

**Watching the Talk: Talk on Television and Talk About Television—The Case Study of  
*Ahmar Bel Khat El Areed***

**Sara Saleh**

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Department of Communication  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Ottawa



**uOttawa**

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## **Abstract**

When studying Arab television, many including some of the better-informed researchers in the Arab world have tended to think mostly of Al Jazeera and news coverage. The academic scholarship thus lacks a more inclusive approach as it excludes a pivotal discussion on entertainment talk shows. This study provides an alternative, unconventional perspective focusing on audience discussion programs. Through content analysis and critical discourse analysis, *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* (Red in Bold Lines), a civic-oriented Lebanese talk show, is critically examined (on the discourse, format and content levels) to fill the knowledge gap left by the existing literature. The present paper proceeds from descriptive studies of this subgenre—drawing on relevant research in communication, media studies, language, sociology and political science—to argue that *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* is an exemplar of issue-oriented talk shows that can contribute to the activation of public spaces through the participation of ordinary individuals in debates on salient personal and social issues during times of conflict.

*Keywords:* Arab television; issue-orientated talk shows; public sphere; conflicts; content analysis; critical discourse analysis.

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## **Dedication**

To Sham

The 11-year-old Syrian girl and 11,000 years old city

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## Introduction

There has been a long-standing debate in the communication tradition on how television not only disseminates mainstream messages, but also influences the formation, expression and consumption of public debates (Blumler, 1970; Carey & Adam, 2009; Lang & Lang, 1968). For some, it is indubitable that *audience discussion programs*—also referred to as a subgenre of *talk shows*—are one of the few public forums for intellectual, conversational exchange in modern society (Manga, 2003; Priest, 1995; Shattuc, 1997; Wilson, 2003). In contradistinction, others argue that even if a public sphere is created, those talk shows are not the space where such debates can take place because real change cannot be attained (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994). However, both agree that through televised participatory programming, “the broadcast media may be seen to offer new opportunities for the public to debate a wide range of political, social and moral issues on television” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.1).

Before the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the term *Arab television* was almost nonexistent on the global media map. “Arab television burst onto [the] world stage” (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.1) with Al Jazeera’s monopoly over the war reporting on Afghanistan in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, when international news networks like CNN and BBC relied in their coverage on the Qatari pan-Arab broadcaster (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009; Lahlali, 2011; Miles, 2006; Sakr, 2007; Zayani & Sahraoui, 2007). Until that point, however, Arab broadcast media had received minimal attention from academics. Hitherto, when the discussion turns to Arab television, many, including some of the better-informed researchers, have tended to think mostly of political and news broadcasting—that is Al-Jazeera or its news competitors (Kraidy, 2007). This has been guided by the misapprehension that “news satellite television

networks are the predominant, even the single, shaper of the Arab public sphere, a perspective exacerbated by the September 11, 2001 attacks” (Kraidy, 2007, p. 139).

The trinity of *war*, *media* and *public(s)* has been long-studied within the communication and political milieu. Yet, scholarly works as well as popular publications on the relationship between media and conflict lean towards focusing primarily—if not almost exclusively—on news and political media, and the issues raised therein (Berenger, 2004). In wartimes, ‘Arab television’ often becomes a synonym of news and political broadcasting. The complexities of this industry—that is, the interwoven and diversified genres it encompasses—are reduced to news and war-oriented programs. The academic literature thus lacks a more inclusive approach as it excludes a vital discussion on entertainment talk shows.

“Long treated as two distinct and separate spheres, the realms of politics and entertainment have become increasingly related in mass mediated societies” (Kraidy, 2006, p.3). Although there are disparities among the political and entertainment industries in broadcast media, there remains an overlap in the televised content they deliver. The need to consider social-oriented talk shows and their role in the public sphere, and not to focus only on news and political broadcasting, is not necessarily driven from the fact that they offer completely dissimilar contents. Rather, the approach they take, what they choose to focus on and how they do so is what makes them unlike. Attention in news and political coverage is usually given to delivering and analyzing information about current events while audience discussion programs often highlight current affairs through publicly debating them on two main levels: the personal and the social. In other words, civic-oriented talk shows focus on personal issues and social problems, often emanated from or stimulated by current events in the news (Livingstone & Lunt,

1994, p.39). This is evident in the viewer perception of each; audiences often seek news for information while they watch talk shows mainly for entertainment.

The lack of scholarly analysis poses as a central research problem inspiring this study in the sense that Arab television during conflicts has consequently not been investigated to the extent and in the breadth required to provide a critical analysis. While current scholarship predominantly focuses on news media and televised political broadcasting, the purpose of the paper is to turn elsewhere; to present an alternative view by critically examining Arab television during conflicts through the analysis of a particular type of talk shows—"the entertaining yet civic-oriented programs" (Dixon, 2009, p.3).

To do so, *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* (Red in Bold Lines, also known as Bold Red Line and The Bold Red Line)—a primetime, weekly, civic-oriented Lebanese talk show—is examined as a case study. Through content analysis (CA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA), this study focuses on investigating how issues are debated on the show from 2012 to 2018, and what distinguishing characteristics define those debates (on the discourse, format and content levels). The paper argues that *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* is an exemplar of the issue-oriented talk show genre that differentiates itself from other forms of televised broadcasting, such as news and political programs, by contributing to the creation or realization of a public sphere through the participatory debates and personal narratives of ordinary individuals where 'the personal' and 'the social' are prioritized. It is proposed that reaching concrete conclusions or universal consensus is not deemed necessarily on such programs. Rather, what they seem to value is 'conversation' suggesting that only through it a public space can be activated during times of conflict.

The study focused on investigating *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* from 2012 to 2018. Three major factors were considered in specifying this timeframe. First, since 2012, the Arab world has been embroiled in many conflicts among them is the Egyptian crisis which began with the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and ended in 2014 (Cook, 2012; Knell, 2012); the Yemeni Crisis which began with the 2011-12 revolution and later developed to the ongoing Yemeni Civil War (Almosawa, Hubbard & Briggs, 2017; Nikbakht & McKenzie, 2018); the Syrian conflict also known as the Syrian War since 2011 (Ramaswamy, 2018; Sorenson, 2016; Wedeman, 2018); and its spillover in Lebanon (Bowen, 2013). This serves the purpose of the study as the social, moral, cultural and political consequences evoked by such disputes and the vestiges left by warfare create a rich nest of content for issue-oriented talk shows. Second, although it is usually difficult to have access to full episodes from Arab shows online, the program digital archive gives access to full episodes since 2012. Because of the episodes' online accessibility, the entire population of available episodes was manually coded and examined through content analysis. Third, the show—hosted by Malek Maktabi—has been airing since 2008 which offers continuity in airing allowing the two levels of analysis to produce quality results over the selected timeframe.

The public sphere is the main theoretical framework guiding this study. Frame analysis was also used as a secondary theoretical approach. The public sphere delineates the characteristics of issue-oriented talk shows as discursive spaces. It draws on their contribution “to public debate and open deliberation necessary when civil society becomes subject to a vortex of [conflicts], violence and terror” (Cottle, 2006, p.147) and ultimately, their ability to make marginalized voices not usually given a public platform heard (Wilson, 2003, p.17). Frame analysis compliments the theoretical role of the public sphere by grounding the critical

examination of how those issues debated on the show are framed and how guests' experiences are cognitively structured (Hall & Woodhead, 1980).

## Literature review

Although there is an abundance of research on talk shows in North American and European contexts, on Arab media, and on the role media play in conflicts, there remain a lack of academic studies linking the three. In other words, there has been little research on Arab talk shows in wartimes. Thus, the literature review will be interdisciplinary and intersectional as it borrows from those three areas of study which themselves have disparities in the research attention they have received. This chapter will synthesize the key concepts and arguments in relevant literature, and the implications of these claims vis-à-vis the topic selected. This includes a discussion on pan-Arab entertainment channels, the issue-oriented talk show, news and political programs versus issue-oriented talk shows, and discourse. Then the central research question will be stated. This chapter concludes with the study's theoretical frameworks—public sphere and frame analysis—how they are contested, and where they are located within the broader domain in which the project is situated.

### 2.1 Pan-Arab entertainment channels

To address *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* as a case study, it is particularly important to identify the cultural and historical milieu wherein it exists. As Arab countries began gaining independence from colonial powers, setting up broadcasting systems became “an important symbol of independence and a crucial instrument of nation-building” (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.13). Whereas broadcast media focus on safeguarding Arabic culture and unity (Lahlali, 2011), their role has gone through different phases in response to shifts in political realities. While during the 1970s and 1980s, the Arab television “robustly defended particular matters such as the Palestinian [question] and the promotion of governments’ domestic policies” (Lahlali, 2011, p.1), in the 1990s and 2000s, the Arab media underwent a radical transformation with the launch

of privately-owned television networks (Al-Ghazzami, 2005; Al Kharusi, 2016; El Mkaouar, 2016; Khalil, 2004; Kraidy, 2008; Lahlali, 2011). Lebanon's 1994 Audio Visual Media Law (AVML) was the first Arab legislation that integrated privately owned radio and television (Lynch, 2006, p.130). National broadcasting systems, once dedicated to political propaganda, were joined by pan-Arab satellite television stations giving way to privatization. This "ended an era of state-controlled media" (Lahlali, 2011, p.1) where audience outreach, "ownership patterns, and politico-economic agendas [of the newly-emerged Arab television] overlapped and competed with state interests and ... non-state actors" (Kraidy & Khalil 2009, p.1).

With more popularity than news networks, "entertainment channels reflect an influential nexus of economic, political, social and economic forces in the Arab world" (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.33). According to the same source, Arab entertainment channels have been the "industry pioneers" in two major ways: (1) they integrated the Arab television into the global media industry through licensed, also referred to as format, programs which directed the attention of international partners to the pan-Arab market; and (2) they adapted to the changing reality in the Arab world by promoting relatively liberal agendas on social, cultural and economic levels (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.33)

The launch of the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) in August 1985 is an example of the process of liberalization discussed earlier. Now in its third decade, LBC—where *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* continues to air—was the first privately owned television station in Lebanon and the Arab world's oldest continuously cooperating privately owned television channel by virtue of "the combination of competent management, exciting pirated and adapted programs, and technical sophistication" (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.41). However, the rise of a

transnational pan-Arab media space was accompanied by strict political constraints enforced by Arab regimes and governments (Kraidy, 1998; Lynch, 2006).

In 1992, LBC underwent internal restructuring when it was renamed the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI), “one of the only four privately owned channels to survive the licensing process following Lebanon’s 1994 Audio Visual Media Law” (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.41). Since its inception, this channel has been a national and gradually an Arab industry trendsetter, reflecting the rise of American-style broadcasting apparent in the choice of a three-letter acronym name, the focus on entertainment programs, and the introduction of issue-oriented talk shows (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.42). Consequently, and perhaps for the first time, the Arab television featured experts, opinion leaders, and intellectuals publicly debating issues with private citizens.

## **2.2 The issue-oriented talk show**

The issue-oriented talk show—also referred to as the audience discussion program, the civic-oriented talk show, and the issue-type talk show—is a subgenre of entertainment talk shows which are “a carryover from the early days of radio and have flourished as a staple in syndication” (Priest, 1995, p.11; Erikson, 1989). With economic pressures for popular television, audience discussion programs rose to fame as their format was relatively inexpensive to produce, they were flexible to schedule, and people were increasingly interested in appearing on television to discuss personal and social issues (Priest, 1995, p.11; Erikson, 1989; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994). There is a typology in the emergent literature that distinguishes this genre of talk shows—which includes *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Geraldo*, *Sally Jessie*, *Raphael* and *Donahue*—from “the more sensational shows” dating from 1991 with the *Jerry Springer Show*, *Jenny Jones*, *Montel Williams* and *Ricki Lake* (Wilson, 2003, p.17).

“In the [pre-Arab-satellite era], topics were rarely polemical”; guests, questions, and discussions were often edited and pre-approved by censors (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.52). In contrast, a successful talk show today entails a combination of the following: successful marketing strategy, controversial topics, and a high level of interactivity through calling, texting or communicating on social media (Kraidy, 2007, p.140; Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.52). This paved the way to publicly debate social problems that were considered taboos in the Arab culture such as freedom of expression, religion, domestic violence, rape, homosexuality and transgender issues (Kraidy, 2008; Kraidy & Khalil, 2009).

Although broadcasting and political regulations alter the nature and the boundaries of audience discussion programs, there remain conventions and commonalities shared among them which provides a useful starting point for their analysis. The significance of Arab talk shows, for instance, stems from their vast popular appeal. Unlike political programs and news networks (Kendrick, 2013; Miles, 2006; Wallington, Blake, Taylor-Clark, & Viswanath, 2010) whose viewers tend to be predominantly adult males (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.51), Arab entertainment channels attract large audiences across demographic groups (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009) and on a transnational scale (Abu-Lughod, 2005; Kraidy, 2005; Lynch, 2006, p.123). Although they gained high viewership in the Arab world, opening several country-based bureaus, they took advantage of the new operational and production scales to expand their reach by targeting the Arabic-speaking diasporic communities in the large expatriate in North America, Europe, Australia, Latin America, and West Africa (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, pp. 3 & 34). In other words, they are ‘transnational’ because they produce “cross-border media” (Bebawi, 2016, p.3) overcoming geographical boundaries by reaching Arabs in diaspora all around the world. Their popularity across borders within the Arab world also suggests a form of transnationalism as

entertainment channels are watched jointly by transnational Arab audiences (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009).

Six key characteristics of audience discussion programs have been developed by Livingstone & Lunt (1994), although features may vary across shows. First, guests, experts and the lay public audience are all seated together in a television studio as “joint author to the text” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.36) to debate moral, social and political topics. ‘Experts’ are usually academics, reporters, writers, lawyers, cultural critics, psychologists, sociologists, doctors, social workers, civil society activists, members of government, or others with presumed expertise or specialized knowledge in the topic under consideration (Haarman, 2001, p.35; Tolson, 2001, p.34). Second, the host roams among the studio audience selecting who can contribute, mediating discussions, and responding to self-selected contributions. Third, each episode focuses on a particular social, political, personal, moral or cultural topic often prompted by current events covered in the media. Fourth, diverse views, often oppositional, are expressed through lively and sometime heated conversations on the chosen topic. Fifth, emotions play a significant role as contributions are ground in the speakers’ personal experiences rather than merely in factual data or information. Sixth, the program is live or recorded in real time shortly before broadcasting with little or no editing (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.36).

### **2.3 News and political programs versus issue-oriented talk shows**

Historically, in Lebanon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, newspaper cartoons and television programs have been considered platforms for caustic political satire (Kraidy, 2006, pp.3-4). As Kraidy (2006) explains, “because of its high visibility, popular culture in general ... is a magnet for contentious politics because the upheaval over its implications for Arab societies stands for a larger, ongoing debate about Arab-Western relations and socio-cultural change.” (p.4).

However, as mentioned previously, although entertainment television might derive its information from news sources rather than generating it itself (Shaheen, 1984, p.6), issue-oriented talk shows are not the news. Rather, they are “the fleshing out of the personal ramifications of a news story: the human-interest component” (Shattuc, 1997, p.3). Even if there is not major event trending on news—such as an election campaign or a terror attack—there remain a human interest in stories told by ordinary people on public platforms. In this context, audience discussion programs, which often are aired in primetime (8:00-midnight) (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.34) are the “transition from news programming to soap operas in the afternoon, and then from the soap operas to the evening news” (Shattuc, 1997, p. 8).

Issue-oriented talk shows are also marked by “the active inclusion of the audience in the spectacle” (Wilson, 2003, pp.3-4). They feature ordinary people directly sharing their experiences, opinions and beliefs through “confessional and therapeutic” discourse (Wilson, 2003, p.18). This explains why some argue such shows might offer an escapist or therapeutic space in times of hardship (Nohrstedt & Ottosen, 2014; Puddephatt, 2006). On the other hand, in news and political programs the speaker directs their talk to the audience through the pronouns "you" or "we" to cut through the impersonal nature of these broadcasts, “as well as [to create] a hierarchy address and authority” (Shattuc, 1997, p.4). Audience members in issue-oriented talk shows, such as *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed*, embody the immediate “you” whom news anchors and political hosts address. The apparent purpose of news is to inform the public whereas talk shows are not intended to balance viewpoints but to present “a serial association of testimonials” (Carpignano, Andersen, Aronowitz, & Difazio, 1990, p.51). This explains why such programs often end with no established consensus or conclusion.

