

## Introduction

The issue of religion has arisen in the public debate since the « return of religion » phase in the early nineties when the Nationalism, patriotism and communism projects have failed, and the subsequent rise of religious speech and related political projects. These projects specifically targeted the Arab countries that adhere to religious authorities in statecraft, “where a group of religious communities and sects are still interfering together, specially the Islamic sects”.<sup>1</sup>

In Lebanon, religion is in leading position of community, since the state is composed of a group of religious sects that share the authorities among each other. The Lebanese Constitution has made each of them a separate entity with great privileges and rights at the political, legislative, and educational levels (articles 9, 10, 19, and 24 in particular, with the resulting legislations). However this constitution put the state in neutral position that does not adopt any religion or sect, despite referring to the state performing reverence to Almighty God (article 9), with the resulting public common space of this position.

Since the end of the civil war in 1990, the public space has witnessed a decrease in the common space that has been shared between the sectarian forces, apace by the rising influence of religious fundamentalists in many Arab countries having armed conflicts since 2011. These conflicts had a negative influence on the Lebanese situation where the divisions in the community and sectarian tension increased. If the political sectarian system is considered making religion a controversial and provocative issue, thus attracting a larger audience, then this is the reason behind covering this issue largely in media; what is the objective justification given by private media institutions for the occupation of religious subject and figures the media platforms? What is the space given for this subject and its status in the debate covered by these institutions? And how this issue is being approached?

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<sup>1</sup> قرم، جورج (2011): *تعَدُّ الأديان وأنظمة الحكم*، دار الفارابي، بيروت، ص. 8 (مقدِّمة الطبعة الرابعة).

## 1- Research Material

### a) The three television programs

To support the hypothesis, a study of the size, status, and image of the religious issue in private television institution has been conducted. The research material that was based upon is the content of the three talk shows that tackle diverse social issues, similar in layout (multiple segments and guests, the approach of the presenters, timing of the show, the studio settings and decoration...), similar in content (sensitive issues, related to national and international events, popular, disseminated through social media, every subject is usually introduced through a video reportage that raises the issue to be discussed...). These programs are also characterized of being showed in the same day on three different TV stations, and according to Ipsos statistics in 2014, they have the highest three percentage of audience. The programs are: "Haki Jales" (broadcasted by the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International LBCI every Monday at 21:30, presented by Joe Malouf), "LelNasher" (broadcasted by New TV every Monday at 20:40, presented by Rima Karaki), and "Toni Khalife- 1544" (broadcasted by Murr Television MTV every Monday ar 21:45, presented by Toni Khalife).

### b) Duration of the Study

The monitoring took place during three consecutive months, from the third of November 2014 till the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2015. The baseline data included 12 episodes of each of the three programs (total of 36 episodes). The episodes were monitored and the content was classified to specify religion related issues in the addressed subjects. It is to note that the episodes of the three programs are not necessarily equivalent in length and structure, and the content of each episode is not necessarily interrelated.

### c) The sample

The sample of the study consisted of 21 segments of the total 36 episodes addressed religion related issues. Noting that the three programs tackled in 5 different segments issues related to religion or religious institutions in a certain way without causing controversy, thus t was decided to exclude them from the sample.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> توزعت هذه الفقرات الخمس على الشكل التالي: ثلاث فقرات مرتبطة بالحلقة التي خصّصت لعيد الميلاد وعُرضت بتاريخ 2014/12/22 (بث مباشر من جبيل وسط مظاهر احتفالية بالعيد في برنامج "طوني خليفة-1544"، أنشودة عن الميلاد أدتها فرقة "جمعية المبرات الخيرية الإسلامية" إضافة إلى قضية نزاع بين دير الشرفة للسريان الكاثوليك ومواطنة في برنامج "للنشر"، وفقرتان لموضوعين أثارهما برنامج "حكي جالس (اعتداء موكب يعود للبطريك الكلداني على أحد المازّة بتاريخ 2014/12/15 وقضية لوحة فنية ساخرة تتضمّن "كأس قربان" بتاريخ 2015/01/19).

## **2- Methodology**

The methodology used in this study is consisted of two complementary parts:

- The first part consisted of quantitative analysis of content, where quantitative indicators were used to support the hypothesis. These indicators tackled the number of segments, their distribution to the TV stations, the sections covered and their types, the time allocated for them, the title of the speakers, their gender and the sectarian distribution of religious figures, in addition to quantitative indicators for the type of speech.
- The second part consisted of qualitative analysis of the content, taking into consideration the political and social contexts of the issue raised, in addition to some qualitative indicators used in the analysis of talk shows. These indicators are related to the guests and the content of their speech, and to the presenters, their role, and the content of their speeches.

The results analysis will be detailed in the introduction of each of the two parts

## Part One: Quantitative Analysis of Content

In this part related to the quantitative analysis of the content, different indicators were used to measure the results and reflect the affiliation of the three programs and their approach to the religious issue.<sup>3</sup> The first stage consisted of recording the segment (which is the part of the content that should be classified) despite its duration. This section was used to define the quantitative distribution between the three programs, and the distribution between the seven defined religious sections. The second stage consisted of monitoring the time (in seconds). This section was used to define the time allocated for the type of the religious issue (ideological or social). The third stage focused on the speakers to define their distribution per title, gender, and type of religious issue (ideological or social), in addition to the distribution of religious figures according to sectarian affiliation. The fourth and last stage defined key words to be used as indicators to the type of religious speech (criticism, fanatic, and tolerant).

### 1- Religious issue: number of segments, their sections and distribution

There were 21 segments that tackled religion related issues, in the period between November 2014 and January 2015. Disregarding the time allocation, “lelNasher” raised the highest number with 9 segments. “Haki Jales” raised the religious issue in 8 segments; while “Toni Khalife- 1544” tackled religious issues in 4 segments (figure 1).

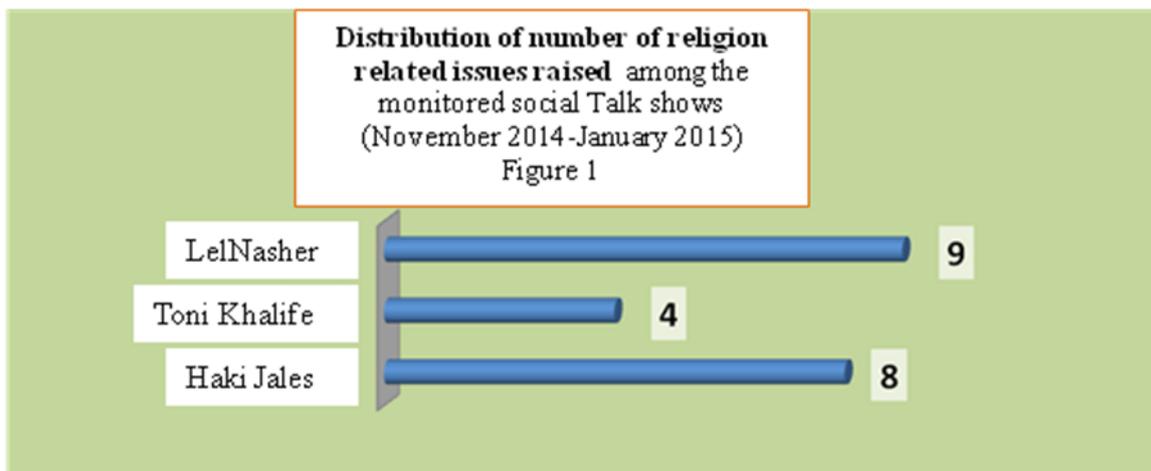


Figure1: distribution of number of religious issues raised in the three programs

<sup>3</sup> Bardin, Laurence (2007), *L'analyse de contenu*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, p. 134-149.

As for the sections of the 21 segments, they were manifold (7 sections), they reflect the importance given to this issue in the Lebanese society, as they reflect the space given to this issue in the Lebanese public debate (as in the world) after the gun attack on the offices of the “Charlie Hebdo” magazine in Paris on the 7th of January 2015 because of the satirical caricatures on religions. The “Heresies and religious beliefs” was the first in terms of the most sections raised (5 sections), and “Religious Sarcasm” was the second (4 sections). The “Fanaticism”, “Religious Edicts (Fatwa)”, and “Practice of Rituals” came in 3 sections each, 2 sections on “corruption within religious institution”, and one section on “LGBT Marriage” (Figure 2).

