AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE STORY OF AN EPHEMERAL ARCHIVE: THE POLITICS OF PRESERVATION OF AND ACCESS TO TÉLÉ LIBAN'S ARCHIVE

by
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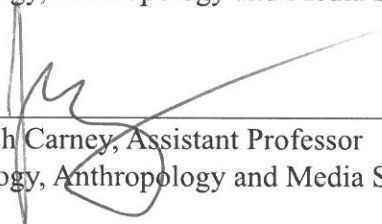November 2019

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

<u>Maya Radwan El Dib</u>   for   <u>Master of Arts</u>
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Title: <u>The Story of an Ephemeral Archive: The Politics of Preservation of and Access</u>
<u>to 60 years of Télé Liban's Archive</u>

This thesis develops a critical perspective on the dynamics of preservation of and accessibility to the Télé Liban's archive. The national Lebanese television's archive has nearly 60 years of Lebanese political, cultural, social history. Much of it has been neglected, lost, stolen and sold in the lack of formal policy. With the absence of an official Lebanese history book and the multiple historical narratives created after fifteen years of the civil war, the Télé Liban's archive offers valuable material that would help visually bridge the past with the present. Furthermore, this rich archive would highlight the role of television in the historical and ideological making of the Lebanese nation. I draw on critical factors that influence the process of archiving, preservation, and access. The Lebanese civil war and its consequences is a major criterion in studying the mechanics of archiving, the politics of preservation of and the dynamics of access to Télé Liban's archive. Although this archive is significant for Lebanese memory, identity and history and his state of disarray today will affect on losing many keys to understanding the past; an interpretation of the social, political and economic factors that shaped the content of this archive is essential for an objective framework and perspective on this historical evidence. Taking into account the various forces and institutions that created this archive in the 1960s, controlled it during the war, and continue to monopolize it to this day, the purpose of this study is to examine the power embodied within in this archive. Power(s) during the civil war produced a subjective political process of knowledge; militia control over television, funders, external interests, censorship and the changing ideologies of the Lebanese state are the factors that structured, created and subverted Télé Liban's archive. At stake in this project is what is remembered and how is it remembered. The marginalization of accessibility to this archive conforms the different employed narratives of the state and the television. It questions how much authority is present over the researchers. It also finds access as a mean to unravel all the way people talk about this archive.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Recent digital technologies have made users believe that everything is available, even the past. For example, I thought that the *Télé Liban*'s archive – which contains tens of thousands of hours of footage, recordings, and political, artistic, cultural and other interviews – would be available and accessible. After all, *Télé Liban* was the first television station in the Middle East and the audio-visual material that it has produced and preserved holds many keys to understanding the past. What I have discovered, however, is that—far from being accessible—the fate of this treasure is unknown.

On September 5, 1983, a bloody massacre took place in the village of *Kfarmatta* in the Lebanese Mountain. It sparked the mountain's war and the heavy battles between the Druze and the Christians that led to the displacement of the Christians for 30 years. The massacre received international attention when a Canadian journalist Clark Todd was also killed. The reported number of Druze victims varied between the different media outlets. Independent sources mentioned about 117 casualties; other journalists mentioned that the targeted Druze militias and innocent were 90-100 (Kawar, 1983, as cited in Hinson, 2017), while other sources referenced about 200 people. The *As-Safir* newspaper only spoke of 40 victims, and Christian's militias insisted that only Palestinians were targeted. After the mountain's reconciliation in 2000, a political and a cultural plan to erase the memory of the war started, especially by Druze leaders. However, every year, the Druze of the village commemorates the memory of this bloody and painful massacre. On one hand, I grew up with the stories of my parents and my community, who always talk about 270 people who were killed

and left as bodies in the streets for six months; one of them was my grandfather. On the other hand, *Kfarmatta* was always screened and portrayed in the media or documentaries as the "Forbidden Village" (Mounayar, 2009) for the Christians who lived far from it for 30 years. I've always wanted to know the in-between story of the massacre and the subsequent displacement.

During my studies at the Film School at Saint Joseph University, I decided to render the past of the *Kfarmatta*'s massacre in a documentary. I wanted archival footages about how the Lebanese television approached the massacre. I've always read articles, books and newspapers framing the first Lebanese television as a unifying force among Lebanese citizens despite all the factors that divide them. I also believed the old saying the camera doesn't lie so I found my only way to have footages of news coverage was *Télé Liban*'s archive. I made several requests for access and was made to wait. The archive officials justified this delay with the pretext that the required material was sensitive in the history of the country. They further claimed that the records are scattered and unorganized and they were, therefore, unable to find what I want. I was determined to have records, because I trusted the state's archive. Thanks to my father who has friends at *Télé Liban*, the employees accepted to provide me with some records. I couldn't access the place itself but what I finally got was twenty distorted seconds without sound, along with the answer that "we hope something will remain from these archives." From here my interest in *Télé Liban'*s archive started.

The archive contains about 55,000-archived hours that tell the story of television in Lebanon and the story of Lebanon. Together these records constitute the collective memory of the Lebanese people. I started to read and ask about the status of *Télé Liban*'s archive, for example even a senior employee at the *Télé Liban* commented

sarcastically in an article: "A day may come when *Télé Liban*'s archives will be sold out of trunks in the Souk El Ahad [Sunday market]" (*As-safir*, 2012). With the lack of funding to protect the nation's cultural heritage, there were institutional and individual attempts to preserve the archive. I began to wonder with regard to the status of the neglected and scattered archive, what is left of as evidence of this nation's past? Who will tell the story of this country? How should we protect the country's audiovisual heritage? Where should it be located and preserved? Is there any motive behind the lack of interest and support of the national television's archive?

I didn't doubt for a moment what I got from the archive or what I heard from the employees. My starting point to write this thesis was to shed light on the disarrayed status of the archive, to illustrate how our national audiovisual memory was fading, and to elucidate the need to institutionalize the audiovisual archiving field in Lebanon. However, investigating the status of this archive lead to more and more questions and ambiguity. Is *Télé Liban*'s archive a state archive with visual evidence that helps us understand our past? Have we lost much of the archive as it is said in the media or is this kind of camouflage in line with the state and Télé Liban's policies? Who choose what is included or excluded from the historical record of *Télé Liban*'s archive? How legitimate are those records for our historical understanding? Who controlled the archive for the past 60 years? On the same subject, is what I got from the *Kfarmatta* massacre, the only remaining? Or is there a political power that defines the accessibility to *Télé Liban*'s archive?

First, I looked at *Télé Liban*'s archive as a place to discover Lebanon's political and cultural history, and second a place that tells a lot about the state neglecting its own treasure. My perspective then developed to include the archival relationship to political,

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economic, technological and cultural power relations. The thesis builds upon Derrida (1995) main claim that "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (p.15). Thus, this thesis will address how the archive is not linear and reflects the political power relations interrelated with cultural and economic power structures. I realized that this archive is constructed for and on the basis of narratives. The question becomes less about a fading archive and more about the politics of presenting, narrating and talking about this archive in terms of the preservation practices and access to it: Narratives of the television and the archive's the golden age in the fifties and sixties, narratives of archival collections' inclusion and exclusion, narratives of preservation practices, narratives of the archive's fading status, narratives of poor archiving conditions and mainly narratives of lost and sold archival records. The thesis interrogates how these different narratives were employed at different time and purpose regarding the preservation of and access to *Télé Liban*'s archive. The narratives themselves gave meaning to this archive. This archive is not only a witness to the nation's history, but also evidence to how the political, cultural and economic forces conspired against it.

A. Studying the Archive

This research is a contribution to focus on the significance of the nation's cultural heritage that is scattered, stolen, neglected and its correlation to the power relations in society. It also deals with the dimensions of identity, history, and memory. The importance of this research is an incentive to conduct such studies as a step to save

the Lebanese past, with the absence of a formal institutional role that protects this archive. There is no need to emphasize on the importance of the archive and its association with memory and history, but I argue that the audio-visual archive has a different impact in affectively engage viewers bodily and cognitively. As Landsberg (2015) argues "in order for real historical knowledge to be produced [...] the affective engagements that draw the viewer in must be coupled with other modes that assert the alien nature of the past and the viewer's fundamental distance from it" (p. 10). Television recreates the past in a more realistic way because it represents the living past with all its details, its people, its buildings, its way of life and its environment, etc. Television archives are considered part of the cultural heritage of a nation by different international organizations and include official and non-official audiovisual and material archives (e.g. paper, photographs, documents, etc.) (Keslassy, 2000; Veyrat-Masson, 2012).

  The theoretical approach that underlies my research is Derrida (1995) in *Archive Fever*. This theoretical starting point will allow me to analyze the relationship of archive and knowledge to power and the law. Derrida's (1995) approach is the most theoretical one that has addressed the concept of archive in an attempt to understand the motivations that drive the need for collection and record keeping. The majority of scholars refer back to Derrida's etymological definition and psychoanalytic reading of the concept of "archive." First, Derrida argues that the term refers to "arkhē" that is the commencement related to nature and history (where things commence) and the commandment according to the law and nomological principle (where men and gods commend) where the different power relations are inscribed. This archive shelters within/from itself the memory, therefore, the concept unfolds the double act of

remembering and forgetting. This is a significant analysis in Derrida's archive: forgetting is an inherent point in the archiving process. This is what he refers to as the archive's "mal" or evil—its death principle. The archive is not neutral; it is a conflict between two forces. One pushes towards death and the other towards life. Derrida regards the archive as space of power through inclusion and exclusion. Therefore, the power of law over the archive is through the process of archiving and the subjectivity of the archivists, the exclusion of records, and the inaccessibility.

Derrida (1995) recognizes the archive as "a place of violence"' where power exists in destruction and concealment through an intended and planned damaging of archives. He sheds insights on the political, patriarchal, and authorial control of archives, on the one hand, and collateral damage to the archive to conceal or change some facts, on the other hand. As Derrida (1995) states, "what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way" (p.18). An archive entails the marginalization or inclusion of what should be kept or what has to be destroyed. This process of shaping the archive and thus memory is based on the ideologies of those in power and on the intended meaning of the institution or the archivist and not the true meaning of the materiel itself.

In other words, Hedstorm (2002) refers to the interface of the computers to describe the archivists as the intermediary between the material and the users through which archivists interpret the past. As she describes it, "the interface is a site where power is negotiated and exercised. For archivists, that power is exercised, consciously and unconsciously, over documents and their representations, over access to them, over actual and potential uses of archives and over memory" (p.22). As the archivist's core task is the selection and appraisal of some historical facts over others, Bothman (2001)

distinguishes two types of archivists: "history archivist concerned with finding records and in them uncovering evidence to develop a linear narrative about a past" (p.62) and "memory archivist concerned with the past's residue as material promoting integrated knowledge, social identity and the formation of group consciousness" (p.62). The archivist struggles to balance ideological goals that are made contradictory by practical constraints (Brown and Brown, 1998, p.18). Tschan (2002), Shwartz & Cook (2002), Featherstone (2006) contradicts the objective perspective argued by Jenkinson (1922) which sees the archivists as historians and guardians of the truth. They acknowledge the subjective discriminating gaze of the archivists that reflect the social, political and ideological hierarchies of the institutions or the state (Tschan, 2002; Shwartz & Cook, 2002; Featherstone, 2006; Brown & David- Brown; 1998).

The concept of the archive in the context of *Télé Liban*'s archive investigates, on one hand, its institutionalization, the power relations, the political, economic, and cultural hierarchies that build, control(ed), and define(ed) the accessibility to this archive. From here, as Manoff (2004) asks "who builds the archive and for what purpose? How is it organized and made accessible? How is it preserved?" (p.20). The notions of archives, history, memory, identity and power are also highly present in the contextualization of any archival collections and archive institutions, as the archive and the people controlling the records directing our memory, identity, and history, equally shaping the knowledge production of a nation in line with the dominant narratives through selecting, excluding and eliciting historical moments. It should be noted that there is no study on the subject of the *Télé Liban*'s archive with the dimensions that my research will address.

I am interested in exploring how Télé Liban's archive mediates within power dynamics and politics of inclusion and exclusion, sculpts the memory and the identity; includes some historical facts and figures and marginalizes the other. However, these different aspects will not be discussed based on the records themselves but on the power of framing this archive in different aspects and contexts by people. The thesis looks at how the past, the identity, the memory, the war are used and deployed regarding this archive. I am interested in exploring the ambiguity, transparency and complexity of the archive in terms of the preservation narratives deployed by the state, the institution and the cultural institutions; the archiving discourses created over time; the media attention on the preservation practices and most importantly the absent narrative of access.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between *Télé Liban*'s archive, the mechanics and socio-political conditions of archiving, the politics of preservation based not only on what is preserved, selected, damaged or scattered but also, more importantly, the challenges of accessibility to this archive. Access can be seen as a mediator of the country's audiovisual archives but also it can be problematic to those who created high fences to protect the archive. Access can have a double fold of legitimizing or countering the narratives. My aim is to elucidate theoretically the reasons for the archive's situation today, drawing on critical factors that influence the process of archiving, preservation and access such as copyright laws, civil war and political circumstances, funds and resources. Therefore, my research question is how have the mechanics of archiving, the politics of preservation and the dynamics of access with their different discourses affected *Télé Liban*'s archive over time?

B. Methodology

The methodology used for this study is based on qualitative methods, especially interviews. In order to receive qualifying answers and to provide a clear picture of the problem and because I didn't have access to *Télé Liban's* archive, and I don't know what is there or what it isn't, I decided to refer to how people talk about this archive. In terms of choosing my interviewees, many have worked with and know about this archive, but I chose the people who in the past few years had direct contact with the preservation and access aspects of this archive. I also used some articles that addressed this topic in the past few years.

This thesis was inspired by my intention to raise awareness on the need to protect this rich cultural heritage. I started interviews with two cultural institutions highly invested in the audiovisual archive preservation practices: *Nadi Likol Nas, Notre Dame University*. I started as a naïve researcher searching for answers to questions like why has *Télé Liban* reached this status? Why does the institution lack funds? Why aren't other cultural institutions initiating any preservation plans? They shifted my attention to the "un-discussed" narratives of the political, cultural and economic power relations shaping this archive. Then, I conducted interviews with the vice president of *Fondation Liban Cinema* (FLC), Gabriel Chamoun, the only institution working on the topic of this archive, and the employees of the Directorate of Archive at *Télé Liban*, whom few of them agreed to mention their names in this work, and a former presenter at *Télé Liban* who had access to the archive, Zaven Kouyoumdjian.