## **2.4 Discourse**

The leading motive of talk shows is language; the daily informal talks where the flow of conversation is organized by “the discursive features of the talk show, regarded as a host-controlled, participant-shaped and audience-evaluated speech event” (Ilie, 2001, p.209). Existing studies also reveal that the repetition of certain linguistic patterns can be used strategically to achieve certain goals (Eagleton, 1983, p.205; Frye & Denham, 2006, p.51). Studio debates present “social life as conversation [offering] a model of citizen’s participation in the ongoing debates in society...[where] we are all constructed as experts on everyday life: supposedly we all have something authentic and unique to say” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.8; Lentricchia, 1989).

The issue-oriented genre of talk shows lies on a foundational basis: personhood discourses (Abu-Lughod, 2005, p.118), also known as the “narrative discourse” (Thornborrow, 2007, p. 1436), and the “naturally occurring talk” (Ilie, 2001, p.213). Talk shows intend to attract the audience’s attention to the conversation taking place in the studio which suggests this category of programs as mainly being constructed around how language is being used. In this context, language is defined by Manga (2003) as:

varying discourses, or systems of meaning through which individuals organize and make sense of what they come to call their ‘experience’, through which they come to be constituted as particular types of ‘subjects’, and through which social practices emerge and institutions are organized”. (p.12)

Discourse also defines and reshape the power of the host and his relationship with the remaining actors (guests, experts, studio audience). As the leaders and mediators of the conversation, hosts precisely know how to use strategic linguistic forms “showing interest in what the guest is saying, encouraging the guest’s talk, creating an understanding atmosphere, increasing the guest’s confidence..., maintaining the flow of conversation, avoiding silent gaps, assisting in the production of talk for the audience, and initiating framing moves” (Aznárez-Mauleón, 2013, p.54). Disagreements on issue-oriented talk shows, for instance, are not resolved

through a change in the participants' beliefs or actions, but rather through language "by making progress over the course of the programme and narrative discourse" (Thornborrow, 2007, p.1439). However, it is important to understand that although these programs offer colloquial, unofficial, or informal forms of discussion, "nonetheless those public debate emerge and are carried out in an institutionally managed, large scale forums" (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.36).

## **2.5 Research question**

Emerging from the literature review detailed above comes the central research question I am endeavoring to answer:

- *How issues are debated on Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed from 2012 to 2018, and what distinguishing characteristics define those debates (on the discourse, format and content levels)?*
- *In turn, through such discussions—does Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed differentiate itself as an issue-oriented talk show from other forms of televised broadcasting, such as news and political programming, in actively contributing to the creation, realization, or activation of a public sphere?*

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

While the public sphere is the main theoretical framework guiding this study, frame analysis was also consulted as a secondary theoretical approach. In this research, theory is approached pragmatically. In other words, "there is no direct bound to some theoretical approach as right" (Manga, 2003, p.11). Rather, both frameworks were used to shape the landmarks of the research problem, and to analyze data as the study progressed.

### **2.6.1 The public sphere**

The first, and main, theoretical framework guiding the study is the public sphere. Following the translation of Jürgen Habermas's book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, communication theorists have increasingly approached broadcast media armed with ideas of how the *television* can bring into existence a *public sphere*, a vocal and "accessible public space for the critical exchange and dissemination of ideas of the collective good" (Cottle, 2006, p.46). The emerging cross-demographic and transnational characteristics of Arab talk shows convey them as "new public spheres" with a transformative impact (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009, p.35). Although they remain very different in political, cultural, social, and economic values, Arabs consider themselves part of a single, common, ongoing debate (Lynch, 2006, p.35; Armbrust, 1996).

Influenced by critical theory, "Habermas's position reflects the ambivalence felt by some towards the mass media" in general (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.10) and the television industry in particular: that there is a great power, but it is not clear how it can be harnessed for the common good (Fraser, 1992; Peters, 1993). To behave as a public body, citizens must deliberate in an unrestricted fashion which guarantees them freedom of assembly and freedom of expression (Habermas, 1974, p.49). For Habermas (1989), television is a medium of the public sphere capable of reducing to a minimum the distance an individual is forced to maintain towards other forms of communication such as print media (p.170). Famously, Habermas (1974) defined the public sphere as follows:

A realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. (p.49)

Two academic camps have taken up opposing positions on the concept of the public sphere, both of which have become prevalent in studies on television. The first, based on

Enlightenment premises, argues for the necessity of “rational, consensual debate” (Cottle, 2006, p.47) in which universal reason prevails. The second moves towards post-Enlightenment premises, reconceptualizing the concept “in more relativist and culturally expressive ways” (Cottle, 2006, p.47). For the latter, differences can be publicly recognized where consensus may neither be achievable nor necessarily deemed valuable for the common good (Cottle, 2006; McKee, 2005; Peters, 1993).

The Habermasian public sphere has not gone unchallenged in communication research. Emendations and suggested revisions of the concept range across the historical, empirical, conceptual, and theoretical (Calhoun, 1992; Curran, 1991; Dahlgren, Sparks, & Meech, 1994; Elliott, 1982; Gitlin, 1998; Hallin, 1994; Husband, 2002; McGuigan, 2000; McKee, 2005; Schlesinger, Golding, & Murdock, 1986; Thompson, 1995). For instance, Habermas’s stand has attracted criticism as a historical account of “the rise and fall of the public sphere” suggesting it to be more of an “idealization than a historical reality” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.16; Curran, 1991; Eley, 1992). Another provoked criticism is that Habermas’s description of the public sphere tends to underplay and exclude, if not entirely dismiss, “other civil society movements active within the general public that were also critical of the authorities yet did not see themselves as part of the bourgeois public” (Bebawi, 2016, p.19; Thompson, 1995). The validity of Habermas’s model in relation to media has also been questioned for labelling the public sphere as “*the* sphere, not *a* sphere” (Gitlin, 1998, p.168), and thus blurs or “ignores the existence of smaller active and inactive spheres” (Bebawi, 2016, p.20) which might exist in private arenas as well (Meyrowitz, 1985; Postman, 1985).

Most theorists today, nonetheless, accept that the concept has unity as both a “normative ideal and critical benchmark” for the interrogation of media in contemporary studies (Cottle,

2006, p.47). Such agreement on the operationalization of the concept facilitates the examination of audience discussion programs as public spheres through their contribution to public discourse (Carpignano, et al., 1990). As Dixon (2009) argues, “under certain conditions, highly popular television talk shows can contribute to democratic discourse and do so artfully” (p.2).

We cannot understand audience discussion programs as social communicative actions and their relation to the public sphere—where processes of opinion formation, public debate and group discussion are carried out—without considering the meaning-making activities of participants and the institutional context in which they are produced. In a two-volume book, Habermas (1984) introduced the *theory of communicative action* which has been valuable in guiding critical research on television (Forester, 1985; Joas & Honneth, 1991). Through this theory, talk shows have been investigated (1) “as meaningful experiences for participants and viewers; (2) as staged by mass media institutions; (3) as actions which have an institutional ‘place’ in contemporary society; (4) as situations which involve relations of control, authority and power; (5) and as possible sites of resistance” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.7).

While all five accounts are inextricably interrelated and can be of relevance to the subject of the study, the focus was on the first and the third perspectives as both are particularly well situated within the context of the research problem. They will serve in investigating *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* as a platform for meaningful experiences for participants, and whether through such participatory interactions, this show can contribute to the creation of a public site with an influential place in contemporary Arab society. Given the scope of the study, consideration is given to the participants’ experiences while the ‘viewers’ or the ‘home audience’ perspective was left for potential future research.

### **2.6.1.1 The public(s) – Studio audience**

Rather than claiming a monolithic *Arab public*, research on the “hypermediated” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) television industry reveal the different publics that have emerged from Habermas’s public sphere. Kraidy (2007) clarifies how Arab broadcast media activated what he calls a “hypermedia space”, a broadly defined “symbolic field created by interactions between multiple media” (p.139). The term “hypermedia”, he explains, captures the technological convergence while emphasizing media performativity which revolutionized how Arab citizens access television. This hypermedia space links the “interoperability of [what were] once discrete media...together into a single seamless web of digital-electronic-telecommunications” (Deibert, 1997, pp. 114-115). Audience discussion programs act as a hypermedia space with many “points of access” that are “personalized, mobile, non-conspicuous and networked” (Kraidy, 2007, p.140). That is to say, they are hypermedia spaces in the way they involve various points of access (appearing live, calling, text messaging, emailing, and social networking, etc.) used by different types of communicators (hosts, guests, experts, audience members, etc.).

As private individuals take on several personas and roles, different *publics* emerge from the ‘general public’ that appears on talk shows. Those range from passive presence audiences to active participants contributing to a pluralist, open discourse (Carpignano et al., 1990). This study will mainly investigate four distinct publics: First, the audience as the “audible public” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.37) providing the laughter and applause which creates a sense of a live event. Second, “the visible but inarticulate public” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, pp.37-38) presented as a group casting the role of a passive spectator in the studio. Third, the “edited public” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.38) resembling public opinion through on-the-spot or vox pop interviews played as video reports to add visual interest during air time. Fourth, the “protagonist public”; where guests and hosts actively converse in a “living room” (Rose, 1985,

p.329). There is, however, no fixed image of that ‘protagonist public’. The line becomes blurred between ‘audience’ and ‘performance’ when an audience member is allowed “to shift from characterized viewer to performer”, and when they do so—“their response is usually limited in that they are on the receiving end of highly contrived situations (Shattuc, 1997, pp.5-6). It is thus important not to confuse participation with influence.

Production studies (Banks, Caldwell &, Mayer, 2009) have also introduced different accounts of the studio audience. Under this perspective, producers perceive audience as a social construction of ordinariness. Guests along with studio audience members are considered ordinary not “only because they lack professional expert or celebrity credentials, but also because they are experiencing some problem or crisis... which is why producers find their stories compelling” (Banks, Caldwell, & Mayer, 2009, p. 76).

As more viewers—members of the general public, participants, critics and so-called experts—appear on television to debate social problems and issues of the day, the discussion in academia on serving the ‘public good’ turns dichotomous. On one hand, there is the body of writing who derides audience discussion programs, and the talk shows in general, describing them as “trashy manifestations of mass/popular culture, exploiting the participants for commercial gain, and/or that they work to recuperate the individual within dominant discourse” (Wilson, 2003, p.17). Under this account, some scholars raised doubts on the purpose served by those programs; why ordinary people appear on television to tell their stories in public; whether talk shows offer new opportunities to challenge established power or whether they are part of a mainstream media diversion from real social change; what real consequences those debates result in; why talk shows offer increasing chances for participation to the private citizen; and ultimately, whether there is any public good served by them or whether they are to score ratings

and fill programming schedules. In Lebanon, for instance, similar discussions revolved around LBCI as a broadcast medium ("educational or commercial?") as well as the role of its entertainment programs ("dirigiste or laissez-faire?") (Kraidy, 2006, p.13).

On the other hand, other studies advocated the social and political value of talk shows. Under this account, audience discussion programs are perceived, if not "a site of public discourse in the orthodox sense, at least a site for very (if not radically) public talk" (Manga, 2003, pp.6-7). They are also described as new 'public spaces' within a larger Arab media public sphere that is a catalyst for highly public debates (Kraidy, 2008). In this context, civic-oriented talk shows challenge binary conceptions of the television entertainment genre; particularly the distinctions between "current affairs and entertainment, emotions and ideas, narrative and arguments" (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.37; Blumler, 1970; Robinson & Beatrice, 1982). As a source of "infotainment" (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.37; Ilie, 2001)—information and entertainment combined—talk shows are popular, cheap, and have become a commonplace part of most television channels. Indeed, Abu-Lughod (2005) argues that in Egypt, and other Arab regions, the culture industry seems to be in the business of "producing not just art or entertainment but national pedagogy" (p.159). However, the social scientist's concern from this academic disagreement should be that any phenomenon—such as Arab issue-oriented talk shows—should be studied for its own sake where "the familiar must be defamiliarized through critical analysis before we can claim to understand it" (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.2).

Although this paper is not centralized on 'the viewer', it is important to recognize the different publics that have been introduced in literature for the home audience. Lynch (2006) introduced what he called "the new Arab public" defined as "active arguments before an audience about issues of shared concern" (p.32). Such arguments, he continues, require media

that can bring discussions before a relevant audience generating a sense of urgency for change that has long been lacking in the Arab world. Among the numerous reconceptualizations of Habermas's public sphere in media studies is the evolution of a "global public sphere" (Bebawi, 2016, p.16). The development in satellite broadcasting, such as the inclusion of the pan-Arab satellite market, might have contributed to the emergence or expansion of a mediated global public sphere (Bebawi, 2016; Chalaby, 2005; Cottle, 2009).

Carpignano et al. (1990) propose the audience discussion program genre as candidate for what they call an "oppositional public sphere [where] what is conceived as confrontational device becomes an opening for the empowerment of an alternative discursive discourse ... [which] don't have to conform to civility no to the dictates of the general interest. They can be expressed for what they are: particular, regional, one sided, and for that reason politically alive" (p.52).

### **2.6.2 Framing and frame analysis**

The second theoretical framework that was consulted for this research is framing. In his publication *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Human Experience*, the Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) developed *framing* as an approach which explains how human behaviour, interaction and experience all are cognitively structured by different frames (Ditton, 1980; Goffman, Lemert & Branaman, 1997; Winkin & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2013). Those frameworks "locate, perceive, identify, and label" the phenomena of human experience (Goffman, 1974, p.21). Today, framing counts as one of the most prominent theories in the fields of communication, psychology, sociology, and linguistics (Druckman, 2001; Haslett, 2012; Schmidt, 2014). A frame not only constitutes a scientific term; in common parlance, it is used as a widespread metaphor (Entman, 1993; Slingerland, 2008). Due to this omnipresence, the

communication scholar Robert Entman (1993) has come to call frames “fractures” as the definition of the concept comprises so many diverse particles (p.51).

The basic idea of framing theory can be summarized by its major premise; that “an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p.104). This illustrates that multiple interpretations coexist on one debated issue as topics are always presented in a specific context, which in turn evokes specific mechanisms of meaning-making (Schmidt, 2014). A commonly used definition which summarizes all these preliminaries is the one introduced by Entman (2004) who understands framing as “selecting aspects of a reality and [making] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52).

Although framing research has centered on the analysis of news media, this should not conceal the fact that framing predominantly takes place in entertainment television (McQuail, 2005, p. 374). Framing is not limited to meaning-making on topics or issues. In audience participation programs, experts are usually seated in front; along with ordinary people they can make a contribution if they get the invitation or attention of the host. Through their physical positioning closer to the host, and by lending authority and credibility to experts, they are “framed as the representative of the public institutional sphere” (Tolson, 2001, p.34). In addition, talk shows’ significance has notably to do with framing them as a “performance of talk” (Tolson, 2001, p.3).

In other words, their popularity is fundamentally rooted in the pleasure of watching and listening to people talking. For the most part these are ordinary individuals who are framed to be engaging in colloquial forms of talk. This itself is a “remarkable phenomenon in an age

fascinated by glamor and by spectacle" (Tolson, 2001, p.3; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994). With the hosts' responsibility for the flow of the performance comes framing. They use certain interactional and linguistic frames to control the talk such as the deployment of discursive framing strategies which includes questions distribution, turns allocation, soliciting, "speaker nomination, cueing, reiteration, formulation, and questions" (Tolson, 2001, p.48).

## Methodology

This section will outline the research methodology. First, interpretive research will be highlighted as the approach directing the study's methodological design, followed by inductive reasoning which is driven by the former. Then, I will outline the basis on which *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* was selected as the case study. Content analysis and critical discourse analysis will be summarized as the selected methods for data analysis. This includes highlighting their strengths while acknowledging their weaknesses. Justification to the appropriateness and the usefulness of both will be provided by demonstrating their capacity to produce valid and reliable data, to facilitate a constructive analysis, and to generate congruent answers linked to the research question. Finally, data collection, sampling and data analysis will be addressed.