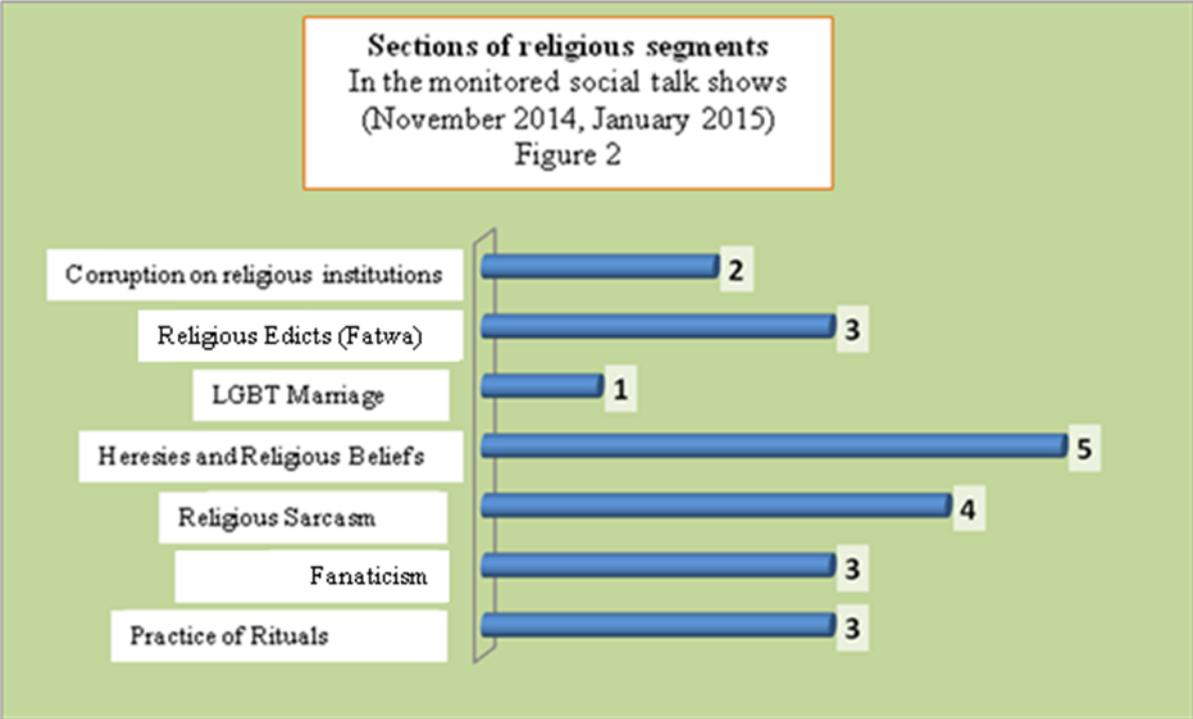


Figure 2: Sections of the 21 Segments Tackling Religious Issues

As for the distribution of the segments on the three talk shows, it is to note that the sections “Heresies and Religious Beliefs”, and “Religious sarcasm” are the only sections that were raised in all three programs, this is related to the attack that took place in Paris as mentioned earlier. “LeINasher” program raised the highest number of sections that tackled religious issues (6sections), “Haki Jeles” (5 sections), and “Toni Khalife- 1544” raised 3 sections only. On the other hand, only “Haki Jeles” program raised issues related to corruption in religious institutions (2 sections).

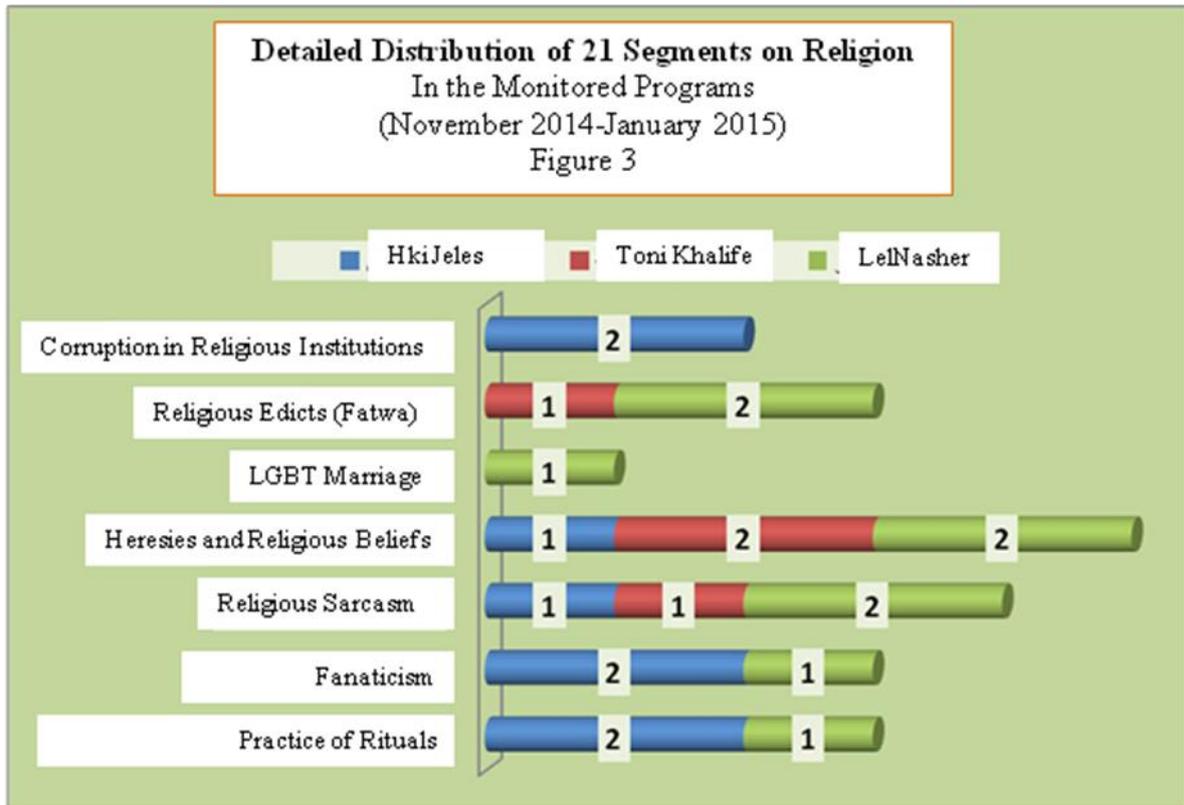


Figure 3: Detailed Distribution of 21 Segments on Religion between the Programs

## 2- Type of Religious Issue: Time Allocated for Coverage

The quantitative analysis of the results show that the total time allocated for religious issues is 31.090 seconds. The programs were arranged by order of the highest importance given to religious issue in terms of time allocation according to number of sections. “LelNasher” allocated for the religious issue 13.970 seconds, “Hki Jeles” 10.040 seconds, and “Toni Khalife-1544” 7.080 seconds. After sorting the time allocation of religious issue, the sections were differentiated in terms of approaching the issue from its ideological aspect, or its social impact. There was a significant difference between the time allocations for the religious-ideological issue (72%) versus the religious- social issue (28%). These results can be related to the growing religious fanaticism and its resulting religious conflicts and controversial edicts, in addition to the division of religious authorities in the region.

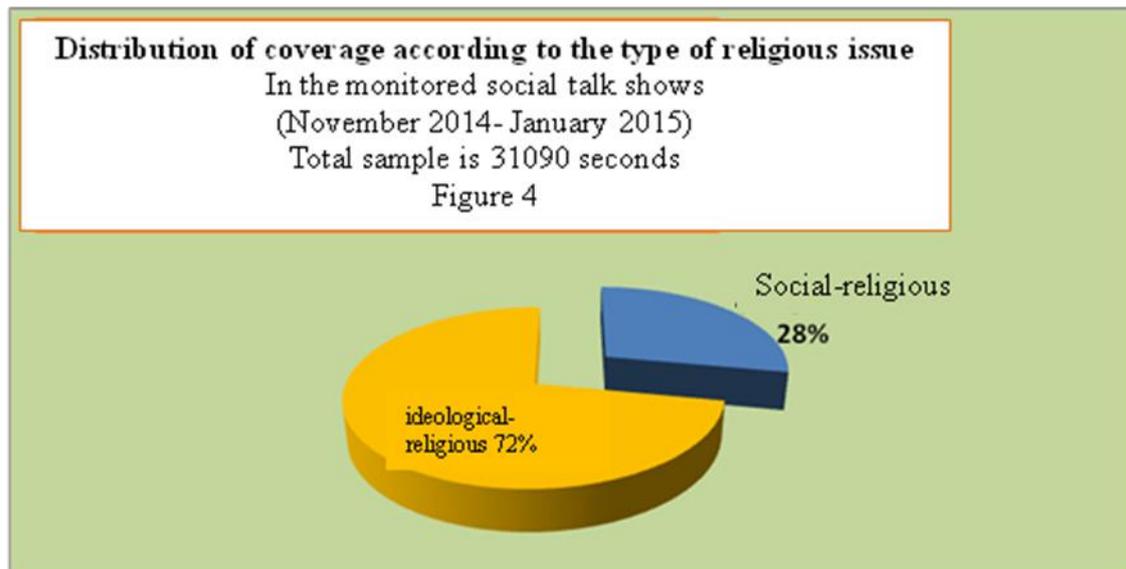


Figure 4: Distribution of coverage according to the type of religious issue

It was significant that the allocation for the religious issue in “Toni Khalife-1544” was tackled entirely from its ideological approach (Figure 5). This result can be interpreted as rising new interesting controversial issues different from the daily social problems. This interpretation remains a hypothesis that this study will try to support in the second part of this report: the qualitative analysis. “LeINasher” as well tackled the issue from its ideological approach (79%). “Hki Jeles” tackled the religious issue in balanced way between its ideological (43%) and social (57%) approaches. This shows interest in reflecting the daily problems faced by people especially that it was shown in Figure 2 that this was the only program tackling corruption in religious institutions. This study will also try to support this hypothesis in the second part.

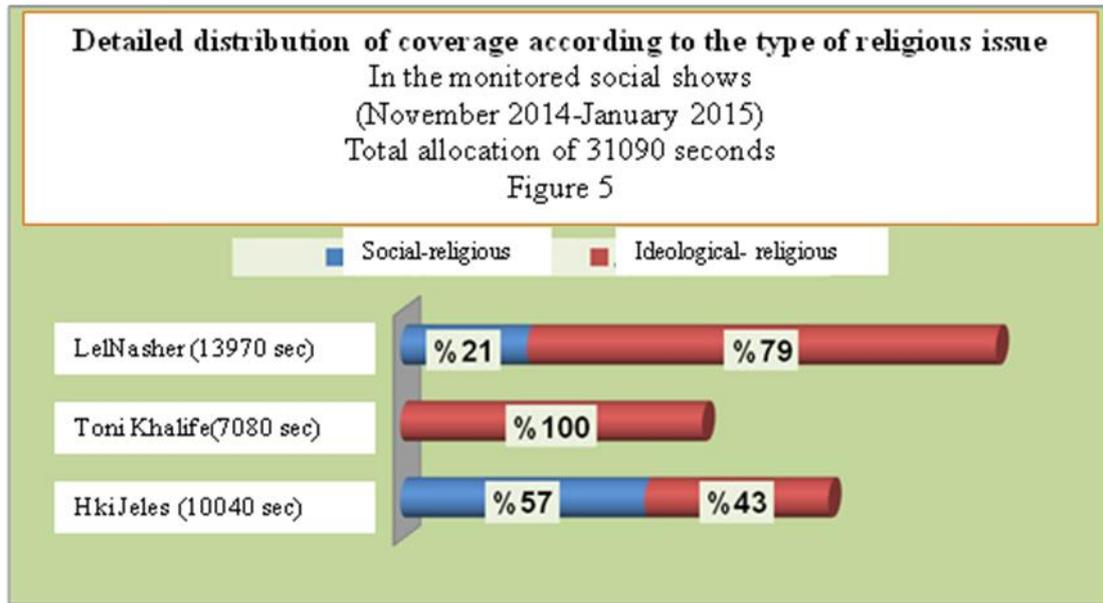


Figure 5: Detailed Distribution of Coverage according to Type of Religious Issue

### 3- Characteristics of the Speakers

The next phase in the quantitative analysis was the study of the characteristic of the speaker guests in the three monitored social talk shows in the period between November 2014 and January 2015. The main focus was on the following criteria: title, sect and community (for religious figures), and gender.

