The Lebanese Army: Advertising a National Institution
to Rebuild a Nation

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Nayla Moussa
PhD candidate at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques - Paris
Nayla.moussa@sciences-po.org

Ma baddna jaych b lebnen ella el jaych el lebnene (“no army in Lebanon but the Lebanese army”). This slogan was chanted by thousands of Lebanese during the massive demonstrations of February/March 2005 after the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. Demonstrators demanded the withdrawal of the Syrian troops, present in Lebanon since 1976 and accused of the assassination. Songs like teslam ya ‘askar lebnân, ya hâmi ist’alna (“we thank our army, the guardian of our independence”) were also aired and sung by thousands of Lebanese. Demonstrators offered roses to the soldiers who were actually deployed to keep them from reaching Martyr’s Square, the rally point at the center of Beirut. This shows the special relationship that the Lebanese have with their military institution. However, this relationship was not “obvious” a couple of years before and is much more complicated than slogans.

At the end of the civil war in 1990, the Lebanese army was fragmented. In the 1990’s, its reconstruction was supposed to embody the “resurrection of the nation”. While all other public institutions are perceived as corrupt, while political elites are considered inefficient, the Lebanese army stood out as the only institution that had the national interest at heart.

This image is in contrast with reality: during the 1990’s, the Lebanese army was a pillar of the Syro-Lebanese security system. Its intervention against political opponents contributed to the degradation of the Lebanese democratic system and introduced a climate of repression. This situation generated contradictory feelings towards the military institution. After the withdrawal of the Syrian army in April 2005, the Lebanese army was finally “freed” and was able to establish a new image for itself.
This paper is the result of observations made on the field during my work for my PhD dissertation. It is based on material collected on the field (army brochures, magazines, posters, the new “army history book”, CDs, DVDs) and on interviews conducted with officers from the directorate of orientation (and other units) and employees from advertising agencies who worked on projects for the army. In this paper, I will show how the army conveys its own image and how private actors contribute to shaping this image, adding to it their own perceptions and sometimes ideals. My goal is to answer the following question: can the creation of a new institutional image contribute to the re-invention of a nation?

At the heart of the army’s communication, moudiriyyat al tawjîh (the directorate of orientation), I will focus on the role of this department, especially through the analysis of its publications. I will then concentrate on one very important campaign launched by the advertising agency H & C Leo Burnett, after the events of Nahr el Bared in 2007.1

The process of “advertising the Lebanese army” has many characteristics: first, it is not a carefully prepared process. It is based on a very simplistic premise: the Lebanese army is the guardian of the nation and the guarantee of a stable Lebanon. New elements are introduced to the process only if they reinforce this image. The communication becomes redundant: the same issues are dealt with in all army publications. The style of writing does not change much. Old propaganda methods are used. Second, the process is political, at least at the beginning of the 1990’s. It is directed towards the Lebanese society and reflects the political competition between two men: Rafic Hariri and Emile Lahoud. The former is the new Prime Minister (as of 1992), the latter is the new commander-in-chief of the army (as of 1989). Two different visions of post-civil war Lebanon confront each other: Hariri favours a “financial” reconstruction based on developing the economy; Lahoud wants the army to be an alternative to Hariri’s economic options. The army should be a model for the whole society. Thus, it needs a new image and it needs to communicate about this image. Third, new actors – private actors – intervene more and more in the process.

1 In May 2007, the Lebanese army fought against a terrorist group, Fatah el Islam, in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el Bared (North Lebanon). I will explain the details of these events later in this paper.
They are more creative and they revitalize the image of the army. They were not part of the basic plan, they added themselves to it. The army did not approach them, they offered their services – for free. They do so for different reasons. One of these reasons is that “branding the army” has a positive impact on their own image. Finally, the army’s new image is also based on the process of rewriting history and inventing myths – such as the myth of Fouad Chehab. I will end this paper with an analysis of the shahid (martyrs) policy or how the army “promotes” its martyrs.
After having made these remarks, and before I move to the analysis of the content of this image, I will begin with a historical overview.

I- Historical background

The Lebanese army is multi-confessional, undermanned and underequipped, but is considered as a professional institution. Fouad Chehab, its first commander in chief, said that the army was a necessity not only to confront the enemy but also to cement the Lebanese unity. Today the Lebanese army is perceived as the only “national institution”, an institution where Lebanese of all religious sects mix. However, the army has not always had this positive image. For a long time after Lebanon’s independence in 1943, it was perceived as a Christian army, an image that it kept till the end of the Lebanese civil war.

a. The Lebanese context: “consensual democracy” and its setbacks

The Lebanese political system stands out in the Arab world. Lebanon has never had a military coup d’Etat. Many observers explain this by the multi-confessional composition of its army. Eighteen different religious sects – Muslim and Christian – are recognized in Lebanon, and they are all represented in the political system. This system is based on power sharing between different sects.