My "naiveté" turned into adopting different approach of an observer and an interviewer doubting all the narratives. Here I began to interrogate the paradoxical, ambiguous, and contradictory answers and observations I received. I started to construct and then deconstruct the predominant "narratives" surrounding the archive. I analyzed

the in-between lines of the interviewees, thinking about their positions, their interests, and their identities. Each interviewee had its own political and cultural bias (this point will be further discussed in Chapter 3). For example, the answers of the employees, as representative of the public institution of *Télé Liban* were mostly with a purpose of being socially, culturally and politically acceptable. The interviews with the others were much more broadening to preserve their cultural positions.

Similar to other studies, as a qualitative study, it is heavily dependent on individual responses. As such, their answers may be politically biased and influenced by things other than opinions, including, for example, the respondent's mood. Because of the time constraints, I limited the scope of this thesis. Just as this thesis doesn't look at this archive from a historical point of view over time, this study also doesn't take into consideration the technicalities of preservation technicalities.

C. Road Map

This section outlines the overall structure of the thesis. Chapter two gives historical background about *Télé Liban*'s archive, examines the role of this archive for Lebanese memory, identity and history, and unpacks the cultural, economic, and political factors and power relations that shaped the television's content since its start. Chapter Two analyzes the archive through the exclusion and the inclusion of the records by militias, political parties, the sectarian and Arab televisions. It also deals with the political, economic and cultural interest of the cultural institution Fondation Liban Cinema (FLC) and the state by deploying certain preservation and archival discourses of a fading archive. Chapter III deconstructs the double relation of access and narratives; access can protect and benefit the narratives but also access presents a threat to the same

narrative. I highlight the wasta as a criterion of access. I reflect on the work of Zaven Kouyoumdjian, using *Télé Liban*'s records to discuss the framework and structure of access at the state's institution.

Together these chapters demonstrate the political, cultural and economic power relations embedded in this archive in the way it was formed, how is it preserved, the limitations of access. They also present the different narratives used by the different parties who had a direct relation to *Télé Liban*'s archive. People and institutions create, control and talk about this archive to present a specific context, or alter the focus towards their purposes. The different chapters read the changing context of the story of an archive.

CHAPTER II

THE PRE-HISTORY OF TÉLÉ LIBAN ARCHIVE

"Nothing is less clear today than the word archive" (Derrida, 1992, p.90)

On November 2019, at one of Maskoon Film Festival debates entitled "*How to Save Our Film Heritage from Disappearing*," Gabriel Chamoun, the Vice President of *Fondation Liban Cinema*, spoke sorrowfully about the fading rich archive of *Télé Liban*. He emphasized the core significance to revive the content of the television's archive, as it contains national treasures dating back to the era of the sixties and seventies. Chamoun's rhetoric is consistent with the larger discourse on the *Tèlè Liban's* archive. When talking about *Télé Liban*, nostalgia for the rich days of the last century is often explicit. The same is true for its archive, which equals the golden age of Lebanon with rich visual evidence for a beautiful past.

At the same time, and less obviously, when thinking of an archive, acknowledging the political, economic and cultural interests that shaped and crafted the content is important. The television was, at various points, both a public and private institution, monitored and controlled by the state, the funders and the political parties in Lebanon. The notions of memory, identity, and historical narratives are negotiated and structured differently in this archive over the years. Therefore, the implicit power relations that controlled the television are now imbedded in its archive and require an analytical view. From here, I theorize *Télé Liban*'s archive as a place of hopes, dreams, and aspirations but also as a space where power dynamics are negotiated. Indeed, this audiovisual treasure is a witness to the so-called golden era but assessing the power dynamics that dominated the television is essential to understand better this archive, the television and the nation.

What approach did this television want to adopt to crystallize the Lebanese identity? What are the motives and aspirations of this medium? Was it a national project? Was it a Nasserism or Christian project? In the same manner, in the context of its archive, do those records represent the past's reality? What is the importance of *Télé Liban*'s archive for the fragmented Lebanese identity? What is the presence of *Télé Liban*'s archive in the collective Lebanese memory? What gaps can *Télé Liban*'s archive fill in our memory? What discourses can legitimize or counter? Who are the various actors that formed this archive? How can we read these archival texts for a better understanding of some historical narratives? These are the questions that structure this chapter.

My interest in adopting those frameworks is not to undermine the importance of this archive but to re-evaluate the nomological sense and the political, social, economic, and cultural frameworks that formed *Télé Liban*'s content. Romanticizing the passive role of the archive in relation to the memory, identity and history leads to a misreading of the active institutionalized agencies that constructed those physical records. It is necessary to take into account the various forces and institutions that created this archive in the 1960s, controlled it during the war, and continue to monopolize it to this day. The importance of this chapter is to shed light on how the archive with its role to the memory and identity mediates within power dynamics and politics of inclusion and exclusion that saliences some historical narratives, facts and figures and marginalizes others.

A. A Space of Power Relations

"When power is denied, overlooked, or unchallenged, it is misleading at best and dangerous at work" (Shwartz & Cook, 2002, p.181)

The political interest of subsequent governments and presidents "to keep television under control by limiting its power" (Dajani, 1992, p.103) and economic interests of the funders and private owners masked the public interest of the television over the years. Thereby, if the archive is a witness to the past events, it is also historical evidence that reflects on the power of "a certain time and space" (Bratslavsky, 2013, p.14). This is why I argue that *Télé Liban*'s archive takes the form of the political and economic structures within which it operates from 1959 until now. It is a space of hopes, dreams and aspirational "practices" of surveillance and censorship with embedded economic visions and political perspectives of the state. All of these elements are contained within the archive alongside and within the material housed there.

Recognizing the power relations embedded in this archive offers a better framework for understanding how to assess the historical knowledge existing in these records. In this sense, the consideration of the historical, cultural and social realms of this archival space legitimizes television in the archival paradigms as a source of knowledge production. According to Epp's (1999) contextual understanding of the archive, "the more that is known about the life of a record" (p.4), how is it formed and what are the complexities surrounding the content of the visual text at a time that was produced and broadcasted, "the more valuable the record is as evidence of past actions and events" (p.4). For an archival record to gain cultural and historical legitimacy as evidence, it has to be "appraised" and "described" with regard to their "provenance" (Epp, 1999).

Indeed, *Télé Liban*'s archive is significant for Lebanese memory, identity and history. But also, a historical, political and economic mapping of the institutions that created and controlled *Télé Liban* is necessary. On the one hand, the archive is a produced, institutionalized space controlled by the state with its constant changing political priorities. The political agendas are the most prominent factors that crafted the content of the visual records of *Télé Liban* over the last 60 years. On the other hand, the archive mirrors the funders and the foreign powers interest in the television. For that purpose, I identify three forces that shaped *Télé Liban*'s archive: the institutionalized state aspect, the soft-psy aspect, and the commercial aspect. Those approaches may overlap at different phases.

In order to clarify the strong link between the present and the past, it is worthwhile to return to the historical context that accompanied the emergence of the Lebanese television in the 1950s. The idea of television began in the era of president Camille Chamoun, who saw the television as a modern cultural medium. The start of television in Lebanon was different from many other countries. While these were government projects, Lebanese television began as a commercial project. It was the first private commercial television in the Arab world, founded by two businessmen, Wissam Ezzeddin and Joe Arida in 1956. The broadcast started officially in 1959. The start was under the name of the Lebanese Television Company (CLT). With the French government's financial support, it broadcasted French and Arabic services for 70 hours per week. CLT succeeded in reaching a good number of the Lebanese population excluding the peripheries (Browne, 1975). A 21-article agreement with the government was signed in August 1956, which gave the Lebanese government the right to monitor the content of the station's broadcast by placing observers from the Ministry of

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Information. The agreement aimed to know in advance the details of the content and had the power to prevent or modify whatever they deemed contrary to public morals, harmful to the national or external authority, provoking ethnic and sectarian strife or a propagandist content for a political party (Kouyoumdjian, 2017). Under these circumstances, the television started as a private institution with the presence, control, and existence of the state at every turn.

The first moment of the television broadcast was at 6:00 PM on May 29, 1959, with the female face of Najwa Qaznoun. This golden moment disappeared several months after its "making," and it is only available on the archival pages of newspapers and magazines. As the television was first established for a commercial purpose, the mindset of the broadcast was solely concerned with the durability of the tapes and not the preservation of the content for future generations. The lack of recording or the re-recording affected on losing the first audio-visual moments of television. In this manner, Bratsalvsky (2007) notes that the television industry in its first years was only framed by the "right now mindset" (p.55). They didn't even imagine the preservation of the ephemeral material and didn't necessarily have any interest in preserving those moments. From 1959 until 1970, a huge part of the records doesn't exist for two reasons. First, they used to broadcast live. Second, the 16 mm or 2-inch tapes were used and re-used multiple times, a practical necessity given the high cost tapes for recording. Indeed, technological factors also contributed the loss of some key records.

In 1962, Thompson Rizk Group established Télé Orient with an English financial support in collaboration with Lebanese stakeholders. It broadcasted in Arabic for 40 hours per week from Hazmieh on Channel 5 and 11. According to a survey conducted by Associated Business Consultants, the television set ownership has grown

enormously in the first 15 years of its broadcast especially in Beirut and lower in the other regions of the country (Browne, 1975). But just like everything else in this country, soon began the war of advertising, control, monopoly of talent, secret deals between the two channels.

To better use and asses the archive now, we have to know the pre-history of this television. The censorship, the control of ministers, the shaping of the content were all key points that are important not to fall into trap of over-romanticizing the archive. If *Télé Liban* has always been shaped by political powers, then so has its archive, therefore when talking about a specific moment in the history of *Télé Liban*, we have to be aware of how and why was it like that. This archive is a witness to the different political power structures that determined the dimensions and the role of the television in the previous years.

In the 1960s, during the reign of presidents Chehab and Helou, the Lebanese television became a very controversial topic. The Chehabists presidency was devoted to building "the state of Independence" based on egalitarian and unifying privileges as a celebration of the Lebanese nationalism. Television was used to promote national unity, a picture far from the events that were increasing: the rise of Nasserism, the threat of bourgeoisie unity, the rise of the Palestinian armed presence, the internal ideological conflict especially between Jumblatt and the Phalangists. This misleading picture of Lebanese reality came within the state policy to bury the memory of the Lebanese Civil War of 1958 (Traboulsi, 2006). The government promoted an image discontinued with the past and shifted from the present itself. For that very reason, television was criticized for its illusory representations. For some, it was a tool for the imperialist

western agendas, for others it represented merely the luxurious elitist social class and a force sharpening the rural and social divides.

Chehab was also known by the establishment of "the second office" (the Lebanese military intelligence service), the intelligence agencies, and the army, which intervened in the political life and exerted pressure on public freedoms to cope the repercussions of the 1958 War. His reign was met with opposition from the powerful Christian parties who saw that his egalitarian system a threat to their existence in the midst of the rising Nasserism. According to Kouyoumoudjian (2016) "Chehab was known for restricting media freedom" (p.32); strict restriction on media and censorship of news broadcasts began to grow in the sixties. The observers monitoring the content were not only representatives of the Ministry of Information whose name changed in 1960 to the Ministry of News and Guidance (Wizarat al Anba' wa Irshad), but also observers were stationed representing the Public Security and the Interior Ministry Intelligence Division. Subsequently, this elicits a series of questions: was television an institutionalized power representing the Chehabi vision? Was it a Christian way of undermining what the state had been working for? Or was it a form of external foreign power for cultural dominance? Does this indicate the state's fear of the television's ideology? How does these institutionalized forms of power embed themselves in what would become the *Télé Liban*'s archive?

On October 21, 1967, CLT started its color broadcast; and the state initiated its use to promote its ideologies. In November 1968, the first color broadcast was dedicated for the elected president Charles Helou calling the Lebanese to fight Zionism and participate in the war against Israel. This moment was a turning point in the political role of television in promoting the first president speeches and public exposure.

The first few years of the 1970s were successful for both of the television stations in terms of revenues from advertising and returning profit and the export market of the Lebanese programs. First, Lebanese television lived a wider margin of freedom with President Sleiman Franjieh, who took over the first presidency in 1970, promising to lift the censorship of the era of Fouad Chehab and give television a wider margin of media and political freedom. But then margin of freedom did not last long, and television found in 1971 that censorship had not changed, but its political aspect did (Kouyoumdjian, 2017). The government reinforced its role in television through an agreement with CLT in 1974 that had a purpose to "institutionalize and formalize the government's role in the political control of the company […] requesting CLT to broadcast a daily one-hour evening program prepared by the government […] and the government should receive 6.5 of the net advertising revenue" (Choul, 2001,p.10). For example, in 1971, Ghassan Tueni, a one-year information minister, canceled the censorship policy on television. He was himself banned from appearing on television because of his previous decision about censorship.

In addition, censorship was on advertisements, programs, and most importantly on news and local film commentaries that "even though the news was prepared by the government's own national agency and the news films were prepared upon the instruction of government officials" (Dajjani, 1992, p.112). As Choul (2001) argues, "[…] government regulations were aimed at allowing officials and the ruling political bosses to exploit this medium for their own political goals. These political bosses legalized their monopoly over television news bulletins and the censorship of material that might threaten their political goals" (p.11). The television was not an organizational institution devoted for the public interest but a political tool that serves the political

interest of those ruling the country. It is for the reason of control and censorship that the television failed to represent the political reality of the Lebanese society. That could be reason why the Lebanese in the seventies heavily referred to Lebanese newspapers or Syrian and Egyptian televisions than CLT and Télé Orient to know the political news because the major important Lebanese and Arab events were prohibited by a decision of the minister of information (Browne, 1975).

