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POST/GLOBAL CONTEXTS

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LEBANESE SUBJECTIVITIES AND MEDIA USE:  
POST/GLOBAL CONTEXTS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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## Abstract

Media use is neither socially determined nor socially determinative outside of subjectivity, the process by which the self makes meaning of its place in the world. To further our understandings of media and social change, this dissertation examines the relationship between Lebanese media use and subjectivities in different times and geographic locations, including within the Lebanese diaspora. It incorporates three case studies, including textual analyses of 1) representations of Syro-Lebanese Oklahoman immigrants in *The Oklahoman* from 1901 to 1958; 2) discourses on media and communication in the contemporary Lebanese civil war novel; and 3) constructions of journalistic authority within the Lebanese blogosphere during the 2006 Summer Israeli-Hizballah war. Through these case studies, this dissertation investigates how global power is constructed/perpetuated/resisted via existing communication channels and patterns of relating that have been created throughout history.



## CHAPTER 1

### Dissertation Introduction

In dealing with the postcolonial question, Arab cultural studies cannot afford to ignore the latest crucially important terrain of capitalism: cultural production and the relationship between the colonization of communication space and postcolonial identity.

Tarik Sabry (2007, 168).

A range of discursive and structural authorities bear upon the ways individuals and communities incorporate media into their lives—for instance, through the production and framing of issues related to security and identity, and in the construction of socio-economic/age/gender dynamics that shape cultural decodings and modes of use of new technologies. Conversely, individuals use media to shape these social forces. From this view, media use is neither socially determined nor socially determinative outside of its relationship with subjectivity, the process by which the self makes meaning of its place in the world (Jackson 2002). The very concept of “new media” highlights how meanings and uses of media-as-technology shift over time. Signified in relation to fluid notions of “progress,” technology is constructed through and constructive of ideologies and power at specific historical junctures (Murphy and Potts 2003). Therefore the relationships between people and media are complex and highly contextual.

Nevertheless, the field of media studies suffers a “drastically foreshortened historical perspective” (Morley 2007, 3). Positioning new media as “the magical dreams of the era of technomodernity,” media studies scholars frequently assume a distinct break between a more “modern” present and “traditional” ways of the

past, particularly between eras of analogue and digital media (2). Currently, an array of popular discourses within global journalism and politics position media as determinative of Arab publics. This determinism takes both dystopic and utopic forms; new media can foster *jihad* or lead Arabs to democratic revolution, depending on the particular social processes or practices being explained as a “current event.” To help correct this ontological bias, investigations of new media must start to “chart the path” of the “tidal wave” of media use rather than merely investigating its current “froth at the crest” (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant and Kelly 2009, 3). Otherwise the field of media studies risks overemphasizing technological determinism—the idea of technology as the driving force behind social change—without basis.

With this dissertation, I help “chart the path” of media and social change by contributing a description of Lebanese media use and subjectivities in different times and geographic locations. Through an examination of situations of media use among Lebanese in Lebanon and within the Lebanese diaspora, I highlight the embeddedness of media within a world capitalist system that originated in histories of colonialism. Yet I also emphasize how Lebanese *use* media as instruments of material and discursive power. I look at the relationship between media and processes of subjectivity construction, negotiation, and maintenance. I argue that media, the situations enabling/constraining their access, and the ways in which humans use them must be positioned within broad spheres of historic, economic, and political relations. I demonstrate these contingencies through a

focus on how communication practices shape and are shaped by processes we label as “globalization.”

A lack of research and theoretical connections between fields of media studies and globalization studies has rendered our understanding of the connection between media and globalization as “vague and unspecified” (Rantanen 2005, 4). Additionally, such paucity of disciplinary connections leaves media and international communication scholars underrepresented in empirical and theoretical discussions regarding globalization (Kraidy 2005; Rantanen 2005). Finally, postcolonial theorists decry the “belatedness” of globalization theory to conversations on identity politics and representation (Loomba, Kaul, Bunzel, Burton and Esty, 2005). To help fill these lacunae, this dissertation moves between Lebanon and the United States to explore relationships between media and people in constructing global and local realities.

Although postcolonial, postmodern, and feminist theories discount “master narratives” (Appadurai 1996), critical scholars concur that “globalization” is primarily a neoliberal or “free market” capitalist enterprise (Robertson 2002; Dupuy 1998; Harvey 2005; Spivak 1997). Subsequently, with the demise of the state as the dominant context in which labor is divided, the “global” has become the main framework within which “haves” are distinguishable from “have-nots.”

Therefore, as per Lenin, imperialism is not only a political process involving dominance over territory, material resources, labor, and/or political and cultural structures. Imperialism is also an economic process and a particular phase of

capitalist development in the form of a world system (Loomba 1998). Imperialism therefore is a component of colonialism, but imperialism does not end when colonization formally ends. In this view, global power is constructed and perpetuated through existing communication channels and patterns of relating that have been created throughout history. Thus, globalization works through historical relationships and communication practices to continue to benefit transnational hierarchies of political and economic elites.

Since the 1990s, globalization has discursively operated as a “brazenly positivistic narrative with utopian desires and universalistic ambitions” of leveled hierarchies and global “equality” (Kzrishnaswamy 2002, 113). Within this context, “new media,” like other technologies, are signified within discourses of utopian fantasy that fetishize social “progress” through the power of idolized gadgets (Bauman 2006). New media’s “utopian universalism” bears a strong resemblance to the “civilizing mission” of earlier colonialisms, focusing on “progress” as the expansion of “free market” ideals, structures, and hierarchies (Fernandez 1999, 59). Therefore discourses about new media and global politics—e.g. that new media facilitate a global “public sphere,” or that they possess inherent capacities for “democratization,” “modernization,” and the extension of “soft power” across nations—demand investigation, if not also deconstruction and critique.

As Edward Said (1993) emphasized, colonial knowledge consistently manages to self-perpetuate and reproduce. Like other discourses, scholarship is inherently positioned; the researcher addresses her or his topic according to

certain ontological assumptions and objectives. In this dissertation, I seek to destabilize totalizing, metropolitan narratives about media use in the Arab world. I work to do so by bringing into relief the standpoint(s) of peripheral positions. As per Said's metaphorical retort to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, rather than maintaining the colonizers' riverboat view of the natives, I work to elucidate views of the imperial vessel from the river's edge. I consider Lebanese subjectivities and media use in various locales in order to interrogate media use in terms of histories of power.

Through such diversity of foci, I hope to highlight the effects of imperialism across time and place. As Stuart Hall (1990) asserts, world capitalism extends itself by saturating social relations "along the Maginot Lines of our subjectivities" (227). For instance, imperialism (re)produces a supposed "Western superiority" through categorizing discourses on "the normal and the abnormal, the developed and the undeveloped, the vanguard and the led, the liberated and the salvable" (Nandy 1983, x). Yet, considering our planetary history of colonial relations and globalizing imperialism<sup>1</sup> (Amin 1997; Lazarus 2004; Robertson 1992), "subject" and "object," or "center" and "periphery" do not abide by hemispheric distinctions. The cultural hierarchies necessitated by large-scale European colonialism — predicated on notions such as "modern," "civilized," and "upstanding"—fit squarely with the continued interests of capitalist expansion. The same notions still function as categories for interpellating or "hailing" (Althusser 1971) neoliberal subjects,

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<sup>1</sup> Over 92% of the earth's livable land surface has been colonized at some point in history (Loomba 1998).

across countries and between them. Suitable “selves” are articulated and sanctioned through the construction of dialectically unsuitable “others” within both national and transnational contexts.

However, a lack of transnational focus in research on “national” identity processes means that the role of globalizing/postcolonial/imperial practices and structures in constructing subjectivities are “routinely obscured” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1002). I seek to shed light on these forces by looking at the production of Lebanese subjectivities and media use across distance and over time. Lebanon provides a rich case study for looking at translocal ideologies that underpin subjective constructions. A relatively small but notoriously embattled country on the Eastern edge of the Mediterranean, Lebanon has historically maintained a “crossroad” position within contexts of Mediterranean circulation and exchange (Braudel 1972; Ribas Mateos 2005); Ottoman and European colonization (Akarli 1993; Zamir 1985); large-scale global emigration (Joseph 2009; Khater 2001); Arab nationalist, Islamist, and anti-imperialist projects (Hourani 1991; Khalaf 2002; Khalidi 1986; Khalidi 1979); regional petro-economies (Issawi 1964; Friedman 2006); hegemonic neoliberalism (Moore 2004; Mousseau 2002); neoliberal post-conflict discourse and funding (MacGinty 2007; Lund 2003); and post 9/11 United States policy and international relations (Acharya 2007; Simons and Tucker 2007). These multilayered encounters bear upon the strategies and practices of Lebanese media use and subjectivities. Lebanese media use and subjectivities also bear upon these transnational contexts.

Northern Africa and the Middle East



Figure 1: Courtesy of University of Texas Libraries

To demonstrate, modern Lebanese sectarianism, the fulcrum of Lebanon’s “unstable political equilibrium,” is at least partially a product of Ottoman and European colonial policies and actions (Makdisi 2004, 166). Lebanese sectarianism differs from mere religious identity in its emphasis on political position within a public space. A subjective process in which religion is used for political ends (Nandy 1990), modern Lebanese sectarianism reflect the nineteenth century colonial integration of Western representative concepts with local communal allegiances based on sect and clan (Khalaf 1987; Makdisi 2000). Lipschutz and Crawford (1996) highlight that, like nationalism, sectarianism is constructed rather than primordial, and therefore it comprises a process in which religious identity provides the “cultural and historical resources for mobilizing popular

support for particular elites” (6). In other words, sectarianism provides a potential site for ideological manipulation and strife. Sectarianism permeates all facets of public life in Lebanon, and arguably, the construction of Lebanese personhood (Ziadeh 2006; Joseph 2000).

A focus on Lebanese subjectivities such as sectarianism and diaspora and their relationship to media allows insight into how experiences of imperialism overlap and reproduce across history. Such focus can also show how people use media to contest power dynamics. Every aspect of contemporary Lebanese politics must be viewed through the lens of sectarian-based communal interests, the nepotistic corruption that has followed such sectarianism, and the potential of outside powers to form patron-client relationships with those bent on preserving their individual and group interests. This is no less true regarding the politics of new media. Communication infrastructure and technologies in Lebanon are bound to sectarian political processes and identity projects that have limited and delayed the availability of emerging new media in Lebanon. At the same time, though, people use media to negotiate, maintain, contest, and rework both sectarianism and the political economy of new media (Ludden 1996).

As an example, Peleikis (2006) describes how Internet use in a multi-sectarian village in the Lebanese Shouf reflects “national and global embeddedness” (142). Through the village website, Christian villagers negotiate the local conditions of conflict and the globalized conditions of migration by positioning Christian village members “at home” and abroad as a cohesive political



community and thus the village political majority. Previous research I have conducted on village-based Internet use among local and global Lebanese from southern Lebanon demonstrates how Lebanese collectively produce myths of origin and family narratives that bind them into sectarian- and village-based communities of interest across time and place. In these examples, media facilitate continued political fragmentation and sectarian imaginings of Lebanese identity among local and global Lebanese.

On the other hand, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, members of the global Lebanese blogosphere used new media during the summer 2006 Israeli-Hizballah war to construct shared subjective positions and journalistic identities across sectarian divides. During my fieldwork, I noted how Lebanese use new media such as mobile telephony and *Facebook* to organize protests and strikes against high cell phone tariffs. Global Lebanese develop and share innovative technologies like voice-over-internet-protocol applications in order to circumvent expensive and unreliable state-provided telephony in Lebanon. These examples demonstrate how multiple contexts shape and are shaped by media access and practices.

My own research experience reflects how the relationship between media and Lebanese subjectivity is complex and always situated. A descendant of Syro-Lebanese immigrants to the U.S., I set out during the late 1990s to investigate Lebanese American cultural identities. I joined other writers and scholars who were exploring a growing Lebanese and Arab American cultural and political consciousness not out of line with other multicultural trends within the U.S.

(Pulcini 1992; Hooglund 1987; Naff 1985; Orfalea 1988; Suleiman 1999). In my research, I discovered that Internet use was engendering shared identity processes between Lebanese in various locales. Upon the establishment of Internet servers in Beirut in 1995, Lebanese in Beirut and abroad demonstrated a sense of urgency in attempts to locate family and friends dispersed during the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war. Sites like "The Lebanese White Pages" and "Proud to be Lebanese.com" were established as early as 1996 through joint ventures between Lebanese in Lebanon and overseas.<sup>2</sup> Lebanese postings to comment boards formed a dialogue constitutive of the sites' identifying purposes, as early visitors to the Lebanese White Pages posted comments like

I think that this page is very important to Lebanese people since they can find each other again after the war has spread us every where in the earth...

Congratulations guys for unifying Lebanese together all over the world.

I seriously believe that this is the best way to unite Lebanese all around the world.

Thank you for your site and I hope this will be another successful step forward in the unity of our people.

Just want to express my gratitude on a wonderful idea. Hoping that more Lebanese will join your cause in bringing the Lebanese people closer in such difficult times.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Lebanese White Pages' founding partners are located in Beirut and France; see: <<http://www.leb.org>>; also see <<http://www.proud-to-be-lebanese.com>>.

<sup>3</sup> "Testimonials" at *The Lebanese White Pages*, available on: <<http://www.leb.org/v3/feedback>> [accessed 20 August 2003].

The emphasis on Lebanese “unity” provided Lebanese in Beirut a sense of post-war communal security. It underscored notions of Lebanon as a country with ties to people outside who would economically and physically rebuild the country.

Yet Beirutis and recent migrants were not the only Lebanese to find such websites useful. Members of the diaspora created directories and comment boards on which Lebanese from all over the world signed up and made connections. Many Lebanese created family websites and conducted genealogical research. As Erben (1991) points out, genealogy can serve as a source of historical sociology in that it “sheds light on family conduct historically” and demonstrates the ideological importance of issues for particular families, subgroups, and societies (275). To present your genealogical information is to announce sociologically who you are.

My research indicated that such sociological positioning constituted a strategic, political project. For instance, many diasporic Lebanese Christians descended from southern Lebanon, an area that was militarily occupied by Israel from 1982 to 2000, were responding to occupation, widespread migration from their local village, and Muslim political dominance in Lebanon by constructing/embellishing/emphasizing an Arab Christian ancestry and local territorial heritage which predated the Muslim expansion into the area during the 700s. In such ways, migrants “reconstruct or reinvent not only their traditions but their political claims to territory and histories from which they have been displaced” (Roychowdhury, 2000). This example demonstrates that the Lebanese diaspora constitutes more than a mere extension of the homeland—it is mutually

produced by and producing of it—and media comprises a tool through which such social relations are practiced.

In the decade since I began researching Lebanese media use and subjectivities, media has continued to change, as have many of the economic, political, and social contexts surrounding Lebanese media use. Throughout this dissertation, I describe some of these shifting contingencies. To do so, I implement Edward Said's (1993) contrapuntal framework of investigating "both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it" (67). Borrowing from Western music notions of counterpoint and fugue, Said (2000) proposes a polyvocal analysis that includes the "submerged but crucial presence of empire" (367). Unlike univocal readings that naturalize dominant narratives, a contrapuntal reading reveals "a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (Said 1993, 51). Conducting a contrapuntal analysis, I work to describe Lebanese media use and subjectivities in relation to practices of both globalization and postglobalization.

The "postglobal" arises in "those moments when globalization as a hegemonic discourse stumbles, when it experiences a crisis or setback" (Lopez 2008, 509). Elaborating on Robertson's (1992) notion of "globality" as a fluid, dynamic, and causal awareness of the "world as a whole," I label postglobality as consciousness of and/or action against "globalization" as imperialism. The emergent field of postglobalization theory brings together postcolonial and world-

systemss studies to analyze and disrupt “globalization” as a hegemonic, neo-liberal endeavor. Subsequently, through contrapuntal discursive and material analysis, I seek to demonstrate that Lebanese not only perpetuate, but also sometimes transform and resist, imperialism and sectarian logics through media use. In this way I hopefully sidestep the orientalist legacy of “essentialization and somaticization of group difference” in which all group activity is perceived as nothing more than thinly veiled sectarian politics and positioning (Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993, 12).

Within a contrapuntal framework, this study includes two broad approaches to media studies: critical political economy and cultural studies. Applying political economic research, I examine some of the structural forces—including state policy and modes of production—that shape media globally and in Lebanon. By considering technological properties, markets, policies, and social meanings surrounding media (Hanson 2008), I explain the contexts and power that constrain media, as well as the ways that people use media to address such power. I also apply a cultural studies approach that incorporates both textual analysis and ethnographic audience research. Textual analysis provides insight into possible meanings generated by polysemic texts, or texts open to multiple interpretations (Hall 1996), while critical audience ethnography explores the particular, situated, and frequently unexpected ways that people interpret and use media (Ang 1985). I draw on ethnographic research undertaken in Lebanon at different times over a six-year period, from 2002 to 2008. This includes a year

living in Beirut from March 2007 to May 2008. I have also conducted ethnographic research in Oklahoma and “online” since 1999.

In Chapter 2 I expand upon the theoretical framework I have introduced here. I explain the theoretical interrelationship between the terms “subjectivity” and “identity.” I then examine “globalization” through the critical lens of postglobalization, a concept that emerges at the intersection of postcolonial and globalization studies. I provide an overview of postcolonial and globalization studies approaches to imperialism and subjectivity. I point out where media studies theories should overlap with postcolonial and globalization studies but do not consistently do so. Finally, I position discourses on diaspora and sectarianism within currents of postglobalization.

Chapter 3 explains in more detail the methodologies used in this study. I give a brief overview of contrapuntal analysis, and I provide an ontological overview of critical political economy and cultural studies to justify my treatment of them as distinct methodological traditions. I then explain practices of political economy, textual analysis, and critical ethnography. I describe my research questions, my specific methods of research, and my data collection. Finally I address the topic of reflexivity and explore issues related to my position as a researcher conducting this study. These issues include matters and concerns that arose out of ethnographic fieldwork.

Chapter 4 places the interrelationship between media use and Lebanese subjectivities, particularly diaspora and sectarianism, in a broader historical

perspective. It describes that, although Lebanese subjectivities are nominally related to the nation-state of Lebanon, their construction must be positioned within a global sphere of processes. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the Ottoman and European colonial contribution to Lebanese sectarianism and sectarianized Lebanese media and communication. I then explicate the role of communication in the mutual construction of “Lebanon” between Lebanese “at home” and in diaspora. Particularly, I point out how racial hierarchies and international relations help organize and are organized through local and global media practices.

Chapter 5 explores Lebanese experiences of conflict through Lebanese literature as a site of response. “The Lebanese civil war novel” (Rida-Sidawi 2004) designates an outpouring of literature over the last four decades by writers in many geographic locations who have addressed the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war. These novels collectively articulate the centrality of media and communication to Lebanese experiences of militarized political violence. In a context in which media failed to provide a “public sphere” (Habermas 1991) of reliable information or space for dialogue through which Lebanese could make sense of their experiences, the novel emerged as an alternative public sphere (Fraser 1990). Through literature, authors challenged not only the inadequacies of local journalism, but also the shortcomings and biases of Western-dominated global journalism in dealing with the conflict. The Lebanese civil war novel became a cultural domain through which Lebanese negotiated and articulated alternative visions of media and communication. I examine how authors transcended deeply-embedded

imperialistic and sectarian power structures to articulate a media poetics of decolonized practices, free from dominant conventions and limitations (Salazar 2004). These poetics and practices can be discerned in later forms of Lebanese citizen journalism, as explicated in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 looks at the Lebanese “blogosphere” during the Summer 2006 war between Israel and the Lebanese Shi’ite organization Hizballah, or “Party of God.” As bloggers reported on traditional media and traditional media reported on blogs, these frequently dichotomized practices jointly originated “a new cross-format trend” (Ward 2007, 2). As I assert in this chapter, the symbiotic relationship between blogs and traditional Western journalism went beyond mere sharing of content. My analysis focuses on the construction, negotiation, and maintenance of journalistic authority, a mode of occupational professionalism constructed through journalists’ efforts to claim for themselves a “monopoly” on “journalistic expertise” (Anderson 2006, 17). I describe how and why Lebanese blogs influenced constructions of traditional Western journalistic authority during the Summer 2006 war.

In Chapter 7, I conclude this dissertation with a summation of the main issues and insights raised in this study.



## CHAPTER 2

### Theory: Subjectivity, Postglobalization, and Media

In this chapter, I work to establish a theoretical framework for analyzing Lebanese subjectivity and media use that adequately accounts for global structures of power and the human capacity for autonomy, resistance, and change. My aim in this dissertation is to provide a nuanced understanding of both the ideological and material authority of old and new media, and the ways in which media facilitate modes of agency that frequently take scholars by surprise (Ang 2003). In the following pages I explain how and why I consider “subjectivity” to be a suitable focal point for this exegesis. To do so, I provide further explanation of the theoretical interrelationship between the terms “identity” and “subjectivity.” I then examine “globalization” through the critical lens of postglobalization, a concept that emerges at the intersection of postcolonial and globalization studies, and I provide an overview of postcolonial and globalization studies approaches to subjectivity. I point out where media studies theories should overlap with postcolonial and globalization studies but do not consistently do so. Finally, I position discourses on sectarian and diasporic subjectivities within currents of postglobalization studies.

Subjectivity emerges as a response to postmodernist and poststructuralist critiques of the concept of “identity” (Bauman 2004). Critiqued for its collusion in Western/modernist glorifications of the individual (Grossberg 1996), the notion of identity is seen as assuming the presence of a stable, autonomous subject with an

“authentic voice” (Griffiths 2004). For instance, early writings on identity and new media treat identity as composites of stable, universalist categories—including gender, ethnic, race, and place-based categories—that new media users can freely “move between” (Turkle 1995). That the World Wide Web can unshackle us from these essential designations and allow us to “experiment” with our identity remains a foundational myth in celebrations of new media (Rheingold 2002; Valkenburg, Schouten and Peter 2005).

This modernist ideology of individualism, which rests upon the presumed existence of a self-determining individual with free will, provides the underpinnings for, among other dominant constructions, the modern liberal subject—a universal-within-democracies-and-free-markets rational citizen and consumer (Rose 1996). In the absence of such a universally self-contained subject—as repeatedly demonstrated since the 1940s and 50s Frankfurt School analyses of culture industries, citizenship, and consumption within the United States—many critical media scholars have opted instead to discuss a poststructuralist-informed notion of “subjectivity” (Rohle 2005). Subjectivity explicitly acknowledges personhood as a constructed, discursive process not immune to material and symbolic power, but not entirely dominated by it either (Fiske 1987).

“Subjectivity” as conceptualized at the intersection of postcolonial and globalization theories questions the privileged position of “the individual” within modernist/neoliberal discourse and subsequently addresses identity as a

discursive construction. Thus, like the “subject”—a connotation of being both exerted upon (made a subject to) and exerting power over (subjecting someone to something)—subjectivity theoretically constitutes a site of both domination and resistance. Additionally, conceptualizations of subjectivity are indispensable for reading the complexities of power, including how pre-existing, historically-embedded roles and forms of identification such as national, gendered, sectarian, and diasporic identities demonstrably work to shape the construction of selves (Brunt 1996; Butler 1990).

I therefore articulate subjectivity as a political project through which I seek more transnationally and historically informed understandings of colonial, racist, and neoliberal pressures on personhood. Pursuing a holistic knowledge, I emphasize subjectivity as spanning processes of domination, negotiation, and resistance (Hall 1996). I do not mean to suggest that subjectivity is a tidy theoretical resolution to the complexity of the subject/object binary, nor do I wish to suppress “the ontological gaps within identity formation and subjectivity and the continuing shortfalls within our theorizing of those concepts” (Carrington 2008, 424). Rather, I aim to shed light on dense, self-perpetuating meshes of colonial/imperial power, illuminating the ways they are (re)produced and how they are opposed as individuals and communities are determined by and respond to local and global power structures and processes. Therefore, this study focuses on historical and contextual relationships between subjectivity and media use among global Lebanese.