Lebanon in its present frontiers exists only since 1920 when the French mandate established the separation between Lebanon and Syria. Before that, both countries had been part of the Ottoman Empire since 1515-16. When “creating” Lebanon, the French introduced the “consensual democracy”. This type of democracies is supposed to favour the participation of all segments of society, in this
case of all religious sects. In this system, Christians, Maronites in particular – an oriental Christian church – were dominant demographically, politically and to some extent economically. Thus, the French relied on them to rule Lebanon. Seats in the parliament were divided between Muslims and Christians on the base of 5/6, for every five Muslim MPs, six Christians. Decisions were to be discussed and made “consensually”. Consensus was – and still is – the key pillar of the Lebanese political system. Maronites dominated the army, the commander in chief was – and still is – a Maronite, so is the chief of military intelligence. In addition, until 1975 and the beginning of the Lebanese civil war, 71 % of the officer corps was Christian. On November 22, 1943, Lebanon became officially independent. A National Pact was put in place at this moment to distribute the main political positions between the three largest religious sects: the President of the Republic should always be a Christian Maronite, the Prime Minister a Muslim Sunni, and the chief of parliament a Muslim Shia. The President of the Republic had very important prerogatives.

When the demographic equilibrium began to change in the 1970’s in favour of Muslims, demands for reforms arose. But the Maronite elites were reluctant to introduce reforms to a system that they dominated. All the elements for a social and political conflict were there. The arrival of Palestinian refugees, and as of 1970 of fedayeen (Palestinians armed men), was the spark that caused the explosion. Christians felt the need to protect themselves – and their system – from the Palestinians. Christian militias were armed and trained. On April 13, 1975, Lebanon officially entered the vicious cycle of civil war, a civil war that lasted fifteen years. During these years, alliances kept changing; international as well as regional actors interfered, backing domestic actors. The Syrian army entered Lebanon in 1976 officially to protect the Christians and stayed in Lebanon until 2005.

The war ended in 1990. The Taef agreement was signed in October 1989, in Saudi Arabia. The agreement introduced some reforms to the system: the president’s prerogatives were considerably restrained and the number of seats in the Parliament was increased to 128 seats, to be divided equally between Muslims and Christians.

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2 For more details on consensual democracies, refer to the work of Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: patterns of majoritarian and consensus government in twenty-one countries*, New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1984

This communitarian distribution of power was supposed to be temporary. The Taef agreement reasserted the necessity to put an end to “political sectarianism”. Sectarianism is perceived as an obstacle to the emergence of real citizenship. As one French official said: “in Lebanon, there are many patriots, but there are few citizens”.

Since the beginning of the “Arab spring”, demonstrations are organized by civil society activists to demand the abolition of “the communitarian political system”. However, few Lebanese rallied this cause. Although, the majority of them are aware of the flaws of the current system, they wonder what the alternative would be.

Finally, The Taef agreement stressed the necessity to rebuild the Lebanese army, in coordination with the Syrian troops, present on the Lebanese territory at this moment and legitimated by the agreement. The agreement also gave the Lebanese army a new mission, backing up the Internal Security Forces (the Police) in their mission of maintaining order.

b. The Lebanese army in turmoil

Charles Tilly highlights the link between war making and state making in the European context. According to Tilly, engaging in wars led monarchs to create armies and eventually to exercise a monopoly over the use of violence. Outside this zone, things evolved in a different way, especially in countries that were the result of decolonization. In these countries, the army was an external element that did not result from the development of society. In the Lebanese case, the army is the “descendent” of the Troupes du Levant established by French authorities during their mandate over Lebanon.

Contrary to the allegations of the Lebanese army, it did not participate in the “battle for independence”, since such a battle never took place. Lebanon obtained its independence peacefully.

As I mentioned earlier, the Lebanese army is multi-confessional, it is the reflection of the Lebanese society. Cynthia Enloe analyzed the role of multi-ethnic armies in divided societies. Do such armies favour “national cohesion” and do they play an

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4 Cited par General Alain Pellegrini, former commandant of the UNIFIL, during a conference at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques, Paris, February 2011

5 Charles Tilly, “War making and state making as organized crime” in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (ed.), Bringing the state back in, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 169-170
integrative role? Her conclusion, after studying different cases, is that multi-ethnic armies revitalize and reinforce primary allegiances and do no contribute to “national unity”\(^6\). The Lebanese army is not an exception.