If we think of *Télé Liban*'s records, we have to acknowledge that this archive entails the power structures of foreign powerful countries that had an interest in the Lebanese television. Understanding the archive as more than it is today and linking it the pre-history of the television is better to define the archival relationship to historiography and memory. The television was also a valuable medium for foreign powers. The French and the Americans funded CLT and Télé Orient, as they believed in the significance of the Lebanese television as a road to the Arab World. We have to take into account the French perspective on Lebanese television, as the French newspaper *Le Monde* wrote about the role of this television towards Muslims and the French state: "As moving images flood Lebanese living rooms, conservative Muslims should prepare for a revolution that will transform traditions, lifestyle and taste" (Koyoumoudjian, 2015, p. 32) encouraging the French government to maintain the French influence in the Middle East through the television (Koyoumoudjian, 2015). I employ the term "soft-psy media" in its broadest context to describe the intertwined desires, agendas, and approaches of foreign countries towards Lebanese television. Sienkiewicz (2016) defines "soft-psy media" as "produced either directly with foreign money or is produced at a facility that is funded by foreign interests, or by local producers […] in contact with their foreign supporters […] a competitive media articulating specific themes or

messages approved by foreign donor, it is funded openly […] with discursive limitation, if crossed, threaten to compromise foreign support" (p. 4). I am applying the contemporary practices of this concept to a medium from the past.

The programming broadcasted on both stations confirms this approach. In the first years of the seventies, television stations were accused of promoting the political and ideological interests of foreign powers. Riad Taha, a former president of the order of publishers, strictly opposed and criticized the material presented on the stations, stating that "there are contracts and secret deals which link certain television announces and non-Lebanese parties to promote the news of other countries, thus giving the impression that the Lebanese state is biased in its Arab and foreign policies" (Dajjani, 1992,p.133). In this context, Dajjani (1992) sheds light on the monopolization of some archival records by those foreign and Arab countries, he acknowledged the foreign exploitation of television as he mentions that "it is not surprising that one finds today films on television that are usually part of the film libraries of cultural or information section in embassies operating in Lebanon" (p.113). This shows the continuing interest in this television that turned into the context of its archive.

The content of the programs and series broadcasted on the two television stations were not only subject to the government censorship represented by the decisions of the Minister of Information but the French, English or Lebanese stakeholders also had the power over the knowledge produced. CLT had two channels: Channel 7 for Arabic programs, and Channel 9 for the luxurious and privilege French programs as a result of a Franco-Lebanese agreement to strengthen the Francophone culture that was highly appreciated by the upper-class Lebanese who were in those days the Christians (Kouyoumdjian, 2017). In addition, At the request of the ministry of

culture, educational programs were broadcasted with a heavy focus on French foreign-made films with subjects in language and science, the French aspect in Lebanese educational broadcasting "might itself be interpreted as sign of desire on the part of the Lebanese Government for stability, since the French system of education is widespread in the country, and many officials in the Ministry of Education are convinced of its superiority" (L'orient Le Jour, 1974). Almost 60% of the programs scheduled for the 2 Arabic channels of CLT and Télé Orient comes from foreign sources (principally Egypt, France, Great Britain, and the U.S) and well over 80% of the programming on the French channel comes from abroad (principally France, while Great Britain and the U.S as secondary suppliers) (Browne, 1975, p.693). Was this exploitation and secret-deals only for political and cultural interests?

The economic interests marked key moments in the pre-history of *Télé Liban*'s archive. Understanding the television industry helps understand how the existing records were oriented by institutions and organizations. Looking at the archive as more than a depository of records is necessary to understand and question its different dimensions. If the television started for a commercial purpose, then the commercial aspect exists in its archival records. The bulk of the series was in line with the ideologies of the Arab countries and not a representation of and for the Lebanese society. The emergence of Lebanese television as a non-governmental business has, from the outset, reinforced the commercial nature and approach to this medium. This tendency was given priority to what "sells" regardless of its cultural content. The funders and financial supporters were other key players in the decision of the television programming. They regarded the stations as assets and insisted on financial profit rather than high cultural rated programs. Their main target was to sell the programs to Arab

countries outside Lebanon, therefore in the sixties and the seventies, they insisted on using Classical Arabic in a major number of series rather the Lebanese dialectic, with themes that would interest the Arab regions such as the Islamic heritage. This tendency was met with a Christian resentment who believed that this promotion of the pan-Islamic spirit will lead to more political and sectarian divisions in Lebanon with a Christian majority back then (Browne, 1975).

Promoting the "unified Lebanese image" continued through the cultural productions. The government wanted to create good naïve characters such as Abu Melhem because this is "good for people to take their minds of their problems" (p.697), but that different forces wanted to "Christianize" his role by force. However, the state's approach contradicted how the television's officials marginalized some figures in the produced series. Browne (1975) argues that some of the series were framed in a Christian village in Mount Lebanon setting with absence of Muslim characters and "no episode was ever cancelled […] the writer steadfastly refused to include them, on the grounds that they wouldn't make sense in such a setting, but any references he made to political figures currently active in Lebanese society (e.g. Camille Chamoun) were regularly and obviously deleted" (p.696). Here, we can see how the content depended heavily on the powerful controlling ideologies at that time.

Looking at the position of the television during the Lebanese civil war is important in tracing the formation and the pre-history of the archive. In 1975, the civil war started. Internal militias and external factions began fighting. Beirut was divided into a Christian East Beirut against Muslim West Beirut. The 1975 war started with the incident of 'Ayn Rummaneh, shots were fired from a car at a congregation of Phalange partisans in front of a church in 'Ayn al-Rummaneh, wounding a number of people.

Phalangist militiamen reacted a few hours later by machine-gunning a bus heading to the Tall al-Za'tar refugee camp, killing 21 Palestinians. Fighting broke out throughout the southeastern suburb of Beirut between the Phalange and the Palestinian resistance and their Lebanese allies (Traboulsi, 2012).

On one hand, the war began with financial losses and challenges for the two stations. During the first years of the war, news programs could not be produced because they couldn't keep their production studios functioning (Dajjani, 1992). On the other hand, the Ministry of Information issued a decision to produce an objective joint news bulletin and banned covering the battles and security incidents of the war. The state's goal was to keep the war away from television. Suddenly, the monotonous news bulletin changed. Militia factions controlled each of CLT and Télé Orient. The two televisions were divided according to the dividing lines of the country: the National Movement parties in West Beirut controlled CLT, Télé Orient in East Beirut was controlled the Lebanese Front parties. By then, militias and armed factions realized the significance of this mean of communication and soon the war period transformed Lebanese television from a commercial enterprise into a military tool. The two stations were used to exchange threats, CLT's installations were damaged in the areas controlled by Christian militias and Télé Orient's installations in West Beirut were damaged or controlled (Dajjani, 1992). The election of President Elias Sarkis in April 1976, who believed that television was a way to stop the war, re-established the unified newscast (Dajjani, 1992; Kouyoumdjian, 2017).

On June 30, 1977, a decree was issued announcing the birth of a mixed company, *Télé Liban*, with the state having a 50% stake. The remaining 50% were distributed between CLT and Télé Orient. *Télé Liban* was granted an exclusive

broadcast right until 2012. The founding decrees set the capital of *Télé Liban* at 30 million Lebanese liras, equivalent to 7 million dollars. The board of directors was composed of 12 members, six appointed by ministers and six representing equally CLT and Télé Orient (Dajjani, 1992). As Dajjani (1992) argues that "the formation of *Télé Liban* was not a result of a new policy adopted by the government to define the role of television in Lebanese society but simply the result of force majeur. It was only possible that the government could take at the time in order to maintain television from collapse" (p.101). The state controlled all administrative, production and labor related to the television. Although it was still officially a mixed commercial company with 50% ownership of the state, *Télé Liban* became known as state television (Kouyoumoudjian, 2016).

The television broadcasted on four channels (5, 11, 7 and 9). The latter was allocated to the French language. The French owned about 30% of the private sector share. The name of the two stations changed from CLT to "Tallet El Khayat" station, and Télé Orient to "Hazmieh." They "continued to function as before […] fifteen years after the formation of *Télé Liban*, neither the programs nor the character of the channels previously operated by CLT and Télé Orient has changed" (Dajjani, 2012, p.100).

Politically, Téle Liban was marginalized at first. At the beginning of the eighties, after militias controlled the official state radio, the state relied on *Télé Liban* to express its political positions, "the ailment of TL began with the civil war when due to increased government intervention in "sanitizing" the station, the station started to lose credibility" (Kraidy, 1998,p.390). According to Nötzvold (2009), "almost no pictures about the war were shown. *Télé Liban* did not fulfill its service to the public; instead of informing its audience about the events that were happening on the ground, it resorted

to protocol news in the official language and largely ignored the war. On top of it, TL also missed the technical developments that were happening in the media world" (p.135). The station was forced to play as a universal power for all the existing factions, but that truth was totally different.

Then, the reality was more powerful and the regional labels of Tallet El Khayat and Hazmieh started to impose sectarian aspects on the televisions and the employees who became divided. The two stations enhanced their sectarian affiliations. In 1984 the two stations began to produce different news representing both warring militias. In August 1982, Bachir Gemayel, the commander of the Lebanese Phalange Militia, was elected president. He realized the importance of *Télé Liban*, he criticized the content broadcasted and promised to improve the station in a manner that encounters "the societal needs of the country" (Dajjani, 1992, p.103). However, his goal was to control television to be the voice and image of his party's ideologies and beliefs, but only after 33 days of presidency, Bachir Gemayel was assassinated (Dajjani, 1992).

Once again, *Télé Liban* was the vanguard in drama series broadcasting. The television's officials signed an agreement with Abu Dhabi Television to finance drama productions. The text of the contract is that the UAE station will buy 200 hours of broadcasting from the Lebanese station every year, ie 16 long series, which will pay the cost of these works after it approves its texts. This funding influenced the content of the series which should have been in line with the convictions of its directors and constituted an obstacle for the Lebanese to accept dramatic plots far from their social and political reality. The programs on *Télé Liban* during the eighties were contradictory, part in control of the funders, part of the programs was the U.S imported and different from the societal and cultural aspect concentrating on sex and violence, and part

representing the extreme values of the society. The national integration or societal needs were absent from the Lebanese series (Dajjani, 1992). In the second half of the 1980s, production began to weaken amidst the security situation and was limited to comedy productions (Koyoumoudjian, 2015).

After Téle liban was the only television, with a high percentage of viewership, this percentage dropped significantly due to the control of private media that began to emerge since the late 1980s. In 1985, the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) was established on the margins of militia support. LBC was back then a "purely military project", and then different ideological militias television were established and led to serious competition with *Télé Liban*. To remedy this situation, *Télé Liban*'s officials turned to American funding, that's why, in 1988, American series were broadcasted.

Although we might overpass it but this archive also have many cultural, political and social records for the era of the 90s. With the emergence of the different sectarian televisions, the look towards *Télé Liban*'s archive began to change into the failing state television. Delving in the 90s records may legitimize or refute this framework of failure. The war stopped, it was important to organize the chaotic situation of the media; Chapter III, Article G of the Ta'if Accord asked for a law to regulate television broadcasting in Lebanon. Therefore, television stations were under a law that was the first in the Middle East to regulate production and distribute broadcasting (Richani, 2007) towards a "formula of confessional balance" (Kraidy, 2005, p.288), were to operate within the framework of the audiovisual media law 382/94 and the operation of the established National Audio-Visual Council (NAVC). Counting years of procrastination and delay, the "Audio and Visual Media Act" was introduced in 1994, and the law was rationed with distinction. Television licenses were

distributed according to purely sectarian and political criteria, with an official television for each party station.

Between 1988 and 1996, private sector shares of *Télé Liban* were traded among more than one investor, most recently the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who bought the private sector's share. After issuing the Media Law No. 382/94 and the licensing of a number of private stations, the exclusive right granted to *Télé Liban* to monopolize the Lebanese media scene till 2012 by a state has ended, the state bought the private sector share. Since then, the competition has become severe on *Télé Liban*, and after that, its advertising revenues have been reduced to a minimum.

The state's control of the television was according to the changing power relations in the country. In 1996, a decree "was passed demanding objectivity in the broadcasting of news and reports in order to safeguard supreme national interests and to distinguish factual news from propaganda and advocacy" (Richani, 2017). The Syrian sponsors at the time also prohibited live broadcasts of demonstrations without prior approval of the government (Rugh 2004, pp. 202–204) and generally supervised un-directly the Lebanese media (Nesemann 2001, p. 97). After the assassination of the prime minister Rafic Hariri and the withdrawal of the Syrian forces, the news was only to present the president and the government routine's work. A study conducted by Maharat foundation (2012) found that while *Télé Liban*'s news coverage is split almost equally between March 14 and March 8 86.9 percent of its coverage is non-field coverage or what they summed up as "He welcomed, he sent off, he stated" coverage (Richani, 2017). Now, the programming of the channel is based on television news and political debate programs that require a limited number of employees to be aired; Arabic television series offered free of charge on the channel by television channels, Egyptian,

Syrian and Jordanian (EUROMED AUDIOVISUAL III, 2013). The broadcast was also based on a "stodgy diet" (Kraidy 2005, p. 123) consisting mainly of repeating 100% of the old series from the 1960s and 1970s, "or whatever hasn't been ruined in their archives" (Richani, 2017, p.190).

Currently, the newscast at *Télé Liban* is offset over the years by the over-dissemination of official news, drowning in bureaucracy, traditional rule, and boredom. All the different organizations and entities are trying to control this archive. The station now is living on the glories of its faded archive and the repeated programs. The political and economic power dynamics of *Télé Liban* are embedded in this archive to this day. The television and its archive are controlled by the ministry, the Directorate, the politicians who have unbridled access to it, the cultural institutions tied to political and cultural powers. In the next chapters, I will elaborate more on these different mechanisms.

This section is to shift the attention of those who are interested in *Télé Liban*'s archive to the pre-history of its formation as a place of historical records. As discussed, the television was a political, cultural and economic tool for multiple forces and power that changed over the years. The institutional structures, the technology, the foreign powers, the economic interest, regulatory forces, the political ideologies were all integral parts of the television. These different power mechanisms are rooted in its archive, however, is it possible to overlook the power that shaped the records?