#### a. The title of the Speakers

The title of the speakers about religious issues is of great importance in Lebanon (Figure 6), since this issue is not restricted only to religious authorities. In Lebanon, religious groups are one of the main constituent of the state, and these groups impose religious/sectarian identity on individuals even before birth, and this identity entail rights and duties that vary from one group to the other.

Thus the religious figures presence significantly dominated the space given to religious issues in the three programs. In the analyzed 21 segments, half of the speakers were religious figures (30 out of 60 speakers 50%).<sup>4</sup> The stakeholders who spoke in religious sections, who were directly concerned in the raised issue (20 speakers, 33% of total speakers). There was a weak presence of specialists or activists involved in public affairs in the three programs, where the experts and specialists were only 7% (4 people), and critics and analysts were 10% (6 people),

<sup>4</sup> مع أن معايير البحث العلمي لا تحبذ استخدام النسب المئوية إلا عندما يتخطى العدد المنسوب إليه المئة، ارتأينا هنا استخدامها بهدف تسهيل عملية قراءة النتائج.

and there was no presence of the opinion from the civil society or citizens, whose impact is as effective as that of religious figures.

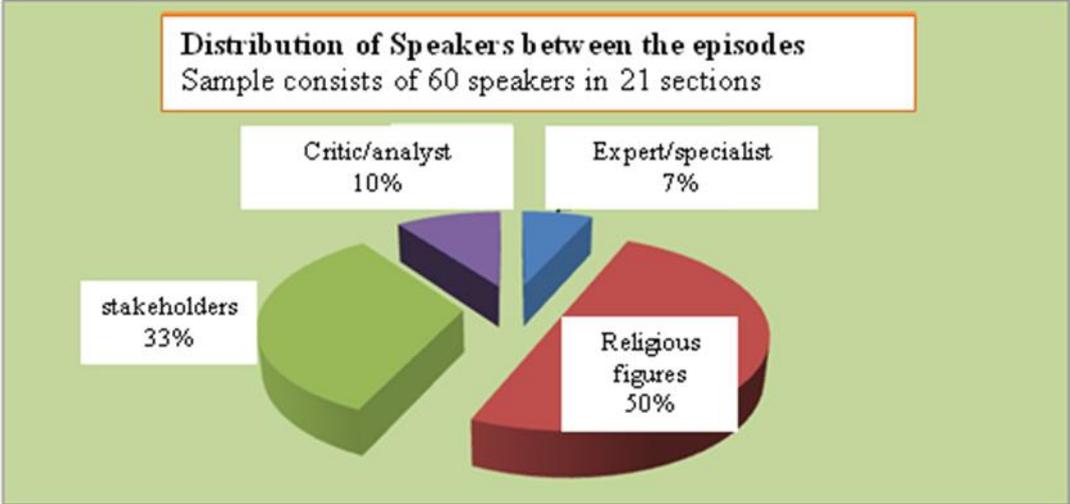


Figure 6: Distribution of Speakers between the 21 Segments related to Religion

The dominance of the presence of religious figures can be related to the dominance of the ideological approach on the religious/social issue as was shown earlier (Figures 4 and 5). Since the ideological approach gives the legitimacy for choosing religious figures as main speakers in this issue, and can be considered as experts in this field. This will be supported in Figure 7 that will show the distribution of speakers in religious/ideological sections, where the dominance of religious figures is confined to ideological approach, and they consist of 24 speakers (out of 37 speakers on ideological issues). The critics and analysts consisted of 5 speakers only, experts/specialists and stakeholders consisted of 4 speakers each.

It is crucial for the religious figures to be main speakers in issues related edicts (9 out of 10) and heresies and religious beliefs (6 out of 10), (disregarding the approach used in tackling the second section and whether the presence of religious figures is considered distortion of beliefs that are marginalized in reality and in media, this point of view can be further discussed in the second part of the study). The presence of religious figures in section on religious sarcasm was moderate, there was a significant presence in this section for critics and analysts that is equivalent to the presence of religious figures (5 speakers for each category), only 2 of the speakers were from the category of specialists and experts.

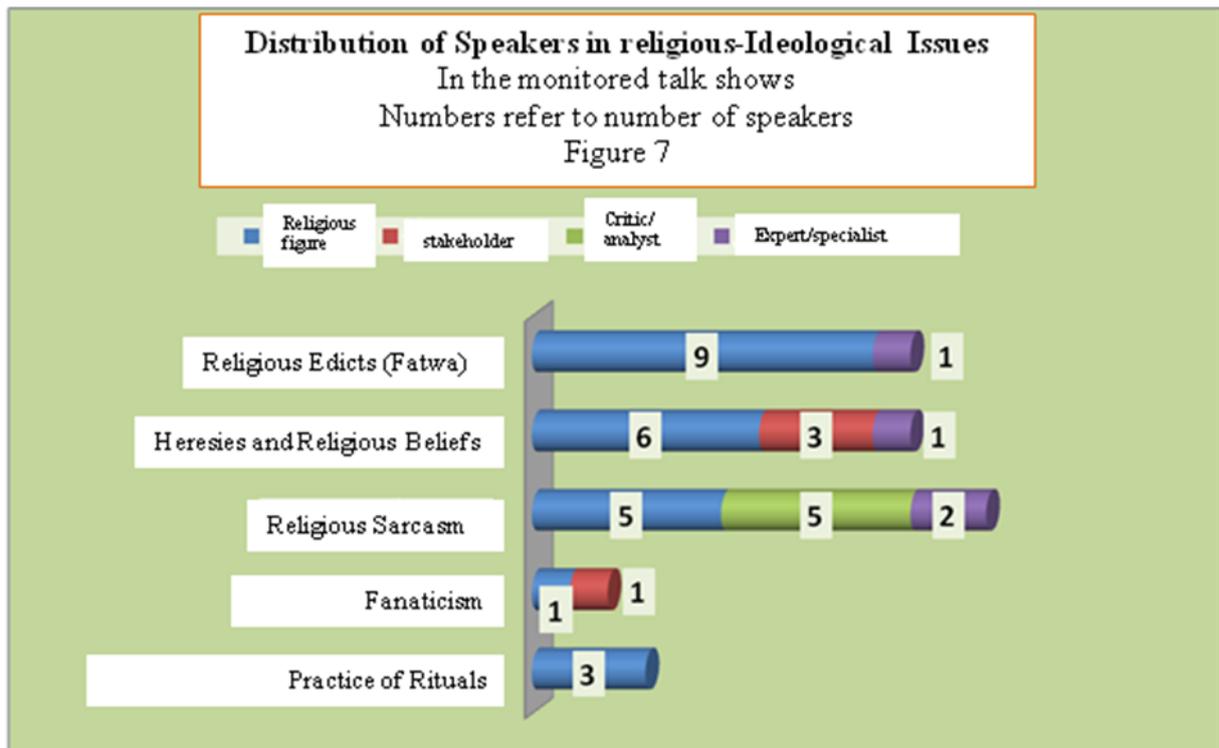


Figure 7: Distribution of Speakers in religious-Ideological Issues (number of speakers)

The presence of religious figures was weak in issues of religious-social approach (Figure 8), especially in the section on the corruption of religious institutions where there was no presence for religious figures, only stakeholders were raising this issue (11 speakers). As for the section on the practice of ritual, it was clear the presence of religious figures whether the issue was ideological (3 out of 3) or social (5 out of 7). This refers to the symbolism of religious figures in promoting open and tolerant speech in a period of many religious disturbances.

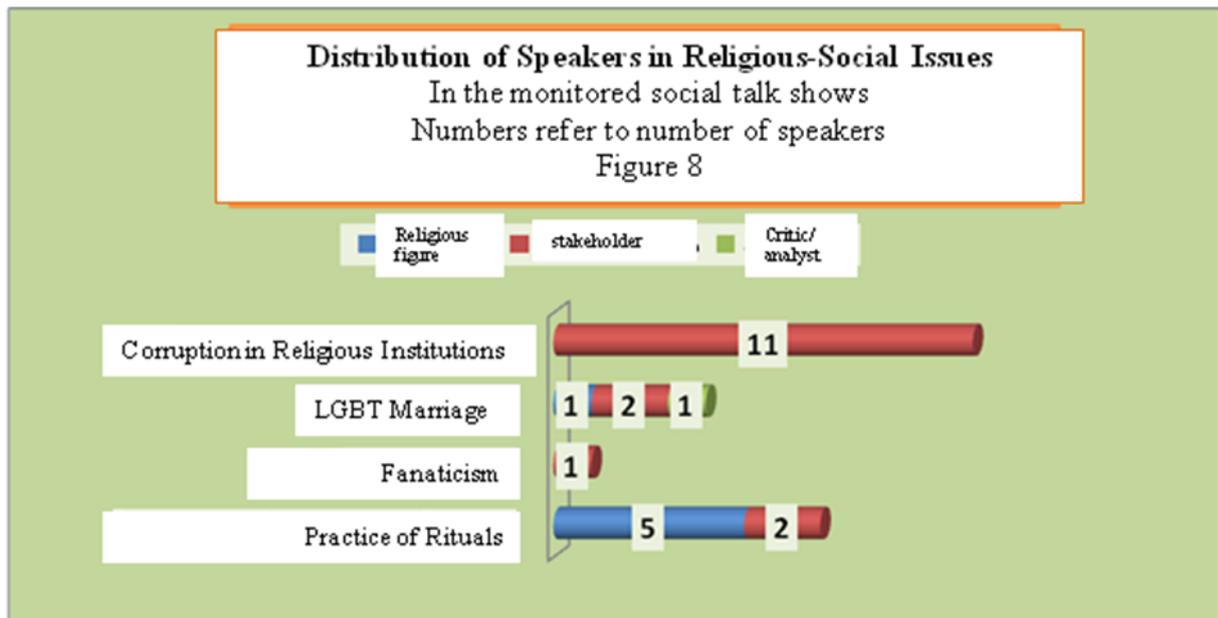


Figure 8: Distribution of Speakers in Religious-Social Issues

*b. Sectarian and Communal Distribution of Religious Figures*

The study identified the sectarian identity of the 30 religious figures, who were speakers in the monitored talk shows (Figure 9), it was noted the presence of 7 Christians and 23 Muslims<sup>5</sup>. This disparity is related to the increase of fundamentalist speech that necessitates tackling the Islamic issue in the first place (this point will be clarified further in the qualitative analysis).