In the late 1960’s and 1970’s, clashes occurred between the army and Palestinians groups. But, in 1975, when incidents took place between these groups and Christian militias, the army stayed on the sidelines; and political leadership prevented it from intervening. Some feared that its Christian image might prevent it from playing its role. Others feared that the institution would disintegrate if it was to intervene in a domestic conflict. Later, during the fifteen years of civil war, the Lebanese army split along sectarian lines.

When the war finally came to an end in 1990, the army was far from having “monopoly over the legitimate use of violence”. Two foreign armies as well as other armed forces were present on the Lebanese soil: the Israeli army (until May 2000), the Syrian army (until April 2005), the UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, still present in South Lebanon), Hezbollah (an armed group that is not under the control of the state) and some armed Palestinian groups.

In this context, the reconstruction of the army was launched: one of its goals was to “mix” its units and to make it more representative of the Lebanese society. With Syrian support, Emile Lahoud, who was appointed commander in chief in 1989, was able to reconstruct the institution. Lahoud was able to create a sense of corporatism especially at the officers’ level by giving them privileges similar to that of the Egyptian or the Turkish armies (health insurance, retirement pensions, training abroad...), creating some sort of military bourgeoisie that distinguishes itself from the political class considered as corrupt. But this process did not lead to the disappearance of primary allegiances, especially communitarian but also regional, familial, sometimes tribal. This is the paradox of the Lebanese army: the soldiers have a strong feeling of belonging to a national institution, and they are often very proud of it. However, they are usually under the influence of their environment. This reality hinders the army’s actions in the event of civil confrontations.

Between 1990 and 2005, the Lebanese security sector was dominated by the Syrian presence. All through these fifteen years, the Syrian regime shaped these institutions

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and controlled the security sector by contributing to its division and taking advantage of the competition between its components\textsuperscript{7}.

After the withdrawal of the Syrian army in April 2005, the Lebanese government failed to put in place a national security strategy. In this new context, the Lebanese army’s role was bound to evolve. New missions arose: protecting the borders and “combating terrorism”. New needs for communication also arose. The \textit{Grande Muette} (“the one that does not speak”) began communicating more and more.

II- \textit{Moudiriyyat al tawjîh}: when the \textit{Grande Muette} communicates

The directorate of orientation is composed of five departments: secretariat, public relations (press, photography), publications (magazines: \textit{Al jaych}, and others), the department of studies and the department of culture (the military museum).

It has two main missions: preparing the military communiqués and advising the commander-in-chief. The Lebanese army does not have a spokesperson; the directorate of orientation plays this role.

Two anniversaries are celebrated by the army: its own anniversary on August 1\textsuperscript{st} and independence day on November 22\textsuperscript{nd}. On these two occasions, the army launches large campaigns (brochures, posters, songs) to praise its actions. It is unusual that an army communicates this much about itself. These campaigns often insist on its role as the “guardian of the national unity”. A simple observer of the Lebanese political and security scene will notice that the army is more the reflection of national division than national unity. The problems of the Lebanese system are reflected in the army and tend to have a major impact on its action – or its inability to engage an action.

Slogans, pictures and songs are usually very far from reality. The target of these campaigns is dual: the Lebanese society on the one hand, the institution itself on the second. The directorate of orientation is supposed to “orient” the soldiers. Recently, a new target appeared: “international community” or more precisely western donors. The Lebanese army is poor and is constantly in need of equipment. To attract these

donors, the army needs to give the best image of itself. Brochures are in three languages: Arabic, French and English. I will first expose the content of these campaigns and then analyze their impact on the three mentioned targets.

a. “The nation at the heart of the army”

The directorate of orientation is in charge of these campaigns. Brochures published by this directorate define the army, its role and even its history. This history is often reinvented and adjusted to fit the new image of an army playing its role, protecting the country. Some visual elements are permanent:

- The colours: red and white (the colours of the Lebanese flag) or the colours of the military uniform (the military pattern, or just brown and dark green)
- The Cedar tree: the symbol of the Lebanese nation (also on the Lebanese flag)
- The Lebanese map: as to say that the army is present on all the Lebanese soil and protects the national territory
- The military logo: two bay leaves, two swords, a cedar tree and the slogan “honour, sacrifice, loyalty”

These elements are recurrent in all brochures and posters. Other elements can be found but are less recurrent: ears of wheat (symbolizing life), a dove perched on a canon (“we are passionate about war, we are the masters of combat, but we do not hate peace”), a rose for the celebrations of the victory in Nahr el Bared (“From the army of the nation to its people”), a rising sun, etc…

2011 posters also focused on the army’s strength: posters showed a unit from the army – the commando regiment probably – performing a military exercise (jumping from a helicopter into the sea). The slogan was: “the guarantee of strong capable state” or “no fear for a country protected by an army like the Lebanese army”. For an army as undermanned and underequipped as the Lebanese army, it is surprising to read such show-of-power statements.