B. A Nostalgic Space

"It can be said that archives emerge as sites and actors of production and circulation of truth in the context of modern societies, through which identities, memories, resistances, and truth are incessantly re-configured." (Ozban, 2014, p.12)

In the previous section, I elaborated on the historical, cultural and political power relations that shaped the work of television in Lebanon and thus are still embedded in its archive. In this section, I aim to present the most well-known narrative of *Télé Liban*, which is very much tied up to the idea of the Golden Age of the Lebanese nation. Older and younger generations, former staff members, journalists, filmmakers, writers and cultural institutions reminisce nostalgically about *Télé Liban*. (Richani, 2007). "Abu Salim", "Hind Abi Lamaa", "Abu Melhem", "Arbaa Mjanin w Bas", "Chouchou", and many other actors, presenters, expressions, and songs drew the history of Lebanon and refined the memory of the Lebanese and their nostalgia for the glorious days of *Télé Liban*, or as the Lebanese refer to it as *madi al zaman al jamil*—the past of the beautiful time where the story of television in Lebanon began. Indeed, the 1960s and the 1970s were the golden age of the two channels; the sixties produced comic and dramatic actors that are still famous today and became the fixed figures of the Lebanese screen. The television has also reinforced the image of artists whose beginnings were on the radio such as Fairuz, Samira Tawfiq and Wadih al-Safi. Just like the Lebanese commemorate political figures, they memorialize television figures, like Simon Asmar, Riad Sharara, Najib Hankash, Elsie Ferneini, and Hind Abi Lama.

The famous discourses regarding *Télé Liban*'s archive overlook that this archive contains rich records that challenge the politics of forgetting and dust off the remembering practices of the Lebanese past for a comprehensible future. However, *Télé Liban* was crafted on discourses and narratives— the narratives used in its news coverage to promote a united nation even after the nation fell apart. For example, Studio El Fan was the first program to discover talents in Lebanon, but the show debuted in 1972, at a time when the Arab region was boiling with Israeli-Arab tensions and the rise

of Arab nationalism and the capital Beirut being bombed by the Israelis targeting the airport and destroying the country's infrastructure (Traboulsi, 2006). Television was mostly a form of distraction about what was happening at that time.

On the one hand, the narratives of *Télé Liban*'s golden age replicate the nation's own narratives about its modern and rich pre-war days. On the other hand, *Télé Liban* is remembered by the same policy that the power mechanisms structured its content. As mentioned in the section above, the Ministry of Information often focused on shifting its political news towards unifying social and national norms. However, this archive has more than we choose to remember it. Thousands of cultural and political records narrating the stories of success, failure, wars, and changing power dynamics can be found in this archive. By only referring to the golden age, the archival discourse covers up the power relations or obscures the existence of the television and its role during the war days.

Télé Liban is known as "the first television: —the first in introducing color broadcast, the first in exporting local productions, the first that influenced the life of the Lebanese in all of its aspects, from fashion, social norms, entertainment, to knowledge and political or national values" (Kouyoumoudjian, 2016). *Télé Liban* was part of the Lebanese story, a milestone in the cultural collective memory, an authentic cultural heritage. In the midst of the cultural and economic prosperity of the fifties and the sixties, the Lebanese television started, and as Majzoub (2019) argues, *Télé Liban* was as a national institution that facilitated the creation of a Lebanese identity.

For the older generations, the optimistic view towards *Télé Liban* may be because it was the magic box that gave hope to the Lebanese after the 1958 War and the result of a "the national unity and technological advancement" (Khazaal, 2018, p.28).

The younger generation's collective memory was based on those nostalgic stories about *Télé Liban* and the repeated cultural series to this day. At the Directorate, the employees' time stopped at the golden days of the television. In the same manner, Richani (2007) also writes:

> "At the time we used to fight to push the limits, we were not the voice of the state, we were the voice of the people, we were not a state apparatus, although it was a state television, but [we were] a television station for all. We were the first who started the PAL/SECAM system in the Middle East, TL was the leader. We used to receive delegations from the Arab world for training in our news department. Lebanese productions ... used to conquer the Arab world, recalled a former editor-in-chief of the news section, before he added wistfully, I am telling you about that phase when there was a state ... This phase has ended." (p.85)

The employees at *Télé Liban* overlook the fact that the station was politically managed over the years by presidents and ministers of information to craft the content of the production according to political, cultural, and social structures. The Golden Age is the only discourse they want to approach *Télé Liban*.

The dynamics of remembering and forgetting regarding this television and its archive is a reproduction of the Lebanese memory that is based on "selectively" remembering and forgetting the past. Perhaps Koyoumoudjian (2017) perfectly summarizes this pining sentimentally for the Lebanese past as "a crisis of the Lebanese identity buried under the allure of that magic time from 1955 to 1975, nostalgically called the Golden Age" (p.23). This Lebanese process of reconstruction, retrieval, reinvention and reconciliation of a collective memory is doomed with two narratives. First, the "state-orchestrated" (Naef, 2018,p.26) a forced amnesia of the civil war, on the one hand to protect the militia leaders, on the other hand, to suppress and silence the trauma of the wars that happened. As Larkin (2010) writes "structural forgetting was encouraged through the culmination of a general war amnesty in 1991, media-

censorship laws (the 1994 broadcasting law), and the complete absence of criminal tribunals, compensation schemes, or truth and reconciliation committees." (p.618).

Second, the "counter-state sponsored amnesia" (Haugbolle, 2007, p.129) with a focus on cultural memory of the pre-war days; nostalgia came as a cure for the trauma of the war. Yearning back to the modern rich past is a remedy that helps the nation to forget the barbarity of the war, and to reconcile with the present. As Hanssen and Genber (2001) argue that "the need to produce a healthy image of the nation compelled the Lebanese to focus on cultural history in the postwar era, relaying certain schizophrenia in Lebanese attitudes to national and sectarian identity" (p.259). We came in terms with the past with a prompt of a nationalist nostalgia that replaced the "history" with "culture" (Haugbolle, 2007; Hanssen and Genberg, 2001).

At the same time, the way the Lebanese generations remember *Télé Liban* corresponds to the strategy the television followed to shift the attention of the Lebanese to its cultural productions rather than political and news coverage. The inclusion and exclusion in political news or cultural productions were according to certain power dynamics that dominated the television through the years. That's why on television, the 'Ayn a-Rummaneh's bus incident was a brief official statement of two sentences in the report issued by the security authorities (Kouyoumdjian, 2017). In another example, after the Israeli Invasion, on June 13, 1982, the Lebanese used the cars' batteries to watch the FIFA World Cup in Spain screened on *Télé Liban* (Khazaal, 2018, p.1). Once again *Télé Liban* was used as a distraction. As discussed above, the focus of the television when it was under the control of the state - not the political parties - was to promote the national unity and security.

C. Conclusion: Present, Past and Future

"Archival paradigms are mediators between the past, present and future" (Cook, 2013, p.102).

This chapter shows how the different cultural, political and economic powers structured the first Lebanese station. On the one hand, it was a way to promote a social and a national unity. On the other hand, it was a medium in the hands of the powerful Lebanese ideologies, the Arab Gulf countries, the French and the American powers, the militias during the war, and the business allies. Considering these different power dynamics is helpful to think of Télé Liban's archive as more than the mirror of the nation's Golden Age. A critical look helps demystify the archive and its potential with regard to the history and the future. The archive might be a place where historical narratives are constructed and created but also where powers are negotiated. The archive itself is also constrained by the same control and powers that govern the television station. The archive is a witness that speaks of all that the nation has undergone including the archival relationship to political, economic, technological and cultural power.

With all that was mentioned, the Lebanese archival television is an essential source for the study of Lebanese history. These audiovisual records visually bridge the present and the past. As Derrida (1996) argues that archives are "as much and more than a thing of the past, before such a thing, the archive should call into question the coming of the future […] promise and responsibility for tomorrow" (p.36). From here, if the historical and cultural events with all the power relations embedded in it are the ones who make the archive, then archives, in turn, reconstruct and evaluate the narratives, historical evidence them through documentation and preservation. Various binary

oppositions meet in this archive, which contains the history, the present, and represents the basis of the future, as it also portrays the conflict between the present and the past, the trauma and the nostalgia, the need to remember and to forget, the truth and the inherited conceptions or lies. Merging the present with the past by using visual archives are attempts of recreation of a historical continuity for the Lebanese memory that is in a constant search for its fragmented elements.

From here, it is important to think of how this archive is preserved. The preserved archive presents the task of archiving the memory first and then understanding the self, the other and the place. But also, if the archive is framed by the discourse of the Golden Age, what are the discourses that shape then its preservation practices and access conditions?

CHAPTER III

A STATE OF EMERGENCY FOR A MYTHICAL ARCHIVE

"The preservation of so-called national or state heritage is not, and never has been, a neutral concept, although it is presented as such by politicians, the press, intellectuals, and archivists" (Frick, 2010, p.35).

In 2009, viewers gathered at the Montagny in the French Cultural Center in Beirut to witness an event that was sponsored by the French Cultural Center, Fondation Liban Cinema, and *Télé Liban*. The event screened a French archival film of 45 minutes reviewing the significant historical moments of the French television's records and a 27 min archival record of *Télé Liban*. This is the first time *Télé Liban* began to crystalize as a "memory television." Suddenly, *Télé Liban* was not a failing state television but rather a rich historical record that documented Lebanon's golden age. While people were captivated by the potential of the archive, they were critical of what was actually shown. *Al-Akhbar* reporting on the event lamented there wasn't any symbolic indication of what these images do. They criticized the film for not having a goal, nor history or content, and reducing the archive to the days of glory. The author ends up with a provocative question "Where is *Télé Liban*'s archive?" (Ayoub, 2008, para.1).

Such an event represents an important shift in the discourse on *Télé Liban* and its scattered and damaged archive that was not meeting its full potential. Although the exact intention, purpose, and objective of the event were not clear, the effect was that media attention became focused on the existence and value of *Télé Liban*'s archive. In response to this, FLC has positioned itself as the body responsible for rehabilitating this archive. This reframing of the archive is an invitation to ask: what are the politics and mechanics of perseveration? And what is the archive and what isn't it?

I build this chapter upon Frick (2010)'s book that investigates preservation as a theory and method with relation to the nation-states formation, heritage studies, and power relations. She argues that the archival preservation boom is "increasingly imbued with notions of sanctioned cultural value, protection, ownership, and power […] emboldened and sanctioned by the archive's emphasis upon preservation" (p.27). Frick's study has been applied to an organized, well-preserved archive; I seek to address the preservation practices of a scattered, damaged, stolen and fading archive.

In the previous chapter, I looked at the prehistory of *Télé Liban*'s archive, its institutionalized political and economic formation, and its contextualization as a space of knowledge production. In this chapter, I look at the current state of the archive after years of its existence. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relationship between *Télé Liban*'s archive, the mechanics and socio-political conditions of archiving, the politics of preservation based on what is preserved, selected, damaged and scattered, and most importantly the role of agencies involved in the archiving and preservation processes. As Derrida (1995) reminds us, an archive is a place steeped in power. His framework urges us to think about the invisible factors that shaped this archive. Therefore, we can ask, *Télé Liban*'s archive is under house arrest of whom? What is the framework of concealed power and authority in this physical place? Who are the guardians of *Télé Liban*'s archive? And how they interpret the records? Why has the rhetoric on *Télé Liban*'s archive has been articulated through its disarrayed and decayed state?

In the discourse, *Télé Liban*'s archive takes the shape of two opposing forces. It is both something that desperately needs to be saved and also something that can be hidden away or destroyed for political gain. The archive is not neutral; it is a conflict

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between two forces that one pushes towards death and the other towards life. This assessment builds on Derrida's (1995) death and archive fever, in which he suggests that forgetting is an inherent point in the archiving process; this is what he refers to as the archive's "mal" or evil, its death principle. Derrida recognizes the archive as "a place of violence" where the power of concealment exists through an intended and planned drive to damage of an archive. He sheds insights on the political, patriarchal and authorship control of archive on one hand and collateral damage to the archive to conceal or change some facts. As Derrida (1995) states, "what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way" (p.18). In the frame of *Télé Liban*'s archive, what force dominates the other?

In this chapter, I argue that investigating the archival process at *Télé Liban* should be on the basis of its excluded records, and not only from the inclusion-centric view of what has survived. Second, I argue that framing *Télé Liban*'s archive through its state of disarray is a cultural and economic "project" for the state and the cultural institution. Rather than examining the technical conditions of archiving, this chapter clarifies and elucidates theoretically the factors and reasons for *Télé Liban*'s state today. By unravelling the power(s) embodied in this archive, it draws on critical factors that influence the process of archiving and preservation. The chapter will unpack the archive as a political, economic and cultural project in relation to the militias, the state, and cultural institution. It will begin with exposing the archiving practices throughout the excluded archive that serves the ideological intentions of the militias, the political elite and the economic purposes of the state it. Then it looks at the preservation discourse of a fading archive that serves the state and the cultural institution. From here, we are able to get a new view of the archive.

A. A Mythical Archive

"The technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event". (Derrida, 1995 p.17)

Many of the people closest to *Télé Liban* agree that the bulk of the main records no longer exist there. This raises an important question: if we are studying *Télé Liban*'s archive, are we looking at what is there? What it could be? Or rather what is excluded? This section speculates on an archive that was created more through exclusion than inclusion. Such a viewpoint challenges the mythical argument of a single, unified, "national" archive. As I showed in the previous chapter, *Télé Liban* as a station included and excluded based on the economic, political and cultural factors at the time. But as we'll see in this chapter that the archiving process itself also included and excluded material. Entering the archival space doesn't legitimize the survival or long-life duration of the record. A lot of different political, social, and cultural groups have had a particular interest in the archive intent on removing pieces of it for their own benefit. Presidents, research centers, militias, political elite, television stations monopolized, destroyed or sold historical records. I aim to analyze what remains in this archive while also keeping an eye on what was taken from it.

In the context of *Télé Liban*'s archive, the fragmented memories of the Lebanese nation are replicated in the fragmented and scattered archive. Layering on top of that, the scattered *Télé Liban*'s archive mirrors the state own dispersed power. Throughout the 15 years of civil war in Lebanon, the state's authority gradually weakened as the various militias' power progressively grew. The alliances formed after the war between the militias, specifically the warlords were dependent on economic

interests and sectarian balance (Traboulsi 2014). The physical division of the capital into East and West Beirut and the split of the television station itself facilitated the militias' movement to control or destroy some archival records. The war ended, but the state was less capable to restore its power and authority. The implementation and the reintegration of the militias' leaders into the new set of power dynamics began. The militia's leaders turned into the political elite of the country. *Télé Liban*'s archive with all its war records was one of the means for Lebanon's elites to maintain or protect their identity and power. The powerful elites influenced on the archiving process as in what gets to remain, as they simply took pieces of it.

