...) but you will not prevent Algeria from becoming free and independent* (the UNESCO show, part 2, min 7:15) – and by constantly referring to her as *munaḍila* [struggler] or *mujahada* [fighter], two different words for freedom fighter (which I return to below), she is portrayed as having heroic strength and an uncompromising attitude. She was fighting for an unquestionable cause where all means were necessary – and acceptable. Through references to Che Guevara and Abdel Nasser, she is framed within an international narrative of anti-imperial struggles and, thus, placed next to other global icons (see e.g. the UNESCO show, part 4, min 0:0). The scene was set for the big event…

The worshipping of Bouhired

The central happening and climax of the celebration was the evening show at the UNESCO Palace, with performances by famous artists, greetings from many more, and the attendance of several prominent figures among the audience. A warm-up hour, hosted by a well-known face of al-Mayadeen, the journalist Kamal Khalaf, led up to the broadcast of the live show itself. During this hour, a serious and expectant atmosphere was built up through a mix of Khalaf's serious conversations with guests in the studio, e.g. Abdel Bari Atwan, and live reports from the entrance hall at the UNESCO Palace as the celebrity-rich audience arrived.

An important element in both the show itself and the hour from the studio was the presence of renowned public figures from all around the Arab world. Celebrities are, of course, always relevant material for a media outlet, but here they also served the purpose of constructing an edifying frame for Bouhired, and thus, legitimising the whole set-up. It added to the atmosphere that the talks with the guests in the studio were regularly put on hold in order to show who had arrived at the UNESCO Palace – such as the Algerian writer Abdul Hamid Abdus, the Jordanian writer Nahed

Hattar, Osama al-Dalil from the Egyptian newspaper al-Ahram, the chief editor of the Iraqi newspaper al-Dustour, and the Lebanese politician Karim Pakradouni[71], all of whom expressed their praise of Bouhired and the time she represented. The conversation in the studio was at one point interrupted by a group of young Nasserists, chanting and shouting as they entered the hall – an event that was proudly documented live.

The show itself was kicked off by the two al-Mayadeen hosts, Aula Malaah and Ahmad Abu Ali, who entered the stage accompanied by music and light. The cameras showed a full theatre hall and zoomed in on some of the most prominent guests on the front rows: the then Lebanese foreign minister Adnan Mansour, the Lebanese minister for public health Hassan Khalil, Aleida Guevara, Ghassan bin Jeddo – and, of course, the key figure herself, Jamila Bouhired. After a short welcome, everyone stood while the Lebanese national anthem – followed by the Algerian – was played. During the evening the Palestinian poet Samim al-Qasim, the Lebanese poet Ghassan Matar[72], and the Lebanese protest singer Julia Boutros – all of whom have a long history of commitment to the fight against Israeli occupation – celebrated Bouhired as a resistance fighter. Arab and international women's rights activists also highlighted Bouhired's contribution to the ongoing fight for women's rights, and stressed her importance as a role model for women around the world.[73] At the end, both Aleida Guevara and Ghassan bin Jeddo paid tribute to Bouhired, and thus, also took part in the iconization.

Over the course of the evening at the UNESCO Palace, Bouhired was honoured as a *symbol* [ramz][74]; as a *symbol of revolution*, a *symbol of the beautiful time*, a *symbol of the Arab resistance*, a *symbol of the struggle*, as well as a *symbol of the feminist resistance*. But Bouhired's status as a living Arab icon was not only constructed by the invocations of the participants. At the same time, the broader framing was constructed in order to place her within the ranks of internationally celebrated figures. Images of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Nelson Mandela, Ernesto Che Guevara, Yasser Arafat, Hugo Chávez, Ruhollah Khomeini, Mahatma Gandhi, and (of course) Jamila Bouhired herself, reappeared throughout the evening in the shape of posters or cavalcades of photos. Hence,

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[71] The fact that Karim Pakradouni participated in the event is both noticeable and informative. Pakradouni is the former head of the right-wing Christian Phalanges Party [*Hizb al-Kataeb*] in Lebanon (part of the Saad Hariri lead 14 March Alliance). Throughout most of his career, though, he is has been representing a pro-Syrian agenda which he brought with him to al-Mayadeen. He is a recurrent figure at al-Mayadeen and, together with the Lebanese journalist Souad Karout Achi, hosted the programme series *al-Jumhuria* [The Republic] on Lebanon's presidential election in 2014. See:
http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/28/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-2014.
The first time he appeared on al-Mayadeen, though, was as guest in the first episode of Ghassan bin Jeddo's signature show, *Fi al-Mayadeen* [At al-Mayadeen], broadcast on 22.06.2012. See:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PQbI2Wsk6U&index=40&list=PL2shxz5r2g-8Eb_aAf9ssRLKd-YkWt_aO.
[72] Member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party.
[73] E.g., the former president of the Committee of the Rights of Lebanese Women, Linda Mattar, and the general secretary of the National Federation of Indian Women, Annie Raja.
[74] The Arabic word *ramz* is usually translated into 'sign' or 'symbol', but it is becoming more common that the word is used equally with the meaning of 'icon' when talking about a secular icon. I have chosen to stay with the classical translation.

she is presented as belonging to the biggest international icons of our time, the revolutionaries, the anti-colonial strugglers, the Third World's representatives of dignity.

Furthermore, the renowned Lebanese singer Fairouz is included in the set-up. Her emotional salute to Bouhired, "Letter to Jamila Bouhired" (1959), was used repeatedly as background music. The sound of Fairouz's characteristic voice is a sound attached with pride and nostalgia. The Lebanese diva represents the legacy of Arab high culture combined with the idea of artistic commitment or *iltazim* (see chapter 6 for a further discussion of the concept). Since the 1950s, together with the Rahbani brothers, she has not only played a central role for Lebanese nation building but also for the Palestinian resistance, and the anti-colonial struggle of Abdel Nasser (Stone 2008, 43–53). When Fairouz sings: *Jamila / my friend Jamila / greetings to you wherever you are / in jail, in suffering, wherever you are / greetings to you Jamila from my village, I sing to you,* it has a meaning beyond the words. Having a song dedicated by Fairouz is, in itself, a confirmation of one's status as a symbol and thus becomes a verification of al-Mayadeen's iconization of Bouhired.

During the promotional or informative spots, and through the evening at the UNESCO Palace, al-Mayadeen aimed to re-launch Bouhired as a contemporary icon of the armed resistance against colonialism, and of a certain era in history. Al-Mayadeen created a conducive setting by repeatedly invoking global icons from around the world, and flashing the presence of Arab celebrities. Furthermore, emotional moments were created by the use of music with important nostalgic and emotional attachments. But in order to turn a symbol or a sign into an icon, they need to be worshipped; thus, the public show at the UNESCO Palace was of central importance (Ghosh 2011, 69, 83). Here, a public celebration of Bouhired could take place, turning her into a true living icon.

During the prelude of the show at the UNESCO Palace, the host Kamal Khalaf asked rhetorically: *Why Jamila Bouhired?* Why celebrate a figure from the past that has been forgotten by many and is unknown by new generations? Khalaf continued: *Is it a reawakening of history in order to get some warmth it in this cold Arab time and get into nostalgia? Or is it to shake the dust off the current reality in an attempt to re-comprehend the concepts of today and to correct the path by reconsidering consciousness* (The UNESCO show, part 1, min 02:12). By raising the question of whether the celebration of Bouhired is pure nostalgia for the past with some kind of pacifying effect or, on the contrary, a source of inspiration that can be used actively today, Khalaf points to the main dilemma of the whole project. It is clear that, by its iconization of Bouhired, al-Mayadeen is strategically trying to awaken nostalgic feelings of the viewer. It is equally clear that the station has strong ambitions to prove Bouhired is relevant as a contemporary icon who can serve as a guide of direction as well as a reminder of true Arab values. In the following, I argue that in the iconization of Bouhired, al-Mayadeen employs a specific reading of the past, as a **modern** time when women acted 'just like men', and as a **heroic** time, when Arab people stood together and fought for their rights. It is exactly the virtues connected to these two readings of the past which al-Mayadeen seeks to evoke. I first investigate how the figure of a female fighter is utilised in this way in order to promote a certain version of modernity, and secondly, look at how the image of 'the golden age is used to deplore the present.

Celebrating the female fighter

(L-R: Jamila Bouhired together with her group; portrait of Layla Khaled on the separation wall in Israel; Terez al-Halasa guesting on Ajras al-Mashreq)

In the Arab world, there is no strong tradition of secular female icons in general, but in the case of the resistance movement, female fighters have played an important role as key symbols of the struggle. The radical ideology of Third World liberationists, which, e.g., the Palestinian resistance movement during the 1960s and '70s was linked to, was typically dominated by a hyper-masculine form of heroism. In spite of these masculine ideals, female warriors were given importance, and on several occasions obtained almost iconic statues as they became symbols of the progressive values that were promoted (at least rhetorically) regarding women's rights (Khalili 2009, 20-21). Within these movements, women became "a measure of the advancement or the backwardness of a culture" (Katz 1996, 93), thus, e.g., the image of Layla Khaled – the famous Palestinian female PFLP member who participated in the hijacking of an airplane – not only symbolises the resistance against Israeli occupation but also certain ideological values such as modernity and progressiveness. Hence, al-Mayadeen uses a well-known feature within the secular resistance movement, of glorifying women who participate – just like men – in the struggle for national liberation.

At the UNESCO Palace, the Indian women's rights activist Annie Raja evoked this tradition of connecting the anti-imperialistic struggle with the empowerment of women. About Bouhired, she said: *She was such a leader who combined the national liberalisation with the emancipation of women (...) Today's world is facing a challenging threat from the imperialist forces lead by the US and Europe Union countries and even some of the Gulf countries so at this danger it is very important that women are also equalling participating, standing in the forefront fighting for the sovereignty and dignity of each individual country* (the UNESCO show, part 2, min 7:57).Thus, the importance of Bouhired's struggle is not limited to the liberation of Algeria; being a woman, her active participation in the struggle serves as a source of inspiration for the contemporary struggle against the imperialistic project of the West.

The female fighter element was discussed on several occasions, and the phenomenon of Arab women taking up arms and fighting side by side with the men was presented as a sign of modernity – as an example of the Arab progressiveness that al-Mayadeen wants to advocate. By hosting other important Arab women who have fought against occupation, such as the Palestinian resistance fighter Fatima Barnawi, who placed a bomb in a cinema in Jerusalem as a protest against the screening of a movie celebrating the 1967 war (Khasa al-Mayadeen, 02.12.2013); Laila Khalid, also

Palestinian, who participated in the hijacking of an airplane in 1969 (ALM, 28.11.2013); the Algerian, Louisette Ighilahriz (ALM, 28.11.2013), and Tereza al-Halasa, a member of the Palestinian resistance organisation Black September, who participated in hijacking of the Sabena Airplane on its way from Vienna to Tel Aviv (Ajras al-Mashreq, 01.12.2013)[75], al-Mayadeen further underlines how the female factor is seen as an extra attribute worthy of attention. The same effect was achieved by the host of Ajras al-Mashreq, Ghassan Shami, in the episode of the series that was broadcast in the week of the celebration, who said: *In these dark times, women like Terez al-Halasa and her comrades Rima Tanous and Jamila Bouhired and all the women who participated in the furnace of liberation are torches of light much needed for us and our societies which are becoming increasingly masculine and patriarchally* (Ajras al-Mashreq, 01.12.2013, part 3, min 15:53). Likewise Abu Zakariya, the host of *ALM*, proclaimed his appreciation of *the Arab struggling woman* [al-mar'a al-'arabiyya al-munaḍila] going all the way back to Fatma Nsoumer[76], and presented their activities as an element of pride in Arab history (ALM, 28.11.2013).

The female fighters were referred to as *munaḍila* [struggler] or *mujahida* [fighter] while the term *fida'yia* [one who sacrifices herself, in plural often transliterated as *fedayeen*] was mainly used in relation to Palestinians. The term *munaḍila* has traditionally been connected with secular nationalist female fighters, while *mujahida* has a stronger religious sentiment, and is generally used when referring to Islamist fighters. The fact that al-Mayadeen frequently employed the term *mujahida* when mentioning Bouhired is not insignificant, and points to the station's ambition to bring Bouhired into a contemporary context, and the ongoing discussion over what it means to be a real resistance fighter. Not only is al-Mayadeen comfortable with using the term, the station also presents its own account of what a real *mujahida* is. Abu Zakariya spelled this point out by contrasting the heroines of the past with the female fighters of today, saying about Nsoumer: *(...) and she was disguising in men's uniforms and fighting side by the side with other mujahedeen, the real mujahedeen and not the mujahedeen of today who kill the innocent souls in the name of the deformed Islam*. (ALM, 28.11.2013, part 1, min 01:59).

In contrast to the contemporary *mujahideen* of Abu Zakariya, earlier in the same year, in an episode of *Min al-Ard*, the host Ugarit Dandash presented an example of today's true female fighters. The episode "Syrian women who carry weapons" (broadcast on 18.04.2013) presents a group of Syrian women who have chosen to join the pro-government militia, the National Defence Force (NDF, [Quwat ad-Difa'al-Watani]), in order to participate in *the defence of their home country*. Half of the programme is a short documentary about these women; here we meet, e.g., a mother of four small girls, who has joined the NDF because she believes that it is her duty to share with the men the role of defending the nation. In the documentary, her husband states that he supports her choice, and says she is *completely like a man* when it comes to handling weapons and defending herself.

An essential part of the documentary is footage of female soldiers in the NDF while they are on military exercises, practising shooting, parading orders etc. – *like men completely*. A central

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[76] Also known by the name Jeanne d'Arc of Djurdjura.

ambition of Dandash and her guest Jansit Abaza, the head of the organisation *Sayidat Suriya al-Kheir* [The Good of Syrian Women], is to point out the existence of a proud history of Arab (Syrian) women carrying weapons and participating in important struggles, and they repeatedly stress how Syrian women are fighting *side by side with the men*. In order to spell out that the opposition is not representing true Syrian values, and as a way of contrasting it with the groups fighting alongside the government in Damascus, Dandash shows a short clip of a random local Syrian opposition leader who rejects any participation of women in the armed uprising – a final proof of the backwardness of the opposition in Syria. Thus, the episode of *Min al-Ard* spells out what the celebration of Bouhired only suggested: namely, that the inclusion of women in armed struggles is an indicator of the degree of progressiveness – and legitimacy – of the cause. True resistance movements proudly grant women an important role, acknowledge their contribution and consider them equal to men.

Hence, to re-launch and celebrate a female revolutionary from the past, in a time of revolts in the Arab world, is not a salute to the current uprisings – on the contrary. Rather, Bouhired is used to dismiss contemporary developments and create "a nostalgic take on modernity", to use the words of Özyürek (Ozyurek 2006, 19). From an al-Mayadeen perspective, Bouhired represents the modern and progressive Arab history of revolution and resistance. Thus, she becomes "a measure of the advancement or the backwardness" (Katz 1996, 93) of the current uprisings – and they score poorly, as al-Mayadeen only grants importance to the radical Islamist elements of the uprisings... The facts that the progressive tradition of including women in militant revolutions presumes that women become *just like men,* and that the empowerment of women becomes important due to the *threat from the imperialists' forces,* are not problematised, but rather, taken for granted. Thus, al-Mayadeen not only carries on the proclaimed values of modernity and progressiveness, but also the idea that women become empowered by becoming just like men.

Celebrating Bouhired as a *female* fighter is one way that nostalgia for the modern is produced during the event. In the following section, I turn my attention towards the other important strategy, namely celebrating Bouhired as an embodiment of 'the golden age'.

Celebrating the golden age

It was not only Bouhired as a female fighter that was the object of the celebration, but also the dream of a memorable bygone era, 'the golden age – as well as the Algerian war of independence, or what al-Mayadeen refers to as *the revolution of a million martyrs*. Thus, a predominant theme throughout the event was the glorification of the past as a time of heroism, order, logical wars, and Arab solidarity. That era is at the same time promoted as lost, and as a role model for contemporary times. In the terminology of Boym, this is an example of "restorative nostalgia", to the extent that it attempts "a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" (Boym 2001, xviii).

In a cavalcade of recorded greetings displayed on a huge screen in the UNESCO building – from, among others, Salim al-Hoss and Julia Botrous – the former British parliament member and al-

Mayadeen host George Galloway appears. Wearing a so-called Nehru jacket that hints at a Third World inspired style and speaking in his clear British accent, he begins: *Jamila is a living reminder in many ways of better times for the Arabs. That might seem a peculiar thing to say because she was a heroic figure in a bloody struggle for national independence from French colonialism which claimed the lives of one and a half million martyrs. To describe those as better times seems bizarre, but I will explain what I mean. In those days the Arabs knew that they had to fight and sacrifice to rid themselves of foreign colonisation. (...) And Jamila was a heroic part of one of the most heroic struggles the Arabs have ever waged. Now a day some Arab are content to be occupied, some ask to be occupied some even beg to be occupied and others collaborate in the foreign occupation of other Arab countries. So in Jamila's great days – and we are very happy that she is amongst us this weekend – in her better days, her great days, when she was a freedom fighter known throughout the world – things were clearer, things were simpler* (the UNESCO show, part 3, min 07:25).

For Galloway, it is possible to read the past as a state of simplicity – it was bad against good, oppressor against oppressed. This depiction of the past from Galloway, in one sense, says more about his concerns for the present than about the real historic circumstances, because of course the past is always much more complicated than the idealised black and white image. If Galloway had turned his attention towards Yemen in those same years, he would have found a bloody civil war (1962-1970), dividing not only Yemen but the whole region, with Egypt and Abdel Nasser on the one side, facing Jordan and Saudi Arabia on the other. Today, the contrasts are not as simple; when the *occupied beg to be occupied,* the just struggle seems to be blurred. And yet, today Galloway still finds a division between the good or the bad, though this time the division is an internal Arab one. According to Galloway, the Arab world is today divided between those who accept – or even admire – the coloniser, and those who, like Jamila Bouhired, fight colonialism by all means necessary.

Another example of how an idealised reading of the past facilitated a criticism of the present political situation was provided by Ghassan bin Jeddo in his speech to Bouhired on the same evening. Here, he argued that the time of Bouhired was a time without *delusion*, *maliciousness* and *confusion,* whereas the current time of history is dominated by exactly these three phenomena. He elaborated: *The Algerian revolution formed a model for wars of liberation and independence without any confusion. This is a revolution which not only united Algeria and its people but also united the umma and its masses. Nasser's great Egypt and Egypt's great people shared the Algerian people with money and weapons. That time is different than the [present] time of foulness (...)* (the UNESCO show, part 5, min 12:48).

Like Galloway, bin Jeddo uses an idealised and simplified past to problematize the present. During Bouhired's heyday, the Arab world stood united, not weakened by confusion or delusion. Bin Jeddo furthermore highlights the Algerian war as a model for wars of independence, and therein points to an important element of the celebration – the opportunity to bring Algeria into the picture. Algeria is a country that in many ways represents the vision of al-Mayadeen. It fought a hard battle against colonialism – and won, it had a secular revolutionary leftist leadership for many years, and the state

fought a violent battle against various Islamist groups during the bloody civil war in the 1990s, after the suspension of elections due to Islamic Salvation Front's victory in the first round of parliamentary elections in 1991. It's a piece of history that could be read as resembling the situations in Syria and Iraq today, as Bashar al-Assad himself pointed out during a visit to Algeria in November 2013.[77] Furthermore, Algeria has been one of the only Arab states to remain supportive of the al-Assad rule during its general isolation by the Arab world. A final feature that adds to Algeria's relevance for current events is that it recalls all the worst elements of French imperialism in the region – a legacy that can serve to delegitimise the opposition in Syria, which has been flirting with the idea of international intervention (where France has been very proactive).

The idea that it is necessary to look back into the past in order to find guidance for the present was also expressed in the interview with Zainab as-Saffar which I quoted in chapter 1. During our talk, she herself mentioned the celebration of Bouhired as a commemoration of the good times of the past, and stressed the importance of remembering the good times of Bouhired and Abdel Nasser as they are *fundamental in our lives* and have *showed the way for resistance, for facing oppression and persecution in a very solid way* (personal interview, Beirut, 13.11.2014). Due to the lack of contemporary role models, as-Saffar argues, it is necessary to look back in time in order to find the necessary inspiration to face the future.

Through the use of images, songs and icons, through the selection of artists and activists contributing to the event, and through the narrative created about Bouhired, everything possible was done to reawaken these *great* and *simpler* days, to use the words of Galloway. The photos of Abdel Nasser, the sound of "The Greater Nation" and "Letter to Jamila Bouhired", the presence of Ghassan Matar, Samim al-Wasim and Abdel Bari Atwan together brings back – if only for a short moment – the memories of a golden past. But the nostalgic sentiments created are not only for pointing back in time. As Boym writes: "Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future". Thus, this strong element of nostalgia in the celebration of Bouhired is not only "retrospective but also prospective" (Boym 2001, xvi). In the section below, I turn to the part of the celebration that was organised by Hizbollah in Mlita, and investigate the prospective aspect further.

Why Jamila Bouhired? Connecting the past to the present
Apart from bin Jeddo and Bouhired wearing Palestinian scarves with the words 'Jerusalem is ours' engraved on them, the evening in the UNESCO Palace had very few references to any present resistance struggles. That evening, Bouhired was the focal point. The ceremony in Mlita, on the other hand, was not only a continued worshiping of Bouhired but also an important opportunity to bring Hizbollah centre stage. The fact that al-Mayadeen broadcast from this specific location, the

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[77] See e.g.: http://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2013/11/111406/assad-compares-syria-war-to-algeria-conflict/, http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/104686, and http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/85811/World/Region/Assad-compares-Syria-war-to-Algeria-conflict.aspx.

former commando centre of the resistance movement, indicates a well-established relationship between al-Mayadeen and Hizbollah; but, more importantly, the Mlita event linked the past to the present and provides an answer to Kamal Khalaf's question of *why Bouhired*. In the following, I argue that through the ceremony in Mlita, al-Mayadeen connects Bouhired to the present political situation by employing her as an icon of what the station regards as true resistance. To a great extent, the celebration of Bouhired is a demonstration of who is able to carry on her legacy and the progressive anti-colonial struggle she represents. Thus, the celebration is used to endorse Hizbollah, and to link Hizbollah's military activities to Algeria's war of liberation.

In contrast to the UNESCO Palace, with room for around 1,200 people, the setting in Mlita is a small room seating around 50 people. The TV viewer is almost invited into the private sphere of Hizbollah when Nasrallah himself appears on a big screen and, as 'the head of the house', welcomes the crowd from afar. He talks about the victories, the martyrs, and the importance of the resistance, accompanied by a footage cavalcade of Hizbollah soldiers on exercise and in real combat, carrying home the wounded and planting Hizbollah's flag on liberated ground. These images are unlike the usual style of al-Mayadeen and are obvious one of Hizbollah's own promotional videos – as can been seen at al-Manar.[78] Hizbollah hosted the event in Mlita and, while several of the UNESCO show's central figures reappeared – Abdel Bari Atwan, Aleida Guevara and Ghassan bin Jeddo – new faces were added: most importantly Muhammad Raad, the head of the Hizbollah group in the Lebanese parliament. The event was rounded off by a small ceremony including an exchange of presents and statuettes. Bouhired, Guevara and bin Jeddo all received one or several honours.

The whole set-up took the form of a promotion of Hizbollah and an attempt to demonstrate how the movement has carried the values of Bouhired into the present. In that connection, the religious ideology of Hizbollah – and the majority of contemporary Palestinian resistance movements – represents a dilemma for al-Mayadeen. As shown above, the Islamist resistance groups fighting today in Syria and beyond are discredited because of their 'ideological backwardness', which is why al-Mayadeen needs to prove that Hizbollah is different. In his speech in Mlita, Ghassan bin Jeddo explains (so that no-one can be left in doubt of the progressiveness of Hizbollah and its fundamental difference from other religious motivated movements): *Today Haj Muhammad Ra'ad, a high ranking leader within Hizbollah was paying tribute to Jamila Bouhired (...) She came here and he did not ask her: Are you religious or not? Do you pray or not? And he did not ask her to veil, this is a secondary issue. He talked about Aleida Guevara and Che Guevara with sincere love, and he knows that Che Guevara and Aleida Guevara are from a different world, from a different ideology, from a different revolution and from a different doctrine. Then what unites us? Our love for our homeland, for revolution, for resistance and for liberation...* (the Mlita show, min 01:06:09).

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[78] For an analysis of the promotional videos on al-Manar see Rounwah Adly Riyadh Beseiso "Al Manar: Cultural Discourse and Representation of resistance" in *Narrating Conflicts in the Middle East* (Matar and Harb 2013)

Thus, Hizbollah is at the same time portrayed as a continuation of a strong and proud tradition of Arab *muqawama* against foreign occupation, and as a movement fighting for true Arab interests, as well as a resistance movement that is part of a global struggle. In relation to the first point, this message would have been in line with a predominant segment of the Arab public in 2000, when the Israeli army redrew from South Lebanon, or in 2006, when Hizbollah faced the Israeli military machinery and Nasrallah enjoyed the status of a regional hero. The situation in 2013 had, however, changed. Even though the star power of Hizbollah had been under pressure for some years, the movement's decision in 2013 to enter the battlefield in Syria and fight in the ranks of al-Assad seriously challenged its status as the representative of Arab interests (Lob 2014) (see chapter 2, "Exploring Arab Ideoscapes" for a further discussion of Hizbollah). In relation to the second point, the cosmopolitan lines which bin Jeddo attempts to draw underlines – together with, e.g., the participation of Aleida Guevara and the framing of Bouhired with international icons – al-Mayadeen's ambitions about connecting to the Third World in general, and Latin America in particular. Thus, the struggle of Hizbollah is not limited to being an Arab struggle; it is at the same time part of an international struggle against imperialism in all shapes and sizes. I return to this theme in the last chapter, "The Re-launch of Third Worldism: the Voice of the Global South and the Cooperation with TeleSur".

During the evening at the UNESCO Palace, Bouhired was framed within a catalogue of global icons. One important image, though, was conspicuous by its absence; namely, that of Hassan Nasrallah. In spite of what one might have expected, he was not included in the ranks of icons which Bouhired was to become part of. One explanation could be that he is less 'global' than the others, and thus may have potentially provincialized, rather than universalised, Bouhired. Likewise, the fact that he is still alive and part of contemporary politics makes him more contested and less stable as an icon. I believe, though, that another important factor is the division of roles. Nasrallah is not (any longer) the global icon that can endorse Bouhired; here, the opposite is at play. After the iconization, Bouhired is the one who can elevate Hizbollah and confirm that the movement is still the representative of true *muqawama*. When Bouhired and Guevara participated in the ceremony in Mlita, they verified the *muqawama* qualities of Hizbollah and confirmed that their legacies are continued by Hizbollah. Thus, it seems that the whole event was not only a celebration of Bouhired, but also a revitalisation of Hizbollah, as the movement could enjoy the unspoiled reputation of the newly iconized Bouhired.

Changing readings of an icon - ethical dilemmas and moral discrepancies

But when I googled Jamila's name again and found a photograph of her with Bashar al Assad, I laughed. Sorry grandpa. Once a heroine, Jamila had become a petrified monument. A guardian of dictatorship.[79]

(Marwa Arsanios)

Jamila Bouhired, as a member of the Front de Liberation National (FLN), participated actively in the Algerian war of independence. In 1957, together with two other FLN female members, she planted a bomb in a French restaurant which caused the death of 11 civilians. She was later arrested, tortured by French soldiers, and sentenced to death (a sentence which was never carried out). In spite of the torture, she never divulged information about her FLN comrades, which made her an international symbol of resistance. In 1958, at the height of Egypt's pan-Arab Nasserist phase, the movie *Jamila the Algerian* was released. It was one of the Egyptian movie director Youssef Chahine's first examples of politicalised films, and told the story of Jamila Bouhired's involvement in the Algerian war of liberation. The film and, not least, the figure of the young female freedom fighter "contributed to the third-worldist anticolonial rhetoric of the time" (Shafik 2015, 105). In the first years after Algerian independence, the heroines of the revolution, the female fighters such as Jamila Bouhired and her comrades, paid official visits to friendly-minded states as representatives of the FLN and "symbols of the youthfulness and modernity of the Algerian revolution" (Vince 2009, 160).

In 1962, on one of these travels, Bouhired went to Egypt in order to meet Abdel Nasser. At that time, it seemed as a natural culmination of her political activities and a well-deserved recognition of her engagement by the-then leading figure and ultimate icon of the Arab anti-colonial movement. Likewise, Nasser must have enjoyed welcoming this female fighter who in many ways embodied his political slogans. Photos of the young girl shaking hands with and sitting together with the fatherly Nasser were circulated, documenting a meeting between two symbols of the same time and the same ideals.

Almost 50 years later, and after having been almost forgotten by the broader public, Bouhired travelled in 2009 to Syria in order to receive The Syrian Order of Merit of Excellent Degree by

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[79] Quotation from the art performance *Have you ever killed a bear? Or becoming Jamila* (2013) by Marwa Arsanios (Arsanios 2013, 10).

Bashar al-Assad for her role in the Algerian revolution. Official pictures resembling the ones from 1962 were released, of the now elderly Bouhired posing next to the Syrian president. Thus, the female embodiment of *revolution* and *modernity* now reappeared as an object of worship for what seemed to be the remnants of the secular, anticolonial project of the 1950s – or what David Scott refers to as a "postcolonial nightmare"[80] (Scott 2004). In 2013, similar images were once again produced, though this time it was Ghassan bin Jeddo who had the opportunity to welcome and honour Bouhired.

After Bouhired's heyday in the early 1960s, where she was internationally celebrated as a symbol of the defeat of the old colonial world order, her fame faded and her name was converted into a subculture figure within certain feminist or socialist circles.[81] The public neglect reached a level where in 2009, Bouhired found it necessary to publish a public appeal to both the Algerian president and the Algerian people asking for greater economic support for her to be able to live a prober life.[82] Thus, when bin Jeddo in 2013 decided to make her the centre of a big public celebration, Bouhired had been "decontextualized, shorn of its concrete details and transformed into an abstract symbol ready to be instrumentalized as a mobilizing tool by being "filled" with necessary ideological rhetoric", as Laleh Khalili describes the process of iconization.

At al-Mayadeen, Bouhired is celebrated and iconized as a *global anticolonial* fighter and a *militant female* fighter. Her methods and those of her female peers are never questioned, as their struggle is just and incontestable. Thus, a potential discussion of freedom fighter contra terrorist is neglected throughout the celebration; at al-Mayadeen there are no doubts. The methods employed are – in line with the prevailing attitude in the mid-twentieth century – seen as "an appropriate weapon of the weak in combating human rights violations in nations suffering under forms of colonialism that had clear internal and external beneficiaries" (Meister 2002, 92). Or in other words, in line with the ideological priorities of the anti-imperialist camp, where the collective good or fighting for *the* cause justifies civilian victims or the individual body.

The approach of the Lebanese artist Marwa Arsanios, who, like al-Mayadeen, found it relevant to bring Bouhired into the light again, is different. Arsanios, who could be placed within the New New Left camp, uses Bouhired in her investigation of the history of socialist projects and anti-colonial wars, and their effects on feminist projects. In the art performance and short movie by the same name, *Have you ever killed a bear? Or becoming Jamila* (2013/2014), Arsanios investigates

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[80] In his book *Conscripts of Modernity: the tragedy of colonial enlightenment* (Scott 2004), Scott attempts to form a new form of postcolonial criticism "after the collapse of the social and political hopes that went into the anticolonial imagining" becomes evident and the bankruptcy of the postcolonial regimes palpable (Scott 2004, 1). I return to Scott in chapter 8.

[81] An example of the leftist environment is www.internatinlsocialist.org.uk. Here, Bouhired appears in a series on Women on the Left and is referred to as a "fighter for Algerian Independence and the liberation of women"; http://internationalsocialist.org.uk/index.php/2013/02/women-on-the-left-djamila-bouhired/#sthash.YJCFpbE1.dpuf. An example of the feminist representation is found on www.agirlsguidetotakingovertheworld.co.uk, here she is posted under the title 'Revolutionary Women'; http://www.agirlsguidetotakingovertheworld.co.uk/#!djamila-bouhired/ccbh.

[82] https://www.marxists.org/history/algeria/2009/djamila.htm.

Bouhired and the ethical dilemmas connected to her acts as a fighter (or terrorist?). The art performance is an outcome of Arsanios's ongoing project on al-Hilal, a prominent Egyptian cultural magazine closely linked to the time of Nasser, where she investigates themes such as "essentialist or xenophobic aspects of pan-Arabism, the movement's expansionistic or even colonial tendencies, the modernisation of Islam and the patriarchal bias often operative within state-promoted 'feminism'" (Weiner 2015, 96). Arsanios herself is part of a leftist and activist artist environment in Beirut, as well as internationally.[83]

Her movie is constructed around a young woman's fascination into how female freedom fighters were represented in al-Hilal in the 1950s and '60s. Incidentally, the young woman gets the chance to play the role of Bouhired in a movie, as the first choice of actress decided to back out of the project due to *a moral issue with it*. After all, the actress couldn't play the role of a – in her eyes – terrorist. Bouhired is, at the same time, the star and the villain, which allows for an ethical investigation of her past. The young woman who takes up the task of playing Bouhired has an imaginary conversation with Bouhired:

> Me*: Can you describe how you planted the bomb?*
> Jamila: *Haven't you watched the movie?*
> Me: *I did, but I would like to hear it from you*
> Jamila: *I forgot*
> Me: *Do you regret it?*
> Jamila: *I was at war*
> Me: *At war in a dance club?*
> Jamila: *Are you condemning me?*
> Me: *Just asking…*
> Jamila: *No one is innocent*
> Me: *That's a justification*
> Jamila: *It was not an equal fight*
> Me: *I'm asking if you personally regret it*
> Jamila: *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry… is this what you want to hear? You are so boring*

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[83] See e.g. the 98Weeks Research Project which is an artist organization founded by Marwa Arsanios and her cousin Mirene Arsanios in 2007, http://www.98weeks.net/p/98weeks-project-space.html. See her homepage http://www.marwaarsanios.info/home.html for more about her work.