## **Identity and subjectivity: partly interchangeable, partly not**

“‘Identity’ and ‘subjectivity’ are terms often used in media studies. They are partly interchangeable: both refer to the way we understand who we are—our identity—and the position from which we look at and understand the world—our subjectivity” (O’Shaughnessy and Stadler 2008, 193).

Within cultural and postcolonial studies, identity is generally considered to connote the relational process by which subjects position themselves/are positioned through language, representation, and performativity (Butler 1990; Hall 1996). Just as “culture” is something carried out, not possessed, identity constitutes a conditional practice rather than an inherent set of features. However, identity does not exist in a social vacuum; culture acts as a “historical reservoir” through which various forces and processes work to impose themselves on identity construction (Pratt 2005). Thus identity is relational to, but not determined by, culture and history. Whereas media theory generally “stresses the present (the moment of authorship)” in identity construction, postcolonial studies focuses on identity as “rooted in specific historic pasts” (Fernandez 1999, 64).

Historical-rooting of identity is problematic for some cultural and media studies scholars, who caution against the suggestion of identity as a “collective treasure of local communities,” formed in cultural isolation, robust yet vulnerable and needing protection (Tomlinson 2003, 69). In order to avoid what they perceive as essentialized identities, some cultural studies scholars research the relationship between media reception and subjectivities. In this view, subjectivities consist of contingent, fluid self-conceptions that are *made* from the symbolic matter at hand (Biehl, Good, & Kleinman 2007).

Poststructural notions of subjectivity can be traced to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, in which personhood emerges from daily interactions between the self and the Other. As elaborated through the work of Louis Althusser (1974), symbolic matter related to "the self" accumulate through symbolic interpellation, a process in which ideologies—dominant notions related to politics, values, products, etc—"hail" a subject to form around their ideals. Michel Foucault (1970) made Antonio Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony central to conceptualizations of subjectivity. Emphasizing hegemony as an active incorporation and transformation of dominant ideas, Gramsci and then Foucault emphasized that ideological power is produced through the consent of the underclasses. As per Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) emphasis on dialogic interrelations and the plurality of consciousness, dominant ideology is not merely an imposition of ideas from above but it is produced through dialogic interaction. Stuart Hall (1996) further elaborated on Gramsci and Foucault to reinstate subjectivity as interpretation, reminding readers that subjects engage in negotiated or even resistant readings of texts.

Poststructural subjectivities are ephemeral, yet active. Their theoretical appeal for media and cultural studies rests in their capacity for symbolic agency. Responding to the monolithic, passive audiences of post-World War II media effects research in the United States, global media studies scholars since the 1970s and 80s have worked to methodologically and theoretically emphasize active audiences and culturally situated readings of media texts (Mitchell and Hansen 2010). In this study of media use and Lebanese subjectivities, I employ the

poststructural approach to subjective analysis in order to emphasize that the relationship between media and people is complex and highly contextual. Historical processes of colonization, armed conflict, and diaspora construct Lebanese subjectivities and are constructed by them through communication practices.

Some scholars, faced with capitalism's post-1980s hyper-expansion through "globalized" structures and discourses, caution that overemphasizing discursive interpretation at the expense of material concerns and ideological analysis actually works in the favor of dominant power (Babe 2009). As Mazzarella (2004) puts it, the "ironic upshot" of cultural studies' reception research is their contribution to the perpetuation of discursive globalization by creating the image of "a seamlessly functioning capitalist culture-machine, kept from achieving total hegemony only by the mischievous 'agency' of what used to be called the masses" (350). Furthermore, various scholars assert that subjectivity's basis in psychoanalytical literature renders it too focused on interiorized symbolic processes. They therefore wrestle with how to observe and analyze subjective processes prior to their articulation (Deleuze 2003), and how to reconcile inadequacies in the literature on subjectivity such as lack of attention to embodied issues like race (Bergner 2005; Carrington 2008) and gender (Adkins 2004). Scholars must also contend with the fact that theories about subjectivity provide little insight into the ways in which interiorized symbolic matter is shaped for representation (Dean 1994; Gannon 2006). They caution that, without consideration of the codes, rules, and histories that construct different cultural spheres and actions, analyses of

subjectivity merely constitute “a seductive but naïve hermeneutics” (Rose 1996, 304).

Despite these apparent shortcomings, poststructural theorizing on subjectivity acknowledges discursive power in subjective production while not necessarily condemning its subjects to repeating history. Ethnographic research of subjectivity can work to demonstrate how “human desire, imagination, agency, and practical acumen inevitably have a profound impact on the possibilities” of human action, while simultaneously such research looks at ways “subjects are epiphenomena, constructed by culturally specific discursive regimes” (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007, 353-357). Similarly, a broad range of interdisciplinary approaches to globalization now point to the “dynamic and plural nature of processes of identity formation” (Nijman 2007, 176). In particular, postglobal studies—those that bring together discursive and structural analysis to investigate globalization as an imperializing project—highlight that “in a post-global world the concept of identity has been challenged; it is a changing, fluid, and ambiguous construct” rather than an essentialized product (Elsheshtawy 2008, 236). In this sense, identities are contested as both signifiers and signs. Not only must they be analyzed in terms of their symbolic content, but they must be viewed at the level of symbolic form (Nairn 2008). Subjective analysis in the poststructuralist tradition can further such holistic semiotic research on identity processes and social change.

### *Subjectivity in the context of war*

Among the contexts salient to construction of Lebanese subjectivity is collective violence and armed conflict. Recent anthropologies position violence as a process of communication—as a force that impacts the symbolic universe of its perpetrators, victims, and witnesses (Das & Kleinman 2000; Greenhouse, Mertz, and Warren, 2002; Nordstrom 2004). Therefore, social transformations such as war can fragment and disrupt subjectivity. Aijmer and Abbink (2000) define violence as a purposeful use of force, or threat of the use of force, “effected by physically and symbolically communicating these intentions and threats to others” (xi). As an act of symbolic communication, dependent on context, violence is always ambiguous except that it relies on intentional threat. As Lacan specifically asserted, the subject is constructed through its observation of another object. Thus violence, in imposing relational force on embodied consciousness, undermines the self’s ability to “make sense” of experience. It therefore interrupts subjectivity, the process by which the self makes meaning of its place in the world (Jackson 2000).

Due to its relational construction, subjectivity incorporates positionality, or a sense of a “point from which to view” the object with which it is in relation. Subjective interpretation of violence is not a direct translation of experience, but rather it is constructed through the subject’s position or point of view in a variety of relations, networks, and discursive systems (Das and Kleinman 2000). Interrupting the subjective, violence also interrupts the realm of the intersubjective, where individual subjectivities are performed and recognized.



Arendt (1998) describes intersubjectivity as the process by which the “private” or “subjective” becomes “public.” The public, therefore, is a communicative sphere in which groups negotiate and construct public interests from contesting private interests. Yet as Jackson (2002) points out, Arendt’s “private” is not mere individuality. Rather, it is a “space of independent and reclusive subjectivities unseen or heard by others” (3). What is made public are only those certain thoughts and desires considered compatible with public space. As Habermas (1987) would later suggest in his theory of communicative action, it is when marginalized individuals and groups are denied “voice” that they are “privatized” away from the public sphere. Das and Kleinman (2000) demonstrate how violence alters intersubjectivity, “the interior experience of the person that includes his or her position in a field of relational power” (1).

Yet, the performative process of identity can also be examined as a means of empowerment in the face of violence. Jackson (2002; 2005) explains how storytelling, a communicative process that transforms what is private into the public, can constitute a process of agency. As Benhabib (1996) describes, narrative action is not the revelation of “some essential meaning that is already in place,” but rather an action that “brings new understandings into existence through social interaction” (Jackson 2002, 125-126). In a Lacanian sense, in which the conscious self is always constituted through interexperience, the power of storytelling is not only at an intersubjective level of language, but also at a “protolinguistic” level in which we (sub)consciously/psychologically reposition ourselves in relation to others, our “place in the universe” (Jackson 2002). This adheres to what Daniel

(1996) calls “an agentive moment” (189), when a shift in the sense of oneself from “an object being acted upon by the world” to a “subject acting upon the world,” occurs. In this way, even in contexts of violence, subjects shape and are shaped by experience.

### **“Globalization” through a postglobal lens**

Despite dominant depictions of globalization as the “harmonization” of economic, political, and cultural practices throughout the world (Held & McGraw 2000), “globalization” and its neoliberal economic norms, institutions and policies—which include free-market, capitalist practices geared toward unregulated global trade (Robbins 1999)—have resulted since the 1980s in lower wages, higher rates of unemployment, and fewer social services for the working classes (Harvey 2005). Dupuy (1998) points out that, as Marx and Engels described in *The Communist Manifesto*, globalization represents

the tendency of capitalism to eliminate all spatial barriers to the reproduction and accumulation of capital and to reconfigure the territorial organization of production and exchange without eliminating the uneven and unequal development of that mode of production within and between nation-states (56).

Thus, as Lopez (2008) succinctly states, “The idea that globalization was ever intended to transform the lives of migrant labourers and other subalterns in any meaningful way remains at best questionable” (510).

Adding to this critique, Parameswaran (2008) calls for a “reflexive agenda of critical globalization studies” in which “critical” implies “a commitment to interrogating the historical specificity of our current material and political

conditions” (123). Such detailed, concrete interrogations could serve as a “rigorous correction” to notions of globalization as “inevitable” (123). Critical globalization studies constitute an emerging interdisciplinary space in which theorists consider economics and social justice (Applebaum and Robinson 2005, as cited in Parameswaran 2008). However, as Darling-Wolf (2008) points out, knowledge production and academia are themselves situated within the frequently-masked structures and discourses of global capitalism and neoliberal hegemony. As Spivak (1997) suggests, in order to overcome the “imprisonment of” and “habituation to” all-encompassing global capital, we might consider capitalism “not as the source of authoritative reference but in terms of the constant small failures in and interruptions to its logic” (469). These small failures and interruptions are labeled here as “the postglobal” (Lopez 2008).

The postglobal, situated at the intersection of postcolonial and globalization theories, constitutes a challenge to imperialistic discourses and structures. While both postcolonial and globalization studies address “imperialism, capitalism, and modernity...(and) the unequal power relations between different geopolitical locations on the globe” (Krishnaswamy 2002, 106), they are founded on discrete ontological traditions. Postcolonial theory emerges from the field of literary criticism to provide a method for analyzing power in discursive constructions and representation (Loomba 1998). Globalization theory arises out of the neo-Marxist world-systems tradition, and thus foregrounds material analysis and issues of economic structure (Held and McGrew 2007). Although both fields contain voices calling for theoretical expansion to include structural, social, and textual analysis,

each field remains predominantly oriented toward particular modes of analysis (Brennan 2004). Thus various theorists call for the unification of these traditions into a symbiotic, holistic critique of neo-imperialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffen 2007). In the following section, I provide an overview of postcolonial and globalization studies approaches to power and subjectivity.

### **Postglobal discourse, structure, and subjectivity**

#### *Postcolonial theory: discourse and subjectivity*

Postcolonial theory challenges power by challenging the discourses that seek to justify it. Foregrounding the subjectivity of the colonial relationship, postcolonialism focuses on discursive processes that foster (re)production of Western cultural dominance (Nandy 1983). Postcolonial theorist Edward Said essentially inaugurated the field with his explanations of orientalism, a “style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and...the ‘Occident,’” or the “East” and the “West” (Said 1978, 2). These distinctions are produced by, and in turn produce, colonial and imperial hierarchies. As Ansari (2008) writes, “central to Orientalism is power: the Orient can be made the Orient because of subjugation” (50). Of particular note to this study is how power functions through the Western hegemonic cultural representation of people from the Middle East as dangerous and “pre-modern” (McAlister 2001; Said 1996; Shaheen 2001), and how people from the Middle East work to contest such stereotypes.

Said’s *Orientalism* elaborated on the writings of Frantz Fanon, a Martiniquan-born psychiatrist and French activist for the National Liberation

Front who directly confronted European philosophy. Indicting colonialism in Marxist terms, Fanon (1961/1994) described how Europe was created from the sweat and dead bodies of non-White races. He estimated the world to be parceled out not on the basis of class but on the basis of whites and non-whites. In this way Fanon repositioned Marx's teleological class relations as the motor of history to race relations as the motor of history. In doing so, Fanon recognized colonization as an ideological set of ideas and as a discursive system of power and he addressed it as a site of resistance. Yet, according to Homi Bhabha (2005), Fanon believed the chaotic nature of human consciousness undermined any determinate conditions of colonization; he saw society as a "constellation of delirium" (62) and so he did not propose any widespread theory concerning colonization, nor did he address the historicity of the colonial experience.

Michel Foucault, however, rejoined structuralism and Marxism to address discursive power within broader ideological and historical processes. Elaborating on structuralism's concern with linguistics (as per Saussure and Levi-Strauss), Foucault (1970) asserted that all human ideals and all knowledge is structured by the laws of a particular code, or "discourse." It was Foucault's seminal assertion that language constructs subjects and that power rests in the ability to create the codes or discourse which give language meaning. For Foucault, subjectivities emerge from discursive processes made possible by knowledge regimes— institutions, experts, and policies working in conjunction to set the boundaries of normativity, desirability, and truth.

Edward Said made Foucault's concern with subjectivity, discourse, and power central to the study of colonization. Said (1978) explained how nineteenth century Western representations of the Orient (re)produced colonial power. In this way he positioned European knowledge production as a means of supporting Western colonialism. As Said asserted, no knowledge about the Orient could ever be "objective," as it is produced by individuals embedded in a colonial relationship. In Foucauldian terms, the colonial project functions as a knowledge regime that frames the colonized subject as savage, pre-modern, and uncivilized while the colonizer is defined in the opposing terms of the binary--cultured, civilized, and modern. Elaborations on Said's thinking question whether "the subaltern," or oppressed (Spivak 1988), the nation (Chatterjee 1993), or academia (Chakrabarty 1997) can be rescued from the cyclical hermeneutics of colonial knowledge production.

Although some scholars within Arab and postcolonial studies argue for transcendence from the subject/object binary (Aijez 1992; Moghadam 2003), most Arab theorists see the social and political "modernizing" projects that accompany European and Western neo/imperialism in the Middle East-North African region as having deeply affected Arab culture (Jabri 1991; Labib 2007; Said 1994). Arab cultural theorists highlight how these effects operate within the production of subjectivity. Sabry (2007) positions Arab identity processes in relationship to the contested construction of "modernity," a site of frequent Westernization, but also of multiple global influences. Labib (2007) emphasizes the inescapable dialectic between "Western" and Arab identities. He asserts that the Middle Eastern

encounter with “modern” imperialism has reversed the trajectory of Arab culture from one of expansion to an inward “pursuit of the self” (v). Labib highlights that the pervasive Arab perception of the West as “the other Enemy by excellence” (v), is “not the result of a mental structure that belongs to the Arabs, but that of an inflicted relationship that is deemed unjust,” colonization (v-vi).

More broadly, cultural studies theorists caution scholars not to be “duped” by Western postmodern relativism and its self-congratulations on the end of “center” and “periphery.” To allow this delusion denies “the subject of this difference the right to negotiate its own conditions of discursive control” (Richard 1993, 160). Postcolonial theorists in particular concur with these postulations. As Shome and Hegde (2002) assert, “The issue is not that difference, marginality, disempowerment, et cetera, do not matter. Rather, the issues is how they matter, how they are evoked....and how they are reconstituted through the differential logics in globalization” (176). These theorists urge scholars to acknowledge the continuing operation of this binary as a first step toward debunking “the taken-for-granted superiority of the metropolitan or imperial ‘center’ that occupies not only the material institutions of power and dominance, but also how superiority figures into the imaginations of both the oppressor and oppressed” (Soyini Madison 2005, 49). I focus in my dissertation on discursive power and subjectivity and how they perpetuate and challenge uneven global relationships.

Yet, while the post-Saidian global academy acknowledges and now takes for granted a long history of Western cultural imperialism, it has failed to produce

much useful information about “where and how cultural infiltration occurs” (Sabry 2007, 160). Postcolonial theory is frequently criticized for its erasure of the materiality of colonial and neo-colonial oppression. Such disregard renders postcoloniality incapable of mounting meaningful resistance to the power of global capitalism. As Dirlik (1994) asserts, “By throwing the cover of culture over material relationships, as if the one had little to do with the other,” postcolonial theory not only disguises the ideological functioning of colonial Eurocentrism, “but also, ironically, provide(s) an alibi for inequality, exploitation, and oppression in their modern guises under capitalist relationships” (346). As Amin (1992) cautions, we should refrain from attributing causality to culture and identity without considering capitalist development and divisions of labor. Amin highlights globalization as the continuation of colonization—a world system that requires material and structural analysis. In this dissertation, in addition to discursive power, I also consider the overlapping global structures and material relationships that produce and are produced through Lebanese media use and subjectivity.

*World-systems and globalization theories: structure and subjectivity*

World-systems and globalization theories initially centered on material analysis. In doing so, they highlighted the ways in which countries exist embedded in a world capitalist system whose origins are in the history of colonization (Robertson 1992). World-systems theory emerged from dependency theory, which was the “Third World’s” reply to modernization theory (So 1990). Modernization theory developed during the post World War II expansion of the U.S. economy, and



in the context of the emerging “Cold War,” when U.S. social scientists examined and theorized possibilities for “modernization,” economic development, and political stability in the “Third World” (Lerner 1958; Rostow 1960). Theorists from those “Third World” countries, initially mostly Latin American, but then more broadly, critiqued such U.S. academic efforts not only for their lack of economic results but also for their focus on “inherent” cultural, social, and infrastructural obstacles to development within countries (So 1990). Dependency theorists repositioned their research focus from modernization theory’s supposedly culture-based explanations to a focus on the interrelationship between countries and various external factors, including histories of colonization (Frank 1969; Cardoso and Faletto 1967).

World-systems theory emphasizes the ways countries are situated within a system and how their economies have been reoriented within that system to fit the demands of world trade. Emmanuel (1972) pointed out the unequal exchange of goods that causes peripheral countries to endure a trade relationship of overdeveloped export of agricultural goods and importation of technical goods. Although world-systems theorists propose a variety of theories and solutions for economic dependency, the theoretical structure of “core versus periphery” is common to world-systems literature. “New dependency theory” elaborates on the core-periphery model to stress the heterogeneity of “underdeveloped” countries, whose particular historical and social contexts must be analyzed through research (Held and McGrew 2000).

Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) incorporated dependency theory's core-periphery model of uneven exchange to examine underdevelopment, poverty, and marginalization from the perspective of a world system. This world system, positioned as its own entity, continues to appear in early theorizing of "globalization." Neo-Marxist writings have produced critiques addressing the globalization of political structures, the power of multinational corporations, and neo-liberalism through the bimodal "core-periphery" (Amin 2001). This theorizing was later extended into core-semiperiphery-periphery, in order to afford upwards and downwards mobility to countries as they "develop" (So 2000).

Wallerstein's framework does not adequately incorporate or otherwise consider the issue of culture, either as a complex, multifaceted process or as a force that itself acts upon globalization (Robertson 1992). Jameson (1986) incorporated a world-systems framework into his theorizing, but he privileged material causation. Therefore his "world culture" merely constituted a world capitalist "superstructure" determined by economic structure. Robertson (1992) argues against such economic determinism and monolithic treatment of culture. Instead, he stresses that

cultural pluralism is itself a constitutive feature of the contemporary global circumstance and that conceptions of the world-system, including symbolic responses to and interpretations of globalization, are themselves important factors in determining the trajectories of that very process (61).

Thus Robertson argues that "globality," an "increasing consciousness of the world as a whole" (77), should provide a major point of reference in the consideration of globalization.

Pointing out the role of postcolonial scholars in determining discussions on cultural globalization, particularly those discussions focused on the nexus of the local and the global, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007) describe globalization studies as having undergone a recent “cultural turn” that has, “most importantly, provided a greatly nuanced view of globalization that developed from its understanding of the complexities of imperial relationships” (105). Globalization theorists now recognize that, as per Appadurai (2001), globalization is a process far more complicated than mere core-periphery economic relations, and that this “new globalization” (Hall 1991) involves issues of cultural massification and “the nature and survival of social and cultural identity” (104). I therefore focus on these discursive and material forces in the production of Lebanese subjectivities.

### **Globalization and (the absence of) media studies**

Media and information communication technologies are central to global constructions and experiences of power. Unfortunately, though, a lack of research and theoretical connections between fields of media studies and globalization studies has rendered our understanding of the connection between media and globalization as “vague and unspecified” (Rantanen 2005, 4). Such a paucity of connections leaves media and international communication scholars underrepresented in empirical and theoretical discussions regarding globalization (Kraidy 2005; Rantanen 2005). An overemphasis on interdisciplinary rivalry and distinction between intercultural and international communication scholars in the U.S. caused them to “miss the big picture of emerging globalization in which media

and communications played a pivotal role in people's experience" (Rantanen 2005, 3). Similarly, British media studies remained focused on media institutions rather than individual or communal media use. Therefore British media studies did not "miss" emerging globalization but rather asserted it merely to be "nothing new" (Rantanen 2005, 3), just another stage of empire (as per Boyd-Barrett, 1998). British cultural studies recognized the homogenizing effects of globalization, but in addressing the process as a larger cultural one, overlooked the role of media (Rantanen 2005). Fields of international communication and media studies are polarized by these discourses about cultural dominance of media goods and cultural resistance against them (Mitchell and Hansen 2010). Disciplinary divisions revolve around Marx's model of base-superstructure, in which the superstructure of ideology produces a false consciousness that undermines human agency and thus determines the base of social experience. As a result, media studies scholars, including international and intercultural communication scholars, British media studies, and British cultural studies, have not adequately explored globalized media power as discursive and structural practice.

During the second-half of the twentieth century, as media goods produced by Western corporations came to dominate local markets throughout the world, theorists began to notice patterns of relationships of cultural imperialism and media dependency between "First World" and "Third World" countries. For Schiller (1969, 1996) cultural imperialism was defined as the domination of the U.S. entertainment, communications, and information (ECI) industry over the institutions of other, particularly "non-developed," countries. More broadly

though, cultural imperialism theory came to be constituted by a set of discourses related to media imperialism, nationality, critique of global capitalism, and critique of modernity (Tomlinson 2001), as well as globalization (Flew 2008).

Various scholars countered, however, that to focus exclusively on political economy risks silencing the role of local agents. Rather than exhibiting a uniform cultural dependency, local agents translate and “indigenize” cultural imports (Tomlinson 1999, 84). While many scholars within the British cultural studies tradition claim that political economy reduces context to crass materialism (Thompson 2003), others insist that to focus exclusively on signification and interpretation erases material concerns and is thus “status quo affirming” (Babe 2009, 64).

Issues related to technological power and agency are generally framed within discourses of technological determinism versus social constructivism. The former attributes causality to the very type of technology or media under study, with a lack of consideration for the social or historical context in which that technology is embedded. The latter considers the ways in which historical and cultural contexts of technology use shape how the technology is employed. Kember (2006) describes these positions as composing a continuum of determinative effects, with technological determinism assigning technology a determinate role in the formation of culture, and social constructivism seeing culture as shaping the uses of experiences of technology.

In response, Lister (2003) asserts that this over-emphasis on determinism versus social construction has precluded an examination of technology itself. Morley (2007) demonstrates how the celebration of new media as “virtual” or “immaterial” has underemphasized the material level of control of information and communication technologies, such as “material geographies of new computer based industries” and “continuing geographical concentration of hub web sites” (7). While information and communication technologies were initially hailed as a means of “leapfrogging” underdevelopment, their capacity to promote human development is limited by other components of local reality, such as electricity, infrastructure, and bureaucracy. Additionally, communication technologies cannot make up for access to clean water, medical care, or good governance.