The results have shown that the majority of the 7 Christian religious figures are Maronites (6), in addition to one speaker that was unidentified (but she was representing the Maronite community in the raised subject), there was no representatives of other Christian communities. As for the Islamic religious figures, they were in majority Sunnites (13), 9 Shiites, and 1 Druze. It was “imposed” to classify the Sunnites in the programs where the 13 religious figures were Association of Muslim Scholars (4), Salafi Movement (4), and Dar Al-fatwa (3), in addition to two unidentified religious figures.

<sup>5</sup> تم احتساب رجل الدين الدرزي الوحيد مع هذه الفئة.

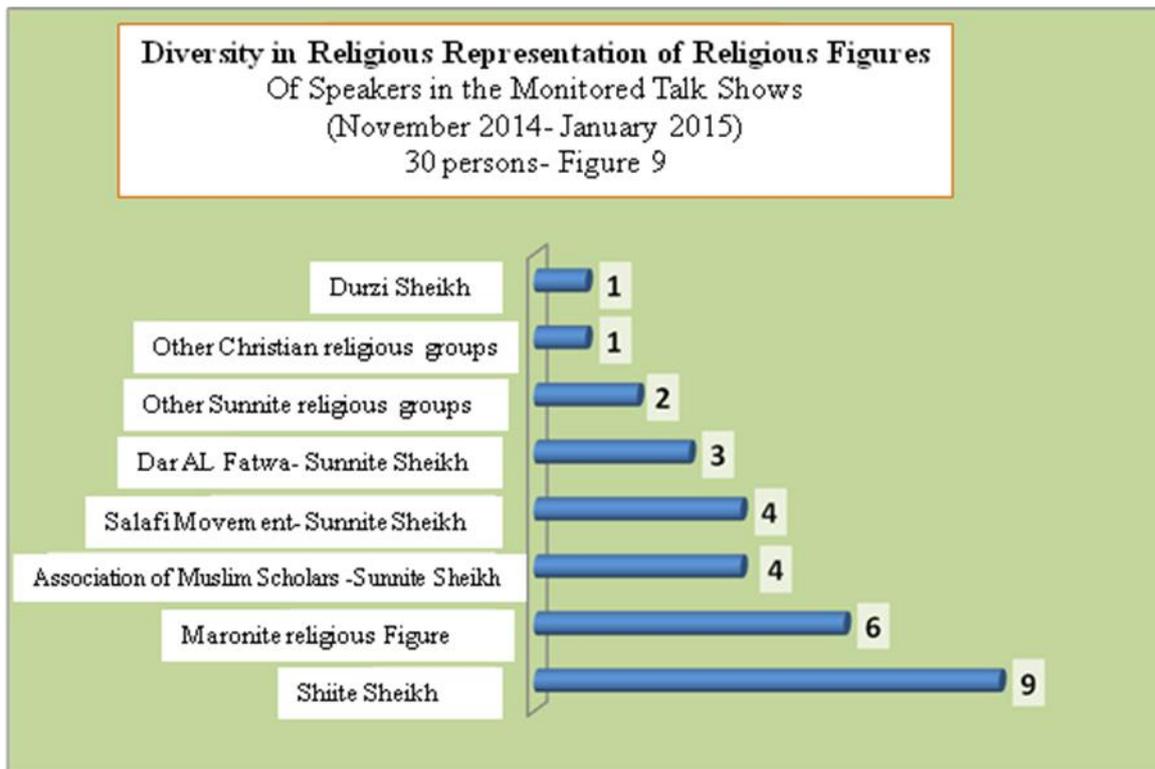


Figure 9: sectarian and communal distribution of religious figures

*c. Gender Distribution of Speakers*

The biggest disparity was in the distribution of speakers according to gender, where males dominated the platforms of the three programs represented in 49 persons versus 11 women (Figure 10). This result reflects local reality where the role of women is restricted to certain domains for many different reasons. This disparity is significant in the category of religious figures (29 males and 1 female); the role of women in religious institutions is known to be very limited. In Arabic the name religious figures is religious men which reflects a reality. On the other hand, the role of women a critic and analysts was also weak (1 female -5 males), but women were with significant presence as stakeholders (7 females- 13 males) and as experts/specialists despite the small number of speakers (2females- 2 males).

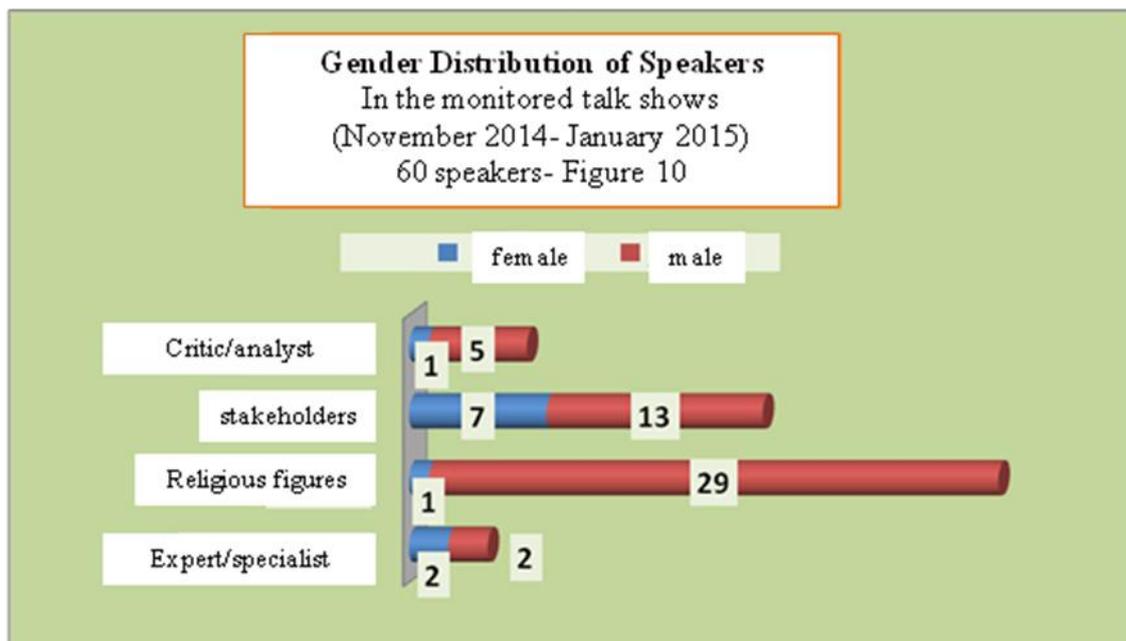


Figure 10: Gender Distribution of Speakers

#### 4- Type of Religious Speech

The study analyzed the type of speech used by the speakers in the monitored talk shows that tackled religious issues. Thus the terms and expressions used by the speakers were monitored and classified according to three types of religious speech: fundamentalist religious speech, tolerant religious speech, and critical religious speech. The results showed that the speakers in the monitored shows used 30 tolerant speeches, 20 critical speeches and 10 fundamentalist speeches (Figure 11). It can be deduced from the results that:

- Significant critical speech that is not used by civil society representatives, critics, and experts
- Absence of fundamentalists or hate speech among same groups (“critic/ analyst”, “stakeholder”, “expert/specialist”). This can be a positive indicator within the political conflicts of religious background.
- Lack of critical speech used by religious figures, instead they use fundamentalist speech taking into consideration that the majority of religious figures use tolerant speech.