### 3.1 Interpretive research design

Recently, talk show scholarship has been influenced by the interpretive research coming from the Chicago School tradition (Dixon, 2009). This approach guided the research as it is situated with understanding meaning-focused practices which themselves interact with, and potentially shape, the social realities we study—that is, “the meanings concrete agents attribute to their social environment, the values and goals they possess; the choices they perceive, and the way they interpret other individuals' social action” (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p.43). In sum, interpretivism maintains that the primary goal of social science must be to “achieve an understanding of human behaviour through an interpretation of the meanings, beliefs, and ideas that give people reasons for acting” (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p.41). This paper is centralized on the behaviours, interactions, and discourses of those contributing to the studio debate (the host, guests, experts and the studio audience). It is very common for interpretive researchers to conduct research that returns them to places familiar from prior activities or experiences in which

they uniquely can draw on previously acquired personal and cultural knowledge (Keohane, 2009).

Many communication scholars have pointed the tendency to cast interpretivism and positivism as two competing traditions in social science epistemology (Pollins, 2009). This exaggerates the differences between them; while they have distinct epistemological and ontological presuppositions, they do not necessarily represent opposing traditions as many elements are common and intersect across different research designs (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p.43; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p.2). Graduate students, in particular, need information about interpretive concepts and processes so they can conduct empirical research with an interpretive approach without having their confidence undermined by “uninformed critiques” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p.2). Indeed, interpretive inquiry has been used in qualitative communication research (Arnett, 2007). Among the existing literature where interpretivism has been employed is *The Global Village Revisited*, a book by Kathleen Dixon where she adopts an interpretive approach to explore three television talk shows from the United States, Belgium, and Bulgaria (Dixon, 2009).

### **3.2 Inductive reasoning**

This study is inductive as research preceded theory. Induction is a mean of reasoning that “begins with specific observations..., move on to the identification of patterns and regularities and to the formulation of some tentative hypotheses, and ends by developing some general conclusions or theories” (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p.29). Robert Merton (1968), a proponent of the research-then-theory-strategy, argues that “empirical research goes far beyond the passive role of verifying and testing theory; it does more than confirm or refuse hypotheses” (p.103). From an interpretivist perspective, empirical research progressively performs four major

functions: investigates a phenomenon, delineate its attributes, analyze resulting data to detect any systematic variation, and if patterns are discovered construct a theory (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996; Reynolds, 1971; Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

### **3.3 Case study selection**

*Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* is a flagship, weekly, primetime issue-oriented Lebanese talk show airing on the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI). The program—which premiered on March 19, 2008—is an exemplar of audience discussion programs that serve as public communication sites where Arabs can question and debate controversial and salient issues. During conflicts, there is a tendency to prioritize discussions on military and security topics while turning away from social concerns (Berenger, 2004; Cottle, 2006). However, this talk show has proven otherwise as it is renowned for debating unconventional and controversial social issues (Abu-Fadil, 2017; Diyab, 2009; Kraidy & Khalil, 2009; Kraidy & Mourad, 2014). Indeed, it became a catalyst platform for highly public and broad-ranging social, personal, moral and cultural debates. It highlights a wide variety of topics—such as terrorism, corruption, power relations, labour rights, discrimination, education, health care, religion, minorities, sects, clans, gun control, gender roles, homosexuality, transsexualism, forced marriages, domestic violence, rape, children's rights, child abuse, human trafficking, sextortion, suicide, addiction, death penalty, disability, online dating, social media, and romantic relations—some which are considered taboos in the Arab world (Agence France Presse, 2009; Sandels, 2009).

Within a highly contested industry of talk shows, we are at a “high point” in Arab television adaptation of “Western programming ideas” (Kraidy, 2008, p.51; Moran, 1998). Unlike licensed Arab entertainment programs who have adopted American and European formats (i.e. Arab Idol, The X Factor Arabia, MBC The Voice), *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed*

maintained its success as a flagship talk show with an original format. Although, today, there are similar programs under this category, the selected show remains unique in the sense that although its content might overlap with other genres, such as news and political broadcasting, it originates the social affairs-entertainment-authenticity triangle; a combination through which it gained its popularity and large acclaim. Unlike group-discussion formats—which includes some news and political programs—where experts usually appear to speak on a given matter (Carbaugh, 1988), *Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* features the stories of ordinary people through their own narrative which represents social reality through “the voice of the authentic” (Wilson, 2003, p.31). Indeed, its mainstream appeal is rooted in its “cultural sensibility as a paradigm for making sense of things [through] privileging of the personal experience or testimonial of ordinary people over professional expertise as a way of framing issues” (Manga, 2003, p.2).

In addition to what has been mentioned, the show combines seven characteristics that are particularly suitable for the study’s purpose and methodological design: (1) known for high viewership and ratings given its controversial content and the large audiences it attracts across demographic groups and on a transnational scale which reflects higher representativeness (Abu-Fadil, 2017); (2) continuity in airing which provides temporal breadth allowing content analysis to produce quality results over the selected timeframe (2012-2018); (3) full videos of episodes are accessible to watch online which enables in-depth examination through critical discourse analysis; (4) English synopses of episodes are available online which prevents bias or context loss in translation during the coding process; (5) program is hosted by the same person and has been airing on the same television channel since it premiered in 2008 which reduces outlier variables that may skew results; (6) as a viewer of the show, I gradually advanced my knowledge

of it as a case study through my cultural and personal experiences—both which are prioritized in interpretive research as discussed previously.

### **3.4 Content analysis (CA)**

This paper employed a mixed methods approach. It combined content analysis to systematically describe and quantify a population of 228 episodes (N=228), and critical discourse analysis to provide further contextualization and greater in-depth analysis of a selected sample of 3 episodes (N=3).

Bernard Berelson (1952) established the practice of content analysis as a scientific “research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p. 147). Building on this, the purpose of content analysis can be summarized “to quantify salient and manifest features of a large number of texts” (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 2007, p. 119). There is a tendency for research methods “to identify and single out an element of a show that is then drawn on to offer more generalized reading” (Wilson, 2003, p.18). On the contrary, unlike other techniques, content analysis is one of the most commonly used methods for examining manifest content in media texts (Berger, 2014; Wright, 1986; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) including TV shows (Merton, 1968). CA has been widely used in talk show scholarship which provided me the opportunity to consider the risks and avoid the limitations of those studies. For instance, it has been used for the analysis of: primetime television shows (Kohm, Glik, De Castro Buffington, Malan, Wainwright, & Papp-Green, 2018); Arab media and gender rights (El Mkaouar, 2016); influences of entertainment media (Eisenberg, Larson, Gollust, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2016); feminist media analysis of the Oprah Winfrey Show (Epstein & Steinberg, 1996); dominant

themes in the depiction of women on television (Jackson, 2014); and popular television series (Shealy, 2013).

This method becomes particularly useful for objectively and systematically trending data over time (Krippendorff, 2004). In turn, this will assist in studying and analyzing the topics debated on the show from 2012 to 2018. While most appropriate for this study, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations associated with this method. CA can become time consuming when systematic coding is not implemented (Holsti, 1969). This, however, was avoided through the creation of a codebook (**Appendix A**) which was used to systematically generate a coding scheme. Another risk researchers must be aware of is focusing on coding while discarding the context produced in a text and the meaningfulness behind it (Berelson, 1952).

### **3.5 Critical discourse analysis (CDA)**

The second level of analysis, following CA, is critical discourse analysis which was used to provide qualitative in-depth analysis on a sample of three episodes (N=3). As defined by van Dijk (2015), CDA is a tool used to study how social power is “enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (p.466). Fairclough (1995) provided an alternative definition approaching it “as an attempt to show systematic links between texts, discourse practices, and sociological practices” (pp. 16-17). Critical discourse analysis can also be described as an interpretative and explanatory link mediating text and society in socio-political contexts (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000; Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Agger, 1992).

Unlike other methods, CDA simultaneously functions in five different yet overlapping directions; all which are germane to my research: (1) it addresses social problems (van Dijk, 1996; van Dijk, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2009); (2) provides multidisciplinary critical analysis

within social and political contexts (Fink & Gantz , 1996; van Dijk, 2015); (3) focuses on the ways “discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge power relations in society” (van Dijk, 2015, p.467, Fairclough & Wodak, 1997); (4) uncovers the relation between power and media through the disclosure of hidden meanings (van Dijk, 1993; Samy, 2004); (5) and involves conversation analysis focusing on linguistic patterns ( Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p.448; Hutchby, 2006), an essential component in talk show scholarship .

Given the scope of this research, the second level of analysis will focus on two of the above functions: the first, to highlight the issues debated in the three selected episodes and how they are framed; and the fifth, to explore the linguistic characteristics and pervasive patterns used in the speakers’ interactions when addressing those issues. It is noteworthy to mention that numerous studies on talk shows have used critical discourse analysis for: analyzing the text of different Arab broadcasting channels in relation to their social and cultural contexts (Lahlali, 2011); investigating opinions and attitudes in Arab media on major events (Samy, 2004); examining the role of entertainment television in promoting moral values (Feng, 2016); exploring talk shows as particular instances of broadcast discourse (Ilie, 2001); and examining different aspects of the Oprah Winfrey Show (Jenicek, 2009).

While no transcripts are available, an online paid subscription gives access to the talk show’s digital archive with full videos of the episodes aired since 2012. Accordingly, using non-probability purposive sampling, a sample of three episodes was selected and watched. As the program only airs in Arabic, all relevant segments from the episodes were translated and transcribed. When analyzing TV talk shows, scholars in media studies often focus on “external parameters—features such as the topic, the participants, audience targets, production—adopting what we might call a macro-perspective” (Aznárez-Mauleón, 2013, p.50). This description can,

however, be “greatly enriched by an analysis of an essential component in most broadcast products, the use of language” (Aznárez-Mauleón, 2013, p.50). Excerpts were taken and used as direct-quotes to support the analysis when appropriate. The focus was on critically examining how topics are debated and the discourse characteristics of the speakers’ contributions and dialogues.

Similar to other methods, critical discourse analysis comes with its own weaknesses. While it is multifaceted and interdisciplinary, this might pose as a risk if research becomes deviated in many different directions (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Thus, it was ensured that research progresses in the direction that best serves the purpose of the study by focusing on the two functions mentioned previously. Critical discourse analysis should also be used carefully and systematically to infer valid results (van Dijk, 1996). Unlike many analytical practices, CDA requires the researcher to take a position aligned with the interests of the socially marginalized (Agger, 1992). Yet, the researcher must ensure to maintain unbiased in collecting data and analyzing findings.

### **3.6 Sample selection and data analysis**

The online digital archive gives access to episodes from February 2012 to present. Accordingly, all episodes from February 09, 2012 to March 29, 2018 were coded and analyzed using content analysis. In other words, in the first level of analysis (CA), the entire population of available episodes was included. A total of 228 episodes from February 2012 to March 2018 were coded using a systematic, manual data coding scheme (**Figure 1**) which followed an established codebook (**Appendix A**).

Inspired by Charmaz’s (2006) “code for coding” principle (p. 49), CA was initiated by a preliminary run of coding and memoing, described as “the process of categorizing data” (Strauss

& Corbin, 1990, p.61). The purpose of this step is to become familiar with the data and its content, and to generate systematic and objective research procedures by identifying key words and themes. In other words, the research is moved forward towards defining the data's core conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2006, p.47). Accordingly, a dataset of 228 episodes (N=228) was manually built by recording the following four items for each unit of analysis: (1) episode title, (2) airing date, (3) short synopsis as posted on the online archive, and (4) 2-5 key words describing the main topic discussed on each episode (**Appendix A**). Then, episodes were coded under the conceptual categories that emerged from the initial run of coding.

CA involved two levels of coding outlined in the manual coding scheme (**Figure 1**). First, through the initial run of coding—and similar to previously conducted studies (Gamson, 1998; Livingstone, 1994; Wilson, 2003)—gender appeared to be a central, overarching topic. Accordingly, a binary code of “Gender/Not Gender” was created. Each episode that directly revolved around gender was coded “Gender” while those that did not were given the code “Not Gender”. This helped to determine the centrality of gender in the show and offered a comparison angle to detect any characteristics associated with the gender-related episodes versus the not-gender-related episodes. Second, the dataset compiling all the units of analysis (N=228) was reviewed again and 13 dominant themes were identified to appear frequently. Those were grouped into the following categories: *Age, Children, Crime, Destiny, Disability, Family, Immigration, Marriage, Motherhood, Religion, Self-image, Social Media, and Traditions*. As the coding progressed, 3 new themes emerged, and the following categories were added: *Culture, Gender Norms, and Human Nature*. An “*Other*” category was also created to include episodes that did not fit under any of the 16 categories.

Coding categories were consistent across cases when the same condition existed. For instance, when ‘child marriage’, ‘child labour’, ‘child abuse’, ‘children’s education’, and ‘children's rights’ came up as frequently covered topics on the show, the “*Children*” category was created and episodes highlighting one of those issues were coded under it. Although each theme encompasses a wide range of topics, creating those coding categories was necessary to allow the systematic quantification of a population of 228 episodes.

The “*Age*” category includes episodes discussing topics such as ageing, age stereotypes, elderly couples, marriages with age gap, and midlife crisis. The “*Children*” category includes episodes on children's rights, children’s education, child abduction, child abuse, child marriage, child trafficking, embryo sex selection, aggressive behaviours among children, children’s talents, and Syrian refugees. The “*Crime*” category involves topics such murder cases, missing-persons cases, kidnapping, gun control, death penalty, sextortion, blackmail, threats, sexual abuse, rape, laws, and violations. Episodes under the “*Destiny*” category mainly highlight extraordinary stories about life, death, disasters, rescue missions, suicide, euthanasia, and other decision-making moments. The “*Disability*” category comprises episodes on handicaps, amputees, malformation, disfigurement, gigantism, polydactyly, struggles, overcoming obstacles, and acceptance.

Episodes coded under the “*Family*” category discuss topics such as family relations, different political affiliations within the same household, relationships between mothers and daughters in laws, competition, and family reunion stories. The “*Immigration*” category includes episodes on labour rights, foreign workers, violence against migrant domestic workers, transnational marriages, race, discrimination, and racism. Episodes coded under the “*Marriage*” category raise issues related to polygamy, forced marriages, sham marriages, incest, infidelity,

domestic violence, oppression, divorce, child custody, relationships, first love, and couples' problems.

The "*Motherhood*" category includes episodes debating topics such as child-mother relationship, pregnancy, infertility, multiple births, parenting, overprotection, mother-daughter jealousy, and mothers' sacrifice stories. The "*Religion*" category is associated with episodes on Islam, Christianity, Satanism, Atheism, Jehovah's witnesses, rituals, sorcery, exorcism, black magic, religious conversions, minorities, and sects. The "*Self-image*" category includes episodes discussing issues related to self-perception, self-esteem, confidence, insecurities, isolation, ugliness, beauty, plastic surgeries addiction, breaking silence, diets, obesity, and body image stereotypes. Episodes under the "*Social Media*" address technology, virality, Youtubers, online social & political messages, and controversial online contents. The "*Traditions*" category includes episodes highlighting Arab customs and traditions, social norms, marital customs, and unconventional friendships in conservative societies.