In light of these vying theoretical perspectives, I apply both postcolonial and globalization theories to holistically explore the media-globalization nexus. This joining of theoretical perspectives can provide insight into “the social processes through which they [the media] are constructed and interpreted and the contexts and pressures which shape and constrain those constructions” (Golding and Murdock 1978, 72). For instance, as the industries surrounding ICTs move some countries from periphery to semi-periphery positions, or from semi-periphery to core, a world-systems structural analysis is necessary for exploring broad sets of global forces and effects. A lag in ICT development, including in telecommunication infrastructure and skilled labor, contributed to the increased economic global marginalization of many periphery countries in the 1990s (Rathgeber 2000). The economics of ICTs have also contributed to increased global

fragmentation of labor, with data processing and service industries becoming concentrated in certain periphery countries. The very structure of ICTs has moved “semi-peripheral” Asian nations to core nations, which structurally illustrates how “modernity” is a globalized process with multiple sets of players. Yet, as Rathberger (2000) asserts,

If globalization is interpreted as another stage of imperialism, it is even more pernicious than its predecessors, as it co-opts large numbers of people living in developing countries and makes distinctions among individuals based on education, skills, and access to ICTs, rather than on the simple centre-periphery or other geographical paradigms of an earlier age. Globalization has created new outsiders in the metropole, just as it has created new insiders in the periphery (19).

World-systems perspectives help elucidate some of the contexts and complexities of these transnational processes.

In a “symbolic” phase of world capitalism (Lyotard 1985, Poster 2001), in which profit increasingly derives from the “sale of signs and experiences,” new media “are at once [capitalism’s] infrastructural means and its privileged signs” (Mazzarella, 346-347). The Internet, mobile phones, and other wireless technologies require an analysis that goes beyond an examination of their production, texts, and audiences. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2005) suggest that studies of new media require a consideration of artifacts and devices, activities and practices, and new social arrangements and/or organizational forms. Besides structure, new media must be considered in their relationship to experience and meaning.

As Said (2005) asserts, “(H)uman beings, men and women, make their own history. And just as things are made, they can be unmade and remade” (366-367). Despite patterns of Western corporate dominance, media anthropologists continue to locate instances of local appropriation. Crain (1997) reminds us, “local actors are never simply the passive victims of such processes of commoditization and specularization,” and they therefore engage in “complex and elaborate symbolic politics in which resistance can take diverse forms and varied tactical paths” (292).

As Garnham (2000) writes, an understanding of media power must include consideration of the principles and values that circulate and construct human relations. Krishnaswamy (2002) reminds us, however, that, postglobal research requires a focus on the tension between the semiotic and the material that goes beyond “an easy cultural politics”:

The theoretical category of culture appears to have become far too overblown and overdetermined to be politically effective in the age of neoliberal globalization; indeed corporate globalization is thriving precisely by emptying out the subversive potential in culture and by incorporating various oppositional or alternative forms of cultural expression across the globe (108).

Similarly, Sabry (2007) calls for a reinsertion of the postcolonial subject into empirical investigations of neoimperialism. As Hall reminds us of imperialism, it operates through a self-righteous colonial “ethnicity” that “speaks itself as if it encompasses everything within its range” (21), always negotiating its sense of self “against difference” (22). Due to this dynamic interplay between global and local identities, Hall challenges postcolonial scholars to represent the multiplicity and contingency of local identifications. In my dissertation, I work to uncover and



convey the complexities of subjectivities and media use in the context of postcolonial global relations and world systems.

### **Communication and subjectivities: diaspora and sectarianism**

A particular concept of hybrid territorial attachment is the “diaspora,” a term connoting massive population displacement accompanied by the maintenance of “homeland” identity (Cohen 2008). “Diaspora” connotes three meanings: a social form, a type of consciousness, and a mode of production (Vertovec 1997). Each of these meanings is related to processes of communication and representation. As a social form, diasporas are groups of migrants and their descendents who are characterized by their “relationship-despite-dispersal” (278). Through various modes of communication, members maintain ties with their “homeland” and construct collective identities across borders. Diasporic consciousness is created by the tension between feeling distinct from the host culture and positively identifying with other cultural realms. As Stuart Hall (1996) asserted, for diasporic groups “identity becomes a ‘moveable feast,’ formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed” (277). Diaspora as cultural production involves hybrid processes of meaning making and fluid cultural values, practices that frequently rely on emerging forms of new media.

These recent conceptualizations of diaspora position it as a “social condition and a societal process” (Anthias 1998, 559). As Tabar (2005) urges, diaspora must be conceptually liberated “from its primordial character derived

primarily from anchoring the diasporic identity in a myth of origin” (9). Only then can scholars recognize diaspora’s “strategic essentialism,” in which “the primordiality...is bestowed with different characteristics depending on the context in which it is deployed and the social actors implementing this deployment”(9). According to Brian Keith Axel (2002), the Internet brings into question analytic categories like diaspora and their production of locality and identification. He writes, “diaspora, rather than a community of individuals dispersed from a homeland, may be understood more productively as a globally mobile category of identification” (426). Axel suggests a rethinking of “place” in relation to diasporas—rather than conceiving of place of origin as constitutive of a diaspora, it is more useful to think of a “diasporic imaginary,” or a “process of identification generative of diasporic subjects” (412). In this way, we can theorize how the diaspora creates the homeland, with the homeland existing not as a “locational identity” as much as an aspect of subjectification that is in relation with other kinds of images and processes (413).

Like diaspora, scholars recognize sectarianism as constructed rather than primordial. Nandy (1990) describes sectarianism as an identity process in which religion is used for political ends. Lipschutz and Crawford (1996) emphasize the ways in which sectarianism is an ideological construction in which religious identity provides the “cultural and historical resources for mobilizing popular support for particular elites” (6). As Ofeish (2004) asserts,

Sectarianism is mainly a political tool whose advocates often exaggerate the significance of "ethnic" markers in sectarian communities in order to stress

their differences and promote an identity of each community versus others. The proponents of sectarianism may shift tactics and arguments, sometimes drastically, to achieve power ends (n.p.).

These theorists highlight how sectarianism functions as a process for reinterpreting complex sets of forces and structures. Similarly, Ignatieff (1994) emphasizes the role of sectarianism in transforming collective relations from a state of “civic nationalism”—an ability to live peacefully despite the perception of difference—into “ethnic nationalism”—a positioning of an “enemy” on the basis of difference. In the post Cold War era, with the demise of imperial and great power influence, Ignatieff asserts that “huge sections of the world’s population have won the right of self-determination on the cruelest possible terms—they have been simply left to fend for themselves” (1994, 8). He describes how sectarianism takes the place of a weak state:

(T)he warlords...They appear wherever the nation state disintegrates...in the Lebanon, Somalia, Northern India, Armenia, Georgia, Ossetia, Cambodia...With their carphones, faxes and exquisite personal weaponry, they look postmodern, but the reality is pure early medieval (28).

Conversely, as opposed to Ignatieff’s view of sectarianism as taking the place of the weak state, Tambiah (1990) describes sectarian violence between the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka as heterogeneity versus a dominant state.

There occurs an increasing ‘theatricalization’ and an accompanying ritualization and polarization, in the escalating contents of violence between ethnic, religious, linguistic, or political minorities on the one side and the majority collectivities and established governments on the other (116).

According to Blok (2000), what is at stake in these dualities is identity and meaning, “and the group membership implied in them” (32).

Ussama Makdisi (2000) points out that, while sectarianism in Lebanon has deep historical roots, modern Lebanese sectarianism (which emerged after the mid-1800s) cannot be described as a monolithic historical force. Rather, it is something produced. He writes,

Because sectarianism refers to the deployment of religious heritage as a primary marker of modern political identity...in its modern context, sectarianism can no longer be taken for granted as a self-evident phenomenon...it is ultimately an act of interpretation (7).

Accordingly, Makdisi sees modern sectarianism as an avenue by which the inhabitants of Lebanon reinterpret “their own history, their own communal self-definition, and ultimately their own rigid social order” (8).

### **Subjectivities and media use**

Scholarship has long linked the construction of subjectivities such as national identity to communicative and media processes. Anderson (1991) describes the “nation’s” rise to prominence as a communal construction related to new forms of communication like the printing press, local newspapers, and capitalist publishing. Hobsbawm (1990) traces the modern concept of “nation” to the collective communication practices and use of common symbols facilitated by mass media, practices that “give a palpable reality to an otherwise imaginary community” (76). Gellner (1983) underscores how standardization of cultural symbols through mass media contributed to emergent nationalism among educated, professional classes.

Similarly, research on new media demonstrates ways in which subjectivity and new media processes reciprocally produce one another. For instance, Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qui, and Sey (2007) demonstrate the interrelationship between forms of identity and mobile telephony practices. Suspicion of surveillance shapes telecommunication use among immigrants in the U.S. and United Kingdom. Sectarian interests drive cellular provider-allegiance in Bosnia (Slatina 2005), and close familial connections shape patterns of use among Latinos in the U.S. (Leonardi 2003). Additionally, corporate telecommunication providers respond to emergent needs and market special packages such as pay-as-you-go options or counter-surveillance devices to particular groups (Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qui, and Sey 2007). Thus subjective processes shape the formation and availability of media. Conversely, media and communication practices construct subjectivities.

Although discourses surrounding new media celebrate its “immateriality” and the “death” of geography, national boundaries impose limits on new media use. Morley (2007) asserts that ICTs are “only as good as the material, social and institutional structures in which they are embedded, from the reliability of the local phone lines or electricity supply to the flexibility of the financial system or the efficiency of the relevant bureaucracy” (239). Additionally, in the actual practice of everyday living, in actions such as using a credit card to pay for a product or flight, the world remains particularly unglobalized (Dejevsky 2001, as cited in Morley 2007, 238).

Yet scholars emphasize the importance of media and communication technologies in the formation of shared subjectivities across borders (Georgiou 2006). Much recent scholarship examines the role of new media in maintaining/constructing “homeland”-based subjectivities for migrants (King 2003, Tynes 2007). Via the Internet, individuals and communities maintain a variety of interpersonal, group, and mass communication ties with their countries of origin, as well as ties with other collectives of migrants (Panagakos and Horst 2006). In this way, the Internet creates “spaces of politics” (Staeheli, Ledwith, Ormond, Reed, Sumpter and Trudeau 2002) from which groups challenge our traditional notions of territorially-bound identity processes. New media can empower and extend sectarian imaginings and communal identities (Ludden 1996). For instance, in the case of India, as new media facilitate mediated communication outside of state control, groups with sectarian interests are more easily able to broadcast, print, and circulate information and messages (Farmer 1996; Thomas 2006). In Egypt, new media are allowing minority sectarian groups to bring their issues to the forefront of public attention (Elsässer 2010). Fox (1996) explains the circulation of sectarian-based nostalgia in Indian pop music. Since the United States led invasion of Iraq and heightened Sunni-Shi’ia tensions across the Middle East, various scholars note how Arab satellite television news “reflect the sectarian situation on the ground and exacerbate it” (Anuari 2007, 254). Conversely, research in Northern Ireland demonstrates how new media is used by youth to form cross-sectarian friendships and associations.

As demonstrated by each of these examples, subjective practices such as diaspora and sectarianism are contingent on broader contexts and forces. Media and communication provide some of the tools through which subjects construct their realities. Simultaneously, media and communication practices help organize relations and realities among subjects. In my dissertation, I work to navigate this ambivalent potential of new media through an examination of both material and cultural processes. I take into account structures of power in the context of a historically constructed world system. I also describe ways in which subjects position themselves through language, representation, and performativity. I emphasize that each set of processes is highly context-dependent.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodologies: Media Use and Subjectivity in Fugue

Contemporary political and journalistic discourses position media as determinative of Arab publics. In contrast, I assert that media use is neither socially determined nor socially determinative outside of subjectivity, the process by which the self makes meaning of its place in the world. To further our understandings of media and social change, this dissertation examines the relationship between Lebanese media use and subjectivities in different times and geographic locations, including within the Lebanese diaspora. It incorporates three case studies, including 1) representations of Syro-Lebanese Oklahoman immigrants in *The Oklahoman* from 1901 to 1958; 2) discourses on media and communication in the contemporary Lebanese civil war novel; and 3) constructions of journalistic authority within the Lebanese blogosphere during the 2006 Summer Israeli-Hizballah war. Through these case studies, I mean to interrogate how global power is constructed/perpetuated/resisted via existing communication channels and patterns of relating that have been created throughout history.

In order to support my argument that media access and use must be positioned within broad spheres of historic, economic, and political relations, I consider in each of the three case studies how communication practices shape and are shaped by “globalization.” An extension of colonialism, globalization constitutes a neoliberal system of power that operates through historically existing



communication practices, connections, and patterns to benefit transnational hierarchies of political and economic elites. As per postglobalization theory, which brings together world-systems studies and postcolonial theory to analyze and disrupt “globalization,” I highlight the embeddedness of Lebanese subjectivities and media use within a world capitalist/(post) colonial system. Yet I also emphasize how Lebanese *use* media as instruments of material and discursive power. My goal is to demonstrate that Lebanese not only perpetuate, but also sometimes transform and resist, imperialism and sectarian logics through media use.

Therefore, as I explain in this chapter, I employ a contrapuntal analysis incorporating political economy, textual analysis, and ethnography to examine the relationship between Lebanese subjectivities and media use. In the following paragraphs, I elaborate on contrapuntal analysis. I then discuss the research methodologies used in this study: First, I provide an ontological overview of critical political economy and cultural studies to justify my treatment of them as discrete analytical paradigms; second, I describe practices of political economy, textual analysis, and critical ethnography. I follow a description of methodologies with an explanation of my specific methods of data collection, which include: historical research of primary and secondary documents; open-ended formal and informal interviews; and participant observation recorded in a set of fieldnotes. I then describe my method of data analysis, a textual analysis based on semiotic, Foucauldian discursive, and psychoanalytic theories. Finally, I address the topic of

reflexivity and explore issues related to my position as a researcher conducting this study.

### **Contrapuntal analysis**

Media studies must navigate two opposing theoretical trajectories. The first trajectory comprises theories pointing out the continuity and contingency of new media and already existing social contexts. As Mazzarella (2004) asserts, “the formal and material properties of a medium arise out of and crystallize a socially and historically determinate field of possibilities” (358). The theories of the second trajectory position a new technology, most frequently what is now known as new media, as heralding a break from the past. Mark Poster (2001), for example, seeks to move away from theoretical “underdeterminism,” the scholarly tendency as per the first trajectory to explain media in terms of extant social relations. As Hier (2008) elaborates on Poster, “the cultural medium of interactivity has changed—technologically and socially—and with it have emerged new forms of politics, subjectivities and global democratic forms of activism” (38). These two sets of discourses demonstrate an epistemological challenge for researchers of media and social change: to uncover the unpredictable and sometimes ironic ways in which change is taking place without overemphasizing change or overdetermining technology at the expense of still-existent social hierarchies and obstacles.

In a complex political context such as Lebanon, in which armed conflict, sectarian politics, and postcolonial structures contribute to the construction of the public sphere, it is easy to overlook ways in which individuals and communities

come up with their own communication and media practices of resistance. Simultaneously, it is easy to overlook the multifaceted ways in which historical power self-perpetuates and reproduces. In order to address the historically-situated yet still emergent potentials of media use among Lebanese, I undertake a methodological approach that makes visible both imperialism and the frequently ironic responses that imperialism provokes (Baudrillard 1985).<sup>4</sup> I implement Edward Said's postcolonial notion of contrapuntal analysis.

Elaborating on the practices of counterpoint and fugue in Western music, Said developed a methodology for investigating the interplay between imperialism's "interdependent histories" and "overlapping characters" (184). As Said (1996) writes,

In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is a concern and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work (59-60).

Through such methodological means, Said aims to highlight both dominant processes and counter processes in order to bring their interrelationship into relief. Chowdhry (2007) emphasizes that Said's polyvocality is not merely a "postmodern plurality" but a "worlding" of texts and practices, "for historicizing them, for interrogating their sociality and materiality, for paying attention to the

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<sup>4</sup> As employed here, "imperialism" constitutes both the political and economic meanings of the word. Imperialism in its political usage can mean dominance over territory, material resources, labor, and/or political and cultural structures. As per Lenin, imperialism is an economic process and a particular phase of capitalist development in the form of a world system (Loomba 1998). Imperialism therefore is a component of colonialism, but imperialism does not end when colonization formally ends.

hierarchies and the power-knowledge nexus embedded in them” (105).

As in other institutions and relational fields, academic discourse and scholarly positions are inextricably bound to broader historical and political contexts (Axel 2002; Kraidy 2005; Said 1978). Contrapuntal methodologies that make visible imperialism and resistance according to a logic generated by their own interrelationship can help correct the “scientific” tendency to reproduce colonial knowledge and discourses (Chakrabarty 1993; White 1982). Additionally, by considering not only how globalization presses upon individuals, but also how individuals contribute to globalization (Rantanen 2005), researchers can work to avoid close-ended analyses of political action and subjectivities.

Within a contrapuntal framework, I implement two key approaches to media studies: critical political economy and cultural studies. Applying political economic research, I examine some of the structural forces—ownership, state policy, and markets—that shape new media use, globally and in Lebanon. Through a cultural studies approach that incorporates both textual analysis and ethnographic audience research, I explore various contexts surrounding new media artifacts, practices, and social arrangements (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2005). Textual analysis provides insight into possible meanings generated by polysemic texts, or texts open to multiple interpretations (Hall 1996), while critical audience ethnography explores the particular, situated, and frequently unexpected ways that people interpret and use old and new media (Ang 1985). As Fenton (2007) summarizes, both political economy and cultural studies approaches “are required to inform a thorough analysis of the role of the media in society” (8).

I employ critical political economy and a cultural studies approach to examine the interrelationship between media use and Lebanese subjectivities. As employed here, media “use” connotes the multiple contexts in which access to and uses of old and new media are embedded (Hargittai 2004). Media use is discussed by researchers in a broad range of terms, including: access, social involvement, and social interaction (Katz and Rice 2002); culture, national identity, and civic engagement (Norris 2001); and technological diffusion, education, and literacy (Warschauer 2003). I utilize the term to connote not only these but other not-yet-defined sets of issues and actions related to media. In this way, “use” may hopefully resist epistemological closure, rendering future research and theory of media use impervious to evaluations of “aberrance,” “(in)authenticity,” or “inconsistency.”

In considering Lebanese subjectivities, I focus on processes through which the self makes meaning of its place in the world (Jackson 2000). Due to its relational construction, as per Jacques Lacan (see Chapter 2), subjectivity incorporates positionality, or the point from which a subject views object(s) with which it is in relation. Through texts and ethnography, the researcher can observe the realm of the intersubjective, shared spaces in which individual subjectivities are articulated, performed, and recognized. The researcher notes how subjects position themselves not only in dialogue with others, but also according to broader contexts of power and experience (Bakhtin 1982). As discussed in Chapter 2, power functions through both discourse and structure. Therefore, by employing a range of research methods I seek to elucidate the complex interrelationships between subjects, media, and power.

## **Methodologies**

Although media studies researchers often position political economic analysis within the realm of cultural studies, I treat political economy and cultural studies as distinctive fields of inquiry due to the differing ontological outlooks upon which the two approaches are founded. Studies of the political economy of communication seek to uncover the ways in which resource distribution directs media access, use and consumption. Cultural studies scholars also acknowledge the hegemonic power afforded by control of communication resources, but they emphasize contingency and fluidity of textual meaning over the “crude materialism” of political economy. Rather than collapsing these issues of structure and culture, I agree with Barker’s (2003) assertion that they are best understood as having emerged from “very specific logics and modes of development” that are “related in context-specific ways” (145). I treat them as distinct but interrelated methodologies in this study.

### **Critical political economy**

Political economy is a mode of scientific inquiry premised on the Marxian logic of material causation. In *The German Ideology* (1846/1970), Marx and Engels assert as one of their foundational premises: “men (sic), developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life” (47). According to such logic, material forces of economic structure and modes of production organize human relations and therefore can be seen as historically and socially determinative. Political

economy of media examines “the production, distribution and consumption” of products of communication (Mosco 1996, 25). Critical political economy goes beyond political economy to deal with broader contexts of power (Golding and Murdock 1997). To limit analysis to patterns of ownership and consumption would ignore the complex semiotic and cultural processes through which dominant structures reproduce themselves. Therefore, since the theorizing of the Frankfurt School in the 1940s and 50s, critical political economy of communication scholars have taken into consideration both economic relations and the production of ideology. They consider the numerous political, social, cultural, and historical currents in which economic processes are situated (Mosco 1996).

In order to consider these various currents within scholarship on media structure, the field of critical political economy has developed five “pillars” or trajectories of research related to media (Flew 2008; Golding and Murdock 2000; Mosco 1996). First, scholars consider the “social totality” and various systems of power surrounding media (Flew 2008, 31). Second, they take a historical perspective on media growth. This includes researching the expansion of corporate control over and commodification of media forms, and the transformation of the government intervention model into a paradigm of for-profit media industries (Golding and Murdock 2000). The third focus considers the balance between private media ownership and public intervention (Bagdikian 2004). The fourth trajectory centers on application of theory through practice (Hardt 1992; Mosco 1996), including scholarly engagement with issues related to “justice, equity and the public good” (Golding and Murdock 1997, 73). The fifth

pillar of this research constitutes its global focus (Miller 2001; Flew 2008). In this study I work to incorporate elements of each of these political economic concerns.

The global focus of critical political economy of media examines transnational movements of capital in the context of imperialism. Schiller (1971) criticizes the dominance of communication products from industrialized wealthy countries, particularly the United States, in the markets of poorer countries. Such dominance, according to Schiller, leads to lower local output of media and a subsequent local dependency on foreign media goods. Schiller sees media dominance as cultural dominance, in that an influx of foreign news and entertainment can shape and alter values, norms and other symbolic processes. Schiller therefore urges research into the ways in which the U.S. entertainment, communications and information (ECI) industries are interrelated with U.S. foreign, military and economic policy; the “direct, though immeasurable impact on human consciousness” of ECI industries (Schiller 1971, 115); and the complex “sum of processes” Schiller designated as “cultural imperialism” (9). Cultural imperialism theory has come to constitute a broad set of critiques on media dependency, global capitalism, modernity, and globalization (Flew 2008; Tomlinson 2001).

Despite the promise of new media to empower individuals and groups through communication ties that bypass traditional power brokers (Gitelman 2004), cultural industries continue to dominate the production and distribution of communication and media texts through which we come to understand the world. Therefore, in this study I pay attention to the properties of technologies; modes of



old and new media production; government policy; and social uses of media, including economic, political, and cultural imaginings of media technologies (Hanson 2008). As McPhail (2010) urges, I pay particular attention to the macro aspects of the mass communication system over time in order to highlight imperialism and transnational issues. In this way I mean to explore the contexts and power that both enable and constrain media use.

In order to examine how global power is constructed and perpetuated through existing communication channels and patterns of relating, my data collection was guided by the following sub-questions informed by critical political economy: What is the structure of the Lebanese telecommunication and media sector? What is the nature of state policy on media and telecommunications? What is the nature of state-run media? What role do non-government actors play in the provision of media access and services? What are the modes of production of global and local information and “news” about Lebanon? In order to address these questions, I utilized a) primary research materials, including governmental publications and policy documents; and newspaper magazine and journal articles; and b) secondary published sources, including scholarly histories and analyses.

### **Cultural Studies**

While use of the terms “culture” varies among scholars, “disciplines” and branches of society (Williams 1976), academic perceptions of what “culture” connotes/denotes have come largely to rest on Clifford Geertz’s (1973) description of humans caught in “systems of signification” that they themselves have spun

(15). As Fiske (1989) writes, culture is “the constant process of producing meaning of and from our social experience” (1). Therefore a “cultural studies” understanding of culture sees it as primarily symbolic, constituting the “entire range of institutions, artefacts and discourses that make up our symbolic universe” (Milner and Browitt 2002, 5).