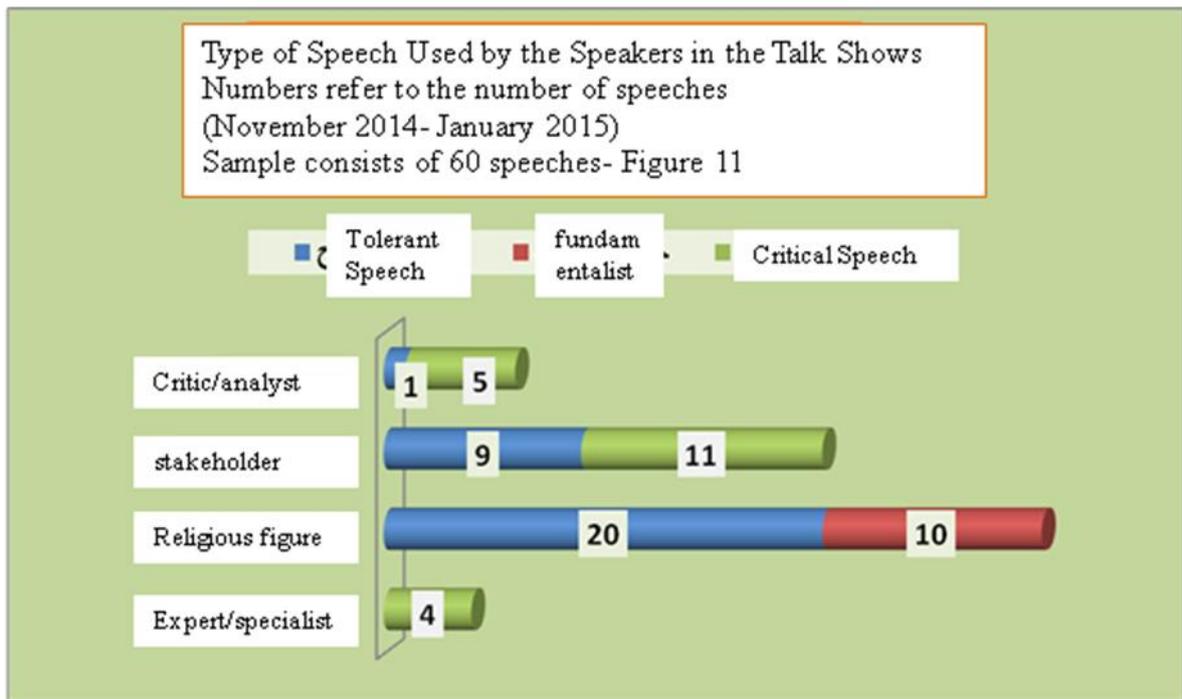


Figure 11: type of speech used by the speakers

## **Second Part Qualitative Analysis of Content**

In the second part, a qualitative analysis of content was conducted for the 21 segments that tackled religious issues in the identified social talk shows (“LeINasher”, “Toni Khalife-1544”, “Hki Jeles”). Thus this part based on the seven sections monitored in the earlier phase as unit of context. These sections are: fundamentalism, religious edicts- fatwa, heresies and religious beliefs, LGBT marriage, practice of rituals, religious sarcasm, and corruption in religious institutions. In each of these sections, the political and social contexts were analyzed in order to understand the point of view of the speakers. The focus was on analyzing the type of speakers in every section and their roles, taking into consideration the relevant context to clarify the way in which the religious issue was approached during the show (number of speaker in every section, on what basis they were chosen? Who and what they represent in society? How the roles were distributed among them? What was the content of their speeches and on what they have focused?). The focus was also on the presenter of the show, their role in dealing with the religious issue and their facilitation of the episodes, and the content of their speeches (what was the issue raised? How they dealt with the speakers? Did they allow the guest to express their ideas? How did they interact with the opinion of the guests? Did they promote other opinions? Did they express their personal opinion directly?).

### **1- Religious Fundamentalism**

In “religious fundamentalism”, one section of “Hki Jeles” tackled the issue of Abu Ali Chichani, who is the leader of armed fundamentalist group in “Jabhat al Nasra” who kidnapped Lebanese soldiers, while another section tackled religious fundamentalism through a popular trending song. A section from “LeInasher” tackled a similar issue in Tripoli. The three issues are related to local security situation related to the war in Syria and its reflection on the Lebanese society.

#### *a. Abu Ali Chichani: obsession of journalistic scoops of big issues*

“Hki Jeles” tackled in one of its sections on 22/12/2014 (for 9 minutes), the issue of Anas Jarkas also known as Abu Ali Chichani from Al Nasra. Joe Maalouf presented Chichani in way that reflects his importance and his negative role on the national level. “he is a terrorist”, “leader of fundamentalist terrorist group with more than 30 armed men”, “he threatened to kidnap the wives and children of Lebanese soldiers when they detained his wife”. The new

element about the show is that they reached Muhammad Jarkas brother of Chichani who “threatened to be killed by his brother” and who assured that his wife Leila Abdelkarim Najjar is involved with his brother and with ISIS and with “facilitating terrorist acts in Lebanon and Syria”.

The duration of the reportage is less than two minutes, he wanted to add some fear and fright to his show thus the video of Chichani threatening the Lebanese soldiers was displayed. As for the feedback on the reportage, it was simplified and do not match the seriousness of the issue (“the one who can kill his brother can kill anyone” ”we built a friendship with Jarkas so he showed us his new secret place”) trying to shed light on the “danger” faced by the staff according to warnings from army intelligence.” This action narration continues to show how the program team were able to lure Mohamed at night, and the interview ends with a message to his brother calling him to let go the soldiers of the Lebanese army, followed by a phone call message that Jarkas wanted to address the secretary general of Hizboullah AlSayed Hasan Nasroullah telling him that “I am in a very critical condition, I wasn’t able to stay longer”. This message incites the action especially after jarkas stated that his son was kidnapped by hizbullah, and they have tried to kidnap him also and that “he has some information that he would tell only to Sayed Hasan”.

Maalouf proceeded with his analysis of the reasons behind the increase of fundamentalism. He considered that “ISIS can make any regular man a prince or governor”, and “this is what makes people like Chichani abuse their powers and to abuse the “miserable” and poor woman convincing her of earning heaven from their deeds”. He concluded in a way that reflects again the will of the program to present a scoop, pointing to the important information for the state”.

b. *Hki Jeles adopts a popular song against fundamentalism*

On the other hand, Haki Jeles tackled religious issue on 19/01/2015 (duration 14 minutes) through shedding light on a song entitles “he has a beard” that was trending lately on social platforms and on local radio stations. The song, as introduced by a two and a half minutes reportage, is about a “love story that ended after the boyfriend joined “ISIS”, a realistic story from the Lebanese context”. The singer and composer (Hani Assaf) was hosted by Joe Maalouf so they can both explain the lyrics and the video clip. Joe defended Assaf who was criticized pointing to the “depth” of the song and criticizing who is committing “criminal acts

in the name of religion”. They both agreed on refusing fundamentalism and the importance of facing it with the “word”.

c. *“LelNasher”*: to refute the image of fundamentalism in Tripoli

In the third section of the segment on “religious fundamentalism”, that was displayed on 10/11/2014 (duration 14 minutes), started like a show to “clean” the fundamentalist image of Tripoli in the media. The presenter and the guest (Sheikh Bilal Mawas) exchanged their roles and the sheikh started the show in a sarcastic way (“I am coming from Tripoli to concur the studio and to eat everyone and drink their blood”). The sheikh introduced himself as a “Muslim from Tripoli” before he welcomes the other guest Rima (the presenter) “who went to Tripoli looking for terrorism but couldn’t find any, instead she found many interesting issues that should be highlighted in the media”. Then they discussed not trying to show salafies in a good way but to show Tripoli in a good image. Then a reportage (duration 6:30 minutes) where Rima is the hero walking in Tripoli, meeting with religious figures and taking the opinion of citizens to change the stereotypes related to Tripoli. The reportage shows to sheikh who are open minded and moderate and these two characteristics are highlighted by the program when tackling religious issues. The sheikhs tried to explain that salafist is not understood well and they are applying it in a wrong way and the result that innocent martyrs are killed from civilians who are not armed and from the Lebanese army.

**2- Religious Edicts - Fatwa**

The two sections related to religious edicts tackled two issues: the first one is the attitude of religion towards killing oneself in the battle field whether to avoid being captivated or to add damage for the enemies. This issue was raised in “Toni Khalife-1544” that was broadcasted on 15/12/2014 and came in the context of behaviors during the war in the region; as for the second issue it is under the category religious edicts that are increasingly widespread and many of them are weird. In this framework “LelNasher” shed light in one of its sections on edicts that forbids celebrating feast with other religion, not because this edict is weird but based on the policy of the media institution that refused anything against conviviality. The program shed light in another section on suicide bombers and how they are being brain washed, and the role of fatwa in this issue.

a. *Attitude of religion from suicide bombers: fallacies and interference of religion*

The “Toni Khalife-1544” section (duration 24 minutes) on suicide bombers was a fallacy in layout and content. The hypothesis raised by Khalife if someone killed oneself in the battle field to avoid detainment or if someone bombed oneself with the enemies is that a suicide or martyrdom?). This is not only related to religion as he wanted to orient the discussion, martyrdom is also related to sacrifice or death for religion. With his approach, he is considering the war in the region a religious war. On the other hand, he contributed in giving the suicide bombers some legitimacy (whether it was called “suicidal” or “martyrdom”) he also gave religion exclusiveness in deciding upon this issues (he used many times “is X allowed?”) he based on the saying that “all religions in consensus that killing oneself is the biggest and worst sin, and they define whether its is martyrdom, suicide, or sin”.

The issue was raised in a controversial manner between religions talking about a “debate between three religious figures one Sunnite, one Shiite, and one Maronite, to see the attitude of religion towards suicide. In this manner he confused between sects and religion as he considered the two sects Sunnites and Shiites as religions. It was bizarre how Khalife called the audience to focus on this section that was not showed in the previous episode because they ran out of time and this is a great section. As for the reportage (1:30 minutes), it raised the issue through displaying historical events of leaders “who put end to their lives” instead of giving up. He focused on Kurdish warrior Gilan Ozalp the 19 years old girl who fought in Kabana last September, and she decided “not to give up herself for ISIS, so she kept a bullet to end her life” as came in the report.

The debate was between three religious figures, sheikh Malek Jdide, the former president of the association of Muslim scholars in Lebanon, and the president of Muslim endowment in Akkar Mufti Jaafari Sheikh Ahmad Taleb and he a “permanent guest of the program” as described by the presenter, in addition to father Beshara Elia Antouni, who is an author and researcher in philosophy and theology and the president of “Antonine School” at mrouj. The debate was purely religious reflecting the opinion of religions and sects in the issue of suicide, and when this act is allowed and when it is considered a sin and this reflects the authority of the three sects represented in the show in defining the options of the citizens even when it comes to war.

b. *Celebrating Christian Feasts: criticism of edicts that forbids Muslim participation*

The second issue related to “religious edicts” was raised by “LeINasher” on 05/01/2015 in a section that took more than 38 minutes, and discussed forbidding the participation in the feasts of others. The introduction of karaka criticized all types of widespread edicts, without refusing them in general (“there are edicts that gather people and others that incite for conflict”) and she raised the issue against the edict related to “celebrating religious feasts with other religions and what is the opinion of moderate thinkers?”. And the reportage (3 minutes) worsened the negative image of the edict before tackling the main issue. The discussion started with “bizarre edicts that come out of nowhere and tackle the women especially”, many edicts were displayed (from Egypt, KSA, Jordan, and UAE). The ending is with a fundamentalist speech saying that “Christmas is a myth”.