Then, amid chaos and weak state power, the warring parties took advantage of the opportunity, setting up their own illegal television stations that reflected the state and the country's divisions, and rivaled *Télé Liban* significantly. Henceforth, the political control of the archive became an economic one; the records turned into assets in the hands of the state and the television for the benefit of the various television stations that serve the politicians and their influential business allies. The story of this archive shows the interrelated relationship between the archive and the power dynamics in Lebanon. It is a representation of the weak state, the control of the militias and the political elites with all their institutionalized power. By focusing on the question of exclusion, I'll show how the archiving practices are entrenched in social, political, cultural and economic power relations.

When the state was weakened during the war, the war militias expanded their power. The territories were divided according to their dominant sect. This division mirrored the political dispersion that was happening at that time. The Lebanese National Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party, the Amal Movement, the Palestinian

guerrilla forces, the Communist Party, and the Mourabitoun dominated the western part of the capital Beirut. Lebanese militias and some Lebanese army brigades loyal to the Phalange Christian Party controlled East Beirut. The spatial/sectarian split during the war divided *Télé Liban* into two television channels and, thus, two archives: one in Tallet Khayat (West Beirut) and the other in Hazmieh (East Beirut). Subsequently, the ownership of these archives came into the hands of the militias. The physical locations and how it connects to the history of the militias themselves foreground the political targeting of the archive that was happening at the time. The meaning of the geographical place of the televisions helped the militias' strategic thinking towards this archive.

The collaboration between employees and the militias facilitated the momentum of the records that began to be removed. As one group was targeting records, the other was protecting them. The destruction or protection was happening at different spaces and with different intentions. In East Beirut, the Phalangists destroyed or took historical records based on their ideological intentions. As Ziad Rahbani commented sarcastically that the stealing came in the interest of protecting "the Lebanese Christian culture" from the danger of the "alien Palestinians, the Muslim parties, the foreign left, and all the strangers" to save the homeland *(Rahbani,n.d.)*. Targeting the television's buildings was the constant aim of the two warring groups. As the Hazmieh television station was exposed to bombings and shellings (C. Beirouti, personal communication, 28 March 2019), militias collaborated with the employees to save records, some were monopolized by the "*Future Research Center,*" one of the main research centers in the Middle East at the time; others were simply monopolized. In West Beirut, as different warring militias controlled the region, the chaos was

pervasive in terms of using or taking records. The station's buildings were bombed, also exposed to fire in Tallet Khayat, no one can confirm what the bombing, negligence, and fire damaged.

As we can see, the archive was used and abused, destroyed and protected based on the militias' strategies and their future perceptions. For the militias that controlled it, it was a treasure to steal from and protect their legacy, for the competing militias it was things that needed to be destroyed because they understood the value of it. The driving force of this process was an urge to ensure identity by destroying the traces of the enemy and also protecting their legacy. Here, we should acknowledge the militias understanding of the power of the archive. There is this myth of militias as super chaotic but during the civil war, they were highly structured and highly organized. Giving space to the physical location of *Télé Liban* and how the militias took control, this shows how strategic and forth thinking they are.

After the war, the physical dispersion of the archive continued. In the pretext of protecting the records, the station distributed the archive among Tallet Khayat, Hazmieh, Sin El Fil and Hamra. But amidst the absence of laws and the control of political parties, Damaj (2012) revealed that "theft was sometimes carried out publicly in all centers…Mafia(s) smuggling the archive, theft and looting continued until 1993" (Damaj, *As-Safir*, 2012). Removing pieces from this archive was not always theft. As a state archive and the political parties are controlling the state, they also had the power to control the archive. The different interviews affirm that every political party and every political leader have war records. In this context, Kouyoumoudjian argues, "All of the political parties monopolized records; I believe they have the right to do it because who owns this archive?" (Z. Kouyoumdjian, personal Communication, 11 April 2019).

The state's power remained fragmented, but the militias transformed from soldiers and warring groups to the powerful political elite. For example, Walid Jumblatt, the leader of the progressive socialist Druze party, has all the records of the Mountain's War and many of the massacres. Moreover, he took all the archival records of his father, Kamal Jumblat. Similarly, Bachir Gemayel's family has all the records of the Christian leader. To grant their position and their power hierarchies, controlling *Télé Liban*'s archive was a political act. It was not for a re-use purpose, but for an effacement drive of the memory of the war par excellence. As Hourani (2008) writes "the performative making of the nation through narrations of war is not simply an intellectual exercise of interest to academics. Nor is it simply an exercise in which the nation works through traumatic events […] It is about inclusion and exclusion. It is about the very constitution of the nation itself." (p.304). The exclusion of the war records was one of the "structural forgetting's aspects (Larkin, 2010, p.617) to cut the Lebanese off their traumatic past.

What survived the militias/elites' monopoly later became the financial target of the different economic power structures entrenched in this public institution. As was shown, the political power in Lebanon doesn't belong exclusively to the state and, therefore, neither does the economic power. Although the creation of the television archive has always been a national issue (Hagedoorn & Agterbegerg, 2016), the case of *Télé Liban*'s archive was different; politicians and their business allies, directors at *Télé Liban*, and ministers of information monetized in archive. As the state's economic power is also in crisis, *Télé Liban* is a dying financial institution that needs money. The archive is its most valuable asset. This archive is no longer exclusive to *Télé Liban*; the original copies are no longer the exclusive preserve of the state channel. They were sold to other Lebanese or Arabic channels.

Lebanese series dating back to the 1970s and 1980s were, for example, sold to Lebanese stations, in particular Al-Jadeed station. Employees at *Télé Liban* argue that "legitimate" contracts have been concluded between state television and other stations. For example, there was a swap deal with Al-Jadeed station, with the former providing state television with fuel, in exchange for rights to several Lebanese soap operas (Modon, anonymous, 2013). Additionally, records were sold to more than one Arab channel, including Rotana and ART (Arab Radio and Television). Others were sold to Syrian television. Most of the Lebanese and Arab channels, leaked images stored on the archives of 2-inch, which is the biggest loss of television (As-safir, Damaj, 2012). In another known incident, Al Sabbah production company, paid $ 500,000 to buy part of the archive, a variety of black and white series, plays of Fayrouz and the Rahbani brothers: Lulu, Petra, Mays Al Reem. On November 2010, Al Sabbah asked for the records of the famous Lebanese singer Sabah under the pretext of watching specific clips for the pre-production of the series *Shahroura*, which narrates the story of this legend. The company received the original tapes. As we can see, if the television was first established for commercial purpose, and then shaped by the funds that created its productions, the economic power structures are also deep-rooted in the preservation and archiving practices of this archive.

The story of *Télé Liban*'s archive confirms Featherstone (2006) suggestion that the archive has a spatial history, too; it can be destroyed, stolen, purchased and relocated. As shown, this archive was reconfigured at different phases to fit the ideological intentions and to reshape collective memory, and historical facts of this nation. It was also an economic and political investment that serves the economic, cultural and political dispersed structures in the country. The archive through its

inclusion and exclusion process involves the selection of material according to a set of political/ideological values defined through institutional policies and reflecting the social, political and ideological hierarchies (Brown and David- Brown, 1998). In doing so, these hierarchies not only shape the archiving process of this archive but also reconfigure the role of this archive as only a witness to the Lebanese golden age.

This section shows that the archival place of *Télé Liban* lacks many key points for our historical understanding. Rather than a loss, the unavailable archive tells another story that teaches us about the nation itself. Scholars have theorized the importance and the significance of an available archive as a cultural heritage for the memory, identity and historical knowledge, as their availability "not only serves to justify the existence of national archival institutions but also promotes democracy; transparency and accountability in a nation" (Mhlanga, 2014, p.1). The unavailability of *Télé Liban*'s records signifies the appropriation and monopolizing of the "national" when the state is weak and as a parallel representation of the dispersed political and economic power. All this information challenges our own perception of *Télé Liban*'s archive. The examination of what was excluded from this archive revealed the structures of power conspired against this state television. We are no longer talking about an exclusive state television's archive but rather of a dispersed and scattered archive in general. What remains in the archive, thus, does not represent the archive as a whole. What is excluded is way more than what rests on the shelves of *Télé Liban*'s archive, here comes the question that what is the state of the remaining records in the institutional walls of *Télé Liban*'s archive? Where did they archive and preserve? Are they stored, digitized and accessible? What is the framework of preservation? In the next section, I'll elaborate on how the state perceives those records as cultural and economic assets in terms of the

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preservation practices.

B. Preserving the State of Emergency

> *"Preservation […] should be viewed as discourse or as socially structured practice, instead of a natural, logical way of incorporating historical moving images into contemporary life" (Frick, 2010, p.23).*

In 2009, FLC digitized 100 hours with the financial support of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Plan images Archives. As mentioned above, the restored records screened with a 45 min archival French Film were criticized for lacking any historical, cultural and political significance. Two years later, the *Télé Liban*'s archive came back to the fore. This time not because of the controversy surrounding the lack and the significance of its records but rather because of the fading status of the archive.

The tapes distributed between the shelves or thrown on the ground, the smell of mold emitting from rooms, the moisture filtering the old records, and the effects of war are visible on the tapes. This scene, like the archive, can be seen in Lara Saba's *Shuttered Memories* film produced by FLC as a fundraising attempt to complete the restoration project of the archive of one of the oldest television stations in the region. The documentary also includes interventions of Aimée Boulos, the director of FLC, and the supervisor of the digitization project. She emphasizes repeatedly that the archive is preserved in disastrous conditions and, therefore, any delay in the restoration worsens this state. She claims that if the restoration is not completed soon, it will all be in vain as the records will crumble into complete decay.

At the same time, although *Télé Liban*'s officials admit that a small part of the records was sold, stolen, taken, they do not acknowledgee the extent to which the archive has been pilfered. On the one hand, for the employees at the Directorate, the

discourse and the myth of a complete, single, and exclusive state archive has to exist. On the other hand, the discourse of failure and the urgent need to preserve the fading *Télé Liban*'s archive is the common rhetoric when talking about this archive at the Directorate. They associate the reason of the fading archive day after day to the lack of funds to equip the Directorate with good equipment and professional labor. The employees use the exact same phrase: "we need to declare a state of emergency to save this rich cultural heritage." In doing so, they present the archive through its state of emergency that needs a quick national action.

Frick (2010) investigates the archive in terms of the centrality of the nation-states. Reevaluating the official stance of a fading heritage archive discourse builds on her argument that centralizes the value of the archive as a rich heritage for the nation employed effectively by the institutions when the archive is "under threat" (p.84). In this context, she writes, "viewing preservation as a discourse or as structured practice, rather than a natural, logical way of incorporating historical moving images into contemporary life, scholars and practitioners can observe how film heritage has been constructed and invoked at particular times, for specific reasons, and by particular individuals" (Frick, 2010, p.29). I use her understanding of the archive and the discourse of threat employed to the context of *Télé Liban*. First, FLC and *Télé Liban* approached the archive through the heritage canons and role of the archive for the Lebanese nation's golden age. Second, they began to focus on the miserable preservation conditions and circumstances of the archive, and the need to provide the necessary funds. What the foundation has done proves that the restoration of the archive, with a financial support, can happen in Lebanon. The most effective way to

proceed with the restoration process is by providing grants for the project from major international organizations; otherwise the work will remain under threat.

In the context of *Télé Liban*'s records, promoting the discourse of a fading archive elucidates both the heritage and cultural value of the archive, and the lack of financial support to enhance the poor preservation conditions. I argue in this section that the above-mentioned discourses are strategically employed for financial and cultural interests. Both of the institutions focus on the heritage importance of this decaying archive as a way to ask for funds. Its state of disarray legitimizes the need for funds. The heritage fading oriented discourse is rooted in the two oppositional forces of the death and archive fever. The funding dreams depend on an archive that is never fixed and always in disarray. Meanwhile, if it were to be fixed, the funding will dry up. The archive simultaneously needs to be in disarray and needs to be fixed.

FLC, the preeminent cultural institution, took the position of cultural rehabilitator of the state's archive. It developed a reputation as the saviour of the Lebanese memory's archive. And as both of the institutions were affiliated to France, Télé Liban was an easy fit for FLC. They are trying to construct this archive discursively along with an alliance with France that is more culturally important and significant. According to Majzoub (2019), France had an important role in forming the first Lebanese television, and of course France will even have the leverage in the archive. Thus, the overarching intent of this section is to argue that talking about *Télé Liban*'s archive through its state of disarray is a cultural and economic empowerment "project" for the Lebanese nation's elite and the state. I ground my focus on three questions: What is the framework of the directorate and the institution's preservation

practices? How was their preservation process working? Why is FLC the only

institution that took part in preserving some of the archival records?

On October 2005, after years of being neglected in storage rooms in different

locations with temperatures up to 60 degrees celcius and humidity up to 130%, the

rescue operation of *Télé Liban*'s archive started. First, a study was conducted by the

Ministry of Information, which estimated the value of approximately 40000 archival

hours at $13 million. Second, the head of the archiving department, Osman Al-Majzoub,

was assigned to transfer all the archival material, including paper archives dating back

to the creation of the television, to digital content. Within this context, the entire archive

was transferred to Hazmieh, where the sorting and restoration operations began. During

this period, there wasn't any preservation department or directorate at *Télé Liban*. There

was no plan of action to save this archive or to renew it. Several years later, the

Minister of Information Walid Daouk, with his "mindset of preservation" (Bratslavsky,

2013), established the Directorate of the Archive in 2012. The main plan of the

Directorate was to protect the records that still exist, prioritizing the oldest 16 mm and

2-inch formats. All the tapes were classified and transferred to this independent archive-

based Directorate in Sin El Fil with an area of 500 square meters. The tapes were

distributed on shelves to be kept intact, in air-conditioned rooms within certain

temperature.