Foundational to the field of cultural studies are the writings of Birmingham School scholar Stuart Hall, who points out how cultural texts are polysemic, or potentially generative of many interpretations and meanings (1996). Hall locates cultural agency within both the production and interpretation of texts, and it is here that cultural studies diverges from political economy as a critical enterprise. Whereas critical political economy focuses on material causation, or the influence of material conditions on social relations, cultural studies focuses on the ways in which people and groups are not only dominated and pre-determined by such economic forces and their ideologies, but also how people and groups negotiate and resist these forces with symbolic processes.

Hall elaborates on the ideas of Antonio Gramsci. In contrast to classical Marxist material causation, Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*, written in an Italian prison under Mussolini and published in English in 1973, show the ways in which the underclasses participate in their own domination through the symbolic re-appropriation of dominant ideologies. Therefore, in Gramscian theory, the underclasses are active rather than acted upon. Additionally, Gramsci saw the potential for revolution in “organic intellectuals,” those steeped in the ways of knowing and patterns of living of the proletariat. Gramsci thus locates this cadre as

a possible site of cultural resistance to ideological domination of the elite. Gramsci considers both hegemony and counterhegemonies, or “‘counter-tendencies’ (that) regularly appear in the seams and cracks of dominant forms” (Lull 1996, 65). As per Gramsci, Stuart Hall and the field of cultural studies view culture as symbolic components of human existence that are related to, but not pre-determined by, material relations and modes of production.

Although the field of cultural studies includes a variety of influences, in this study I highlight the theoretical and methodological influence of British cultural studies upon media research. As Kellner and Durham (2006) describe, “the center and fulcrum of British cultural studies at any given moment was determined by the struggles in the present political conjuncture” (xxv). This is reflected in the recent emphasis on internationalization within the field of cultural studies, and, in particular, in the call for research on transnational experiences of imperialism and globalization (Abbas and Erni 2005). Due to a scarcity of empirical research on media use in the Arab world, particularly research that avoids massifying Arab opinion under the notion of an “Arab street,” Sabry (2007) argues for a field of Arab media studies with culture at its center. He specifically urges for an appropriation of British cultural studies due to “its radical rethinking of the relationship between culture and society” (163). Sabry writes,

In Hall’s words, cultural studies are ‘*always* about the articulation—in different contexts...between culture and power.’ It is, if anything, this relationship that needs to be maintained for Arab cultural studies to be credible. Indeed, maintaining such credibility depends on the ability to articulate and assess not only the dynamics of power, as they emerge in the cultural text, but also the economic structures that govern and influence cultural production in the Arab world (164).

In this passage, Sabry calls for the joint application of cultural studies and critical political economy in considering Arab media use. Therefore, this study applies cultural studies media methodologies of audience-centered critical ethnography and textual analysis.

### *Ethnography*

Although ethnography is a relatively new practice of audience research, the method possesses a long history by way of other fields of academic enquiry such as anthropology, sociology, and education (Moore 2000). Seeking to provide cultural description and interpretation, the ethnographic researcher documents and relates a group's observable rituals and customs (Miller and Salkind 2002). Hobbs (2006) describes ethnography as "a cocktail of methodologies" which position "personal engagement with the subject" as the primary means of gaining knowledge about a group or setting (10). Through an *emic* research perspective, or "insider's point of view," the ethnographer pursues description and meaning that has emerged from the researcher's experiences with her subject(s), rather than imposing existing/outside models on these research encounters (Wolcott 2008).

Unlike the quantitative tradition of audience reception research, in which audiences are treated as monolithic, passive recipients of fixed and stable media messages (Press 1996), ethnography differentiates audiences and acknowledges their agency in their media use (Tuft 2000; Radway 1988). In its emphasis on nuancing accounts of human experience, ethnography can demonstrate the complex ways in which individuals, groups and societies across cultures engage

with media texts. Through what Clifford Geertz (1973) called “thick description,” ethnography can depict the “thoroughly situated, always context-bound ways in which people encounter, use, interpret, enjoy, think and talk about television and other media in everyday life” (Ang 1996, 30).

In cultural studies, researchers focus on identity processes and the construction of subjectivities among audiences, broadly interpreting what constitutes an “audience” and situating media use within broader sets of social practices (Ang 1996). In light of these broadened contexts of media consumption, ethnographic investigations do not treat media spaces “as a completely separate isolated social world” unconnected to other aspects of people’s lives (Kendall 2002, 9). Ethnography requires a researcher’s long-term involvement in order to contextualize media use in terms of other aspects of audiences’ lives (Miller and Slater 2000).

In the case of my research, this contextualization required diverse methods of observation, including textual analysis of novels, webpages, participation in online environments like social networks and blog comment boards; and interviews with a range of people, including members of civil society and non-government organizations; students; telecommunication executives; information technology specialists; bloggers and citizen journalists; Internet providers, and ordinary media users. It also required research in a variety of fields, such as Internet cafes and social functions, to include formal and non-formal encounters with research subjects. Finally, my fields for data collection were located in a variety of geographic places.

Marcus and Fischer (1986) assert that multi-sited research is necessary to adequately address transnational forces—cultural, political, and economic—in the construction of local contexts. They call for multi-sited research to account for the increasing movement of objects and people in an era of “globalization.” Marcus (1998) goes on to suggest a “research self-consciously embedded in a world system” that “moves out from the single sites and local situations...to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space” (79). As further argued regarding ethnographies of media, “a field site can no longer be seen merely as a geographical location, but rather may be viewed as an intersection between people, practices and shifting terrains, both physical and virtual” (Strauss 2000, 171-172). Subsequently, my research moved through Oklahoma, Beirut, and south Lebanon in order that I could consider the interrelationship of old and new media use and Lebanese subjectivity in complex scenarios of postcolonial relations, globalized economies, and war.

Critical praxism, or “practice,” in ethnography requires “exposing the material effects of marginalized locations while offering alternatives” (Fine 1994 17). Such alternatives emerge from a research focus on issues of class division, access to resources and knowledge, and social justice (Thomas 1993). This focus allows the ethnographer to contribute to “emancipatory knowledge,” such as “new forms of addressing conflict” (Madison 2005, 6). Critical ethnography expands on the ethnographic concern with the structures of power that surround the research context (Thomas 1993). With the “critical turn” in ethnography, the methodology began to reflect broader ontological uncertainties about the possibilities and moral

implications of positivist “objectivity” and “generalizability,” allowing “new” fields of ethnography that place the subjectivity of human experience, including of the researcher, as central to the research (Denzin 2001). The critical ethnographer turns attention to an investigation of broader issues of power, including those of the research encounter.

My methodological research tools included participant observation, in which I performed as a full participant observer and recorded my observations and experiences in my diary-based documentation, otherwise known as field notes. Field notes were typed daily based on written and audio recorded notes kept during the day. They included observations of people, places, and events; my thinking on methods and theories; and personal notes such as self reflections and impressions. A blank column was left next to the field notes for ongoing comments and analysis. I also conducted informal interviews, and semi-structured long and short interviews. Participants were acquired through snowball sampling, or contacts generated through other contacts, within the researcher’s personal networks and contacts. Prior to each interview, the investigator informed the subject of the nature of the study and obtained their informed consent. Formal interviews were recorded. The interviewee was assigned a pseudonym throughout data collection. Name or other personal identifiers were not recorded or published in either audio-recordings or fieldnotes. Interviews were transcribed. Audio-recorded digital data and digital fieldnotes were stored by the researcher under password protect. During the time the researcher completed transcription and translation, the digital recordings were stored 1) on the researcher's computer

under password protect; and 2) at the researcher's email address, which is also password protected. Upon transcription and translation, the digital recordings have been stored on a CD in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home.

Sample interview questions included,

Can you describe your most meaningful uses of the Internet?

What do you seek to accomplish using the Internet? How do you go about this?

How often do you use the Internet? What Lebanese-based or Middle East-based websites do you visit? How often?

From what sources do you get your "news"?

Have any of your Internet experiences changed your point of view on Lebanon or on being Lebanese?

Do you still have relatives in Lebanon/do you have relatives outside of Lebanon? Are you in touch with them?

How is being "Lebanese" part of your life right now? In the past?

I undertook ethnographic research in Lebanon at different times over a six-year period, from 2002 to 2008. This included a year living in Beirut, from March 2007 to May 2008. I also conducted ethnographic research in Oklahoma and online since 1999.

Marcus and Fisher (1986) emphasize that representing ethnographic subjects involves situating those subjects within broader cultural and political contexts. My fieldwork was multi-sited, but rooted within specific network locales. Thus it constituted what Burawoy (2000) calls a "grounded globalization,"



allowing me to observe local and network contexts of Lebanese subjectivity and new media use within the “global” as a world system. Notions of intertextuality and intersubjectivity (Barthes 1977) demonstrate how meanings spill over and reproduce across cultural places, genres and texts. Therefore, the ethnographic research “field” constitutes several different sites of inquiry, including the texts and artifacts through which meaning circulate (Bauman 2004; Jackson 2002).

### *Textual analysis*

Emerging from rhetorical analysis and linguistics, textual analysis has comprised a methodology for the interpretation of “texts” since the Frankfurt School applied it in the 1940s and 50s (Stern 1996, 62). Merging Marxist theory and linguistic/semiotic analysis, the “Birmingham School” further developed textual analysis moving beyond conceiving the text as a literary object; rather cultural studies scholars theorize the text as a semiotic object permeated by the power structures and relations of the society that produced it (Hughes 2007). Subsequently, text as used here indicates an organized collection of signs, or “any intentional symbolic expression—verbal or non-verbal” (Griffin 1991, 15). Thus the scholar can analyze media texts and artifacts like interviews, art, literature, and historical documents.

As an umbrella term, “textual analysis” can include semiotic, Foucauldian discursive, psychoanalytic, and other forms of analysis that undertake a “constructivist” and/or “structuralist” approach to meaning making (Hughes 2007, 250). As a critical methodology, textual analysis employs a number of strategies in order to uncover “the political, social and cultural implications of the texts that we

encounter (and produce)...to...challenge the status quo” (Hoey 2001, 3).

Textual analysis, based on Saussurean semiology and Barthes' semiotics, treats the "text" as an object of meaning. In his work on power and meaning, Michel Foucault took textual analysis beyond semiotic analysis, proposing a form of critical discourse analysis. Parker (1999) summarizes discourses as “patterns of meaning which organize the various symbolic systems human beings inhabit, and which are necessary for us to make sense of each other” (3). As per Plato’s “shadow in the cave,” the signifier is not the signified, and thus symbolic systems do not refer directly to the world. Rather, they refer back to their own resources and logic. Thus discourse includes the values and meanings that order symbolic systems. This study employs a Foucauldian discourse analysis of signifying resources in order to “loosen the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things” (Foucault 1972, 48-49). Through Foucauldian discourse analysis, scholars work to examine and unravel the history and context of our symbolic practices. Applying Foucauldian analysis, I consider how discourse organizes, categorizes, and prioritizes social practices, policies, and institutions.

As discursive meanings do not remain constrained to a particular media or text (Barthes 1977), I draw on the field of psychoanalysis to engage in intertextual analysis of media texts. Meanings of texts spill out and circulate via assorted means—mediated or not—through communities and across them (Terranova 2004). In the act of repetition, whether for the sake of contestation, negotiation, confirmation, and/or rejection, certain meanings are sanctioned, naturalized, and privileged. Such is the intertextual process by which media help form dominant

meanings (Fiske 1987). I apply psychoanalysis not to investigate constructions of the “psychological,” but to consider iterations of subjective commitment (Butler 1993; Hall 1996). Employing the tools of psychoanalytic analysis, I examine media texts to uncover psychic desires and fetishes, how they are produced, and how they impact the construction of the Other (Bhabha 1994).

Literature and art are analyzed as texts essential to examinations of subjectivity. As Biehl, Good and Kleinman (2006) explain, subjectivity self-consciously and explicitly represents itself in art. They write, “in contrast to objectivity, in this sense, subjectivity does not imply an error but connotes creativity, the possibility of a subject’s adopting a distinctive symbolic relation to the world in order to understand lived experience” (6). John Downing (2001) asserts, by considering art, media, and communication together “we do not fall into the trap of segregating information, reasoning and cognition from feeling, imagination and fantasy” (52). Through postcolonial and historical analysis, I situate the texts and artifacts under consideration within broad spatial and temporal contexts (see Chapter 4).

Unlike media effects methods of textual analysis (such as content analysis) that treat media messages as fixed packets of meaning independent of their receivers (Krippendorff 2004), cultural studies approaches to textual analysis recognize the contingency of texts. Within cultural studies, textual analysis frames the text as inseparable from surrounding social and cultural contexts. Among other issues, this methodology addresses the politics of representation, including the positionality and/or identities of producers and audiences. Such a holistic

approach is necessary to uncover the ways texts “convey specific ideologies of gender, race, class, sexuality, nation, and other ideological dimensions” (Kellner 2003, 14). A cultural studies-informed textual analysis does not question whether results are “replicable” or “verifiable.” Rather, as Kellner (2003) reminds us, “each reading of a text is only one possible reading from one critic’s subject position, no matter how multiperspectival, and may or may not be the reading preferred by audiences” (15).

I apply textual analysis to research on Lebanese media use and subjectivity as an empirical yet critical mode of analysis. As an empirical enterprise, or one that creates knowledge through perception, textual analysis pays close attention to the texts under consideration. Yet as a critical endeavor, holistic textual analysis can draw attention to silences surrounding power. I seek through my research to interrupt discourses that situate media solely in terms of teleological Western progress—our “dreamy visions of Utopia 2.0” (Mosco 2010)—with more nuanced and informed understandings of global power relations (Lister 2003).

From a critical studies point of view, I iterate as per Crain (1997) that “local actors are never simply the passive victims of such processes of commoditization and specularization,” and they therefore engage in “complex and elaborate symbolic politics in which resistance can take diverse forms and varied tactical paths” (292). I therefore juxtapose structural research with cultural studies approaches, including textual analysis and critical ethnography, to investigate such audience activity. My intention is to take a holistic approach to the contexts of media use (Schiller 1969; Miller 2005).

In order to investigate how global power is constructed and perpetuated through existing communication channels and patterns of relating, data collection was directed by the following cultural studies-informed subquestions: Who uses what media, and how? With whom do they communicate? How are the communicators articulating/performing Lebanese subjectivities?

I collected media and cultural artifacts and employed a broadly hermeneutic approach to my analysis of texts. Media and cultural data include mass media and popular texts such as weblogs, newspapers, and magazines; mass media such as global broadcast news and national broadcast news; and Lebanese literature. Drawing on Foucauldian discourse analysis, I examine how the text functions in terms of larger structures and discourses beyond the text. Drawing on psychoanalysis, I consider the intertextuality of various representations and their interrelationship within broad currents of meaning. Drawing on postglobal analysis, as elaborated in Chapter 2, I consider the production and consumption of texts within broader histories and currents of imperialism.

### **Position of the researcher and fieldwork**

As Madison (2005) asserts, the “politics of positionality” require an acknowledgement of the researcher’s power and biases, not merely an investigation of the power structures in which the subject is embedded. Similarly, Noblit, Flores and Murillo (2004) call for a postcritical ethnography that not only focuses on social change but also interrogates the positionality of the researcher: “Critical ethnographers must explicitly consider how their own acts of studying and representing people and situations are acts of domination even as critical

ethnographers reveal the same in what they study” (3). I explicate some issues as related to this study below.

A critical ethnography must take into account the “politics and epistemology of location” (Haraway 1991, 195). Such partiality of location and situation provides the basis for knowledge claims. “Situation knowledges” are “marked knowledges” that produce “maps of consciousness” reflecting the various identities and subjectivities of the researcher (Haraway 1991, 111). As Foucault (1970) reminds us, discursive practices are embodied in a variety of processes and forms, including in the pedagogical processes that enforce and maintain them. For instance, Axel (2002) reiterates Foucault’s point by demonstrating that scholarship on Sikh national aspirations is circumscribed by world history, particularly the end of the British Empire.

Similarly, this study about Lebanese subjectivity and globalized communication is situated within a particular moment, at the crux of various vectors. Most broadly, from my position within “the West,” I must look for ways in which Orientalism informs my context of research (Said 1979). Effectively, Orientalism constitutes any ontological assertion of the “East” as dialectical to a more civilized, enlightened, or rational “West.” Additionally, international relations related to the Middle East are in perpetual flux and, in the contemporary context of globalized infotainment and media, no one trying to understand the Middle East can stand outside of that flux (Robertson and White 2002). Finally, my own diasporic Lebanese subjectivities influence my research and reflect processes of globalization (Tabar and Nahas 2007).

In conducting multi-sited ethnographic research in Oklahoma, Beirut, and south Lebanon, I sought not to produce a totalizing narrative on the relationship between places. Instead, I aimed to generate a “homework” of research sites that I subjectively moved through (Visweswaran 1994). As Teaiwa (2004) warns of conducting multi-sited ethnography in communities with which the researcher has ties,

The result of my movements among multiple research sites was the displacement of the conventional single-site anthropological paradigm and the unlearning of anthropological *and* indigenous authority...a deeply troubling experience in which I was neither insider nor outsider (216-217).

As demonstrated in this quote, Teaiwa highlights how viewing one’s own ancestral village, networks, and groups through a critical, reflexive ethnographic lens denaturalizes known and experiential cultural authorities, sociological hierarchies, and discursive constructions. Familial and cultural myths are denaturalized, and unquestioned assumptions are brought into question. In this way, a researcher conducts “homework” “as a discipline of unlearning as much as learning” (Clifford 1997, 85).

During the course of my “homework,” I realized that my efforts to avoid ascribing an essential, inherently “Lebanese” way of being or acting onto my research subjects in Lebanon and the U.S. had generated an overly-constructivist ontological framework for my study. In my initial research design, I compartmentalized and “bounded” the local experiences of subjects within their separate locations of Beirut, south Lebanon, and the U.S. For instance, initially I only considered how early twentieth century racism and nativism in the U.S. influenced Syro-Lebanese Americans. I did not consider how these social forces

might, through international relations and transnational migration, influence Lebanese subjectivities in Lebanon over time as well. Through ethnographic “homework” and constant moving through places, families, and events in Lebanon and the U.S, sets of shared translocal issues came into relief. These issues alerted me to the position of Lebanese subjectivities and media use within history, as imperialism and colonialism have led to commonalities (as well as multiplicities) across time and space.

Additionally, media in Lebanon reflect postcolonial contexts of militarized conflict and corruption. During fieldwork in Lebanon, I found myself having to daily negotiate what I perceived as overpriced, unreliable, outdated telecommunications and computerized communications. Electricity outages would kick me off-line in the middle of composing an email or conducting online business. The Internet connection in my apartment was unreliable and slow. Cellular telephony cost U.S.\$1/minute, so like other Lebanese I text messaged and “miss called” people as a means of communicating. Yet, these complications reminded me that my “working theories about new technologies for communication were embedded in invisible infrastructures of privilege” (Markham 2009, 132). I was made experientially aware of place-based disparities in media access and use. I came to understand how these differing situations influence our attitude toward, expectations of, and values related to media use. I hope through multi-sited and reflexive experiences to have dissipated my research authority over subjects, processes, or technologies in this study.



Accumulation of data began with my complete membership role in the “online” Lebanese diaspora from the late 1990s (Adler and Adler 1987). As technology-mediated environments include both production and consumption of technological artifacts, I became a user of Lebanese-based media such as family and village websites, news sources, blogs, and *Facebook* in order to work and “do things” within these spaces of research. Immersed fully, I shared common experiences, goals, beliefs, and values of transnational diasporic Lebanese cultures. Such an “insider’s perspective” facilitated an everyday understanding of some ways in which Internet users make sense out of, ascribe meaning to, and create “Lebanon” and “Lebaneseness” through a process of continual interpretation and negotiation (Garfinkle 1967). My unique position allowed a phenomenological interpretation of meaning and social action.

From this online experience I began to conduct formal and informal open-ended interviews with Lebanese immigrants and their descendants in Oklahoma. These conversations and interviews transpired among Lebanese Oklahomans with whom I had contact through family ties or university settings. I gathered historical documents such as family histories and newspaper articles; and textually analyzed websites to consider the historical interrelationship between forms of media and Lebanese subjectivities in Oklahoma. I travelled to Beirut and south Lebanon for several weeks in summers 2002 and 2005 to conduct interviews and focus groups related to Internet use and Lebanese identities. These conversations allowed me to identify themes from research subjects’ own perspectives (Kvale 1996). Based on

these experiences I planned this study and gathered research funds to spend more than a year, from March 2007 to May 2008, living and researching in Lebanon.

In Lebanon, I visited family in Beirut, in Mount Lebanon, and in Marjayoun, southern Lebanon. A multi-sectarian village close to the Israeli-Lebanese and Lebanese-Syrian borders, Marjayoun shares historic ties with a large community of immigrants and their descendants in Oklahoma, U.S. Having gleaned information about relatives of my great-grandfather through Internet village and family-based websites and genealogical directories, I made contact with these relatives in 2002. I interviewed distant family members on their experiences under militarized Israeli occupation of 1982-2000. In those interviews I became aware of the impact of conflict, migration, and policies of the state on methods and means of communication in Lebanon.

Over the years, I collected data through situations that allowed me to meet people. These interactions would generate data in the form of both written and unwritten histories and points of view, as research subjects would frequently provide unpublished family histories or local artifacts such as newspapers or social publications. I attended formal events at universities and cultural centers. I ate with and spent time with locals in a variety of informal situations. Through formal but open-ended interviews, I would ask subjects to elaborate on issues that arose during informal conversations. Simultaneously, I continued to conduct interviews, discussions and research via the Internet with Lebanese in various

locale. In this way, I experienced the mediated construction of cultural knowledge and ties online.

Each of my research visits followed a political crisis in Lebanon—in 2000, the end of 18 years of militarized Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon; in Summer 2005, the February 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and subsequent departure of Syrian troops from Lebanon; and in 2006, the Summer 2006 Israeli-Hizballah war. These politically determining events, each of which impacted my ability to visit certain areas of Lebanon and the nature of daily life, shaped my research experience. As mentioned previously, they also influenced the availability and affordability of forms of communication and media.

Due to the Summer 2006 conflict between Israel and Hizballah, the bulk of my research during 2007 and 2008 took place in Beirut rather than south Lebanon. Administration issues related to my research funding dictated that I must live in Beirut. In the West Beirut neighborhood of Hamra, around the American University of Beirut and Lebanese American University, my social networks included students, young professionals, and ex-pats. Through observation I became aware of the prevalence of blogging, citizen journalism, and *Facebook* use in Beirut. Therefore, this component of my research grew organically out of my experiences and observations as an ethnographer in Lebanon. I conducted informal and formal interviews with bloggers; ex-pats who worked in public relations and journalism; local students and young professionals; and political activists.

More broadly, the research context of violent conflict produced an embodied experience of terror that helped remove the distance between my research subjects and myself. In particular, during the two years that followed the 2006 Israel-Hizballah war, Lebanon's government dissolved and acts of political violence by various groups increased in frequency. By Summer 2007, the Lebanese Army was fighting the Salafist Jihadist group Fatah al-Islam in the Nahr al-Bard Palestinian camp north of Tripoli. Additionally, a string of assassinations of Lebanese politicians and bombing of public venues during 2006 and 2007 had contributed to a sense of anxiety in Lebanon. Over time, my research in Lebanon repositioned my reaction to and attitude toward this ongoing violence.