Since this issue is related to religion, religious figures were the majority of the attendees. It was evident the opinion of a fundamentalist represented by Dr. Hani Sibai president of the Makrizi Center for Historical Studies in London (through a video), it was used in the introduction to promote for moderate opinion represented in Lebanon by Sheikh Ali Hussein “Imam at Al Salam Mosque”. Sibai criticized Christmas “it was considered a myth by Christians until the middle ages then protestant” and he considered that it is against the Shariaa and a sin. He also criticized the western Christians who “provoked conflicts between Sunnites and Shiites” pointing to the crusaders who “destroyed the Muslims”. The attitude of karaka was obvious she was with “moderate religion”, and she directly criticized the opinion of Sibai who was provoked many times and he asked her sarcastically if she is the one who “do the edicts” (“what is the reason of disapproving joyful feasts that can bring people together?”, “the essence of Islam is to understand and love the others” “do we need more separation?” “How do you consider it a sin when it is about gathering and love?”).

Sheikh Ali Hussein representative of Dar Al Fatwa tried first to adopt the opinion disapproving celebrating feasts with other religions “without blaspheme the ones who do it”. But karaka was very criticizing (“why? We (Muslims) respect Christmas and we believe in it!”, “isn’t some blaspheme a blasphemy?”, “why are we taking over the role of God?”, “in Lebanon we need more peace then why not celebrating with each others?”). the fundamentalist speech of Sibai and the more open opinion of participants through the phone made Hussein change his speech so he confronted and refused what Sibai said, especially that the conflict between them moved to the issue of celebrating Muslim feasts like the birth of the

prophet. Then Hussein greeted all Christians live wondering how many edicts have led to disasters. Thus the presenter succeeded in orienting the speech towards criticizing the edict, and she didn't stop approving with father Joseph Daw (through phone call), she agreed to his "significant and open" speech "words that calls upon you for love then why you open conflicting debates?".

The participation of sheikh Suheib Hebli (through the phone) increased the argument between Sibai and the audience, and hebli and Sibai accused each others. Hebli pointed that he participates with Christians when launching the building of churches, this opinion was highlighted by Karaki who agreed to "this image of Islam that we are all waiting for", and she didn't forget to criticize the religious figures who force the presenters to wear hijab when hosting them", referring to Siabi, and she concluded that "the majority is with moderate opinion but fundamentalists are dominating". According to Karaki, this moderation is from within the essence of the religion ("diversity of religions in Lebanon is a blessing from God", "we all believe in one God", "arabs and Muslims have to be the voice of moderation"...).

### *c. Suicide Bombers and Brain Wash: a search of moderate religious speech*

As for the section on suicide bombers during "LelNasher" on 19/01/2015, it was in the context of suicide bombing that occurred in Tripoli few days before the episode. This context affected the discussion from the political approach when it was meant to tackle the psychological part for suicidal. This issue was raised during a two and a half minutes reportage raising questions related to "brain wash" ("how Lebanese youth are being convinced to commit suicidal acts, what are the tools that were used to attract them? And is brain wash becoming a fact?"). it was obvious from the terms that were used in the report (it showed a woman attacking who took away her son and talked about "terrorist groups", youth who became puppets") and from the introduction of the section the complete refuse of this issue, at least when it is targeting "a clear non civilian enemy".

The majority of the participants were religious figures with the presence of a psychologist and university teacher (Dr randa Chalita) who had a marginalized role and a limited time, since what dominated the discussion was the political (attitude from the war in Syria) and the religious approach. Thus the discussion was limited between Sheikh Mohsen Chaaban and sheikh Sahib Hebli where the former speech was more moderate. Chaaban talked about brain wash in Saida by Al Asir the thing that sharpened the argumentation between them. Halabi

talked about the difference between suicidal acts to set free a land and those who kill innocent people in the same country stating that most probably the reason is the effect of the environment and the psychological status of the suicidal, criticizing the dangerous attitudes of some sheikhs in the mosques. As for Chaaban, he considered that Islam “allows martyrdom suicides”, then he showed very biased attitude when Karaki asked him “what would edict if you were allowed to?” he answered “that any act against basher Asad or Iraqi government or Americans or Israeli enemy is a blessed act”.

This political- religious domination led to marginalization of the scientific-psychological opinion as the doctor seemed hesitating in approaching this issue in front of the tow sheikhs who are tackling the issue from a critical way that cancel the individual for the sake of the group. Thus she avoided tackling the ideology. Karaki did not give her enough time to express her opinion and did not provide any feedback on what the doctor said as she did with the sheikhs. The opinion of the presenter was obviously against suicidal acts, and criticized the use of religion for extreme purposes; she considered that the solution is within the religion itself, “the real moderate religion with educated religious figures”. She repeated her opinion at the closure “the solution is in the voice of conscious, real religion and moderate and educated religious figures whose voices are unfortunately fading in front of the current fundamentalism”.

### **3- Heresies and Religious Beliefs**

The varied sections that tackled issues related to heresies and religious beliefs where with different purposes: the issue of Georges Kiwan and “Gin and demons”, that was tackled in “LelNasher”. The issue of St Elie shrine at Ein Saade, tackled in “Hki Jeles”. The issue of reincarnation and miracles tackled in “Toni Khalife-1544”. Each of these issues were tackled in a different approach.

- a. *Gin and Demons: popular and mythical beliefs for attraction and the sexual element is always present*

Tackling the issue of gin and demons during “LelNasher” on 08/12/2014 (32 minutes) raises questions about the seriousness of dealing with similar issues in “social” programs instead of issues that really matter for society. The section starts with confirming the existence of gins without any scientific examination as the presenter starts with asking “how is the life of people driven by gins and how can they get rid of them?”. Then a seven minutes reportage follows that promotes this issue through showing the case of Chab Hasan who is being driven by a gin

for a while the thing that is preventing him from doing his work as a dentist. The man talked about the way “Satan” spoke to him and how he abuses him but he hits him from the inside out so no bruises show on his body, and he said that Stan threatened him to hit him in the eye when he knew he was planning to show up on the program. The formal Arabic language spoken in the reportage makes it more serious, and then the question raised “what could happen if we were girls?”.

Then the reportage tackles a different point of view, and adds the sexual aspect to make it more attractive, where the story of Shady is highlighted to show how he abuses girls to fulfill his sexual desires and then the mythical part interfere when Shady convinces the girls that they are driven by gin and that the gin is the one doing the sexual relation with them. The reportage also shows someone who states that he is a psychologist and uses mythical ways to cure people (“rakwe” “chereb”) and explains how the rape happens and how the gin moves inside the girls and how they are cured, and this erotic scene happens again to convince the girl to take out her clothes giving her different reasons then he suggests that she lay down on the bed and to wear sexier clothes that he provides her with, this scene continues for five minutes where the man and the girl are arguing she wants to leave and he is not allowing her with the conversation between them (“why you are taking my clothes off?” “I want to touch you”, “this is the second time that you enter the bedroom and you change your mind”). The reportage had a date which was probably the recording date that goes back to march 2008, in addition this part will not be directly related to the discussions, this what concludes that it is only for attraction, which raises again the question about the seriousness in tackling such issue in similar ways used in this program.

Then a discussion took place after the reportage between people who may be concerned in this issue (medicine, religion, the party pretending illness, and the party pretending ability to cure): sheikh Mohamad Ali Haj Amili, hasan Kbeisi the dentist that the reportage was about, Fidella “spiritual women saying that she can remove the gin from Hasan” (this how she was introduced by Karaki, in addition to Rania Boubou “clinical psychiatry”); and the discussion starts with Karaki facilitating the discussion without any questions about the preciseness of the stories and starts asking Hasan if Satan was there with them at the moment and what was he saying, and she asked the psychiatrist about her interpretation of this case, and then the Fidella joins the scene and accuses the gin to live in Hasan, and Karaki asked her to exhort the gin, noting that all the tools were available on the stage, this scene continued for more than 6 minutes.

The sheikh explained the existence of gin in Quran, and assured that there are no proof of direct contact between humans and gins pointing to the possibility that Hasan is having a psychological disorder and those dealing with the spiritual world are fake people and these things are not allowed in Islam. Karaka tried to incite the argument between the sheikh and Fidella. But at the end of the section karaka closed the issue with the opposite opinion to show that the aim was only to add an attractive element to the episode and she criticized hasan and Fidella stating that the first one is “sick” and has a “medical file” and he is refusing to proceed with his treatment as his parents said and accused Fidella of being abusive and that she is hurting Hasan.

It was obvious the marginalization of the scientific opinion of the psychologist who was asked once at the end of the episode and the priority was given for the religious opinion even though the doctor was the only one to approach the issue from scientific psychosocial approach (the sheikh agreed with her but said gin exist in religion), she stated that gin don't exist scientifically and they are the result of human imagination.

b. *Georges Kiwan: the opposition of religious institution of the media role*

The journalist Rima Karaki tackled the issue of Georges Kiwan with her guest mother Eagnes Maryam Al Salib within “LeNasher” on 10/11/2014 (21 minutes). The section started with a three and a half minutes reportage and Mrs Helene Samia participated through the phone (for 7 minutes) one of the victims who is accusing Kfoury of using her and raping her. The reportage highlights the performance of Kiwan for holiness and how he gathered his fortune through 30 years of brain wash and he gained thousands of followers some of them are priests who are asking for his blessing and kissing his hand. The reportage emphasized how he abused women and harass them and then came Helen to expose him. The reportage highlighted the objection of the church for Kiwan and is warning the religious figures who are still in contact with him to stop, the church opinion was presented through the presence of mother Eagnes.

Karaki tried to highlight the negative implications of this issue emphasizing that the worst type of corruption is that with religious cover without accusing the religious institutions. Mother Eagnes was more conservative and considered this issue as an internal problem of the church and shouldn't be tackled in the media because this affect the holiness of the church and the saints and that this issue should be solved internally as it is more spiritual than social.

Karaka was constantly trying to prove the social approach of this issue and the right of media to cover it since no one is allowed to abuse people in the name of religion, but the mother was not agreeing and tried to limit the damages and insisting on this issue being something internal.

Each of karaka and the mother insisted on their opinion, then mother Egnés stated the importance of media in this issue but she returned to her objecting attitude when karaka said that the church is not taking quick actions since the procedures may take up to 10 years and this should be emphasize to protect the people and the religion itself, and mother Egnés closed refusing the censorship role of media and said laughing that we hope you protect the religion.