Certainly, the lack of equipment, labor and space affected the preservation

process. They are only eight employees working on this huge project, and they are

unable to cope with the changing institutional culture and archival preservation

technologies. Employees claim that they need at least five years to finish their

digitization work. According to Osman Majzoub, the director of the Directorate of

Archive, "the state has to declare a state of emergency; we don't have a suitable or new equipment and we are afraid that a new generation won't accept to work with the existing labor conditions and circumstances, thus we'll lose more […] Every day we are losing records" (O.Majzoub, personal communication, 28 March 2019). Here we have to locate the Directorate as part of the complexities of a Lebanese state institution. The Directorate of Archive and the preservation process at *Télé Liban* were limited and framed by the structure of the television as a public institution. The social, economic, and political instability of the state and the invisible power relations had an impact on the preservation flow. The Directorate needs infrastructural innovation and human resources, but the economic support was poor and each minister carries an independent agenda. Also, as the Directorate is part of *Télé Liban*, a state-owned institution, it is subject to the laws of the Lebanese state in terms of employment, labor laws, and budgets. It also reports to the Ministry of Information, which considers the archive as a national treasure but doesn't work towards a concrete solution for the remaining archive, unless through funds.

The prestigious elite Lebanese, French affiliated cultural institution FLC was the only institution that collaborated or was allowed to collaborate with the television station to preserve the archive. Since the early 2000s, FLC has been aware of the neglected archive. Although its actual work was to digitally restore and transfer the 16mm movies from *Télé Liban*'s archive (Marks, 2015), its interest was also to attract funds. Given the fact that the French Embassy was one of the foundation's main supporters, they communicated with INA, the French national institute of archive, who conducted a preliminary study about the needed criteria and methodologies for the preservation process. This study, according to FLC, is available at the Ministry of

Information, which denied in return having any study related to *Télé Liban*'s archive. So, is everything that FLC say about the archive true?

The first phase of the project has been completed with 100,000 euros in funding from the French Embassy. Although a significant grant was received, little of it went to the preservation practices. Instead, different beneficiaries were paid within the hierarchy. In this context, a common argument in the interviews I conducted underscores that every attempt to improve something related to the archive should profit FLC and the state, including the ministers of information, who all take overhead. What is odd is that although FLC received grant money to repair what they are working on, they asked *Télé Liban* for 1500$/ hour to commence the project. Here we can deduce how the financial interest determines the discursive structures of the archive itself. I argue that Lebanon is a neo-patriarchal state composed of a system based on political extortion, especially among elites and the state, which use of the archive's resources to achieve special benefits. This is done in the presence of privileged persons who render themselves above the law in terms of their ability to undermine the principle of the state's monopoly.

The archive attracted the interest of the U.S, Swiss and Turkish Embassies; however, the only accepted fund was the French funding through FLC, with the argument that the other embassies wanted to take the records outside the institutional walls of *Télé Liban*. Although the important barrier to archiving is funding, the ideological intentions of financiers and the political agenda of institutions are also important. Streams of funding have a critical impact on the archival processes. Brown and Davis-Brown (1998) explain that budget and financial issues "not only are means for allocating resources to various units and functions within an organization; they also

are instruments for defining the character and activities of the organization itself"
(p.128). In the case of Tèlè LIban's archives, France is also part of the story. The
connection between FLC and the French Embassy are very clear. FLC thinks that
ideally the archive should end up with INA. The status of the archive now is a
temporary step to be given to the French INA.

The collaboration with FLC stopped, so as the funding. Since then we no
longer hear or read about the archive in the media. However, FLC is still the spokesman
regarding their responsibility on rehabilitating the archive. They turned a blind eye to
the fact that the foundation's work with the directorate ended seven years ago. This
raises a series of questions: why does the foundation represent the topic of *Télé Liban*'s
archive in conferences rather than the employees from the directorate itself? Does FLC
monopolize the topic of the archive in the media?

FLC responsibility to this state archive was demonstrated primarily through
exhibitions and conferences. This cultural institution wanted to be known and
recognized as an important key figure in the history of *Télé Liban*'s archive. FLC is one
of the strongest elite cultural institutions in Lebanon; their work is related to the
Lebanese film industry, funding films, workshops, and conferences and preserving the
Lebanese cultural heritage. I do not want to downplay their leadership and effectiveness
in this field, however FLC positions itself as the cultural arbitraries of the country.

In the context of *Télé Liban*'s archive, the archive is more of a "project" than a
physical space, an anticipated site of memory production by "intentional post-national
imagined communities" (Featherstone, 2006, p.594). In this manner, to understand the
discursive role of this cultural institution, I highlight the framework of the elite in the
Lebanese society. There have been many political and economic changes in Lebanon

over the years, new political and economic elites have emerged, especially after Taif agreement. However, my interest is the cultural elite of the country. Zogheib's (2013) discussion of ethnic entrepreneurs is particularly significant. Zogheib (2013) refers in her analysis of the Lebanese nation to the Christian ethnic entrepreneurs whom I suggest are also the cultural entrepreneurs of the country.

As the power of the Christians weakened after the war, they formed cultural alliances to revive the pre-war days when they "enjoyed control over the state" (Zogheib, 2013, p.7) In the modern nations, the state' national agents and actors, described by Zogheib (2013) as ethnic entrepreneurs manipulate and romanticize some historical narratives to create unified collective memories They play a significant role in the formation of the nation's narratives, they nostalgically revive the past, they create the Hobsbawnian traditions, they set the educational programs and unify the cultural reforms, they could be, "the elite, the intellectuals, the religious leaders, the strongmen of the communities" (Zogheib, 2013, p.13). The Christian ethnic entrepreneurs in the country try to monopolize the cultural heritage boom in Lebanon and this politicized nostalgia is a political, economic and socio-cultural force that serves the elitists past majority. *Télé Liban* was one way of doing so. It is a television that highlights there glory past days, revive their role in the country.

C. Conclusion: A Scattered Archive that Needs to be Saved

> *"The imperial archive was a fantasy of knowledge collected and united in the service of state and Empire" (Richards, 1993, p.6).*

The two primary aims of this chapter were to investigate the archons and to ascertain the power embodied in this archive in relation to involvement of the elite and

the warlords. Political, economic, cultural forces framed and controlled the preservation of the records. The media attention and economic profit tented to take precedency over the true goal of archiving. The archive reflects the dominant social structures of cultural institutions, the power relations at Télé Liban, and the economic value of this archive. Employed as a valuable or invaluable archive, organized or unorganized archive is a systematic process deployed at different time and circumstances based on the interest of the state or its allies, whether politically, culturally and economic. Mobilizing the cultural heritage preservation serves the interest of the state and FLC. As we can see, FLC showed little interest in the historical value of this archive, and much attention to its economic facet and its cultural benefits. Access to this archive is a way of finding out what has been left and what has been lost, what faded and what remained at Télé Liban. Is this cultural heritage accessible?

CHAPTER IV

DIVING INTO THE ARCHIVE

"To show is to preserve," said Langlois.
"No," said Lindgren. "To preserve is to show" (Frick, 2010, p.186).

On 25 March 2019, I visited the Directorate of Archive at *Télé Liban* as a researcher and not as a requester of records. The interviewees were mainly focusing on the status of the archive and the preservation practices without any mention to the scope of accessing this place or the framework of using the archive. In the context of *Télé Liban*'s archive, to preserve and to show are to highlight the records' state of disarray. The discourses of a fading archive come under the pretext and urgency of protecting the archive for future generations, but what about what remains in this archive, what about the orphan records? What I saw and what I heard were completely different. The orphan records were organized and preserved in rooms with good scientific conditions and the momentum of work was normal. Is access a threat to *Télé Liban*'s archive and its discourses?

In the previous two chapters, I interpreted the archive as a space of knowledge production with economic, political and cultural power relations shaping the availability of records. In contrast, this chapter is not about what is in the archive but rather how access to it is granted or not granted. I aim to study the factors implicated in defining the accessibility of the archival place and space of *Télé Liban* and to shed light on the significance of the "less-discussed" and "much-needed" discourse of accessing this national archive.

Access is a matter of great public interest for archivists, institutions, scholars, and media policymakers. Access may be defined as a spectrum of use, reuse and

permission, ranging from scholarly to uninhibited public use to the ability to discover

and understand the archive (Prelinger, 2007; Loewen, 2008). Frick (2010) foregrounds

access as a central debate in audiovisual preservation discourse, meaning, and practice.

In the same spirit, Frick (2010) and Prelinger (2007) acknowledge the dialectic between

the two primary archiving missions: preservation, and access. They stress on the process

of preservation as an act of "posterity" in the industry; the preservation of the material

"takes precedence over access to content" in most contexts (Frick, 2010, p.10).

Therefore, to keep the materials safe, intact, unused, and protected for future

generations is more important than ready access. Archivists or institutions tend to

privilege preservation to access for fear of damage of records. As "keepers" of culture,

they set high barriers using arguments that access against the law or expensive. Does the

archive have a real historical and cultural value if only preserved? Is the archivists fear

of "showing" the records stems only in their eagerness to protect the archive? Why

access is so scary to archivists and institutions?

This dichotomy has been flattened out in the case of *Télé Liban*, where

preservation and its discourses are prioritized over access. The overall discourse on *Télé

Liban*'s archive ignores the importance of access to these historical records.

Preservation practices, narratives, and discourses were the focal interest of *Télé Liban*,

the Ministry of Information, the funders, the cultural institution, and the media. But we

might ask why. Is it for the safety of the records? Or are the state and cultural

organizations and institutions afraid of what these records might expose? Along similar

lines, the key questions I address in this chapter are: is the archive a sacred a treasure to

be kept for a long-time survival than a short-time accessibility (Frick, 2010; Jeavons,

2007)? Or is it, as Lowenthal (1985) claims of the archive "to appreciate the past is to

transform it" (p.187), to use it and reuse it in different contexts and to create new contents by scholars (Sarkikakis, Kolokytha & Rozgonyi, 2016)?

I argue that access to the archive reinforces the already embedded power hierarchies that exists in the archive itself but also challenges the preservation discourses and the way that people discuss the archive. On the one hand, the structures of access parallel the economic, cultural and political power relations embedded in the archive. Just like preservation, power relations are negotiated in defining the structures of accessibility. For example, the primary mean of which people is able to access the archive is through the system of Wasta which is by itself rooted in the same structures that we saw determining the shape of the archive in the previous chapter. From here, Wasta overcomes the structures of access but also reinforces them. On the other hand, access deals with more than the materiality and the use of the records; it poses a threat to the dominant narratives. By not allowing access, they will further focus on the preservation practices and protect the multiple unconfirmed or in deterministic preservation narratives of a fading, disarrayed, stolen, damaged and dispersed archive.

A. An Open Structured Access

"Who controls the archive? Is it closed or is it open? Is it within institutional walls or outside them? Who can have it, how to get it, what they can get to and what they want to do with the contents once they have them?" (Garde-Hansen, 2011, p.75)

Mary Jane Miller (1992) wrote about her utopian dream of a digital, open-access archival paradise. Writing in the early 1990s, on the cusp of the digital age, she imagined an archive for all sorts of people, with the help and collaboration of archivists who admire and value the work of television scholars (Byers & VanderBugh, 2010; Byers, 2007). Her romanticized description is the result of the Canadian scholars'

struggle with an inaccessible national televisual archive. Miller's dream is a useful starting point for thinking about *Télé Liban*'s archive and access to it. If in 1992 a digital open access archive was a dream, then what can we say about the status of access to *Télé Liban*'s archive in 2019? We might also wonder whether Miller's dream of an open access far from reality is doomed with technological, economic and political factors that define the framework of accessibility, then, is this dream of open access a possibility?

Though the framework of accessibility is different from one country to another and from one archive to another, the need to investigate the debates of access with regard to the "gatekeepers of knowledge" (Nelson & Cooke, 2010; Noordegraf, 2010) remains important. Building on Foucault (1969), what can be known and how it is to be known, what are the debates of access in the context of *Télé Liban*'s archive? Who chooses what can be viewed and how to be viewed? What are the barriers to access? What are the determinants and challenges of access? Do some people have the privilege of accessing the state television archive, while others do not?

Challenging *Télé Liban* asserting the open access to this archive, I aim in this section to discuss how access to *Télé Liban*'s archive, as the preservation practices and narratives, is entrenched with political, economic and cultural power relations and structures. First, access is defined and framed by Wasta, a pervasive culture in the Lebanese society, a canon of personal knowing that helps the Lebanese gets what they want. Second of all, access reinforces the cultural and political narratives and policies of the state. Wasta is a mean to go around the structures of access to *Télé Liban*'s archive, but the same power relations are also negotiated in it. Wasta supports the preservation

narratives while also using the narratives of the past and the present, and not the records themselves to build the future.

1.   Justifying Access

"A researcher accessing television's recorded traces within the archival spaces poses an additional obstacle in terms of access. A level of selection and a level of acceptance that not everything can be viewed will be viewed is always inherent in the historical process" (Bratslavsky, 2013, p.96).

Télé Liban repeatedly broadcasts parts of its archive. This "regime of repetitions" (Bratslavsky, 2013) is the main way that scholars and others access the *Télé Liban* archive. However, Bratslavsky (2013) explains, "using the commercial product to gain access to historical evidence versus physically locating the source alters one's experience and understanding of the historical material" (p.97); not choosing, selecting, and spending hours diving in the archive limits the scope of thinking, and of knowing what is available. This affects the knowledge that is disseminated in scholarly work. Nelson and Cooke (2010) show how the lack of a national television archive can lead to a misrepresentation or re-framing of a national television canon that cannot be informed by what is unknown because it is unavailable and inaccessible to researchers. *Télé Liban*'s archive has thousands of hours that some of it are not part of our cultural or political memory and others needs to be discovered and used in different cultural productions. This archive may be very useful for writing or collecting pieces of our history, but it is only restricted to the repeated series that makes up to about 80 percent of the total broadcast hours (Nötzvold, 2009).

For example, in studying how sectarianism is portrayed and language is dealt with on Lebanese television, Khazaal (2018) uses *My Aunt's Home* series broadcasted

on *Télé Liban* between the years 1987-1989 as one of her case studies. She criticizes the idealization of the non-sectarian representations that leads to sectarianism itself. She also elucidates the use of Fusha and the Lebanese vernacular as a characteristic representing the Lebanese nation. She picked this series because it was repeatedly broadcasted, even after its original airing date. It is an interesting analysis, but it is also limited based on how she accessed the archive. She mostly accessed this material from outside of Lebanon as part of this commercial use of the archive. In doing so, she reinstates the very famous narrative about sectarianism without taking into consideration that the series was screened on a state television or the conditions of producing a series on *Télé Liban*. In addition, *Télé Liban* has a lot of visual evidence to offer especially in terms of the language, and the use of the Fusha and the Lebanese vernacular. As it was discussed in Chapter 1, the use of language was based on economic, cultural and political structures. Khazaal's interpretation was restricted by her lack of access to the archive, and access to the TL archive would have, possibly, generated an entirely different analysis, one that moved away from the "Golden Age" narrative that already discursively structures the unknowable archive. This raises the question of what would if meant for her to access the archive?

