The Lebanese Media

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Anatomy of a System in Perpetual Crisis

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For Dennis and Karl

FOREWORD

Media studies has long been dominated by conceptual frameworks derived from the experience of a small number of countries of North America and Northern Europe. It is only very recently that a real tradition of comparative research has begun to emerge that attempts to conceptualize a wider range of media systems on their own terms. Important recent contributions include Guerrero and Marquez-Ramírez (2014) writing on Latin America, Chakravartty and Roy (2013) writing on India, and a number of scholars working on Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (e.g. Gross and Jakubowicz 2013). What sets the best of this new research apart from earlier work is that it is genuinely comparative. Even when researchers are focused on a single national media system, they use the method of "structured, focused comparison," drawing on a wider body of research on diverse media systems to ask questions about their particular case in a systematic way that contributes to a wider process of theory-building.

Here is another fine study in this tradition, dealing with what is in many ways a particularly fascinating case. Lebanon is a country with highly developed media industries that have long had influence beyond its own borders. At the same time, as El-Richani points out, it is a country constantly in crisis, fragmented by sectarian conflict and frequently subject to outside political intervention. El-Richani's analysis of the Lebanese case is a most welcome addition to the growing body of comparative research beyond Western Europe and North America.

Most of the new generation of comparative research draws heavily on *Comparing Media Systems* (Hallin and Mancini 2004), taking it as a point of departure and sometimes a point of contrast. It is important, therefore,

to clarify how Mancini and I see the relevance of *Comparing Media Systems* for the analysis of cases outside our original framework. Mancini and I very deliberately chose not to attempt to create a universal framework for analysis of media systems, one that would be applicable to any system across the globe. Ours was intended as a concrete, historical analysis of 18 media systems, which, as many have pointed out, are quite unrepresentative of the range of media systems that can be found in other regions. We have always intended that scholars working on media systems in other contexts would adopt our *approach*, but not attempt to apply the particular *conceptual framework* we developed. This is particularly true of our three models, which are intended as ideal types summarizing particular patterns of media system development and organization that characterize the history of the Western capitalist democracies we studied. As Voltmer (2013) has pointed out, our four dimensions of comparison (the structure of media markets, the role of the state, the degree and forms of political parallelism, and the degree and forms of journalistic professionalization) "travel" better than our three models. If we understand these dimensions broadly, we can ask similar questions about any media system, and this is a beginning point for using the method of structured, focused comparison. The particular conceptualizations we employ to operationalize these dimensions, however, will often have to be modified substantially to apply them to other media systems.

We do make the point at the end of our book that of our three media system models, the one that would be the closest comparison for most other parts of the world would be what we call the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model, which prevails in Southern Europe. We made that point in part as a rhetorical move to underscore the importance of analyzing Southern European media systems, which have mostly been ignored by media scholars who have seen them as flawed approximations to normative Northern European models. Many scholars working on other regions have confirmed this observation, as El-Richani does here, noting many parallels between media systems in other parts of the world and our Polarized Pluralist Model, most strongly, usually, in the high degree of politicization of the media, the tendency for political alignments to outweigh professional autonomy and solidarity among journalists and the importance of clientelism. If we put it in terms of Bourdieu's field theory (Benson and Neveu 2005), we can say that in systems resembling the Polarized Pluralist Model the media field is strongly influenced by the political field rather than autonomous from it. One theme that appears

in El-Richani's analysis echoes analyses in many different regions. This is the idea that media are often "captured" by political and economic actors who use them to intervene in the world of politics. Researchers working on both Latin America (Guerrerro and Márquez-Ramírez 2014) and Eastern Europe (Mungiu-Pippidi 2013; Bajomi-Lázár 2015) have noted the importance of this concept, which has parallels to our discussion of "instrumentalization" of media in Southern Europe. Clearly, the Lebanese political and media systems are both pluralistic and polarized, characterized by a wide range of contending political forces and deep political differences!

At the same time, as Albuquerque (2012), among others, has pointed out, it makes little sense to lump diverse media systems around the world together under the label of Polarized Pluralist, turning it into a kind of catch-all residual category. A few media systems beyond Southern Europe may fit our Polarized Pluralist Model fairly closely; this may be particularly true of East European cases (Perusko 2013). For the most part, however, it will be important to develop new models firmly rooted in research and theory on other regions, and to make clear the differences between other systems and the Southern European systems we analyzed.

In the case of Lebanon, three key differences emphasized in El-Richani's analysis stand out, all of them closely connected. One, the most important, has to do with the weakness of the central state in Lebanon, and the corresponding centrality of non-state actors, to which the media are for the most part closely tied. There are some elements of this pattern that are present in milder forms in Southern Europe. Clientelism sometimes undermines the ability of the state to act, and separatist movements in Spain and Italy are significant. But for the most part, the central state in Southern Europe is historically a very important actor with strong influence over the media system. Political factions contend for power over that central state, rather than building parallel structures of power of their own.

A second difference has to do with consociationalism, or power-sharing. Among the countries we discuss as examples of the Polarized Pluralist Model, only Italy is characterized by a strong role of power-sharing, though the role of regional governments introduces a secondary element of power-sharing in Spain. In Lebanon, power-sharing is clearly central to the political structure, though, as El-Richani argues very convincingly, it takes a very different form from the Northern European consociationalism, analyzed by Lijphart (1977), which we discuss in connection with our Democratic Corporatist Model. The latter is characterized by strong

central state institutions and a high degree of consensus on the rules of the political game—which also extends to standards of practice in journalism, and these are clearly for the most part not present in Lebanon.

Finally, Lebanon differs from the Southern European countries on which our Polarized Pluralist Model was based in the degree to which it is influenced by transnational pressures, including foreign political intervention, foreign media ownership and also (as analyzed by Kraidy 2012) the significance of foreign media markets for Lebanese media industries.

If I had to give the name to the type of media system that characterizes Lebanon, I suppose I might call it Weak State Polarized Pluralism, or maybe Divided State Polarized Pluralism. Giving it a name, and calling it a "type," of course is most useful if this is in some way a recurring pattern that can be found in other parts of the world. One of the most important questions going forward in El-Richani's analysis is: Is the Lebanese media system essentially unique, or are there other cases that closely resemble it? And if there are, how do we understand the origins of this particular media system type?

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List of Abbreviations

AFP   Agence France-Press
ARD   Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
BBC   British Broadcasting Corporation
CBC   Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CMG   Choueiri Media Group
ddp   Deutsche Depeschendienst
DPA   Deutsche Presse-Agentur
EU   European Union
FPM   Free Patriotic Movement
LBCSat   Lebanese Broadcasting Channel Satellite
LBC   Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation
LBC   Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation Group
LBCI   Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International
LDC   Lebanese Diaspora Channel
LF   Lebanese Forces
MBC   Middle East Broadcasting Center Group
MTV   Murr television
NAVC   National Audio-Visual Media Council
NBN   National Broadcasting Network
PSB   Public Service Broadcasting
RAI   Radiotelevisione italiana
TL   Télé Liban
TAM   Television Audience Measurement
NNA   The National News Agency
UK   United Kingdom

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA   United States of America
ZDF   Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen

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