"*Culture*", the first of the three categories that were later added, includes episodes that shed light on Arabic language, symbols, proverbs, heritage, Arab celebrities, lookalikes, old beliefs such as jinx and misfortune, popular culture, and Lebanese cuisine. Episodes coded under the "*Human Nature*" revolved around life-changing experiences, memories, bad habits, stinginess, laughter, grouchiness, curiosity, swearing, dangerous hobbies, sports, adventures, fears, and strange phobias. The "*Gender Norm*" category includes episodes that are specifically gender-related and did not fit any of the above categories; those debate issues such as gender roles, power relations, online dating, Tinder, spinsters, animal and chocolate obsession among women, love, loneliness, Movember, female body builders, and women decision makers. The "*Other*" category is the final category, it includes all the episodes that did not fit any of the 16

categories; those highlight topics such as terrorism, terrorist organizations, military, use of weapons, gun control, tribes, clans, authority, government power, gambling, drugs, and unconventional jobs. The total number of coding categories is 17: *Age, Children, Crime, Culture, Destiny, Disability, Family, Gender Norms, Human Nature, Immigration, Marriage, Motherhood, Religion, Self-image, Social Media, Traditions, Other.*

**Figure 1**

Content Analysis Coding Scheme Outline						
Episode Number	Episode Title	Synopsis	Date Aired	Key Words	Gender	Theme
From 1 to 228, sequentially.		Short description.	MM/DD/YYYY	2-5 key words.	<input type="checkbox"/> Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Not Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Age <input type="checkbox"/> Children <input type="checkbox"/> Crime <input type="checkbox"/> Culture <input type="checkbox"/> Destiny <input type="checkbox"/> Disability <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> Gender Norms <input type="checkbox"/> Human Nature <input type="checkbox"/> Immigration <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage <input type="checkbox"/> Motherhood <input type="checkbox"/> Religion <input type="checkbox"/> Self-image <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media <input type="checkbox"/> Traditions <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> N/A

Three caveats must be noted; first, given the complexity of social issues and how interwoven and interrelated they can be—an episode may fit under two different categories. A child marriage episode can be coded under both “*Marriage*” and “*Children*”. When instances of categories’ overlap occurred during the coding process, theme centrality was established through five main steps: (1) the online synopsis was carefully read; (2) key words describing the episode were marked; (3) topics covered under each of the two categories, as detailed above, were thoroughly reviewed to better understand what they included; (4) segments from the episode were closely watched to become more familiar with its content; (5) the amount of time spent

discussing each of the two overlapping categories was also considered in measuring theme centrality. Accordingly, the more prominent theme was determined, and the central category was selected. In this example, the child marriage episode was coded under “*Children*” as it was debating child brides and children’ rights more than it was concerned with the notion of marriage itself.

Second, each season concludes with a “Best Of” episode where the highlights of the season and its best moments are shared with the audience. The “Best Of” episodes were not included in the analysis as they cover a wide range of different topics and it will be difficult to code them under one of the above categories. Therefore, a “N/A” response was developed. Out of the 228 episodes, 6 received a “N/A” response. Third, of the 228 episodes, 14 took a documentary format which is not uncommon within the talk show genre (Dixon, 2009, p.115). Those episodes were included in the analysis as they discussed one main topic which fit under the coding categories.

Coding categories are not only important for the quantification of data and for the study’s conceptualization, they also enabled the monitoring of codes’ frequencies over time. In addition, as we cannot study a universe of possibilities relating to a phenomenon, through those categories familiarity with the collected data was developed to determine different aspects the research anticipates will prove important (Halperin, & Heath, 2017, p.115). In this context, CA set the stage for CDA as the second level of analysis.

Given the capacity and the scope of the research, it is impossible to make an infinite number of observations for the in-depth analysis. Thus, CDA involved sampling where selection was based on non-probability purposive sampling to select a total of three episodes covering conflict-related topics. In non-probability sampling, principles and criteria vary with each

method depending on the objectives of the research (Brick, 2011; Bryman, 2008; Yang & Banamah, 2014). With this sampling technique, there is no way of specifying the probability of each unit's inclusion in the sample (Groves, Presser, & Dike, 2004; Moser & Stuart, 1953).

Among a broad range of different non-probability sampling methods is purposive sampling, also referred to as “judgment sampling” (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996, p.184; Cumming, 1990). With purposive samples, researchers select sampling units subjectively to obtain a sample that appears to be representative of the population (Stephan & McCarthy, 1974). Purposive sampling has been employed in a broad range of relevant talk show studies: Indonesian broadcasted TV shows (Rachmat, Sumartono, & Jemat, 2018); American reality-based television programming (Kohm, 2005); attitudes of broadcast TV hosts (Kendrick, 2013).; and television addiction measurement (Horvath, 2004).

### **3.7 Validity and reliability**

While validity is concerned with the “relationship between a measuring instrument and the measurement outcomes”, reliability refers to “the extent to which a measuring instrument contains variable errors, that is, errors that appear inconsistently from observation to observation during any one measurement attempt or that vary each time a given unit is measured by the same instrument” (Frankfort-Nachmias, & Nachmias, 1996, pp.166 & 170). Although content analysis involved the full population of *available* episodes, it is important to acknowledge that this is not the entire population of *aired* episodes. While the show premiered in 2008, the study examines episodes from 2012 as the online digital archive only gives access to those. In other words, the population of available episodes is considered a sample of the entire population of aired episodes. However, by including episodes from 2012 to 2018, the study covers more than half of the entire population of aired episodes which hence maximizes representativeness.

To increase coding reliability, both the codebook and coding scheme were maintained as simple as possible to avoid any complicated variables that have the potential of being coded differently. The same steps were followed when coding each episode to ensure coding is systematic. To ensure validity at the second level of analysis, timing was considered when collecting and watching the three episodes. In other words, the units of observation were selected at different points in time (Courtright, 2014; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996; Lacy, Watson, Riffe, & Lovejoy, 2015).

The “rule of exhaustiveness” (Frankfort-Nachmias, & Nachmias, 1996, p.337) was followed to ensure the enumeration of categories is sufficiently exhaustive so each and every episode is classified without a substantial number being coded as ‘other’. Although categories overlapped given that social topics are complex and often intersect, the “rule of mutual exclusivity” (Frankfort-Nachmias, & Nachmias, 1996, p.336) was considered in the sense that none of the categories was a subset of the other. If so, one of the two categories was excluded.

## Results and Analysis

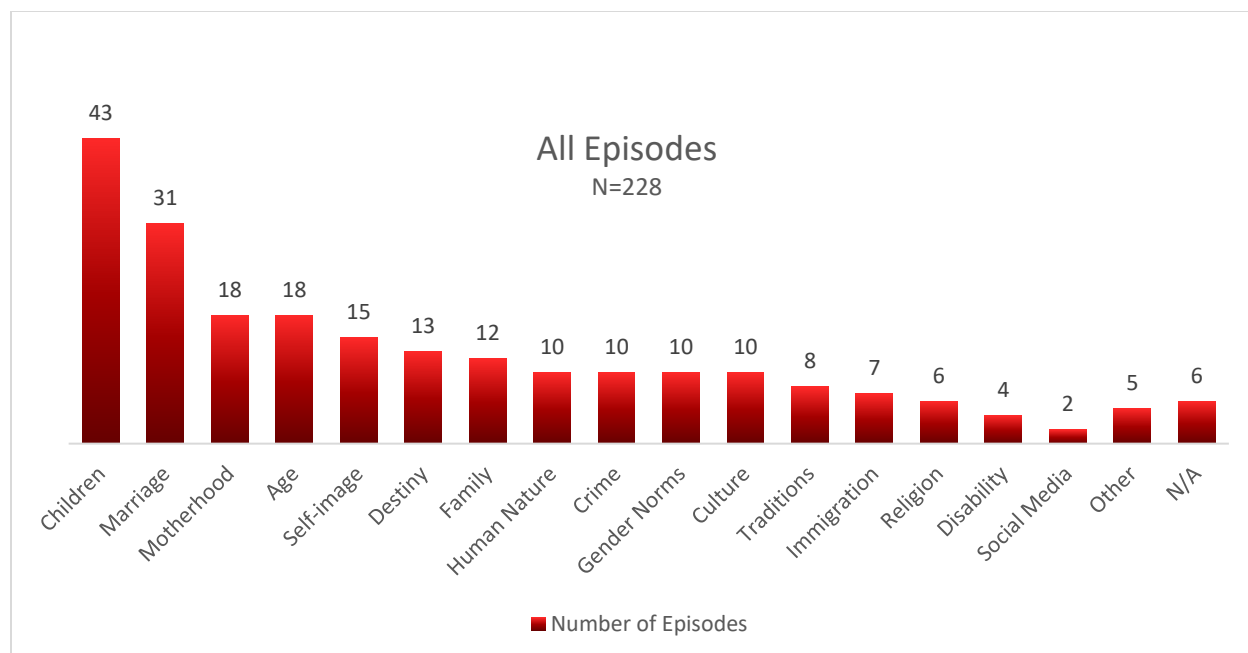
The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the key findings from the content analysis and the critical discourse analysis in relation to both the literature review and the research question. Reflections on the research design and methodology will also be provided to better situate the analysis within the broader context of the study.

### 4.1 Content Analysis Results & Discussion

As outlined in the methodology chapter, content analysis “can systematically analyze the data obtained from ... mass media [such as] TV and radio shows” (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996, p.324) by identifying specified characteristics of texts (Holsti, 1969, p.14). Using CA, the total number of coded episodes from February 09, 2012 to March 29, 2018 is 228. Whilst 147 episodes did not have an explicit or direct relation with gender and were coded “Not Gender”, 75 episodes were coded as “Gender”, and 6 episodes were assigned a “N/A” response.

Although gender-related topics are popular, they did not constitute the majority of the issues discussed on the show. As shown below (**Figure 2**), “*Children*” was the most popular theme with 43 episodes coded under this category. The second most popular category is “*Marriage*” with 31 episodes, followed by “*Motherhood*” and “*Age*”—both at 18 episodes. “*Self-image*”, “*Destiny*” and “*Family*” falls next with 15, 13 and 12 episodes respectively. The remaining categories recorded a lower number of episodes.

#### **Figure 2**

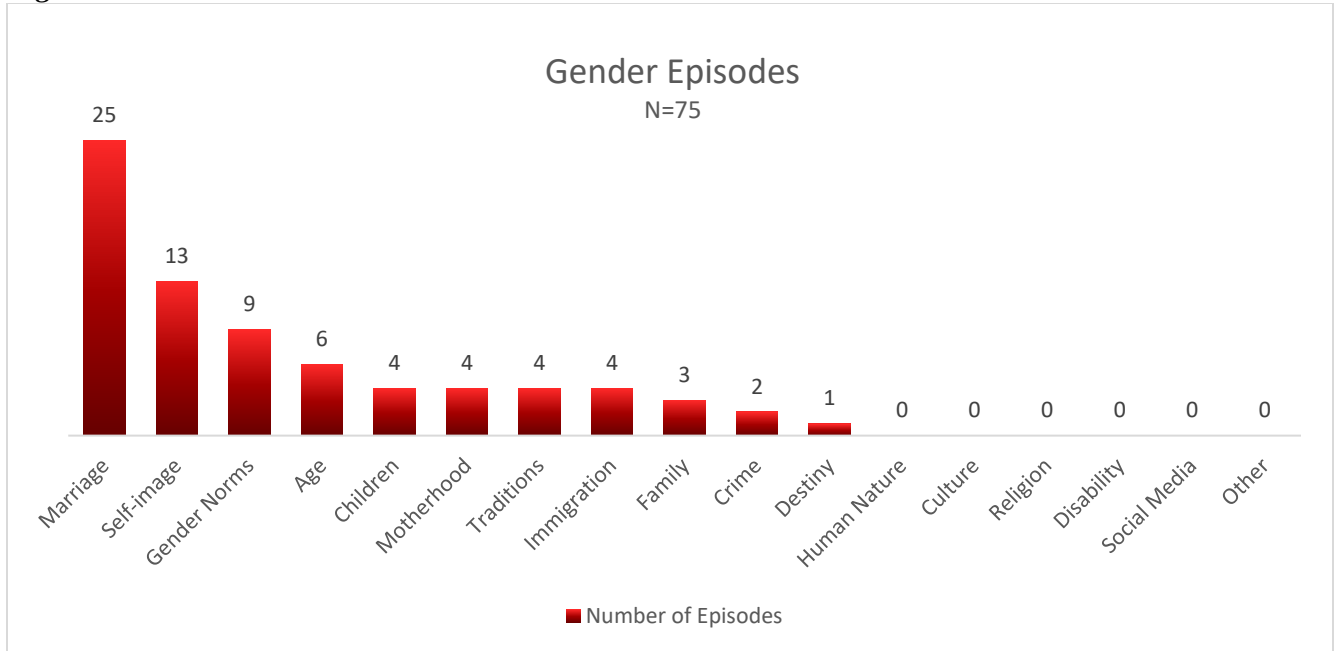


When filtering the episodes through the “Gender” and “Not Gender” codes, a shift in the popularity of themes becomes apparent. In gender-only episodes (N=75), “*Marriage*” becomes the top category with 25 episodes followed by “*Self-image*” at 13 episodes and “*Gender Norms*” at 9 episodes (**Figure 3**). Some categories such as “*Human Nature*”, “*Culture*”, “*Religion*”, “*Disability*”, and “*Social Media*” no longer appear as they highlight issues that are not directly related to gender.

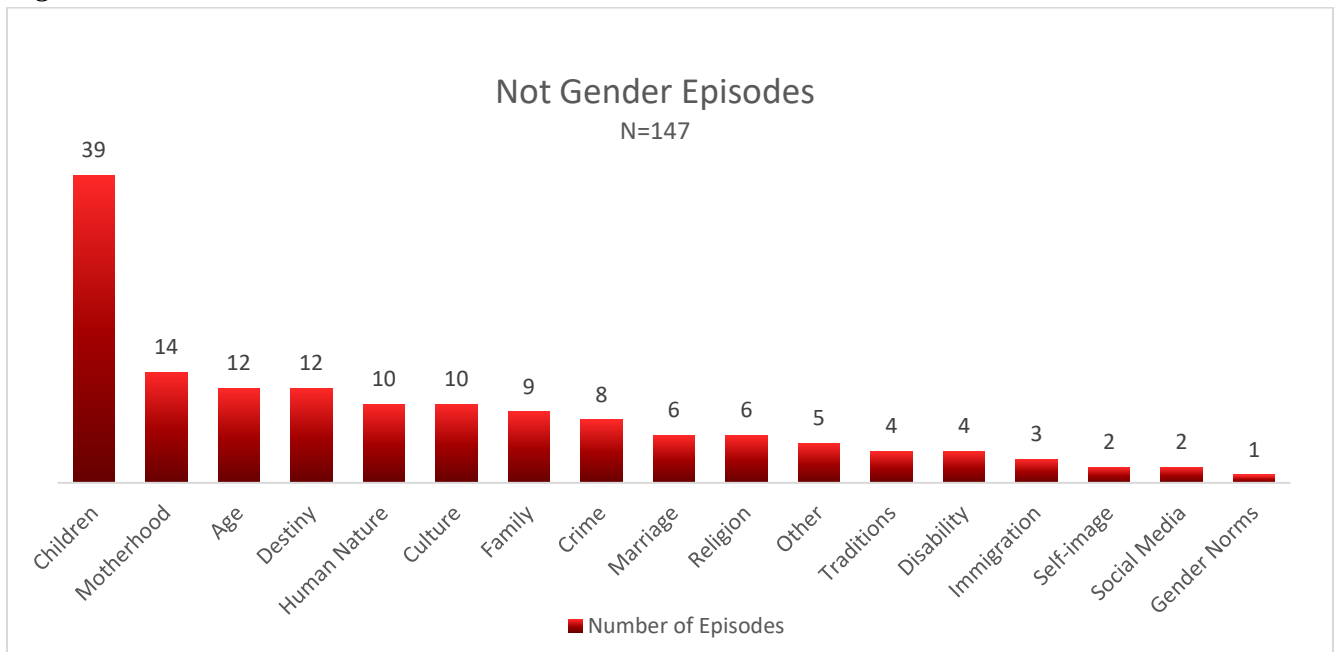
On the contrary, among the episodes that were coded “Not Gender” (N=147)—“*Marriage*”, the former top category becomes less popular with 6 episodes only (**Figure 4**). The top category becomes “*Children*” with 39 episodes followed by “*Motherhood*” at 14 episodes while “*Age*” and “*Destiny*” both recorded 12 episodes. Unsurprisingly, “*Gender Norms*” is the least popular theme with 1 episode. In this episode, titled “Mad about their pets”, Maktabi hosts women madly in love with their pets. Although this episode sheds light on animal love, which is not directly related to gender; the reason to why it was not considered a gender episode—guests’ stories highlighted the ways in which their obsession affected their romantic life. Some women explained why they chose their pet over their partner. Unlike the gender-only population where

some themes diminished, in the not-gender group each of the 17 categories recorded at least one episode (**Figure 4**).