Slogans are key in conveying the message: the word “watan” is recurrent in these slogans. Watan means “nation” in Arabic. However, in military slogans, it has a dual meaning: when addressing a soldier, the Lebanese often use this word to emphasize
the link between the army and the nation. When passing by an army checkpoint they would say: *Marhaba ya watan* (“Nation, hello”)8.

“Sacrifice” is another recurrent topic: “my ashes give life to Lebanon”. This idea of soldiers sacrificing themselves for the rest of the nation is very present in the army’s communication. It is the core of “martyrology” that I will explain later.

The texts of the brochures do not change much from a year to another, unless a major event took place during the year. All brochures contain sections on the history of the army, the relationship between the army and the state, the army and the nation (or the people). The brochure of the 60th anniversary of the army (2005) analyzes the impact of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. Hariri is considered a *shahid* (martyr) and his assassination a “brutal crime”. The text exposes the stabilizing role that the Lebanese army played during this crisis, a role that was “acclaimed and admired by local as well as international actors”.

The withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon is analyzed in the next section. This withdrawal was a direct consequence of the assassination of Hariri. The Syrian army which was criticized by demonstrators, is considered as “a sister army”. This rhetoric was often used during the Syrian presence in Lebanon. It is interesting to note that although the Syrian regime had withdrawn its troops, the Lebanese army still felt the need to “praise” the Syrian army. This section highlights the great achievements of this army in Lebanon and mentions the alliances of the Lebanese army with other countries such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Algeria and the United States. This is typical of the army’s “consensual” stance.

This consensual tone is used in all army brochures and publications. The army aims at being an institution that all Lebanese trust but also all foreign actors (Arab or western countries).

Another major event that influenced army’s communication is the 2006 war. When appointed commander-in-chief, Lahoud gave a new direction to the army; some officers call it the new “ideology”. He redefined the army’s alliances: the Syrian regime is an ally, so is Hezbollah, Israel is the Enemy. The Lebanese army has never fought against the Israeli army and yet all the rhetoric is directed towards Israel. The choice of words is also very interesting: “in 2006, during the national epic [the

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8 Hubert Dupont, “La Nouvelle armée libanaise: instrument de pouvoir ou acteur politique” Confluences Méditerranée N 29 (Spring 1999)
Hezbollah-Israel war], the Lebanese stood with their army and their resistance to face the Israeli enemy who conducted a brutal war on Lebanon” (August 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2009).

Since 2006, all brochures mention the 2006 war and the role of the army during this war. However, the army did not intervene during the events. Some soldiers were killed but not during the battle, they were killed because army barracks were attacked. This is typical of how the army adjusts reality to its own advantage.

Finally, the army communicates a lot through its actions: Special Forces clean historical sites such as the ancient citadel of Baalbeck. They go to schools and universities to talk about the army and to “show another face of the army” according to General Georges Nader, the commandant of the airborne regiment\textsuperscript{9}. The military institution is also engaged in development activities: building roads, bringing water to remote areas, extinguishing fires…

These actions are not the core mission of the army, however it seems that they contribute the most to its popularity.

\textbf{b. The impact of these campaigns}

On every army anniversary, thousands of banderols are hung all over Lebanon, even in remote villages to praise and show support for the army, often on the initiative of ordinary citizens. The first observation would be that the army’s communication was successful and that its image as the “guardian of national unity” is now solidly established. However, this communication seems to stay “superficial”, at the speech’s level. Beyond such slogans, Lebanese are rarely satisfied with the army’s action. A further sociological study should be conducted on this issue. But it seems that Lebanese are often very aware of the limits of the military action.

The same can be said about the impact of these campaigns on soldiers: they tend to “reproduce” the slogans and talk about the army as “the school of the nation” or the “impact of the uniform” that unites them all under one institution. Deeper discussions, however, show that their primal allegiance remains their community and not the military institution. It is interesting to note that officers often perceive the army’s mission according to the interest of their own community.

Finally, western military attachés have a positive image of Lebanon. The French military attaché in Lebanon considers the army as the “guarantee of a stable

\textsuperscript{9} General Georges Nader, in discussion with the author, Beirut, December 2009
More surprisingly, the American Embassy in Lebanon considers the Lebanese army as an ally. However, it is unlikely that this is due to such campaigns. During the Syrian presence in Lebanon, the Lebanese army was not considered as a trustworthy institution because it was under Syrian influence. The withdrawal of the Syrian troops in 2005 led to more collaboration between the Lebanese army and western countries. The Lebanese army became an ally in combating terrorist groups.