(Arsanios 2013, 14)

Here, reflections on the quality of Jamila's act are played out. In spite of the contestation, Jamila remains the hero throughout the whole movie – though not an uncontested role model, as is the case at al-Mayadeen. Later on in the performance, Jamila elaborates on her justifications and digs deeper into a moral discussion on good and bad: *Remember it is not a fair war. And you are no longer a civilian. You stopped being a civilian when you saw people dying. (...) Did they expect a white revolution? Is a revolution supposed to be stainless? I wonder. A revolution is not a virgin but if it stops being a virgin, they start hating it. There is no pure revolution to satisfy your fantasy my dear. The revolution is not a virgin. It is dirty and bloody* (Arsanios 2013, 8).

Again, Arsanios investigates potential dilemmas in relation to Bouhired's struggle – and to resistance and revolution in general – but in spite of the continuing discussion back and forth between Jamila and the girl acting as Jamila, the dilemma remains unsolved. Here, there are no easy answers to this question. In contrast to Arsanios, al-Mayadeen attempts to formulate answers to the question of what characterises real resistance, using Bouhired and the Algerian war of liberation as a clear case of 'morally right' resistance. Because Bouhired was fighting foreign occupation, her struggle was just, no matter the methods – as is the case with Hizbollah today. To re-launch and honour a female resistance fighter from the archives, in a time of uprisings across the Arab world, could have been a statement in support of the revolts. Similarly, the celebration of Bouhired by a TV station that promotes itself as a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause could have been a confirmation of this agenda, linking to the contemporary struggle against foreign occupation of Arab land. Neither is the case. As we saw above, Hizbollah is the group here which can enjoy being associated with the icon.

This interpretation and utilisation of Bouhired explains why, for al-Mayadeen, there are no inconsistencies between Bouhired and Bashar al-Assad, unlike in Arsanios's art production, when the young girl playing Bouhired notes: *when I Googled Jamila's name again and found a photograph of her with Bashar al Assad, I laughed. Sorry grandpa. Once a heroine, Jamila had become a petrified monument. A guardian of dictatorship.* (Arsanios 2013, 10). This disappointment over Bouhired's changing representation is central and shows how the symbol of Bouhired through the years has been used to represent different, and even opposing, values. Arsanios investigates exactly this potential conflict of representation and points to the struggle over symbols. For her – or the young actress at least – there is a discrepancy between what Bouhired historically has represented, and her endorsement of the al-Assad rule.

Arsanios, thus, exposes the instability of a symbol, and how this instability can create a mismatch between the symbol and the readers of the symbol. While Bouhired can be a symbol for feminists as well as socialist groups at the same time, without creating fundamental contradictions for the reader, the fact that the former revolutionary female fighter has chosen to stand with the established power in Syria, against a public uprising, is for some readers too profound an inconsistence to be bridged. Bouhired revealed one reading of her own past, as well as the present, when she accepted the

honouring by Bashar al-Assad in 2009 – namely, the understanding of Ba'th Syria as a contemporary representative of her own resistance struggle. Al-Mayadeen's iconization of Bouhired underlines the same potential conflict of representation, just as Bouhired's participation in the 2013 celebration only confirms her previous translation of her legacy into the modern era.

Conclusion

With the concept of Worthy of Life, it seems clear that al-Mayadeen aimed to evoke *a bright history* and *a constructive vision* (as in the English edition of the Worthy of Life pamphlet). *The bright history* was recalled by the participants, who for the most part represented the past, and *the constructive vision* was established by showing how the glorious strategies of the past can be integrated into the future through Hizbollah. By choosing Bouhired, an almost forgotten icon from the past, as the object of celebration, al-Mayadeen had the opportunity to 'recharge' a symbol detached from contemporary political affiliations but with important nostalgic qualities – an almost empty shell, ready to be refilled. As she stood on the stage in the UNESCO Palace, old, fragile and at the same time steadfast and committed, she appeared as the pure symbol of *muqawama* raised above contemporary political power games and worthy of iconization.

For an icon to be created or stay 'alive', the performance of worship is of crucial importance. Thus the public celebration orchestrated by al-Mayadeen was not only a publicity stunt but also a necessary component for the creation of an icon, an embodiment of an ideology. By placing her within the prominent company of Nelson Mandela, Che Guevara, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Yasser Arafat, and having names like Aleida Guevara, Nasrallah and Fairouz saluting her, al-Mayadeen re-launched an icon; an icon who refers back to an era representing the visions and ideals which al-Mayadeen wants to reawaken. Aleida Guevara was invited not only because of her father but also by virtue of her own image as a politically engaged, Third World female activist; thus, the feminist aspect – and an additional progressive quality – was highlighted. In addition to the row of global icons which Bouhired was placed within, al-Mayadeen engaged a gallery of well-known figures from the Arab world to participate in the celebration. Cultural figures like Abdel Bari Atwan, Ghassan Matar, Samim al-Qasim and Julia Boutros are all outspoken supporters of the fight against Israeli occupation and the right to military resistance.

Whereas some readers detected an inconsistency when Bouhired posed together with Bashar al-Assad, this is not the case at al-Mayadeen, where al-Assad becomes a guardian of Bouhired's resistance struggle. Rather, the opposite is the case – and Bouhired becomes a demonstration of why al-Mayadeen disqualifies the current uprisings as real *muqawama,* just as she comes to function as a link between the historical leftist secular values and the contemporary resistance of Hizbollah. Through the iconization of Bouhired, al-Mayadeen tries to monopolise the reading of a shared Arab – and international – symbol. She is no longer the empty shell that can be filled with several parallel meanings; she is now an icon of *The New Regressive Left*. Moreover, Bouhired's participation underlines the monopolisation. Thus, Bouhired equally becomes an embodiment of how the revolutionary, progressive, socialist, anti-colonial struggles in the Arab world turned into

authoritarian rule; a dilemma which the (Arab) Left has been facing for decades, and which has only become even more acute since the uprisings in 2011 challenged the previous political and ideological positions.

Through the making of an icon, al-Mayadeen produces ideology. Not only does the event – and the icon – offer a platform for the dissemination of political and ideological beliefs, the iconization itself becomes an element in the production of *The New Regressive Left*. The setup, the framing, the choice of participants, the music, etc., all merge with existing al-Mayadeen productions and together develop and update the ideological qualities of the station. As Finlayson points out, ethos is an important component of an ideology. The fact that a former female resistance fighter from Algeria is the holder of the role of authority becomes part of the ideology itself.

In this chapter, I have used the iconization of Jamila Bouhired as an example of how an orchestrated public event served an important role for the production of ideological discourse. Bouhired is the personification of *The New Regressive Left,* embodying the core concept of resistance. In the following chapter, resistance is still the focal point, though addressed within the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Taking the use of poems, slogans, songs, images and animations as my point of departure, I investigate how these aesthetic expressions re-launch a heroic narrative of the Palestinians.

Celebrating the *Muqawama* through Words, Images, and Songs: the Case of Palestine

Palestine is a topic that is ever present at al-Mayadeen – in the news stream and programmes, in the topics being discussed, and the guests being invited.[84] When al-Mayadeen argues for bringing Palestine back to the top of the political agenda, the underlying argument propagated is that the past years of Arab uprisings have led to confusion, a loss of focus, and an abandonment of *the* fundamental issue for the Arab world. However, al-Mayadeen does not only give Palestine and the resistance to Israeli occupation a high priority; the station has, from its earliest days, consciously aimed at promoting a particular image of the Palestinians as active and heroic rather than passive or victimised – whether as a soldier in combat or an intellectual engaged in art and culture. In this chapter, I investigate al-Mayadeen's approach to Palestine, and how al-Mayadeen attempts to counteract the mainstream narrative of victimhood and to tell a more heroic story of the Palestinians – a narrative that constitutes an important element of the ideological discourse of *The New Regressive Left*.

Al-Mayadeen's focus on Palestine is not a new phenomenon; rather, the station builds on a well-known practice in the Arab world of evoking the Palestinian cause as a promotional strategy that can unite the public. For nearly 70 years, the struggle for Palestine has been a central question for the whole Arab region. Throughout the years it has been a reason for wars, a central theme for all major regional political movements, an object of deep-felt public sympathy, a cause used by Arab governments for their self-promotion, and "the prism of pain through which most Arabs view the world" (Telhami 2013, 73). Likewise, Palestine has played an important role in Arab media, not least after the birth of Arab satellite TV and particularly in al-Jazeera's intensive on-the-ground

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[84] During the Gaza War in the summer of 2014, the coverage was obviously even more intense – news updates, daily programmes allocated to the situation in Gaza, several journalists reporting from the ground, and political analyses in the studio. Al-Mayadeen broadcast three daily special programmes dealing with the subject, namely *Falisṭin Tantaṣir* [Palestine Wins] (broadcast daily 01.08.2014 – 21.08.2014), a one hour debate from the news studio on the latest developments with one or several guests, and *#Falisṭin_Taqawam* [#Palestine_ Resists] (broadcast daily 22.07.2014 – 22.08.2014), a one hour programme on events and developments on the social networks and social media, with the al-Mayadeen journalist Abdel Rahman Az-Eddin and the blogger Khaddar Salama. Finally, an al-Mayadeen news anchor hosted the leader of the station's department of Israeli affairs, Abbas Ismail, together with the chief of the al-Mayadeen office in Palestine (OPT), Nassar al-Laham, in the programme *Zaman Ghazah* [Gaza Time], a one hour discussion of political developments (broadcast daily 15.07.2014 – 27.08.2014).

- *Falisṭin Tantaṣir* http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/46/%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1
- *#Falisṭin_Taqawam* http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/44/-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86_%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85,
- *Zaman Ghazah* http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/43/%D8%B2%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%BA%D8%B2%D8%A9

coverage of the Second Intifada in 2000 (Elmasry et al. 2013). Because since 1948 Palestine has played a central role for Arab politics and ideological thinking – not least within the Arab Left – it is of relevance to look more closely at how al-Mayadeen treats the topic, and thus how *The New Regressive Left* relates to the Palestinian cause.

As discussed earlier, in recent years Arab mediascapes have become political and ideological battlefields and arenas for the promotion of visions and ideas. Visual images play a central role and, as Lina Khatib writes in the introduction to *Image Politics in the Middle East*: "The Middle East has become a site of struggle over the construction of social and political reality through competing images. In this competition, one political actor's carefully self-constructed image can be erased by a new, oppositional image" (Lina Khatib 2013, 2). Political struggles are, thus, also fought as battles of representation, leaving visual media as a platform for conflicts over images and narratives. I investigate how al-Mayadeen constructs a particular image of Palestine – as a vibrant and strong entity, with a distinct cultural identity and the moral right to resist – and what this image is intended to erase.

In order to investigate this image construction, I look at different cultural and artistic expressions with strong visual power, such as music videos, *wamḍat* [flashes, short spots], and animations. I argue that al-Mayadeen consciously aims at reshaping the narrative of the Palestinians by reintroducing a heroic, proud and (at times) militantly resistant discourse from the past. I look at al-Mayadeen's promotion of the operetta "The Land of the Prophets" ['arḍ al-'anbya'], its use of images and songs during the Gaza war in 2014, and its launch of Naji al-Ali's famous drawings of Handala, turned into small animations. In all three cases, words, visuals, songs and the legacy of cultural figures are central for the establishment of a particular image – of both Palestine and al-Mayadeen. The cases are rich on aesthetics and obvious examples of what Jeffery Jones refers to as *aesthetic expressions* or, as he elaborates, "the stylistics or poetics that dramatize (…) ideological thinking" (Jones 2013, 188).

In the following section, I investigate how the discourse of Palestinians has changed through time and space. After this historical review, I move on first to discuss how the operetta "The Land of the Prophets" is used to promote Palestine as a distinct, vital and civilised cultural entity, and to promote art as an important form of *muqawama*. Next, I look more closely at two songs broadcast during the Gaza War in 2014, the old hymn "Keep the Weapons Alert" [*Khali al-Silaḥ Ṣaḥi*] by Abdel Halim Hafez, and Julia Boutrus's release of "The Right Is My Weapon" [*al-Ḥaqq Salaḥi*], and investigate how these music videos praise militant *muqawama*. After, I look at selected *wamḍat* from the time of the Gaza War and the animations of Handala for an investigation of the notion of *ṣumud* [steadfastness]. In the last part, I zoom out and examine how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is used to read developments in Syria and Iraq (with regards to Islamic State).

From hero to victim – and back again

Top banner of the al-Mayadeen website during the Gaza War

Palestinian national awareness and consequently a Palestinian national resistance movement grew out of the local Palestinian experience of becoming an English mandate after the First World War, together with the emigration of European Jews to the area. From the early years, a heroic discourse was predominant, featuring heroic fighters, ready to sacrifice themselves for the (soon-to-be) newly independent nation. *Al-Nakba* [the Catastrophe] of 1948 challenged this narrative and created a fundamental framing of the Palestinians as victims. Nevertheless, parallel to the victimising experience of 1948, and as an antithesis to this narrative, the heroic narrative of the *fedayeen* [the ones who sacrifices themselves] was kept alive and further developed during the 1950s and '60s in the meeting with the transnational Third World anticolonial community of resistance. This heroic narrative was radicalised and matured during the 1970s as a result of the defeat and occupation in 1967 (Matar and Harb 2013, 173). The idea of militant resistance at the expense of political struggle, and the emphasis on the willingness for personal self-sacrifice, became dominant ideological convictions just as hyper-masculine heroism became the celebrated virtue (Khalili 2009, 18-20; Matar and Harb 2013).

These first decades of struggle for national independence were inspired by secular ideologies offered by regional nationalist regimes and international anti-imperialist movements. The Arab defeat to Israel in 1967 represented in many ways a turning point for secular versus religious ideologies in the Arab world, as the economic, social and military failures of the secular nationalist regimes became clear. In the following years, culminating with the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, an Islamic revival swept the Arab world on both the individual and societal levels. These developments, of course, also had an impact on the Palestinian resistance struggle (Zubaida 2011, 190).

In spite of the new religious sentiments, which challenged the existing political order, important continuities should not be overlooked. Not only did several former secular nationalists 'convert' and reappear in an Islamists context, central discourses and political rhetoric were also inherited from one movement to another (Zubaida 2011, 181, 191). The shared historical origins of secular pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism as political outcomes of the Ottoman collapse and growing European influence in the region provided the two movements with common fundamental features and traits from the outset, including an anti-colonial, and by time an anti-Zionistic outlook. The heroic discourse of the secular liberation movements likewise reappeared as a central element in modern Islamist resistant movements (Khalili 2009, 26).

Later, this tradition of promoting heroic resistance was challenged by the international humanitarian and human rights discourse which gained a growing influence during the 1980s and '90s, especially after the collapse of the USSR and the so called 'new world order'. In Palestine, the human rights

discourse had already been invoked during the First Intifada as a strategy for international attention, but the Oslo Accords and the following influx of foreign-funded NGOs, with their mandatory discourse of human rights and democratisation, changed the name of the game (Hammami 1995; Allen 2009). The image of the militant hero lost its appeal, and instead a narrative of being an innocent victim grew stronger. Being a passive woman or child became more suitable than being an active man when trying to win the sympathy of an international audience. This new international victimised discourse clearly contrasted the prevailing heroic and hyper masculine ideals, and thus influenced the general representation, as well as the self-conception of, the Palestinians.

The politically demobilising and often victimising discourse promoted by the NGO industry was furthermore nurtured by a general sense in the Arab world of being in a state of crisis. Similar ideas about Arabs facing a fundamental crisis on all levels of society had been recurring since the end of the 19th century, but in contrast to earlier constructive reactions, this time it led to a pacifying discourse of general Arab victimhood, or what Samir Kassir calls "the cult of the victim" (Kassir 2006, 81). The central role which Palestine plays for the collective Arab narratives of both crisis and victimhood is highlighted by Shiley Telhami when he states that "the Palestinian-Israeli conflict issue remains the prism of pain through which most Arabs view the world" (Telhami 2013, 73).

An important platform for these transformations has of course been the media, and not least the pan-Arab satellite channels. Lori Allen stresses the important role played by Palestinian and pan-Arab media during the Second Intifada in turning the Palestinian into a "sympathy-deserving suffering human" (Allen 2009, 162). Likewise, Marc Lynch shows how a discourse of shared Arab victimhood and societal crisis, promoted especially by al-Jazeera, was important for unifying the new Arab public (Lynch 2006, 11, 35, 58). Lynch focuses on al-Jazeera's coverage of Iraq before and after the US-led invasion in 2003 but argues that "the Palestinian and Iraqi issue increasingly merged into a common narrative" (Lynch 2006, 128) where one conflict only emphasised the other, as they both confirmed and nurtured the same narrative about Arab suffering. The role of al-Jazeera in promoting the discourse of victimhood is similarly emphasised by Kassir in his investigation of "the Arab malaise". He also argues that the Arab media, and in particular al-Jazeera, played a central role (Kassir 2006, 81, 85).

An illustration of how this discourse of victimhood has developed and been expressed artistically is in the two operettas the "The Arab Dream" [*al-Ḥulm al-'arabi*][85] and "The Arab Conscience" [*al-Ḍamyir al-'arabi*][86] from, respectively, 1998 and 2008, written and produced by Ahmad al-Ariyan. They are examples of a tradition of joined "We are the world" types of musical productions which have been created over the past decades[87], starring a selection of the biggest contemporary Arab singers from the Lebanese pop idol Nancy Ajram to the Algerian 'king of rai' Khaled. Across the two operettas respectively, 23 and 33 artists shared in the joint project with a strong political

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[85] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVgo9eCInSM
[86] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxQ6v95UGYo
[87] This tradition goes all the way back to a song such as "The Greater Nation", which I touched upon in the previous chapter.

message about Arab brotherhood. The first is a retelling of the history of the Arabs from 1948 to 1998, while the second covers the following ten years. Thus the setup is basically similar but looking more closely, it becomes obvious that the discourse has changed.

"The Arab Dream" tells the story of 50 years of conflict and Arab defeats to Western military superiority and Israeli aggression. In spite of the continued crises – or because of it – the song sends a strong appeal to all Arabs to remember the old dream of unity, since this is the only solution to the present malaise. The chorus illustrates the persistent hope for a better future: *The darkness of the night may separate us, but the brightness of the light can reach the most distant sky*. In "The Arab Conscience", on the other hand, the tiny light from "The Arab Dream" has faded away and is surpassed by an attitude of resignation and hopelessness, without any real signs of resistance against the overwhelming injustice facing the Arab world. Here, the chorus, which plays a very central part in the song, says: *The heart of the people has died, our self-esteem has died, maybe we have forgotten today, that the Arabs are brothers*. Hence, the depiction of the Arab people has shifted here from one that is still dreaming of better days to come (even though it might seem hopeless), to one that is paralysed by injustice, turned into a pacified victim. Although the attitude in the two music videos has changed from 1998 to 2008, they share an overall focus on conflicts, death and suffering, and the representation of the Arab people as victims.[88]

Parallel to this dominant discourse in the mainstream media, the existence of subaltern counter-publics (Fraser 1990) should not be overlooked. In particular, Hizbollah's TV channel al-Manar and other media outlets of the resistance movement have through the years been an important representative of alternative voices opposed to the dominant representation of the Israeli-Arab conflict, by promoting a narrative of empowerment and Arab strength. In the following sections, I place al-Mayadeen within this victim-hero parameter and discuss how the station perceives itself as being part of an active, heroic-though-cultured, resistance discourse.

Culture as *muqawama*

At al-Mayadeen, songs, poems, and cultural figures are in general a central means for conveying the political and ideological stances of the station – not least in relation to Palestine and the topic of *al-muqawama*. Art in general is recognised as a medium for resistance in line with other strategies, both because art can contain a clear and strong political message, and because the mere production of art is a way of proving one's worth and continued existence. As the host of the cultural talk show Bayt al-Qasid, Zahi Wehbe, notes with regard to the Israelis: *What upsets and bothers them most is*

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[88] The two music videos are, furthermore, a telling illustration of how a conscious strategy of winning the sympathy of the international community by staging one's own suffering had gained ground by 2008. Al-Ariyan explains in an interview with the Gulf Weekly, in connection with the release of "The Arab Conscience", that an important part of the project has been to win the sympathy of the West, and he outlines how he has been working strategically to reach a Western audience by, for example, translating the video into several languages. He elaborates: "It will make the West see what the street in the Middle East sees: why they are annoyed, why they are in pain, what makes them retaliate, what makes them hurt. And if they see that, they may think, wait a minute, we can understand." (www.gulfweeklyworldwide.com/Articles.aspx?articleid=16685).

when they see a Palestinian image – as we said earlier in our talk – a beautiful Palestinian image: Palestinian artists, Palestinian great musicians, Palestinian painters, great poets like Mahmoud Darwish, Mourid al-Barghouti, Tamin [al-Barghouti] and others like them, such as Michael Khalifi, Rim Banna, Rim Talhami or tens of other names like, Trio Jubran, Kamilia Jubran … (Bayt al-Qasid, 20.11.2012, part 3, min 06:22). On this basis, al-Mayadeen has a declared ambition about being the main platform presenting cultural figures and artists renowned for their engagement in and support of *al-muqawama*.

The genre of *wamdat* is a medium for integrating art as a means of resistance, and it was used intensively by al-Mayadeen as a way of communicating political messages during the Gaza War in 2014. These small spots (typically of a length of around 30 seconds to two minutes) are often built on well-known songs, poems, and symbols, or they make use of strong images mixed with clear slogans or iconic quotes in order to evoke nostalgic feelings and political commitment. In the promotional department at al-Mayadeen, employees with many different professional backgrounds work together in order to generate a creative space.[89] The short clips are a genre that allows artistic creativity – everything from animations to slogans, old and new footage, texts, music, and poems are used in order to stage the precise narrative that the station wishes to advocate. They are often produced in small series, commenting on a certain topic, and run as shorter or longer campaigns – Palestine is a reoccurring theme.[90]

In the summer of 2014, well-known poems or songs by Samih Qasim, Mahmoud Darwish and Sheikh Imam, as well as Tamim Barghouti and Khaled al-Habr, were turned into flashes supplemented with a visual side. All of them functioned as comments on the situation in Gaza, from a humanitarian, political or ideological perspective, while at the same time allowing al-Mayadeen to line up in a long and proud tradition of resistance through culture, as well as proving itself to be a guardian and promoter of this same tradition. Furthermore, a notable type of short clip was produced, namely, a serial of short personal greetings from renowned artists to the people of Gaza. More than 20 cultural figures from around the Arab world offered a 1-2 minute statement of sympathy. Several of the participants were familiar faces at al-Mayadeen, like Abdel Bari Atwan, Julia Boutrus, Tamim Barghouti, Jamal Sulaiman and Khaled al-Habr.[91] Others appeared for the first time. Through these flashes, al-Mayadeen was able to present itself as the preferred media space for renowned artists and intellectuals, while the personal statements at the same time functioned as an endorsement of al-Mayadeen's standpoint by reputable voices. According to Hind Khaled, head of the promotional department, the majority of the participants contacted the station themselves in order to participate in the campaign – an indication of al-Mayadeen's relative success in becoming a relevant platform for this group.

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[89] The promotional department produces all of the promotional material which is broadcast at al-Mayadeen, whether it is about the station itself or forthcoming programmes and shows (trailers), including the political flashes that I deal with in this chapter.

[90] Some of the *wamdat* are available at al-Mayadeen's website, see:
http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/58/%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%AA

[91] I return to Abdel Bari Atwan, Tamim Barghouti, and Khaled al-Habr in the following chapter as guests on the cultural talk show Bayt al-Qasid.

Another indication of al-Mayadeen's success in offering itself as a space for resistance art is the famous Lebanese singer Julia Boutrus's choice to launch her response to the war in Gaza, the song "The Right Is My Weapon", at al-Mayadeen. On her way to Dubai to record the song, Boutrus called Ghassan bin Jeddo and offered the chance to launch the song on al-Mayadeen. This anecdote fed al-Mayadeen's image as the voice of the resistance, as Hind Khaled explains: *I think, because they [the artists] know that they will find a place, they will find a spot on al-Mayadeen to say what they want to say ... It gives more of a drive for them. I could imagine myself as an artist; if I don't have an outlet for my work I might postpone it a bit. But it was as easy as a phone call ...* (personal interview, Beirut 24.11.2016). The ambition to offer space for art of this type also resulted in a special programme dedicated to promoting the operetta "The Land of the Prophets", though it didn't receive much attention from the media in general.[92] Al-Mayadeen hosted the initiator of the operetta, the Palestinian writer and composer Rami al-Yousef, along with two of the ten participating singers, Palestinian-Israeli Dalal Abu Amneh and Tunisian Lotfi Bouchnak, for a discussion of art and resistance.

Though "The Land of the Prophets" is part of the same tradition of Arab operettas as "The Arab Dream" and "The Arab Conscience" – starring artists from different Arab countries promoting a joint call to the Arab world – the message is basically different. This became evident in al-Mayadeen's approach to the operetta, when the hostess Aula Malaah opened the programme by stating that, in the defence of the Palestinian national identity, *we resist with the pen, we resist with the bullet, we resist with the stone, we resist with music, poems and songs* (Khas al-Mayadeen, 03.11.2013, part 1, min 00:20). Then, Rami al-Yousef explained how he consciously deselected images displaying *heroism, bloody and harsh images of what the region undergoes* (Khas al-Mayadeen, 03.11.2013, part 1, min 9:24). Instead, the music was accompanied by footage of Jerusalem – daily life, old architecture, nature, Christian symbols (such as churches, crosses, icons), and long sequences of al-Qasa mosque. Thus, a common thread throughout the video is the coexistence of Muslims and Christians – a proof of Palestinian civilisation. Al-Yousef stresses, *in this operetta we talked about peace, about coexistence, about love, this is the city which through its implications and its symbols portrays the civilised Palestinian as open to all cultures and civilisations* (Khas al-Mayadeen, 03.11.2013, part 1, min 21:20).

Thus, the music video aims to break away from the image of Palestine as a country of suffering; rather, al-Yousef tries to create a narrative of a confident and vibrant culture with something positive to offer to the world – very much in line with al-Mayadeen's own agenda. Furthermore, Aula Malaah used the song to promote the image of Palestine as a whole – insisting on Palestine as one cultural and human coherent entity as well as one coherent political cause, which is a recurrent

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[92] Khas al-Mayadeen, broadcast on 3 November 2013.
http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/episode/9004/%D8%BA%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A1

and essential element of al-Mayadeen's general approach to Palestine.[93] In this narrative, the Palestinians living in Israel play a centre role, and thus Dalal Abu Amneh represents an important trend at al-Mayadeen of prioritising Israeli Palestinians and presenting them in line with Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza, or abroad. When first appearing on the screen (from Nazareth[94]), the hostess Aula Malaah addresses her as "the daughter of Nazareth" and asks her about the message of "The Land of the Prophets", to which Abu Amneh answers, *I, as an artist from Nazareth, from Palestine, from inside the occupied land, I convey my message as a continued and constant communication between the Galilee and Jerusalem and all the Palestinian areas and all the Palestinian lands. This is an emphasis on my role as an artist, on interaction, love and on the unity of the same people in spite of all the attempts of partition and this is my contribution as an artist and my message in general and in this operetta* (Khas al-Mayadeen, 03.11.2013, part 2, min 00:43).

Thus, both the host and Abu Amneh herself stress the Nazareth identity. The mere fact that she is living in the part of the historical Palestine that today is part of Israel is important, as it offers an opportunity to underline that, in spite of her Israeli nationality, she still considers herself Palestinian and she is still perceived as a Palestinian by al-Mayadeen. The Palestinian Israelis are not 'abandoned', and their Israeli nationality not accepted; rather, they constitute a symbol of the continued existence of Palestine in spite of the establishment of Israel. Furthermore, Abu Amneh, a young beautiful woman, quietly adds – without any attention paid to the political implications by herself or the programme's hostess – that she speaks from "inside the occupied land". This is not an uncontroversial comment when made in relation to a city that, since 1948, has formed a part of Israel. Thus, both symbolically and rhetorically, a discourse of one coherent (and occupied) Palestine is created.

"The Land of the Prophets" was used by al-Mayadeen to promote a particular narrative about Palestine as being one coherent entity consisting of one people, and as being a vital source of art, culture heritage, and religious coexistence. This image of Palestine as a distinct cultural and geographical coherent whole is a reply to the view that the land of Palestine and the Palestinian people are nothing but part of a common Arab identity, with no justified right to their own existence. Furthermore, the promotion of a vibrant Palestinian cultural production establishes the Palestinians as cultured and civilised people with something positive to offer rather than merely a poor group of victims.

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[93] As illustrated by, e.g., the programme series on Palestine, *Hona Falisṭin* [Here is Palestine], broadcasting from different Palestinian (and Israeli) cities during the month of Ramadan in 2014.

[94] Nazareth in general plays an important role at al-Mayadeen. As the 'Arab capital' in Israel and a city that has historically been a Christian stronghold, it is ascribed a central role in this discourse. In the summer of 2013, al-Mayadeen ran a short serial of programmes called *Min al-Naṣarah* [From Nazareth] (http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/21/%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A9). Also, in the programme Ajras al-Mashreq, Nazareth (together with e.g. the Syrian village Ma'loula), is an important city.

"The Land of the Prophets" illustrates how al-Mayadeen uses cultural productions as an instrument for breaking away from the victimised image of the Palestinians by establishing a narrative about a vital Palestinian culture. In the following sections, I look more closely at two other songs, namely "Keep the Weapons Alert" and "The Right Is My Weapon". These two songs were played repeatedly during the Gaza War in 2014 and formed part of the intense promotion of militant resistance against Israel during and after the war. That the songs were broadcast in the context of war is clearly reflected in their focus on militant, rather than cultural, resistance and thus demonstrates al-Mayadeen's broad understanding of the different, valid forms of Palestinian revitalisation and resistance.

The promotion of militant *muqawama* through art
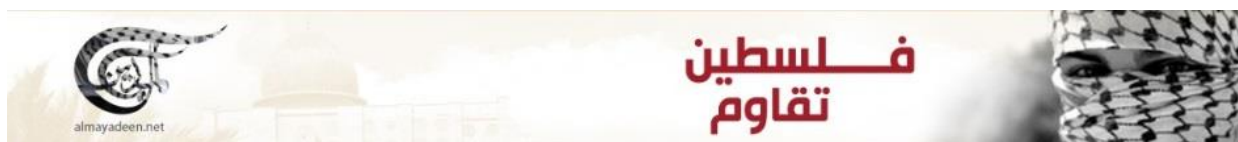
During the Gaza War, al-Mayadeen decided to re-launch the old Abdel Halim Hafez song from 1968, "Keep the Weapons Alert".[95] It was shown repeatedly as a short spot between programmes or whenever suitable in the days of the war and in the following months. The song was originally written at a very fragile time in the collective Arab history, by an important cultural figure. Halim Hafez was a personal friend of Gamal Abel Nasser, political and socially engaged, and even today, still one of the most popular and worshipped modern Arab singers. This song was Halim Hafez's contribution to the reestablishment of Arab self-esteem after the devastating defeat by Israel in 1967, and a call for public commitment and steadfastness. Hence, the song is very well-known among the Arab public and the text, together with the voice of Halim Hafez, talks to nostalgia as well as feelings of pride.

The music is vibrant and Halim Hafez's voice is more determined and strong than his typical romantic or melancholic sound. The lyric is rather simple, and repeated several times:

> *Keep the weapon alert, alert, alert*
> *If the world slept, I would stay alert with my weapon*
> *My weapon in my hands day and night alert*
> *It [the weapon] calls, oh revolutionaries our enemy is disloyal*
> *Keep the weapon, the weapon alert, alert.*

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[95] Al-Manar also re-launched "Keep the Weapons Alert" during the summer of 2014, using the song as a promotional video clearly displaying the strength, courage and professionalism of the resistance movements. It was not the first time al-Manar used the song: for examples of the song in a Hizbollah context, in 2014 and 2012 respectively, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSxMef-qD94 and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VszzgzXijA. For an analysis of an earlier version, see Pete Ajemian: "Resistance beyond time and space: Hezbollah's media campaigns" (2008).