**Figure 3**



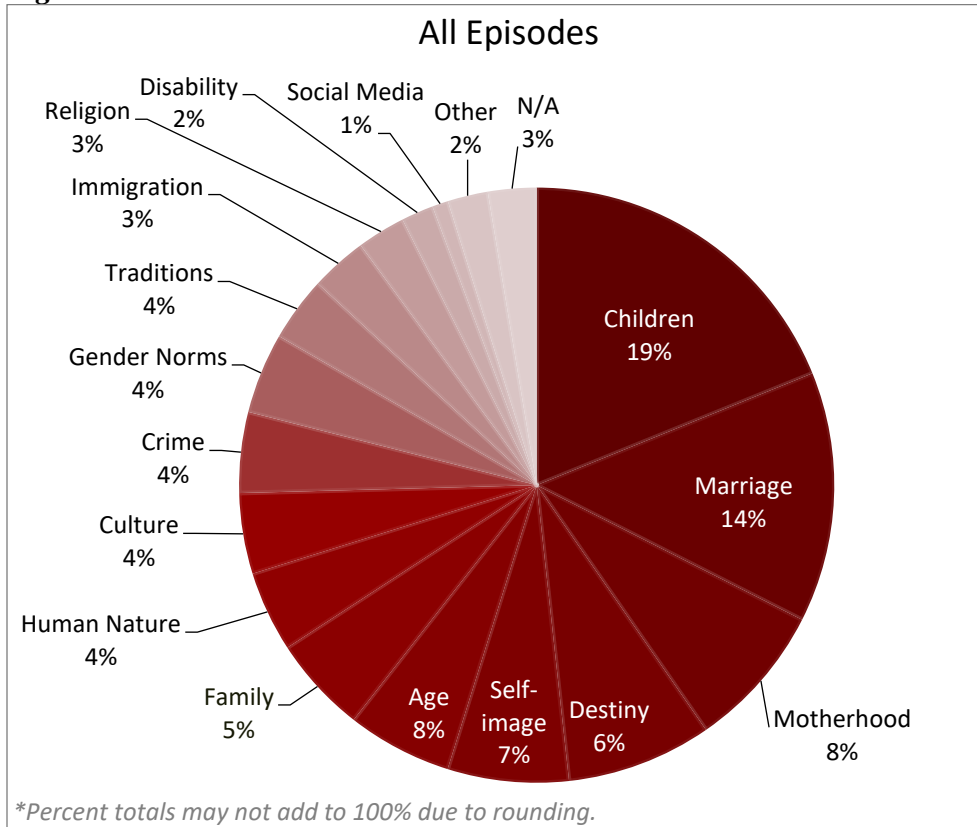
**Figure 4**



To reflect on the relative contribution each of the categories made into the total population of episodes, findings were quantified into percent points (**Figure 5**). In other words,

the number of episodes under each category was converted into a percentage value. Among the entire population of episodes (N=228), 19% discussed issues related to “*Children*”, followed by “*Marriage*” which occupied 14% of the show’s coverage and “*Motherhood*” at 8%.

**Figure 5**



Among the gender-only episodes (**Figure 6**), “*Marriage*” (33%) and “*Self-image*” (17%) made up half of the debated topics. “*Gender Norms*” falls next with 12%. Among the episodes that are not-gender-related, four categories made up just over half of the coverage: “*Children*” (27%), “*Motherhood*” (10%), “*Age*” (8%) and “*Destiny*” (8%) (**Figure 7**).

An analysis on the meaning-making of some of the discussed topics revealed that their framing changed over time. The conceptual meaning of ‘gender’, for instance, evolved over the 2012-2018 period. In earlier seasons (2012-2013), with few exceptions, gender was framed as a synonym of marriage. Episodes highlighted gender mainly within the marriage frame or in relation to common topics such as stereotypes, elderly couples, sexual abuse, women’s rights,

and self-image. With time (2014-2015), gender discussions were no longer exclusively carried out in relation to marriage. The concept expanded to include public debates on unconventional and perhaps controversial issues at the time such as cohabitation, sex education, domestic violence against men, violence against women, female bodybuilding and physical strength, spinsterhood, sextortion, migrant women domestic workers, plastic surgery addiction, chocolate addiction among women, picking chocolate over men, and forced marriage. In more recent seasons (2016-2018), the concept of gender evolved further to include gender roles, polygamy, animal love, picking pets over men, marital rape, unconventional friendships, child custody, civil marriage, interfaith marriages, shame marriages, embryo sex selection, and online dating apps.

*Ahmar Bel Khat Al Areed* does not exist in a mass media vacuum. As outlined in the literature review chapter, topics debated on audience discussion programs may be stimulated by current events in news media. Analysis reflects a growing attention given to violence, sexual abuse, and women's rights on the show in 2014—evident in a higher number of episodes debating such issues. This is not indiscriminate or coincidental as notable events relevant to such matters took place in 2014. In April 2014, the UN Refugee Agency announced an exponential increase in the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon marking 1 million which meant that registered Syrian refugees made up 20% of all residents inside Lebanon (Bender, 2014). This influx was accompanied by an overwhelmingly massive gap between supply and demand for services and infrastructure which included education services, medical care and suitable accommodation.

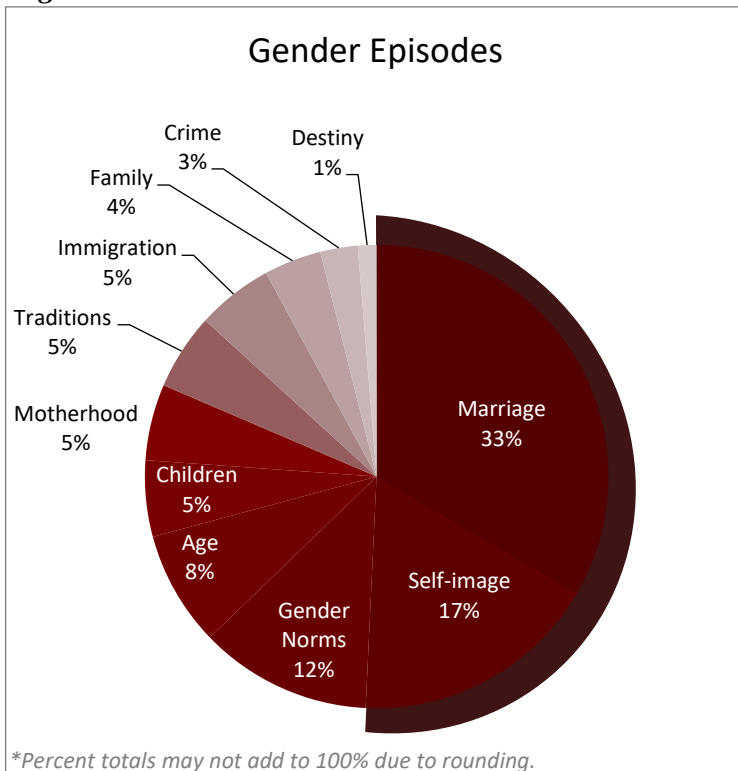
The Fall of Mosul also known as the Battle of Mosul also occurred in January 2014 when the so-called Islamic State (IS) took control of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city (Knights, 2014; Smith-Spark & Robertson, 2014). In August of that year, the Yazidis, an ethnic Kurdish group in

northern Iraq, was targeted by IS killing the men and capturing more than 3,500 women and girls as sex slaves (Otten, 2015; Watson, 2014; Wood, 2014).

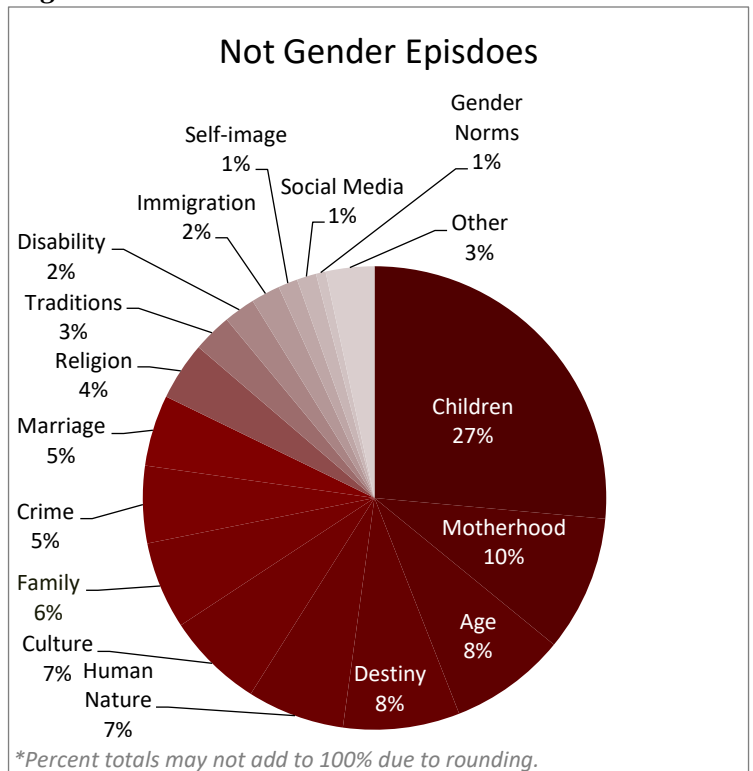
A time analysis was also conducted to determine the top themes—among the entire population of episodes—that were debated on the show from 2012 to 2018. To do so, the two categories with the highest number of episodes were selected from each year. Findings revealed that of all categories, “*Children*” remained the most popular (**Figure 8**).

This persistent popularity can also be associated with different events. In 2014, for instance, “*Children*” was the second most popular theme. Child marriage broke international news headlines in 2014 with Jordanian reports showing about one in four Syrian refugee girls between the ages of 15 and 17 was married; double the rate from before the start of the Syrian conflict (Anderson, 2014; Narayan, 2016). In response, we can see that “*Marriage*” also became a particularly popular topic in 2014 (**Figure 8**). In 2015, the “*Children*” category was the top theme with 9 episodes which might be linked to the international and Arab media coverage reaching a peak in their coverage on the Syrian refugee crisis in September 2015 with the photo of Alan Kurdi, the drowned three-year-old Syrian refugee, washed up on a Turkish beach (Barnard & Shoumali, 2015; Clarke, Rachel, & Shoichet, 2015; Devichand, 2016).

**Figure 6**



**Figure 7**



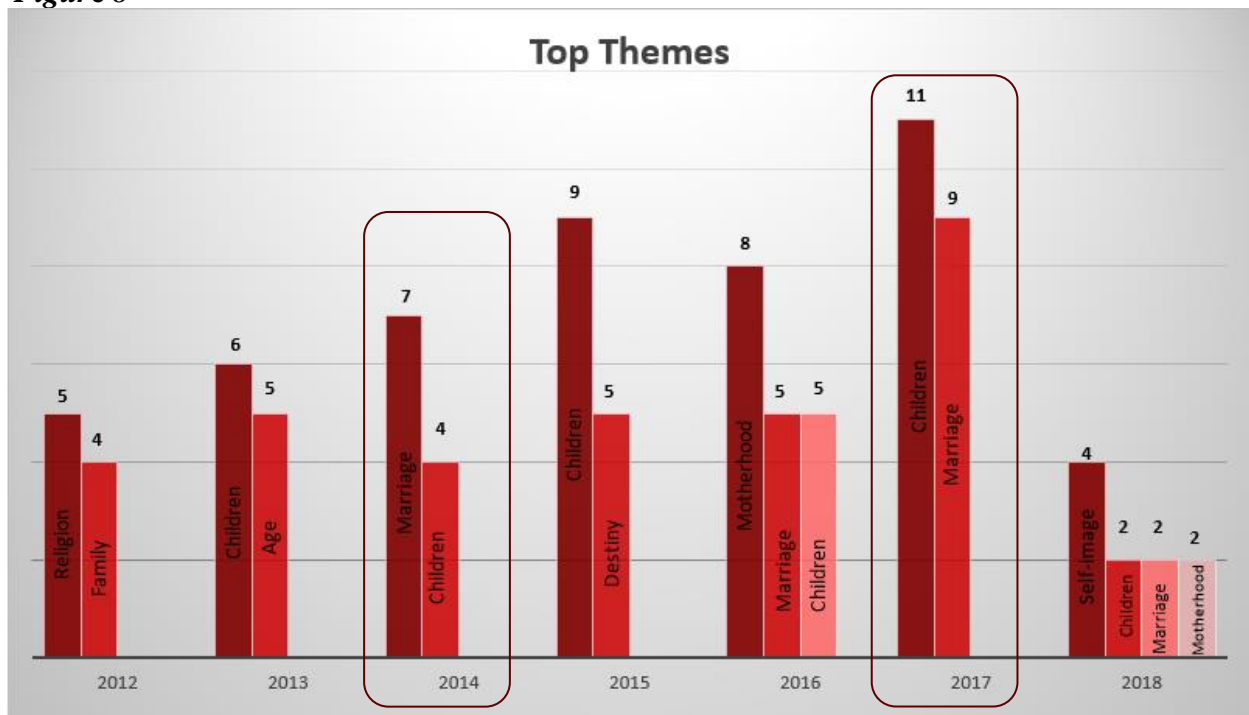
Interestingly, the same two categories maintained their status as the two most popular themes in 2017 (**Figure 8**) with a notable rise in the number of episodes associated with each theme, compared with 2014. This can be explained by three key factors. First, circumstances remained unchanged since 2014; the Syrian refugee crisis was ongoing in 2017 and refugee girls were still forced into being child brides. Second, in April 2017, a legislative bill was presented in the Lebanese parliament to end child marriage in the country which gained the attention of national and regional news reporting (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Third, in November 2017, a draft law was unveiled where if adopted would make civil marriage possible in Lebanon (Diwan, 2017). However, the intent is not to generalize this argument as this might be an overstatement because “the television landscape is a rapidly changing one especially during crisis” (Dubrow, 1982), and one cannot assert that the prominence of specific categories is always correlated to or associated with certain events.

With the increasing and “outsized role [of mass media] in the communication of cultural stereotypes about the aesthetics of body image” of women (Perloff, 2014, p.363), it is not

surprising to see “*Self-Image*” as the most popular category in 2018 with 4 episodes (**Figure 8**).

The show attempts to create an appreciable shift in how both society and media influence people’s perception of self-image by reinforcing a more positive and critical approach in relation to this topic. All four episodes, for instance, highlight issues related to the concepts of ‘ugliness’ and ‘beauty’ challenging existing stereotypes on body image, obesity, and aging.

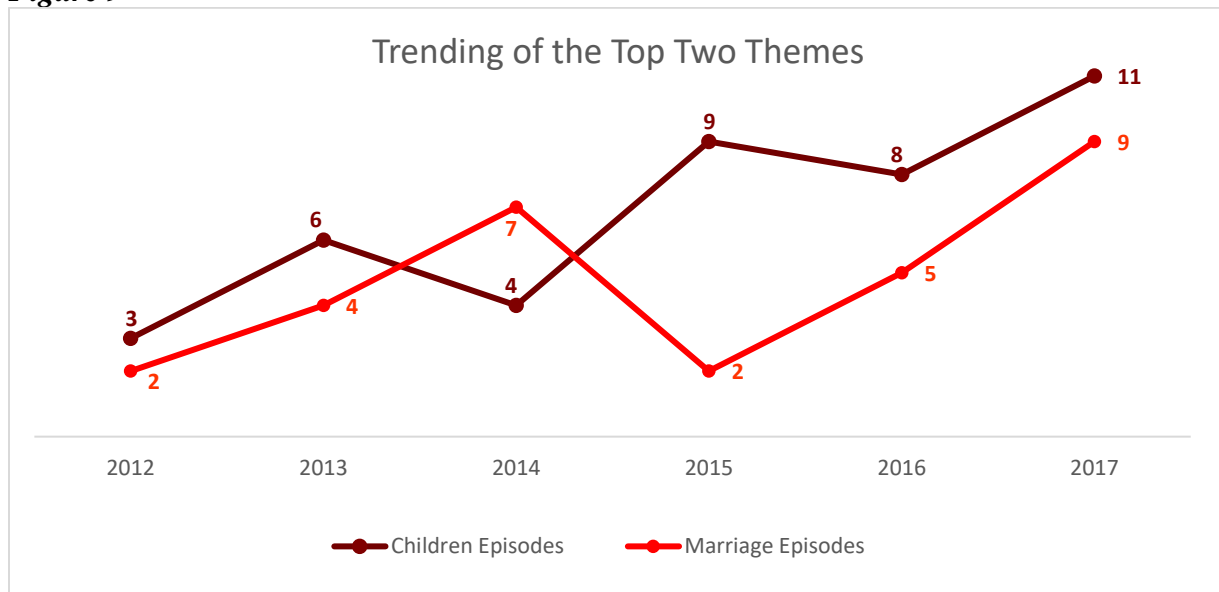
**Figure 8**



Finally, episodes that were coded under the two most popular themes, “*Children*” and “*Marriage*” were separately analyzed by trending them over time using a line graph (**Figure 9**).