One last remark concerning the target of these campaigns: it is interesting to note that the army does not try to recruit through its campaigns. It is common for professional armies – such as the Lebanese army – that do not rely on conscription to launch recruitment campaigns. It is not the case for the Lebanese army. These campaigns are not addressed to potential recruits. Young men enrol in the army for economic reasons. They often come from poor areas. On the officer’s level, the situation is slightly different; some enter the military academy because they believe in the military values, others to improve their social status. In any case, they are not the targets of these campaigns.

III- History Revisited

a. Analyzing the new history book

Reinventing its own history is part of an institution’s way to change its image. Mary Douglas talks about “what is forgotten and what is remembered”. Institutions tend to adapt their history. The new history book written by the directorate of orientation is a way of rewriting history. The first volume was published in 2009. It covers the period from 1920 till 1945. The army is now working on the second part: 1945-1975, the beginning of the civil war.

It is interesting to note that the Lebanese still do not have a common history book. When school programs were reformed in 2003, the “history committee” was not able

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10 Colonel Philippe Petrel, in discussion with the author, at the French embassy, Beirut, December 2009

11 It is surprising because the Lebanese army is allied to Hezbollah since the 1990’s. The slogan Al jaych, al cha’b, al mouqâwama (“the army, the people, the resistance”) summarizes this alliance. The United States consider Hezbollah as a terrorist group. Officials at the American embassy say that the Lebanese army has a perfect record in terms of use of weapons given by the US. When the US give weapons and equipment to an army, they check how these weapons are used and if they are handed over to other groups such as Hezbollah.

12 Mary Douglas, *Comment pensent les institutions?*, Paris: La Découverte/Poche, 2004, pp. 105-106
to come out with a common history book. Who should write what happened during the civil war? What do we want to remember? This is to say that collective memory and history are complicated issues in Lebanon. As a result, different history books are taught in Lebanese schools; more importantly most of them do not go beyond the independence in 1943. More than half a century of Lebanese history is completely absent from history teachings.

The first volume of the history book goes back to the Ottoman period and the creation of Lebanon in 1920. If a relative consensus exists for this period, it will be interesting to see how members of the committee in charge of the book will tackle more problematic issues. In the introduction to the first volume, the “events” of 1975-1990 are mentioned: “during the events, the military institution was the most cohesive institution, and the fastest to reconcile after the events”. It is clear that the authors will try to avoid – if that is even possible – some issues in order to give their own version of the “events”.

b. The invention of myths: Fouad Chehab

Fouad Chehab was the first commander in chief of the army in 1945. Chehab comes from a family that played an important role in Lebanon’s history in the nineteenth century. Originally, it was a Sunni family but his ancestor Bachir Chehab converted to Christianity. Bachir Chehab is one of the major Lebanese historical figures.

Fouad Chehab came from a branch of the family that was not very prestigious. He entered the military academy in Damascus in 1921 when there was only one army for Lebanon and Syria under the French mandate. He became commander in chief of the new Lebanese army after the independence in 1945. He also played an important political role. In 1958, president Camille Chamoun decided to reorient Lebanon’s traditionally neutral foreign – regional – policy towards the United States. He was faced with massive demonstrations and the beginning of what looked like a civil war. Chamoun asked for the intervention of the army. Fouad Chehab refused. These events led to the election of Chehab as president of the republic. As a president, Chehab introduced major reforms to the Lebanese public administration and he is considered as the father of modern Lebanese institutions. But this is not the only characteristic of

13 Lebanese often refer to the civil war as the “events”
Chehab’s mandate. During his presidency, Chehab relied on the army, and more particularly on the 2ème bureau i.e. military intelligence or moukhbarât. They intervened against political opponents especially in elections. The 2ème bureau became a very important political player. The outcome of Chehab’s presidency is thus mitigated.

However, years after his mandate, Fouad Chehab is elevated into a myth. He is considered as a model for all officers, especially those aspiring to become commanders in chief – and eventually president of the republic. Emile Lahoud considers himself as a chehabist, and so do many other officers. They tend to ignore the other “face” of chehabism. According to them, political leaders are corrupt and inefficient, therefore only a military should rule Lebanon. This theory was developed by a Lebanese officer in a book published in the 1970’s: al jaych houwa al hall (“the army is the solution”) and then reasserted in another book by a Lebanese general: “The army remains the solution”.