Of course, we cannot fault Khazaal. Accessing the physical place of *Télé Liban* or even a digital platform is impossible. This is despite claims by the Directorate that there is easy and open access to the archive. Every historian, researcher, academic or filmmaker must submit a written request detailing the required records and their purpose. Multiple administrators review the request. If the required material is available and they determine it is not detrimental to public interest, a partial copy of it is given to the requester, who signs a form agreeing to preserve the moral rights of *Télé Liban*, and

not to copy the given records. Otherwise, the television will legally prosecute. However, this form overlooks the fact that there is no law that allows or preserves *Télé Liban*'s rights regarding the archive. People, even if they follow procedure, cannot access the space of the archive and there are gatekeepers who further limit what people can do with it. Further, by drawing on vague terms, like "detrimental to public interest and moral rights," *Télé Liban* makes the rules governing access even more obscured and whim to the gatekeepers' personal interpretation.

Accessing the national Lebanese television is limited by practical, financial and organizational reasons. My own experience of accessing the archive tells that although the employees at the *Télé Liban*'s archive are committed to preservation, they are not equipped to guide scholars and researchers to use the archive. Staff and administrators identify two main reasons for these limitations. First, there is a fear of a more dispersed archive. As discussed in the previous chapter, the chaotic monopolization of this archive by politicians, political parties, militias, and television stations forced the television to set limits to control what and who takes from this archive. Another argument is that there is a lack of funds to provide the necessary equipment and expertise to facilitate access to this archive. Employees mention that the public could not view everything; the inclusion and exclusion of records through an accessible platform is a necessity and needs years of work. The way that employees talk about access reinforces the overall discourse on the archive as an institution that lacks funding and an organizational framework. However, because no one has access to the archive, it is hard to evaluate whether or not that's true.

The arguments of funds lack of equipment and labor, and the need to protect the archive frame the official discourse of limited access. Whether or not these

statements by employees are true—and they may very well be—access is inherently an exercise of power. Access needs to be unpacked and examined just like the archive itself, and it is never separate from the other forces that shape what the archive is. Along the same lines, the power of the archive doesn't only lie in its power of inclusion/exclusion; the power of access is a force unto itself. As Schwarz and Cook (2016) mention, in dealing with archives in society, scholars must recognize separately two themes: "knowledge and the shaping of archives and archives and the shaping of knowledge. Imbricated in these themes is the exercise of power—power over information and power of information institutions" (p.9). In the same manner, Freshwater (2003) explains that the relationship between the state and the archive does not just lie in the formation of national identity but also in "the state's methods of maintaining control of its subjects" (p.8). The power of accessing the archive also lies in the control of some ministers of information who issued a decree that allows them to choose the scope of accessibility and to review the requests of access. Just like the marginalization of some historical records is defined by the archiving and preservation factors, framing the power/knowledge nexus in the archival practices in terms of the structures and power of access is important. The control over the archive through access means also the control of society and the control of determining history's winners and losers. However, I argue that all of those tightening borders of accessing the archive fall in front of Wasta, a political, cultural and economic Lebanese way that will be discussed in the next section.

2.   Wasta

The power of People (Timonthy, 2011).

In Lebanon, there are ways to overcome the tight restrictions over access. As we'll see, even the forms that overcome the limitations on access don't overcome the politics that govern access in the first place. My own experience as described in the introduction to this thesis confirms that access is tied to the Wasta, which varies from person to another. In this respect, as a state institution, *Télé Liban*'s archive cannot be framed or described as a closed or open place to be accessed. Instead, it is a space controlled by favoritism.

It is hard to describe for a non-Lebanese the meaning of the word Wasta, which has become a socially reproduced practice in our everyday lives. Wasta is a system in which personal connections allow people to overcome or circumvent processes and procedures. With Wasta, people draw on these personal connections in order to acquire jobs, to dodge taxes, to access resources, etc. The culture of Wasta, is one of the most effective ways in Lebanon to access services; it intervenes in all actions related to state institutions in general, including employment, resources, goods, positions, inheritance laws, education, etc. The Lebanese tournure of the word Wasta is different from the initial Arabic meaning of this word. The Lebanese Wasta is a method, pretext, an intermediary, a mean, or an agency based on personal knowing. The Wasta mechanism is related to the sectarian system in Lebanon and the reproduction and distribution of power relations based on sects. In other circumstances, the canon of Wasta can be connoted to favoritism through the intervention of a powerful agency. Wasta is tied to the weak state, as Tarab and Eagen (n.d.) explain. They show how Wasta as "a particular form of institutionalized social capital has become the dominant socially

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efficient resource, and how the majority of Lebanon's state and non-state institutions have become subordinated to the logic of this capital, and to the principle of legal sectarianism upon which its circulation is based" (p.28).

Télé Liban is implicated in Wasta. It could be a way to overcome the limitations of access. At the same time, we should not forget that it is still tied to other ways in which power operates in Lebanon, including the weak state. As *Télé Liban* is a public state institution, the concept of Wasta is not far from it, and the submission to its practices is not the decision of the Directorate's staff. In this sense, Kouyoumdjian (2019) argues "If a senior official in the state contacts the Directorate and asks for records to one of his relatives, is it possible to refuse his request?" (personal communication, 11 April 2019) As mentioned in the previous chapter, two elite families Jemayel and Jomblat asked for records and the staff was submitted to accept. The staff is yield to the structures of *Télé Liban* as a state institution.

Wasta is a corrupt pact that represents a weak state, but on the surface, at least for some people, Wasta is a savior. Although wasta is tied to corruption, it is, nevertheless, a mean of access, and—as we've seen—access to *Télé Liban*'s archive is important. In the case of the neglected *Télé Liban*'s archive and the lack of interest of the state to qualify the directorate and create a platform accessible for the public with economic benefits for the television, it is a mean of access. But rather than accept it uncritically, we should ask what this wasta entails and what it represents?

Wasta doesn't alwasy lead to the same levels of access. It is a way to go around the access limitations, but if we actually examine it closely, wasta is not only tied to the structures of power in Lebanon, but it is in and of itself uneven. The scope of access varies greatly depending on the wasta that one has access to. In spite the fact that

I had wasta, I couldn't access the place of the archive physically. On a similar note, Tabar and Eagen demonstrate "how the use of wasta and wasta-like practices—not to mention agents' attitudes towards and perceptions of such practices—varied according to their capital structures and their relation to the reproduction mechanisms" (p.29). My access to *Télé Liban* was limited to 20 sec chosen by the employees. In contrast we might consider an example like Zaven Kouyoumdjian, a famous television presenter, who spent five years in the Directorate examining the archive physically for his two books on the golden moments of Lebanese television.

The attempt of the well-known Lebanese-Armenian presenter Zaven and his publication of two books *Assaad Allah Massakoum* (2015) and *Lebanon on Screen* (2017) to document the important moments of *Télé Liban* are worth considering. What moments can reduce the whole past? Were the records used in the "subjects" of the books? Or were they an "object" to produce books? Was the "content" of the records the mere focus of the writer? Or were they used as a "carrier" for cultural or political purposes? (Jeavons, 2007, p.20).

3.   Throughout the Narratives Lens

"The memories of television viewers in Lebanon in the days of glory and war are restored in this book […] all this and the story of television remained absent and marginalized" (Kouyoumdjian, 2015).

The memory and the history of the first Lebanese television are completely out of documentation. Kouyoumdjian was the first to write about the history of the television industry in Lebanon using *Télé Liban*'s archive. His work and access demand that we consider a less-addressed question in the literature on archive and access: What about the positionality of the researcher or the scholar in his use and interpretation of an

archive? This question of selection and classification by the users of archive for scholarly work, in common with Shwartz and Cook (2002) describing this process of "on-going critical interpretation among creators, keepers, and users as a form of power sensitive conversation unfolding the relationship between archives, records, and society."(p.12) We might consider Kouyoumdjian who is a prime example of someone who had an open access to *Télé Liban*'s archive. This access to the archive resulted in two books, one in Arabic published in 2015 and one in English published in 2016. I argue that his work was a race of access more than a documentation of the content itself. His works are more about demonstrating his access to the archive than about showcasing the archive itself. The two books were the story of his access more than the story of the television. As a result, the content of the books reinforces and re-inscribes the same narrative of the archive that the official discourse gives us about the war, the Lebanese memory, and the archive.

According to Kouyoumdjian, he was the first one to enter the archive rooms after years of neglect. He even described diving into the swamps of water to save records (Kouyoumdjian, personal communication, 2019). He is one of the only witnesses of the archive's poor state. He had the "carte blanche" to spend hours, days, and years in the archive. After five years of research, covering three decades of history in Lebanon, and building on the pioneering cultural role that Lebanon played in shaping the features of the Arab world, his work reads the experience of the Lebanese television from a global perspective. Speaking of historical television material, the question of the images and their importance in supporting the content of this type of project is emphasized. The books are full of pictures. They resemble the television itself and can be considered visual books, full of colorful images that truly give a flavor of television's

past. The books are written in very dynamic prose, and his enthusiasm is visible in every turn because he spent years working for this television station. The books are the first of their kind in terms of its approach to the Lebanese archive of television. Kouyoumdjian combines historical information and personal stories of the most prominent personalities that accompanied the era. The books are structured around the 100 most important moments of television history. And yet we might wonder, did open access to the *Télé Liban*'s archive generate new narratives about the history of *Télé Liban*?

Indeed, the books fill an important gap in the scholarship on Lebanese popular culture, Lebanese television, and its leading role in the Middle East. At the same time, they re-tell the same narratives that have become commonplace. I argue that these two books actually re-inscribe the existing narratives of both *Télé Liban* and its archive. Kouyoumdjian had an important role in *Télé Liban*. He began his media career in the early 1990s at *Télé Liban*, where he first met with the treasures of the archive. As an Armenian, he was the new image of Lebanese youth after the war, far from the sectarian stereotype. He was close to the television, and he became susceptible to the same discourses. Although the aim was to narrate Lebanon's history through television, the books do not give the history its fair right. The subjectively selected moments instead favor the constructed narratives of the Lebanese nation as a whole, and the role of the first Lebanese television in particular.

Of the 100 moments that he chooses to analyze, only ten focus on the political history of the country including the fifteen-year war. The remaining 90 moments emphasize the so-called golden era of the Lebanese television. On the one hand, the open access to this archive reinforces the promoted post-war nostalgia for the cultural

golden age of the fifties and the sixties. On the other hand, the books contribute to the lack of audiovisual memory that we have of the Lebanese civil war and pre-war politics. The moments chosen by Kouyoumdjian reinforce the narrative of disarray and exclusion within the archive. By organizing his books around moments, he actually has re-inscribed the idea that the archive itself is scattered and fragmented. As we can see, open access to the archive can be provided if it is in line with the political, economic and cultural goals of the state and other governing institutions. Who is better than Kouyoumdjian to support, publish and market this memory and these narratives? After all, he was the face of the public Lebanese television for so many years.

Even as he described his methodology to me, it was according to very specific criteria that he selected his moments. Even with specific and clear criteria, we are getting a limited view of what access is or what is allowed to be accessed. He claims that the scientific and academic criteria included 15 questions with universal rules that were used to identify a television moment, focusing mainly on studying the extent of the television moment, the proportion of viewership and the magnitude of their impact in time, in addition to being a pioneer on the political, social and cultural situation of the country. He added and created additional standards to suit the Lebanese society and its circumstances (Kouyoumdjian, personal communication, 2019). And yet, what results is the very familiar story.

He may have used a rigid methodology, but we can't expect him to separate his own subjectivity and his understanding of what Lebanese television that is based on his own participation in and aspirations for it. His aims with these books are to give people a document that affirms what he already felt on television. He was the youthful face of reviving *Télé Liban*'s campaign when the war was over. He believed that this television

unified the Lebanese communities and formed the Lebanese nation. However, the Lebanese television was more than this nation's saviour, and how he limited it to the golden age is a surface analysis of the true ideological role and power of the television.

Also, if we look at the metrics that he mentions, they are actually quite subjective. The proportion of viewership is indeed measurable, but it goes back to the same agency that created the archive. For example, not all the Lebanese had televisions back then. Also, did he acknowledge the diversity? The different regions? The political context of each and every moment for the different sects? Did all the Lebanese regard the series in the same way as the famous discourse of the cultural golden age? And most importantly, given the amount of what is in the archive, how did he manage to view all of the records to present an objective documentation.

What we see in the book is that the 1950s and the 1960s are about glamour, and they have been vacated from any sort of political memory. The books are rich references to the symbols of the golden age and its myths, as well as the most famous heroes of its screen. The pictures of the 1950s and 60s feature glamour, the casinos nights, the role and significance of women in society, the first French kiss, the gay character, and the leading role of the series industry—in short, the potential that we had. The pre-war days are the oasis of the memory and identity of this nation. He does mention the censorship, and some political events, but as they are visual books, the political moments of the pre-war days were absent from the visual moment. The eye-catching photos are only about the glamour, the fame, the prosperity of the television through their cultural productions, and the borrowed modernity of the western culture, but was this television well watched and received in the mountains, the suburbs of Beirut, the Bekaa, the South? Did the Lebanese only refer to the television for its series

or its talk shows and news bulletin? Adding to that, he ignores the political events of the fifties and the sixties, the famous political leaders of this previous era, as the political in Lebanon is limited to war. This cultural nostalgia cuts this nation off from its downfalls, and its sectarian division, which has always been present even before the war.