The victim Helen Samia refused to accused the church admitting that this is an individual act even though karki tried to incite her to add something new to the story and asked about the sides who are threatening her husband, when Samia replied that members from the army and from political parties the presenter interrupted her and changed the subject which reflects the limits of the program in tackling such sensitive issues.

*c. ST Elie Shrine at Ein Saade: Accusing the financial and individual abuse of religion*

The last section of heresies and religious beliefs was within “Hki Jeles”(11 minutes) on 10/11/2014, about St Elie shrine at Ein Saade where contributions were gathered for the past 50 years in the name of the saint to build a hospital but the building was stopped but the contributions proceeded. The aim is criticizing the abuse of people in the name of religion especially that religion has a very big and powerful effect on the lives of people.

A three minutes reportage was displayed highlighting the abuse of religion for financial purposes without accusing the religious institution and the reportage showed memos from the orthodox church stating that this shrine is not relevant to the church. The issue was tackled from the point of the abuse that can be faced by people in the name of religion.

The president of the catholic media center father Abdo Abou Kasem was present who had fundamental opinion, he is not representing the shrine (which is related to orthodox sect), but he is there to emphasize that there is no relation to the church with this act and its is not allowed to use religion for personal purpose and referred to the wrong and magical actions that are practiced at the shrine and that people get grace from the saint not from material tool that are being abused. He added the strict rules about having a shrine. This religious speech was adopted by the presented who described is guest as reference.

d. *Reincarnation: maximum incitement*

Reincarnation is one of the debatable issues that cannot be raised but to attract the attention of the audience, especially in the way approached by “Toni Khalife” in his show on 10/11/2014 (20 minutes). The show highlighted the case of two people who spoke about their past life and met their previous families and one of them met the one who killed him. Reincarnation is known to be believed in the Druze sect which makes this issue more mysterious and interesting in addition to adding the element of the Lebanese civil war. A four minutes reportage shows the case of Firas halabi who spoke about his past life before he was killed in 1976 by a person called Hanna, and then he met his mother and son, and the reportage showed similar case of Rami Bou hamdan who is still having the mark of a bullet that he took in his earlier life.

The section discussed the case of the Bou Hamdan who was asked about how they felt after death and whether they are interested in meeting his old family. The issue of civil war was brought when the man told him that he was killed on a security check when he was trying to save a Christian family. The section hosted only one sheikh to avoid having people who can reject and oppose the stories of the two men. The sheikh explains the reincarnation from a religious point of view. And at the end of the episode Toni called the old family of Bou hamdan if they have identified themselves to call the program.

e. *Miracles and Wonders: the religious story and the Christian-Islamic difference for incitement*

“Toni Khalife-1544” tackled the issue of miracles and wonders in a section (39 minutes) on 05/01/2015 that was approached in the same way of the issue of reincarnation. The issue was raised in celebration of Christmas for the Armenian community, the baptism of Christ for the Christians and the birth of Prophet Mohammad for the Muslims as stated by the presenter. The issue was tackled through the history and that there are proofs that miracles happened and that there many people who do not believe in such powers.

Then for more attraction and incitement, the presenter launched a debate between Muslims and Christians (6:30 minutes-longest reportage in the study). The reportage describes Lebanon as the country of saints and displays religious sonnets and shows the testimony of people who had miracles, then the reportage move to the miracles within the Shiite sect where miracles for Sayida Zainab were highlighted.

The debate within the studio was between two sheiks, Moufty jaafari Ahmad taleb and Sheikh Ahmad Ismail and through a video conference from St Charbel Annaya (symbolism of the place to support the religious story) father Louis Matar. There was nomedical or scientific representation in the discussion, and no representation of the Sunnite sect and Christian opinion other than the Maronite. The three religious figures agreed on the possibility of miracles, and each focused on the miracles reported in their sects.

The agreement of the presenter especially with the Christian religious story was very obvious in the use of his terms and the emphasis on saints and their relation with God. And one of the sheikhs refused the need for a medium to reach God and they tried to convince him about the proven miracles..

#### **4- LGBT Marriage: the Negative Religious Opinion in Front**

This issue is not relevant to religious issues but it was raised due to the participation of a religious figure in a section (30minutes) that tackled LGBT marriage in “LelNasher” on 15/12/2014. The discussion was about the LGBT community and their rights with the vice editor in chief on AlAkhbar newspaper Pierre Abi Saab and sheikh Yousef member of the association of Muslim scholars in Lebanon, in addition to two gay men Mohammad and kais or Jennifer. This study will focus only on the religious part of the discussion which was completely negative where the sheikh refused to look at the men and called them as not normal and sick and that it is not acceptable for them to get married, and stated that they should seek medical health and the punishment of LGBT in religion can reach killing the person. Karaki dealt with the issue in neutrality and highlighted the right of people to choose and the right to discuss this issue without stereotypes and provided some criticism to the fundamentalist attitudes of religious figures.

#### **5- Practice of religious rituals**

The three sections about religious rituals tackled three different issues. The first section was about the acting the life of prophets covered in ‘Hki Jeles’ and it reflected the religious argument about the Iranian film about the life of Prophet Mohammad, the program also tackled another issue raised on social media about the prayer timing for Islamic sects. The third section highlighted a more attractive issue about some Christian families practicing Achouraa rituals.

- a. The life of Prophet Mohammad in a film- Sunnite-Shiite Dispute

'hki Jeles' tackled on 01/12/2014 (19minutes) the issue of the Iranian film about the life of prophet Mohammad by the Iranian director Majeed Majeedi. The issue was tackled from a controversial approach between Sunnites and Shiites. The introduction of the section pictured the conflict between the Sunnites and Shiites references as historical conflict in this regard. A two minutes reportage was displayed highlighted the opinion of Mount Lebanon Moufti Mohammad Ali ElJouzou who said that an Iranian person acting the role of the prophet is an insult for Islam, and the section tackled the possibility of banning the movie in the movie theatres.

The speakers were only religious figures representing the major sects in Lebanon Sunnites Shiites and Maronites (despite the fact that they are relevant to the issue but the presence of a Christian figure will complete the religious scene). The discussions were purely ideological and it was obvious the will of the presenter to add more incitement to the debate based on sectarian separation.

There was consensus between the opinion of Maronite and Shiite figures where the former that we don't need more problems especially in this phase that is having conflicts between Sunnites and Shiites, and the first one said that everything that contradicts religion we stop it from being showed in the movie theatres.

b. *Prayer time: use of marginalized issue to attract audience*

In a section of 'Hki jeles' on 17/11/2014 (24 minutes), Joe Maalouf tackled the issue of conflict about prayer time for Islamic sects. Raising this issue showed how much the program is only seeking scoops and the argument is that this issue is widely trending on social platforms. The issue was tackled as an urgent matter, the importance of prayers for Muslims was highlighted and the importance of respecting the prayer was emphasized, and he added that there is a conflict on the prayer time between the Sunnite and Shiite sects. Then he showed four minutes reportage on a new Islamic Research that has been conducted in Egypt and the Arab World.

As for the discussion at the studio, it focused as usual on the conflict between the Sunnite and the Shiites in the layout and in the content. The discussion was based on religious facts between religious representatives of the two sects. The religious representatives disagreed with the title of the section stating that Muslims has been praying at the wrong time for 100

years, and Maalouf said that it was the title of the study not their choice, this is to show the only reason behind raising such issue that is not directly related to the concerns of people is to attract the attention and initiate the debate.

c. Christians Practicing Ashouraa Rituals

This issue was tackled in a section of 'Lelnasher' (19 minutes) on the 03/11/2014. The section highlights a specific case that shows the participation of a Christian family in Islamic rituals. Reportage (2minutes) was displayed to introduce the family and the Islamic and Christian icons displayed at the house.

The mother and her son Elias were at the studio while the other two children were lively covered practicing the ritual of Ashouraa hitting their heads and wearing white robes. Then the discussion continued with the sheikh who is against hitting on the head and he described the family as ultimate givers and lovers. Karaka raises the issue of Muslim sheikh who are against practicing Christian rituals.

The priest Peter Khalil joined the discussion over the phone; the issue was not covered from a psychological or anthropological point of view. The priest criticized the family and said that respecting other religions doesn't mean acting, or abandoning the beliefs of our religion to practice some other. But Karaki was against his point of view clarifying that he cannot know whether they are acting or they really mean it. He closed the section stating that some people feel belonging to all religion and it is not wrong to practice all rituals but of course not through hitting on the head.

**6- Religious Sarcasm**

Three of the four sections related to religious sarcasm tackled the issue of comics published in Charlie Hebdo that was attacked in Paris on 07/1/2015. These sections occurred in the three monitored programs (the three took place on the same day on 12/1/2015), 'Lelnasher' only tackled the issue of the Egyptian writer Fatima Naout that was taken to court for disrespecting Islam.

- a. *'Charlie Hebdo' in 'haki Jeles': conservative speech of Maalouf versus a critical serious discussion*

'Haki Jeles' tackled this issue in 30 minutes where a short reportage about the victims with classical music, then he started his introduction about the disaster that happened and tackled the issue of Islam in Europe.

The section highlighted the interaction of the Lebanese society and the dilemma of who to sympathize with, the victims in France or in Tripoli. He emphasized that the international public opinion never emphasized with Lebanese victims and he criticized the publishing of the Charlie Hebdo magazine during a monologue that took more than 5 minutes that shows the religious background in his speech. He started blaming some Lebanese then continued to blame all of them, and ended up with disciplinary lessons emphasizing the importance of not using guns.

The long introduction was followed by another reportage (2:30 minutes) that shows some segments of the LBCI news bulletins. His guests in the studio were Pierre Abi Saab vice editor in chief of AlAkhbar (at the studio) and the academic Dr Khattar Abou Diab (conference call from Paris). The choice of the guests helped giving the discussion an analytical and social dimension.

b. *Charlie Hebdo in 'Toni Khalife-1544': religious approach that refuses affecting religion*

Similar to what Joe Maalouf has done, Toni Khalife also did not hesitate to adapt this issue to the Lebanese context comparing from the begging between the French and Lebanese victims. Khalife criticized all the political leaders in the world for not showing any empathy with all the martyrdom and kidnapping of soldiers from the Lebanese army.