Data from 2018 was excluded because the sample of episodes was much smaller than previous years as data collection for this study was completed in March 2018 while the season was still airing. In this context, 2018 was considered an outlier year as results would have been skewed due to the small sample size. While in 2012 there were only 3 episodes concerned with children’s issues, the number almost quadrupled in 2017 to 11 episodes. Similarly, there is a fourfold increase in the number of marriage episodes from 2 in 2012 to 9 episodes in 2017.

**Figure 9**



#### **4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis Results & Discussion**

Now that content analysis allowed us to build impressions on the data obtained, identify and extract what is deemed most relevant, and make detailed inferences about the observations made—this section will discuss the findings from the critical discourse analysis conducted on three episodes (N=3). While CA is an appropriate methodological tool to objectively and systematically quantify data, it might not capture the nuances and complexities of explorative and open-ended data (Kohlbacher, 2006, p.27). Therefore, the purpose of CDA is to dive deeper into the contextual and conceptual nature of the selected units of observation on three main levels: discourse, format and content.

As explained earlier, CDA is an analytical practice that is “not one direction of research... Rather, it is a critical perspective that may be found in all areas of research” (van Dijk, 2015, p.466). It thus requires “true multidisciplinary and an account of intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture” (van Dijk, 1993, p.253); all which are critical to the subject of this study. Non-probability purposive sampling was

used to select three units of analysis (**Figure 10**). Episodes’ selection was based on their relevance to the research problem. The sample is consisted of three episodes that were most pertinent to war or conflict-related issues. Each has an overall duration of about one hour. There was a minimum of a two-year interval when selecting the episodes to ensure time sampling is considered by selecting observation units at different point in time (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996, p.219)

The first episode—aired September 13, 2012— titled “Tribes”, sheds light on clans in Lebanon; their history, their customs and traditions, how they function, their use of weapons, and their relationship and perception of the government. On the second episode—aired September 18, 2014—titled “Until the Last Breath”, Maktabi interviews widows of Lebanese army soldiers who martyred while fighting terrorist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Nusra Front. On the third episode—aired June 29, 2017—titled “The Power of their Smiles”, children who came from Syria to Lebanon share their heartbreaking refugee stories. While the first two episodes were coded under the “*Other*” category as they did not fit any of the other themes, the third episode was coded under “*Children*”. All three episodes are around one hour long.

**Figure 10**

Selected Episodes for Critical Discourse Analysis					
	Episode Title	Date Aired	Length	Main Theme	Number of Guests
1	Tribes	September 13, 2012	1:05:48	Other	10
2	Until the Last Breath	September 18, 2014	56:50	Other	6
3	The Power of their Smile	June 29, 2017	1:02:01	Children	4

#### 4.2.1 Discourse

Discourse is “a form of social practice” (Sharifi, Ansari, & Asadollahzadeh, 2017, p.51). It is “socially constative and... conditioned ... constituting situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of relationships between people and groups of people” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p.258). This section will focus on the discourse characteristics of the host-guests-

studio audience interactions and any particular discursive styles associated with them.

Conducting an analysis of the text involves a concentration on “the form of self-expression that arises through the discursive practice of confession and ... the narratives spoken by the guests.”

(Wilson, 2003, p.11). Inspired by the work of Sharifi, Ansari & Asadollahzadeh (2017) discourse will be analyzed on three different levels: (1) the meaning level, (2) the style level, and (3) the contextual level.

#### **4.2.1.1 Analysis on the meaning level**

Analysis on the meaning level consists of many textual elements (van Dijk, 1991). Findings from the meaning level analysis revealed that *generalization* (Sharifi, Ansari & Asadollahzadeh, 2017; van Dijk, 2003), *clarity and vagueness* (Sharifi, Ansari & Asadollahzadeh, 2017; van Dijk, 1991), *categorization* (Sharifi, Ansari & Asadollahzadeh, 2017), and *propositional structures* (van Dijk, 1993) are the four main distinguishing elements the host, guests and studio audience used in their discourse to communicate their ideas, beliefs and opinions on the discussed topics.

Most discussions, and more so debates, “involve forms of *generalization* in which events or actions are generalized and represented in a broader manner (van Dijk, 2003, p.71; Sharifi, Ansari & Asadollahzadeh, 2017). This was particularly evident in the first episode; it became apparent in few instances when Maktabi and his guests—clans members from Ba‘albek, a city in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley northeast of Beirut—were debating the relationship between clans and the government:

#### ***Excerpt 1***

- Clan member (male guest): ...*Everyone* uses weapons ... There's a weapon in *all* Ba'albek's homes... First, weapons existed in our region for a long time. Second, *the state* wanted to cover its acts in killing *the people* in our region...
- Maktabi (host) interrupting the guest: Who's killing the people?
- Clan member (male guest): *The state*
- Maktabi: I have reservations about this, I don't accept this statement. How's the state killing the people?
- Clan member (male guest): Some individuals within the state...

The management of *clarity and vagueness* of a discourse was also used “to strengthen or weaken...[different] dimensions” of the talk (Sharifi, Ansari & Asadollahzadeh, 201; van Dijk, 1991). In excerpt 1, we see the host requesting more clarification from the guest when a generalized statement was made about ‘the state’. However, in other instances, discourse remained vague. Excerpt 2 below is taken from the scripted introduction Maktabi gave on the third episode describing the journey of Syrian children who fled to Lebanon as refugees. In this example, the use of vagueness was employed as a technique to strengthen the introductory part of the show by not stating whom the host's words are addressing or referring to; an attempt to capture the attention of the home audience and prompt them to keep watching:

***Excerpt 2***

- When they left, their dreams remained there. They said, ‘a short time and we will be back there’. Years have passed, and they didn't go back, and the world is watching. A second generation was born, a generation that knows nothing about ‘there’ except that there are dreams awaiting. A second generation began to draw dreams and the world is still watching...

*Categorization* in discourse was also used in the form of categorizing people into groups. In the “Tribes” episode, Lebanese were categorized into two groups: ‘clans members’ and ‘anti clans individuals’. For instance, a heated debate broke out when a guest who is a clan member responded to a comment made by a studio audience member who argued against clans’ use of weapons which he argues puts into jeopardy domestic peace and national security:

***Excerpt 3***

- Clan member (male guest): Did someone from clans ever blocked *your* way with weapons? Did you go to Ba‘albek and *they* blocked your way on a road? This weapon is used to protect *your* children. *You* are living safe thanks to the clans, not by virtue of or thanks to the government or ruling parties.
- Activist (male audience member): No, not by *your* virtue.
- Clan member (male guest): Yes, in spite of *you*, *you* are living thanks to *us*.

The use of *propositional structures* can completely alter the meaning or the connotation of a sentence. A clan member—wearing a balaclava to hide his face as he is wanted by the Lebanese authorities under 29 arrest warrants—appears as a guest on the first episode where he was discussing the use of weapons with Maktabi. In this example, the replacement of one proposition changed the semantic structure of the sentence:

***Excerpt 4***

- Masked man wearing a balaclavas (guest): There’s no resident in Beqaa that does not have a weapon. This weapon is to protect himself from the state or from the enemy outside the borders.
- Maktabi (host): You protect yourself *from* the state or *through* the state?

Propositional structures have also been employed as one of the ways discourse is used to “discredit powerless groups, for instance, ... to pay extensive attention to their alleged threat to the interests and privileges of the dominant group: we will get less (or worse) work, housing, education, or welfare because of them, and they are even favoured” (van Dijk, 1993, p.264). In excerpt 5, guests are speaking up about the state of neglect in their region:

***Excerpt 5***

- Clan member (first female guest): Deprivation has been here for a long time, and on all levels. *We don't have* a university for example, *we don't have* many things...
- Clan member (second female guest): ...In our region, there are 14 water springs. Yet, people still have to buy bottled water to drink. *We don't have* electricity...

**4.2.1.2 Analysis on the style level**

Second, analysis conducted on the style level uncovered four major characteristics—*lexicalization* (Fairclough, 1995), *positioning* (van Dijk, 2001; van Dijk, 2003), *argumentation* (van Dijk, 2003), *action and interaction* (van Dijk, 2003)—that can be used to convey similar meanings using different words.

*Lexicalization* is defined as the “unwritten and unspoken conventions for the use of a particular word or expression in connection with particular events or behaviours, which are operative and taken for granted in the production and interpretation of [texts]” (Fairclough, 1995, p.34). The role of the lexicon can be accepted and naturalized as “the neutral code [for] creating alternative lexicalizations that are generated from divergent ideological positions” (Sharifi, Ansari, & Asadollahzadeh, 2017, p.55; Fairclough, 1995, p.36). As shown in excerpt 6 below, the image of clans was displayed as two-faced in the first episode. Particular words used by speakers with opposing standpoints to describe clans were naturalized that they (alternative

lexicalizations) became almost synonyms to ‘clan’. In other words, they became so blended that referring to one meant the other:

***Excerpt 6***

- Clan leader (male guest): *Chivalry, honouring the guest, and generosity* all are present within clans...
- Activist (male audience member): ...Clans have been associated with *kidnapping, blocking roads, and violations of laws.*

In the third episode, while Syrian children were narrating their heartbreaking stories, the image of ‘home’ was portrayed in two separate images: ‘home before war’ and ‘home after war’. Sham, an 11-year-old Syrian girl, describes what happiness meant to her when she was living in Damascus before the war erupted and in contrast what her hometown looked like when she left. Words like play, jump, and dream that were used to describe the former were replaced by war, bombing, and death to describe the later:

***Excerpt 7***

- Maktabi (host): When someone is young what’s the thing that makes them happy the most?
- Syrian girl (guest): *Happy? To play, to eat, to buy things, umm, to jump, umm ... yeah that’s it.*
- Maktabi (host): And what else?
- Syrian girl (guest): *To dream.*
  
- Syrian girl (guest): ...We left Damascus a very long time ago. We’ve been here for five years.

- Maktabi (host): Why did you leave Damascus?
- Syrian girl (guest): Because there's *war* and *bombing* there... War is *death* ... it means they *died*, I saw the *death*.

*Positioning* of words can play a significant role in the impact a statement might leave on the recipient. Information expressed at the beginning of sentences receives higher emphasis. They are read or heard first and “therefore will have more control over the interpretation of the rest of the text than information that is expressed last” (van Dijk, 2003, p.55). Statements expressing “positive meanings about us, and negative meanings about them will typically appear up front ... And conversely, meanings that embody information that is bad for our image will typically tend to appear at the end, or be left implicit altogether” (van Dijk, 2003, p.55). As illustrated in excerpt 8, negative meanings about them were foregrounded by their position in the semantic structure of the sentences order in the discourse (van Dijk, 2003, p.55; van Dijk, 2001).

***Excerpt 8***

- Clan member (male guest): ...In Lebanon, we have 200,000 casualties from a civil war that was caused by political parties whom are in ruling power today. And they keep talking about weapons. We never used weapons for the purposes they used it for.

Perhaps the characteristic, on the style level, that is demonstrated the most in talk shows is *argumentation*. As van Dijk (2003) explains, “many discourse genres have argumentative structures, for instance editorials in the press, letters to the editor, scholarly articles, an everyday fight of a couple or parliamentary debates” (p.55). Excerpt 1 can be considered a display of an argumentative discourse structure. Another example is excerpt 9 where the host (speaker) and guests (addressees) argue with different viewpoints.

***Excerpt 9***

- Maktabi (host): ... You spoke about the clan's role in creating a social reform. Revenge is still present within some clans, is it considered a pride or shame?
- Clan leader (male guest): The situation is now different. Nowadays, clans hope that the state will take its role in chasing anyone who...
- Maktabi (host) interrupting the guest: 'Hope'? Do clans 'allow' the state to do so?
- Clan leader (male guest): It is completely allowed to do so.

*Action and interaction* is one of the main components of discourse structure. As van Dijk (2003) explains, "discourses when uttered in a specific situation may accomplish the speech act of an assertion, of a question, accusation, promise or threat... [which] might be associated with power, and power groups in society," (p.59). Excerpt 3 is an example of an assertion discourse use; a clan member (power group of society) is directing his statement to an activist from the audience who was arguing against clans' use of weapons in Lebanon. The former was explicitly asserting that clans' use of weapons has been influential in protecting the Lebanese people. However, in the same episode, other examples came in the form of a threat discourse (**Excerpt 10**). The response to this threat was a blend of conversation and call to action. Maktabi invited the guest to speak with a civil society activist, who was present among audience members, and to work together on some of the issues that were raised during the episode. This was received by a strong round of applause from the studio audience.

***Excerpt 10***

- Clan member (male guest): We are going to announce the state of Beqaa, an independent state.

**4.2.1.3 Analysis on the contextual level**

Third, critical discourse analysis conducted on the contextual level expanded beyond meaning and style levels to involves the examination of "both *personal and social cognition*; beliefs, goals, evaluations, emotions and ... other 'mental' or 'memory' structures involved in discourse and interaction" (van Dijk, 2001, pp. 97–98). Television proves cultural texts to have different interpretations when communicated in different contexts (Abu-Lughod, 2005, p.43). It is "only through an integration of these accounts (discourse, cognitive, and societal) may one reach a sufficiently descriptive, explanatory and critical adequacy in the study of social problems" (van Dijk, 2001, p. 98). In other words, contextual level-analyses fill the gaps left by the meaning and style level analyses.

In excerpt 11, transcribed from the first episode, we see two clan members debating with opposing opinions. The first, a man in his early 30s, advocating for the customs and traditions of clans arguing that they have been stigmatized and falsely portrayed. The second guest is a woman in her early 40s with a sociology degree. Although a clan member as well, she does not share his opinions or beliefs. Rather, she advocates against the use of weapons and calls for personal development through education. While both identify with and belong to the same group, without considering their social and personal cognitions, talk analysis would have been incomplete as this dissimilarity in viewpoints would not have been fully understood.

***Excerpt 11***

- Clan member (male guest): ...For sure there are weapons. But this image has been stereotyped, distorted and placed in a different context. It's been used in a wrong way, so they can denigrate our image...
- Maktabi (host) addressing the female guest: ...You hold a degree in sociology and you belong to a clan. Do you carry a weapon?

- Clan member (female guest): Never. A weapon does not protect me...

#### 4.2.2 Format

In this section, findings from the analysis conducted on the episodes' format will be discussed which includes a critical examination of the studio layout, the studio audience, and the guests. In *Ahmar Bel Khat Al Areed*, similar to other issue-oriented talk shows, a studio is filled with 50 to 70 ordinary people and others who are presented as “having expertise on the topic considered” (Haarman, 2001, p.35). Usually, both are seated together engaging in a discussion where each can make a contribution under the direction, through the mediation or by the invitation of the host. Those discussions vary from “a topical question, [to a] social problem or matter of human interest” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.1).

In the first episode—aired September 13, 2012—the studio audience is frequently seen (**Figure 11**) as the camera angle and movement capture their action under two main conditions: when an audience member involves in an ongoing discussion, or when the audience reacts by applauding or laughing. However, although they often laugh and applaud voluntarily, producers and stage managers in audience discussion programs also “attempt to bring about the sought-after emotional tenor through prompts: flashing signs or gesturing personnel” (Shattuc, 1997, p.5).