When I first visited Beirut after the 2006 Summer war, in December 2006, I took what I thought was a discrete picture of a member of the Lebanese Army slouched in his chair playing with his cell phone while he was meant to be "guarding" a corner in West Beirut. Three hours later, having been questioned by the police, the Army, and then the government's security apparatus, I was entering the lobby of my Hamra hotel with a plain-clothes member of "security." Sent with me by his supervisor to look at my computer, the agent searched my room. He explained that my camera contained photographs from Damascus, including photographs of posters of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah. Therefore, the agent was told to look through everything in my hotel room, and then look again. Having newly arrived in Lebanon and not having directly experienced any violence or aggression except for this, I laughed out loud. I shook my head and explained that those photos too were part of my research.

The agent satisfied himself with a quick look at my computer and left. My reaction had demonstrated that, at that time, I had no sense of context for this interaction except my own perceived security and privilege as an outsider to Lebanese hostilities and events.

By May 2007, a series of bombings in quick succession produced a frightened, quiet stillness in the streets of Beirut, and a pervasive social tendency to relate all speech and discourse to violence. I began receiving emails from the U.S. Embassy with travel warnings to avoid public places in Lebanon. In late May, the British Embassy website warned, “there is a high threat of terrorism in Lebanon against Western interests, this includes a threat that Westerners may be kidnapped.” My field notes of late May and early June 2007 repeatedly mention the silence and emptiness of Beirut’s streets. Like many Beirutis, I attempted to carry on with research and daily life, conflicted about my position as a “Western” target. Yet I was as embedded in what the press called “the situation,” much of it mediated, as everyone else. The degree to which violence and anxiety permeated everyday discourse can be detected in an email from another Beirut-based researcher to myself,

Don’t worry about the party tonight, it will probably be quite a small thing as most reporters must be up north watching the lebanese army try to enter the camp (those poor soldiers – since 7 this morning and still nothing but smoke and, I imagine, death). The overnight anthro tip sounds very interesting – I hope its fun (and useful). Make sure your phone is recharged before you go, please (money and power) just in case things get messy elsewhere in Lebanon! boukra soir I have no plans – let’s go for drinks at the usual not-likely-to-be-bombed spot (personal email, June 1, 2007).

Meanwhile, on television, in blogs, and via social networks, Lebanese consistently complained about another “lost summer,” and I too became increasingly angry about the number of cancelled music festivals, the many friends who cancelled trips to visit Beirut, and the nights in a row that restaurants closed early. As I watched the pro-Army videos on every station of Lebanese television and noted the pro-Army comments and groups formed on *Facebook*, I understood and experienced the Lebanese army as a unifying institution. In these examples, I experienced media as a site from which political violence, including its context and meanings, were generated.

As I noted media to be complicit in the national and sectarian projects that dominated everyday life, such as eliciting support for the Lebanese Army, I came to understand media cynicism in Lebanon. Most generally, such cynicism reflects the pervasive notion that news is not “objective” but instead reflects certain political agendas. Yet, one day I heard myself reiterating an argument I had read on a blog. To friends, I questioned whether the Lebanese Army was intentionally underfunded and kept weak through collusion between domestic sectarian leaders who feared civil conflict and international powerbrokers with pro-Israeli interests. While I heard myself speaking, I noted that the theory was not out-of-line with my “common sense,” but that it was “marginal” and unlikely to be heard beyond the bounds of “alternative” media spheres such as blogs. In this way I intuitively came to understand how more subtle demonstrations of media cynicism in the form of “rumors” and “conspiracy” proliferate in situations of intense “official” distrust. My cynicism reflected my distrust of international powerbrokers, sectarian Lebanese

leadership, and Lebanese mainstream media due to the continued unstable conditions in Lebanon and my perception that each of these parties played a role in Lebanon's continued political dysfunction. Through these experiences, I noted that media cannot entirely determine individuals, who empirically understand how media functions. Yet media *mediate*, and even construct, the reality, politics, and relationships in which we live, and in which we make decisions about our media use.

In June 2007, two events escalated my position toward violence beyond mere anger and cynicism. On June 13, in the middle of a sunny afternoon in Beirut, Lebanese Minister of Parliament Walid Eido was assassinated by a car bomb in the parking lot of a seaside recreational club in Beirut. As the bomb went off, I was seated at a café next to the parking lot. I had just sat down to meet with a Beirut-based blogger, but at the moment the bomb went off, I was on the phone with a Beirut-based U.S. journalist setting up a meeting. The explosion was deafening as it sucked the air out of the atmosphere around us. Just seconds before, children were playing, women were chatting, young adults were smoking argilas, and older men were playing backgammon. Now they were all on the ground, including the waiters, many of them under the tables. Just a few feet away from me, someone kept shouting "*lehm, lehm*" the Arabic word for meat. I thought a waiter had spilled his tray of grilled meat. I learned moments later that *lehm* is also the Arabic word for "flesh," which had been blown around us with other debris. I was still holding the telephone. The journalist was asking what was happening. I told him there was an explosion and he told me to start filming. By that evening, my pictures and

video of large plumes of smoke were circulating the blogosphere and were posted on the website for the *Washington Post*. The images were not particularly interesting, and they had little intrinsic news value. However, due to contacts and serendipity, I was able to put them out into the broader public sphere.

Then, on June 24, a car bomb in Marjayoun, south Lebanon killed six Spaniards with the United Nations Interim Force (UNIFIL) in Lebanon. One week before, I had travelled the same road in a UN personnel carrier as I “shadowed” a journalist on assignment. My field notes from the next day reflect contexts of ongoing violence, both mediated and immediate, in which I was functioning:

I just read an article about the force of the blast in marjayoun Sunday. I keep imagining it, the experience of blowing up. I guess I shouldn't melodramatize a mere coincidence as a near miss. For most of the afternoon [the week before, during my trip to Marjayoun], we were in the middle of a caravan, so we would have seen the carrier ahead blow up instead of ourselves.

But I look back on the day now and see it very differently. The officer assigned to us warned us before departing the base not to leave his side, and if anything happened, to stay right with him. Enroute, we stalled due to a clutch going out on a UN vehicle ahead of us. [The journalist] said, “it's the first rule of war, stop the convoy so you can ambush it.” We laughed. But we were a caravan, stalled on a hill, clearly visible from many directions. UN soldiers holding guns that launched grenades guarded the caravan, while the truck ahead of us was pushed to the side of the road to be towed later.

Later we heard two landmines detonated near Tyre. A UNIFIL helicopter was flying over at the time. My first thought was it was a ground to air missile, or an IED hitting one of the UN personnel carriers. I felt silly when they told me it was just the mine-clearers doing their job. Now I don't feel so silly.

As these notes demonstrate, my position toward ongoing violence in Lebanon had changed. Where I had previously felt put out by the contexts of violence, I now felt nervous. Two days later, I described in my field notes walking past cars and



thinking, “will this one explode?” My notes also indicate that I was growing less tolerant of petty interruptions to daily life, such as traffic jams, electricity outages, and a taxi driver who could not make change for a large bill. How was I meant to put up with larger contexts of violence if I had to deal with these “ineptitudes” too? My interpersonal connections with those not in Beirut grew more strained, more difficult. I scolded my parents when I could not reach them, put demands on my partner (now husband), and fought with customer service representatives for the bank and credit cards who “denied” me when I tried to conduct business online from Beirut. The complex interplay between media and my own experiences had relocated the position from which I viewed violence in Lebanon, and had subsequently realigned my intersubjective practices and relations.

In this chapter, I addressed the ontological schism of material causation between critical political economy and cultural studies. I provided an overview of the field of critical political economy of media, and I described how this study helps meet the need for a field of Arab media studies that utilizes the British cultural studies tradition. I explained holistic textual analysis and multi-sited ethnographic audience research. Finally, I positioned myself as a researcher conducting this study and discussed power relations and contexts surrounding my fieldwork in Lebanon.

## CHAPTER 4

### Colonial Origins, Subjective Effects: Representations of Syro-Lebanese in *The Oklahoman*, 1901-1958

This chapter places the interrelationship between Lebanese media use and Lebanese subjectivities, particularly processes of diaspora and sectarianism, in broader perspective. Although Lebanese subjectivities and identities are nominally related to the nation-state of Lebanon, their construction must be historically positioned within a global sphere of processes that includes media and communication. In the following sections, I delineate the colonial origins of Lebanese sectarianism and sectarianized communication and media in Lebanon. I then explicate some ways in which colonial practices and subjectivities influenced the mutual construction of “Lebanon” and Lebaneseness between Lebanese “at home” and in diaspora, particularly in Oklahoma, United States, during the first half of the twentieth century. I point out how subjective processes like racial hierarchies and international relations organize, and are organized through, local and global media practices.

I present this information within a framework of “communities-in-relation,” not to suggest that experiences between groups represent “identical positionings,” but rather to “make links” and “reimagine the study of regions in a way that transcends the traditional dogmatism of area studies” (Shohat 2002, 69-76). I work to show how colonialism influenced subjectivities across time and space. As George Lamming (1953) wrote, “colonialism” is more than a political or economic

arrangement, it is a “base and structure” of “cultural awareness” (15). A language of colonial values, colonialism positions local culture(s) in relation to a dialectical “Mother culture” that “cradles” it (15). Like other forms of human organization, colonialism dialogically constructs discursive practices, identity roles, and communication systems that perpetuate its logic and relations of power (Bakhtin 1984). Additionally, as demonstrated in later chapters of this dissertation, colonialism and sectarianism dialogically elicit varying forms of response.

In the following sections, I seek to counter theorizing on media that privileges the power of technology over human agency. Through an analysis of the colonial underpinnings of media and communication systems in Lebanon, I demonstrate that, in many ways, people shape media. A textual analysis of articles from *The Oklahoman* from 1901-1958 shows how syndicated newspaper articles in the U.S. helped standardize discourses about Ottoman Syrian immigrants as “alien” and exotic during the first decades of the 1900s. However, these articles also reveal how Syro-Lebanese immigrants used processes of self-representation to negotiate and modify these discourses within the context of their sectarianized Christian, pro-Western identities. Additionally, textual analysis of *The Oklahoman* illuminates ways in which international wire services helped situate the construction of Lebanese Oklahoman subjectivities relative to processes of international relations. Through this historical overview, I point out that relationships between media, subjectivities, and society are complex and highly contextual.

## **Colonialism and sectarianism in Lebanon**

Globalization is a process with a long history (Robertson 1992). As McPhail (2010) describes, four phases of empire building—Greco-Roman militarized conflict, militant Christianity and the Crusades, mercantile European colonialism, and now, “electronic colonialism”—have intentionally and unintentionally circulated sets of ideas and symbols across vast geographical distances. McPhail’s assessment holds true for Lebanon. As Cooke (2002) asserts, “the most persistent traits associated with Beirut, as with its hinterland, Mount Lebanon, have been freedom and refuge” (18). Mount Lebanon’s mountainous reaches and rugged terrain historically provided refuge to the region’s religious minorities escaping colonial and imperial practices. Jews escaped Roman oppression in Judea; Maronite Catholics, in a dispute with Jacobites over Christ’s divine/human make-up, were deemed “heretical” in the sixth century and fled from other parts of the Holy Land into the northern part of Mount Lebanon; more Maronites followed in the tenth and eleventh century to escape persecution from the Byzantine church; in the eleventh century, the Druze, a Shi’ite offshoot from Egypt, took refuge in the southern parts of Mount Lebanon. These migrants joined groups of Shi’ite Muslims and Greek Orthodox and Catholic Christians who made their way to the Mount Lebanon area during the Sunni Muslim expansion across Arabia after the 700s. Sunni Muslims lived in enclaves on the nearby Mediterranean coast (Salibi 1988).

For the most part, these religious minorities peacefully co-existed in the Mount Lebanon area up until the nineteenth century. After 1830, socio-economic

issues generated political tension along sectarian lines (Fawaz 1994; Firro 2009). As I explain in the following paragraphs, several centuries of colonial processes had produced material and sectarian divisions in the Mount Lebanon area. Ottoman Turkish and European agents vied for political power among the groups around Mount Lebanon after the sixteenth century. These social and economic interactions drew Mount Lebanon and the nearby Mediterranean coast into the world capitalist system (Fawaz 1994; Traboulsi 2007). Meanwhile, religion provided the “site” of their “colonial encounter,” resulting in the demarcation of “sect” as a social category within Lebanese public space (Makdisi 2000).

*From “refuge” to world capitalism and sectarianism*

The Turkish Ottoman Empire took control of the area that now comprises Lebanon in 1516 and officially administered the area until the end of World War I, when Lebanon was put under the “protection” of France. At the height of the Empire during the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, the Ottomans ruled a vast geographic expanse across the Middle East, North Africa, and southeastern Europe. With limited manpower, Ottomans administered the empire through political coercion of local elites (Douwes 2000). In Mount Lebanon, Ottoman governors utilized local Druze feudal lords to help gather taxes and loosely govern the area, giving the Druze a degree of autonomy. In this way, something resembling a discrete political entity surrounding Mount Lebanon emerged in the sixteenth century (Traboulsi 2007). However, these Ottoman fiefdoms produced

societal divisions, as feudalism vertically demarcated, and religious-based administration horizontally differentiated, formal public life (Makdisi 2000).

During the eighteenth century, Maronites, who maintained ties with Western Europe after the Crusades, began to politically assert their interests. Ottoman agents increasingly made use of Maronite feudal hierarchies to administer regional peasants. Ottomans divided the province of Syria, within which Mount Lebanon was located, into a hierarchical system of *millets*, with Muslims comprising the top tier over other people “of the book,” Christians and Jews (Traboulsi 2007). These intertwined sectarian and socio-economic practices produced, and were maintained through, processes of colonialism and conflict.

Starting in the mid-sixteenth century, but with particular commitment and effort after the early nineteenth century, European colonial agents vied for geopolitical power around Mount Lebanon, including along the coast and into the Syrian interior. European capitalists took advantage of historical connections with Christians to access agricultural and other resources from Mount Lebanon and to supply finished goods for Beirut markets. As Mount Lebanon was being drawn into the world capitalist system, socio-economic pressures exacerbated already strained communal relationships in Lebanon (Traboulsi 2007).

In the mountain, rapid population growth unsettled relationships between Catholics and Druze. On the coast, agriculture and trade with Europe resulted in less control over the conditions of trade by Sunni trading families. Meanwhile, an emerging Christian bourgeoisie of merchants and traders took some of the market

share and further diminished Sunni economic power. These mercantile and social forces caused economic and political instability in the area surrounding Mount Lebanon (Fawaz 1994).

More broadly, the Ottoman Empire incurred similar economic hardship as it was enfolded into European trading networks and a broader financial system. Mount Lebanon constituted an important link in the Ottoman Empire's chain of land communication from Istanbul through the "Syrian hinterland" to Egypt and to Mecca and Medina. However, diminished funds reduced Ottoman administrative control over Ottoman peripheral provinces, including Mount Lebanon, leaving the Ottomans to more heavily rely on local elites. Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire, in contact with and under political pressure from Europe, was shifting from "an imperial paradigm into an imperial view suffused with nationalist modernization rooted in a discourse of progress" (Makdisi 2002, par. 2). Feudal Lebanon began to be reined into the modernizing Ottoman state. Lebanon's existent system of secular hierarchy and rank was discredited and a "new form of politics and representation" was required in order to define the relationship of Lebanese subjects—particularly Maronite Catholics and Druze--to the Islamic Ottoman Empire (Makdisi 2000, 6). Under an "ideal of religious equality," membership in religious community was emphasized rather than the previous feudal class rank (Makdisi 2000, 7). Meant to bring a host of pluralistic/ethnic identities under one central administrative representational rule, sectarianism constitutes a discourse and a political process.

Prior to colonial encounters, religious difference was “subsumed” by the deep, class-based rift that divided Lebanon between feudal elite and “the rest” (Makdisi 2000, 29). The divide between peasants and landowners, peasants and Ottoman administrative agents, or peasants and feudal lords was based primarily on location, rather than sectarian identity. In 1800s Lebanon, interaction between inhabitants of Mount Lebanon and agents from Britain, France, and Istanbul produced what Makdisi (2000) calls “colonialist knowledge” (8). Colonial agents curried favor with groups according to historic religious affiliations—for instance, according to ties between Russia and Eastern Orthodox populations, and between France and the Maronite Catholics. Colonial agents without historic ties forged them, such as British agents who insisted upon a resemblance, and even a potential ancestral connection, between the Lebanese Druze and British colonial subjects, the Scottish highlanders (Makdisi 2000, 25). These horizontal, sect-based affiliations did not erase vertical, class-based divisions, but class and sect worked in conjunction. Modernizing Ottoman and colonial influences operated within the realm of class-based economic relations, shaping the “social roles and expectations, forms of cultural capital and wealth, and training and education that made one a constitutive element of this stratum” (Watenpaugh 2006, 20).

Due to increased socio-economic pressures in the area and sectarianization of public life, in 1860 conflict erupted in Mount Lebanon between Christians and Druze (Fawaz 1994). Sectarian-based conflict spread to Beirut and Damascus. Waning Ottoman power and heightened European colonial aspirations led European consuls to intervene. European powers entered into an agreement with



the Ottoman administration to set up an area around Mount Lebanon in which certain European states “protected” and helped administer particular sectarian communities. The agreement instituted a Russian protectorate for Orthodox Christian groups, a French protectorate for the Catholics, and a British protectorate for the Druze. Mount Lebanon came to constitute a semi-independent province within the Ottoman Empire with European say in how it was governed. With the institution of sectarian-based administration after European intervention in the late 1800s, the *za'im*, or feudal power, shifted from administering a religious mix in his locale to becoming a feudal lord within a particular religion. In this way, colonial hegemony capitalized on and existed through already present social formations.

After World War I, colonial rule of Lebanon was handed from the Ottomans to France. France, seeking to utilize its historical relations with Lebanese Maronite as a means of shoring up French colonial power, exacerbated existent societal tensions among groups in the eastern Mediterranean (Salibi 1988). In particular, France capitalized on its mutual distrust of Arab nationalism with Maronite Catholics to foster an alternative set of national ideologies among Maronites. These Western-oriented, Christian-based ideologies served as a means of countering rising tides of Arab nationalism within French mandated Lebanon and Syria. Whereas Arab nationalism inherently espoused Arab sovereignty and self-governance, Lebanese Maronite ideologies proclaimed France to be *al umm al hunun*—“the loving mother” (Salibi 1988, 33) of the Lebanese nation. Lebanon continues to wrestle with these polarized national ideas—an emphasis among

some groups on the Mediterranean and therefore Western position of Lebanon, and an alternate emphasis on Lebanon as situated within the Arab world. Harik (1978) describes the phenomenon and its generation of political conflict as “the agony of ambiguous identity” (7).

As the early history of Lebanon demonstrates, colonial practices work to organize human relations in ways that (re)produce colonial power. The “modernizing” sectarianism of Ottoman reform in the nineteenth century, useful for making non-Muslims citizens of the Islamic Ottoman Empire, institutionalized complex sets of relations and hierarchies produced through historical migration, socio-economics, and colonization. These Ottoman subjectivities translated into the post French mandate sectarianism of the twentieth century, in which religious identity remained the primary marker of political identity in Lebanon, and the basis of any project geared toward “modernization, citizenship, and civilization” (Makdisi 2000, 8). Besides their influence on Lebanese subjectivities, these collective processes and practices organized the origins of Lebanon’s media and the country’s position within global systems of telecommunication, which I describe in the following section.

#### *Colonial-sectarian press and communication*

Since the start of mercantile European colonialism in the seventeenth century, media and systems of communication have constituted an integral component of colonizing processes (Bartolovich and Lazarus 2002). First the printing press, then the telegraph and the submarine telegraph cable “enhanced

the power of the rulers over the ruled” (Hanson 2008, 19). The printing press allowed for the codification and distribution of vernacular languages in religious tracts, and for the temporal and spatial production of shared political issues via inexpensive periodical journalism. These processes facilitated the massification of societies (Anderson 1983). Mass production and mass media constructed elements of a mass culture (Rogers 1986), or an “integrated system of social control, manipulation, and ideology” in the service of dominant/capitalist interests (Hammer and Kellner 2009, xxi). Simultaneously, the telegraph and subterranean cable were essential to Europe’s administration of colonies and the integration of an increasingly joined-together world economy (Hanson 2008; Headrick 1991). Headrick (1988) asserts that no invention in the nineteenth century “contributed to the shrinking of the world quite so obviously as the submarine telegraph cable” (98).

Colonial agents with interests in the area around Mount Lebanon worked to manage and control public communication in the area, including the Lebanese press and systems for communication, on the basis of Lebanon’s sectarian divisions. As political power within the Turkish Ottoman Empire waned during the nineteenth century, French, British, and other imperial agents invested in Lebanon’s administration and infrastructure—its schools, roads, and means of communication—according to their allegiances with various confessional groups (Fawaz 1994). Through systems and practices of communication, colonial competition helped maintain Lebanese sectarianism.

The origins of the Lebanese press reflect these forces of colonization and sectarianism. The presses' institutional foundations are rooted in the "protocol" signed by various European powers in 1861 stating that they would jointly "administer" Lebanon as an independent province within the Ottoman Empire (Dajani 1992). The protocol granted more journalistic freedom in Lebanon than in other Arab countries at the time. The Lebanese press has from its origins provided a site for protest against foreign interference and colonization (Moussallem 1977). Yet colonial powers exercised authority over the press, and in periods of diminishing authority, did so particularly harshly: In 1916, Ottoman authorities hung 16 Lebanese journalists. After the end of Ottoman rule, during the French mandate over Lebanon between 1920 and 1942, French Mandate authorities repeatedly fined and imprisoned Lebanese editors (Dajani 1992).

Additionally, the early Lebanese press reflected colonial loyalties and affiliations. For instance, in the late 1800s, newspapers with ties to European agents called for an end to Ottoman oppression (Moussallem 1977). After 1918 and the start of the French Mandate over Lebanon, a number of French newspapers were founded. From its origins, the press in Lebanon reflected sectarian-based social categories, with each paper established and granted permission to serve a particular sectarian community. Such a remit to "spread a specific religious or ethnic-oriented message" resulted in "no claims to objectivity" (Dabbous 2010, 162) on the part of the papers. Dabbous (2010) asserts that the lack of "objectivity" as a news value in Lebanon goes back to the feudal centrality of the Lebanese *za'ims*, or local notables who under Ottoman rule administered

local areas, and, through European colonization, came to comprise Lebanon's sectarian feudal elite. The press in Lebanon was established—and remains—“political organs” to the sectarian *za'ims* and the political parties that have organized around them throughout Lebanon's modern history (Dabbous 2010).

An account of Lebanon's press encompasses a complex interplay between colonialism, subjectivities, and a will toward autonomous representation and communication. The Lebanese constitution, enacted in May 1926, which sought to establish Lebanon as a parliamentary democratic republic with equality among all citizens, included an article guaranteeing “Freedom of expression, oral or written, and publishing...are protected by law.” Due to its sectarian foundation and divisions, Lebanon's press reflected tension between pan-Arab nationalism and Western influence since it emerged (Moussallem 1977). In the process of working together to gain their independence from France, the various sectarian groups in Lebanon negotiated a confessional system of government in which representation within the political system adhered to sectarian identity: Christians would be represented in the Presidency and directorate of the general security and armed forces; Sunni would fill the Prime Minister's position, and Shia would fill the seat of Speaker of the Parliament. Sectarian groups were assigned a designated number of parliamentary seats.

After independence, these institutionally organized and horizontally demarcated sectarian groups sought licenses to publish print media that reflected their political positions and interests. During the early years of Lebanon's

independence after 1943, the Lebanese press reflected the polarization of sectarian-based debates over Lebanon's national identity. Nationalist debates became so vitriolic that a large segment of Lebanese civil society called for government restrictions on the press. In the aftermath of politically motivated assassinations in the 1940s, many political activists and commentators considered the rampant proliferation of sectarian based newspapers as detrimental to Lebanese national unity (Moussallem 1977). Although the Press Laws of 1948, 1952, and 1962 helped establish professional unions and a degree of autonomy from the government for the press, the deeply entrenched sectarian divisions and loyalties that structure the Lebanese press served to regulate Lebanese media content. Therefore the Press Law of 1962 sought to curtail the proliferation of political publications by imposing more stringent licensing requirements for periodicals wanting to publish "political" news (Dajani 1992). However, the licensing requirements, which are limited in number, expensive, and obtainable mainly through complex sets of non-transparent processes based on *wasta*, or the possession of socio-economic status and/or political connections, merely limited the capacity to publish political news to a more narrow group of economic and political elites. It did not curtail the political polarization and sectarianism of Lebanon's periodicals and press.