Thus the main approach was political, and then Khalife moved to the religious approach. He showed a reportage (3minutes) that showed how disrespectful the magazine was with all religions but what was done is a terrorist crime. Thus the problem raised in the three programs was whether disrespecting religion is considered freedom of speech? And should the defense be by killing?

It was clear from the choice of guests that the approach to deal with the issue will be religious, where two sheikhs were present, in addition to the journalist Ghassan Basil as civil representative (through conference call from Paris). The discussions focused on the look of

fresh people toward Islam in addition, the discussion refused both the publishing of the magazine and the reaction of the people as this is a wrong thing to do and this the fault of terrorism.

Basil explained more about the Fresh system and about the wide space given for freedom of expression the thing that limited his role in the discussion. He explained that religion in France doesn't have any relation with the political state the thing that give more space to criticize religion, but again it is not allowed to disrespect anyone nor to kill in the name of religion. Khalife closed the section emphasizing again the fact that no one sympathize with Lebanese problems.

*c. Charlie Hebdo in 'LelNasher': religious fundamentalism and Zionist Conspiracy*

As for Rima karaka she tackled the issue of Charlie Hebdo in 'Lelnasher' and the issue of religious sarcasm in a section that took about 37 minutes. The section started with two minutes reportage about what happened, again the program refused religious sarcasm and refused the terrorist act in the name of religion, in addition it showed the difference interactions of the Lebanese people concerning this issue.

The discussion took place between sheikh Raafat Mikaty, professor of Islamic law and shariaa, Mr. Amin Abou Yehya, journalist and social media expert, the academic Dr. Khaled AbdelFattah, and over the phone joined the comic painter Stafro Jabra and the journalist Salem Zahran. The discussion was freedom of expression in France, and karaka raised her questions according to whom she is addressing. The opinion of the guests differed, they refused the behavior of the magazine and the terrorist act. The sheikh talked about the difference between freedom of expression and disrespecting religion, and described what happened as a Zionist conspiracy to destroy Islam in France

*d. The Writer Fatima Naout*

The same episode of 'LelNasher' tackled another section (28 minutes) about the issue of Egyptian poet Fatima Naout, who wrote of her Facebook and twitter pages about the sacrifices in Islam<sup>6</sup> thus she was sent to court for disrespecting religion. Karaka hosted Naout before her first session at the court and one of religious figures in Egypt who are against what Fatima said joined the discussion over the phone.

There was a short display (1:30 minutes) of previous interviews with Naout, then the sheikh joined over the phone and explained about the Quran and why Fatima is considered guilty and karaka raised provocative questions to incite the tension between the two speakers.

## 7- Corruption in religious Institutions

The last segment was about the corruption within the Maronite courts that was tackled only in 'Hki Jeles'. This issue was tackled in two sections: on 08/12/2014 and on 05/01/2015

### a. The Maronite Spiritual Court

This issue was tackled in 'Hki Jeles' over two sections especially about the high fees that citizens should pay when trying to get a divorce (300 cases per year, their fees between 7 and 20 thousand dollars for a period between 5 to 7 years). Raising this issue reflects a margin of freedom towards religious authorities and institutions without rejecting the role of religion in society. The first section criticized the procedures adopted at the court and the problems people are facing, it covered the high amounts of money they have to pay on the long procedures that they have to follow up on, and some stated that they had to change their religion to finish this issue. The section did not host any lawyer representative from the court as the presenter said to avoid listening to the religious authorities giving live excuses.

### b. *The Maronite Court- Part Two: High accusation and open debate*

The second section was similar to the first, it is the longest section in this study (56 minutes) it emphasized the same concept that religious corruption is the worst. It tackled cases from different sects within the Christian religion. There was no religious representation, the same guest remained as in the first section (Miled Abou Malhab) who started accusing religious

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<sup>6</sup> "كل مذبحه وأنتم بخير . بعد برهه تُساق ملايين الكائنات البرينة لأهول مذبحه يرتكبها الانسان منذ عشرة قرون ونيف ويكرّرها وهو يبتسم. مذبحه سنوية تتكرّر بسبب كابوس باغت أحد الصالحين بشأن ولده الصالح. وبرغم أن الكابوس قد مرّ بسلام على الرجل الصالح وولده وآله، إلا أن كائنات لا حول لها ولا قوة تدفع كل عام أرواحها وتُحرق أعناقها وتُهرق دماؤها دون جريرة ولا ذنب ثمناً لهذا الكابوس القدسي (...)." .

authorities and started providing bizarre pieces of advice of both political and religious content. Many random discussion were raised who showed up with his anti feminist language and the role of these discussion was to catch attention at all price.

## Summaries

The three TV programs that were monitored between November 2014 and January 2015, included many religious issues that differed from general to specific, scoop to clichés, thus they were of different degrees of importance for the audience and for the society, and they were tackled in different approaches. The study resulted in concluding some common traits of these three programs that tackled religious issues. First the common traits will be covered, then the characteristics of each of the three monitored program will be highlighted in this regard.

### First: The Political Affiliation of Media

It is certain that private media is a part of the Lebanese religious system; it is affiliated to its structure and reflects its division and its religious-sectarian conflicts on its platforms. The three monitored program make no exception of this rule, and this was shown through some comments that can be summarized as follows:

- Domination of religious figures in the coverage space allocated for religious issues in the three monitored programs (50%), weak representation of experts (7%), or activists in public affairs (10%) with all the resulting promotion of religious notions the thing that reflects the power of religion in the Lebanese society (and Arab World).
- Religious commitment of presenters of the three monitored programs, who usually have their predefined attitudes towards the issue to be raised. This commitment reflect the moral authority of religious figures in defining the options of the citizens in varied issues that exceeds sometimes the religious dimension.
- The absence of critics and analysts in issues related to religion and their presence only to discuss issues that are agreed upon from both scientific and religious figures also shows the power of religion. For example while talking about gin and brain wash of suicidal which are issues of consensus for both scientific and religious opinion, there was a presence of psychologists and anthropologist. But when it comes to miracles and reincarnation which is something not supported scientifically, only religious figures were present. In both cases religious figures are given the biggest coverage space.

- The dominance of the religious figures from the three biggest sects in Lebanon (Maronite, Shiite, and Sunnite) on the platform of the monitored programs with total absence of representatives of other 14 Islamic and Christian sects, except for the presence of one sheikh from Druze for the sake of the issue raised on reincarnation. It was also noted that only representatives from the Maronite sect were present even when the problem raised was about another sect (St Elie Shrine at Ein Saade).
- High representation of Sunnite figures (13) as a reflection of the political conflict in the region which witnesses an increase in fundamentalist groups (this also explains the varied communities of the participating Sunnites), moderate participation of Shiite religious figures (9), who were hosted to confront the Sunnite Presence reflecting the political – sectarian conflict in the region. On the other hand, the lowest representation is for Christian religious figures (7), not just in number but in role as well where three of them had secondary roles in the sections while more important roles given to figures from other religion.
- The dominance of the ideological- religious issue over the social religious. This controversial approach expose that media provide their platforms for fundamentalist speeches away from the daily social issues that concerns the citizens.
- Each programs had certain limits in tackling the religious issues, where the different issues were tackled from one point of view without taking into account the opposite opinion or the opinion of the other sect
- Weak presence of females in the three monitored programs (11 versus 49), especially when it comes to religious figures. It was also noted that the female role in the debate was marginalized and this comes within the marginalization of the voices of experts and analysts for the sake of religious figures (especially when they are on the same platform).

### Second: Media as an alternative space

Despite all previous comments, the private media is a counter power even if in limited powers, to confront the current religious authorities, this is shown through:

- Despite the dominance of religious figures, especially in the ideological religious issues, but there was a presence for critics and analysts in sections related to religious

social issues, with a critical speech (especially with the sections on Charlie Hebdo and the corruption in the religious institutions)

- Criticizing the religious authorities in more than one section of 'Hki Jeles' and 'LelNasher' which reflects a small margin of freedom towards that authority but without disrespecting or underestimating its role.
- The presenters of the three programs promoted a speech that is against all sorts of violence and criticized fundamentalism

### Third: the search if incitement and the impact of the new media

The constant will for incitement was evident in the three monitored programs, whether through the choice of guests or the subject that will be tackled, the content of the reportages or the visual aids that were used. All presenters stressed the idea of an issue trending on social media which shows that these platforms are major sources for these programs, thus we can note the following:

- The controversial approach used in tackling religious issues in all three programs
- Raising any provocative issue despite its importance
- The three monitored programs where seeking journalistic scoops

### **LelNasher- New Tv**

The introduction of this program is characterized of keeping the largest space to serve the raised issue in comparison with the other two programs. The presenter was always trying to show a moderate image of religion that she sometimes interfere to orient the debate in that direction. On the other this program allowed more female participation than the other two programs, and the religious figures that were hosted were both with fundamentalist and moderate speeches.

### **Hki Jeles- LBI**

This program doesn't adopt a specific policy to tackle religious issues, but seeks first to raise what causes incitement of the audience, and this results in contradictions in the content of the three parts of a section: the report, raising the issue from the point of view of the presenter, discussions with the guest. On the other hand, it has a large amount of freedom that allows it

to criticize the work of religious institutions as it is the only program that tackled this issue. This program also balanced between the social (57%) and the ideological (43%) dimensions which resulted in raising issues that is related to the daily concerns of people. The program is also characterized in the space given for the presenter to discuss his thoughts before hosting the guests.

#### **Toni Khalife- 1544 - MTV**

This program raised the least religious issues (4), yet they were all from the ideological approach to religion, aiming to incite the audience by raising controversial and provocative issues away from the daily social problems. Toni Khalife always insisted on tackling the raised issues from a controversial Islamic-Christian or Sunnite-Shiite approach. He was also characterized in forcing his personal opinion, and similarly to Joe Maalouf he also raises some contradicting ideas in the same section.