It is interesting to note that two of the three Lebanese presidents of the post-civil war period are former commanders in chief (it is the case for the current president). When discussing this issue with Lebanese officers, they tend to speak about Fouad Chehab’s mandate as the “golden age”. Nations often need a hero, a fortiori armies. There are not so many officers who would dare question the myth of Fouad Chehab. Former commander in chief Ibrahim Tannous is one of them. He points out to the problems of Chehab’s mandate. Tannous believes that Chehab refused the intervention of the army only because he was preparing himself to become the next president and not because he wanted to preserve the institution.

However, the new myth tends to disregard these issues. The directorate of orientation contributes to this image. Fouad Chehab is mentioned in all brochures as “the father of the modern state and the modern army”.

IV- The Nahr el Bared events: between “private” and “public” communication

In May 2007, the Lebanese army was facing Fatah el Islam, a terrorist group. Members of this group took refuge in a Palestinian refugee camp, Nahr el Bared, after having robbed a bank. The day after, at sunrise, they cut the throat of ten soldiers at the checkpoint at the entrance of the camp. This was the beginning of around three
months of conflict between the army and this group. The battle showed the weakness of the army: soldiers lacked training and equipment. But at the end, the army managed to overcome this small group of well-trained men.

Posters, brochures and songs issued by the directorate of orientation “celebrated” this victory. Many messages were conveyed. First, the “victorious” army: a poster with a tank and soldiers from the regiment commando (red berets), carrying Lebanese flags, surrounded by civilians also carrying flags. And the slogan: “Lebanese people, we salute you”. The point again is to show the special relationship between the army and the people. Second, the idea of an army that is respectful of people: a picture of soldiers carrying children out of the camp of Nahr el Bared after the army took control of the camp. The directorate of orientation also prepared videos of the combats in Nahr el Bared. However, officers accuse the directorate of inactivity.

They failed to communicate about what was happening and to gather support for the army. When “official” communication fails, it is “outdone” by private actors who impose their own vision. It was the case in Nahr el Bared.

Bel alb ya watan campaign: when a private actor takes in charge the army’s communication

Seeing that Lebanese media were not covering what was happening in Nahr el Bared, H & C Leo Burnett creative team decided to launch a campaign to support the army. The campaign’s title was “bel alb ya watan”, which literally means, “Nation, you are in our hearts”. I mentioned earlier the two meanings of the word watan.

Rana Najjar, associate creative director at Leo Burnett, says that the campaign wanted to point out to the fact that the “Lebanese army was fighting in the name of all the nation, and thus needed the whole nation’s support”. What is interesting is that this ad comes from a private initiative. The creative team at Leo Burnett thought that “they needed to say something, especially that in this case, it was not about Lebanese fighting against each other as it had been during the civil war”. They needed the army’s authorization. The directorate of orientation was not very cooperative even

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14 Lebanese officers in discussion with the author, Beirut, December 2009

15 It is still possible to watch the ad online at this address: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkgwVAC2glQ

16 Rana Najjar, in discussion with the author, at Leo Burnett’s offices, Beirut, July 2011
though the whole campaign did not cost the army anything. Everyone worked for free. The production company “Independent Productions” offered to produce it and its manager directed the ad for free.

The campaign was in collaboration with another advertisement agency Saatchi & Saatchi. Leo Burnett’s Beirut office had also to ask for an authorization from Publicis, the mother company. They had to prove that it was not a political ad. Omar Boustany, former associate creative director at Leo Burnett, was in charge of this campaign. He says that for once the army was “doing something good”\textsuperscript{17}, after years of repressing political opponents, in close collaboration with the Syrian army. Lebanese usually get in touch with the army at checkpoints. The first idea was to represent people saluting a soldier at a checkpoint, and then it developed.

In this one-minute video, a young soldier is walking down a Beirut street. Hamra Street was chosen because it is a popular street, full of potential scenes. There were some debates at the beginning of the shooting, whether the soldier should be seen in the ad or whether his presence should only be implied and revealed by the slogan at the end. The second option was seen as more interesting artistically. Omar Boustany thought however that the goal was “not to win prizes but to have a genuine impact on the public”. The soldier does not appear from the beginning of the ad, we only see people saluting. It is the method of “point of view/subjective camera”, which shows what the main character is seeing; the world is perceived through the eyes of the soldier. And then, the uniform appears (the head of the soldier is still not shown at this point). This has an important meaning. When talking to Lebanese soldiers, officers especially, they often mention “the respect for the uniform”. The uniform is an important symbol; it is one of the specific characteristics of this institution. Finally, we see the soldier’s face. He runs into “ordinary citizens”. When they see him, they immediately salute him, a salute of respect and gratitude. It is an interesting creative crescendo.