In 1958, Lebanon experienced a brief civil war. A Christian-dominated segment of the population wanted Lebanon to sign the U.S.'s Eisenhower Doctrine and thus align Lebanon with the U.S. during the Cold War (Hudson 1968). Conversely, a Sunni-dominated segment of the population considered Lebanon's

national future to lie within a pan-Arab alliance led by charismatic Egyptian leader Gamal Nassr. Militarized conflict erupted in 1958 between the groups. The U.S. Marines intervened in the 1958 Lebanese civil war to help secure the leadership of pro-Western Maronite president Camille Chamoun. In this instance, Lebanese Christian pro-Western subjectivities, produced through colonial processes, benefitted U.S. cold war foreign policy and international relations.

Lebanese media during this period reflected the efforts of a heterogeneous population to assert a variety of social and political interests against the self-serving regulations and sanctions of the governing political elite. At the outbreak of violence in 1958, only Radio Lebanon broadcast. During the 1958 civil war, two pirate radio stations briefly took advantage of the vacuum in institutional authority to begin broadcasting (Achi n.d.). The Lebanese Television Company (La Compagnie Libaniase de Television) commenced broadcasting in 1956 and Television of Lebanon in 1962. Under agreement with the Lebanese government, these stations prohibited programs that “would threaten public security, morals, religious groups, or enhance the image of any political personality or party” (Dajani 2001). These agreements worked to the benefit of political and economic elites rather than the public (Dajani 2001). Both the state-run radio and television stations failed to critically address social, political, and economic factors that contributed to Lebanon’s fractured national sectarian contexts. Subsequently, during the civil war, between 170 and 300 pirate radio stations, and 40-50 television stations, began broadcasting. This will toward autonomous, representational communication is later reflected in the quick and strategic uptake

of blogging by Lebanese during the 2005 “Beirut Spring” and the 2006 Israeli-Hizballah civil war.

Lebanon’s external systems of telecommunication also reflect colonial origins. Besides working to assert colonial authority in Lebanon through the management of the press, France actively sought during the late 1800s to establish an underground telegraph cable between France and Lebanon. Historical detail on the cabling of Lebanon is lacking, but Traboulsi (2007) reports that Lebanon was first linked via an underground cable through the Mediterranean to an unspecified European location in 1858. The general tendency at the time was for France to rely on short cables between its colonies that tied into a larger, extensive network of underwater cables owned and managed by the British (Hanson 2008). France laid its own cable between France and Tunisia sometime around 1870.<sup>5</sup> France worked during the first part of the twentieth century to establish a link with Lebanon that was independent of the British network. Interrupted by World War I, France did not achieve a connection with Lebanon until 1938, when Submarine Cables Ltd. manufactured and laid an underground cable between Nabeul, Tunisia and Beirut, Lebanon. The cable was nationalized by the French government after World War II, and thereafter was operated by the French Ministry of Post, Telegraph and Telecom.

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<sup>5</sup> Traboulsi (2007) reports that the an underground cable was laid between France and Algiers in 1860; Hanson (2008) reports that the French government did not lay its first cable to North Africa until 1871.



After the U.S. helped restore President Chamoun's leadership in 1958, Lebanon entered a phase of unparalleled liberal economic growth as Beirut became a hub for international finance, banking, and industry (Traboulsi 2007; Khalaf 2002). Lebanon's telecommunication sector during this phase reflected efforts of corporations in U.S., France, and other European countries to promote neo-liberal, globalizing telecommunication development in Lebanon. Throughout the twentieth century, discourses on telecommunication development had emphasized the centrality of telecommunication to the "advancedness" of Beirut. By mid-century, Beirut was celebrated as "the fulcrum of the entire region" in terms of telecommunications, with Western investments flowing in for its telephone network, automatic exchanges, and switching systems (Ericson n.d.). Just prior to the 1975 outbreak of the civil war, Beirut was considered a "bridge between East and West," a "major cultural and educational center with...increasingly sophisticated telecommunications and technological advancements" (Hammoud and Afifi 1994, 161). *Aramco World Magazine* described Lebanon in 1971 as "coming of age on the world communications scene," a "trend setter" on the basis of its Western telecommunication investments (Antar 1971). Telecommunications helped construct Beirut's "modernity" and Western veneer, which in turn created demand for more imported telecommunication products.



Figure 2: From “The History of Ericson” website. Website caption: “The President of Lebanon, Camille Chamoun, inaugurates a telephone station in 1957.”

Lebanon’s media and telegraph show how forms of human organization create and are maintained through communication practices and connections. In this way, processes of “modernization” shape relationships of global power according to world capitalist trade and colonial hierarchies. However, “modernization” does not constitute a monolithic force. Modernizing influences are broad contexts of social change that include local experiences (Watenpaugh 2007) and translocal migrations (Khater 2001). Although some scholars conflate the “modernizing” of Lebanese mercantile classes with their Westernization, deeming the process as inauthentic or “false consciousness” (Fawaz 1983), Watenpaugh (2007) highlights the subjectivity, dimensionality, and contingency of experiences of modernity. He argues against ascribing imperialism “an exclusive role” in modernizing processes in the Eastern Mediterranean during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For instance, return immigrants from North America to Lebanon brought back altered tastes and notions of gender roles that played a role in the formation of class-based identities in Lebanon (Khater 2001).

Existent historical literature on Lebanese nationalisms and the formation of Greater Lebanon indicates a correlation between discourses “at home” and those overseas. As Khater (2001) asserts:

The idea of the ‘nation’ as developed in the mahjar [land of emigration] is a research subject that is very much in need of being pursued. Studies of Arab nationalism which focus solely on events and ideological currents in Syria, Lebanon, and the Ottoman Empire provide only a part of the picture because many of the nationalist debates took place in Brazil, Argentina, and the United States. There, the emigrant community was confronted with an identity they had not encountered before. This encounter obliged some of them to start defining a countervailing national identity (195, fn33).

As described in the next section of this chapter, though, such transnational subjectivities relate to complex sets of local, national, and transnational processes mediated by transformations in communication technologies and the emergence of a global media system rooted in relationships of colonization. These shared processes and communication practices demonstrate the simultaneously local and global embeddedness of “modern,” sectarian, national, and other subjectivities from as early as the nineteenth century. In the following section, through a textual analysis of the daily newspaper *The Oklahoman*, I examine how Lebanese immigrants to Oklahoma, U.S. positioned themselves in relation to a variety of processes, influences, and hegemonies between 1901 and 1958. First, I explain some of the historical characteristics of Lebanese immigration to Oklahoma. I then explicate emergent technologies and their relationship to news production within the U.S. at the time. Through a textual analysis of local, syndicated, and newswire articles in *The Oklahoman*, I position Lebanese Oklahoman nominal identity processes in relation to U.S. race relations and international politics. In doing so, I

highlight how emergent communication technologies and global media systems helped shape the social formations and subjectivities of Lebanese in Oklahoma. I also look at ways in which Lebanese in Oklahoma used media for strategic identity purposes.

### **Lebanese immigrants in Oklahoma, U.S.**

The movement of people around the Mediterranean and within the Islamic world goes back many centuries. Yet, for various social and economic reasons, after the nineteenth century, migration into and from the Ottoman Empire drastically increased (Karpas 2002). This included a massive emigration from the Ottoman province of Syria--including the area now designated as Lebanon—to the Americas.

Arabic-speaking immigrants began arriving to the U.S. in large numbers during the late 1800s. Primarily from the Ottoman province of Syria, which now includes the countries of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, the majority of these immigrants were Christian (Karpas, 2002; Suleiman, 1999). The first recorded “Lebanese” immigrants traveled to Oklahoma, USA in the 1880s, prior to statehood, when the area was still Oklahoma and Indian Territories. As overpopulation and economic pressures “pushed” emigration from the Ottoman province of Syria in the decades leading up to World War I, free land for agriculture and emerging coal and petrol industries simultaneously “pulled” immigrants in a pattern of chain migration to the area that in 1907 became Oklahoma, United States of America (Caldwell 1984; Lucas 1996).

Upon their arrival, immigrants to the twin Oklahoma and Indian territories entered an existing network of multicultural relations, in which forcibly resettled Native Americans lived and did business with Freed Blacks, European-descended homesteaders, and other immigrants, all governed by only nascent local institutions, structures and systems (Foreman 1942). Such “frontier” dynamics proved inviting, even hospitable, to the Syro-Lebanese immigrants of the early twentieth century: by 1910, more than 400 known Ottoman Syrian immigrants had relocated to Oklahoma and Indian Territories.<sup>6</sup> By the 1950s, the Lebanese Oklahoma community was recognized for its economic, social, and political influence in many towns and at the state level (Caldwell 1984).

According to family and community histories of Lebanese Oklahomans, the community easily, if not “naturally,” achieved its economic, social, and political successes (Caldwell 1984; Lucas 1996). Reflecting broader discourses on Lebanese accomplishments in the Americas and other locales (Orfalea 1992), dominant community narratives regarding the Lebanese experience in Oklahoma describe how a Lebanese penchant for commerce and an inherent Lebanese understanding of Christian capitalist values led the community to prosper in Oklahoma during the decades of state-building and state growth. Biographies of early Lebanese Oklahoma immigrants relate how the Lebanese established businesses, industries, and banks and laid the groundwork for the community’s “easy” assimilation and material success (Meredith and Meredith, 1982; Massad

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<sup>6</sup> Based on author’s research of public documents such as marriage licenses and obituaries.

1986). Writings on later periods of state history discuss the economic contribution and civic leadership of Lebanese Oklahomans during the World Wars, the Depression, and Oklahoma's economic growth during the post-War period. Scholarship, popular history, and community narratives have all treated the economic, social, and political ascendance of Lebanese in Oklahoma as a taken-for-granted, seemingly inevitable event.

However, a closer look at the history of the Lebanese in Oklahoma reveals a host of darker individual and community experiences. Newspaper articles, oral histories, and local records indicate the pervasive presence of early nativist obstacles in Oklahoma, including encounters with the Ku Klux Klan and ethnic-based economic resentment against the Ottoman emigrants (Shamas 2000). Like other groups who came to the U.S. during the Great Wave of Immigration from 1880 to 1924, Ottoman Syrian immigrants arriving in Oklahoma at the turn of the century confronted a pervasive social expectation that they would acculturate to the rituals and norms of American "whiteness"<sup>7</sup> (Guiltieri 2005). During the course of the twentieth century, Ottoman era immigrants and their descendants constructed a "Lebanese Oklahoman" identity that emphasized a "Caucasian" ancestry and community adherence to "Christian"-based values and economic liberalism.

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<sup>7</sup> Kayal and Kayal (1975) anticipated that the westernizing of Syrian Lebanese Americans and their religious institutions would result in "the end of the Syrian-Lebanese community as we know it" (235).

The ubiquity of such experiences and their similar suppression among other immigrant groups has led Roediger (1991) to assert that our understanding of the interrelationship of immigration, class-consciousness, ethnicity and race in the U.S. is unnuanced and incomplete. Similarly, Gultieri (2005) describes among academics an “uncritical acceptance of the ‘whitening’ of the first wave of Arab immigrants in the United States” (112). Gultieri urges for research to be done on “the kind of choices” made by early Arab Americans in processes of identity construction in order to more fully understand the “racialization” of these immigrants (2004, 75). Scholars consider such research useful for the insight it provides into continued Arab American identity projects (Gultieri 2004). I also argue that, due to continued connections and ties between Lebanese descendants in the U.S., the global diaspora, and Lebanon, research on the racialization of Ottoman-Syrian immigrants to the U.S. contributes to our understanding of Lebanese identity projects more broadly.

In this section, I look at how media provided a key site through which Syro-Lebanese Oklahomans encountered and negotiated dominant cultural agents, structures, and symbols in the process of their acculturation to their new home. A textual analysis of *The Oklahoman* since 1901 provides insight into the depiction and discursive treatment of these Ottoman immigrants both locally and more broadly, within the United States. As I explain, the saliency of immigration as an issue resulted in a significant amount of news attention and column space dedicated to the issue in U.S. newspapers (Kaufman 2003). As news was already structured primarily as a business, entrepreneurs were joining news forces and

sharing resources through news wires and news syndication. The telegraph enabled newspaper editors to share content and information from the early 1800s. By the mid-1800s, papers had news columns devoted entirely to “telegraphic news.” Thus, national “news” about immigrants circulated through local newspapers alongside local stories and international “news” from the news wires and agencies such as Associated Press and Reuters. Simultaneously, however, local news carried artifacts of individual and communal Syro-Lebanese Oklahoman self-representation, such as marriage notices, obituaries, advertisements, and editorials. Collectively, these texts demonstrate a complex interplay of translocal influences on Syro-Lebanese Oklahoma subjectivities, as well as strategic mediated responses and positioning by Syro-Lebanese Oklahomans.

As I explicate these subjective processes, I emphasize their position within a complex interconnection of the “local” and “global.” Research indicates historical collaboration between Lebanese within the U.S. and Lebanon in the construction of Lebanese national identities. As scholars have demonstrated, after the mid-1800s, migrants from Ottoman Syria to North and South America influenced the emergence of the Lebanese “national idea” (Hakim 2002), the construction of “modern” Lebanese identities (Khater 2001), and the institutionalization of “Phoenicianism” as a notion of Lebanese Mediterranean rather than Lebanese Arab ancestry (Kaufmann 2004). As Khater (2001) asserts, Lebanese representational processes in the Americas merit examination when considering construction of “Lebanon” and Lebanese nationalisms.



Similarly, this examination of the community in Oklahoma can shed light on the symbolic contribution of external communities of Lebanese migrants to Lebanese national ideas. Lebanese-Oklahomans have since their arrival in the U.S. maintained religious, family, village-based, cultural, and internet-based ties with Lebanon—through return migration, visits, letters, telegraphy, telephony, and computer-mediated communication. Lebanese-Oklahomans also maintain close familial and religious ties with Lebanese descendants in the Midwest U.S. and Canada. Finally, the Syro-Lebanese community in Oklahoma is networked into centralized/institutionalized Lebanese Antiochian Orthodox and Maronite churches. Previous studies of Internet use by Lebanese in multiple locations demonstrate shared identity processes and subjectivities between translocal Lebanese (Shamas 2000; Shamas 2003). Therefore, Lebanese Oklahoman identities are produced through and productive of broad sets of intermeshed translocal subjectivities and relations.

Classified most broadly as “Turks from Asia” at the turn of the twentieth century (Kayal and Kayal 1975), Syro-Lebanese immigrants to the U.S. confronted racial and cultural prejudice against non-northern European Protestants upon their arrival in the U.S. (Gualtieri 2005; Kaufman 2004). I examine how the biased discourses of mainstream media pressed upon the construction of Syro-Lebanese subjectivities. In examining the discourses of mainstream media, I focus on the process of framing. A “frame” is most basically how pieces of information are selected and organized to produce stories that “make sense” (Ryan 1991). Frames therefore fall in line with dominant ideologies, and are naturalized and taken for

granted within the news story (Gamson 1985). “Identification” constitutes one model of framing (Entman 1996), comprising the use of words or images to encourage us to identify with those in the story.

I describe how “Lebanese Oklahomans” responded to such biases throughout the first half of the twentieth century by both (re)signify existing nominal identity markers—those identities that designate and “name,” i.e. “Turkish,” “Syrian American,” “Lebanese”—and constructing new ones (Jenkins 1996). Nominal identity production reflected strategic efforts of the community to achieve social, political, and material success within the U.S. Following the subject-as-language approach to identity (Du Gay, Evans and Redman 2000), in which “identity” is a verb connoting the relational process by which subjects position themselves/are positioned through language, representation, and/or performativity (Bauman 1996; Butler 1990; Hall 1996), “nominal identity” is the semantic veneer through which subjects are “known.” In other words, nominal identity constitutes not the symbolic *content* but the symbolic *form* of identity processes.

The symbolic form of nominal identity can be signified with a range of symbolic content. Jenkins (1996) describes, “it is possible for individuals to share the same nominal identity, and for that to mean very different things to them in practice, to have different consequences for their lives, for them to ‘do’ it differently” (182). Nominal identities, like other identities, are fluid, contested, and strategic. “New identities” comprise both the (re)signification of existing nominal

identities and/or the emergence of new forms of nominal identities (Alexander 2006). As with the Barthesian (1972) relationship between the signifier and the signified, the form and content of identities cannot be separated. What Barthes demonstrated for signs and their signifying content can be applied to nominal identities: the label and the subjectivity are bound by the context of their mutual historical/ideological construction (1972). Both label and identity are contingent, contested, and always strategically constructed in relation to each other.

As I explain in the following section, ways in which Lebanese Oklahomans (re)signified existing nominal identities and adopted new ones highlights ways in which Syro-Lebanese immigrants navigated the hegemonic prominence of “whiteness” within the U.S. Yet, overcoming the salience of racial classification within the U.S. required navigating issues not only of skin pigmentation, but also issues of cultural and geographic origins (Collier-Thomas and Turner 1994). Through local media and news syndication, a host of racist discourses and orientalist tropes mediated Syro-Lebanese acculturation into the Midwest U.S. I show how Syro-Lebanese Oklahomans responded to local and syndicated representations of “Turks” and “Syrians” as “weird,” “alien” and “usury,” with self-representations of the community and its members as “Christian,” “patriotic,” and “philanthropic.” Through an examination of nominal identity usage, I also demonstrate how newswires and international relations helped shape community identity. Due to political events in the Middle East, including the 1943 independence of Lebanon from France, Syrian Oklahomans over time shifted to referring to themselves as “Lebanese” Oklahomans. However, the shift in nominal

identity was protracted and the process reflects a complex mix of local, national, and international politics.

*Emergent technologies and the “news”: The Oklahoman*

The emergence of telegraphy and underwater cables during the nineteenth century “radically altered the way in which news was produced” (Bielsa 2008, 348). Prior to the 1844 introduction of the telegraph into the U.S., news enjoyed an “unparalleled [in Europe] profusion” of newspapers and versions of events (Blenheim 1995, 2). However, with the advent of the telegraph came distribution of news along newswires, through mass distributed news plates, and via supplements to metropolitan newspapers; newspaper content was broadly shared across states and regions. Within the U.S., geographic constraints precluded the emergence of a national newspaper (Law and Morita 2000). With the rise in popularity of newspapers in the U.S. during the second half of the nineteenth century, as news was already structured as a for-profit business, entrepreneurs joined forces to share resources through news wires and news syndication. By 1875, a third of U.S. newspapers were using ready-print pages.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, news agencies were established and expanded worldwide. As sending reporters abroad was cost-prohibitive for local papers, the Associated Press was formed so that members could share the cost of sending one reporter. News agencies first demonstrated their world-wide scope during the Crimean War in the 1850s, in which Reuters utilized correspondents in Vienna, St. Petersburg and Istanbul, the capital of the

Ottoman Empire (Bielsa 2008). However, news to the U.S. still had to be physically transported. After 1866, underwater telegraph cables between Europe and the U.S. expedited and radically changed the production of news. By the early 1900s, news agencies Reuters, the Associated Press, and United Press International had correspondents and offices throughout world capitals, including in Malta; Alexandria, Egypt; Beirut, Lebanon; and Jerusalem and Haifa, Palestine. News agencies “were and have remained the most important players in the field of global news” (Bielsa 2008, 350).

With the advent of telegraphy and underwater telegraphy cables, the basis for news selection in newspapers shifted from spatial proximity to “newly emerging journalistic criteria of news relevance” (Bielsa 2008, 348). Journalistic criteria for what constitutes “news” is shaped at least in part by processes of news production. Through the wires, the Associated Press secured a monopoly in the U.S. on the provision of news, providing the association the power to produce “an official view of reality which can constrain and control human action” (Carey 1997). News agencies since they were formed have focused on official, top-down perspectives on news events (Bielsa 2008). These processes inform journalistic standards and norms. Scholars attribute the professionalization of journalism in the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century to the standardization of news practices and discourses with the news wires and news syndication (Carey 1989). However, emerging standards of professionalization and objectivity did not overcome the salience of deeply-embedded racial constructs employed “in the very discourses to report facts” (Brady 2010, 3). In fact, the alibi of “objectivity” helps

naturalize mythological constructions such as racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes as “real” (Lule 2001 ).

*The Oklahoman* began publishing before statehood, on January 14, 1894, from Oklahoma City. The paper was founded by Reverend Samuel W. Small, who had worked at the *Atlanta Constitution* as an official reporter for the United States Senate, and as a confidential secretary to former President Andrew Johnson. Historical accounts indicate that, “although he had limited funds,” Reverend Small sought to operate *The Oklahoman* like a newspaper “in a big city, utilizing Associated Press news and market reports by telegraph and territorial weather forecasts from the weather bureau in Washington, D.C” (Dary n.d., par. 2). In late January 1903, Edward Gaylord became business manager of the newspaper and continued Reverend Small’s remit to utilize syndication and wire content in *The Oklahoman*. Besides syndicated and news wire content, *The Oklahoman* also carried “human interest” stories on the lives of “ordinary people.” As Schudson (1978) points out, local editors began to carry localized news after the 1850s in order to differentiate their own publications in light of increasing standardization.

In Oklahoma and Indian Territories and other areas in the U.S., Syrian immigrants were negotiating their racial status, which was “not simply a matter of cultural ‘common sense’; it was a legal question with serious consequences” (McAlister 2004, 37). Until 1952, U.S. citizenship according to the Naturalization Act of 1790 was only designated for “freed white persons and persons of African nativity or descent” (McAlister 2004, 37). In 1909, a lawsuit in California

established that Syrians are “Caucasian” and not “Mongolian” and that they can therefore obtain citizenship in the U.S. Syrian immigrants to the U.S.--of whom there were an estimated 600,000 between 1860 and 1914, mainly Christians, and initially of low socio-economic status (Karpat, 2002)<sup>8</sup>—engaged in “direct encounters” with the dominant host culture through mercantilism, labor, and everyday interaction. Such “direct encounters” between previously unintroduced cultures require cognitive framing, through which the Other is examined and defined in relation to existing perceptual data (Bitterli 1986). This interaction is invariably informed by power (Matar 1998).

Local and syndicated articles in *The Oklahoman* reflect various characteristics of this direct encounter. Through syndication, *The Oklahoman* reported on national instances of violence and repeated broader discourses of racism against Syrian immigrants. A December 31, 1922 syndicated article with a bi-line of Marietta, Georgia entitled “Syrians to abandon town after bombing,” reports that a member of the “prosperous colony” of Syrian merchants will move after the home of one merchants is “dynamited.” Additionally, from the outset, syndicated and local media frames employed by *The Oklahoman* reflected a hybrid of race-based prejudice and orientalism.

Race constituted a salient cultural marker in Oklahoma. An initial quantitative analysis of articles published from 1901 to 1958 demonstrates how,

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<sup>8</sup> [Detailed information on Ottoman Syrian immigrants entering into the U.S cannot be ascertained due to incomplete and/or inadequate records on the part of both U.S. or Ottoman authorities.](#)

for certain groups, constructed categories of race are consistently referred to within syndicated and local articles. For instance, the words “negro arrested” appear together at least 937 times during 57 years. A closer look at one issue of the paper in 1912 demonstrates that the racial classification of arrestees was not always revealed: On January 12, 1912, the headline “Nowata negro to hang” appears on the same pages as a report about the arrest of James Snyder, who kills his wife and baby. Snyder’s race and/or ethnicity is not mentioned.