The visual element that al-Mayadeen produced to accompany the song was a guided tour through a proud history of Arab resistance, and the virile attitude of the song is, thus, reflected visually. "Keep the Weapons Alert" is not an operetta in line with "The Land of the Prophets", but the visual side still talks into the historiography presented in "The Arab Dream" and "The Arab Conscience" – though the narrative is fundamentally different. The video takes us all the way from the time of Izz ad-Din al-Qassam[96] and the fight against European colonialism to the current 'professional' militant resistance movements fighting against Israel. The focus on heroic resistance, though, does not mean that death and destruction are not part of the narrative. On the contrary, violent images of soldiers, battles, destruction, and victims are part of the visual side, but the violence is not about turning the Arabs into passive victims or leading to hopelessness. It is about producing the idea of an active and persistent Arab resistance throughout time and space. A graphic illustration of how the pre-1948 borders of Palestine are continually shrinking functions as an explanation, and reminder, of why and for what people are fighting.

Throughout the video, small comments are written across the screen underlining what the struggle has been about all these years. *Against the occupation,* it says, as we see old footage from 1948. *Against surrendering* accompanies footages of destroyed military vehicles left behind in 1967. *Against the massacres* is shown over photos of victims from Sabra and Shatila lying in the street. *Against the conspiracy,* it says, as we see footage from the Lebanese Civil War. As a building collapses under an attack from the Israeli artillery, the words *against the betrayal* appear. And finally, as the song is coming to an end, the writing concludes: *keep the weapons alert, because of the right.*

In this reading of history, which al-Mayadeen promotes, each Israeli act is followed by counteraction. From the very beginning, Israeli colonialism has been met by resistance; in fact, even before the establishment of the state of Israel, the resistance was vibrant (as exemplified by Izz ad-Din al-Qassam). We see victorious Egyptian soldiers from 1956 and Palestinian guerrillas in the streets of Beirut, and the last part of the video is devoted to contemporary Islamist resistant movements. The video almost bears a resemblance to the well-known promotional videos of, for example, Hizbollah or Hamas, with disciplined and professional looking soldiers and advanced equipment ready for combat. At several points, the music is drowned out by the sound of missiles being launched and rockets being fired.

The music combined with the visuals form a certain aesthetic experience, which is at the same time nostalgic and romantic. The timeworn black and white images, the old footage from 1956 and the glimpses from the time of the Lebanese Civil War not only recall history, they also encourage nostalgic longings for a time when the man in the street fought back. The aesthetic experience shifts as the images move from one of a faded past to one of a bright present, illustrated by professional resistance soldiers. This blend of simultaneously cultivating nostalgia for the past and celebrating

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[96] A Syrian-born leader of the militant resistance against French and British colonialism and against the Zionist movement.

the present's dynamic resistance is a reoccurring aesthetic expression at al-Mayadeen, which helps to connect the past with the present – the resistance taking place today is part of a long proud history.

In Julia Boutrus's song, "The Right Is My Weapon", launched on 29 July 2014 on al-Mayadeen, the celebration of the contemporary resistance is even more outspoken. The song is, as explained on al-Mayadeen's website, *a support for the resistance in Palestine as well as salutation and full solidarity with the steadfast people in Gaza* (link). In this video, nostalgic longings for the past are no longer the focal point, and yet both the lyrics and the images are very emotional. Boutrus, who is renowned for both her work as an artist and her strong support for Hizbollah, is able to induce both patriotic feelings and heroic sentiments.

The text as well as the visual side of the video has a clear message, namely the moral right to defend one's country by armed resistance. Clips of the beautiful Julia Boutrus as she walks thoughtfully around in the mountains are mixed with footage of professional resistance soldiers running through olive groves, young men and boys throwing stones in the streets, troops of resistance soldiers ready for combat, and launches of huge intimidating missiles. The contrast between the peaceful mountain setting with Boutrus and the violent battleground dominated by heroic male fighters is striking, but serves to underline what the soldiers are fighting for: namely, the land… This is further elaborated in the text, as the first verse illustrates:

> *The right is my weapon*
> *The right is my weapon, and I resist*
> *I am above my wounds, I will resist*
> *I will not surrender, I will not break*
> *And about you, my country, I don't bargain*
> *My house is here … My land is here …*
> *The smooth sea, the river is for us …*
> *How should I stay peaceful while facing the fire*
> *I will resist*

In the video, there are no crying or wounded children, no misery or suffering. Only one wounded person appears – a resistance fighter who is carried away on a stretcher by his comrades. Even this image of a fallen soldier is not a call for pity; rather it is a proof of the true heroic character of the resistance. In this video, Palestinians are neither victims nor terrorists; they are a people under occupation, and thus, they have the right to resist. The only ones showing signs of weakness are the Israeli soldiers. One clip shows a group of Palestinian boys throwing stones at an Israeli tank until it turns around and leaves; another clip shows a group of Israeli soldiers packing their things and leaving their camp. Both clips are accompanied by Boutrus's voice: *They will leave and we will stay, and the land will remain ours.*

Throughout the video, the beauty of the nature is a dominant theme. Olive trees, sunsets, the sea, and the mountains play a prominent role and indicate not only great love for the nation but also remind the viewer of the aim of the struggle. It is about the land – the resistance movements are fighting for the people's right to their land. And if anyone should doubt the wholehearted support of the people, the video aims to remove this with a Palestinian man who stands in the middle of ruins and total destruction and screams to the camera: *I am with the resistance, and we will always be with the resistance, from the oldest of us to the youngest child*. In a short passage, al-Mayadeen is suddenly woven into the narrative, with a clip of an al-Mayadeen journalist who struggles to continue her reporting while a couple of Israeli soldiers try to stop her. This, while Boutrus sings: *I will resist*. Hence, al-Mayadeen places itself as an active part of the resistance.

Where "Keep the Weapons Alert" binds together the resistance through time and space, in this video, the beauty of the nature of the Levant is juxtaposed with the heroic struggle of the resistance movements and the cowardice of the enemy. This aesthetic experience underlines the holiness of both 'the land' and the struggle – one elevates the other – and thus integrates both elements as central in the ideological discourse.

Ṣumud – you have to be a victim, in order to resist

During the coverage of events in the summer of 2014, the consequences of the Israeli bombing in Gaza were ever present: destroyed neighbourhoods, crying children, images of the dead and wounded etc. Still, the suffering was neither the main point in itself, nor an appeal for international sympathy; rather, it served as a legitimisation and promotion of the resistance, as illustrated by one 18-second long black and white animation showing Israeli missiles bombing Gaza until red blood drips beneath the city.[97] As the city fills up with blood, red drops start to fall, then transform into missiles which land in Tel Aviv. The short graphic message ends with the words: *Gaza, worthy of victory*[98]. Thus, the video proclaims, the resistance is born out of the crimes committed against Palestine – and Palestinians own the moral right to fight back militarily, and to be victorious.

This logic is developed further in two other flashes. One shows three consecutive images together with short pieces of text: the bombing of a Palestinian village is showed as the words *When injustice becomes a habit* appear. Then there is a photo of a girl looking insistently into the camera, followed by a photo of an elderly Palestinian woman with a Palestinian flag and an olive twig, and the words *Resistance becomes a duty*. Lastly, carved in stone: *Resist!* The message is that fighting back is not only a right but a moral duty. Moreover, the oppression leaves no space for bystanders, but demands action and attitude from everybody.

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[97] This and the following flash I deal with here are no longer available online.
[98] A statement that links to the award *Worthy of Life*, cf. the previous chapter.

A similar flash underlines the fact that resistance in all shapes and forms is acknowledged at al-Mayadeen. The 11-second long flash shows three different images of Palestinians as they resist the occupation, accompanied by the statement: *Every act of resistance... is a victory. Resist*. The first photo shows a young man throwing a stone; he is wearing a T-shirt with "1948" on the back and a Palestinian scarf around his head and face; on the screen is written: *Every act of resistance …* The next shot shows a professional resistance fighter with a rocket on his shoulder, looking intimidating, with his face covered in a black balaclava. On the last image, a girl faces a group of Israeli soldiers with her arm in the air showing the sign of victory. On the screen is written: *…is a victory*. Finally, carved in stone, comes the request: *Resist!*[99]

Different types of resistance are presented as equally important. Professional resistance, street upheavals and civil disobedience are promoted side by side. The statement: *Every act of resistance... is a victory. Resist!* sparks associations to Mahmoud Darwish's comment "The important thing is to hold on. Holding on is a victory in itself" (Darwish 2013, 62), which illustrates the idea of *ṣumud* [steadfastness][100]. The point is that the mere continual physical presence of the Palestinians and the stubborn continuation of normal life prove that Israel will never be able to win, in spite of its military superiority. It is along these lines that culture is seen as something essential at al-Mayadeen: as long as Palestinian art and culture is being produced, the existence of a people is being proved.

The logic of *ṣumud* also forms the basis of presenting the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel as a victory for the Palestinians. In the announcement of the victory, the al-Mayadeen news anchor declared: *Palestine won. Palestine won because Gaza withstood* [ṣamadat] *and remained firm, and didn't kneel*. Once again, the performance of steadfastness is celebrated – both as a method to gain victory, and as a victory in itself.

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[99] See: http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/episode/5992/%D9%83%D9%84-%D9%81%D8%B9%D9%84-
%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%87%D9%88-
%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1--%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85

[100] For a discussion of the term ṣumud among Palestinian refugees, see e.g.: Leonardo Schiocchet: "Palestinian Sumud: Steadfastness, Ritual and Time among Palestinian Refugees" (Schiocchet 2011) and Laleh Khalili: *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Khalili 2009, 90–112).

It is from this viewpoint that al-Mayadeen's re-launch of Handala should be understood. In the spring of 2015, al-Mayadeen launched a series of short animations based on the late Naji al-Ali's famous drawings of the figure Handala. The project was originally initiated and executed by the multimedia and communication company, Mentis[101]; al-Mayadeen later bought the finished animations as the station found the project to be in line with its Palestine strategy. Almost 150 episodes were animated (personal communication with Saleh Hassan, September 2016). In connection with the broadcasting of the animations, al-Mayadeen and Mentis ran an "awareness campaign about both Naji al-Ali and Handala" in order to "teach the younger generation about Naji al-Ali [and Handala] as they lack knowledge about important cultural symbols and creators" (personal interview with Saleh Hassan, 30.04.2014).[102]

In the animations created by Mentis, each episode starts with the same, almost a minute-long introduction – a medley of figures, drawings and symbols from al-Ali's work that together present the universe of Handala. A Zionist builds up a wall around the al-Aqsa mosque, while Gulf Arabs and other collaborators hand him the necessary stones. The next image is of az-Zalama[103], sitting in an Israeli prison; then we move to the White House in Washington, where a whole line of Arab leaders have their mouths zipped up by the US. Oil is floating, people are hungry, Israeli missiles are falling, and the wounded Palestinian lying on a stretcher is going nowhere as the two men carrying it are pulling in opposite directions. American paratroopers with their feet formed as keys fall through the sky, landing in keyholes that fit perfectly. At the same time, az-Zalama, also with feet in the shape of keys, walks determinedly forward, stepping carefully into keyholes that fit his feet. This path of keyholes takes him to a destroyed city with a pile of dead bodies. Finally, the viewpoint zooms out, and Handala appears with his characteristically clasped hands on his back, standing next to a fountain pen – or candlelight – the size of a streetlamp, with its nib turned into a flame. The universe of Handala, thus, is not filled with Palestinian masculine resistance fighters or professional militant equipment; rather, the ordinary people are the heroes. Handala is a symbol of Palestinian public resistance, steadfastness, and political awareness. He sees right through the

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[101] Mentis is in charge of developing al-Mayadeen's webpage, social media, and layout; it also arranges al-Mayadeen's press conferences and other events. The company is situated around the corner from al-Mayadeen's office in Beirut.

[102] The websites www.hanzalona.com and www.anahanzala.com ran for one year, and are now disconnected. They contained the animations as well as background information about Naji al-Ali and his drawings. A Facebook page was also launched, www.facebook.com/handala.program. The animations are still available on the YouTube channel حنظلة/handala
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCySxOWuKbuDkDv8zSP58RgA/videos?shelf_id=1&view=0&sort=dd

[103] Az-Zalama means 'the man' in Levant dialect and is a reoccurring figure in the cartoons. He represents the ordinary Palestinian man.

hypocrisy and self-interest of the Arab regimes, Israel and the West alike, and refuses to surrender to the unjust.

Naji al-Ali (1938-1987) was a Palestinian cartoonist noted for his critical and often sarcastic comments on Arab, Israeli and international politics. His most famous character, the 10-year-old Palestinian refugee boy Handala, came into existence in 1969 as a reference to al-Ali's own destiny when he left Palestine at the age of 10 in 1948. Handala is poor, untidy, barefoot, and with unkempt hair. He most often appears as a passive, though sharp and critical, observer. In later years, he gets a more active role as a participant in the resistance. In 1973, the character turned his back to the reader with his hands clasped behind him, as a symbolic rejection of Arab and international approaches to the Palestinian issue, or – in the words of Naji al-Ali – "his [Handala's] hands are clasped behind his back as a sign of rejection at a time when solutions are presented to us the American way" (Alazzeh 2012, 435).

Through the 150 episodes and the legacy of the 40,000 or so additional drawings of al-Ali, a narrative of Palestinian steadfastness and continued resistance on the one hand, and Israeli, Arab (the Gulf countries in particular) and international betrayal on the other, is created. In the episode called "The Israeli and the curse of stone"[104], a Palestinian man lacking both hands encounters a malicious, laughing Israeli. The Palestinian tries to pick up a stone to throw at the Israeli but realises that he cannot without his hands. After thinking the situation through, the Palestinian grabs the Israeli, turns him upside down and starts hitting his head against the stone. He might not be able to throw the stone, but that does not mean that he will not react and find a way to resist.

The work of al-Ali has been an important factor in the shaping of Palestinian self-esteem. Orayb Aref Najjar writes in his article "Cartoons as a Site for the Construction of Palestinian Refugee Identity" (2007), that "the cartoonist [al-Ali] was instrumental in constructing the refugee narrative that transformed the image of Palestinian refugees from helpless destitute people, who lived in tents and shacks and depended on United Nations rations for survival, into revolutionaries who took their fate into their own hands" (Najjar 2007, 258).[105] It is this legacy of agency and resistance that al-Mayadeen is trying to both revitalise and associate itself with. Sune Haugbølle furthermore argues: "Naji al-Ali is today more than just a beloved cartoonist whose political views and use of familiar images make him easy to identify with. He belongs to a group of selected few artists who have been so influential in Arab thought and sensibilities that they have arguable become cultural icons, in the sense that their work provides an language through which the diverse historical memory of the Arab Twentieth century is articulated and negotiated" (Haugbolle 2013a, 232). Haugbølle also suggests that the image of al-Ali has become part of a body of art constitutive of what it means to be leftist, and that al-Ali is an icon of the Arab secular Left (Haugbolle 2013a, 232-233). Thus, when al-Mayadeen introduces al-Ali's drawings and aesthetic language, the station not only draws the

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[104] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJB4FlR08eo

[105] Handala is today reproduced on T-shirts, batches, keyrings etc. in line with figures such as Che Guevara, Yasir Arafat or the traditional Palestinian scarf (see e.g. Najjar 2007, 259). In 2009 he became – in a slightly adapted version – the symbol for the Green Movement in Iran.

attention to Palestine, it also evokes a particular representation of the Palestinians as well as a cultural language of the Arab Left.

In line with many of the songs and poems in the flashes, Naji al-Ali and Handala refer back in time to that (imagined) period in history which al-Mayadeen wants to reawaken – a time where Palestinians were still ascribed heroic resistance, political agency, and intellectual clear-sightedness, and before the Oslo Accords and the influx of Western NGOs, with their (victimised) human rights discourses. At al-Mayadeen, there is a strong awareness of wanting to break away from this mainstream victimised portrayal of Palestinians described earlier, which is why the revival of the heroic narrative and the focus on Palestine as a cultural and intellectual centre are both essential. Hind Khaled explains:

> *We think and we believe that it [the perception of the Palestinian person] was manipulated on purpose for years and years and decades, because it is more difficult for someone to feel with a weak person. As I told you, we believe that this was done systematically and on purpose by various media outlets. We believe that it started in the Western media and it was copied – was it by choice or by practice or by being unaware of how dangerous this kind of practice is. So the image of the Palestinian human being ... we are working very seriously on changing that stereotype of the Palestinian who is helpless and just crying. Because you can't, psychologists tell us that you can't empathy with a person like that. You can only empathy with a person that knows what he wants. It is like "tell me what you want and I will help you out, I can't help you out if you are just sitting there crying all the time". (...) So we do work on the bad stereotyped image of the Palestinians* (personal interview, Beirut 24.11.2014).

Khaled's view on victimhood contradicts the predominant perception of the human rights discourse, where the victim is given the privileged position of always being right. To cite Ofer Zur: "The victim stance is a powerful one. The victim is always morally right, neither responsible nor accountable, and entitled to sympathy" (Matar og Harb 2013, 169). Thus, when al-Mayadeen refuses to portray Palestinians as victims, it is an encounter with the human rights discourse altogether. The privileged role is not seen as that privileged after all in the worldview of Khaled and her colleagues. The victim might be morally right, but the price is high. The victim is dehumanised and turned into an object to be pitied rather than a fellow human being you can relate to. In this connection, Robert Meister, in his article "Human Rights and the Politics of Victimhood", adds an important point, namely that in the human rights discourse, the right of the victim to resist has been written out. Whereas terrorism has previously been seen as "an appropriate weapon of the weak in combating human rights violations (...) now terrorism is defined as itself a human rights violation (…)" (Meister 2002, 92). Instead 'the good victim' is expected to accept moral victory as "victory enough, and to forego the demands of revolutionary justice" (Meister 2002, 95) (e.g. The Oslo Accords). Seen from this perspective, what al-Mayadeen wants is to regain the right of the

Palestinian to resist militantly, to remember the history of oppression, and to insist on revolutionary justice – even if this means a break away from the human rights discourse.

The bigger picture
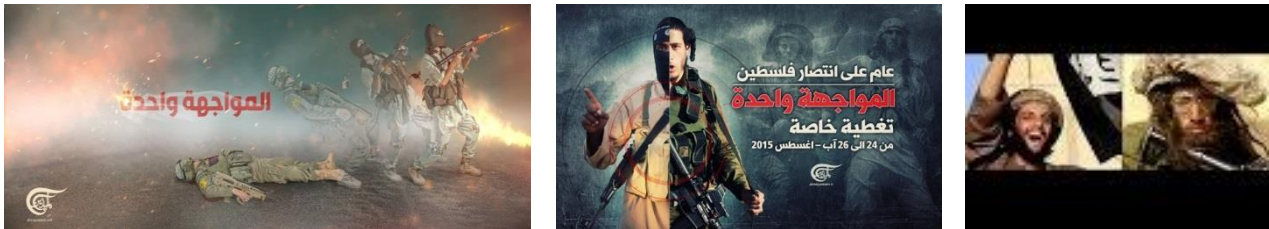
(*The same confrontation*: the front cover of almayadeen.net, 04.09.2015, and images from the flash *The same barbarism – the same terrorism – the same elimination*)

Al-Mayadeen's re-launch of Palestine as the focal point of the Arab world is not only an act of support for Palestine but also a clear discrediting of the Arab uprisings. This message is conveyed in different ways in different contexts[106] – most outspokenly, in the marking of one year on from the Gaza War in 2015. During the previous year's war, though, Julia Boutrus had already touched upon the topic in her personal statement (in a flash)[107]: *They invented something called The Arab Spring in order to distract us from the original question, the central question of Palestine. The real Arab Spring today is in Gaza.* Thus, the Arab Spring is an unauthentic concept, which has been imposed on the Arab world in order to weaken and divide it. Al-Mayadeen, on the other hand, has set out to counter this fragmentation by urging the Arab public to unite around Palestine – or so the station frames its own agenda.

Julia Boutrus continued her statement by broadening the perspective to include the situation in Syria and Iraq: *And a word to the people of Iraq and Syria who are facing the same enemy, but with two different faces: the Zionist enemy of which the other face is extremism*. The same point was repeated and further developed during the marking of the one-year anniversary of the Gaza War of 2014. Under the slogan, *The Same Confrontation,* al-Mayadeen spells out the message that Israeli soldiers and IS fighters are one and the same – by, e.g., showing images of soldiers who are half Israeli and half IS, or flashes where a IS fighter get shot and by the time he falls to the ground, has turned into a dead Israeli soldier.

A flash from August 2015, *The same barbarism – the same terrorism – the same elimination*[108], provides a historical perspective for the message. For 45 seconds the screen is divided into two – on

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[106] See chapter 7 on the Ramadan program Harrir Aqlak for a discrediting of the Arab uprisings within a religious narrative; see chapter 6 on the cultural talk show Bayt al-Qasid for an secular intellectual discussion of the same issue.
[107] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIN2_UOtvNI
[108]
http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/episode/1778/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9-
%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A9--%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8-

the right side, we see the result of Israel's presence in the region, on the left side, similar images illustrate the consequences of IS. Similar streams of refugees and similar refugee camps are in black and white on one half of the screen, and the other half's images are coloured. The clip shows similar images of death and violence, and finally, similar images of the destruction of cultural sites, olives trees and religious symbols. To spell out the message, the flash ends with the photo of the President of Israel Netanyahu next to one of leader of IS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and in the words: *the same elimination*. The flash is a powerful visual experience with strong images, strong slogans and a strong message. It follows the same layout as many of the flashes from during the war with dramatic music, a clear message communicated through images, and with the few words used in the flash presented as written visual slogans.

The claim that developments in Gaza and in Iraq and Syria are two sides of the same coin, namely Western imperialism, leads to two interlinked effects. Firstly, on a global level, this reading of the situation in Syria and Iraq feeds into al-Mayadeen's overall narration of a Southern world struggling against Western imperialism in all its shapes and forms. Following this logic, even the public uprisings around the Arab world are seen as yet another example of Western imperialism. I investigate this reading of the global order further in Chapter 8, where I analyse al-Mayadeen's cooperation with TeleSur. Secondly, on a regional level, the linking of IS terror in Iraq and Syria with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, means that the current wars in Syria and Iraq are both placed within an important historical frame as well as narrated in an simple good-bad narrative. By equating the Israeli occupation and IS as the militant enemies, the Syrian and Iraqi military are compared to the Palestinian resistance movements and, thus, legitimised and depicted as heroic defenders of the people.

These inferences are not givens; according to Finalyson: "such tropes do not function apart from the rest of an argument. They support and are supported by constructions of ethos and by emotive appeals, and they form part of larger narratives, descriptions of 'how we got here' emphasising some elements of a situation and downplaying others" (Finlayson 2012, 762). Thus, Boutrus's statement is an illustrative example of how a certain *logos* is being build up as an important element of the ideological discourse.

(Images from almayadeen.net)

Conclusion

The representation of Palestinians in an Arab as well as an international context has changed and been reshaped through the years of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Depending on the political context, Palestinians have been portrayed as heroic resistance fighters, innocent civilian victims and malicious terrorists. Victimised Palestinians have made up an important feature in the stream of images and it is this stream of passive victims, humiliation and suffering which al-Mayadeen has set out to counteract. In the promotional department at al-Mayadeen, the staff work determinedly on conveying a clear political message to the audience by offering aesthetic experiences in the shape of well-known songs, poems, and cultural figures, as well as expressive images, footage and slogans. These experiences play on common (leftist) denominators, talk to the feelings of people, appeal to shared nostalgic cultural memories and infuse pride. Al-Mayadeen employs cultural productions from the 1960s and '70s in order to revitalise a particular narrative, as well as promoting contemporary Islamic resistance movements – both in order to celebrate the stout attitude of resistance. The station invites the viewer into a nostalgic review of history and places the present struggle within a specific reading of the past.

Al-Mayadeen employs several well-known approaches within the Palestinian narrative, while highlighting certain discourses over others and presenting them in a remixed version. The militant professional resistance fighter or amateur stone-throwing youth, civilian disobedience in everyday life and the stubborn insistence on continuing life, and, not least, the heritage and continued production of Palestinian art and culture, are all proudly presented as a proof of special Palestinian qualities. The concept of *ṣumud* is presented as an important element of the general resistance strategy and underlines the victimised element of al-Mayadeen's heroic narrative: the persistent and committed public support for the resistance movements in spite of the humanitarian costs, the ability to stay and continue life in the middle of the ruins, and the general disobedience in daily life by children, women and elderly. In this description, the Palestinians are not a people to pity because of their suffering; rather, they serve a symbol of a particular attitude that al-Mayadeen wants to promote.

Thus, al-Mayadeen's confrontation with the passive, depoliticised depiction of Palestinians is actually less about whether Palestinians are victims or not but rather about which kind of victim. The narrative of the active hero depends on a fundamental framing of injustice and victimhood. Only as a reaction against suppression, which is recognised as wrong, can resistance be acknowledged. Hence, the Palestinian is also a victim at al-Mayadeen; but a victim with the moral right to fight back.

The concept of resistance is, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, a core ideological concept at al-Mayadeen and therefore, the way that concept is being read and performed is a cornerstone in the production of the ideology of *The New Regressive Left*. The insistence on the right to military resistance is an important ideological statement, just as the heavy emphasis on the heroic narrative becomes part of the ideological discourse. At al-Mayadeen, the Palestinian struggle is not seen as an isolated Arab incident, but rather as an Arab version of an international phenomenon of

imperialism. Thus, professional resistance movements as well as national militaries enjoy a heroic status no matter their aims and methods, as they participate in the global struggle against imperialism. Thus, national injustice, suppression, and destruction are overlooked in the name of resistance against the international enemy of imperialism.

The aesthetic experience offered by the genre of flashes or spots forms an important part of the ideological discourse at al-Mayadeen. The flashes not only disseminate a certain ideological position, they are part of what constitutes the ideology. The genre, the aesthetics, the cultural productions, the rhetorical slogans – all of these elements both together and alone contribute to the production of *The New Regressive Left*. In the next chapter, we stay within the role of art and culture, and how that forms a cultural leftist identity, but move from flashes and war to a cultural talk show. Bayt al-Qasid is an important pillar in the creation of this ideological mini-cosmos as it provides the intellectual reflections or the *logos* that make it possible for certain conclusions to follow naturally from certain premises (Finlayson 2012).

Re-launching *Iltizam* through Leftist Cultural Figures: the Case of the Cultural Talk Show Bayt al-Qasid

On November 18 2014, Zahi Wehbe hosted the two sisters Rihan and Faia Younan on his weekly cultural talk show, Bayt al-Qasid[109]. Around a month earlier, the sisters – who originate from Aleppo but were brought up in Sweden – had been unknown to the general public, but their short art performance, "To Our Countries" (or in Arabic *Biladi* [To My Countries]), published on YouTube had turned them into a media phenomenon.[110]

(Images of Rihan and Faia Younan from "To Our Countries" and from the artist group Step Team's parody of the video)

The aesthetic of the video is minimalistic: the two sisters stand alone against a neutral white brick wall. They both wear dark blue dresses, their lips and nails are painted bright red, and their blue eyes look determinedly into the camera while their hair blows softly in the artificial wind. The video is a mix of poetry-like statements and a medley of Fairouz's classics performed by the two women, and starts with Faia, who sings "Damascus, to pronounce the word Damascus created shakes in my mind" a line from the Lebanese diva Fairouz's song, "I Read Your Glory", and continues with Rihan reciting her own lyrics:

> *Syria ... three years and more, of crazy, selfish and illogical war.*
> *Three years in which souls, hearts and minds have been destroyed.*
> *A war that sneaked through the doors stealthily without knocking,*
> *to settle down in the homes and humiliate their owners.*
> *A war in which children and women were sold in slave markets.*
> *A war that brought the nation's mother to tears, and exhausted its men ...*
> *A war that never knew its beginning ...*
> *A war dreaming of its end*

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[109] An online archive of all the episodes is available at al-Mayadeen's website:
http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/5/%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%AA-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%AF
[110] Link to the video at YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GO52i0xui8

(citing the English translation).

The video continues for another eight minutes, with a mix of Rihan's own writings and Faia's Fairouz interpretations. It is an emotional comment on the situation in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine, and a tribute to the four countries. During the first week of its release, the video clip was seen more than 600,000 times and after one month, the number had passed 1.5 million (Iaccino 2015). The hype on the internet was also noticed by Western media[111], indicating that the strategy of releasing the video with English subtitles had borne fruit. The success of the video, the charm of the sisters and, not least, the message they were promoting were all not lost on al-Mayadeen, which hosted Rihan and Faia Younan on several occasions in the following months.[112] Their first appearance on al-Mayadeen, however, was on Bayt al-Qasid, when they visited Zahi Wehbe for a talk about the video and their future aspirations.

The Younan sisters differ in several ways from the typical guest of Bayt al-Qasid. They are young amateurs in the midst of sudden media attention and not, as is usually the case, renowned, well-established, sophisticated artists, often overlooked by the media. Still, I argue, they embody the main agenda of the talk show. First, by being young, authentic, patriotic, and politically engaged, they embody Wehbe's message that there is still hope for the future and that the Arab world can offer more than war and suffering. Second, they seem to confirm Wehbe's conviction that values from the past are essential for overcoming the destruction of the region in the present, given that their artistic contribution is an endorsement of an aged cultural icon.

Third, they point to more or less direct support for al-Assad rule in Syria, which is also promoted by the show. The Younan sisters and their seemingly impartial calls for peace in the video – presented with all their youth and natural Levant beauty – are, as is the case with most guests of the show, not politically neutral. To say about the war in Syria that it *never knew its beginning* is a statement heavily loaded with political partiality – many Syrian people would without hesitation point to spring 2011, when the Syrian state responded to peaceful demonstrations with violence as *its beginning*. Likewise, the mentioning of *children and women sold in slave markets* without a similar reference to state violence is conspicuously one-sided. Furthermore, the juxtaposing of the war in Syria with the conflicts in Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon places the Syrian conflict within a narrative of an Arab state facing a foreign invasion, or occupation., which is a reading that in subtle, though obvious, ways indicates the political sympathies of the sisters. Thus, the sisters represent a recurrent narrative of the show of 'solidarity with the Syrian people' or 'support for Syria as a nation', which

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[111] International Business Times, 15 October 2014 http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/our-countries-video-syrian-sisters-singing-about-middle-east-conflicts-goes-viral-1470188 and Spiegel Online, 22 October, 2014 http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/youtube-hit-to-our-countries-ueber-syrien-libanon-und-irak-a-998457.html
[112] 08. December 2014, al-Mayadeen broadcasted the programme *My identity is stronger* [Huwayti Aqwa] about the sisters (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPKkjbZGPPA). During the "Worthy of life" celebration of the Lebanese politician and former prime minister Salim al-Hoss – like Jamila Bouhired the previous year – Faia Younan delivered the musical entertainment of the show (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSFjKX_ZFFQ). Since 2016, Rihan Younan has been a host on al-Mayadeen's cultural youth programme, *Metro* (http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/4/%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88).

at first appears uncontroversial, but on closer analysis often actually means expressions of support for Bashar al-Assad – even if ambivalent.

In this chapter, I use Bayt al-Qasid as a case study for an investigation of how al-Mayadeen legitimises ideological values through the promotion of cultural figures and intellectual voices, who, in different ways, embody the concept of *iltizam* [commitment]. Through an analysis of selected episodes of the talk show[113] and drawing on personal talks with Zahi Wehbe, I examine how the notion of *iltizam* is interpreted and used by al-Mayadeen, and how the station even tries to monopolise the concept, as well as how the re-launch of the notion of *iltizam* is used as a strategy for legitimizing al-Mayadeen's political stance. By hosting renowned *multazim* [committed] Arab cultural figures, al-Mayadeen not only benefits from the reputation of the guests, but also adds an intellectual aspect to its ideological stance. Thus, I argue that the program is one of the main pillars of al-Mayadeen's activities, as it constitutes the intellectual 'spine' of the station and provides intellectual backing for its ideological worldview.

In the following, I first present the talk show, the host and the guests, followed by a historical overview of the use of the notion of commitment – or *iltizam* – in an Arab context. I then move on to investigate the use of *iltizam* at al-Mayadeen in general and on Bayt al-Qasid in particular, based on my analysis of the selected episodes. Furthermore, I look into how both patriotism and progressive ideals are promoted by the show as elements of an ideological outlook.

Bayt al-Qasid – a cultural show

Every week since the launch of al-Mayadeen, Wehbe has hosted a new cultural figure in the talk show Bayt al-Qasid, broadcast every Tuesday at 8.30 PM. From the lounge at the hotel Markazie[114] in downtown Beirut, Wehbe discusses life, art and politics with his guest of the week. The atmosphere of the program is intimate and calm, and contrasts in many ways with the fast tempo of the news stream or the serious discussions on the station's political debate programs. The hotel lounge provides an intentionally sophisticated setting for the meeting with dark wooden furniture, bookshelves and subdued lightning. When watching the programme you almost get the feeling of having been invited into Wehbe's private home. The name Bayt al-Qasid, which can be translated

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[113] I have chosen the selected episodes based on three main criteria. Firstly, they reflect the variety of nationalities, professions and generations represented in the show; secondly, the conversation touches upon politics, society, or the concept of iltizam. Finally, I have prioritised guests who also appeared at al-Mayadeen on other occasions – as is the case with Abdel Bari Atwan, Khaled al-Habr, Tamim Barghouti, Duraid Laham, and the Younan sisters – since they seem to have a stronger affiliation to the station. The episodes star:

- Tamim Barghouti, the Palestinian-Egyptian poet (broadcast 23.10.2012 link)
- Abdel Bari Atwan, a Palestinian media figure (broadcast 16.04 link and 23.04.2013 link)
- Khaled al-Habr, the Lebanese singer and composer (broadcast 17.09.2013 link)
- Duraid Laham, Syrian actor (broadcast 07.01.2014 link)
- Rihan and Faia Younan, Syrian performers from YouTube (broadcast 18.11.2014 link)
- Ja'afar Hassan, Iraqi singer and composer (broadcast 09.12 link and 16.12.2014 link)

[114] The setting of the show has changed a couple of times over the years, but most of the included episodes were shot at hotel Markazie, and when I met with Wehbe and sat in on some of the shoots, hotel Markazie was the setting of the show.

to 'the essence' or 'the bottom line', underpins this homelike atmosphere, as *Bayt* in Arabic means 'home' or 'house'[115].