The war is also very much absent in the books. The Lebanese civil war which is at least in recent memory the most significant event that has happened is also fragmented and downplayed in his books, with only 8 moments in the Arabic version and 10 moments in the English version. Fifteen years of the attempts of every political party to control the television is limited to a few very known moments. Michel Aoun's historical moment addressing the popular sit-ins; an extract of the videotape of Sanaa Muhaidili talking about her will after her martyrdom operation in the South on April 1985; Bashir Gemayel election as President of the Republic, an episode of the *Malaf-File* program, which was initiated by the Minister of Information to be a window of national dialogue (the episode of Prime Minister Saeb Salam from West Beirut and Phalange Party leader Pierre Gemayel from East Beirut), the first divided newsletter with a the detailed narration of its contents, the stereotyped image of the Lebanese watching football and the World Cup despite the war and the Israeli invasion, the coup d'état on March 11, 1976, and the announcement of Ahdab leadership of a military coup. The open access to the archive didn't generate anything new. When it comes to the war, it is about the moments that people already know and remember, rather than providing new information, perspectives, or knowledge. By choosing only 10 moments, he undermines the role of television during that time. Where are the pictures of the daily suffering of the people at the "East and West" crossings? The pictures of people escaping the sniper bullets? The long waiting lines on the doors of the ovens? The daily

displacements? Pictures of about 17,000 missing from all parties? The political speeches of all the political leaders?

The books give us the same story of the war and the golden age and reconstruct the same narratives of the exclusion, decomposed, dis-organized archive. A review of the books shows that the visual content and the moments promote the same stories of the memory and e nostalgia and the same narratives that already exist at *Télé Liban*. But also, he pushes to think that does really the war records don't only belong to the state television anymore? Who have the copyrights of the political archive especially the leaders on screens? Does the excluded representation of the Druze Leader Kamal Jumblatt prove really what was mentioned in the previous chapter that his son took all his records? But also, Jemayel's family has the records of the Bashir, but still present in the books? Or are all the records there, on shelves, protected and preserved but their fate is to be forgotten and silenced?

B. Why is Access so Scary?

"The archive can be figurative, a philosophical construct to employ as a lens or deploy as a critique" (Bratslavsky, 2013, p.57).

Based on the newspaper articles talking about *Télé Liban*'s archive and the records that I received several years prior, I had some prejudgments on the status of the archive as abandoned, neglected, and stacked in rooms. My father's position as a friend of the director at the Directorate of Archive, Osman Majzoub, made it easy to ask for interviews. When I visited the archival space of *Télé Liban*, I conducted the interviews that emphasized on the argument of a fading exclusive national and un-monopolized archive. Then—intentionally or unintentionally—they showed me the archive in stocks,

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archived in a scientific and organized way. I also saw the employees work on computers

with the records organized by dates, names, and events. There is no doubt that their

work needs more resources, but what I saw made me doubt what I heard, and whom I

met. What do they want me to know or what do they want to show?

Access to *Télé Liban*'s archive can unravel all the ways in which people talk

about it. Just as preservation is a discourse so is access. The primary discussion of the

archive, preservation, and access is the records themselves. When people talk about the

archive, they talk about the records, but we need to look at all of the elements that

construct the archive, including how people deploy discourses and narratives about

preservation and access. Access is not only about the material, but it is also about the

narratives. The power of access stems not only in its role of using the past for the future,

disseminating historical records for historical knowledge, but also in validating the

constructed preservation narratives over time. Through access, people can see behind

the archive.

What is significant in the context of *Télé Liban*'s archive is not only the

materiality and the importance of the records, but also the narratives that shape our

encounter and understanding of this national archive. The narratives of an un-

organized, disarrayed, fading, excluded, closed, the rich archive should also be the

interest of academics, researchers, historians in terms of accessing *Télé Liban*. That is to

say, access should also be viewed and discussed in different contexts and contents, in

terms of the discourses and not only the material. In the previous section, I discussed

how access limited by Wasta is a practice that rebuilds the same narratives. In this

section, I seek to address access in a different manner, in terms of the narratives and not

only the material, access not only can correspond to narratives, but it also can destroy them.

As we deduced in the previous chapters, *Télé Liban*'s archive was built by and for narratives. No narrative can be confirmed or refuted. For multiple purposes, multiple stories were crafted and talked about. On one hand, *Télé Liban* refuses the story of a stolen archive. On the other hand, interviewees and the media affirm that the militias take the organization's archives by force resulting from the chaos of war or with the consent of the institution itself. Perhaps, the argument of exclusion is addressed and motivated to remove the attention to access and the use of these records. Narratives silence some historical eras and work on the logic of open access on the remaining cultural archive. Additionally, selling the archive to television stations swings between rejection and reality. Most importantly, the promoted fading archive argument and the need to save it can't be confirmed if it is a myth or a fact. Is it an organized, preserved archive or not? Is the myth of a dispersed archive true? Are the records monopolized? Does the preservation discourse an argument that serves the political, cultural, economic purposes of the state, *Télé Liban*, the institution? What was left from this archive? Is the fading, scattered, stolen archive an argument that is in the interest of access? It is the lack to *Télé Liban*'s archive that allows these questions to appear in the first place.

Indeed, the lack of access to the national television's archive and the dangerous deterioration of the archive will affect the credibility of writing about history. In reviewing the importance of access to television' archive for scholarly work, Nelson and Cooke (2010) show how the lack of a national television archive can lead to a misrepresentation or re-framing of a national television canon that cannot be informed by what is unknown because it is unavailable and inaccessible to researchers. Taking the

example of the Canadian archives, Byers and VanderBurgh (2010) state that "Canadian scholars risk creating an ahistorical narrative that dangerously mirrors the ahistorical hegemony of national discourse […] one prescriptive effect is that access to material keeps us writing about the present even if we want to write about or in dialogue with the past" (p.121). It must also be noted that, the closed access to *Télé Liban*'s archive creates a canon of narratives in favor of the economic, political and cultural interest using the preservation discourses.

As narratives are strategically constructed and deployed, I also argue that the way that people talk about the archive is strategic. A point that needs to be re-mentioned is that I build this chapter upon the analysis of the interviews that I believe were a set of structured and well-prepared arguments in agreement and correspondence with the dominant political and cultural narratives. I had great difficulty, for example, receiving answers other than the discussed arguments in the media and the public. From here, approaching the interviews as "communicative acts" in a cultural and linguistic form and context (Briggs, 1986) and eliciting the subjective interpretation aspect is important. Briggs (1986) urges us to think about the evidence that we can draw, use and transform from an interview. He explains how the interviewer's gender, race, linguistic, social and political context affect the interpretation of the interview with the need of the interviewer's awareness of these characteristics.

The identity, position and the power of the interviewee define the way he engages with this topic. As for the employees of *Télé Liban*, they are private-sector employees within a state institution. The elite's responses were from and for their cultural and social power positions. The multiplicity of answers and scopes regarding the same aspect pushed me to think more of the employing of narratives in favor of each

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interviewee's interest. The multiple aspects and ways in which the archive was contextualized and talked made me think of the truth and the credibility of the narratives. Within the institution, the archive is a rich cultural heritage that is fading day after day and needs to be saved, with open access for all the public. For the elite, what remains in the archive weakened its true value. Equally, the open access for Zaven puts in question also the availability and the status of the archive. Alike, it is important to think that they want to protect their interconnected power relations.

C. Conclusion: A Strategic Access

"The past is a part of us […] It is important that future generations have access to, and understand the past, to better understand themselves and to better deal with the future"
(Altin, 2010, p.1).

By not allowing access, *Télé Liban* will further focus on the preservation practices and confirm the preservation narratives. Once we receive access, we can expose narratives and truths regarding the history and the status of *Télé Liban*'s archive. What could access give us? If we think of the archive as a place where the past and the future come together, then access is the present. Access is about the present moments where you enter the archive hopefully creating knowledge that will serve the future using the past. But because it is about the present, it is also about everything that the present is in terms of what it means to exist or operate in this particular context with all the social and political strategies like Wasta, a weak state, the bureaucratic institutions and all the power relations that structured the archive and the television over the years.

Giving access to *Télé Liban*'s archive can unravel narratives. Access, even as it is limited and framed by Wasta can be a way of finding out what is left or lost, to legitimize the exclusivity and the disarray arguments, to present counter-narratives.

Sccess is a form of preservation that offers more than the monopolized narratives of preservation presented by Fondation Liban Cinema (FLC), the embassies and the state. It is a form of making publicly available the records outside the economic, political and cultural control and narratives of the state and the institutions.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

"I'm interested for the most part in what's not happening, that area between events that could be called the gap. This gap exists in the blank and void regions or settings that we never look at." Robert Smithson, "What is a Museum?" (Berkley, 1996,p.44)

I have argued throughout this thesis that the archive is not neutral in terms of the discourses, its initial formation, the preservation practices, and the access to it. The chapters grapple with the political, cultural, and economic power hierarchies that are entrenched in *Télé Liban*'s archive. In Chapter II, I unpack the power relations that structured the television in the first place. Understanding these powers is important to the way we perceive the archive. First, political power relations shaped the content of the first Lebanese television. Presidents and ministers of information used the television either for their own ideologies, or to distract the Lebanese from the ongoing events. Censorship was largely controlling the television back in the days. Second, the television was used by and for economic interests. The cultural productions' content was mainly in line with foreign and Arab countries' ideologies and culture. Third, the television was highly invested and targeted by foreign powers, especially France who had/have a cultural alliance with the Lebanese nation and thus its television. Therefore, this archive was a result of economic, cultural and political power relations. The power of including and excluding started before the formation of what so called "*Télé Liban*'s archive." The national television's archive is both a source of knowledge and a place of knowledge production that allowed the creation of historical narratives that are biased to achieve specific political or ideological goals.

Despite all of that, the famous rhetoric when talking about this archive is about how the records that tell the story of the Lebanese nation's pre-war golden days. The perceived role of this archive is in line with the state's policy of the civil war effacement and the promoted nostalgia for the prosperous era of the fifties and sixties. Therefore, I read *Télé Liban's* archive as an explicit space of hopes, dreams and nostalgic memories and an implicit invested space of political, cultural and economic power hierarchies.

In Chapter II, I argue how six decades, including tens of thousands of hours, recordings, and political, artistic, cultural records, forming the archive of the first television in the Middle East are stolen, displaced, damaged and/or fearing extinction. Although it is more of a scattered, invested, and monopolized archive politically and financially, the most featured discourse shaping the status of the archive nowadays is the urgent need to save a disarrayed archive. For an in-depth understanding of the power structures embedded in the preservation practices, I suggest in this chapter to read the archive through the excluded records more than what remains in the archival space of *Télé Liban*. The war with its political and economic repercussions and the weak state facilitated the manipulation within *Télé Liban's* archive. *Télé Liban's* archive was subject to multiple robberies by different Lebanese militias from 1975 till 1993. Records were removed to immunize the political identities created after the war whether of the elite families or the political leaders. On the other hand, the archive was sold for different sectarian Lebanese and Arab stations. The exclusion shows the different changing powers over the years of the militias and warlords, and most importantly the status of the weak Lebanese state. Exploiting the archive was both for a political interest of preserving or protecting the identity of those who are in power, or as an economic investment.

I also grapple with arguing that centralizing the discourse of failure is a social, political, and economic structured practice employed to serve the politics of remembering and forgetting of the state, the militias, and the cultural status of the élite in the society. I show how the employees at *Télé Liban* don't admit that the bulk of the archive is not there and insist on the discourse of a fading archive. Their collaboration with the élite cultural institution FLC reveals a lot about their strategy to talk about a disarrayed archive to attract funds, and to advance FLC's position as the rescuer of *Télé Liban*'s archive. This archive is inseparable from the political, social, economic, cultural history of Lebanon as well as in its contradictions, civil wars and lines of confrontation. *Thus, Télé Liban*'s records are political, economic, and cultural powerful assets.

In chapter IV, I pose the question of what access can unravel. In Lebanon, access proved to be limited and framed by Wasta that reinforces the power hierarchies in the archive and structures access through the narratives. I have highlighted the work of the Lebanese presenter Zaven Kouyoumdjian, who had access to *Télé Liban's* archive for five years. His access was documented in two books about chosen 100 moments of the Lebanese television. However, his books limit down the history of the Lebanese television to its golden age that is the same known discourse promoted by the state. His access doesn't give us anything new or push us to explore more and more the archive. From here, wasta may be given if it is in line with the state and the television's policies. In examining the state's policy in rendering the past through "creating" a pre-war cultural memory and forging a forced amnesia of the war memory, this research evaluates the right to access versus the gatekeepers of knowledge of the *Télé Liban's* archive. In addition to this, and most importantly, the power of access can hamper the preservation discourses of a disarrayed archive. Access deals with more than the

materiality and the use of the records; it poses a threat to the dominant narratives and to the rhetoric discourses of the archive in general and the preservation practices and discourses in particular. As we can't confirm or contradict the multiple contradictory discourses, access to the archive is a methodology by itself to unravel what is not known or talked about. By not allowing access, they will further focus on the preservation practices and protect the multiple unconfirmed or in deterministic preservation narratives of a fading, disarrayed, stolen, damaged and dispersed archive.

The one confirmed story is that imagining and understanding the nation can be through *Télé Liban's* archive. As shown in the chapters, this archive tells a lot about the nation how "imagined", "invented" and "constructed" it is (Anderson, 1991). Re-framing the archive multiple times over the years reflect the invention and re-invention of the nation's story. If the gaps in *Télé Liban's* archive tells this much about the Lebanese nation, what the available records can reveal? The story of whom was to be told through the available archive? Whom to be privileged and whom to be historically oppressed?

The story of *Télé Liban*'s archive highlights and speculates on different untold and silenced stories. Here it is useful to bring up Carter (2006) framework of the things said and unsaid in any archive, as he notes:

> "Silences haunt every archive. Silence, however, can be contested and the marginalized can be invited in, although it must be recognized that these groups may not accept this invitation. Once archivists are aware of the silences in their archives, they can take measures to try to allow for multiple narratives to fill some of these gaps, to make users aware of the silences, and to attempt to understand and respect the choice of certain groups to keep their silence". (p.217).
> I use this idea in which access almost as a speculative methodology to unravel

the silenced stories and to raise these questions about the archive: Is it an exclusive or excluded archive? Is it a fading archive? Does the institution lack a platform of access?

We might further think about access to address these other points for future research. By focusing on the question of access, we are actually forced to approach the archive more critically, and it forces us to ask these questions which I addressed. We can also use the dynamics of access to ask questions that I didn't address in this thesis, and that could be promising for future research.

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