By 1909 and 1910 the legal status of Syrians was widely accepted to be “white.” Still, in every known case of the arrest of a Syrian or the report of a crime involving a Syrian into the 1920s,<sup>9</sup> race/ethnicity is mentioned. To demonstrate: A local October 21, 1906 article reports that a named Chas Earl, no ethnicity mentioned, attacked “a Syrian.” In a syndicated article of March 29, 1908 with a byline of Vicksburg, Mississippi, *The Daily Oklahoman* reports that George Shadid of Wichita Kansas, a Syrian, was arrested due to mistaken impressions that he was about to kill Edith Roosevelt, the President of the United States’ wife. On the same date the paper reported the arrest of Lena Askins, no ethnicity mentioned, for writing a series of bogus checks. Similarly, in the November 28, 1910 issue of the paper, a syndicated article headlined “Prisoners wanted by Illinois officers,” describes “F.S. Rahhall, young Syrian, wanted for larceny.” In the same paper, neither Joe Poole nor Frank Miller, wanted for theft of a diamond ring and a statutory charge respectively, are ethnically designated. As late as August 5, 1924, a local *Oklahoman* article reflects the ongoing tendency to ethnically designate Syrians in the

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<sup>9</sup> [I base this assessment on name recognition and knowledge of Lebanese families within the Oklahoman and Indian territories at the time.](#)



headline, “Mangum Moses Moses Syrian, shot Richard Malouf, Syrian.”

Although ethnicity does not function as categorically as race in the U.S. as a mode of social division, ethnic designations serve narrative functions that convey social hierarchies through perceived traits of people, norms, and goods. For instance, the Irish, although Caucasian, did not enjoy the erasure of ethnic markers that other “white” groups did. Between 1901 and 1910, the word Irish appears in *The Oklahoman* at least 1936 times, with the words around Irish including

Irish lad, Irish leader, Irish baseball players, Irish American, Irish club, Irish liniment, Irish cleanser, Irish Derby, Irish crown, Irish Table Damask, Irish linens, Irish laces, Irish Maid, Irish wit, Irish potato crop, Irish landlords, Irish champ, Irish home rule.

Like “Irish,” the marker “Syrian” is mentioned in instances where ethnicity is not journalistically relevant. For instance, on August 2, 1916, a local article reports that a “Syrian bootlegger sells white wine concoction”: “drinkers of it don’t give police much trouble, they can’t after two drinks.” These ethnic designations continue into the 1920s.

Besides being ethnically designated when the story does not warrant designation, emigrants from Ottoman Syria are represented through orientalist tropes. As Edward Said (1979) explained, “the orient” constitutes an essential, monolithic exoticized “East” that is dialectical to the more civilized, enlightened, rational “West.” In *The Oklahoman*, Syro-Lebanese immigrants were framed in both syndicated and local articles as “weird,” “alien,” and “usury.” As Said delineates, orientalism functions in both manifest and latent modes. Both are apparent in *The Oklahoman* representations of Syrians. Manifest orientalist

depictions establishing the immigrants as from-the-Orient include a local December 19, 1906 article entitled "Orientals in Court," which describes: "Two sojourners from the far East, Syrians, will appear before Justice Zwick today. One, Oscar Odwan, is accused of using language toward A.G. Samara that is considered profane in Oklahoma as well as Asia." A local July 18, 1909 article jabs: "A Syrian peddler was held up in Alfalfa county last week and robbed of his goods and cash. Possibly the Oriental knows how his victims feel when he leaves after a sale." Syrian merchants are frequently described as dealing in "oriental" goods, even when they own a dry goods store that sells jeans, boots, cottons, linens, and other locally standard items. For instance, an August 9, 1920 local article reports that "F.H. Barkett, a dealer in oriental goods...fears that in the many raids made by the Arabs and Mohammedans...his brother and family have been massacred."

Latent orientalism, in which the Orient is depicted as eccentric, backward and despot, can be detected in a March 17, 1904 local description of Syrians: "A large party of Syrians loaded down with bundles...and wore many silver bracelets and necklaces. They all wore silk handkerchiefs knotted at each corner in lieu of hats." A syndicated January 29, 1921 article entitled, "Poison of Lebanon on Bullets Syrian fired," starts out, "Reading like a chapter from a new Arabian Nights tale..." In a syndicated August 13, 1908 article, a "Turk" is related to have threatened to "drink the blood" of a rival Ottoman immigrant. A syndicated August 19, 1906 article describes the discovery of a smuggling operation on the Mexican border through which more than 50 known Ottoman Syrian immigrants entered the

country. Their passage to the U.S. from Naples had been denied due to their diagnosis of trachoma.

These depictions of “Turks” and Syrians did not merely exoticize the immigrants. The articles positioned cultural difference as alterity, or irremediable difference (JanMohamed, 1985). As JanMohamed (1985) explains, alterity is predicated on “the colonizers’ invariable assumption about his moral superiority” which means that “he (sic) will not be inclined to spend any energy in understanding the worthless alterity of the colonized” (18). For instance, a local 1902 article described a “Weird Wedding” ceremony between two Syrians. Several newspaper articles commented on Syrian weddings; a syndicated February 7, 1904 article described Syrians as affluent Roman Catholics with “misconceptions about government” in the U.S., particularly in regard to the marrying of first cousins. A syndicated January 19, 1908 article reported on a bride who, due to her “Syrian religion” was not allowed to speak for three days after getting married. As late as February 14, 1941, a local article reported an event of “unusual interest” in the marriage of two first cousins from Marjayoun. Repeatedly, Turks and Syrians are presented as “exotic” and irreconcilably different.

Alterity helped maintain the Syrians’ status as aliens. In the contested national debates about citizenship, immigration, and labor, Syrians were deemed as “alien labor” that threatened local jobs. A September 18, 1909 local article reported a letter written to President Taft by local Oklahoma City businessmen,

“Alien Labor is Termed a Menace: Building Trades Appeal to President Taft to stop importation.”

Just as dominant discourses characterized Syrians as an alien menace to local workers, Syrian posterity was positioned as a threat to local structures and norms. Affluence is disallowed within the position of alterity; it is, in the words of one interviewed Lebanese descendent, the equivalent of “being black and driving a ‘pimped out’ car in a white neighborhood.” Demonstrating the construction of Ottoman Syrian difference as pejorative, a syndicated article reported on July 21, 1907, “Heiress anxious to marry Syrian, a donkey driver.” A November 4, 1903 local article described a Syrian gathering in which the Syrians spoke in their own tongue and engaged in financial disputes. The writer described how “everyone in attendance seemed to be of much money.” Positioning the community as simultaneously alien and affluent, articles frequently characterize the Syro-Lebanese immigrants as threateningly ambitious or usury. For instance, on October 10, 1909, a syndicated article announces that “Turks” cannot become U.S. citizens. A local December 20, 1909 article describes Syrian Americans having their money returned after trying to “buy” American citizenship. In a January 8, 1908 local article, a Syrian peddler is reported to be suing the city of Tulsa for damages sustained in a streetcar accident. The article asserts the peddler woman to have incurred no other damage than to her peddler’s pack during the accident. On May 21, 1904, a local story tells of a young Syrian woman who accepted the offer of a “significantly” older affluent Syrian immigrant in Oklahoma to pay her

passage to the U.S. Upon her arrival, the Syrian woman ran off with a younger cousin/lover to the “Syrian colony” in Mangum.

Such representations reflect as much, or more, about the mindset of those constructing them as they do about the subjects they are meant to represent (Tucher 2009). Carey (1997) states that journalism history is a kind of a cultural history in that it reveals a relationship between representational forms used within the newspaper and worldviews of those both writing and reading them. Representations of the immigrants from Syria positioned them as markedly “different” from either the journalists or their intended audiences. As Bird (2003) reminds us, however, “mainstream resonance” does not make negative stereotypes and narratives more palatable to those whose own senses of identity they “violate” (90).

### *Resignifying identities*

As indicated in the previous section, Syro-Lebanese immigrants to Oklahoma were confronted in the early 1900s with exclusionary media discourses that circulated within both local and broader syndicated journalistic realms. However, Syrian immigrants to Oklahoma found ways to negotiate dominant portrayals of Syro-Oklahomans as “weird,” “alien” and “usury.” Through obituaries, wedding notices, editorials, and advertisements, Syro-Lebanese Oklahomans resignified and repositioned these dominant media frames. They recast themselves as falling in line with particular aspects of “mainstream” American society. Where local and syndicated articles characterize Ottoman Syrian immigrants as “weird,” “alien,”

and “usury,” Syrian immigrants to Oklahoma and their descendants resignified their nominal identities as “Christian,” “American/patriotic,” and “philanthropic.” These constructions demonstrate not only how identity signification is frequently refractory, with the identity of one group mediated by its perception of the identity of another group (in this case, dominant Anglo-Protestant Americans) (Cohen 2000, 9), but it also shows how Syro Lebanese immigrants negotiated hegemonic whiteness in the U.S. at the site of their sectarian subjectivities.

To counter the portrayal of Syrian immigrants as having “weird” customs and rituals, including frequent derision of their weddings and marriages as aberrant, Syrians emphasized the Christian origin of their marriage rituals. For instance, a January 21, 1924 marriage notice reports “Ancient Ritual of Church of Antioch joins Syrian couple here.” In a January 11, 1907 article, “Children Baptized Under Greek Rites,” 1907, *The Oklahoman* describes Syrian traditions as historic and pleasant: “The form of the trinne (sic) immersion was used, according to the tradition of the Greek church...Children were robbed in pretty garments” and a “beautiful Greek Hymn” was sung. Syro-Lebanese immigrants also emphasized their Christianity more broadly. For instance, in an April 29, 1921 article describing the transformation of a “native of Syria” into a naturalized citizen, the subject of the article is quoted as declaring his adherence to Christian beliefs: “Christ died so that men may live.”

Syrians emphasized their commonality with Americans in order to address constructions of their community and its members as “alien” or “foreign.” For instance, a local letter to the editor on February 26, 1919 reads, “We Syrians, who are just as good as Americans, as the proudest freeborn citizen. We sent every one

of our young men to war. Syria is a Christian nation. The Syrian people are bright and civilized as any on earth." In 1920, Syrian immigrants in Oklahoma began organize clubs as "Syrian Americans" through which they engage in community philanthropy. For instance, on February 14, 1924, *The Oklahoman* reports the formation of a Syrian League "founded on Americanism."

Syro-Lebanese immigrants in Oklahoma repositioned their affluence as philanthropy. On December 11, 1921, a local article reports that Syrian Oklahoman community leader Joe Abraham has returned to Oklahoma from tour of "the Holy Land," during which Abraham provided a school so the children of his home town could learn "the Syrian language." Abraham is quoted as saying that he was "glad to get back to America." Throughout the first part of the twentieth century, "Syrian Americans" report to *The Oklahoman* that they have formed "Syrian Societies" and "Syrian Leagues" to collect clothes and provide for those in need. On January 1, 1910, *The Oklahoman* reports the charter of the United Syrian Society; on December 10, 1924 an article describes "Clothes collected by Syrian's League: It helps Salvation Army care for the poor"; in 1928, *The Oklahoman* report the foundation of the "Progressive Syrian American club," and in 1932, "Syrian-American Ladies Educational Association," report that they have published a monthly paper, "Syrian Light"; in 1932, the "Syrian American Women's society" collects clothes for those in need. These multiple articles describe how Syro-Lebanese Oklahomans formed leagues, clubs, and organizations oriented toward civic engagement.

As demonstrated by these examples, Ottoman Syrian immigrants to Oklahoma confronted dominant whiteness and orientalist constructions of “Turks” and “Syrians.” Articles in *The Oklahoman* positioned Syrian immigrants in the U.S. as weird, alien, and usury. News syndication contributed to these understanding. Similar to Anderson’s (1991) explanation of mass media’s dispersal of vernacular languages, media syndication worked to (re)produce the racial and cultural meanings in within which people lived and made sense of their lives. In future publication, I demonstrate how emerging technologies and newswires positioned Syro-Lebanese identities in Oklahoma in relation to global politics and U.S. foreign policy.

### **Conclusion**

To make room for themselves in a race and class-based system of social stratification within the U.S., Lebanese Oklahomans struck a delicate balance between resignifying existing nominal identities and creating new ones. The communal transition from “Ottoman Syrian” to “Lebanese” involved both the construction of new symbolic content—such as signifying “Syrian” as “Christian American” rather than “oriental Turk”—and new sets of signs, for instance, in hybrid forms like “Syrian American” and “Syrian from Lebanon.” These identities reflected the various intergroup and international political dynamics that Lebanese Oklahomans navigated to make sense of their subjective position(s). Lebanese Oklahomans maneuvered between constructing identity forms and content based on strategic assessments of whether to embellish an existent



nominal identity or to create a new one. Only after “Lebanon” surpassed “Syrian” in its capacity to improve the local position of the Lebanese Oklahoman community did the community adopt Lebanese Oklahoman as a communal identity marker.

As this chapter points out, global media technologies help draw subjects into multiple “centers” and “margins.” Forms of globalized media, including telegraph-facilitated news wires and syndication, embed local identity processes within local and national hierarchies and power structures, as well as those of broader currents of international politics. These processes demonstrate how cultural imperialism comprises a continuum of processes between dependency and local appropriation. Identity models can be (re)produced and naturalized, or challenged, expanded upon, and/or overturned (Butler 1990).

## CHAPTER 5

### Decolonized Poetics in Alternative Spheres: The Lebanese Civil War Novel

In Emily Nassrallah's short story (1992) "We Are All Alright," set in Beirut during the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war, a resident of East Beirut composes a letter to a close friend who has fled for overseas. Barricaded in her room, she writes

[M]aybe, just maybe, a few items of news will be smuggled out to the world to tell what is happening here, of the forgotten suffering in this part of the universe. I tell you, my friend, as pain carves new pathways into my heart, that the fire that devoured the homes in your neighborhood is steadily approaching, with giant steps, threatening our buildings. As we sit in little pockets within the city, waiting for it, or maybe not waiting for it, just trapped and cornered by this war while the world watches from afar our suffering... (93-96).

Lebanese cultural producers have addressed the Lebanese civil war through a variety of genres, including literature, art, and film. What scholars label "the Lebanese civil war novel" (Rida-Sidawi 2004) designates an outpouring of writing in the unique form of the novel over the last four decades, from many geographic locations, that deals with the prolonged militarized communal violence. A series of complex conflicts between multiple actors, Lebanon's "civil war" constituted a prolonged and grimly violent set of events with which many Lebanese still emotionally and psychologically struggle (Haugbolle 2010). Scholars are looking to the Lebanese civil war novel for insight on memory (Mostafa 2009; Hout 2005), trauma (Hout 2009; Rastegar 2006), identity (Ghandour 1998), and women's experiences of war (Cooke 1987). Lebanese civil war authors also criticize the inadequacy and partisanship of global and/or local media during the conflict.

Despite the diverse focus and scope of these novels, the authors collectively articulate the centrality of media and communication to experiences of militarized political violence. However, a systematic investigation of media and communication within the Lebanese civil war novel has yet to be undertaken.

Based on an interview with Lebanese Canadian novelist Rawi Hage, Gatzmaga (2009) writes that “literature in a globalized world takes on a special role, as regional conflicts have to be perceived globally” (par. 4). Hage argues that sufficient understandings of local conflict will remain obscure without the “voices of people who have gone through something and have given thought to it, who show an insider’s perspective” (Gatzmaga 2009, par. 3). As is typical of traditional journalistic coverage of war, during the Lebanese civil war, global media failed to provide communication spaces for insiders' perspectives. Instead of articulating local understandings of conflict, the global media told sensationalist stories that solidified pre-existing stereotypes and assumptions. Many journalists engaged in so called “parachute journalism,” spending just enough time in Lebanon to gather brief, rudimentary coverage of events that adhered to stereotypes and journalists’ preconceptions. Subsequently, Hage dismisses depictions of the civil war by traditional journalists, who “come and after a few days leave again,” and the author urges instead a broader “translation” of local experiences (Gatzmaga 2009, par. 3).

This chapter explores Lebanese experiences of conflict using Lebanese literature as a site of response. As media and communication constitute forms of power that both “regulate and repress conflicts,” I consider to what extent “a

politics of cultural production” can resist and counter insufficient media representations of conflict (Demaria and Wright 2006, 7). In a context in which media failed to provide a “public sphere” (Habermas 1991) of reliable information or dialogue through which Lebanese could make sense of their experiences, the novel emerged as an alternative public sphere (Fraser 1990). As Habermas (1992) pointed out, through literature authors “experiment” with subjectivities and practice the art of rhetorical persuasion within broader intersubjective realms. Lebanese authors challenge the inadequacies of local journalism and the shortcomings and biases of Western-dominated global journalism from their own unique positions. The Lebanese civil war novel became a cultural domain through which Lebanese negotiate and articulate alternative, situated visions of media and communication.

Scholars and historians note the dysfunctional state of the Lebanese press scene in Lebanon throughout the civil war, as local media incited violence through dehumanization of the Other and partisan framing of events (Dajani 1992). Meanwhile, structural constraints, the drive for audiences, decontextualized “professional” journalistic standards, and cultural assumptions diminish the quality of Western-dominated global news coverage of conflicts in general and the Middle East in particular (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2007; Hudson and Stanier 1998; Kavoori and Fraley 2006; Norris, Kern, and Just 2003; Moeller 1999). However, through literature, authors are able to transcend deeply-embedded imperialistic and sectarian power structures to articulate a media poetics of

decolonized practices, free from dominant conventions and limitations (Salazar 2004). According to cultural anthropologist Juan Salazar, media poetics are

concerned with the way media comes into being and functions in a given community, group or culture through its practice, or poiesis. It is concerned with the way social practices of technology are grounded in cultural politics and social action, generally rooted in local social solidarities. This poiesis...is both a process and product of cultural representation (Salazar 2005, 9-10).

In this chapter I theorize how, in the absence of a mediated public sphere, a poetics of writing positioned the Lebanese civil war novel as an alternative public sphere. This sphere forms part of a broader web of alternative artistic, cultural, and political discursive spaces contesting the absence of public memory and dialogue on the Lebanese civil war. Lebanese writers and their readers use the novels as communication spaces to, among other things, express their experiences of war, address issues of exile and migration, and design alternative media and communication systems. In the Lebanese civil war novel, authors codify media and communication practices in new ways, which, as I show in the next chapter, were reflected in Lebanese practices of alternative journalism and “blogging” during the 2006 Israeli-Hizballah war.

This chapter applies a semiotic analysis borrowing heavily from the field of psychoanalysis. It invokes the concept of “intertextuality” in order to displace the authorship of any individual work and to situate the collective genre within a larger field of discourses. Specifically, I situate the Lebanese civil war novel in relation to global journalism and local media and systems of communication. Due to the imperfection of discursive repression (Lacan 1977), the shift from one set of

meanings into another is never tidy, as every system of signification bears traces of others--in both their absence and presence (Kristeva 1984).

### **Literature: Creating presence from absence**

Literature constitutes a rich source for exploring complex experiences. Its utility for social investigation emerges from its rendering of the subject as deliberately present. The very point of literature, as with all art, is to self-consciously articulate. Unlike “objective” forms of inquiry and narration such as science and journalism, art intentionally foregrounds and offers access to subjective knowledge (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007).

Such deliberate presence can “undo” absence. Literature can make present a subject erased by the alibi of journalistic “objectivity” (Barthes 1977). The field of journalism repeatedly betrays its professed objectivity in that journalists actually construct what they purport to reference (see Chapter 6). In doing so, journalists simultaneously dismiss various subject positions. Additionally, the media in general, and television news in particular, define a mode of reality dependent on the logic of the medium rather than on the experience of the community they mean to represent. Journalism’s processes of erasure include what Barthes names “the privation of history” (1977). As symbolic matter is appropriated to construct events according to the myth of “objectivity,” the historical detail contained within those symbols is blanched to make room for the myth.

Literature restructures absence as something present and productive. It provides a site where even non-dominant subjects, cultures, and histories can

communicate themselves more broadly (John 2003). Within post/colonial literature, communication networks frequently figure for “imperial power and colonial relationships... enabling the coded expression of key questions of subjectivity, language, and power difficult if not impossible for authors to formulate directly” (Worth 2008, 231). By focusing on media and communication, postcolonial writers can interrogate the centrality of Western culture as “standard setter,” including of journalistic standards. The Lebanese civil war novel answers orientalism with both latent and manifest forms of postcolonial response. As described in this chapter, the novel latently criticizes forms of “objective” narration within its literary form while it also manifestly confronts global representation of conflict in Lebanon in its commentary.

Besides journalistic erasures, literature can reinstate other communication absences wrought by conflict and colonization. This includes issues of migration, exile, and diaspora. Ghassan Hage refers to Michael Taussig’s notion of “public secrets,” or “what is ‘kind of known,’ but remains hidden or unexpressed” (Hage 2004, 1), to bring attention to the unspoken difficulty of leaving “home,” or of watching others leave. “No one talks about it, or the whole system could break down” (Hage 2007, n.p.). Hage points out how literature can bring this pain of exile to light (Hage 2004). Lebanese diasporic authors express both a “poetics” and a “politics” of exile: through both aesthetics and commentary they shed light on the condition of being a migrant (Toibin 2010), and on communication practices of “transnational connectedness” and their various social effects (Castles 2003, 24). By expressing otherwise “hidden” experiences, authors describe their positions

within multiple-yet-overlapping communicative and cultural realms (Karim 2003). This includes their mediated experiences of violence by way of global journalism.

Additionally, processes and practices of colonization have produced communicative silences within Lebanon that Lebanese writers work to restore. As colonial powers sought to manage and control public communication within Lebanon and between Lebanon and the “outside,” they invested heavily in media and communication infrastructure. They facilitated a sectarian press system and they dominated public media through harassment and physical disciplining of journalists (Dajani 1992). Additionally, postcolonial telecommunication development in Lebanon remains tied to Western political and economic influence.

As the Lebanon case demonstrates, electronic colonialism is merely a phase of mercantile colonialism, with different products and delivery (McPhail 2010). After the World Wars, colonialism shifted from military domination to a global extension of European and American power through international organizations, transnational corporations, and global commercial practices. Through these entities, Western powers continued to focus on “developing” countries as emerging markets. Yet within the core nations, means of production shifted from industry to an information-based economy. Therefore “electronic colonialism” constitutes

the dependent relationship of poorer regions on the postindustrial nations caused and established by the importation of communication hardware and foreign-produced software that...establish a set of foreign norms, values, and expectations (McPhail 2010, 18).



Electronic colonialism produces not only relationships of technology production and consumption, but it also contributes to the imaginings and values associated with communication technologies. Through literature, writers respond to communication norms imposed through relationships of electronic dependence. They vent culturally and contextually appropriate communication norms, values, and expectations related to their actual information and communication needs.

Finally, through literature, writers work to convey senses and patterns of experience dismissed by journalism and popular culture as “chaotic” or “senseless.” Abstract judgments by outsiders that local conflicts are essential and inevitable, rather than contingent upon circumstances, makes those conflicts, their causes, and their implications easier to ignore. This notion that violence is madness situated specifically within its local and cultural milieu—untranslatable and having no relationship to outside contexts—permeates academic writing on violence. Much theorizing focuses on experiences of violence as “incommunicable” or “language destroying” (Das 2000; Sontag 2003). Anthropologists of violence posit that war intrudes upon our sense of who we are, our construction of identity (Casey 1996; Riano 2006). Carolyn Nordstrom (1992) describes violence as a force that “unmakes the world” for both its victims and witnesses. Elaborating on Scarry’s (1987) assertion that pain “defies,” even “destroys,” language and therefore brings into question the taken-for-granted correlation between embodied experience and consciousness,<sup>10</sup> anthropologists of violence explore the

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<sup>10</sup> Scarry (1987) writes “Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to

symbolic rupture between individual experience and structures of relational meaning. Das (2007) asserts that it is in the space of the scream, the “limits of grammar,” that one situates “the experience of world annihilating violence” (8). Loss of language correlates to a loss of stable experiential or relational referents, as the individual is existentially displaced as both a “being in time” (Heidegger 1927) and as a relationally-constructed subject (Lacan 1936). Collective violence therefore shreds the shared context underpinning communal existence—hence what Taussig (1992) calls the “murky” uncertainty of violence, or Levi’s (1988) “gray zone” surrounding violent human interactions.