The program is highly dependent on Wehbe. He brought the show with him from the Lebanese TV station al-Mustaqbal [Future TV] (in an adapted version), and the fact that he himself also has a parallel career as a renowned (committed) poet brings integrity and seriousness to the show. He has been able to host a long line of prestigious and relevant guests through his personal connections and by virtue of his name. According to Wehbe, he receives many inquiries from artists who wish to participate in the programme, which is an indication of Bayt al-Qasid's position as an attractive platform for certain groups of Arab artists. In addition to all these qualities, Wehbe is a strong spokesman for the resistance against Israel; he was born in the South of Lebanon and fought against Israel in 1982; spent a year in prison as a result of this connection; and was, in 2005, honoured with Palestinian citizenship[116] as a result of his strong support of the Palestinian cause. His clear image as an unconditional supporter of the resistance enables him to embrace both the resistance discourse of the secular leftist and Arab nationalists as well as the Islamist movements such as Hizbollah.

The guests of Bayt al-Qasid are typically Arab artists of various kinds such as actors, musicians and poets, as well as occasionally intellectuals or other cultural figures. In contrast with the show which Wehbe hosted at al-Mustaqbal for almost 15 years, called Khalik bil-Bayt [*Stay at Home*][117], the guests on Bayt al-Qasid come from all around the Arab world. Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians dominate, but Egyptians, Tunisians, Iraqis and Algerians are regular guests as well. Most other Arab nationalities are also represented, but on a lower scale.[118] Most of the 75-minute long show is a conversation between Wehbe and the guest, but two returning components, *Milestone* and *Words Meant to Reach,* add additional angles. The first is a small video clip of the guest from her/his daily life, the other is similar short clips (usually three) featuring a friend or a colleague commenting on the work and personality of the guest. These clips underpin the intimate atmosphere and sometimes even create an almost clannish environment. Many of the artists invited onto the show have close personal relations with it through friends, spouses or family members, and this cohesion is underlined through the style and layout of the programme.

Wehbe describes Bayt al-Qasid as the viewer's chance to get a break from the never-ending news stream of conflict and violence (personal interview, Beirut, 18.11.2014). Nevertheless, the conversations during the show are heavily loaded with politics, often to a degree where Wehbe has to remind both himself and the guest that it is indeed a cultural talk show. Often the guests on Bayt al-Qasid are outspoken over their dedication to the Palestinian cause and their support of the resistance movements, and Wehbe seeks to touch upon controversial themes such as the conflict in

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[115] The double meaning is e.g. stressed in the third episode (03.07.2012) when the famous Lebanese media figure George Kordahi, the guest of the evening, complimented Wehbe on the name of the programme to which Wehbe answered *hopefully this will always be your home and the home of all creative Arabs* (part 1, min 01:38).

[116] http://www.alrai.com/article/130889.html , http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2005/10/31/18207.html

[117] Referring to the famous song by Fairouz of the same name.

[118] During the first two and a half years of the show, Wehbe hosted artists or intellectuals from Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait, and Sudan

Syria or the quality of the 'Arab spring'. Furthermore, the ideological stance of the programme is explicitly confirmed when special episodes comment directly on political events – such as in several episodes dedicated to Gaza during the Israeli military offensives in 2012 and 2014[119], or the episode commemorating the 2006 war in Lebanon shot outdoors, from the village of Bint Jbail[120]. Hence, Bayt al-Qasid contributes to al-Mayadeen's overall editorial line but from an angle that focuses on culture and the role of intellectuals and artists in Arab societies today.

During the first few years of the programme, big cultural icons – such as the Egyptian writer and feminist Nawal Sadawi, the Egyptian movie director and film writer Khaled Youssef, the Syrian actor Rafiq Subaie and the Palestinian poet and writer Ibrahim Nasrallah – as well as less well-known names visited Bayt al-Qasid. In spite of some stardust, the style of the programme is far from the typical Lebanese celebrity talk shows, and Wehbe aims to maintain a serious atmosphere. Wehbe explains that he looks for participants with *non-consumptive and non-commercial cultural and creative practices* (personal interview, Beirut, 18.11.2014). Thus, Wehbe is trying to present politically, culturally and intellectually engaged members of society rather than commercialised names from the entertainment industry.

I argue that the group of artists and intellectuals invited to Bayt al-Qasid, in spite of their great variety regarding nationality, background and profession, share certain ideological values. An overall interlinking notion that binds the group of guests together is the notion of *iltizam* – as I return to throughout the chapter. Furthermore, anti-imperialism, patriotism, secularism or religious pluralism, the empowerment of women, and being at one with, or even representing, ordinary people are all themes which are typically promoted directly or indirectly through the conversations between Wehbe and his guest. These values are traditional key issues to the Arab Left, and could roughly be labelled 'progressive'. The guests, though – with a few important exceptions – are not members of political parties or representatives of a specific political ideology. Thus, I argue that the guests could be categorised as part of the so-called *cultural Arab left[121]*. Thus, Bayt al-Qasid is an obvious case study for understanding both al-Mayadeen and *The New Regressive Left,* and how political developments after 2011 have challenged the Arab Left or so called progressive intellectual voices ideologically.

The notion of *iltizam* – an historical overview

In this section, I look into how the notion of *iltizam* was introduced and used in an Arab context, from Sartre's existentialism to the Islamisation of the word. It is a topic that has not received much attention from researchers, and thus the available literature is limited. Nevertheless, I attempt to outline the historical context before I move on, in the succeeding section, to an analysis of how the notion is understood and discussed by Bayt al-Qasid.

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[119] 20.11.2012; 08.07.2014, 15.07.2014, 22.07.2014, 29.07.2014.

[120] A village in the South of Lebanon where some of the most intense confrontations between Israel and Hizbollah took place in 2006. Broadcast 13.08.2013

[121] See Sune Haugbølle's article, "Social Boundaries and Secularism in the Lebanese Left" for a discussion of the Left as both a political and a cultural denomination (Haugbolle 2013c, 429–30).

The idea that art and artists should take social responsibility for, and be actively engaged in, national questions already played an important role in Arab cultural and intellectual life during the struggle for national independence in the 1920s and '30s. The philosophically grounded concept of *iltizam*, however, came into existence after Taha Hussain introduced Sartre's Existentialism and his notion of *literature engagée* in 1947. Hussain, who belonged to the old *nahda*-generation[122], saw the great potential of Sartre's writing, while at the same time remaining critical of his demand for intellectuals to take political responsibility. The younger generation of Arab intellectuals and writers, on the other hand, welcomed the new ideas enthusiastically, and instantly began to hold vibrant discussions about their roles and obligations in society (Klemm 2000, 51, 52). The French philosopher became a source of inspiration within progressive Arab intellectual and cultural circles, and came to play an influential role in the formative years after various countries in the region gained national independence. Sartre's ideas were quickly adapted to an Arab context and merged with local notions about resistance, independence, nationalism, socialism, and, later on, Marxism, and thus, took on a variety of new shapes different from the original European concepts. Hence, from the outset *iltizam* has been closely connected with anti-colonial, progressive, leftist intellectuals in the Mashreq and Egypt.

The most important forum for discussions about *iltizam* and *al-adab al-multazim* [*literature engagée* or *committed literature*] was the literary journal al-Adab [*The Literature*], launched in 1953 by the Lebanese writer Suhayl Idris. Al-Adab became the mouthpiece of a whole generation of committed writers and poets. It was open to a variety of voices and outlooks who shared the same vision about intellectuals' obligations to take an active part in the national liberation and modernisation process. In al-Adab, Arab critics reflected upon Sartre's questions of "what we write, why we write and to whom we write" and criticised the older generation for being isolated in their "ivory tower", detached from surrounding society. By the mid-1950s, *iltizam* had – in the words of Yoav Di-Capua – become an "ethical habit" and the community around al-Adab "the forefront of nationalist culture" (Di-Capua 2012, 1075). The leftist ideals were, from the outset, central in the understanding of *al-adab al-multazim,* but over time a division between socialist and nationalist ideals on the one hand, and Marxist principles on the other, became visible. Idris and the al-Adab community in general had shared a pan-Arab outlook as the common denominator without paying much attention to the social context. The Marxists, on the other hand, offered a more radical (and 'red') reading of *iltizam,* stressing the importance of social classes. The latter approach resulted in the birth of Arab socialist realism (Klemm 2000, 56; Di-Capua 2012, 1077).

Arab Existentialism, including the notion of *iltazim,* had been at the centre of decolonisation for almost two decades when Sartre made a two-week visit to Egypt in 1967. This apparent climax of an intellectual tradition was followed by an acute downturn when Sartre, some weeks later, signed a pro-Israeli manifesto. Edward Said's description of Sartre as "a bitter disappointment to every (non-Algerian) Arab who admired him" is telling for the feeling of betrayal that swept the Arab world

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[122] See the following chapter, "Walking a Tightrope: the Role of Religion" for an introduction to *al-Nahda*.

(Said 2000). A few days later, the 1967 war broke out, which sent a decisive blow to the (secular) idea of *iltizam*. Over the following years, the general ideological apathy and resignation characterising leftist circles also gripped the community around al-Adab and *multazim* intellectuals in general.

In the decades following 1967, only on the literary scene in the West Bank and Gaza did *iltizam* in its original meaning seem to still play a role; in most other contexts, the words *multazim* and *iltizam* were influenced by the general Islamic awakening. As was the case with other popular concepts of the secular national movements of the 1950s and '60s, the Islamic movements inherited slogans which were then imbued with religious meaning and symbolism (Haugbolle 2012; Gelvin 1999).

An example of an environment that has hung on to some of the values of *iltizam*, though, is within the Syrian TV drama industry. Here, old ideals about educating and modernising the audience have continued to be a motivational factor for several TV makers and cultural producers who "see themselves at the vanguard of a secularising process" who struggle in "promoting progressive political or social agendas" in a globalised world dominated by Gulf money and Salafi values (Salamandra 2008b, 180–81). The uprising in Syria in 2011 challenged much of the previous rationale of what Ratta refers to as the "*tanwiri* [enlightening] drama makers" (Della Ratta 2013, 61) and their previous (ambivalent) shared interests with president Bashar al-Assad. Today, Syrian drama makers are divided over whether to stand with or against the al-Assad rule (Della Ratta 2013, 128–34) – a division which is reflected in the participating guests in Bayt al-Qasid. I return to this point later in the present chapter.

The use of *iltizam* in Bayt al-Qasid – or *iltizam* the Wehbe way
Thanks to all of you for loving the committed media (the UNESCO show, part 5, min 08:06). Ghassan bin Jeddo's voice is emotive as he looks out at the crowd in the UNESCO building at the celebration of Jamila Bouhired (cf. chapter 4). The media he is referring to is, of course, al-Mayadeen, and the ideal of being committed is one of the important focal points of the station's self-understanding. During my fieldwork in Beirut, a returning adjective – when people working at al-Mayadeen described themselves or their workplace – was *multazim*. For some, it meant a specific political position (support of the resistance movements), for others it was less concrete, but still linked to a certain element of social and political engagement, and an ideal about making a difference. Translated into concrete activities, at al-Mayadeen, being 'committed media' means taking a clear pro-Palestinian stance, openly supporting the resistance movements in general and Hizbollah in particular, orchestrating a celebration of Jamila Bouhired, establishing a media network in Latin America, or actively trying to revitalise the Arab cultural identity. The latter is done in numerous ways, but the ultimate flagship of al-Mayadeen's cultural ambitions is Bayt al-Qasid.

In the winter of 2014, I was fortunate enough to interview Wehbe and attend the shooting of a couple of episodes of Bayt al-Qasid. For the interview, Wehbe had asked me to meet him at a café

by the Corniche, a *shaabi* [public] place, which he preferred above the more fancy cafés in downtown or Hamra. I found him at a table in a remote corner of the café reading a newspaper, and with a couple of books lying neatly on the table. While sitting overlooking the sea coast, Wehbe explained that his interpretation of *iltizam* is broader and less politicalised than the general understanding of the concept at al-Mayadeen, and thus includes art that is not necessarily narrowly political art.

Furthermore, Wehbe explained that in his opinion you can be a committed artist without producing political art; but a political artist commenting on contemporary political developments through art is, per definition, a committed artist. He continued: *iltizam is not only politically iltizam but iltizam to human beings from a human point of view, for example when an artist sings a great love song, then that, in my opinion, is art multazim. It does not have to be a political song or directly about martyrs, Palestine or resistance.* Wehbe underlined several times that, for him, *iltizam* is about offering something positive to society, and that *committed culture is everything that elevates the standard of humanity, taste for aesthetics, awareness and thoughts* (personal interview, Beirut, 18.11.2014).

I argue that included in this non-dogmatic understanding of *iltizam* is a perception of culture as a battlefield – thus, even when art is not political art, it can still be a political manifestation, as I equally showed in the previous chapter. The mere existence of a rich Arab culture contains a message about strength, relevance and the right to existence. The Syrian actor Duraid Laham said during his visit to Bayt al-Qasid: *If you want to destroy a nation, destroy its culture and its history* (Bayt al-Qasid, 07.01.2014, part 4, min 06:12). Thus, promoting a vital and rich Arab culture – as is done at Bayt al-Qasid – creates *a form of resistance*[123]*,* and builds up a people.

What is the role, though, of a cultural programme on a news station? I asked Wehbe and his answer in many ways resembled how his guests see the role of artists in society; namely, one of infusing hope. For Wehbe the aim of the show – and the implication of being *multazim* – is, in a time of war and conflict, to give a glimpse of hope by insisting on alternative narratives. He argues: *Hope is very important ... and it gives people hope, not fake but true hope, that there is something else in life other than politics and slaughter... There is music and art. In my opinion art enables us to bear life better. If we imagine for a moment that this planet is without music, or colour, or songs, then this would be unbearable* (personal interview, Beirut, 18.11.2014).

This stance was also reflected in Wehbe's talk with the Younan sisters, who explained how their video insists on the message that – despite the pain and suffering in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine – there is still hope. They deliberately chose to end their account of conflicts and chaos

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[123] I here refer to a programme of the same name [*Shakal min ashkal al-muqawama*] broadcast by al-Mayadeen on the 11.08.2014 in the eight year occasion of the 2006 war. From a mountain top in the small South Lebanese village Maroun al-Ras overlooking the occupied Palestine, Wehbe, the Lebanese media figure and programme host George Kurdahi, and the Lebanese actress Wafa' Sharara are discussing the role of art as a form of resistance.

with the old hymn "Mawtini"*[124]* [my homeland], in order to infuse hope for the future. Likewise, they chose to leave out the terrifying images found in the daily news stream in order to show that *we are strong and there is hope*. They argue that pictures of violence and suffering create weak and resigned populations – instead, the viewer is presented with the youth and beauty of the girls.

An ambition with Bayt al-Qasid is not only to counter the discouraging news stream, but also to open up the media space for *multazim* artists. While sitting at the café overlooking the sea, Wehbe described his frustration about the commercialisation of media and art in the Arab world. He believes that the values of the 1960s and '70s have been forgotten in the name of profit; similarly, commercialised pop stars without vision have replaced the icons of the past – he mentioned Sartre, The Beatles and Pink Floyd. During an episode where Wehbe invited the Iraqi protest singer Ja'afar Hassan onto the show, the same comparison with the past is made by Hassan when he complains: *Earlier we were singing it in the street, we would occupy the street and start to sing, and the theatre activity was strong, it was possible for us to sing in any theatre. Now we are in need of space, we are in need of one of the satellite channels and if any is interested in this aspect then we are ready* (Bayt al-Qasid, 16.12.2014, part 5, min 3:58), to which Wehbe proudly answers that offering a platform for alternative voices is one of al-Mayadeen's main ambitions.

Ja'afar Hassan is one of the few guests on Bayt al-Qasid who openly presents himself as a leftist, in the meaning of being member of a specific political party. For Hassan, being an artist and being a leftist are naturally interlinked: *I think that every artist inclines to the left and to the common people and the children of the poor. This belonging took me to the communist party, because we as artists feel with the people and the present reality, and I am also from a struggling family ['a'ilah munaḍilah]* (Bayt al-Qasid, 09.12.2014, part 2, min 03:05). This reading of what it means to be an artist – or a leftist – is very much in line with Wehbe's. He argued, during our conversation, that you could be a committed artist without being leftist, but not a leftist artist without being committed:

> *Let's say that all leftist art is committed art. Ok? But not all committed art is leftist. Yani* [a general filler word in Arabic, 'meaning', 'you know', ' that is'], *the left, in my opinion, is by definition committed but the commitment might be leftist and might not be leftist. Maybe it is committed to a national question or committed to a question relating to the resistance but not necessarily a leftist or a leftist thinker or a Marxist thinker, what distinguish the Left –compared to the Right in my opinion – is that the Left has historically been producing: It produced poets, it produced musicians, it produced singers, yani, the cultural movement is part of the leftist movement. Yani, it is as if the intellectual in general is more inclined because he is with the freedom, with the poor, with the oppressed people. You find that the relation between the Left and commitment is strong. An obvious and firm intimate relation, but maybe you will meet a person who offers committed art but who is not a*

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leftist, yani, it is not necessary to be leftist but I am saying that it is more difficult to find a right-wing artist who offers committed art.
(personal interview, Beirut, 18.11.2014)

So, in spite of Wehbe's theoretical, depoliticised interpretation of the notion of *iltizam,* and insistence that art does not have to be political in order to be committed; his notion of *iltizam* is still tightly connected to the heritage of one specific political tradition, namely the Left. This connection is reflected in the worldview of the guests in Bayt al-Qasid as well as in the themes and questions being discussed. Not because Wehbe promotes a communist or socialist political agenda, or because the guests represent leftist political parties, but because the shared values advocated are interlinked with the typical ideals of the Left.

The question of the ideal role of art(ists) in society is a topic that Wehbe often addresses during the talk show by nostalgically evoking the legacy of *iltizam*. A returning topic on the programme is whether artists carry special responsibilities for their nation and what that might entail. A shared premise seems to be that the old committed artists rebelling against *art for the sake of art* have been replaced by an aim of counteracting *art for the sake of business*. In this way, the programme almost becomes a 2015-version of the old journal al-Adab, by offering a forum for Arab intellectuals to discuss how they see themselves and their work in relation to surrounding society. The guests each offer an individual version of what it means to be *multazim* today – whether it is to fight sectarianism, call for peace and solidarity, give voice to the poor and oppressed, love one's nation, stay in one's homeland or merely produce supreme art.

Hence, throughout the conversations on Bayt al-Qasid, *iltizam* is being re-launched as a non-religious term linked to leftist values and with an intellectual legacy from the 1970s and earlier. Wehbe takes the lead in creating a strong narrative about what it means to be *multazim* and many of his guests are embodiments of this narrative. Through the narrative an unarticulated counteraction against the Islamisation of the term unfolds, and nostalgic sentiments for the past are awakened, but what is even more important is the way the notion of *iltizam* is used to create a value-laden group identity or feeling of community. 'The family of *iltizam*' – meaning the guests of Bayt al-Qasid in particular and viewers of al-Mayadeen in general – is more progressive, tolerant, societally engaged and modern than the rest of the chaotic surrounding society.

Patriotism – the space for emotions and personal sorrows
In this section, I analyse an overall and predominant theme in Bayt al-Qasid, namely the love for one's homeland [*al-watan*] and how this patriotism plays a central role in building the credibility, or the *ethos* (Finlayson 2012), of both the talk show and the guests. This patriotic narrative is of fundamental importance for legitimising political and ideological choices – as I elaborate on in the succeeding section – just as the narrative constitutes a central element in the ideological discourse of *The New Regressive Left*.

The historical homeland, the cultural heritage, the landscape, the nature, the people… a strong loyalty and deep pride for one's place of origin is expressed episode after episode; a tendency that becomes even more conspicuous when the talk involves Palestine or Syria. Palestine is celebrated as a concrete geographical space, a political commitment, an artistic production, a personal memory from childhood or a long and proud family chronicle; likewise, Syria is a never-ending source of emotive expressions of deep pain, longings for the past, for a nation, or for a homeland, as well as the nostalgic pride of representing the cradle of culture, or the true Arab identity.

The patriotism promoted in the show varies depending on the guest of course, but nevertheless a shared fundamental understanding of the importance of staying loyal to one's place of origin, appreciating one's cultural roots, and the meaning of true patriotism exists. Thus, through the conversations, Wehbe establishes a patriotic space where all are expected to contribute to the promotion of the glory of patriotism. Nostalgia is an important element in creating this space for national devotion; and the intimate atmosphere of Bayt al-Qasid further reinforces the implied mutual understanding of the importance of patriotism.

Abdel Bari Atwan demonstrates his ultimate (and romanticised) loyalty for his Palestinian identity when he refers to his childhood years in a Palestinian refugee camp in Gaza with great enthusiasm, saying: *these 17 years were the most beautiful years of my life*, and later on continues *it resembled Platon's Utopia* (Bayt al-Qasid, 16.04.2013, part 1, min 7:26, 7:55). Likewise, and in spite of his many years in exile, the homeland remains the focal point of his life. When Wehbe asks Atwan if he is planning to return to Gaza to live at some point, Atwan replies with all the nostalgia of an expatriate: *Yes. When I arrive at the end of the project of al-Quds al-Arabi then I will return to Gaza. Soon I will buy a piece of land by the sea, and I will build a small hut and sit facing the sea and around this hut or house I will plant pepper and tomato and eggplant and cucumber and a fig tree and vineyard* (Bayt al-Qasid, 23.04.2013, part 5, min 09:22).

This romantic image of a simple life in Gaza in close contact with nature is both a nostalgic expression of the longing for the lost homeland and a political statement about the return to Palestine, as well as a moral confirmation of the homeland as the ultimate destination. The question of staying in – or returning to – one's homeland is a recurring theme on Bayt al-Qasid. Staying physically on the ground and staying loyal in spite of difficult times or geographical distance is framed as being morally elevated and a central element of being *multazim*. When Wehbe later on asks if he really believes in the possibility of returning to Ashdud[125], Atwan answers with a strong *YES*.

In line with Atwan's stated dream to return to Gaza, the Younan sisters confirm that their goal is to return to Syria as soon as the situation allows, and Ja'afar Hassan talks of how he returned to Iraq in 2003 from his exile in Yemen the moment Saddam Hussein was removed from power. Leaving one's country requires both a proper excuse and a confirmation of one's aspiration to return, while

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[125] A small now Israeli coastal city north of Gaza.

the ultimate expression of true patriotism is found among the Syrian guests who have chosen to stay in Damascus despite the violent conflict. Wehbe never shies away from dwelling on the subject of staying put in Syria, and it is a returning theme, not least in conversations with Syrian actresses or actors. Thus, on Bayt al-Qasid, the element of nostalgia is literally the longing for a lost home or homeland – even if it no longer exists, or never has existed. The home that Bari Atwan imagines he will return to is certainly an imaginary place, just as the home that Laham desperately tries to hold on to belongs to a past time in history. Thus, the notion of the homeland, on Bayt al-Qasid, is surrounded with nostalgia and has an almost utopian dimension, while it also serves as a central rhetorical strategy in establishing the credibility of the guests.

In the episode with Duraid Laham, the fact that he still lives in Damascus regardless of the security situation is the leitmotif of the conversation. In the beginning of the programme Wehbe asks why he has chosen to stay in Damascus, to which Laham answers *the homeland is not a hotel* (Bayt al-Qasid, 07.01.2014, part 1, min 09:35), meaning, you don't just check out when that seems convenient to you, but stay loyal at all times. Syrian actresses like Rasha Shabatji (16.10.2012, part 1, 01:55-04:35), Dima Qanalfat (10.12.2013, part 1, 07:38-09:08), Salma al-Masri (15.09.2015, part 1, 09:10-11:35), and Salafa Mamar (07.10.2014, part 4, 02:28-04:14) elaborate on how their love for the homeland makes it impossible to leave, and Suzan Najem al-Din (21.07.2015, part 2, min 3:20) seems to be in a state of shock when asked if she ever for a moment during the years of war has wished that she was not born in or lived in Syria.

Later on in the episode with Laham, we see a clip of his daily life in Damascus, and again the fact that he stays in his homeland is highlighted and glorified. In the footage, we learn how he lives a typical everyday life in the city among 'ordinary people' – he prepares his morning coffee, reads his newspaper and buys food. A sophisticated female voice-over tells us that: *here he is, he didn't leave and he didn't emigrate, he is here with the tired people who by the power of light and glimpses of hope are dreaming of a new life and a return to normal life as before. The Damascus lover didn't and will not leave his Damascus, he will stay here in the city which he gave a lot of laughter and colour and which gave him a lot of medals of love and keys of success* (Bayt al-Qasid, 07.01.2014, part 5, min 02:20). Thus, Laham stays loyal not only to his country but also to his people. He doesn't abandon them, but shares with them the good as well as the difficult times.

He sees it as his duty to lead the way, to act as an inspirer of patriotism: *I feel that the presence of artists in their country gives confidence to the people and make them more attached to their country* (Bayt al-Qasid, 07.01.2014, part 3, min 09:00). In similar ways, after many years in exile, Atwan still remains one with his people, a representative of the Palestinian public, or in his own words an *ambassador of the camp*. He recalls how the most beautiful moment in his life was the first time he appeared on CNN and how he had wished that *all the children of the camps would see me and would know that I was their ambassador* (Bayt al-Qasid, 16.04.2013, part 1, min 08:50). Later on he continues, *Alhamdulillah, I am happy that I was able to become ambassador for the camp, a messenger of the camp and bring the camp to all corners of the globe*. Considering themselves the

true patriots, Atwan and Laham also perceive themselves as representatives of their people and feel a responsibility for steering patriotism.

An efficient element in the establishment of the true patriotic space is tears and personal sorrow. Thus, together with the enthusiastic love, the nostalgic childhood memories, and the romanticising of lost times, genuine grief plays an important role in some episodes. Laham and the Younan sisters, along with several other Syrian guests, struggle with tears when talking about the situation in Syria, exposing the ultimate emotional commitment – and Wehbe rarely shies away from dwelling on the subject. When the Syrian actor Ghassan Masoud (Bayt al-Qasid, 11.09.2012) breaks down, overwhelmed by fear for the safety of his family, the scene is protracted, with additional questions and long close-ups before Wehbe finally offers to end the situation with a commercial break. The actress Salafa Mamar, likewise, fights to stay in control of her emotions when Wehbe asks her about the situation in Syria (Bayt al-Qasid, 07.10.2014, part 4) and even though he attentively shifts subject, it is only after a dramatic atmosphere has been created. These exposures of personal grief, dwelling on intimate moments, are what Jeffrey Jones refers to as "aesthetic expressions or aesthetic acts" (Jones 2012; Jones 2013) that dramatize and bring ideological thinking to life. Thus, the intimate situations that produce tears and personal sorrows are not only saleable reality-like TV, but also performances of an ideology. In this way, nostalgic patriotism and heartfelt longing for the utopian homeland both become an important element of *The New Regressive Left*.

Furthermore, the emotional scenes and the patriotic space created also contribute to building up the credibility of the guests – and the show in general – or, in other words, to building up *ethos*. The patriotism comes to function as quality assurance of the guests, and thus, the audience is invited to accept the political stance promoted because of who is making it. A statement like *we are Syria* (part 4, 05:37; 07:10), uttered by both Rihan and Faia Younan, indicates the degree of patriotic commitment advocated every Tuesday evening – but it also illustrates how the guests of Bayt al-Qasid are promoted as personifications or embodiments of a particular ideology. Thus, through Wehbe's continued exposure of the grief and worries of his Syrian guests, and through their emotional speech about their homeland and their eventual tears, Wehbe manages to show that they are honest and loyal citizens who know what is best for their country.

Finally, the emotional scenes underscore the already existing home-like (though cultured) atmosphere that pervades the show. Bayt al-Qasid, thus, comes to function as a refuge for – what is perceived as – a civilised and progressive community; a refuge where this community can confirm and be confirmed in its ideological and political outlooks. A space is created where the common denominator is a deep-felt and true patriotism – a space where the homeland is above political or personal issues, and close to a status of being holy. In the following section, I turn my attention towards another sensitive issue that this community-like space allows the exposure of: namely, personal reflections over ideological dilemmas provoked by the post-2011 political developments.

The progressive ideals – do they leave space for revolutions? Personal dilemmas and ideological ambivalences

All your history, in your theatrical and artistic work, Mr. Duraid, yani, you have criticised and rejected injustice and tyranny, and you have criticised the authority and the wrong practices. So some expected that your natural position would be on the side of the opposition in Syria, maybe … Were you… (07.01.2014, part 2, min 06:05). Wehbe is searching for words in order to finalise his question, but ends up looking imploringly at Laham, hoping that his guest understands where he is heading. Wehbe, who is usually calm and in full control, is for a short moment disconcerted. He would like Laham to clarify why his support for the al-Assad rule in Syria does not compromise the ideals and values that his artistic career has revolved around. Laham solves the situation by confirming how, over 53 years and together with Omar Hijo and the late Mohamed Maghout, he has worked for *freedom, democracy and social justice*, and how these values are still guiding principles for him.

Wehbe's question touches upon some fundamental dilemmas that are of great importance to the show, as well as many of the guests. How can one be a representative of revolutionary ideals, a defender of freedom, and the voice of the people, and still be or become a supporter of the al-Assad rule? How can one prioritise the resistance discourse, anti-imperial rhetoric, and secular ideals of the Ba'ath regime over profound (and democratic) political change? How did a utopian wish of preserving pre-2011 Syria become a natural choice for people who consider themselves to be representatives of progressive – or even revolutionary – ideals?

In this section, I look more closely at how the intimate space of Bayt al-Qasid, as well as the credibility of Wehbe and the guests (by virtue of their *iltizam* and patriotism), facilitate open discussions of the personal dilemmas and ideological ambivalences of the guests. I show that the use of a particular narrative pattern in discussions on Syria, where the guests are first framed as being progressive and revolutionary – once again building up their ethos – before they proclaim their, at the same time, pragmatic and ideological support for the al-Assad rule in Syria, is a strategy for perceiving Syria as a nation of Arab *muqawama* and *mumana'a*. Of course, not all guests and conversations fall within this pattern, deviations that reveal the ideological limits of the seeming inclusiveness of the show.

The Lebanese singer and composer Khaled al-Habr struggles with the same dilemma as Laham. With his long history of being a committed leftist artist, writing political songs in support of Palestine, 'the ordinary people', or other leftist political issues, and having close affiliations to the Lebanese Communist Party (though not a member)[126], his current stance on Syria is not a given. Wehbe explores the ambiguity while establishing the image of a politically committed artist with a history of opposing the Ba'ath Party:

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[126] During his visit in Beit al-Qasid, his leftist political identity is highlighted by Wehbe, who engages in discussions on Marx and Lenin with al-Habr, and the clip from his everyday life *Milestone* shows how he meets and hangs out with his friends from the Lebanese Communist Party.

Al-Habr: *(...) you know that we were some of the first who fought against the Syrians in 1976.*
Wehbe: *The Lebanese left and the Communist Party?*
Al-Habr: *The Lebanese left and the Socialist Party. We fought in '76 against the Syrians.*
Wehbe: *And you refused their entry into Lebanon?*
Al-Habr: *We were refusing their entry into Lebanon and we stood against the regime, because the regime is in need of reforms and in need of a revolution, maybe, a revolution to its left and not to its right.*
Wehbe: *True.*
Al-Habr: *When the movement started in Syria I was with the popular movement because I know that there is injustice in Syria. There is injustice against the people and there is political and economic injustice and lack of security, but when the case turned and changed into a global war against Syria ...*
Wehbe: *And the fighters started to arrive from all corners of the world ...*
Al-Habr: *Syria became the land of jihad for them. They tell you, and I don't know if the numbers are correct, they tell you that 85,000 foreign fighters are present in Syria. Something which is impossible ... Really, you see yourself taking a stand, which you don't want. Something which you don't want but you have to take it just in order to preserve Syria.*
Wehbe: *As a homeland and entity and country ...*
Al-Habr: *As a homeland, as a country, as an entity. I want to preserve Syria and I don't want it destroyed and I don't want a million killed in Syria during two years or three. This is the Syria I wanted. And it is not important to me who stays [in power], what is important to me is Syria the muqawama, Syria the mumana'a, the Palestinian Syria which taught us how to support Palestine.*
(Bayt al-Qasid, 17.09.2013, part 2, min 8:30).