These citizens are supposed to represent the Lebanese society as a whole. Omar Boustany says that in most of the ads he creates, he likes to give a large panorama of the Lebanese society, what he calls “the Lebanese flavour” or the “local colour”:

- All categories of ages: from the little boy to the old man, as well as young men and women. One very important element: the mother with her young boy, both

\textsuperscript{17} Omar Boustany, in discussion with the author, Beirut, July 2011
saluting the soldier, to “show that families also support the army, although usually families are afraid of violence and even of the army”.

- All socio-economic categories: two businessmen, a taxi driver, a waiter. Most soldiers come from poor rural areas. Omar Boustany says that it was very important to show that even “high classes” from Beirut were supporting the army, and not just their families in remote villages. They also chose more “folkloric” characters such as the old man who is selling orange juice or the one selling lottery tickets. Both of them were not actors, they found them on the street and decided to include them in the ad.

- All religious sects: it is unusual to see women wearing veils in ads produced by Leo Burnett or other international agencies. The typical Lebanese represented in ads is usually an “a-religious” citizen, which means that nothing in his/her appearance should indicate his/her religious affiliation. But in this ad, two women wearing veils can be seen. According to Omar Boustany this is intentional. The army was combating an Islamist group. All Muslim politicians and religious leaders condemned the actions of this group. It was important to show that the Muslim community (or communities) does not identify itself with such group, even though the terrorist group presented itself as Muslim. The goal was to “send a message to the pious Muslim communities by showing that these two clearly identified Muslim women are integrated into the whole national community”. In addition, this was a message to the families of these soldiers, which were Muslims in majority. Although there are not official statistics on the sectarian composition of the army, estimations consider that the rank-and-file level is predominantly Muslim. The point here is to show that this “battle” should not be perceived as a battle between the army and Islam, but between the army and this terrorist group. Finally, it is interesting to note that these two young women are actually Christians and are “playing the role” of Muslim women.

At the end, everyone gets out of their car and salutes the soldier. The slogan bel alb ya watan appears and the ad is signed Al loubnaniyyoun (“The Lebanese people”), with a small Lebanese flag. As Rana Najjar explains, “there was a consensus concerning the army’s action in Nahr el Bared, all Lebanese agreed on the army’s mission”. The signature illustrates this “consensus”.

The second phase of the campaign showed eighteen Lebanese celebrities, in a six-second ad, saluting. The soldier does not appear in this ad, but the same music is played. Viewers will definitely remember whom the salute is for. At the end, the same slogan *bel alb ya watan*, and the name of the person in the ad: famous actors and actresses, writers, journalists, musicians, singers, directors who show their respect to the army. Najjar says that they were all very easy to convince. They had seen the first ad and they all accepted to participate in the second phase of the campaign. The scenes are shot at their homes, place of work, or even in the street.

The last phase of the campaign was on independence day (November 22, 2010). Leo Burnett organized a campaign with the slogan *Bî himâyat al jounoud, tanmou al wouroud* (“roses grow under the protection of soldiers”). Army helicopters threw hundreds of red roses (with little parachutes) on the military parade celebrating independence in Beirut. Again, the initiative came from Leo Burnett but received approbation from the army; the commander in chief even proposed that soldiers help Leo Burnett’s staff in preparing the roses and offered army helicopters.

When asked about how this campaign was received by its main target – the Lebanese society – Rana Najjar says that it was success, “people actually started saluting soldiers in the street, it was also the case for Leo Burnett’s staff that worked on the campaign”.

The campaign received the “special jury prize” at the Pikasso d’Or competition in Lebanon in February 2008. But, in the meantime the army faced a major setback: in January 2008, riots organized by the opposition (Hezbollah and Amal, two Shia parties) to protest against electricity cuts ended up in bloodshed. Two rioters died and ten were wounded. The army was involved in these events. This had a negative impact on its image. When the campaign won the Pikasso prize, no one wanted to accept the prize. Omar Boustany accepted it and dedicated it to the “martyrs of Nahr el Bared” and then gave it to a general who was present in the audience: “we need to stand by our army,” he says, “even when it is going through difficult times”.