Of the three selected observation units, this was the only episode where the public appeared in vox pop interviews that were played in a video reportage highlighting different descriptions and perceptions of clans. In this sense, as identified by Livingstone & Lunt (1994), three audiences can be identified: the “protagonist public” where guests, audience members and the host are actively involved in a discussion; the “audible public” providing applause and

laughter; and the “edited public” representing public opinion through on-the-spot interviews played in video reports (p.37).

The first episode involved more speakers compared with the two other observation units. Ten guests were invited to the studio while five audience members also made contributions on the invite of the host or by interrupting the conversation. Studio audience can be distinguished from guests as they are seated behind the host and his invited guests with a physical barrier on both sides of the studio (**Figure 11**). This in turn might give the impression of them as being secondary to the conversation. As Shattuc (1997) explains, “even with more interactive public-affairs programs...the studio audience is a secondary element and often offscreen” (p.5). The circular feature of the studio also conveys a more dialogical character than in the standard stage (host)/audience opposition layout.

**Figure 11**



On the other hand, in the second selected episode—aired on September 18, 2014—interestingly, the studio audience was dropped altogether (**Figure 12**). A review of subsequent episodes revealed that this was a one-off case as this change was not permanent. The exclusion

of the studio audience can be attributed to three main factors: first, the producers and the host sought the major focus to be on the guests, widows of Lebanese army soldiers who died in Aarsal on August 02, 2014—one month before the episode aired. Second, to eliminate the established power relations that usually defines traditional dichotomies such as “program and audience, producer and subject, expert and laity” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.36). Third, given the sensitivity of the topic and its recency, the absence of the studio audience contributes to creating a sense of familiarity, intimacy, likeness and closeness between the host and guests. This in turn removes the burden or anxiety associated with being in a studio which might create a sense of uneasiness and unwillingness preventing guests from openly speaking about their traumatizing experiences or integrating the emotions involved with such experiences.

Analysis also reveals that the physical barrier between the studio audience and the host was removed. In addition, more physical space is allocated to the host on the studio floor compared with episodes from earlier seasons (**Figures 11 & 12**). The mid-area of the studio where Maktabi usually moves was expanded. This space also physically intermediates the two sides of the studio where audience members and guests are usually seated which might reflect the host’s role as a mediator of any communicative action taking place. Although this might seem an insignificant change, Tolson (2001) argues otherwise by explaining that a host’s power and control:

Is visually conveyed by their mobility. They are, in fact, the only persons other than the technical crew who are entitled to rise and walk in the studio, selecting speakers, preferring the microphone to member of the studio audience, withdrawing it at their discretion. Control patterns are also exerted through linguistic patterns typically utilized by all hosts. (p.32)

While in the first episode fifteen people participated in the discussion, unsurprisingly, only six invited guests spoke on the second episode. As there was no debate taking place, the aim

to represent different viewpoints and opposing opinions was no longer present. Rather, guests were given the time to walk the home audience through the details of the last day they saw their husbands alive, the burning wait for any news, and the challenges they are facing with their children today.

***Excerpt 12***

- Widow (first guest): I kept trying and trying to call him... I called every single second, but his phone was turned off... my son woke up screaming, he's usually very quiet. He was crying and crying, and I couldn't calm him down. I'm telling you, he knew his father was gone... On TV they announced that two martyrs from the Lebanese army were dead. Watching the news, I didn't realize my husband was one of them...
- Widow (second guest): I tell Hiba [their 4 years old daughter] her daddy went on a long journey and he's going to take a while ... he won't be back. I explain to her that her father is a hero, he's in heaven, and he's a martyr. She memorizes those words...

***Figure 12***



Although on the third episode—aired June 29, 2017—the audience is back in the studio, they are often offscreen. When they appear, they either can only be seen to the sides of the screen or behind Maktabi when speaking to his guests (**Figure 13**). This indicates a transformation in their role. While studio audience participants suggest “a mixture of motives, combining contributions to a perceived public sphere with self-glorification” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.116), their presence as authors of the talk has gradually faded as they no longer contributed to the conversation. The communicative action in studio became limited to a host-guest interaction.

On a side note, the LBCI logo—displayed to the top left of the screen—appeared different in each of the three episodes. While the LBC International maintained its acronym in the first two episodes, it was changed to LBC Europe on the third; an international version of LBCI targeted to audiences in Europe. It is also noteworthy to mention that in earlier seasons people could call in using a hotline. Today, while live participation is not available for viewers, they can communicate with the show while an episode is airing using WhatsApp; a freeware, messaging and calling app available on smartphones. The home audience can also interact through the host’s and the program’s social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram).

***Figure 13***



### 4.2.3 Content

Analysis of the content reveals six characteristics and features of the show: *resemblance of interpersonal communication, ordinariness, authenticity, narration, creation of a sense of community, and variation in the host's action and function.*

Unlike the first episode, where two groups of people are debating with opposing opinions, ideas and beliefs—the second and third episodes took a storytelling approach; they are narrative-oriented rather than debate-oriented. Ordinary guests were narrating their life-changing experiences. In this context, content is considerably similar to that of interpersonal communication as both are communicative interactions intended to be heard by their recipients (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.6; Scannell, 1991). In the selected observation units, ‘ordinary’ people—“rather than solely the stars and experts who vie to promote their latest ventures” (Priest, 1995, p.5)—step to the centre to discuss their lives and make their voices heard. This ‘ordinariness’ signifies ‘realness’ as stories and experiences are being shared by those whom lived through them without following a script or claiming to be experts. In other words, content is created by those whom “appear as themselves (as their anonymous selves), as a segment of

what is usually referred to with a touch of redundancy, ‘the general public’” (Carpignano et al., 1990, pp.43-44).

On the other hand, content delivered through experts, who only appeared in the first episode, was often questioned. Some of the guests, belonging to clans, argued that experts do not have the real-life experience to speak on their behalf in the sense that they might not have ever been to their region, they have not faced the challenges they face or undergone their daily sufferings. This has been identified as the “*loss of authority on behalf of the expert as he/she speaks for others, whereas the guest, who speaks for him/herself represents*” authenticity and truth (Wilson, 2003, p.31; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994). This ‘loss of authority’ was identified in the show through shifting the focus to ‘the ordinary guest’ while acknowledging the importance of providing informative content through video interviews rather than featuring experts in the studio along with other guests. For instance, while in the first episode some experts appeared in the studio amongst other speakers, they were no longer present in the second and third episodes. Instead, they appeared in interviews played as video reports twice or three times during the episode.

The content experts deliver can also be differentiated from that communicated by the ‘ordinary’, lay public. Excerpt 13, for instance, displays a comparison between two identifications of clans in Lebanon. The first is offered by a sociology and communication specialist (the expert) whom appeared in a video report, while the second is given by a clan member (the ordinary) in the studio:

***Excerpt 13***

- Expert: Clans are an old anthropological component which was presumed to dissolve with the evolution of the state. They came from Arab countries; from The Hejaz, Najd,

Yemen and some parts of Iraq... The civil state was strong in urban centres which explains why clans vanished in cities becoming small families... However, over time, the clan system maintained its existence because the state is weak...

- Clan member (guest): The tribe is the first state. From tribes come clans... Clans were the state when there was no state.

On August 2, 2014 the deadly Battle of Arsal erupted between the Lebanese army and jihadist militants after they seized the Lebanese border town of Arsal in response to the arrest of an al-Nusra Front commander (Holmes, 2014; Saad Gladstone, 2014). Jihadists then took control of the town where the fighting continued into the next day leaving thirty militants, eleven soldiers and two civilians dead (Abi-Habib, 2014; Al-Solh & Al-Fakih, 2014). In the second selected episode, Abir, the widow of a Lebanese army soldier narrates the events of the last day she saw her husband alive.

***Excerpt 14***

- ...He kind of wanted to and didn't want to go... During that period, he spent the Eid with me and our son. He told me I really became attached to Daniel [their son] ... he didn't want to leave him and go. He kissed and hugged him to the point where I told him leave the kid alone you're going to kill him. But I didn't know he was saying goodbye to him...I thought he was just kissing him like any other time... I didn't pay attention to those details until I heard what happened...

In addition to resemblance of interpersonal communication, ordinariness, authenticity, and content delivery through narration, analysis revealed a sense of community shared in this talk shows. Audience discussion programs offer “a sense of community where everyone belongs...and common sense is the key to addressing everyday problems” (Livingstone & Lunt,

1994, p.39). While no consensus might be reached, and the debate may persist as an open text (Eco, 1979) or dialogic text (Bakhtin, 1981), publicly engaging in such discussions—which we usually do not see on mainstream news media—is of value. In the first episode, following a heated debate between guests who belong to clans and audience members from civil society organizations, a female activist directs her talk to a clan member.

***Excerpt 15***

- Why do you want to distance yourself from me? There's no doubt much suffering is going on. I'm with your outburst, I support you, I'm like you, I feel you! I also belong to this land. You matter to me. I care about you, I love you and so should you...

Although Maktabi maintained his role as the host or what Tolson (2001) refers to as the “program manager” (p.32)—he introduced the topics of discussion through a scripted introduction, presented guests and audience members, and directed the proceedings—analysis implies a variation in his action and function. This is not necessarily pertaining to time as Maktabi remained the point of contact between the audience at home and the television studio; the guests, experts and studio audience. Rather, it is circumstantial or responsive to the content of each episode. Content in the first episode was highly debate-driven; over 15 guests, experts and audience members were involved in the discussion with opposing opinions. Maktabi roamed among the speakers stopping those who might be dominating the discussion to give a chance for others to speak. He also responded to, questioned, and interrupted some contributions. Some guests and audience members interrupted or talked over each other as well. This was evident in the shorter dialogic talks that were made in this episode compared with the other two:

***Excerpt 16***

- Maktabi (host): Do you use weapons?

- Clan member (female guest): Sure, I do. When someone infringed on my rights, whoever that person was. Either if they were external or internal enemies.
- Maktabi (host): There's an internal enemy!?
- Clan member (female guest): Of course.
- Maktabi (host): Who's 'the internal enemy'?
- Clan member (female guest): A spy is an internal enemy; one whom infringed on my rights is an internal enemy.
- Maktabi (host): Do you have a red line?
- Clan member (female guest): My dignity is a red line.
- Maktabi (host): Just that?
- Clan member (female guest): That's it, and whatever represents it.

In the second episode—with the absence of the studio audience, the fewer guests, and the highly-sensitive subject—Maktabi's role shifted to listening, elucidating and maintaining the flow of the conversation. Unlike the first episode, guests' contributions in this episode were much longer as they narrated how they lost contact with their husbands in light of the Battle of Aarsal:

***Excerpt 17***

- Widow (guest): ...I kept trying to call him from the afternoon until 2:00am. When I called at 2:00am, someone picked up! I shouted Nader [her husband], how are you? How are you doing? Why aren't you answering my calls? The man who answered asked 'who's this'. I responded, who are you? Aren't you Nader? He said: No, no I am not Nader, who's this. I responded, I'm his wife and I want to know anything about him. He said Nader is busy and can't talk to you right now. Then, he hung up.

- Maktabi (host): Who was he?
- Widow (guest): For sure someone from those whom seized his phone...
- Maktabi (host): So, either the Islamic State (IS) or Al-Nusra Front answered your call...

The third episode was a war narrative through the eyes of Syrian children who came to Lebanon as refugees. Although only four children spoke on this episode, given their age and capability of carrying on with a conversation for a long time, sentences became much shorter compared with the first two episodes. Their contributions mainly came in the form of answers where Maktabi's role shifted to asking questions and responding to their answers with follow-up questions:

***Excerpt 18***

- Syrian girl (guest): I used to dream to appear on TV.
- Maktabi (host): Since you were a little kid?
- Syrian girl (guest): um-hum [shorthand for a sound of agreement]
- Maktabi (host): Why do you want to appear on TV?
- Syrian girl (guest): So all my friends can see me.
- Maktabi (host): Your dream came true today, but why do you want all your friends to see you Sham?
- Syrian girl (guest): Because I'm in Lebanon and my friends are in Syria.
- Maktabi (host): What do you want to tell your friends who are watching you from Damascus?
- Syrian girl (guest): Now?
- Maktabi (host): Yes.

- Syrian girl (guest): I would like to tell them that I hope we meet soon, and may Damascus go back to what it used to be like and may all the families that are dispersed come back together. [Crying] I'm hurt. This is something that hurts me.
- Maktabi (host): What it hurts you Sham?
- Syrian girl (guest): My siblings...they died in Syria...
- Maktabi (host): Are your siblings old or young?
- Syrian girl (guest): No, they are little... one is five and the other is four years old...

This variation, however, has a lot to do with “the persona of the host who facilitates the proceedings and the relationship they engender with their studio guests and audiences” (Wilson, 2003, p.17). While in the first episode, Maktabi challenged his guests’ viewpoints and opinions, in the second he became an attentive listener. In the third episode, Maktabi created a balance between the complexity of the Syrian refugee crisis as the topic in hand and the capability of children to grasp what happened with them and turn it into a narrative. When interacting with them, he often got down on their eye level or sat next to them. When they talked, he listened; when they became emotional, he became sympathetic and turned the conversation to a less bitter topic (**Figure 14**).

***Figure 14***



This episode concluded with a surprise to Mohammed, a Syrian refugee who admires Duraid Lahham—a leading Syrian actor with a career spanning over six decades—because he reminded him of his missing, or dead, father (**Figure 15**). We also see Sham in a video report taking her first cello lesson which was a dream she shared with Maktabi while on the show. This mixture of emotions—sadness, happiness, yearning, surprise—is what distinguishes the talk show genre from other televised broadcasting as it becomes a form of “performative” (Tolson, 2001, p.149) and “therapeutic” (Peck, 1995, p.58) communication. Those emotions are not abstract, they offer a “cultural performance” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.40) as they transcend from the individual guest to the home audiences (Tolson, 2001, p.109).

**Figure 15**



Although clans, the Battle of Arsal and the Syrian refugee crisis have all been covered on television, *Ahmar Bel Khat Al Areed* highlighted the personal ramifications and stories behind them. It covered those topics on the personal and social levels which is often unseen in other forms of broadcasting. The Battle of Arsal, for instance, received extensive regional coverage, however, news reports and televised political broadcasts did not address the difficulties those widows are facing with their children in the absence of their father, as discussed in previous sections.

Discussions in the selected episodes were not merely informal conversations among ordinary people, they also shed light on pivotal matters. In the first episode, there were conceptual discussions about the necessity to differentiate between the state—embodied by institutions—and those in power. It also shed light on education, healthcare, drug addiction, urban development, amnesty, and democracy. Through their participation in the episode, some

clan members were also connected with civil society activists and they both agreed to work together on the issues raised to create real social change.

No conclusions are often reached on *Ahmar Bel Khat Al Areed*, similar to the majority of talk shows of its genre. Indeed, as the post-enlightenment premise suggests, consensus may neither be reached nor deemed of value (Cottle, 2006; McKee, 2005; Peters, 1993) for the public sphere. In this sense, television, and the talk shows genre in specific is considered a “parasocial interaction” (Rubin, Haridakis, & Eyal, 2003, p.339; Horton & Richard Wohl, 1956; Livingstone, 1990; Shattuc, 1997) where the credibility of the narration of one’s own experiences is privileged over that of the expert (Wilson, 2003, p.31).

Through the public discussion of salient issues in current affairs, the engagement of diverse and often opposing opinions, the involvement of strong emotions and experiences, and the narratives of ordinary people— *Ahmar Bel Khat Al Areed* can match up to its goal in offering a contribution to the public sphere. What audience discussion programs seem to induce then is the belief that ‘conversation’ is the way intellectual exchange is guaranteed among individuals who agree to publicly discuss their disagreements.

*Ahmar Bel Khat Al Areed* featured a large number of guests encompassing a pluralistic demographic profile varying in age, class, race, social status, religion and nationality. Through their participation in public discussions on civic-oriented talk shows, guests did not only construct an important role for the ordinary individual who is taking an active part in them, they also drew a picture of ‘the public’ as a “citizen, consumer, client, social problem, individual or mass” (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.4). Telling stories, sharing experiences, revealing feelings, questioning, arguing, agreeing, disagreeing, confirming, opposing—all generate a “cacophony of narratives” (Masciarotte, 1991, p.86). However, this polyphony is not futile or chaotic. Rather,

through our contribution to those public debates, or our interpretation of their content, we negotiate our identities provoking thoughts which might not otherwise have existed.