The conversation builds up al-Haber's credibility as a leftist nationalist who has been fighting on the side of the people against oppression all of his life. He is not a blind believer of the Ba'ath party in Syria or in Bashar al-Assad – on the contrary. He fought against the Syrian involvement in Lebanon, just as he supported the uprisings in 2011. It is not easy for him to reach the conclusion that he now supports the al-Assad rule, but he does. The reason is that the war in Syria is no longer a national uprising, but part of a global struggle against imperialism. Syria has to remain the symbol of resistance – even if this means keeping Bashar al-Assad in power. Thus, for al-Habr, the importance of *muqawama* and *mumana'a* rank above all other considerations. In similar ways, Atwan tries to argue for his stance on Syria, which many – in accordance with Wehbe – find has changed or is inconsistent with Atwan's ideals. First, as was the case with Laham and al-Habr, a track record of democratic and progressive values is established, as when Atwan explains to Wehbe:

> *Since 15 years my newspaper has been forbidden in Syria from the days of President Hafiz al-Assad. Since 15 years and until this moment the website of my newspaper is blocked in*

Syria, until this moment. Why is it blocked? Because we have criticised the Syrian regime – sometimes even harshly. We criticised it because of the violations of human rights, we criticised it because of its stances, because it didn't defend Lebanon when its power plants were bombed in spite of the existence of a mutual defence treaty. Why didn't Syria confront this Israeli aggression? (…) (Bayt al-Qaid, 23.04.2013, part 1, min 8:42).

Then follows the explanation of why the Syrian uprisings can no longer be supported, and, in line with al-Habr, it is due to foreign intervention – Atwan argues that it is because oppositional troops are being trained in Jordan, because CIA is distributing weapons, because… And in line with al-Habr, Atwan aims to confirm that he *is with Syria the entity, with Syria the homeland. The systems… Syria is 7,000 years old, many regimes have left and many regimes have come but Syria has remained. I am with Syria the homeland with Syria the entity with Syria's national unity, with Syria's territorial unity, with Syria's stance against Israel* (Bayt al-Qaid, 23.04.2013, part 1, 10:29 min).

Through these talks we learn that critical and informed people, who are burningly aware of the oppressiveness of the Baʿath rule in Syria – and who don't shy away from pointing it out – have become supporters of the regime. It is not an easy decision for any of them and their personal dilemmas and considerations are important elements in building up the argument. This is not framed as an unreflective worshipping of Bashar al-Assad or the Baʿath Party, but as a critical, thought-through ideological decision, taken in the name of Syria as the representative of Arab *muqawama* and *mumanaʿa*.

Hence, the returning narration is one of a patriotic artist who, through all his or her life, has been committed to political progressive ideals. As artists they distinguish themselves as being *multazim*, by not only being an artist for art's – or money's – sake, but for the change of society. They see themselves as member of a cultural – sometimes also political – Arab Left, which for decades has been the secular oppositional voice in an authoritarian Arab world. Thus, they see themselves as representing the voice of the people, as fighting for a just and democratic society, and, equally, against international imperialist power and national authoritarian suppression. Many of the guests struggle with the tension between, on the one hand, their reputation, public image, and their self-perception, and, on the other hand, their actual position on the current political question. These apparently progressive voices find themselves in the middle of a heated ideological battle, and Bayt al-Qasid offers a platform for them to present and defend their political position by exposing their personal dilemmas and ideological ambivalence.

Today, due to the war in Syria, disagreements over ideological priorities are acute, and they are dividing an already divided Arab Left. These dilemmas can be read as signs of ideological transformation. Just as the primary identity marker for the Lebanese Left has changed from fighting against a laissez-fair economy and for social justice, to later being about opposing the sectarian system (not least triggered by the Lebanese civil war (Haugbolle 2013c)), today ideological negotiations over what constitute the primary ideological values or *core concepts* of leftist ideology

are provoked by the war in Syria. These current ideological transformations are, thus, being performed in Bayt al-Qasid. Bassam Haddad's and Nicolas Dot-Pouillard's divisions of the Left into a pro-resistance/anti-imperialist camp and an anti-authoritarian/pro-democracy camp are being personified and acted out on the show (Haddad 2012; Dot-Pouillard 2012). While the anti-imperialist camp is surely represented on Bayt al-Qasid, so is the case for what I refer to as the Compromising Left, ambiguous and ambivalent voices which create a more inclusive and complex discourse.

That this ideological and political position is contested and only one of several to be found within the Arab Left is hinted at in an episode with the Egyptian-Palestinian poet Tamim al-Barghouti. Here, the storyline changes slightly; the uprising in Egypt naturally plays a bigger role and the overthrow of Mubarak is something which both al-Barghuti and Wehbe can endorse without any reservations. Accordingly, the clip from al-Barghouti's private life presents a revolutionary, a man of the people. He is filmed in the streets of Cairo as he passes by revolutionary graffiti and young activists making street paintings, as he crosses Tahrir square, or as he becomes the incarnation of Naji al-Ali's Handala when he stands with his back facing the camera while looking at a drawing of that same figure.

Nevertheless, when Wehbe by the end of the show opens the discussion of Syria, the message becomes more blurred. Both men are clearly challenged by the dilemmas exposed by the conflict in Syria, but al-Barghuti refuses to compromise his principled stance that democracy and resistance against imperialism are interdependent, not mutually exclusive. Wehbe tries to contest this insistence and to persuade al-Barghuti into making an exception by pointing out the Syrian state's essential role for the resistance movement against Israel, and continues: *Do I understand that you agree with me that what is needed is change in Syria not changing Syria? Or changing Syria's role or Syria's stance as an entity and as a state axial country in the Arab Mashreq and in the Arab world?* (23.10.2012, part 4, min 09:30). In spite of Wehbe's attempt to get a 'concession' from al-Barghouti – in line with e.g. the one of al-Habr – that indicates his support for preserving the rule in Damascus in the name of *muqawama* and *mumana'a*, al-Barghouti insists on the argument that tyranny never brought liberation. Here, Wehbe chooses to close the discussion by saying that he doesn't want the programme to become too politicised (after which he continues nevertheless, on a similar political vein, by asking al-Barghuti about his motivation for supporting Mursi during the election in 2012).

The conversation with al-Barghuti points to the limits of the ideological negotiations on Bayt al-Qasid. Personal dilemmas and ideological reflections are not only accepted but consciously exposed in the cases where the guest has moved from a position of opposing the Ba'ath Party to supporting its continued rule in Syria in order to preserve the nation of *muqawama* and *mumana'a*. Al-Barghuti's insistence of, that the world must keep space for democratic values while the uprising in Syria is turning into a regional battleground, is on the other hand dismissed on the account of preserving Syria as the Arab centre of resistance. Hence, the talk show also has its limits for inclusiveness, leaving no real space for the voice of e.g. the New New Left. For Wehbe, al-Habr,

Atwan, and Laham it is neither loyalty for Bashar al-Assad nor for the Syrian Ba'ath Party that directs their position; rather, it is loyalty for Syria's geopolitical and symbolic role as the centre of Arab resistance.

The case of the Younan sisters reflects the other end of the spectrum. With no track record of years of political engagement, their credibility is tied to their youth and innocence. The sisters' appeal for peace and aspirations for a more humane world are, at al-Mayadeen, read as a universal, valid position, free from political implications. This is, however, not an uncontested reading. At the height of the media hype of *To our Countries*, critical voices pointed out that the sisters' peace appeal borrowed heavily from the rhetoric of the regime in Damascus. The oppositional artist group Step Team[127] [friqqah ḥaṭwah al-fanniyya] published a parody of the performance on YouTube in October 2014, starring Yousef and Muhammad Baker as Rihan and Faia Younan.[128] It was badged as "a response to the video", which they saw as part of a propaganda war from the regime in Damascus. Step Team was founded in 2012 in Aleppo by a group of young activists – mainly amateur actors, writers, directors, and photographers – committed to the uprising – a group that, roughly, could be placed within the New New Left camp. They started by producing short movies to be uploaded on YouTube, but after relocating to Istanbul due to the work conditions in Syria, they have also been doing street performances, pantomime, storytelling etc (SyriaUntold 2014).

During the conversation with the Younan sisters, Wehbi addresses their weak spot: namely, the accusations against them of being a media stunt orchestrated in support of Bashar al-Assad. He asks Rihan Younan to comment on the fact that *some have interpreted the work as serving a certain side, as being in the service of the regime in Syria* and thus offers her the opportunity to reject this and insist on the universal human aspect. Rihan underlines that it *is humanistic work, that talks about the human and the homeland* (Bayt al-Qasid, 18.11.2014, part 2, min 5:10). The sisters' impartiality though seemed to shrink rapidly when, a few months later at the beginning of 2015, they appeared on Syrian state TV, in a talk show on Sana TV. Nevertheless, their conversation with Wehbe still illustrates the ideological discourse of Bayt al-Qasid – no outspoken celebration of Bashar al-Assad, but rather a framing of his rule in Syria as the only viable way to protect humanistic, progressive and anti-imperial values.

Conclusion

When Rihan and Faia Younan made their video "To our countries", their message found a surprisingly big audience. Both Arab and Western viewers got taken by the *aesthetic expression* – their stylish appearance, their cultured image and their universal plea for peace. They offered an alternative narrative about the Arab world, one that tried to infuse hope into the situation and allowed the viewer to envision a 'modern' and progressive Arab world embodied by the two beautiful women. They became a media stunt which – in an Arab context – spoke right into an

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[127] See the group's Facebook page: https://ar-ar.facebook.com/khotwa.step.gav. See the group's channel on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUpeNbMKwDyvoLBOmzjM7ew
[128] See the parody here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dh1f2mJpRjc

ideological discussion. The fact that Zahi Wehbe found the Younan sisters suitable as guests for Bayt al-Qasid is not surprising. They embody – like the guests on Bayt al-Qasid in general – several of the values which Wehbe wants to propagate with the show, of which *iltizam* and patriotism are the most important. Week after week, conversation after conversation, Wehbe insists on showing a glimpse of hope, demonstrating the existence of an intellectual and artistic basis to build a future on. In this way, Bayt al-Qasid's and Wehbe's relaunch of Arab cultural identity is an expression of not only *iltizam* but, ultimately, of *muqawama*.

On Bayt al-Qasid, there are no excuses for not being loyal to one's homeland and it is expected that political exile is accompanied with an ambition to return home, or an actual return. Likewise, being *multazim* is essential for an artist's quality and credibility. These two values, which are both surrounded by a nostalgic sentiment, are used consciously as a strategy to boost the *ethos* of the host, the guests, and the show (as a trustworthy space). This is further strengthened by the creation of an intimate community feeling. The viewers are invited to be part of the progressive and committed family of Bayt al-Qasid; they are even invited into the intimacy sphere of both Wehbe (to 'his house') and the guests (to their personal life stories, grief and dilemmas). Through these personal stories, where dilemmas and ambiguity are allowed, Wehbe normalises and legitimises support of the al-Assad rule in Syria. By virtue of the guest's *ethos* and his or her track record of being progressive, a certain storyline of conversion from fighting against the oppressive Ba'ath rule in Syria to supporting its survival is established, and thus an ideological cosmos with its own *logos* is created.

Bayt al-Qasid might be a place of intellectual resistance to both cultural and military imperialism but that agenda has its costs. Laham's, al-Habr's, and Atwan's conversations with Wehbe are perfect illustrations of the dilemma facing leftists who have been regarded as oppositional voices by many but who, nevertheless, in recent years have turned out to be or become supporters of the existing al-Assad rule. In many ways, Zahi Wehbe, the guests, and the show in general seek to promote progressive values, but the case of the Younan sisters reveals how this reading of progressiveness has concrete political consequences – as their appearance on Syrian state TV demonstrates. Bayt al-Qasid, I argue, offers a space for not only the anti-imperialist camp but also the Compromising Left. I is a space which on one side is limited by the avoidance of direct celebration of Bashar al-Assad and, on the other side, by the acceptance of him as the protector of Syria, the nation of *muqawama* and *mumana'a*. Hence, I argue that the programme is one of the main pillars of al-Mayadeen's activities, as it constitutes the intellectual spine of the station and provides intellectual backing for its translation of ideological worldview into political reality. The ambiguity which is exposed is a message to the public that you can be 'politically progressive' and a supporter of al-Assad at the same time.

Walking a Tightrope: the Role of Religion

Trees, a waterfall pouring out of a mountainside covered in green, sunlight playing in the leaves – impressive images of idyllic Lebanese nature, accompanied by soft classical music. The camera zooms out and a man dressed in traditional Gulf clothing appears out of nowhere and greets the viewers with an extended version of the traditional Islamic opening phrase. The scene is set for the first episode of al-Mayadeen's new Ramadan programme, *Harrir Aqlak* [Free your Mind].[129] That was in the summer of 2015. A couple of months later, I find myself sitting in the outdoor cafeteria at al-Mayadeen together with Mona Abdullah, the producer of Harrir Aqlak, who has agreed to meet for a talk about the programme.

Her excitement is genuine, as she explains to me the background and purpose of the programme, and why al-Mayadeen decided to launch a daily Ramadan programme with the Islamic researcher and thinker Abdel Aziz al-Qattan. What had originally caught my attention when I first saw the programme – the staging of a traditionally dressed man from the Gulf in magnificent Levant nature – is also the image Abdullah is keen on conveying. The fact that al-Qattan is a Kuwaiti, an insider of Gulf society, is a point that Abdullah returns to several times during our meeting. In her opinion, it gives him a natural credibility when he points out the weaknesses of that part of the region, and legitimises his criticism – just as it conveys the message that *we have khaliji* [people from the Gulf] *here*. That he is placed in the Levant, I argue, on the other hand, ensures the necessary distance for him to appear as a credible critic and adds an educated and cultured perspective, which supports his mission to stir an intellectual renaissance. Thus, al-Qattan's clothing is consciously chosen, and the different natural settings carefully selected, in order to create a frame that brings together the proud religious heritage of original Islam with the civilised and progressive culture of the Levant.

In this chapter, I investigate what role religion plays in the ideological discourse at al-Mayadeen and for the *The New Regressive Left* at large – with regards to Islam, Christianity and the concept of religious pluralism. I use Harrir Aqlak[130] as a starting point to investigate religious broadcasting at al-Mayadeen and in particular, its ambivalent relation to Islam and, thus, how Islam forms an element of the ideological and political agenda of the station. What does Islam offer to an ideological cosmos where leftist and secular cultural heritage makes up the scenery and the notion of *iltizam* is used in a secular rather than religious meaning? The Gulf countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular play a central role when al-Mayadeen relates to Islam, as this area simultaneously both owns a special status, being the place of Islam's origin and the holy cities Mecca and Medina, and also represents the – in accordance with al-Mayadeen's position – contemporary misinterpretation of Islam. Thus, the station walks a tightrope when balancing

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[129] All episodes are available at al-Mayadeen's website:
http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/71/%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%82%D9%84%D9%83
[130] This chapter was written before the new episodes in 2016 were broadcast, and therefore the analysis deals exclusively with episodes from Ramadan 2015. The new episodes from 2016 have the same set-up but deal, in general, more with political topics and less with universal values or philosophic reflections than in the previous year.

between its critical approach toward Saudi influence and its endorsement of Islam as the authentic source of Arab civilisation, culture and ethics. Al-Mayadeen's approach to Christianity as well as to other religious minorities in the region is, on the other hand, a full-hearted embrace.

What follows in the section below is a short introduction to the religious broadcasting at al-Mayadeen with a focus on Harrir Aqlak and its host, al-Qattan. In the analytical part, I look into four central themes on the basis of selected episodes[131], namely, the tradition of al-Nahda, religious pluralism contra sectarianism, the juxtaposing of IS and Israel, and finally the discussion on political stability versus political change in connection with the Arab uprisings.

Religious broadcasting at al-Mayadeen – the shows and the hosts

The launch of Harrir Aqlak can be seen as part of a shift in al-Mayadeen's prioritisation of and approach to Islam, in which Islam has come to play a more explicit role. During the first few years of the station, the only regular programme dealing specifically with Islam was the provocative show *Alif Lam Mim* [ALM], with the controversial host, the Swedish-Algerian Yahya Abu Zakariya, who openly seeks to confront any element connected to Sunni Islamism or in particular to Saudi Arabian Wahhabism. Only in May 2014 was the weekly talk show *Islamiyyun wa Ba'ad*[132] [The Islamists and beyond] added to the sechdule, in which a former or current leader of either Sunni or Shia Islamist movements joins the host Muhammad 'alush for a critical discussion of political Islam. In June 2015, al-Mayadeen additionally launched Harrir Aqlak, and thus entered the field of Ramadan broadcasting with a daily 20-minute lecture by al-Qattan. The thirty Ramadan episodes were re-run during autumn 2015, and new weekly episodes have been broadcast since January 2016.

At al-Mayadeen, the religious pluralism typically found in the Levant is considered a proof of the civilised and cultured nature of a society, and religious tolerance is seen as a benchmark for ideological superiority. Translated into programming, this means that al-Mayadeen has from day one run the weekly show Ajras al-Mashreq [The bells of the Levant], which deals with the social, political, theological, and cultural issues of Christians living in the region – both from historical and contemporary perspectives. The programme is hosted by the Lebanese Ghassan ash-Shami, who performs as the distinguished and cultured elderly gentleman offering a platform for Christian figures and representatives (religious as well as lay), among other contemporary voices, to appear in the Arab public sphere as an illustration of them being a accepted element of a pluralistic Arab public realm. The programme is a clear and noticeable prioritisation of Christian society and cultural heritage, and an opportunity to promote the message that Christianity is a natural part of the Arab identity. Furthermore, Christianity is in general given a relatively high visibility at the station,

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[131] I am citing from the following episodes: 18.06.2015 (link), 19.06.2015 (link), 20.06.2015 (link), 21.06.2015 (link), 22.06.2015 (link), 24.06.2015 (link), 26.06.2015 (link), 27.06.2015 (link), 28.06.2015 (link), 06.07.2015 (link), 16.07.2015 (link).

[132] http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/SwS_p,_LhUCCaqMmAMNuXQ/%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%8 5%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86---%D9%88%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF

with the marking of Christmas shown by decorations in the studios, special thematic programmes[133] and short spots highlighting the holiday[134].

Islam, on the other hand, has been given less obvious attention, e.g., in the marking of Islamic holidays. In 2013 and 2014, there was no daily Ramadan programme, meaning that weekly programmes such as the cultural programmes *al-Ard Mustamer*[135] [The Show Continues] (run both in 2013 and 2014) and *Amiyya ...*[136], reporting from Palestine, Tunisia and Lebanon [Evening from …] (run in 2013), had more or less been *the* marking of Ramadan. In comparison to how big an event this occasion is in most other Arab media, al-Mayadeen was notable silent. In 2013, though, al-Mayadeen also broadcast the weekly programme *as-Salam Alaikum*[137] [Peace be upon you], starring the Syrian grand mufti (since 2005), Ahmad Badreddin Hassoun. Hassoun often appears at al-Mayadeen as the always-smiling representative of what is framed as a tolerant, reflective and truly spiritual version of Islam – and in 2013, he even fulfilled the role of spiritual guidance in the holy time of Ramadan. The set-up of the programme presents him as the religious authority; he is sitting in a room decorated to resemble a mosque, preaching for a selected audience, but with the possibility for listeners to contribute with theological questions or topics for reflection. The most noticeable thing about the programme is Hassoun himself, as he is a symbol of Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian state's version of Islam – advocating inter-religious dialogue and tolerance at the same time as being an outspoken supporter of Bashar al-Assad.

In contrast to Hassoun's image of representing 'Ba'ath Islam', al-Qattan is, to a large degree, an unknown name. Before starting his career as an Islamic thinker and researcher, he had tried his fortunes as an artist – both as an actor and a writer – but with seemingly limited success, reaching only a national Kuwaiti scene.[138] As an Islamic thinker, he had appeared a couple of times on different TV stations, such as the Lebanese al-Thabat TV and al-Iman TV, or the Yemeni al-Yeman al-Youm, but he did not have a strong track record of media appearances when he first appeared at al-Mayadeen.[139] Al-Qattan's debut at al-Mayadeen was as guest on Abu Zakariya's Alif Lam Mim on 7 August 2014, in an episode titled "The stance of the Ulama in regards to the destruction of tombs of prophets"[140]. Here, he impressed al-Mayadeen's editorial leadership – as well as the

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[133] E.g.: The episode of the cultural talk show Beit al-Qasid, broadcast on 23 December 2014 link, or the episode of the political analytical programme La'abet al-'Umam [The Game of the Nations], broadcast on 23 December 2015, link.

[134] See e.g. the following spots: spot 1, spot 2, and spot 3.

[135] http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/FajvQ,dCaEaPqaH2AJ5scw/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1

[136] http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/22/%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9

[137] http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/14/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%85

[138] In the Kuwaiti newspaper, it was reported that he had participated in the TV serial "Old Friends" http://alwatan.kuwait.tt/articledetails.aspx?id=326126, just as he had a poem published http://alwatan.kuwait.tt/articledetails.aspx?id=171435&yearquarter=20121.

[139] See his YouTube channel for an overview of his media appearances https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5Ybv5as-tXpgA4Lxz5YT-A

[140] http://www.almayadeen.net/Programs/Episode/Ms0K1wDOnk2P0KOAASEZBg/%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%85%D9%86-

producer of Alif Lam Mim, who had cast him for the show – with his direct criticism of Gulf society. His successful performance became the stepping stone to his future career as a programme host. After discussions back and forth on how to launch al-Qattan more permanently at al-Mayadeen, it was decided that he should host a Ramadan programme – the title of the programme Harrir Aqlak was decided by Ghassan bin Jeddo himself.

Mona Abdullah, producer of both Alif Lam Mim and Harrir Aqlak, explains to me that the aim of both programmes is to show true Islam, and to prove that Islam is not equivalent to the fanatical and violent groups that get all the media attention, but, rather, is a humanistic and tolerant religion. However, there is a division of labour between the two programmes, she elaborates: Abu Zakariyya, the host of Alif Lam Mim, is the religious scholar who offers discussion on Islamic schools of thought and Islamic doctrines. He hosts guests who are often religious intellectuals and the programme *takes you back to Islam's origins, how did these thoughts and the politics start*. Al-Qattan, on the other hand, promotes his personal opinion directly to the viewer. He has no guests and therefore is not expected to be balanced like a host must be – and *when he talks about the Gulf he knows what he is talking about* (personal interview, Beirut, 1.12.2015). It is worth noticing that neither of the two hosts belongs to the traditionally educated group of *ulama,* but represents the new phenomenon of self-taught media figures preaching Islam. I return to this issue below.

Harrir Aqlak is presented as a *mashru'a nahḍwi* [renaissance project][141] that sets out to bring about *a mental revolution in a time where the Arab mind has been captured by ignorance, Arab regimes, extremist terrorist groups, asabiyya* [tribalism, clan solidarity]*, sectarianism and tribalism*[142]. The overall theme of the programme is, thus, a critical reflection on the state of Islam and the state of Arab societies, and how to reform both. The frame of the programme is given – we are living at a chaotic time where Arabs at large are intellectually stagnated, and the states, the traditional communities as well as religion itself (as it is being practiced) are all preventing mental progress. Within this setting, al-Qattan and Harrir Aqlak offer inspiration for revitalisation.

This fundamental assumption that the Arab and Islamic world is in a state of crisis constitutes the point of departure for Harrir Aqlak. Through the thirty episodes, al-Qattan identifies the current crisis from changing perspectives – political, social, intellectual etc. – and tries to find ways forward. The programme is easily accessible without any requirements for religious knowledge, and the use of quotes from the Qur'an, or anecdotes from the time of Muhammed, are limited. Likewise, far from being theologically dogmatic or straightforwardly missionising, al-Qattan instead seeks to

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%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B1-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A1

[141] http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/gGLSCAAujE6woKS0AJ2FHw/%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B1-
%D8%B9%D9%82%D9%84%D9%83

[142] http://www.almayadeen.net/news/politics/5665/-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%82%D9%84%D9%83--
%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%86---
%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%82%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B6%D8%AF-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A-
%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B5

promote a message about the need for an Islamic revision. He describes the programme as one that *awakens the Arab and Islamic mind (...) an enlightenment project of the mind* (Harrir Aqlak, 18.06.2015, min 1:55). In the show, Al-Qattan lectures for 20 minutes without any interference – no questions from viewers or guests in the studio, no advice about how to live a good everyday Muslim life, and no issuing of fatwas. Rather, al-Qattan addresses general philosophic, moral, and political issues, and aims to talk to the conscience of each individual viewer. The themes which al-Qattan discusses during the thirty episodes are of general existential interest, such as love, education, freedom, tolerance, and forgiveness, or specific contemporary political issues, such as Zionism, IS, Shia-Sunni or the Arab uprisings, and thus, al-Qattan ensures that the programme maintains a broad appeal – even to non-religious people.

The lectures themselves are in a serious tone and the old-fashioned programme design combined with al-Qattan's uninterrupted talks further supports this atmosphere of solemnity. As mentioned earlier, al-Qattan does not belong to the traditional *ulama*[143]; like other modern TV preachers, he is self-taught, and his strength is his media appeal rather than his educational background. His young age, his active and personal communication with the viewer through body language and direct requests, and his limited use of traditional religious interpretations are all important elements in the set-up. Furthermore, while he talks, important keywords appear on the screen in different sizes and colours, which gives the programme tempo and intensity.

(Images of al-Qattan from Harrir Aqlak)

All the shootings are outdoor, in Lebanese nature, thus there are no offices with wooden furniture, carpets and bookshelves, or any religious buildings or traditional Islamic symbols. Rather, the Levant nature provides an important framing of the programme, both as a contrast to and integration of the Kuwaiti, al-Qattan. He wears traditional Arab clothes, including headscarf and thobe, while standing by the coast, in the mountains, next to a waterfall or in front of a mountain village with church towers and minarets side by side. Thus, already, through the set-up, important messages about universalism, inter-cultural integration and religious openness are conveyed – a message that al-Qattan repeatedly articulates by the word *insaniyya* [humanity].

In the first episode, al-Qattan presents the programme as *non-traditional* [ghayr taqlydi] and says about himself (…) *and I am not here in the position of a preacher or spiritual guide. I am a student of knowledge in the path of salvation as Ali Ibn Abi Talib said. I am free from any inclinations, I am a human being and an Arab and a Muslim and before being an Arab I am just a human being. Just*

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[143] He presents himself as a thinker and researcher of human thought.

a human that thinks and that is free (Harrir Aqlak, 18.06.2015, min 2:04). In this quote, al-Qattan presents himself as an ordinary yet universal representative of the human race and thus, underlines that the programme is of relevance to a broad public and not limited to religious Muslims. At the same time, we are told that he is not a guide [murshd] who should lead others, but rather a student himself inspired by Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad. I return to the role of Ali in the section "Religious pluralism and sectarianism".

Hence, the figure of al-Qattan is carefully selected by virtue of his strong and direct critique of Gulf society, his promotion of religious pluralism, his rhetorical gifts, and, not least, by virtue of him being a man from a Gulf country. The last part is intentionally staged by his garments and is considered an important element in making his criticisms profound and authentic. Mona Abdullah explained to me how she saw his outfit as an important element in the branding of him and the programme, and how she had asked him to change clothes before attending the press conference held by Ghassan bin Jeddo in connection with the conflict with ArabSat (see Chapter 8) – if he had shown up in jeans and t-shirt, no one would have recognised him, she noted. The programme Harrir Aqlak is designed to fit al-Qattan and present him in the most convincing setup; thus, the idea of a Ramadan programme came up because of al-Qattan – not the other way around.

In the following four sections, I look more closely at four central and reoccurring themes, which al-Qattan discussed during the thirty days of the Ramadan in 2015. First, I investigate his use of the legacy of *al-Nahda*, and then his view on religious pluralism and his understanding of Islam as cultural heritage, which, I argue, draws on the ideology of the Syrian Ba'ath Party. In the last two sections, I look at how he equates IS and Israel, and how he rejects the Arab uprisings. Both topics appear elsewhere in the thesis (Chapter 5 and 6) but here I am interested in how Islam is utilised to facilitate a particular political stance or a particular ideology, and how al-Mayadeen advocates the same message based on different arguments. In other words, I investigate what role Islam and religion at large play in *The New Regressive Left*.

Harrir Aqlak and the legacy of *al-Nahda*

As already mentioned, the eye-catching nature settings that al-Qattan appears in and which in every way contrast the nature of the Gulf, play an important role in the programme. The fertile and, at the same time, mountainous landscape, the sparkling water, and the coastal scenery are all characteristic elements of Levant nature. In contrast to the Gulf, the Levant together with Egypt has a long and proud history of urban civilisations, and has traditionally been the intellectual and cultural centre of the Arab world. The framing of Harrir Aqlak as *a small project of enlightenment* refers to the intellectual renaissance, the so-called *Nahda*, which took place more than a hundred years ago in – mainly – Egypt and the Levant. Al-Mayadeen and al-Qattan are consciously trying to draw on this historical legacy. The nature settings, I argue, facilitate the connection of the Kuwaiti al-Qattan with the intellectual legacy of the Levant.

The historical Nahda was generated at the end of the 1800s by the Arab encounter with a strong Europe combined with the weakened position of the Ottoman Empire, which together demanded and enabled critical internal Arab reflection. How had Europe gained this economic, military and intellectual superiority? What had gone wrong for the Islamic Ottoman Empire, including the Arabs? Why this decline? Questions about Arab identity, the status of Islam, modernity contra tradition, the relationship to Europe and the ideal development and organisation of society inevitably appeared, and answers were sought in different ways. These reflections led to an increasing criticism of Turkish rule, a growing Arab self-awareness, and a heartfelt need to reform Islam in order to rediscover its true strength (Hourani 1983).[144]

The global political and economic transformations were accompanied with profound theological discussions within Islamic environments about the correct definition of beliefs and practices – and eventually led to a reformation of Islam (Lapidus 1997, 449). Over time, these intellectual developments took different shapes and directions, and they have fed into the creation of movements as different as secular Arab nationalism, apolitical Salafism, and political Islamism (Hourani 1983, 163, 344, 360) – ideologies which all in different ways claim ownership to the concept of al-Nahda today. One important element of al-Nahda that unites different schools across ideologies and times, though, is the idea that the Arab and Islamic world is in a state of crisis and failure.

Stephen Sheehi describes the phenomenon: "The obsession of Arab and non-Arab thinkers, scholars, journalists, artists with 'failure' is not a coincidence, but rather a preoccupation that finds it roots in the very formation of modern Arab subjectivity during the Arab Renaissance of *al-nahdah al-'arabiyah*. These terms predominate because they are an outgrowth of paradigms inherent to modernity and built on the dichotomy of progress and backwardness" (Sheehi 2004, 3). This perception of the Arab world as somehow lagging behind constitutes the frame of Harrir Aqlak. In one of the episodes, standing at the beach with the sea and a dusky, light red sky in the background, al-Qattan expresses his frustrations about the backwardness of the Arab world and its lack of critical reflection: *It is in the nature of a human being to be inquisitive. Europe rose by asking questions, by science, by thinking, and by contemplation ... Europe rose, Asia rose, the whole world rose, except for the Arab Umma* (24.06.2015, part 2, min 05:26).

According to al-Qattan, the Arab and Muslim world is facing an existential crisis, and is in need of reform in order to face the acute problems of today. In the third episode, with the title "Read", his entrance point to discussing this crisis is the idea of knowledge. Standing on a beautiful green mountain slope with impressive stone formations and a lively cascade by him, he argues: *What the Arab mind is lacking today in these circumstances, in these political, intellectual and lifestyle disruptions, what the Arab mind is lacking, is knowledge. The Arab mind and the Muslim mind*

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[144] For a thorough introduction to al-Nahda, see Albert Hourani (1962/1983): *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939.* See also Yoav di-Capua: "Nahda: the Arab project of Enlightenment" (2012). For a critique of the understanding of al-Nahda as initiated merely by the encounter with Europe, see: Stephen Sheehi: *Towards a Critical Theory of al-Nahḍah: Epistemology, Ideology and Capital* (2012).

today are in need of spiritual and intellectual nourishment in order to once again have the initiative and once again to be in the forefront in regards to knowledge and to be in the forefront in regards to civilisation, as we used to be earlier (20.06.2015, part 1, min 04:43).

During al-Nahda, Europe played a very present role both as an actual threat and as a source of inspiration. The Arab world had to relate to concrete meetings with Europe whether in the shape of military supremacy – e.g., the French occupation of Tunisia in 1881, and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 – or in the shape of inspiring intellectual centres and admirable educational systems. This duality or fundamental ambiguity of the historical Nahda is still present in al-Qattan's thinking, though much less urgent. Europe, or rather the West at large, plays a less prominent role, as other parts of the world are equally used as role models.[145] Likewise, the West is no longer described as the primary physical threat. Rather, the West is often referred to as an almost abstract phenomenon that nurses its interests through the Arabs themselves – what is concrete, on the other hand, is its allies in the region – namely, *some Gulf countries* and *the Zionists*. According to al-Qattan, the concrete threat to Arab interests comes today from within, the Arabs and Muslims themselves, and crucially from the growing sectarian division between Sunni and Shia. He elaborates: *The West came and divided us into small countries. Today it conspires against us through what is called 'The New Middle East' which divides the already divided. I don't say that this is by Western hands, I say by Arabic Islamic hands – the new swords for the West. Islamic sectarian swords ... The division, I don't say that the US divided us or that the Zionists divided us, I say that Muslims have divided us. The Muslim today is the one who draws the sword of sectarianism and tears us apart, and who says: 'this one is Sunni' and 'this one is Shi'a' and both curse each other* (28.06.2015, part 1, min 9:00).