It was the first time that a “creative product” was made for the army. So far, there were only campaigns launched by the directorate of orientation or video clips by Lebanese singers (that were not of great quality).
This campaign shows how private actors interfere and contribute to shaping the image of an institution. Rana Najjar and Omar Boustany both mentioned the national consensus concerning the action of the army. However, this consensus was very fragile: Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of Hezbollah, said that the camp of Nahr el Bared was “a red line that the army should not cross”. Many politicians criticize the army’s action in Nahr el Bared\textsuperscript{18}. It is better to say that this campaign gave the illusion of a consensus. It reflected the vision of a specific category of the Lebanese society. It also conveyed the image of a strong and capable army. This image is very far from reality. In addition, the impact of this campaign seems limited and did not go beyond the events of Nahr el Bared.

On the other hand, this campaign is also supposed to have a positive impact on the agency’s image. It gives prestige to the company and contributes to its integration into the community.

V- When the dead speak: the \textit{shahid} policy

The use of the word \textit{shahid} (martyr) exploded in the Arab world and in Lebanon in particular. After the civil war, every political group had its own martyrs, not recognized by other groups. Hezbollah built its communication strategy around the idea of \textit{shahid}. However, if it is common for a group, especially a group with a religious ideology to “promote” its martyrs, it is more unusual for an army to present its soldiers dead on the field as martyrs. These soldiers die while performing their duty. But having martyrs is now a pledge of legitimacy in Lebanon. And the army is not an exception.

The communication of the army is more and more oriented around “martyrology”. This is not new but it has been reinforced lately. For instance, Fouad Chehab tried to cement the Lebanese army by honouring its martyrs, promoting celebrations and valorising “heroic actions”.

At the entrance of the minister of defence, there is a big poster with the pictures of all the soldiers who died during the Nahr el Bared events. Two booklets honour the

\textsuperscript{18} Discussion with Abdel Rahim Mrad former minister of defense (2004-2005), and Samir el Jisr, head of the defense committee at the Lebanese parliament.
martyrs of two Special Forces regiments that participated in the combat in Nahr el Bared: the airborne regiment and the commando regiment.

The airborne regiment: “they martyred… to preserve the nation”

This regiment was founded during the civil war (1981-82). It is one of the elite units in the Lebanese army. Forty-three soldiers of this regiment died in Nahr el Bared. The booklet has the colours of the regiment, dark brown and the logo of the army on its cover. Each martyr has his own page, with a picture, a short resume – grades, distinctions, and personal situation – and the date of death. On the page also, a short poem written by his colleagues in the Lebanese dialect. All poems are about martyrdom; some mention the characteristics of the person. General Georges Nader, commandant of the regiment, was in Nahr el Bared. His regiment built a small monument in honour of the martyrs. When showing me this monument, he insisted that I read the names of the martyrs to show me that they were from all religious sects; he seemed to attach importance to this point.

In the army magazine Al jaych of June 2011, there is an article about the inauguration of a garden at the regiment’s casern for the martyrs where for each martyr was planted an oak tree. A museum was also inaugurated “the regiment’s memory museum” where pictures, uniforms and personal belongings of the martyrs are exposed. During the ceremony, prayers were said on the souls of the dead: a priest and Muslim Sheikh led the prayers, the symbol of a unified army.

Conclusion

When the Lebanese army got out of fifteen years of civil war, everything had to be reconstructed. Trust between Christian and Muslim soldiers had to be restored. The Christian image of the army had to be replaced with the image of a national institution. But from 1990 till 2005, the Syrian army was present and controlled the process of reconstruction of the army. Emile Lahoud, the new commander-in-chief tried to impose the image of a new army. The directorate of orientation was in charge of this image, with little resources – human and financial. When the army really needed to communicate about its actions, private actors stepped in. I mentioned the Leo Burnett campaign, but other advertisement agencies also “worked” on the image of the army. These agencies and the directorate of orientation both convey the image of a national institution, a guardian of national unity. But these actors do not have the
same resources and their final products are very different. The directorate of orientation fails to give a dynamic image of the army; it fails to go beyond “fixed” slogans. The Leo Burnett campaign gave a new artistic touch to the army’s communication. This gap between the two types of actors involved explains the “eclectic” characteristic of this communication. Finally, the process does not have a major impact on nation building. The original goal was lost in the way: at the directorate of orientation, bureaucracy prevailed over the “message”. Communication became a routine activity.

In addition, recent events challenged this image of a national institution. In May 2008, clashes erupted between militants of Hezbollah (a Shia group) and partisans of Saad Hariri (Sunnis) in the streets of Beirut. The army did not intervene; the memory of soldiers’ defection during the civil war is still very fresh.

More than twenty years after the civil war, the military institution failed to embody “national unity”. The Lebanese society is divided on issues that represent the core of a nation. The military institution is a reflection of this division.

In a country plagued by sectarianism, and where the political system is often paralyzed without any perspective of change, the army embodied the Lebanese’s hope but also their frustrations.