## Conclusion

When *conflict* and *television* are juxtaposed in academia, many tend to think of news media. There seems to be a wrongful association between the two where the latter is reduced to political and news broadcasting. Given the amount of scholarly attention to the significant role media play in wartimes, it is surprising that relatively little has been studied on how audience discussion programs—as an entertainment subgenre—can create or activate a public space for critical debates on personal, social, political, cultural and moral issues. This poses as a theoretical, epistemic and conceptual problem in the sense that such association excludes an inextricably foundational component of Arab television; that is civic-oriented talk shows.

*Ahmar bil-Khat al Areed* was analyzed as a case study using two levels of analysis: content analysis and critical discourse analysis. The former revealed that among the entire population episodes (N=228), sixteen major themes were debated on the show: *Age, Children, Crime, Culture, Destiny, Disability, Family, Gender Norms, Human Nature, Immigration, Marriage, Motherhood, Religion, Self-image, Social Media, and Traditions*. Topics related to “*Children*” and “*Marriage*” were among the most popular from 2012 to 2018. The framing of some topics, such as gender, transformed over time to introduce new conceptual meanings. As issue-oriented programs may derive their topics from news sources, some topics can be linked to current events that were covered in the media then.

Critical discourse analysis examined a sample of three episodes (N=3) discussing conflict-related topics. Analysis was conducted on three levels: *discourse, format and content*. Analysis of the *discourse* investigated the distinguishing characteristics of the host-guests-studio audience interactions on (1) the meaning level, (2) the style level, and (3) the contextual level.

Findings revealed that certain textual elements weakened, strengthened or altered the semantic structure of the discussions. Those included *clarity and vagueness, categorization, propositional structures, lexicalization, positioning, argumentation, action and interaction, and personal and social cognition*. Analysis of the *format* focused on the studio layout, the studio audience, and the guests. While the studio audience actively contributed in earlier seasons, their role diminished over the years where they are now often offscreen. The number of guests also declined with time while longer, personal narrative replaced shorter, heated debates. More space on the studio floor was allocated to the host which was visually conveyed by his mobility. Analysis of the *content* revealed six major features that were manifested in the analyzed episodes: *resemblance of interpersonal communication, ordinariness, authenticity, narration, creation of a sense of community, and variation in the host's action*.

The meaningfulness and the significance of the paper lies in the potential it holds in filling the existing knowledge gap by critically examining the issue-oriented program genre as an indispensable component of the Arab television landscape and the media scene in general. The theoretical frameworks guiding this study, public sphere and frame analysis, both assisted in better interpreting the results by linking them to the broader theoretical milieu wherein the research exists.

First, the public sphere enabled the identification and examination of *Ahmar Bel Khat Al Areed* as a public space for meaningful experiences to the participants. In particular, findings supported post-Enlightenment premises that reconceptualized the theory of public sphere to a more culturally diverse modality. They did so by revealing that while concrete conclusions and consensuses are often not reached, similar to the majority of audience discussion programs—the show can serve as a public platform where ordinary people can contribute to the creation or

activation of a public sphere by representing the voice of ‘the authentic’ through sharing their experiences, narrating their stories, questioning, agreeing, disagreeing and debating salient personal and social issues. However, a limitation of the Habermasian public sphere is its idealization of the concept (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994, p.16; Curran, 1991; Eley, 1992). Although *Ahmar Bel Khat Al Areed* can serve as a public sphere for intellectual exchange, citizens are not deliberating in a fully unrestricted fashion (Habermas, 1974, p.49). Indeed, access to such talk shows is not equally guaranteed to all citizens.

Second, through the public sphere theory, the study introduced and explored different audiences as distinct publics. Inspired by the work of Livingstone & Lunt (1994), findings redisplayed four main audiences and the role each played in the three selected episodes: “the audible public”, “the visible but inarticulate public”, “the edited public”, and “the protagonist public (pp. 37-38). Third, through framing theory, results of content analysis and critical discourse analysis illustrated that one media text (i.e. episode) can evoke multiple interpretations. Findings also emphasized that framing is not decisively or exclusively limited to reshaping topics or issues on talk shows. Rather, it expands to include the framing of individuals—the hosts, guests, and studio audience members—and their contributions in public debates.

It is nonetheless important to acknowledge the research limitations associated with this study. While the paper focused on different aspects in relation to *Ahmar Bel Khat Al Areed* and the broader civic-oriented talk show genre—topics debated, guests, studio audience, experts, discourse, format, content—given the scope of the study, the ‘home audience’ and the circumstances in which they talk shows are watched and interpreted were not closely investigated. That is, how audience discussion programs affect the viewers in the course of everyday life, the diverse social conditions under which they perceive them, and the degree to

which they pay attention to a program. Existing studies, for instance, have looked into how talk shows may set conversation topics among women at work (Hobson, 1982) and how families may interact around a debated issue (Goodman, 1983). In trying to understand how audiences make sense of talk shows, one must consider how watching them fits into their everyday life; “in particular, how their practice of watching talk shows fits into the other routine practices of their everyday lives (Manga, 2003, p.59; Silverstone, 1994, p.133).

The value of this paper can also be attributed to the fact that academic findings can be linked to applied knowledge as well. In the recently published 2016 census, Statistics Canada (2017) revealed that Arabic is becoming the main immigrant mother tongue and amongst the fastest growing non-official languages with nearly 30% growth since the last census in 2011. With the resettlement of 40,081 Syrian refugees in Canada in 2017 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017), nearly half a million of Canadians identify Arabic as their mother tongue. Thus, understanding the Arab television landscape and the changing realities around it may assist in better understanding the increasingly diversified communication landscape in Canada and its new evolving nuances that do not fit into sound bites. Finally, through the findings of the study—their interpretations and implications—this research intended to produce an unconventional piece of academic work with a critical perspective on the issues that are publicly debated in wartimes. This opens new avenues for future research on the role talk shows play, not only as entrainment tools, but as ongoing social powers intertwined with the realities of the Arab world.

## Appendices

### *Appendix A: Codebook*

**Data Collection Period:** February 09, 2012 – March 29, 2018

**Case study:** Ahmar Bel Khat El Arid

**Unit of Analysis:** Episodes

**Sample Size:** 228

**Language:** Arabic

**Data Source:** Ahmar Bel Khat El Arid online digital archive, available on LBCI website via this link: <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/ahmar-en>

**Data Collection and Coding:** Data is manually collected from Ahmar Bel Khat El Arid online digital archive. Then, each episode is recorded on an Excel database using seven variables (*Episode Number, Episode Title, Synopsis, Date Aired, Key Words, Gender, Theme*). Coding is also completed manually.

**Sampling Methodology:** Non-probability purposive sampling.

**Place of Production:** University of Ottawa, Department of Communication.

<b>Variables</b>
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<b>Episode Number</b>	Each episode receives a number. Episodes are numbered chronologically from 1 (most recent/March 29, 2018) to 228 (earliest/February 09, 2012).
<b>Episode Title</b>	Each episode has a title. Episodes' titles are recorded as retrieved from Ahmar Bel Khat El Arid online digital archive.
<b>Synopsis</b>	Each episode has a short description (1 to 2 sentences) highlighting its main topic. Episodes' synopses are recorded as retrieved from Ahmar Bel Khat El Arid online digital archive.
<b>Date Aired</b>	Each episode has an air date recorded as retrieved from Ahmar Bel Khat El Arid online digital archive.
<b>Key Words</b>	Each episode on Ahmar Bel Khat El Arid online digital archive is associated with multiple "tags". Those come in the form of words describing the main topics discussed in the episode. Using those tags, 3-5 key words are recorded for each episode to summarize the issue covered.
<b>Gender</b>	Is the episode gender related? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If yes, code as [Gender]</li> <li>- If not, code as [Not Gender]</li> </ul>
<b>Theme</b>	What is the key theme of the episode? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- [Age]</li> <li>- [Children]</li> <li>- [Crime]</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- [Culture]</li><li>- [Destiny]</li><li>- [Disability]</li><li>- [Family]</li><li>- [Gender Norms]</li><li>- [Human Nature]</li><li>- [Immigration]</li><li>- [Marriage]</li><li>- [Motherhood]</li><li>- [Religion]</li><li>- [Self-image]</li><li>- [Social Media]</li><li>- [Traditions]</li><li>- [Other]</li><li>- [N/A]</li></ul>
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*Appendix B: Coding categories count*

<b>Coding Categories Count</b>	
<p><b>Total Number of Episodes (2012-2018) = 228</b>  <b>Not Gender = 147</b>  <b>Gender = 75</b>  <b>N/A= 6</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motherhood = 18 (7.89%)</li> <li>2. Marriage = 31 (13.59%)</li> <li>3. Self-image = 15 (6.57%)</li> <li>4. Children = 43 (18.85%)</li> <li>5. Family = 12 (5.26%)</li> <li>6. Human Nature = 10 (4.38%)</li> <li>7. Age = 18 (7.89%)</li> <li>8. Crime = 10 (4.38%)</li> <li>9. Gender Norms = 10 (4.38%)</li> <li>10. Disability = 4 (1.75%)</li> <li>11. Immigration = 7 (3.07%)</li> <li>12. Traditions = 8 (3.50%)</li> <li>13. Destiny = 13 (5.70%)</li> <li>14. Culture = 10 (4.38%)</li> <li>15. Social Media = 2 (0.87%)</li> <li>16. Religion = 6 (2.63%)</li> <li>17. Other = 5 (2.19%)</li> <li>18. N/A (including "Best Of" episodes= 6 (2.63%))</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Total Number of Gender Episodes (2012-2018) = 75</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motherhood = 4 (5.3%)</li> <li>2. Marriage = 25 (33.3%)</li> <li>3. Self-image = 13 (17.3%)</li> <li>4. Children = 4 (5.3%)</li> <li>5. Family = 3 (4%)</li> <li>6. Human Nature = 0 (0%)</li> <li>7. Age = 6 (8%)</li> <li>8. Crime = 2 (2.6%)</li> <li>9. Gender Norms = 9 (12%)</li> <li>10. Disability = 0 (0%)</li> <li>11. Immigration = 4 (5.3%)</li> <li>12. Traditions = 4 (5.3%)</li> <li>13. Destiny = 1 (1.3%)</li> <li>14. Culture = 0 (0%)</li> <li>15. Social Media = 0 (0%)</li> <li>16. Religion = 0 (0%)</li> <li>17. Other = 0 (0%)</li> </ol>	<p><b>Total Number of Not Gender Episodes (2012-2018) = 147</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motherhood = 14 (9.5%)</li> <li>2. Marriage = 6 (4.08%)</li> <li>3. Self-image = 2 (1.36%)</li> <li>4. Children = 39 (26.5%)</li> <li>5. Family = 9 (6.12%)</li> <li>6. Human Nature = 10 (6.8%)</li> <li>7. Age = 12 (8.16%)</li> <li>8. Crime = 8 (5.4%)</li> <li>9. Gender Norms = 1 (0.68%)</li> <li>10. Disability = 4 (2.2%)</li> <li>11. Immigration = 3 (2.04%)</li> <li>12. Traditions = 4 (2.72%)</li> <li>13. Destiny = 12 (8.16%)</li> <li>14. Culture = 10 (6.80%)</li> <li>15. Social Media = 2 (1.36%)</li> <li>16. Religion = 6 (4.08%)</li> <li>17. Other = 5 (3.40%)</li> </ol>
<p><b>Total Number Episodes in 2012 = 35</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motherhood = 2</li> <li>2. Marriage = 2</li> <li>3. Self-image = 0</li> <li>4. Children = 3</li> <li>5. Family = 4</li> </ol>	<p><b>Total Number Episodes in 2013 = 39</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motherhood = 2</li> <li>2. Marriage = 4</li> <li>3. Self-image = 2</li> <li>4. Children = 6</li> <li>5. Family = 2</li> </ol>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Human Nature = 1</li> <li>7. Age = 3</li> <li>8. Crime = 2</li> <li>9. Gender Norms = 2</li> <li>10. Disability = 1</li> <li>11. Immigration = 1</li> <li>12. Traditions = 1</li> <li>13. Destiny = 1</li> <li>14. Culture = 0</li> <li>15. Social Media = 1</li> <li>16. Religion = 5</li> <li>17. Other = 3</li> <li>18. N/A: 3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Human Nature = 0</li> <li>7. Age = 5</li> <li>8. Crime = 3</li> <li>9. Gender Norms = 1</li> <li>10. Disability = 0</li> <li>11. Immigration = 1</li> <li>12. Traditions = 3</li> <li>13. Destiny = 0</li> <li>14. Culture = 2</li> <li>15. Social Media = 1</li> <li>16. Religion = 1</li> <li>17. Other = 3</li> <li>18. N/A: 3</li> </ul>
<p><b>Total Number Episodes in 2014 = 40</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motherhood = 4</li> <li>2. Marriage = 7</li> <li>3. Self-image = 3</li> <li>4. Children = 4</li> <li>5. Family = 3</li> <li>6. Human Nature = 2</li> <li>7. Age = 1</li> <li>8. Crime = 2</li> <li>9. Gender Norms = 2</li> <li>10. Disability = 0</li> <li>11. Immigration = 2</li> <li>12. Traditions = 2</li> <li>13. Destiny = 3</li> <li>14. Culture = 3</li> <li>15. Social Media = 0</li> <li>16. Religion = 0</li> <li>17. Other = 1</li> <li>18. N/A: 1</li> </ul>	<p><b>Total Number Episodes in 2015 = 35</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motherhood = 2</li> <li>2. Marriage = 2</li> <li>3. Self-image = 3</li> <li>4. Children = 9</li> <li>5. Family = 0</li> <li>6. Human Nature = 1</li> <li>7. Age = 4</li> <li>8. Crime = 2</li> <li>9. Gender Norms = 2</li> <li>10. Disability = 1</li> <li>11. Immigration = 0</li> <li>12. Traditions = 0</li> <li>13. Destiny = 5</li> <li>14. Culture = 2</li> <li>15. Social Media = 0</li> <li>16. Religion = 0</li> <li>17. Other = 1</li> <li>18. N/A: 1</li> </ul>
<p><b>Total Number Episodes in 2016 = 34</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motherhood = 5</li> <li>2. Marriage = 5</li> <li>3. Self-image = 3</li> <li>4. Children = 8</li> <li>5. Family = 1</li> <li>6. Human Nature = 2</li> <li>7. Age = 2</li> <li>8. Crime = 0</li> <li>9. Gender Norms = 1</li> <li>10. Disability = 0</li> <li>11. Immigration = 1</li> <li>12. Traditions = 2</li> <li>13. Destiny = 0</li> <li>14. Culture = 3</li> <li>15. Social Media = 0</li> <li>16. Religion = 0</li> <li>17. Other = 0</li> <li>18. N/A: 1</li> </ul>	<p><b>Total Number Episodes in 2017 = 32</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motherhood = 1</li> <li>2. Marriage = 9</li> <li>3. Self-image = 0</li> <li>4. Children = 11</li> <li>5. Family = 1</li> <li>6. Human Nature = 0</li> <li>7. Age = 2</li> <li>8. Crime = 1</li> <li>9. Gender Norms = 2</li> <li>10. Disability = 2</li> <li>11. Immigration = 2</li> <li>12. Traditions = 0</li> <li>13. Destiny = 1</li> <li>14. Culture = 0</li> <li>15. Social Media = 0</li> <li>16. Religion = 0</li> <li>17. Other = 0</li> <li>18. N/A: 0</li> </ul>

**Total Number Episodes in 2018 (Until March 29, 2018) = 13**

1. **Motherhood = 2**
2. **Marriage = 2**
3. **Self-image = 4**
4. **Children = 2**
5. Family = 1
6. Human Nature = 1
7. Age = 1
8. Crime = 0
9. Gender Norms = 0
10. Disability = 0
11. Immigration = 0
12. Traditions = 0
13. Destiny = 0
14. Culture = 0
15. Social Media = 0
16. Religion = 0
17. Other = 0
18. N/A: 0

***Appendix C: List of other relevant work consulted for general knowledge***

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