Almost a hundred years after the first *nahda*, the defeat that the Arab world suffered in 1967 created a renewed intellectual crisis. Behind the overall question 'Why have we been defeated?' lay many of the same fundamental reflections from the first *nahda*. For many thinkers at that time, the answer to 'why?' was the insufficiency and corruption of the secular regimes, and the solution became an Islamic awakening (Abu-Rabi' 2003). In the following decades and until the uprisings in 2011, the perception of the Arab world as being in a state of crisis continued to be ever-present. Whereas 2011 for some constituted a turning point in the Arab history, and the long-awaited end of decades of crisis, the point of departure for Harrir Aqlak is an insistence on a continual crisis, where the so-called Arab Spring is only yet another symptom of its gravity.

The present time, in accordance to al-Qattan, is a time of *fear*, *explosion* and – not least – a time of *takfir* [accusing others of being unbelievers] (18.06.2015, part 1), and a profound crisis in the state of the Arab mind and thinking is paralysing society (06.07.2015, part 1). Al-Qattan finds, in line with his predecessors from the first *nahda*, that the root of the problem is a misinterpretation of Islam, and suggests there is an urgent need for a new enlightenment project, a new *nahda*. The causes of the current problems are, thus, an ignorant and stagnated way of understanding Islam; a

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[145] Role models today can be found around the world: Japan as a role model, see e.g.: 19.06.2015, part 2; or 23.06.2015, part 1.

loyalty built on *assabiyya* rather than true Islam; and a belief focused on traditions rather than on the original source of revelation. The solution is no longer, as it was in 1967, more Islam, but rather a reformation of Islam inspired by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897), Muhammed Abduh (1849-1905) and the other big thinkers from the first Nahda.

Al-Qattan identifies the tradition within Islam to uncritically imitate or follow an Islamic scholar as the biggest problem of the Arab and Islamic *umma* [nation] and the reason for its backwardness (24.06.2015, part 1, min 0:39). Without entering a scholarly debate on *taqlid* [imitation, tradition] versus *ijtihad* [independent judgement in legal or theological questions], he clearly positions himself within the schism when he emphasises the importance of free thinking and interpretation [al-ta'byr]. He stresses that the human is born free with the freedom to think – and that this is the will of God.[146] In an episode shot at sunset on the coast of Beirut, with his usual direct and energetic approach, al-Qattan urges the viewer: *Oh brother, Ask! Think! Manage! Don't try to hide your ignorance. Yes, you are ignorant! When you allow others to think for you, you are ignorant. Don't allow others to think on your behalf. Think by yourself! God the almighty gave you the will and you are responsible in front of God, not in front of the tribe or religion. You are the one who is responsible* (24.06.2015, part 1, min 7:29). It is in the Qur'an – not in out-dated interpretations or dogmatic (extremist) convictions – that each individual can find the guidance and wisdom needed to face contemporary challenges, and the act of reading brings wisdom and insight to the reader. This focus on the individual is characteristic for al-Qattan's approach in general. He addresses the individual, pointing out that each person can make a difference and that all changes start from within, just as he speaks out against the reliance on *assabiyya,* and demands that each person take responsibility.

As mentioned above, the historical *nahda*, initiated by al-Afghani and Abduh, developed through the following generations into very different ideologies. The name of the Tunisian Islamist parliamentary party as well as the name of Muhamed Mursi's electoral programme for the presidential election in 2012 – a five year economic and social programme for Egypt's revival – are both al-Nahda[147], and this illustrates how the concept, together with its legacy, is still being contested and fought over today. When al-Mayadeen launched a programme with the stated hope of stirring a new *nahda*, the station entered an ongoing struggle over the ownership of the concept. Al-Qattan's role is to confront the Salafi and Islamist adaption of the concept and try to suggest another – more progressive – reading of this intellectual heritage.

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[146] See ex. 21.06.15, part 1, 2:10 where al-Qattan says: *God the almighty gave the human the mind, gave him the will, gave him the freedom, gave him the grace of interpretation, gave him the freedom of speech, the freedom of words, the freedom of thought – and this by the grace of God*.

[147] http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=29932&ref=search.php, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-election-economy-idUSBRE8550RK20120606

Religious pluralism versus sectarianism – and the case of Ajras al-Mashreq

An important element in al-Qattan's worldview is religious pluralism and religious tolerance. Even though he does not, as such, promote secularism or nationalism, at times he seems to be inspired by the secular nationalist ideologies from the 1940s and '50s – for example, the Ba'ath Party – in his approach to the role of Islam in society and his focus on respect for religious minorities. And in line with the Ba'ath ideology, for al-Qattan the glorious time in the Arab and Islamic history is the time of Andalusia, which serves as an important symbol of the ideal society.[148] What characterises this historical epoch is not only cultural and intellectual prosperity, but also religious coexistence between Judaism, Christianity and Islam – a quality endorsed by al-Qattan. In the episode from 22 June 2015 called "Tolerance", al-Qattan retells an anecdote about what he sees as true coexistence. The Umayyad Caliph, Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, who wanted to undo the mistake of his predecessor, decided to give back to the Christians some confiscated land where a church had been torn down and replaced by a mosque. But instead of simply accepting the praiseworthy offer, the Christians insisted on preserving the mosque and divided it into two entities – a church and a mosque. Al-Qattan ends the story by saying that the building still stands in Damascus, and until the present day, still functions as both church and mosque.[149] Between the lines, we understand that the Ba'ath rule in Syria has guarded this culture of tolerance from the Andalusian epoch – in contrast with the ideals of the opposition groups fighting for power in the country today.

The same message of religious tolerance is reflected in al-Mayadeen's general programming by Ajras al-Mashreq, as I introduced above. This programme brings forward a great variety of Christian churches, groups and sects in the Levant (and occasionally Egypt), such as the Maronites, the Greek Orthodox, the Eastern Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, and the Armenians, as well as representatives of the Mandaeans and the Sabaeans societies. Ghassan ash-Shami often travels around the region in order to meet with his guests, who mainly live in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria but are also found in Iraq, Jordan and beyond. The overall discourse of the programme has, from the beginning, been one of trying to counter the growing sectarianism in the region by exploring the religious diversity, the historical Christian heritage of customs, architecture and culture in general (all of which is presented as being in danger of extinction), and to educate the viewer about what ash-Shami sees as an important cultural richness, and proof of the civilised qualities of the Arab society. The doomsday narrative which had been pervading the programme reached a climax during IS's military offensive in Northern Iraq in the summer of 2014, when the worst scenario became a reality. Ash-Shami covered the situation intensively by hosting Christian representatives from the affected areas (through Skype); similarly, his regular broadcasts from Syria often contain messages about the acute threat against Christian societies in the region – just as is the case in Harrir Aqlak.

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[148] Ex: 24.06.2015, part 2, 05:30.

[149] Broadcast 22.06.2015, part 2, 08:17. He does not mention the name of the church or mosque. He might be referring to the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, even though that building is only actively used as a mosque today. The head of John the Baptist, though, is still kept in a shrine inside the mosque.

Whereas Ajras al-Mashreq and ash-Shami mainly focus on the Christians in order to prove how natural religious pluralism is, al-Qattan does not only highlight the importance of equality between the three *heavenly religions* – he also repeatedly stresses the inclusion of small sects and religious groups as Ismaili, Allawi, Druses, etc.[150] Again, a parallel to the Ba'ath ideology is notable. In Syria, the issue of religious affiliation has through the years of the Ba'ath rule been almost a taboo, both due to the secular ideology of the party and to the religious background of the al-Assad family. Religious differences were depicted either as irrelevant or as a potential threat to the national security. Nevertheless, religious coexistence across sectarian differences was – according to the official Ba'ath rhetoric in pre-2011 Syria – a national trademark to be proud of, yet not an issue to be investigated further (Rabo 2012, 81). Additionally, Lebanon served as the perfect reminder of the dangers of exploring the topic further. In recent years, though, the narrative has been changing, and today religious diversity has come to play an important role as an identity marker for the rule in Damascus.

Al-Qattan demonstrates the same interest in staging his inclusion of all religious minorities as an indicator of his progressive worldview. Thus, when he argues that God has created humans to be different and therefore that we need to accept each other in spite of different beliefs – and that some ulama do not understand the meaning of freedom and tolerance as the Qur'an prescribes – he uses the opportunity to once again list all kind of small sects and religious communities:

> *Yes, we differ; there are differences, and this is the human nature, this is how humans are, this is how human life is – different human mentalities, different culture, different experience ... So, it is very natural that human beings differ from each other – differ politically, differ intellectually, differ in doctrines (...) What if my neighbour was Christian, what if he was Muslim, what if he was Jewish, what if he was Ziadiya, Shi'i, Ibadity, Druze, any confession – accept the other. I say, as Ali Ibn Abi Talib, peace be upon him, "The human in front of you is a brother in religion or an equivalent to you in the creation"* (21.06.2015, part 2, min 1:05).

Thus, it is the will of God that human beings live different lives and, therefore, we have to accept and respect each other in spite of these differences. Another important element in the quotation above is al-Qattan's reference to Ali Ibn Abi Talib. Ali is a central person in the Sunni-Shia divide, as it was disagreements about his status that led to the split within Islam. During the programme, al-Qattan never reveals whether he himself is Sunni or Shia, though his general emphasis on Ali as

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[150] Al-Qattan also promotes religious tolerance between Sunni and Shia as well as between Islam, Christianity and Judaism. This is not unique, though; rather it echoes other important voices within the Muslim community. Al-Jazeera's media shaykh al-Qaradawi is an example of an important voice who, in his many years at al-Jazeera, has been an important representative of the term *wasatiyya* [middle way, centrism] which also includes a moderate approach to Shi'ites and a call for dialogue between religions (Gräf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2009, 203). Nevertheless, al-Qaradawi's tolerant tone has been challenged since the outbreak of the war in Syria. Since the spring of 2013, al-Qaradawi has not only taken a clear political stance by strongly condemning the acts of the Syrian regime, he has also abandoned his previously more inclusive religious agenda, by reading the war in Syrian through a more sectarian lens (Warren 2014, 17–20).

a source of inspiration creates an impression of a Shia inclination. This, however, seems not to be the case, as al-Qattan openly stated that he is Sunni during his second appearance on Alif Lam Mim in May 2015, in the episode titled "The reproduction of *fitna* [riots, internal strife] in the Arab and Islamic world".[151]

The Sunni-Shia division is also an important and returning theme of al-Qattan's talks, and on 28 June 2015, the whole episode was dedicated to the subject. Here, he once again underlines that it is natural that humans differ in beliefs and ways of life, and that it is exactly in the meeting between differences that new developments are facilitated. The violent struggle today between Sunni and Shia is unnatural and against the message of the Qur'an – it has led the Arab world to a situation *as if we are still in the Middle Ages, we talk with the accent of prejudices, and I don't say sectarian, rather I see it as a new assabiyya jahalliyya, which was prohibited by the prophet* (28.06.2015, part 1, min 6:06). Al-Qattan not only talks strongly against the phenomenon of internal Muslim division, he characterises it as an example of ignorant tribalism, using the term *assabiyya jahalliyya* – as he consistently does when discussing Saudi Wahhabism (I return to this in the following section). The cause of the sectarian division is to be found in the Gulf, he argues, where the regimes produce sectarianism as a political tool. He continues by stating that even though these regimes *raise the slogans of "dialogue between the religions" or "religious dialogue" or "sectarian dialogue", the truth of the matter is that these regimes export terrorists and export extremism not only by rifles and not only by killing and beheadings. The extremism comes through talk; the extremism is inside you when you refuse the other only because he differs from you in views* (22.06.2015, part 2, min 2:05).

This is a very direct accusation of the Gulf leaders, and illustrates how al-Qattan over and over point out the Gulf stats as 'the other'. They are infusing division in the population(s), they do not respect the order of human differences that God has designed, they pretend to be tolerant but are not, etc. In other words, the Gulf stats are working against the interests of the Arab people – and an implied contrast to al-Qattan (and al-Mayadeen at large) is, in this way, established. In this narrative, he can see through the game of the Gulf (because he is himself from the Gulf) and understand how they are misusing Islam (because he himself is closer to true Islam).

Al-Qattan's style is very direct, almost provocative in fact, as he attempts to reach each individual viewer by awakening his or her conscience and moral integrity. He places himself together with the viewers and the audience, and forms a 'we'. He looks insistently into the camera as he proclaims: *We have to confront ourselves with our own mistakes. Are we in reality tolerant? Not at all! Not at all! We are not tolerant. We are sectarian by distinction. We are all sectarian per excellence. We*

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[151] ALM, 07.05.2015, min 01:07:30,
http://www.almayadeen.net/Programs/Episode/ZZZBvbgJgEGZEBdaLBHKKQ/%D8%A5%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A

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are all sectarian. This channel is sectarian and that channel is sectarian and I am sectarian and you are sectarian, and if we were not sectarian yet we practise sectarianism, we practise sectarianism in our behaviour when we hint condescendingly to others of another sect or race or tribe or ideology (22.06.2015, part 2, 1:19).

Both the intensity and the intimacy are high. Al-Qattan is at the same time serious and eager, and as a viewer you are not in doubt of the essentiality of the topic. Much is at stake because sectarianism is one of the measurements when distinguishing the 'good' Muslim from the 'bad', or 'us' from 'them'. In this division, al-Qattan plays an ambiguous role, as he somehow seems to belong to both camps. His insistence on his Gulf identity not only gives him the authority to criticise that society, but also keeps him connected to his place of origin. He did not leave it all behind. At the same time, he is strongly placed in the Levant through the characteristic natural settings of the programme. This ambiguity blurs the lines between 'us' and 'them', and provokes the audience to rethink its categories, just as al-Qattan's insistence on drawing even the self-righteous viewer into the mud of sectarianism provokes the viewer to rethink him or herself. Furthermore, the fight against sectarianism is important because it constitutes one of the central identity markers, or core ideological concepts, of the (Lebanese) Left. Thus, here al-Qattan is able to unite leftist (secular) positions and religious arguments.

Two sides of the same coin – and the problem of Saudi Arabia

This ideology, the Daeshi Zionistic weapons, who supports it? The Gulf governments support it. The Gulf governments, with who are they siding? Whose allies are they? They are allies of the US and in them [the Gulf countries] are the American military bases, and my country Kuwait is among them. We are talking realistically and transparently. And I say it from the end, I tell you, this is the reality of the situation. Therefor Daesh and the Salafi Wahhabism are merely a Zio-American creation. And it is supported with money, ideology, and weapons (ALM, 07.08.2014, part 3, min 5:26).[152]

It was with statements like this that the Kuwaiti thinker and debater impressed al-Mayadeen's leadership the first time he appeared on Alif Lam Mim. Throughout the episode, the host Abu Zakariya had argued for Daesh and Zionism being one and the same phenomenon, and al-Qattan futher supports the point.[153] This idea of Daesh and Zionism 'being two faces of the same enemy' – as stated by Julia Boutrus in a flash during the Gaza War in 2014 (see Chapter 5) – is a basic assumption in much material from al-Mayadeen, including Harrir Aqlak.

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[152] Daesh is another term for Islamic State (IS), but negatively charged. I use this term when referring to al-Qattan's viewpoints, as he consistently uses this term.
[153] ALM, 07.08.2015, see:
http://www.almayadeen.net/Programs/Episode/Ms0K1wDOnk2P0KOAASEZBg/%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A1

The interconnectedness of IS and the Zionists is apparently also a topic of interest for al-Mayadeen's viewers. According to the producer of Alif Lam Mim and Harrir Aqlak, Mona Abdullah, it was the ninth episode, "The Zionists and Daesh", broadcast on June 26 2015, which was the breakthrough episode for al-Qattan and the programme. The first episodes had dealt with general religious or moral questions, and had not attracted much attention from the viewers. Initially though, Abdullah had been in doubt as to whether the episode should be broadcast at all. She felt that it was too strong an outburst coming out of context. Then suddenly, the context arose, when IS on 23 June 2015 released a video showing a group of prisoners in a cage being lowered into water and drowned.[154] Thus, the episode was broadcast as a direct response to this incident, Abdullah explains – and adds that IS claiming responsibility for the bombing of a Shi'a mosque in Kuwait on 26 June, some hours before the episode was broadcast, only confirmed her decision.

The episode itself is notably different from the usual set-up: it is dark, without any daylight, and a carefully arranged bonfire has replaced beautiful nature. The music accompanying the programme is dramatic, and underlines the importance of the topic. While the fire eats its way through the wood, al-Qattan offers a thorough clarification of Daesh, its origin, and its nature. With this dramatic setting as the background, he explains that the West supports both Daesh and the Zionist movement in order to destroy anything that upholds the existence of an Arab or Islamic identity. Al-Qattan rhetorically asks who is benefitting from the current destruction, and even though he never answers that question directly, it is clearly not 'true Muslims and Arabs'; rather, it seems to be the Zionist movement that sees its interests safeguarded. Al-Qattan elaborates:

> The Zionist entity came from the diaspora. It came to prove its descent from a land, which is not its land. Here is the problem: the practises of the Zionist entity. It displaced the Palestinian people; it destroyed houses, mosques, and churches; it erased the identity, any Arab identity; it erased every tree, it removed every beautiful tree, the Zionists removed every olive tree. And this is the same practice, which Daesh practises today, or al-Qaida organisation and the takfiri group, they are all the same. Names do not matter to me. Extremist groups whether Zionist or Islamist their practises are the same as are their goals, namely to extend the Zionist entity. The goal is the dream of the Zionist entity "From the Nile to the Euphrates" (26.06.2015, part 2, min 05:39).

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[154] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3135913/Sickening-new-ISIS-video-shows-caged-prisoners-lowered-swimming-pool-drowned-shot-RPG-blown-explosive-filled-necklaces.html

When al-Qattan refers to Israel as the 'Zionist entity', he is drawing on an tradition within the Arab public at large, including Arab Islamists (Gray 2010, 132; Baroudi 2014, 11; Suleiman 2011, 131), and is thus being far from controversial. What, on the other hand, stands out is his comparison of Zionists and Islamists. In this direct outline of how al-Qattan – and al-Mayadeen – both see a common agenda and shared strategies behind Israel and Daesh, it is worth noticing that not only are Daesh and Zionism juxtaposed, but they are also used to highlight a specific Arab or Muslim quality of tolerance and pluralism. Before being destroyed by external forces, churches and mosques were found side by side, and ethnic and religious pluralism were natural characteristics of the Arab identity: *Today, Daesh implements the Zionistic agenda of erasing the Islamic heritage, the Islamic identity, and the Arab identity with all its minorities, ethnicities and religions* (26.06.2015, part 1, min 05:35).

That fact that Daesh must be understood, al-Qattan underlines, as yet another face of the Zionist enemy does not mean that Daesh is not an integrated part of Muslim society or only an imaginary phenomenon – as 'some TV channels try to convince the public'. On the contrary, Daesh is a vibrant part of *us*, meaning Arab Islamic society. He continues *Daeshism is in our heritage, Daeshism is in our hearts, Daeshism is in our thoughts* (26.06, part 2, min 00:12). Thus, in order to tackle the problem of Daesh, Muslims have to reject the parts of the Islamic tradition that promote hate and lies, and instead return to the Qur'an for guidance. The tradition that has to be eliminated is Wahhabism because, in accordance with al-Qattan, *Daesh is the same as al-Qaida, al-Qaida is the same as the Salafist Jihadist movement and the Salafist Jihadist movement is the same as Wahhabism* (26.06.2015, part 1, min 01:58). Wahhabism, al-Qattan argues, was established by the English Secret Service as a tool to weaken the Ottoman Empire, in the same way as the CIA nurtured the Taliban in Afghanistan. The founder of Wahhabism, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, was invented by foreign powers and consequently worked for their interests, not the interests of Muslims or Arabs. He did not contribute with anything new theologically, but merely flashed the slogan – similar to what Daesh is doing today – 'There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger'.[155]

The criticism of Saudi Arabia's religious founder Abd al-Wahhab, together with its official state religion, Wahhabism, is a direct attack on Saudi Arabia, but al-Qattan also has more indirect criticism. A phenomenon which al-Qattan returns to over and over again is the problem of *assabiyya* in Gulf society. In several connections, al-Qattan identifies the reliance on *assabiyya* or tribalism as one of the fundamental reasons behind the acute crisis in Arab societies (27.06.2015, part 1, min 10:15 and 22.06, part 2, min 00:08) and an expression of a phenomenon which he refers to as *the new jahiliyyah*. Jahaliyyah means ignorance in Arabic, but in an Islamic context it also

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[155] During al-Qattan's first appearance in ALM, 07.08.2014, he introduced the same idea, see:
http://www.almayadeen.net/Programs/Episode/Ms0K1wDOnk2P0KOAASEZBg/%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A1-%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A1

refs to the pre-Islamic time prior to Muhammed and the revelation of the Qur'an. To suggest that Saudi Arabia, through Wahhabism, promotes an intellectual and not least theological standard that equals the time before Islam represents hard words, which are ultimately an accusation of infidelity.

Change or stability

Al-Qattan merges elegantly moral exhortations, a narrative of a cultural Islamic identity, and strong political statements. Yet the balance between promoting universal humanistic values and context-specific politics has changed over time – the turning point being the episode discussed above, "The Zionists and Daesh". From the ninth episode, al-Qattan became more direct in his discussions and comments on contemporary politics, while Islam seems to function more as a religious legitimising frame – a tendency that became even more pronounced in the new weekly episodes from 2016. During the month of Ramadan, al-Qattan often discussed the 'Arab Spring', the problems of the current non-democratic political systems in the region, and the need for change. And, as is the case for al-Mayadeen in general, he is faced with a fundamental dilemma over how to combine a rough criticism of the uprisings, a call for tolerance and pluralism, condemnation of the existing Arab regimes in the Gulf for their lack of democracy, and then more or less outspoken support for other authoritarian regimes in the region.

In general, al-Qattan is very sceptical towards the Arab uprisings, though he occasionally acknowledges that the uprisings had *a glimmer of hope* (18.06.2015). What he does accept is the legitimacy of the populations' dissatisfaction with old oppressive regimes. He talks about the need for change and *the aging of the Arab regimes* (19.06.2015, part 2, min 3:47). And he recognises that *Yes we admit that there are political mistakes committed by some Arab regimes, there are political injustice, suppression and dictatorship, and there are killers and oppressors and intelligence services everywhere which undermine the human, and kill the human, and violate his rights in the name of preservation of the homeland and national security. Slogans, empty words ...* (16.07.2015, part 1, min 3:30).

Thus, al-Qattan tries to embrace public frustration over existing oppressive regimes and – just as was the case in Bayt al-Qasid – it is a point in itself to recognise the existence of problems with the ruling systems. The rejection of the uprisings comes **in spite of** the current oppression. Al-Qattan continues his critic of the current *tyrants*, yet after describing them as *following a Pharaonic*[156] *path,* he turns around and asks rhetorically what the solution is to the current situation where Arab countries are ruled by *the Pharaoh's descendants*: *Is salvation reached through destruction of the country as has happened in the past years, in what is referred to as the Arab Spring? The solution – clashes!? Clashes!? Should I destroy my country more than it is already torn and destroyed?* (16.07.2015, part 1, min 03.42). The implied answers to these questions is, of course, no. Destroying one's own country is not the solution, and as this is what the uprisings have offered, al-

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[156] Al-Qattan's reference to Pharaonic and Pharaohs should here be understood as a general reference to a tyrannical style or tyrant leaders. It furthermore brings to mind the well-known Arab idiom that says that the Pharaohs became tyrants because no one stood against them.

Qattan suggests they are a failure. In his analysis, the uprisings failed due to their lack of centre, direction, future plans and strategy (18.06.2015, part 1, min 06:24) or, as he elaborates on another occasion – the Arab Spring lacked an ideological and intellectual spine. He explains:

> *Why didn't the Arab Spring succeed – or what is referred to as the Arab Spring? Here is pain and therefore the Arab street suffered and it cried out loudly, but no one listened. Not one ear was listening. Do you want to know the reason? The reason is that the revolution doesn't have a clear strategy. The ones who should lead revolutions are: the philosophers, and the thinkers and the scholars. For that reason the Arab revolutions didn't succeed but things became even worse and chaos and ignorance swept the Arab world and we became as if we were in the Middle Ages* (19.06.2015, part 2, min 00:44).

Thus, in al-Qattan's view, the regimes have committed mistakes, but the responsibility for the current destruction in Syria, Yemen, Libya and so forth is on the shoulders of the people who revolted in the first place. We all make mistakes, al-Qattan acknowledges, but not in this way, where *I revolt and call for my country to be torn apart*. The uprisings did not produce anything more than the violent scenarios we are witnessing today, and this is due to the irresponsible acts of the people. The fact that people took to the streets in frustration over suppression and injustice – but without any viable political alternatives – has, according to al-Qattan, resulted in nothing but more pain, ignorance, and poverty – and even more Pharaohs: *today you have tens, hundreds, hundreds of Pharaohs, which enter Arab countries with different names, the Pharaonic Daesh, the Pharaonic takfiri, al-Qaida al-takfari* (16.07.2015, part 1, min 4:14; 5:05).

Thus, in accordance with al-Qattan, due to the irresponsibility of the people, the state of the Arab world is now much worse than before 2011. The chaos following the uprisings has allowed for the real enemy to grow and multiply. Sunni Islamism in all its different forms and shapes (including Salafism) is appearing around the region, creating division between the people and stirring *takfiri* while it carries on the oppressive heritage of the Pharaohs. In order to further dismiss the uprisings, al-Qattan brings in the argument of foreign infiltration and external elements. Because of all the weaknesses and shortcomings of the Arab Spring, he suggests, it was taken hostage: *The Arab Spring was kidnapped by these Islamist movements, these takfiri movements, and Western intelligence services penetrated them and the American and Zio-American in the region have manipulated them and the Arab dream disappeared* (18.06.2015, part 1, min 06:55).

We already saw the 'foreign infiltration card' in the previous chapter on Bayt al-Qasid. This is the ultimate reason why the uprisings cannot be supported. They no longer (if they ever really did) represent Arab interests, but rather global imperialism, whether in the shape of IS, Israel or US. But al-Qattan does not stop here in his condemnation of the uprisings; the uprisings have also jeopardised the biggest blessing from God, namely safety and security. He continues: *The blessing of safety and security is of the most beautiful blessings which God the almighty bestowed on humans. Today, most or all of the Arab countries, which enjoyed calling for the Arab Spring, all of them are lacking safety, all of them, without exception* (16.07.2015, part 1, min 5:54). This

statement, though, is not neutral. Placing safety and security over, e.g. dignity and justice, as al-Qattan is doing, is a rating of values with both ideological and political implications. Politically, the focus on safety and security is in line with the rhetoric coming from the regime in Damascus, which has promoted itself as the ultimate protector of stability in the country. Ideologically, the prioritisation of safety and security together with a neglect of the originally democratic ambitions of the uprisings hints at one of the core ideological concepts of al-Qattan, as well as al-Mayadeen.

True reforms of society should not, according to al-Qattan, bring about destruction, sectarian killings, or blood. They should not *kill the identity*, not happen by *collusion with foreigners against the son of the soil or the army of the country*. Rather, the needed reforms have to come in the shape of political reforms, al-Qattan argues. Once again, clear political and ideological positions are wrapped up in his statement. Foreign interference is placed in opposition to both the people and the army – while the army is placed next to the *ibn baladi* [son of the soil][157], an emotional expression used to describe ordinary, 'authentic' people. The similarity to the reform rhetoric coming out of Damascus is notable, though al-Qattan provides the argument in a religious frame when he proclaims that *reform cannot be in destruction. Reform cannot be in absurd killing of people. Reform cannot be by blood, by murder, by killing another person from my religion. Reform cannot be implemented by murder according to your ID*[158]. *Reform cannot be done through interaction with the foreigner and conspiring against my fellow citizen* (16.07.2015, part 1, min 6:10).

Conclusion

At al-Mayadeen, Islam plays a central and subdued role simultaneously. Islam is obviously a factor that cannot be ignored when dealing with – or being part of – contemporary Arab politics, and al-Mayadeen is clearly positioned in the ongoing regional strife between Iran and Saudi Arabia, a strife which also includes a sectarian dimension. At the same time, many of the symbols, ideals, and historical references that the stations employs are connected to secular ideologies. There is no doubt that the station consciously and from the beginning aimed at catering to an audience that regrets the fact that secular ideals in the Arab public, to a large degree, are being marginalised. Harrir Aqlak illustrates how al-Mayadeen attempts to create a space where both secular and religious voices critical of Sunni Islamism are brought together. The contempt and fear for Saudi influence, whether political, cultural, or ethical, thus constitutes a meeting point for secular leftist and religious minorities (including Shi'ites), as well as for other parts of the public who find the shrinking of secular spaces worrying.

The heritage of *al-Nahda* is an important framing of the programme – yet another element that can appeal to viewers for religious, intellectual and cultural reasons. Al-Qattan not only plays with the legacy of the term and borrows heavily from some of the main ideas of this historical intellectual

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[157] See. e.g. Sawsan Messiri: *Ibn al-Balad: A Concept of Egyptian Identity* (1978) for a discussion of Ibn al-Balad in an Egyptian context.
[158] In many Arab countries, including Syria and Lebanon, one's religion is registered in one's ID – during the Lebanese Civil War, this was used extensively as a way divide and persecute the population.

tradition, he also engages in an ongoing struggle over the reading of the term – as well as the intellectual heritage. Both al-Qattan himself and the producer Mona Abdullah envision Harrir Aqlak as a *nahda* project, and the stated hope of al-Qattan is thus, to stir a new *nahda,* and to promote 'true Islam'. The concrete reason for doing so is his wish to counteract the Sunni Islamism being promoted by the Gulf countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular.

Al-Qattan is, in every way, the focal point of the programme. He not only talks without any interference, his personality and way of communicating are also intense. His Gulf cloth, his insistent voice, and his direct way of approach the audience; all of it supports his provocative statements. At the same time, he appears as an independent voice and a more or less unknown face to the public. In contrast with, e.g., the Syrian Great Mufti Hassoun, who is closely associated with the Syrian state, or al-Jazeera's mufti Qaradawi, who has a long track record of being a public media figure, al-Qattan's fame is in the making. His Gulf background combined with his Levantine 'exile' offers a particular platform or identity of legitimacy, through which al-Qattan can promote his messages.

He uses the Qur'an as *the* point of reference and *the* source of authority, but several elements of his message have similarities to the secular nationalistic ideologies of, e.g., the Ba'ath Party. In particular, his approach to religious tolerance, as well as his envisioning of Islam as a cultural heritage and ethical framework rather than religious dogmatism, has a resemblance to these secular ideological traditions – just as it talks into one of al-Mayadeen's most important characteristics, namely its insistence on religious pluralism as being part of the true Arab identity and culture. The programme Ajras al-Mashreq illustrates the latter feature even more clearly; here, regional Christian societies are not only accepted but even promoted and nurtured.

An important narrative in the programme is the picturing of 'the other'. The other is understood to be Sunni Islamists and Gulf society, but also the parts of the populations that chose to revolt against their governments and in this way, are seen to have jeopardised the safety and security of their homeland. Through the picturing of 'the other', al-Qattan also creates a potential community of viewers who feel alienated from Gulf culture, and who are worried about the consequences of the uprisings. The group of people who can potentially feel included in this community are not identical with the community of Bayt al-Qasid, just as the master signifiers who bind these communities together are not the same; nevertheless, there are clear overlaps. First and foremost, 'progressive values' such as tolerance, civilisation, education and culture are evoked (though the heritage of symbols differ); likewise, the excluded group, 'the other', is shown as the less civilised, less educated and less cultured element. In Harrir Aqlak, Islam is employed as a strategy of legitimisation or as a source of *ethos*. Thus, in the programme, the ideological discourse of *The New Regressive Left* is given an additional element, where Islam and the reading of Islam become an indicator of whether one belongs to the community or not – whether one is progressive or not. The aesthetic expression is at the same time cultured (the natural setting, classical music, Qur'an references) and populist (al-Qattan's anti-elitist approach to Islam, dramatic and direct style).

The Re-launch of Third Worldism: the Voice of the Global South and the Cooperation with TeleSur

In this chapter, I investigate al-Mayadeen's self-perception of being part of a global revolutionary South, and its relaunch of Third Worldism as a frame for understanding contemporary political developments in the Arab world – and beyond. The Arab experience with what al-Mayadeen considers modern Western imperialism – such as Israel, US-led invasion wars, IS, and the Arab uprisings – is to a growing degree framed as yet another manifestation of a global phenomenon, rather than a unique Arab issue. Thus, in the present chapter, I include the global perspective and look more closely at how al-Mayadeen perceives the world – and its own role within it. In this context, Latin America plays a central role as a political ally, an ideological inspiration, and a source of revolutionary spirit. Latin America is made present through the use of music, images and old icons such as Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, and used to steer nostalgic sentiments for the heydays of revolutions and Third Worldism. Equally, Latin America in general, and Venezuela and Cuba in particular, serve as contemporary role models, and the coverage of Latin American politics such as elections in Venezuela and Bolivia or the death of the late president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, are given high priority. More concretely, the Latin American focus has resulted in Ghassan bin Jeddo's venture of establishing close collaborations with the pan-Latin American TV station TeleSur and Cuban state TV, as well as founding a global media network representing the voice of the Global South.

The central narrative in al-Mayadeen's Latin American strategy is the story of the two regions – Latin America and the Arab world – being historically connected through immigration, shared humanistic values, and a legacy of revolution and resistance, as well as through shared experiences of Western imperialism. Thus, the narrative of 'having something in common' plays a central role in al-Mayadeen's focus on Latin America in general and the collaboration with TeleSur in particular, while the most important component of this narrative is the idea of a shared experience with Western imperialism. It is this aspect that I investigate by looking at selected episodes of Poder[159] (in Spanish)/*Nastaty'a* (in Arabic) [We Can], the monthly programme co-produced with TeleSur – including what could be considered the first pilot episode (though originally broadcast as an episode of Khas al-Mayadeen) from June 2015, in which Ghassan bin Jeddo is a guest in the

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[159] All episodes are available at:
http://www.almayadeen.net/programs/73/%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%8A%D8%B9--poder
I have selected five episodes of Poder on the basis of their relevance for the topic of this chapter. The episodes are: "The reality of Latin America and the Arab region" (08.06.2015) (link), "Chávez the anniversary and the remembering (27.07.2015) (link), "Venezuela after the elections" (28.01.2016) (link), "The media and its role in the path of the crises" (25.02.2016) (link), "The economic exchanges between the Arabic and Latin worlds" (28.04.2016) (link). Furthermore, I refer to the programme "Al-Mayadeen in Havana, 2013" (link).

TeleSur studio in Caracas in order to promote the future cooperation to the audience in both Latin America and the Arab world. I also look at the programme "Al-Mayadeen in Havana 2013", which documents the station's participation in the annual Radio and TV festival in Cuba in 2013.[160] Furthermore, I draw on interviews which I have conducted with al-Mayadeen's Latin American expert and key figure for all issues regarding that region, Wafy Ibrahim, as well as the presenter Wafa Saraya, who hosts Poder together with TeleSur's Abraham Istillarte.

Third Worldism – past and present

Third Worldism is, in the words of Robert Malley "a heroic ideology" (Malley 1996, 17) that came into existence after the Second World War and the decolonisation that followed. It compromises over different groups and visions but is held together by a fundamental ambition about breaking with "the vision of the world compromising a group of industrialised nations lending their civilising and developing hand to less fortunate counterparts" and to substitute that outdated picture with one of "a globe polarised between a revolutionary third world symbolising the future and an imperialistic, exploitative, and decrepit West" (Malley 1999, 361). In the following section, I first briefly draw the lines of the historical development of Third Wordism and account how it had lost much of its ideological strength by the 1980s. Secondly, I look more closely at contemporary elements of Third Worldism, and at how a party such as Respect in Britain carries on elements of Third Worldism, just as the ambitions of countries such as Iran, Russia, China, or Venezuela to counteract US hegemony are often articulated within the discourse of Third Worldism.

In 1955, a meeting was held in Bandung, Indonesia, bringing together leaders of new nation states and national movements in Asia and Africa, including Sukarno, President of Indonesia (1945-65), Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India (1947-64), Gamal Abdel Nasser, President of Egypt (1954-70), Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1954-69), Kwame Nkrumah, the future Prime Minister of Ghana, (1957-66), and Zhou Enlai, Prime Minister (1949-76) and Foreign Minister (1949-58) of the People's Republic of China (Berger 2004, 12). This group of political leaders was the driving force behind what Mark Berger refers to as the "first-generation of Bandung regimes" and the meeting signified "that world leaders no longer resided exclusively in Paris, Washington, or London, that there would be new names to pronounce and new faces to recognise: those of India's Nehru, Egypt's Nasser and Indonesia's Sukarno" (Malley 1999, 360). Thus, events in 1955 manifested a new political development that would lead to the formation of Third Worldism, and later, in the 1970s, the more moderate Non-Aligned Movement.

The discourse and politics predominant between the nations meeting in Bandung was a strong focus on modernisation and development. But the leaders of the newly independent nations not only aimed at 'catching up with the West'; they also perceived their own populations as needing education – or further development – in order to become full citizens of a modern nation. Or, in the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty, "from Nasser to Nyerere to Sukarno and Nehru, decolonisation

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[160] Similar programmes have been made in the following years, documenting al-Mayadeen's participation at the festival in 2014 and 2015.

produced a crop of leaders who saw themselves, fundamentally, as teachers to their nations" (Chakrabarty 2010, 54). A characteristic for this first-generation, thus, was that Europe was still perceived as the role model, as the ideal nation state which the rest of the world had to become like.

In an Arab context, these intellectual and political developments were continuations of, or a culmination of, the period of *al-Nahda* (cf. chapter 7). The ideology of Arab nationalism that – among other things – was born out of al-Nahda was not a uniquely Arab phenomenon; it found likeminded streams in other parts of the colonial or post-colonial world. Thus, the 1950s and '60s were times of the internationalisation of a postcolonial awareness and solidarity. As the list of attendees of the Bandung meeting also indicates, Abdel Nasser was *the* Arab representative of the first-generation of Third Worldism, but as the ideological stream was radicalised during the 1960s and '70s, and what Berger refers to as "the second-generation of Bandung regimes" took shape, the ambitions which Nasser represented slowly appeared outdated. The victory of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Algeria in 1962 turned Algeria into *the* symbol of not only Arab anti-colonial struggle, but also international Third Worldsim, because as Robert Malley argues, the liberation of Algeria became "a defining moment in the history of Third Worldism, for the battle had lasted so long, had been so violent, and had been won by a movement so acutely aware of its international dimension" (Malley 1999, 361). By the time the second non-aligned meeting was held in Cairo in 1964 (the first was held in Belgrade in 1961), the internal disagreements and power struggles within the group of non-aligned countries were clearly working against the formation of a strong united front. Similar problems arose from the fact that more or less all of the nationalist movements and Third World regimes had economic or military relations with one or other of the two superpowers – or both.

The previous key exponents of Third Worldism – Nehru in India, Sukarno in Indonesia and Nasser in Egypt – had by the end of the 1960s lost their initial political appeal and influence, or even passed away (Nehur passed away in 1964, Sukarno was removed in a coup in 1966, Nasser was defeated by Israel in 1967 and passed away in 1970). The heirs of the first generation were more radical socialist movements in their respective countries, inspired by militant revolutions around the Third World, and with symbols such as Che Guevara. In accordance with Berger, the second-generation Bandung Regimes "represented the practical complement to the rise and spread of dependency theory", "a more radical anti-imperialist agenda", and they "attempted to radicalise state-mediated national development efforts in various ways in the name of socialism and national liberation" (Berger 2004, 20–21).

While the 1970s saw the emergence of a number of new rulers who adopted a distinctly revolutionary Third Worldist tone and outlook in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the 1980s was the decade when the Bandung era came to a close. The new political and economic trends that emerged in this decade were dominated by the US-led globalisation project, the agenda of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), the renewal of the Cold War (e.g. in Afghanistan) and the weakening and later collapse of the USSR. The latter, together with successful capitalist development in East Asia in the 1970s, eroded the socialist element of the Third Worldist

ideology while the political results – or lack of results – of the second-generation Bandung regimes became evident, leaving the movement in decay (Berger 2004, 24–28; Malley 1999, 362–64). The Third Worldist governments had, in the long run, failed to deliver economic and social development to their populations just as the political systems more often than not suffered under authoritarianism, and military-led dictatorships.

In his 2004 book, *Conscripts of Modernity. The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, David Scott sums up the disillusionment which the heritage of Third Wordism left behind: "In many parts of the once-colonized world (…) the bankruptcy of postcolonial regimes is palpable in the extreme. Where in the early decades of new nationhood an earnestly progressive ideology (radical nationalisms, Marxisms, Fanonian liberationisms, indigenous socialism, or what you have) aimed at giving point to the relation between where we have come from, where we are, and where we might be going, (…) The New Nations project has run out of vital sources of energy and creativity, and what we are left with is an exercise of power bereft of any pretense of the exercise of vision. And consequently, almost everywhere, the anticolonial utopias have gradually withered into postcolonial nightmares" (Scott 2004, 1–2).

It is against the backdrop of these *postcolonial nightmares* that al-Mayadeen and TeleSur have attempted to re-launch the concept of a revolutionary South struggling against a imperialistic West. This vision, of course, does not come out of nowhere, but is rather an example of a contemporary ideological trend that draws on elements of Third Wordism in regional battles over power, and global power struggles against what is seen as Western (US) dominance – in this context, both Iran and Venezuela have played leading roles in the production and promotion of this trend. During the years of Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran has strategically aimed at developing relations with Third World countries, not least in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, adapting a rhetoric inspired by the discourse of Third Wordism (cf. chapter 2). Likewise, since the late Hugo Chávez's presidency (1998-2013) – continued by Nicolás Maduro (2013-) – Venezuela has represented a clear Third Worldist voice and pursued a anti-imperialist and pan-American agenda. On a regional level, Venezuela has been one of the driving forces behind the strengthening of the political and economic integration of Latin American and Caribbean nations, through initiatives such as the trade block Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) as a counteraction to US hegemony. On a global level, Venezuela has prioritised establishing strong ties with other governments that challenge the US global dominance, such as Iran, Russia and China as well as (to a lesser extent) Syria (Dodson and Dorraj 2008). According to Dodson and Dorraj, the relation between Iran and Venezuela during the presidencies of respectively Ahmadinejad and Chávez was further supported by strong personal ties between the two leaders. They write: "what they share in common is considerable: both are populist leaders of humble origins and both have military backgrounds; each enjoys support among the poor and has promised to distribute oil money among them; and both embrace anti-imperialism and support a non-aligned, developing world solidarity political agenda" (Dodson and Dorraj 2008, 81). One of the most recent examples of Venezuela's attempts to promote itself as a counter to the West and to strengthen its ties with its allies is Maduro's launch of

the Hugo Chávez Prize for Peace and Sovereignty, which he awarded to Putin (Pells 2016).[161] It might, at first, look contradictory that Russia, the representative of the Second World per excellence, has been admitted to the contemporary Third World alliance – but as I discuss below, at al-Mayadeen, Russia is seen as a country which, if not a victim of Western imperialism in line with Latin America and the Middle East, is then the ultimate opponent to Western imperialism. Thus, Russia is seen as an important ally of the so called Revolutionary South and its struggle against Western ideological hegemony (e.g., in the shape of a hegemonic democratic discourse).

This contemporary ideological trend is also visible in a Western political context. The character of George Galloway, former MP in the British parliament and leader of the leftist party Respect, is a central representative of an anti-imperialist leftist current.[162] Born out of the anti-war movement opposing the Iraq war in 2003, the Respect Party was officially established in 2004 (and dissolved again in 2016) bringing together far-left groups and Islamist figures around issues such as anti-imperialism, resistance against economic globalisation, the protection of the environment and the promotion of a multicultural society (Alistair Clark, Karin Bottom, og Colin Copus 2008, 516–20). Galloway himself has played a very central role in the party due to his "performance-based style of political engagement" (Crines 2013, 81) and through his work with both Iranian and Russian state TV, as well as at al-Mayadeen, he personifies the political alliance between these countries and regions. In the following section, I look more closely at how this anti-imperialist and revolutionary Southern discourse works in the cooperation between TeleSur and al-Mayadeen, using the monthly co-production Poder as my main case study.

The revolutionary South – united by imperialism and the concept of soft war

Al-Mayadeen is biased towards the southern world (…) al-Mayadeen explicitly declares its support of the human revolutions and their leaders, no matter their nationalities, people, religion, sect or rulers. It is therefore biased towards resistance in the face of any invasion or occupation (printed booklet, English version).

This quotation is from Ghassan bin Jeddo's presentation of al-Mayadeen in an official booklet handed out by the station at the Radio and Television Festival in Havana in 2013, in which al-Mayadeen participated, and it points towards al-Mayadeen's ambition to frame itself as *a voice in the revolutionary southern world*.[163] During my interview with Wafa Saraya – the al-Mayadeen hostess of Poder – she likewise stressed al-Mayadeen's revolutionary stance and global outlook when she explained to me that *al-Mayadeen has from the beginning had one approach, namely that*

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[161] The prize was awarded on the same day as Juan Manuel Santos, president of neighbouring Colombia, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in negotiating a peace agreement with Marxist FARC rebels.

[162] George Galloway was a member of parliament representing from 1987-2005 the Labour Party, and from 2005-2010 and again 2012-2015, the Respect Party.

[163] The Cuban state organisation The Cuban Institute of Radio and Television has since 2012 organized an annual radio and TV fair, bringing together mainly media outlets from Latin America and the Caribbean, but also the Iranian state TV's Spanish channel HispanTV, the Palestinian station Palestine Today – and, since 2013, al-Mayadeen. Link to the festival: http://www.rtvfestival.icrt.cu/?lang=en.

it is with the line of revolution and with the line of the people of resistance, yani, any injustice, any tyranny, any people who want the resistance [against that], al-Mayadeen is with them. Al-Mayadeen has symbols which were penetrating even in its initial promotional trailers such as Fidel, Chávez, Che Guevara. In the beginning we, here at al-Mayadeen, saw this image and considered that it is not only the resistance on the basis of the Arab world where we are based, but we are the only Arab channel that is in line with the resistance not matter where (Personal interview, Beirut, 04.12.2015).

Both quotations indicate how al-Mayadeen aims to elevate the Arab world into a global (Southern) framework of the people's struggle against (Western) imperialism. Saraya's statement furthermore confirms what has been visible when watching al-Mayadeen during its first years of broadcasting, namely that the global perspective was not fully developed from the beginning, but rather is an awareness – or strategy – that has developed over time. Whereas a pan-Arab perspective predominated in the first years, a narrative of a 'revolutionary South' and of a close connection with Latin America has gained strength over time. By globalising the Arab experience of the West, the line of resistance – which al-Mayadeen considers itself a promoter of – becomes part of a global line of resistance, and the revolutionary global South fights the same struggle for freedom and shares the same symbols across time and continents. What binds the Arab world and Latin America together, accordingly to Wafy Ibrahim, the head of Latin American-related issues at al-Mayadeen, is the fact that *historically there are many similar conditions, especially in regards to the United States of America's greed for the wealth of these Latin American countries and nations and Israel's greed for the nations in the Arab region* (personal interview, Beirut, 27.11.2015).

Thus, according to Wafa Ibrahim, the two regions have faced Western imperialism in the past and continue to do so today, though the immediate forms of it might differ. Ibrahim further elaborates by explaining that Israel is to the Arab world what the US is to the Latin American world. The US is a global imperialistic power that wants to control people and revolutions around the world, especially in the Latin American region. Israel, on the other hand, is an ally of the US, an artificial element in the region pretending to be a democratic state respecting human rights, but in reality, only a representative of US imperialism. In spite of the different appearances, the consequences of Israel's and the US's ambitions for, respectively, the Arab world and Latin America are the same. And it is this shared exposition to Western imperialism that constitutes the basis for the collaboration between the two TV stations, al-Mayadeen and TeleSur, as both have set out to counter the US hegemony over the global flow of information.

The collaboration between the two stations has so far materialised in the monthly programme Poder, which has been broadcast since June 2015. Each episode is made in close cooperation – every other episode is shot in Venezuela and Lebanon (or a neighbouring country), the teams of the two stations work together on deciding the content and the topics, the programme is co-hosted by the al-Mayadeen hostess Wafa Saraya and the TeleSur host Abraham Istillarte, and the hosts and the guests speaks their own languages (broadcast with subtitles). The programme deals with social, political, economic and cultural issues, and aims at both an Arab and a Latin American audience. What brought the two TV stations together is also visible as a common thread throughout the episodes of Poder. During Poder's first year, different topics such as the economic relations between the Arab world and Latin America, Daesh, the role of global media, and the destabilisation of the two regions by the US are all investigated with the shared argument that modern imperialism basically resamples previous colonialism, to an extent that only the strategies employed differentiate the two. Through the different episodes, we learn that the previous strategies employed by the West to exercise hegemony, such as military power and economic exploitation, still thrive, but today a so-called *soft war* [ḥarb naʿima] is equally being waged against the global South, involving media, civil society and NGOs, together with international financial organisations as the central tools. The concept of 'soft war' is a term used in Iranian political discourse "as a euphemism to describe movement of foreign ideas, culture, and influence into Iran through communications" (Blout 2015, 33). Emily Blout shows that the term emerged in the early 21st century (after the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the ensuing public uprisings in 2009) and argues that it must be understood not only as an adaption of Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power', but equally as a continuation of the "foreign conspiracy myth" which goes back to pre-revolutionary Iran. Blout argues that "soft war, as an iteration of the myth of foreign conspiracy, appealed to the majority of Iran's governing elite in that it conformed to preexisting prejudices and paranoia. Many of this group viewed the post-election turmoil as an attempt by foreign powers to bring about a 'velvet revolution'. Not only did soft war explain the unrest, it also provided a culprit for the high levels of violence, vandalism, and murder that accompanied the government crackdown on protests" (Blout 2015, 39). Thus, al-Mayadeen and TeleSur adopt an Iranian concept, and attempt to globalise its implications.

The idea of a soft war as a new weapon of the Western imperialist force is discussed in the episode of Poder from January 2016, called "Venezuela after the election". This episode was recorded in Caracas, where Wafa Saraya and Abraham Istillarte hosted the Venezuelan sociologist and human rights activist Antonio González for an analysis of the recent election in the country. In the opening, Saraya begins the episode by stating that a soft war has been launched against those who carry on the legacy of Chávez and the Bolivarian revolution, and against anyone else who says *no to colonialism, no to hegemony, no to imperialism*. In a short piece of reportage at the beginning of the episode, the concept of 'soft war' is further accounted for. Here, we learn how potential national divisions such as sectarianism and multiple ethnicities are being incited by the West through the media, and how US-funded NGOs aim to create chaos by supporting political opposition groups. The reportage also offers a historical, global perspective of the concept of soft war, going all the way back to the Prague Spring in 1968 – which is seen as nothing but another example of Western-

incited uprisings. Here Russia – and the old Eastern bloc in general – is placed firmly within the part of the world that has suffered from Western imperialistic agendas, when the voiceover explains:

Targeting Russia through soft war started before the 1990s, when the American way of life was portrayed as the optimal model of life, and this targeting continued either openly or in disguise ever since, and became evident after President Vladimir Putin won the last presidential term. Oppositional demonstrations broke out and continued for weeks throughout the country. Iran is another country that has been exposed to Washington's soft war. In 2009 the country experienced the so called Green Revolution which was carried out by the opposition raising the slogans of liberalism against the Islamic Revolution. A Green Revolution in Iran, a Cedar Revolution in Lebanon, followed by an Orange in Ukraine, The Prague Spring, the Damascus Spring [in 2000-2001] and the Arab Spring. Different naming was given but for the same goal; stirring troubles and planting chaos in countries that are not subjected to the will of Washington and what it dictates. Today the Latin American countries live an internal political struggle ... But it is in reality another episode in the serial of soft wars which Washington has carried out in all continents of the planet. The US is watching and working eagerly to end the experiment of the Left in Latin America, in particular in Caracas, which embodies the victory of the Chávez revolution and the heart of Bolivarianism. (28.01.2016, min 10:10).

According to this perspective, the US has been employing the same strategy across time and space – namely, interfering in the internal affairs of other countries by stirring public uprisings and chaos in order to weaken nations that are considered to be in opposition to its dominance. This strategy, we are told, already played a role during the Cold War, and has since then been used around the world. Today, a soft war against the leftist governments in Latin America is unfolding just as the Arab Spring has been constructed in order to weaken the Arab world through chaos and internal division. Opposition groups, whether in Ukraine, Iran, Lebanon, Damascus or Latin America, are supported by the US with the purpose of weakening national governments which are not serving the interests of the US – or, as Ghassan bin Jeddo explained in the first episode of Poder, where he was the guest of Saraya and Istillarte in the TeleSur studio in Caracas: the West is attempting to weaken *the governments and groups which we consider taqaddumiyya* [progressive] *and which we consider serving independence, the line of resistance against hegemony in general* (Poder/Khas al-Mayadeen, 08.06.2015, part 2, min 10:14).

In the episode, Ghassan bin Jeddo sits in an armchair on a small platform, wearing, as he often does, a so called Nehru jacket[164], which gives him an authentic and intellectual Third World look. Saraya and Istillarte, on the other hand, are placed a couple of metres away on some high bar stools,

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[164] The Nehru jacket is a lapel-less jacket favored by Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru. It has political undertones of anti-colonialism, in line with Zambia's round-necked 'Kaunda suit', Fidel Castro's 'khaki bush jacket', and Mandela's loose-fitting, colorful shirts (Grant og Nodoba 2009). Around 1968, the jacket was quite trendy in the West, introduced by The Beatles among others (Kutulas 2012). Though the style lost its appeal in the West rather quickly, it is still widely worn in India today.

wearing matching dark-coloured suits. Thus, this is not staged as cosy small talk between friends, but rather as a serious conversation led by to professional journalists allowing bin Jeddo the role of the native political analyst and visionary media figure. During the episode, a picture of a hostile and imperialistic West is established just as a global South – whether it is a geographical East or South – is created by a shared experience of Western attempts of interference, dominance, and exploitation. The West is working against the political camps which bin Jeddo considers 'progressive', by promoting opposition groups under the banner of Western buzz words. Wrapped in words such as democracy, human rights, and freedom of speech, foreign NGOs penetrate and undermine independent nations, and thus, expose them to the modern imperialism of the West, he argues. USAID is the preferred example of a Western organisation working for the interest of the West rather than of the nation it operates within (though this is not a NGO), but the concepts of civil society and NGOs in general are considered to be part of the problem (Poder/Khas al-Mayadeen, 08.06.2015). Another example of modern colonialism discussed on Poder is institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In the episode "The economic exchanges between the Arabic and Latin worlds" (28.04.2016), we learn that in spite of the end of direct colonisation, this does not mean the end of a relationship of economic exploitation. In a piece of reportage about the attempts of the BRICS nations to counteract Western economic hegemony, we are told that new strategies and tools are employed *in order to use it as new tools to control the resources of the Southern countries among them the Arab world in the East and the Latin American countries in the West* (Poder, 28.04.2016, part 1, min 16:13).

Facing these different forms of Western hegemony, the importance of a united South becomes clear because, as Wafa Saraya proclaims in the opening of the episode mentioned above, *together we are able to build bridges, provide enticements, strengthen the relations, direct the politics, disseminate knowledge, fight the politics of deception, monopoly and flattening of thoughts; because these nations possess the human and natural sources. Together we can really open the prospects of the future in order to strengthen our societies and develop them in the face of the wild capitalism which accompanied economic globalisation in the central administration of international economy through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and multinational companies which subdues, starves, represses, monopolises, and deprives these nations of their rights* (Poder, 28.04.2016, part 1, min 0:53).

Thus, the solution to the challenges which the global South is facing is solidarity and cooperation. Standing united will make the global South able to withstand capitalism and neo-liberalism, the contemporary face of Western imperialism. Likewise, we must understand from this that the cooperation between al-Mayadeen and TeleSur is more than merely a business relationship between two media outlets; rather, it is an attempt to face contemporary imperialism and represents a counteraction against the US soft war waged in the parts of the world that still resist its global hegemony. In the following sections, I look further into the cooperation with TeleSur. First, I investigate the two stations' understanding of the media's role in modern imperialism, and how this is translated into what they perceive as a media war.

Fighting a media war

Ghassan bin Jeddo is talking from *the heart of the great Arab world, from the heart of the proud Lebanon and its revolutionary and steadfast resistance* [muqawamatu al-thawriyya al-ṣamida] to the conference delegates in Cuba, the home of *history, culture and the revolution* (al-Mayadeen in Havana 2013, min 10:08). He appears on a huge screen in the conference hall of the Radio and Television festival in Havana in 2013 (as he was not able to be in Cuba as originally planned), and delivers an account of how he sees the global mediascapes. Today, he argues, the media is divided into two opposing camps – one that supports Western imperialism and one that remains free, resisting the Western hegemony. He elaborates as he addresses the participants directly: *You are with the public good and peace; they are with public misery and war. You are with media that serves the public good, the poor, the miserable, the intellectuals, the writers, children and women, and that defends the land, dignity, independence, and the love for cherished honourable life. They use and promote media that serves the public exploitation, corruption, the non-nationally minded bourgeoisie, colonialism, slavery, and the humiliated and disgraced life under different titles that impose hegemony on everything and in the name of everything. Here is where the role of the media becomes more important and effective in the service of the general good and the rights and humans* (al-Mayadeen in Havana 2013, min 11:31).

In Ghassan bin Jeddo's worldview the situation is clear: there are media with good intentions and media with bad intentions – and the latter is a tool used in the ongoing Western imperialistic 'soft war' against the global South. He regrets the professional and ethical downfall of the Western media and how it is being used to initiate and wage wars around the global South. The group of *free media* [al-ʿilam al-ḥurra] (as bin Jeddo likes to refer to them) meeting in Havana at the annual festival, represents, on the other hand, the global media group that al-Mayadeen considers itself part of. Free from Western dominance, free from Western political interests, free from Western imperialist ideology. Bin Jeddo's rhetoric is strong, the adjectives plentiful – and the message strikingly simple. As bin Jeddo continues his speech, he changes from speaking in the second person and attributing things to the audience, to instead speaking in the first person as he places himself and his station within the 'good' camp: *We are in fact with freedom, democracy, and human rights and we really want and seek and work in order to support the interaction between cultures and civilisations and history, and we do not have problems with any people but what our world witnesses now is really a return or even continuation of old renewed politics which want to impose hegemony over everything and by the name of everything. Here, the role of the media increases in importance and influence in the service of the public good and rights and humanity. We are with Latin America and a free Africa and its struggle, and with Asia, the history, the construction and with the minds that are able to accomplish a lot of humanity by cooperation and interaction and shared struggle.* (Mayadeen in Havana, 2013, part 1, min 12:01).[165]

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[165] The last sentence of the quotation was later reused repeatedly in spots and trailers at al-Mayadeen, as a slogan for its global South cooperation – accompanied by clichéd Latin American music and romanticised images of Cuba.

Thus, al-Mayadeen is taking part in this global media war that is unfolding; it stands united with the rest of the global South against Western imperialism, and for freedom. Whereas words like human rights, democracy, freedom and humanity are promoted by the West rhetorically, al-Mayadeen sees itself and its peers as the true protectors and promoters of these values. In this media war, the media of the global South has to unite in order to counter the hegemony of Western media, and the cooperation between TeleSur and al-Mayadeen is a strategic move towards realising this ambition. TeleSur, is like al-Mayadeen, a pan-regional project. It is based in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, and launched in 2005 as an initiative of Hugo Chávez – though it is funded not only by Venezuela but also by Argentina (until 2016), Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Uruguay[166]. The station is, to a high degree, a product of Chávez's political agenda to integrate Latin America, confront US hegemony and present the cultural and ideological voice of the Bolivarian revolution (Hayden 2012, 132; Painter 2008, 45). Its slogan 'our north is the south' is telling for the counter-hegemonic agenda of the station, which wants to present alternative perspectives to the dominating international viewpoint – or, as James Painter points out, "Its [TeleSur's] directors are fond of portraying it as an antidote to the 'information imperialism' of Western media and big corporations, whereby the dominant news flow is from the 'West to the rest'" (Painter 2008, 51).

When Chávez originally announced the ambition of creating a pan-Lain American news network, al-Jazeera was the model of inspiration, and from the very beginning a media alliance between Latin American and Arab TV stations was part of the vision. Already, in 2006, a year after the launch of TeleSur, the new TV station and al-Jazeera had signed an official agreement of cooperation with the main object of exchanging media products and collaborating on facilitating news coverage in the two regions (Ricco 2012, 3-5). TeleSur in general represents the ALBA (The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) position on events in the Arab world, and has been outspoken in its critique of Israeli violence with regards to Palestine. Thus, support for the Palestinian cause and how to perceive the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been an important topic where the two stations shared a political stance.

The common ground between al-Jazeera and TeleSur, though, was challenged fundamentally by the Arab uprisings in 2011. Massimo Di Ricco investigates in his article, "The Arab Spring is a Latin American Winter" (2012), how TeleSur and al-Jazeera drifted apart as the uprisings spread from Tunisia and Egypt to countries allied with Chávez's Venezuela, such as Libya and Syria. Whereas al-Jazeera eventually took a pro – some would even argue a proactive – perspective on the uprisings (cf. chapter 3 for further discussions on al-Jazeera's coverage of the uprisings), TeleSur's coverage changed between the end of February and beginning of March as demonstrations spread further. Whereas the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt were described as "popular revolutions" and the "victory of the people against an oppressive regime", the coverage of both Libya and Syria toned

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[166] In 2012 the station was owned by Venezuela (46%), Argentina (20%), Cuba (14%), Uruguay (10%), Bolivia (5%), and Ecuador (5%) (Ricco 2012, 3), and Nicaragua (?%). In spring 2016, after Cristina Fernández lost power in the December 2015 election and the conservative leader Mauricio Macri won the post as president, Argentina first withdrew its funds (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/28/argentina-telesur-tv-network-venezuela-hugo-Chávez) and later took TeleSur off air (http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Argentina-Continues-Censorship-Policy-Keeps-teleSUR-Off-Air---20160909-0005.html).

down the extent of the uprisings, stressing the continuation of normal everyday life (Ricco 2012, 7-9). TeleSur's reporter in Damascus furthermore presented Syria "as the main country supporting the resistance against Israel in the region and he blamed foreign power for destabilizing Assad's government due to his anti-imperialist position" (Ricco 2012, 13). It became clear that al-Jazeera and TeleSur were no longer in sync, and the partnership was suspended. One year later, al-Mayadeen appeared and offered itself as the new likeminded ally of TeleSur in the Arab mediascape. The cooperation between the two later allies is already now much deeper and profound than was ever the case with al-Jazeera, and whereas the relation between al-Jazeera and TeleSur to a high degree seems to have been driven by the wishes of the latter, the current partnership between al-Mayadeen and TeleSur seems more mutual.

Al-Mayadeen is not the only international media TeleSur co-produces with. In March 2015, it launched a political programme along the lines of Poder but in cooperation with Russia Today Spanish, and under the title "Venezuela and Russia at gunpoint" (Russia Today 2015).[167] In spring 2016, the monthly cultural show "Prisma" appeared, co-produced with Chinese state TV, CCTV Spanish (Duxuan 2016).[168] Thus, the cooperation between al-Mayadeen and TeleSur is part of a wider strategy of uniting media across the globe that offer a counter-narrative to the US-dominated media sphere.[169] Along these lines, al-Mayadeen also co-produces a programme which airs every three months, with Cuban state TV, as well as producing a weekly news bulletin (for free) for the Latin American market. Furthermore the Radio and TV festivals in Havana in 2013 and 2014 were important opportunities for al-Mayadeen to meet with a big number of Latin American media – Argentinian, Bolivian, Caribbean, Mexican, etc. – and initiate discussions of a future network of likeminded media outlets. And the ambition does not stop here. According to Ibrahim, the hope is of a global network including media outlets from *Japan, China, India, South Africa, Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique and other African countries* (personal interview, Beirut, 27.11.2014). Though the inclusion of Japan in Ibrahim's listing seems somehow out of context, the overall ambition is that the network brings together voices representing the global South, critical of US hegemony and interested in promoting an alternative media centre. Or as Ibrahim explains: *Our CEO, Ghassan bin Jeddo, has made an initiative that aims at creating something like a big international network with all the media that says: no to hegemony, no to wars, no to terrorism, no to interference in a country's internal affairs and all the ones who really struggle for humanity, yani, for the environment, for the rights of women, for the rights of the child, for all that* (personal interview, Beirut, 27.11.2015).

In spite of the high ambitions with the media network, al-Mayadeen has kept a noticeably low profile with regards to this project. Ibrahim explains that at the station, they have consciously decided to build up the network *slowly slowly* because *we are afraid; many will start undermining*

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[167] See the programme at: http://videos.telesurtv.net/videos/programa/programa/en-la-mira
[168] See the programme at: http://videos.telesurtv.net/videos/programa/programa/prisma-cultural
[169] In this context, the trend of state media to launch TV stations in foreign langiages targeting an audience abroad – like the US's al-Hurra, BBC in Arabic, etc, has also been counteracted by e.g. Iran launching al-Alam (2003) in Arabic, Press TV (2007) in English, Hispan TV (2011) in Spanish, or Russia TV in English and Spanish.

the programme and the project because many people are working against us (personal interview, Beirut, 27.11.2016). Ibrahim's answer points to the fact that this new media network is seen as a weapon in the media war, and, at al-Mayadeen, they expect it to be followed by a strong reply. The same perception is evident in an episode of Poder titled "The media and its role in the path of the crises" (25.02.2016). The episode is dedicated to discussing how the media is being misused and manipulated in order to control public opinion in Latin America as well as in the Arab world. At the beginning of the episode, TeleSur's host Istillarte states that *the purpose behind the use of media is not to create abundance of communication, and is not purely commercial, but rather to attack governments or ideological projects as the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, the Cuban revolution, the progress in Argentina and Brazil, and the Left in Bolivia and Ecuador. It is proved that the goal was to control the political power in these countries, in which many media organizations were tools used to undermine stability and to distort the reality of the achievements of these governments. This results in the loss of the voters' faith and the gaining of more space by the right-wing force in Latin America and in Middle Eastern countries* (poder, 25.02.2016, min 02.26).

Thus, the global revolutionary leftist South is exposed to an ideological media war led by the West in order for the West to stay in control of political developments in countries which are considered within its interest sphere. In November 2015, al-Mayadeen felt the media war – or what they at the station consider to be an example of the war – very concretely. On the accusation of al-Mayadeen violating "the spirit of the Honor Charter of the Arab Media which clearly and explicitly forbids the broadcast of any Programs that contravene viewers' rights and privacies, instigate sectarian conflicts, violence, differences, social disorder that disturb tranquility, disunite viewers, or degrade and demean any of the political and religious figures in countries of the footprint of the satellite", ArabSat decided to suspended its provision of satellite services to the station.[170] The conflict was triggered by al-Mayadeen's starring of a guest that accused Saudi Arabia of being responsible for the casualties during the Hajj 2015. At al-Mayadeen, however, there is a strong impression that it is the station's coverage of the war in Yemen and not least Saudi Arabia's role in the war, which is the real reason behind the conflict. The reaction from the Saudi-owned satellite company, ArabSat, was prompt and today al-Mayadeen is no longer available through ArabSat but instead on NileSat and Hot Bird. The incidence fits perfectly into al-Mayadeen's self-perception of being the progressive voice fighting against the oppression of the counter-revolutionary pro-Western powers, just as it confirmed the frame through which al-Mayadeen in general understands events and developments in the world.

From an al-Mayadeen perspective, a media war is going on, and thus merely being a media outlet makes you part of the struggle. Either you fight against the dominant media stream or you become part of the Western strategy for upholding its imperialistic ambitions. In this way, the cooperation with TeleSur is of importance beyond the concrete exchange and co-production of broadcast material – it is seen as a strategy to counter US media dominance. Likewise, the ambitions of a

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[170] See ArabSat's official statement in regards to the issue: http://www.arabsat.com/english/media-center/news-press-and-events/corporate/statement-of-broadcasting-via-arabsat-satellites

global media network is not merely an element of a business plan, but rather an attempt to turn an ideological stance into concrete action – an desire to promote a united Southern media alternative. The vision behind the network is, furthermore, an ideological insistence on the South as an active, independent body, rather than a passive victim of Western imperialism. Al-Mayadeen wants to make it clear that 'the South hits back'. Thus, the ideological promotion of the perceived weak as the actual strong – which was the key in chapter 5, regarding the representation of Palestinians – and Arabs in general, reappears here in a global perspective. As al-Mayadeen (and TeleSur) takes a clear stance with regards to this perceived division of the world, the TV station also sees itself as an active actor in this ongoing media war between two opposing forces. One important perspective offered in Poder to understand this division is a Right-Left dichotomy – where the rightwings represent or support the West, while the leftists side with the global South. In the following section, I look more closely at how the ideal Left is perceived and ask the question: which Left?

Which Left?

Wafy Ibrahim talks with a strong conviction in her voice. She pauses, and looks at me to ensure that I have understood what she is explaining to me. It is evening and I am sitting in the guestroom in her private home in the suburbs of Beirut. The walls in the room are covered with political posters, private photos, souvenirs, flags, and other carefully collected items from Latin America, mainly Cuba. Ibrahim has just started her account of American neo-Imperialism in Latin America, and the Arab world, and she is eager to tell me how she sees this issue. Ibrahim is the main person at al-Mayadeen on issues relating to Latin America, whether as an expert on the region, a translator, editor-in-chief of the al-Mayadeen website in Spanish (launched in 2013) or as part of the steering group working on the Latin American strategy of the station – and not least as the well-connected person who can 'open doors' in Latin America.

Ibrahim lived for Cuba in ten years after she followed her future husband – who had been elected the Lebanese communist party representative to Cuba – and left Lebanon in 1980. During her years in Cuba she travelled around most of Latin America working as a translator in connection with Arab political delegations traveling to the region, a job that through the years made her very well-connected within leftist political circles in Latin America. After her return to Lebanon in 1991, she continued her work as a translator, mainly for the Cuban embassy in Lebanon. Furthermore, she was also the coordinator of the "Lebanese Committee of solidarity to release the Five Cuban Heroes"[171], and in 2008 she was honoured with the "The Medal of Friendship" by The Cuban president Fidel Castro.

Ibrahim started her work at al-Mayadeen as a freelance translator, but was rather quickly offered a full-time position at the station, as the work she was doing became more and more central. Apart from her work as translator and her role as the Latin American expert, she has become an essential figure for the collaboration with Latin American TV stations as her huge personal network in the region has been essential for al-Mayadeen's entrance into the Latin American mediascape – it is

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[171] http://www.lebanese4cuban5.com/

difficult to imagine that the cooperation with TeleSur and Cuban state TV could have been established as quickly and successfully without her at the steering wheel. As one of the few people I managed to meet at al-Mayadeen, Ibrahim was very enthusiastic about meeting with me, and clearly had certain issues that she wanted to discuss with me – or rather explain to me – namely, the effect of Western imperialism and US hegemony on Latin America and the Arab world, and the division between the revolutionary South and the Left on the one side, and Western imperialism and the Right on the other side.

This camp-based thinking, or global Left-Right dichotomy, that Ibrahim promotes is obviously in line with TeleSur's ideological base, but it is equally a worldview that is becoming more and more visible at al-Mayadeen, not least as a result of the partnership with TeleSur and Cuban state TV. This does not mean that al-Mayadeen has not been promoting it from day one, as, e.g., by its employment of a character such as George Galloway (hosting his weekly show Kalima Hurra [Free Words]) illustrates. Through this perception of the world, it is possible to read regional developments as global phenomena – to lift the Iranian-Saudi Arabian political power struggle into a Left-Right frame, where socialism is struggling against the hegemonic capitalism. Where cultural leftism constitutes the background setting for Bayt al-Qasid (see chapter 6), the concept of the Left is a more direct political denomination in al-Mayadeen's approach to Latin America. As a result of the leftist governments that have come to power in several Latin American countries during the past decade or two, the region offers itself as a contemporary, authentic, and very concrete role model for revitalizing the leftist values of the past. The late Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and Cuba's late former president Fidel Castro are both promoted as heroes. The latter was, e.g., celebrated as being Worthy of Life in 2015, while the former was the topic of the second episode of Poder starring Abdel Bari Atwan (27.07.2015). The fact that Abdel Bari Atwan was the first guest on Poder (aside from Ghassan bin Jeddo) indicates the important role he plays at al-Mayadeen – he is considered the safe choice when launching not only a new programme, but also future working cooperation between the two stations. During the conversation, Chávez's commitment to the Palestinian cause, his importance as an icon for global Southern resistance, as well as his role for the revival of the Latin American Left, were all discussed thoroughly. Atwan stressed how the Arab world is in need of the heritage of Chávez, because this heritage *combines democracy with the Left, and the Left, yani, the Left that is siding with the poor. The Left that is siding with development, the Left that is siding with self-sufficiency, and with supporting people and the issues of the people* (Poder, 27.07.2015, min 05:36). To state that Venezuela led by Chávez is a role model for how to integrate democratic principles in leftist ideology is surely a statement that is up for contestation[172]. For example, Barry Cannon terms Chávez "populist", and adds that he "shows some authoritarian tendencies" (Cannon 2009, 139), while Rachel Vanderhill uses Venezuela under Chávez as one of her three examples of states that promotes authoritarianism abroad and she argues that Venezuela – like Iran and Russia – views "the spread of democracy as tied to the spread of US influence because

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[172] Other than the examples provided in the text, see also e.g. Jorge Castanda:"Latin America's Left Turn" (Castaneda 2006) or Maxwekk Cameron's and Flavie Major's review of several books on the subject:"Venezuela's Hugo Chávez: Savior or Threat to Democracy" (Cameron og Major 2001).

of a belief that more democratic states are more likely to support the Unites States" (Vanderhill 2012, 6). A similar criticism has been made of Chávez's proclaimed prioritisation of the poor, where critics have accused Chávez of investing too much oil money in regionally strategic politics rather than his own population (Castaneda 2006). Nevertheless, at al-Mayadeen, Chávez is a hero, and the criticism would typically be seen as yet another representation of Western imperialism.

Later in the programme, the hostess Wafa Saraya, digs deeper into the issue of the Left in the Arab world when she asks Atwan *but why does the Latin Left succeed in the elections and also govern and lead in Latin America from Bolivia to Argentina and also in Venezuela and Cuba, while the Left in our Arab world is retreating or to some extent, is becoming decoration for the authority. When it [the Arab Left] participates in governments, it does that either only in appearance or devoid of its principles* (Poder, 27.07.2015, min 18:52). Thus, here the Left and the leftist governments in Latin America are framed as a success, against which the Arab Left and Arab governments can be measured. When a leftist wave can run through Latin America, then why is the Left in the Arab world dissolving? How can the Arab world learn from the experiences of Latin America?

As a reply to the question, Atwan argues that the Left in Latin America comes from the bottom and not from the middle class, as is the case in the Arab world; thus, it is an *authentic Left*, a Left of the poor. Furthermore, the Latin American Left came after great struggles against dictatorships and repression. This is why the Left is blossoming in Latin America and there is a state of *awareness* and *intellectual renaissance* [nahda fakriyya]. In the Arab world, on the other hand, most of the Left is close to the bourgeois side rather than being the struggle of the people. And, he adds, *we [the Arabs] took this Left from Europe and not from its original source. In Latin America, this left came offering a different model of asceticism* (Poder, 27.07.2015, min 12:12). But the most important reason for the success of the Left in Latin America is that they offer the *authentic Left* [al-Yasar al-'aṣli], that represents the people, and which has been able to turn talk about social justice into action. Atwan explains *we [the Arabs] talk about social justice but little do we achieve, while South America and the South American Left have achieved social justice which is the heart of socialism. Yani, this is the difference. The most important thing is social justice* (Poder, 27.07.2015, min 20:49).Thus, Atwan considers the Latin American Left to be more authentic then the Left in the Arab world, because it has succeeded in turning theory into practice, or, more precisely, into realising social justice – which Atwan argues is the central nerve of socialism. Though Atwan's assertion about social justice in Latin American can be contested, the statement itself is important as Atwan comes back to one of the historical 'core concepts' of the Left as a measurement of success.

When I discussed the topic of the Left with Wafy Ibrahim, she was very keen on stressing that al-Mayadeen wants to promote what she referred to as *the New Left* [al-Yasar al-jadid], or the Big Left [al-Yasar al-Kabir], by which she means a version of the Left that is not just reproducing socialism in accordance with the old USSR, but rather a Left that represents a strong anti-neoliberalism combined with the resistance and commitment of the people through engaging, e.g., social movements, worker unions, women rights unions etc. She further offered Cuba as an example of

how the exclusive cooperation with the USSR (which was done out of necessity due to the international boycott) had been problematic, and how the current renewal of socialism which Castro has initiated offers directions forward (personal interview, Beirut, 03.12.2015). Or, as she phrased it during our other interview: *I want the Left, but I want the Left to be reformed* (personal interview, Beirut, 27.11.2015).

Ibrahim, in line with Atwan, finds a contemporary role model in Latin America – here in the shape of Castro. The president of Cuba, according to Ibrahim, adjusted and reformed socialism, and thus, made it authentic – not just copying from the USSR, as was the case earlier in history. For Ibrahim, the concept of the Left is tightly connected to resisting US hegemony, as one of the key US strategies for exercising imperialism is through its liberal economy. Thus, fighting for social justice is part of resisting US-led economic imperialism – and this is one of the central interest points which TeleSur and al-Mayadeen share, and can collaborate around. Along the same lines, Wafa Saraya explains: *in one way or another both al-Mayadeen and TeleSur are resisting imperialism led by the US. They [al-Mayadeen and TeleSur] are – as I told you – with liberalism. I mean, wherever there is any liberal thought they will support it and stand with it. Now this small experiment of "Poder" will develop into something bigger. (...) I want to tell you, the leftist is the one who resists any... maybe anything that takes away his freedom. He resists with the human, with the people wherever they are. Sure this is what TeleSur and al-Mayadeen believe in. That is why they have formed this network through which they might move independently in the future. I can't tell* (personal interview, Beirut, 04.12.2015).

In accordance with Saraya, the US is promoting its imperialistic interests by supporting economic liberalism around the world; as such, being leftist means resisting this imperialism. Here, Saraya links liberalism with imperialism, and resistance with leftism, and it is the struggle against the two former, and the support of the two latter, which bring al-Mayadeen and TeleSur together. In this way, leftist economic values such as social justice become a weapon in the struggle against imperialism and underpin one of al-Mayadeen's other official values, namely 'The right of peoples to resist and refuse foreign interference or hegemony'.

Conclusion

Al-Mayadeen's prioritisation of Latin America is important in several ways. First of all, it is a noticeable political message when the station decides to launch its website in Spanish rather than English, when it engages in cooperation with TeleSur and Cuban state TV, and when it glorifies Latin American icons (Che Guevara, Fidel Castro), as well as when it idealises former revolutions and contemporary regional politics. It is a clear message about what al-Mayadeen – and *The New Regressive Left* – perceives as the relevant centres of the world, who is considers important allies and likeminded peers, and which ideological values it wants to promote. Secondly, this international outlook ensures that al-Mayadeen places itself and the ideological discourse which it represents within a global context. What at one time looked like a particular Arab problem or Arab crisis is instead being read as an international phenomenon of Western imperialism, placing al-Mayadeen

within a global alliance of anti-imperialist movements. Thirdly, the overall approach to Latin America is predominated by nostalgic and romantic sentiments, sentiments which have come to constitute important elements of *The New Regressive Left*.

At al-Mayadeen and TeleSur, overall imperialism today is seen as a continuation of earlier Western colonialism, only in new forms where the West exercises its hegemony through an economic war as well as a so-called 'soft war' against the global South. Whereas international financial institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO are tools in the first case, the media and NGOs are seen as central actors in the second case. As military power no longer is the key tool for imperialistic projects, political, economic, and media dominances have become equally important strategies. The result is ongoing wars fought within these dominances between an imperialistic West and a counteracting South – wars between the political Right against the Left, between capitalism and socialism, between big international media concerns and alternative media outlets. In this conflict, al-Mayadeen seeks to play an active and outspoken role as the global representative of the Arab people in general, and the Arab line of resistance in particular.

While al-Mayadeen draws heavily on the rhetoric and ideological outlook of Third Worldism from the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, the international political reality is fundamentally different from the time of the Cold War and the USA-USSR leadership of the world. Whereas Third Worldism originally developed as a response to the bipolar division of the world, as an attempt by the newly independent former colonies to form an alternative to siding with either the USA or the USSR, the revolutionary global South of today sees the US and the West as the exclusive threat. Russia, on the other hand, has transformed into not only an ally but also a likeminded (though militarly stronger) peer, finding itself fighting the same fight as the former Third World, namely, against US hegemony.

Conclusion

When I started working on this thesis, I was curious to understand some of the ideological and media developments that had been stirred by the public uprisings that took place across the Arab world in 2011. I was interested to hear the more silent voices, the voices of the parts of the Arab population which did not represent or identify with either the hope and vision of the young progressive activists initiating the uprisings, or with the strategy and ambition of the growing Islamist tendency, whether in political life (e.g., the election of Mursi in Egypt), on the battlefield (e.g., the militarisation and Islamisation of the uprising in Syria) or in the media (e.g., IS's online media campaign). Sitting in Copenhagen in 2012, I was curious to investigate alternative voices to the ones that had first caught the attention of media and academia alike. When al-Mayadeen was launched, I knew that this could become an outlet for exactly that. Thus, my intentions with this project have been two-fold. I wanted to investigate not only the TV station al-Mayadeen, an important representative of post-2011 Arab mediascapes, but also how it is part of a growing political trend and ideological discourse in Arab ideoscapes (and beyond), which I have called *The New Regressive Left*. In the following sections, I sum up al-Mayadeen's positioning in contemporary Arab media- and ideoscapes; then I move on to reflect upon the terminology of regressive versus progressive; and finally, I pin down what characterises *The New Regressive Left*.

Placing al-Mayadeen in the Arab media- and ideoscapes

Al-Mayadeen came into existence as a response to the ideological and political developments that followed the Arab popular uprisings, and in particular as a concrete response to al-Jazeera's stance with regards to these uprisings. When al-Jazeera, after the first few weeks of hesitation, decided to stand with the Syrian people who took to the streets – and to cover the Syrian uprising in line with the Egyptian and Libyan ones – it at the same time abandoned its previous appreciation of the 'line of resistance', or the concepts of *muqawama* and *mumana'a*. This editorial move furthermore signalled the end of al-Jazeera's previous strategy of bringing together the voices of the most important Arab nationalists and Islamists, and also Leftists and liberals at large – in other words, a reflection of the important political and ideological developments of the 2000s, what Michaelle Browers refers to as "cross-ideological alliances". The sacrifice of values such as *muqawama* and *mumana'a* in the name of democracy – and, in time, in favour of the Islamist element of the alliance – alienated part of the station's staff as well as part of its audience. Mainly among Arab nationalists and groups within the Left, this move by al-Jazeera was read as an abandonment of the struggle against Western imperialism in general, and Israel in particular; an ideological prioritisation that they could not accept.

Before al-Jazeera's repositioning within the mediascapes, the popularity of Hizbollah's TV station al-Manar had been challenged for several years. The broad popularity that Hizbollah had enjoyed in the early 2000s (reaching its apex in 2006), was already shrinking before 2011, and as the movement transformed from being a pan-Arab phenomenon to once again being a Shia interest

organisation, al-Manar's public appeal also decreased. Thus, an important pan-Arab voice of *muqawama* had by 2011 lost its broad public influence. This repositioning within the Arab mediascape created the necessary space for a voice that would re-launch notions such as *muqawama* and *mumana'a,* and redirect attention towards the struggle against Israel.

While al-Jazeera's and al-Manar's new positions left a void in the Arab mediascape, the on-going regional power struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia constituted an essential premise for al-Mayadeen's existence. At al-Mayadeen different – and sometimes opposing – voices are brought together by a shared frustration over, and even fear of, the growing influence of the ideology and politics of the Gulf region in general, and Saudi Arabia in particular: the sponsoring of intolerant versions of Sunni Islam in different forms, plus close relations with the US and thus, the continued acceptance of Israel's conduct in the region. The fact that al-Mayadeen is located in Lebanon is a clear illustration of its underlying ambition to counterweigh the influence of the Gulf – within the media sphere in general, and in news production in particular. Its location in the southern suburbs of Beirut further underlines this positioning, while it also spells out how al-Mayadeen should be understood as a part of an Iranian media strategy.

While the previous two decades were characterised by pluralisation in Arab media, the post-2011 Arab mediascape has, in several ways, become more fragmented. The previous inclusive and diverse ambitions of, e.g., al-Jazeera – as symbolised in its motto 'One opinion and the other' – have been replaced by a more exclusionary and singular tendency, where people of the same opinion become isolated in an echo chamber – as expressed in al-Mayadeen's slogan, 'The reality as it is'. While al-Mayadeen is both a product of and a contribution to the echo chamber phenomenon, this does not mean that al-Mayadeen promotes Bashar al-Assad as Syrian state TV would do, or celebrates Hizbollah as al-Manar does. The narrative at al-Mayadeen is more complex, as the station targets an audience that consists of different population groups mainly united by their eagerness to counterweigh Gulf influence and by their contempt for Sunni Islamism and Saudi Arabian-sponsored Wahhabism. Rather, al-Mayadeen shares certain similarities with the Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar, in the way the two media outlets insist on their independence from the Gulf, attempts to bridge different (mainly secular) voices on the basis of *muqawama* and *mumana'a*, and, thus, end up as more or less outspoken supporters of the al-Assad rule in Syria, Hizbollah and Iran.

Earlier, I drew the contextures of a typology of the contemporary Arab Left describing four camps: namely, the Anti-Imperialist, the Anti-Authoritarian, the New New Left, and the Compromising Left. While the Anti-Authoritarian camp to a large degree would be considered problematic at al-Mayadeen – especially its acceptance of foreign (Western) intervention in, e.g., Syria, as well as the adaption of (what is perceived as) a US-inspired agenda of liberalism – the Anti-Imperialist camp and al-Mayadeen are to a large degree in sync, especially when it comes to the appreciation of the values of *muqawama* and *mumana'a* , and the uncompromising rejection of Western intervention in the Syrian war (and simultaneously, an appreciation of the Russian intervention). The ideological discourse at al-Mayadeen is, nevertheless, more multifaceted than that of the Anti-Imperialist camp, and the station hosts figures that would never see the light of day on, e.g., Syrian state TV. This is

partly because Syrian state TV would not want to present voices that are ambivalent towards Bashar al-Assad, but equally importantly, because those figures would also not like to be linked directly to the Syrian state's media strategy. Thus, the camp that I refer to as the Compromising Left plays a central role at al-Mayadeen as it ensures a degree of complexity in the station's agenda, and creates space for doubts, ambiguity, and ambivalence.

While al-Mayadeen clearly draws on the ideological heritage of the Arab Left, not least of the Syrian Ba'ath Party and the SNNP, the ideoscapes which al-Mayadeen moves within nevertheless extend beyond the Arab Left and include the worldviews of Hizbollah and Iran. The components from Hizbollah and Iran feed into the Leftist discourse of *muqawama* and *mumana'a,* while at the same time making the topic of religion in general, and Islam in particular, inevitable. While it is difficult to discount the importance of Iranian funding, the station consciously targets a secular and leftist audience. This ideological dilemma is bridged by introducing religious tolerance or religious pluralism as a central mantra – as is clearly reflected in the station's prioritisation of not only the region's Christian communities – most clearly illustrated by the programme Ajras al-Mashreq – but also of the general religious mosaic of the Levant, including, but absolutely not limited to, the Shi'ite minority.

Progressive or Regressive?

When engaging with the broadcast material of al-Mayadeen and thus, when engaging with the ideological discourse of *The New Regressive Left,* the terms progressive and regressive are up for revision. Choosing the negatively charged – and thus, also rather provocative – name of *The New Regressive Left* shows my intentions: to play with exactly these two terms and with our preconceptions of them. At al-Mayadeen, values that are traditionally related to being progressive, such as secularism and religious pluralism, public revolution and anti-colonial struggle, the continued insistence on the Palestinian's rights, the fight against neo-liberalism, the struggle for women rights, etc., are all celebrated. At the same time, when al-Mayadeen translates these values into politics, the result is the preservation of the past: a preference for 'a strong leader', and safety and security over the voice of the people and political change; nationalism and patriotism as the supreme moral ideals; and the portrayal of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with its authoritarian political system and religiously fundamentalist ideology, as progressive.

The chapter on the iconization of Jamila Bouhired made evident that the celebration of this former female fighter was also a celebration of progressive values, such as the (secular) struggle against colonialism, the view of women as an important part of this struggle alongside men, and pan-Arab solidarity. At the same time, the celebration became a dismissal of the uprisings of 2011, a message about the need to look back in time in order to find appropriate role models and 'better days', and a lost opportunity to discuss terrorism contra resistance struggle, or to question whether the emancipation of women necessarily means that they have to become 'just like men'. In several ways, the celebration was furthermore a confirmation of the ideological prioritisation of '*the* cause' over the individual body.

The chapter on Palestine likewise challenged the categories of progressiveness and regressiveness. Al-Mayadeen looked back in time in order to re-launch not only the case of Palestine as the most important question for an Arab world in the midst of radical change, but also the heroic masculine narrative of the time before the Oslo Accords (or even the first Intifada). Though remembering Palestine is neither untimely nor, per se, an expression of regressiveness, I would argue that doing so by merely raising the well-known banner of Palestine without offering any new perspectives is a drain on potentially inventive thinking. Likewise, the unreflecting celebration of Palestinian resistance – whether through culture, military means, or the practise of ṣumud – somehow underlines the hopelessness of the situation rather than initiating hope for a brighter future for Palestine. In line with the previous chapter, the prioritisation of the '*the* cause' over the individual at al-Mayadeen was confirmed.

In the chapter on Bayt al-Qasid, the dichotomy between progressiveness and regressiveness was obviously at play. While both the host and the guests at first seem to represent progressive values by the virtue of their professions, reputations, and track record of opposing repressive Arab regimes or fighting against Israel, they find themselves in 'the home of all creative Arabs', legitimising the support of Bashar al-Assad. Through intimate talks and emotional moments in home-like surroundings, political pragmatism wins over staying true to one's ideological ideals. Furthermore, the programme – as was the case in the two previous chapters – looks back in time in order to find ideals worthy of safeguarding – in this case, the notion of *iltizam,* and not least, how it should be read. Furthermore, the strong expression of patriotism once again points to the prioritisation of the collective over the individual.

In the chapter on Harrir Aqlak, an open-minded and progressive reading of Islam was propagated as a counterbalance to the regressive readings of Islam: of, e.g., Saudi Arabian Salafism, or militant Islamist groups. While al-Qattan preaches the individual's right and responsibility to think and the importance of love and tolerance, and speaks out against religious extremism, he equally argues that the biggest blessing from God is safety and security, that the current chaos in the Arab world is to be blamed on the people who took to the streets in 2011, and that political reforms of defective regimes rather than public revolts are the right way to ensure the needed change in Arab political systems. While the responsibility of the individual was at the centre of al-Qattan's message, the rights of the individual were left out of the message. At the same time, the responsibility of the individual was about realising '*the* cause' – in this case, the right reading of Islam.

In the chapter on al-Mayadeen's Latin American strategy and its cooperation with TeleSur, the field of tension between regressive and progressive values remains the same, although the perspective has turned global. The fight against Western imperialism, neo-liberalism and the political Right – all values that would traditionally be considered progressive – are, in the context of al-Mayadeen and TeleSur, best fought 'the Chavez way', or by looking towards Fidel Castro's Cuba for inspiration. Both political leaders are seen as representing the true revolution, as being the voice of the people, and as symbols of the global South counterbalancing Western imperialism. The

accompanying lack of democracy, authoritarian way of ruling, and issues with economic inequality and poverty are never tackled, but rather excused on the basis of aggressive Western imperialism. Again, individual rights are given low priority, in favour of '*the* cause'.

What runs through the chapters as a common thread is a nostalgic focus on concepts, figures, and ideals from the past. Even the medium itself – a TV station in a time where online media are, to a growing extent, replacing older forms of news streams – is not coincidental, but rather part of the traits of the ideology. Nostalgia is propagated rhetorically, emotionally and aesthetically. Whether it is the romantic longing for a time when true wars against imperialism were fought by men and women side by side, a time when *fan multazim* [committed art] flourished and ensured the promotion of values such as modernity, civilisation and development, or a time of Third World revolutions, nostalgia permeates the al-Mayadeen universe. As the present lacks true heroes, al-Mayadeen looks back in time in order to present icons *worthy of life* such as Jamila Bouhired and Fidel Castro. This 'looking back in time' is an essential ideological component of *The New Regressive Left,* and a feature that underscores its regressiveness.

The New Regressive Left

On the premise that a media outlet can function as a forum for the production of ideology – and not only for the dissemination of already existing ideology – I have analysed a variety of broadcast productions from al-Mayadeen's first 3½ years of existence as a 'way in' to an understanding of *The New Regressive Left*. I have been curious to understand how the composition of programmes form a coherent (though ambiguous and fluid), ideological discourse. What has become clear from the analytical case studies are the contextures of a new cross-ideological alliance in the making. This emerging coalition between different ideological groups resembles previous alliances across beliefs – cf. Browers' concept of the 'cross-ideological alliances' of the 2000s – but this time, it is Saudi Arabia and Sunni Islamism (including Salafism) in general, rather than authoritarian Arab regimes, that constitute the uniting enemy. The alliance builds on a shared contempt for the growing Saudi Arabian influence – religious, cultural, political, economic or military. Shia Muslims (most importantly, Iran), religious minorities and parts of the Arab Left, including secular cultural producers, plus the remains of the political strategic coalition of resistance (Iran, Hizbollah, Syria) are brought together. They unite around 1) a demonisation of Saudi Arabia to an extent where the Kingdom melts together with Israel, 2) a romanticisation of (historical as well as modern Ba'ath) Syria as an embodied contrast to Saudi Arabia, 3) a rejection of the 'Arab Spring' as fake, and 4) a belief in the need for a global outlook in order to counterbalance Western imperialism, and, not least, an accompanying shared fear over what the future will bring. The fear for the future is rooted in these groups' self-perceptions – real or imagined – of being minorities living with the risk of extinction; a fear that makes the status quo preferable over change.

Firstly, al-Mayadeen walks a fine balance between on the one hand discarding Sunni Islamism and Saudi Arabian Wahhabism, catering for a leftist audience predominated by secular values, and on the other hand staying in line with its (likely) Iranian funder, while at the same time giving priority

to not only Christians but also to other religious minorities. Religion is not written out of the discourse – on the contrary – but used instead as a benchmark for dividing the Arabs into 'progressive' and 'regressive', 'tolerant' and 'intolerant', or – to push it even further – 'modern' and 'backwards'. As was already visible in the chapter "The Creation of an Icon: the case of Jamila Bouhired", at al-Mayadeen there is a clear division between the right and the wrong understanding of Islam, where Hizbollah's celebration of Bouhired, in spite of her non-religious appearance, becomes a proof of the movement's tolerance, progressiveness and, thus, its right reading of Islam.

Secondly, Syria constitutes a shared focus point for *The New Regressive Left*. In contrast to Saudi Arabia, Syria has a long and cherished history of civilisation and culture; Syria acknowledges and houses a mosaic of religious minorities; Syria is ruled by a secular Leftist political party that through the years has been a symbol of *muqawama* and *mumana'a*; Syria is not 'bought' by Western imperialist money (within this logic, Russian money does not count); and Syria is not subordinated by Western (and Israeli) interests. The war in Syria is central not only for al-Mayadeen but for *The New Regressive Left* at large, as it exposes and tests the validity of several core ideological concepts, such as *muqawama* and *mumana'a*; however, the strong focus on Syria also functions as an 'Arabisation' (or cover-up) of the Iranian agenda – just as the strong focus on Christianity is a way of talking about the case of religious minorities, without bringing Shi'ism to the centre of attention.

Thirdly, and contrary to what one might expect when taking al-Mayadeen's appreciation of public revolutions into consideration, the 'Arab Spring' is not seen as carrying forward the true revolutionary spirit. While the uprisings on Bayt al-Qasid were discredited due to the interference of foreign powers and thus, the lack of patriotism, on Harrir Aqlak, the uprisings are problematic because they are perceived to jeopardise God's most beautiful blessing: safety and security. At al-Mayadeen, the uprisings are seen as being instigated by imperialist forces in order to divide the region and distract Arabs from the issue of greatest importance for the region, namely, Palestine.

Fourthly, at al-Mayadeen, there is a clear ambition to elevate the Arab state of affairs to a global level. This ambition has been developed further by the cooperation with the pan-Latin American TV station, TeleSur. Seen from a global perspective, the Arab world is exposed to the same threat as the rest of the global South, namely, Western imperialism. The answer to this threat is for the global South to unite around its historical revolutionary ideals, to revitalise this heritage, and, in line with Venezuela during Chávez's rule – and Maduro's – to insist on leftist ideological approaches as a counterweight to the economic liberalism of the West.

While this project is based on the case study of al-Mayadeen, the ideological discourse *The New Regressive Left*, I argue, can be found beyond this TV station. Rather, *The New Regressive Left* is an expression of an ideological development that is not only taking place in the Arab world, but on an international level. The Left in Europe has also been challenged by the dilemmas put forward by the war in Syria, as much as it has been divided over the prioritisation of core ideological values and concepts. Likewise, beyond a leftist context, authoritarian ideals are gaining ground at the

expense of democratic values and the human rights discourse, which, not long ago, seemed to constitute the (official) rules of the game.

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Interviews and other empirical material not available online is available on Dropbox: https://webmail.ku.dk/OWA/redir.aspx?C=OyjnIJNBDBjz-JGquQepWyoIwyh0WYIQACK4lfUiic_ftEDakyXUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fwww.dropbox.com%2fl%2fscl%2fAACBP1EwL8M_7JzL9WzuGjjOrIk3ZADz_Ac

APPENDIX l:

List of people I have interviewed during from my four stays in Beirut

<u>Al-Mayadeen staff at the time of interview</u>
1. Journalist, head of almayadden.net, Ali Hashem ®
2. Head of the promotional department, Khaled Hind ®
3. Head of the producers, Nicole Kamato ®
4. Talk show host, Zahi Wehbe ®
5. Talk show host, Wafa Saraya ®
6. Talk show host, Zainab as-Saffar, ®
7. Head of the foreign bureaus department, Hassan Chaaban
8. Head of Latin American strategy and of almayadden.net/Spanish, Wafi Ibrahim ®
9. Producer, Mona Abdullah ®
10. Producer, Ritta Wehbe
11. Director of production, Rashid Kanj
12. Producer, Zahir Aridi
13. Freelance Producer, Ghada Saleh

<u>Former al-Mayadeen staff</u>
14. Former journalist, Rowaida Abu Eid
15. Former journalist, anonymous
16. Former general manager (resigned before launch), Neyef Krayem

<u>Others</u>
17. Account manager , Saleh Hassan (Mentis) ®
18. Journalist, Jamal Ghosn (al-Akhbar)
19. Director, Haj Ali Aresaln, (MTC)
20. Director, Khair eddin Haseeb (CAUS)
21. Researcher, Dima Dabbous (LAU)
22. Researcher, Fawwaz Traboulsi (AUB)
23. Researcher, Yasmine Dabbous (LAU)

® = interview recorded, copy of interview attached as USB stick