As Nordstrom (1995) writes regarding the experience of conflict and its aftermath:

How can we write about the ‘unmaking’ and ‘creating’ of the world in a ‘made’ world of academic prose? No matter how representative we try to be, theory and literature have a structure and an order that they impose in and of themselves, always once removed from experience, intolerant of chaos (138).

In contrast, I assert that Lebanese novelists have developed an aesthetic—a poetics, in Salazar’s sense—that comes close to representing their experiences of violence, and that is tolerant of, even thrives on, “chaos.” I suggest that for the Lebanese, the novel provides a space in which to produce the “very minute signals to which humans cling to make order” (Mertz 2002, 356). In the words of Das and

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language...Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned. Intense pain is world-destroying...the created world of thought and feeling, all the psychological and mental content that constitutes both one’s self and one’s world, and that gives rise to and is in turn made possible by language, ceases to exist” (29-30).

Kleinman (2001), “in the midst of the worst horror, people continue to live, survive, and to cope” (1). The Lebanese developed a literary genre of the civil war novel as one such mechanism. Through the novel, authors process the Lebanese civil war and construct meaning around events and experiences, including media and communication.

In the chaos of violence, meaning construction becomes a mode of social action, as subjects (re)construct themselves and their intersubjective relations. For instance, in public testimonies, black South African women process and make sense of the subjective effects of apartheid through narratives about the domestic and family lives of others. In doing so, they “map the interpolation of violence” onto their own lives (Ross 2001, 267). Maya Todeschini describes how narrativization by Japanese atomic bomb survivors is “a transformatory and eye-opening process” in which the production of narrative allows a “creative reworking of the meanings of their experiences” (2001: 135-136). As per post-conflict studies, communities work through narrative, storytelling, and other performances to collectively repair the symbolic “undoing” wrought by violence (Riano-Alcala 2006). Survivors of war seek to replace the loss of “language” and the lack of agency associated with violence. Such recovery of voice can include a variety of cultural processes that range from visual images to hip hop<sup>11</sup> (Weine 2006, 127), or, as in the case of this chapter, the novel. In the aftermath of violence, “stories are called forth” out of “the ruins of memory” (Das & Kleinman, 2001, 20)

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<sup>11</sup> [Many Beirut youth employ Hip Hop forms in the realm of “everyday” in order to contest social, political, and economic exclusion.](#)

as individuals and groups work to make meaning of experienced trauma in order to negotiate their present existence. As stated by Lebanese author and literary critic Mona Takieddine Amyuni (2002):

I have coined the phrase “Wounded Beirut” as an expression of the state of my bleeding heart and my city's as I lived and suffered the war that decimated my country between 1975-1990. I witnessed the agony of my city being reduced to ruins, and yet, refusing to die. Indeed, “Wounded Beirut” summarizes in my imagination all that we did, witnessed, and resisted throughout those long, tragic war years. Writing about my city has certainly been part of the healing process and a tribute to Beirut.

The Lebanese civil war novel articulates detailed perspectives on militarized conflict for broader translation. In creating art, a subject adopts “a distinctive symbolic relation to the world in order to understand lived experience” (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007, 6). Literature conveys a postcolonial subjectivity that speaks for its own sake (John 2003). The critical capacity of postcolonial literature resides not only in its content, but also in its aesthetics and form (Bahri 2003). In the case of the novel, this includes how the text alters “conventional notions of mimesis” (119), or adherence to “realism” as a modernist project. Elaborating on Adorno, Benjamin and Marcuse, Bahri (2003) asserts that, “in the aesthetic dimension it becomes possible to allude to the possibility of a vision neither conceivable nor understood in the language of a world dominated by the rule of equivalence” (130). Literature articulates postcolonial consciousness beyond/outside of dominant symbolic forms.

As an intersubjective realm and dialogic space, literature allows the repositioning of subjects and therefore “the experience of subjugation may itself, when owned and worked upon, become the source for claiming a subject position”

(Das and Kleinman, 2000, 6). As new forms of subjectivity present themselves, there are new ways in which signs can signify that form to represent lived experience (Das 2000). Symbolic matter is (re)appropriated and rearticulated, and therefore historical context can be owned, reinterpreted, and redefined. Such symbolic agency can provide the basis for cultural and/or psychological decolonization, as well as processes of individual and collective peacemaking— dialogic, intersubjective symbolic action through practices of media and communication use. Therefore, an interrogation of a text’s aesthetic relation to experience can reveal what a “Third World’ non-aligned with conventional rationality and identity thinking might be” (Bahri 2003, 119). These differing world visions constitute forms of utopian longing through which we can locate alternative communication practices.

### **The Arabic novel**

As described below, the emergence of the novel as an influential literary form among Lebanese writers reflects a broader impetus among Arabs to articulate social commentary through literary texts during the second half of the twentieth century. In the absence of a “public sphere” created by a free press (Habermas 1991), many Arab journalists and intellectuals responded to rapid changes in the Middle East through an alternative sphere created via literature. At the heart of this commentary were discourses critical of public and state institutions.

The first known Arabic novels emerged during the late 1800s. However, not until the 1960s and 70s, during the social, cultural and political upheavals

which swept postcolonial West Asia and North Africa in the decades after the two World Wars, did the novel ascend to its dominant position in Arabic literature (Hourani 1991). Specifically, scholars of Arab history and Arabic literature point to 1967 as a “watershed year” in terms of Arab culture and Arabic expression. According to Allen (2001), during the six days of the 1967 June War, Arab public life was changed as contemporary Arab regimes and their “propaganda machines...systematically lied to the Arab people” (208).<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, after the resounding Arab defeat to Israel during the Six Day War, political cynicism wrought among Arabs what Hourani called “a disturbance of spirits” (1991, 434, as cited in Allen 2001, 209).

In response to a political sphere that Allen (2001) describes as having been “totally discredited” (208), Arab writers employed narrative as “symbolic action”—a “magical” response intended to shift the meaning of experience (Sartre 1948). Similar linguistic agency is described by Benhabib (1996) in her definition of narrative action as not so much the revelation of “some essential meaning that is already in place,” but rather an action that “brings new understandings into existence through social interaction” (Jackson 2002, 125-126). During the 1960s and ‘70s, most Arab media operated under variations of what Rugh (1979) labels an “authoritarian press system,” in which mass media become an instrument for

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<sup>12</sup> Established in 1956, Egyptian radio station *Sawt al-Arab*, or The Voice of the Arabs, acquired millions of listeners throughout the region and helped establish President Gamad Abd al-Nasser’s leadership. However, the station lost credibility after announcing an imminent victory for Egyptian troops in the 1967 war when in fact [Egyptian troops](#) were withdrawing in defeat from the Sinai desert (Guaybess 2001).

transmission of the official “truth” (3). Facing totalitarian governments and prohibitions on “unofficial” information or public dissent, regional newspaper editors devised alternative means to express disillusionment with the status quo: they published short stories and poetry “to convey criticism to readers through symbolic fiction” (Rugh 2004, 44).

Allen (2001) describes of the Arabic genre: “It almost goes without saying that all of [the political and social phenomena ‘disturbed’ by rapid changes] have also provided fruitful topics for the Arabic novel” (209). As Henry James asserted in his 1873 review of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, the modern novel is both a work of art and a kind of history. Auerbach (1957) would later point out in *Mimesis* that the novel’s concreteness of historical perspective stems from its concern with symbolic realism. Authors provide access to a sense of their historical location by working to wholly represent their situation through accurate symbolic details. To demonstrate, in 1988 Egyptian novelist Najib Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize in literature for his evocative use of local allegory and symbol as social, political, and cultural criticism.

The 1967 *naksah* (setback) of the Arab loss to Israel resonated deeply within Arab culture, particularly in the ensuing decline of pan-Arab nationalism. Subsequently, regionalism and localism “profoundly effected” the development of the Arabic novel (Allen 2001, 209). Thus a noted characteristic of Arabic literature is its rich diversity of subgenres, with each subgenre situated in its own particular histories and symbolic trajectories. Hence Lebanese literature in the past decades

has responded to its unique “disturbance of spirits”—the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war. Hout (2001a) emphasizes that, “like all cataclysmic events, the Lebanese civil war inspired a generation of writers to respond artistically to the destruction and killing in a variety of genres” (Hout 2001a, 285). Lebanese literature is characteristically “tinged with the heavy burden of the war years” (Manganaro 1994, 374). For instance, Lebanese authors describe experiences of trauma in conflict (Rastegar 2006) and the shredding of social collectives such as families, apartment buildings, neighborhoods, villages, and Beirut through the war’s widespread displacement of Lebanese.

Meyer (2001) examines what he calls “the experimental Arabic novel” to assert a privileged relationship between aesthetics and politics in the work of many Arabic authors, a number of his examples including Lebanese (Elias Khoury, Ghadda Samman, and Rachid Al-Diaf). As changes in literary structure and form of the Arabic novel mirror social upheaval, such as the Lebanese civil war, the novelists

have reacted to the formal unity, ideological bias, omniscient viewpoint, and heroism of realist narratives and countered these with narratives that are fragmented, artistically determined, multiple-voiced, and that reflect a sense of cultural crisis (7).

The war experience has “defined and shaped the writing techniques and narrative stylistics of a number of Lebanese novelists who belong to different generations” (Mostafa 2009, 208).



*The Lebanese civil war novel*

According to Lebanese author Elias Khoury (1993), the 1975-1990 civil war, particularly its interference with local media production, was crucial to the emergence of the Lebanese novel. Unlike Egypt, in pre-war Lebanon the novel had been “rather marginal and intellectual” (Khoury 1993, par. 3). Not coincidentally, prior to the outbreak of the civil war, Lebanon enjoyed the most robust public sphere in the Arab world, the cornerstone of which was a chaotic press scene with over four hundred periodicals granted licenses to publish by the government, including fifty daily newspapers (Rugh 2004). Although the quality and politics of individual publications varied considerably, taken as a whole, the press scene presented readers with a wide variety of opinions and information. Upon the outbreak of violence, not only did the number of titles and rate of circulation significantly decrease—for instance, only 15 dailies continued to publish and were erratic in doing so—but, according to Rugh (2004), “the level of responsibility and veracity in the press diminished as the crisis worsened; those papers lacking ties to patrons with armed militias became circumspect or went out of business while the rest became more vociferous” (95).

Scholars concur that, immediately after the war, in the face of initial public silencing, literature constituted a site of memory of the war, an “artistic initiative to remember” (Haugbolle 2009, 191). Such silence stemmed from the political “amnesia” of the Ta’if Accord—the 1989 settlement that officially ended civil war and reestablished the Lebanese government. To have tackled the causes of civil

violence in Lebanon would have required overhauling the Lebanese government, displacing from power the militarized political elite who actually perpetuated the war (Kerr 2005). As the same-said elite remained in power upon the war's conclusion, they put in place no process to hold themselves accountable for acts of violence, exploitation, or theft. Thus, according to AbuKhalil (2001), the Ta'if Accord was no more than an "obituary of the Lebanese civil war," written by the "political elite," that failed to resolve a range of volatile issues. Novelist Elias Khoury (1997) concurs: "Responsibility, crimes, the disappeared—none of this was dealt with." Samir Farah (2004) puts it succinctly, "There is a general amnesty which complies with a general amnesia."

Complex layers of official silencing often accompany war and its aftermath, a process that includes the "erasure" of those powerful figures who populated the front lines (Nordstrom 2004). Nordstrom (2004) reasons that such censoring stems from the reality that "the truths of war little match the myths that sustain war" (26). Rather, the "politics of invisibility" are a product of the messy business of war-time profiteering, an "economy of power" that includes legal, extra-state, gray and black-market channels (Nordstrom 2004, 34). The reductive narratives used to explain war, like "ethnic cleansing," or depictions of religious antagonism as an "atavistic throwback to a less-civilized age" (O'Leary 2005. xvii), reveal little about the lucrative exchanges of arms, vehicles and fuel, medicine and tools, communication systems, booty and trade that sustain "modern" conflict. Significantly, the Ta'if Accord kept in power the profiteering elite in Lebanon. Once sanctioned within the Ta'if Accord, official "silence" was introduced into other

post-war Lebanese institutions, such as educational curricula and textbooks (Mouzoune 1998). The general amnesty included a 1994 broadcasting law outlawing any programming that would incite sectarian prejudice or violence.

As Elias Khoury stated, “the most tragic thing about the Lebanese civil war is that it is not a tragedy in the consciousness of the Lebanese” (Hockstader 1999, A24). Novelists such as Elias Khoury position their work in direct opposition to such amnesia. Khoury’s detailed accounts of murders and kidnappings reinstate the experience of violence as part of the collective memory. The act of “remembering” is recognized as an elemental component of Lebanese literature since the end of the civil war. Cooke (2002) describes a pervasive tension in Lebanese writing, films, and discourse throughout the 1990s between “the need to forget this war, this bad patch in Lebanese history, and the need to remember in order not to repeat.” (4). For instance, El-Eid (2004) explains “the referentiality” of the contemporary Lebanese novel,” in which “symbolic chaos” is executed as a means of perpetuating the symbolic presence of the Lebanese civil war (n.p.). The genre of Lebanese literature includes what Hout (2001) labels “the post 1995 Lebanese exilic novel,” a genre of texts produced by Lebanese Anglophones and Francophones who experienced part or all of the war in Lebanon and, now from elsewhere, use geographic space and temporal hindsight “to create critical distance from the war’s violence and chaos” (285). From abroad, Lebanese exilic writers (re)produce “survivor memory” as a response to the silence in Lebanon regarding the civil war (286).

Many Lebanese authors are well-acquainted with the practices and institutions of professional journalism, having themselves worked as journalists or within the media industry before, during or since the civil war.<sup>13</sup> A large number of these writers began or continued their journalistic careers upon their arrival abroad. This intimate acquaintance with professional journalistic processes likely shaped both their narratives on media and their turn to literature as a mode of self-expression.

### **Glocal media critique and utopic visions**

Both negativity and utopic yearning characterize the Lebanese civil war novel (Seigneurie 2008). Discourses on communication comprise an intrinsic aspect of each of these literary themes. Hanan al-Shaykh writes in *Beirut Blues*,

Our friendship [between a Shi'ite and Christian in Beirut] couldn't have survived as it was with the passing of time and the war; even the language has changed. The war buried some people and brought others to prominence. I developed a thousand different personalities all teeming with stories (4-5).

As Rawi Hage (2006) writes in *DeNiro's Game*, "No one has anything to say. Don't you know that war spreads silence, cuts tongues, and flattens stones?" (38). Jad el-Hage (2007) in *The Myrtle Tree* describes pervasive interpersonal "breaks in communication...leaving unanswered questions to grow into fearful panics" (163).

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<sup>13</sup> Amin Maalouf's father owned a newspaper and was a journalist; in 1971 Amin joined *An-Nahar* as a journalist until his exile to Paris in 1976, where he worked alternatively between a French magazine and *An-Nahar*'s Parisian weekly installment. Hanan Al-Shayk also worked at *An-Nahar* until her exile to London in 1976. Rabi Jaber is editor the weekly cultural supplement of the newspaper *Al-Hayat*; and Elias Khoury is editor of the weekly cultural supplement in *An-Nahar*. This is only a small sample of the many Lebanese writers working in journalism.

Patricia Sarrafian Ward's (2003) *The Bullet Collection* depicts a young protagonist working to reconcile her embodied and mediated experiences of violence, both in Lebanon and after the family emigrates to the U.S. The protagonist's twin sister collects bullets and newspaper photos to try to make sense of the war. At the end of the book, as the young protagonist reflects on the war, her childhood, leaving for the U.S. and her inability to cope there, she describes,

I tell and feel nothing. Only the fear, the search for language, a code that does not exist, it cannot, a way to read, to decipher, translate the alphabet of these images...only a wish to find and not to find words, to feel and not to feel, to remember and not to remember (301-302).

In these examples, Lebanese writers depict the strain on language and communication wrought by conflict and violence.

Yet Lebanese do not merely critique the lack of communication associated with war; they also describe the importance of media, information, and communication to coping with experiences of violence. For instance, Sbaiti (2009) describes the "cessation of communication" depicted in Ghada Samman's *Beirut Nightmares*: as the sound of shots have "rendered language ineffectual" (9), neighbors seem to be " 'broadcasting' on a totally different wave-length" (286), and even silence is portentous, "full of dangerous foreboding" (133). In the midst of conflict, needing information, the protagonist wants to hear radio news being broadcast by pirate stations, instead of the incomplete, censored state news. The protagonist steals a neighbor's shortwave radio as a mode of survival. In addition to her critiques of war-strained communication and relationships, Samman describes the utility of the pirate radio stations that mushroomed in Lebanon

during the war. Additionally, Samman applies innovative narrative forms that reveal utopic visions of communication; her narrative forms are “experiential,” “creative” and “reflective” (Meyer 2003). Thus Samman’s writing constitutes “a foundation for protest” (Long, 1999, 32) of the failure of communication and media in conflict, as well as an exploration of how communication might mitigate and/or translate experiences of violence and chaos.

As this example demonstrates, two broad categories of commentary and aesthetics, jointly referred to in this chapter as “poetics,” can be discerned in the Lebanese civil war novel as related to media and communication: a media poetics of critique aimed at mainstream journalistic institutions, agents, and processes; and a poetics of emergent media and communication practices rooted in experience and actual needs—a poetics of presence. As per American Indian theory, groups can “use” communication, including literature and media technologies, to undo their historical hiding, to make themselves symbolically present (Lyons 2000; Powell 2000). I “tug” at these two interrelated poetics—one critiquing mainstream media, and one proposing emergent media and communication practices—for insight into Lebanese perspectives on global and local media processes. In this way I work to untangle the dense knot that constitutes the “glocal” nexus of media and communication in experiences of local conflict.

### *Poetics of media critique*

From various global locales, Lebanese novelists critique the function of media in Lebanese experiences of conflict. Novelists direct their critiques toward media institutions, processes, and journalists situated both within Lebanon and abroad. As I elaborate in this section, the Lebanese civil war novel most broadly addresses the gap between experience and mediation. More specifically, Lebanese novelists indict Western-dominated international news for misrepresenting conflict in Lebanon, for failing to delve into its causes, and for dehumanizing Lebanese. Writers' criticisms do not focus solely on global journalism, as Lebanese civil war writers roundly dismiss the Lebanese press as erratic, unreliable, untruthful, sectarianized, and violent. Finally, Lebanese novelists portray the added emotional burden of losing contact with family and friends during conflict, as communication was limited by unreliable post, communication, and travel. These condemnations are asserted both through commentary and within the novel's artistic composition. Content and aesthetics jointly produce a poetics of media critique.

Within the commentary of the novels, writers point to the tension between mediated representation and real experience. A major theme in Ghadda Samman's *Beirut Nightmares* is the disconnect between real experience and mediated reality. The protagonist, trapped in an apartment for two weeks due to militarized violence between militias staked in her neighborhood, contemplates movies she has seen for insight into situations she encounters during the siege. These

contemplations provide no revelations. Rawi Hage's *DeNiro's Game* juxtaposes the real and the surreal in his depictions of radio broadcasts:

The news was on: two were dead, five injured; an Arab diplomat was visiting Beirut; an American diplomat was also visiting Beirut. The moon was round, and the diplomat's flag was on it, and an extraterrestrial sniper was using it for target practice (44).

In another scene Hage describes,

I picked up my mother's radio and held it in my arms. I pulled back the cover. Inside, the wires were green and yellow. The speaker was round and mute, tiny silver metal glued on green plastic sheets. I looked for Fairuz, but she was singing in Paris (89).

In *The House of Mathilde*, Hassan Daoud depicts the distance between reality and processes of representation/interpretation by describing how an Armenian Lebanese woman's perceptions of "America" ebb and flow with cycles of violence. Once the battles have worn the woman down so much that she can no longer muster the energy or interest to leave Lebanon, she comments that she does not still perceive the streets of America as "illustrious." Hanan al-Shaykh's *Only in London* describes the situation of an Iraqi woman in London watching other Iraqis protest against Saddam Hussein. The woman feels distant, as her experience of Iraq is now relegated to "the news," "the papers," and "demonstrations":

She was a spectator, looking at Iraqis just as the English did, and the tourists, before their attention went elsewhere—as if she were not like them, as if she'd never been scared, or looked into the darkness of the night wondering, 'Where shall I sleep tomorrow?' and 'Where shall I wake up?' (120-121).

In a similar vein, Jean Said Makdisi explains part of her motivation for writing her autobiographical *Beirut Fragments: A War Memoir* to have been the experience of



walking into her Beirut apartment after an intense period of shelling in March 1976 to find large portions of the exterior walls gone:

Realization dawns. Those are not white sheets, but dust. The place is a shambles. Everything is white and broken. Real fear now. This is death. Not something to be read about in the newspapers, but something that has come into my house, that has violated my life, my territory, my being (25).

Makdisi goes on to aesthetically demonstrate the contrast between “objective” news accounts and the details of experience:

I walk into the bedrooms, hardly able to keep my balance, as the floor is covered unevenly with inches of rubble. Pick up a few things, a teddy bear off the floor, a blanket draped over a lamp, someone’s dusty pajamas. There is no logic to what I collect.

On the way out I pick up a piece of shrapnel from the rubble. Shrapnel. So this is shrapnel, I think. I never took it seriously before. Somehow when I had heard someone had died of shrapnel wounds, it hadn’t sounded quite as serious as dying from a bullet or in a fire. But this jagged, heavy, twisted, hot piece of iron—this is shrapnel. Shrapnel is serious (25).

Beyond the general disconnect between media and lived experience, novelists comment on the biased depictions of Lebanon and the Middle East by global media. As news events are “framed,” or organized and explained for audience understanding, some aspects are emphasized and particular connections and meanings conveyed (Entman 1993). These frames are constructed according to journalistic norms, which are themselves relational to audience expectations. Thus news framing seeks “cultural congruence” with the basic assumptions of the audience for which it is intended (Entman 1996). Western frames of Lebanon are a key theme in Rachid Al-Daif’s *Mr. Kawabata*, in which the dying protagonist

addresses a series of contemplations to the Nobel Prize-winning Japanese novelist Kawabata Yasunari:

By the way, Mr Kawabata, why did the Western media portray us as if we were some strange specimens of humanity? Why this malice, why this blindness on the part of people who defend themselves from each other with atomic bombs? How did you look at us in Japan? (76).

Various authors critique Beirut's now iconic Western patina, constructed largely by the Western press (Mackey 2002). As Rabih Alameddine's *Kool Aids: The Art of War* comments on a Western journalistic description of Beirut prior to the war as "Paris of the Middle East":

If there is one statement I hate more than anything else in the world, it's 'They say Beirut used to be the Paris of the Middle East.' That is so fucking patronizing. I hate it. It is so fucking condescending...Of course the corollary statement, 'I hear Beirut used to be the Switzerland of the Middle East' is just as inane. There is no comparison. Paris is Paris and Beirut is Beirut (201).

Similar criticisms of media reliance on stereotypes and superficialities are levied from other locations. From Germany, Eddie Naoum criticizes the German media's oversimplification of the conflict in Lebanon, particularly for its focus on the "symptoms" rather than the "causes" of the conflict (Khalil 1996, 554). Naoum laments the focus of West German journalists on the "religious" nature of the war rather than on its vast international political contexts. Such misrepresentation of the conflict and failure to delve into its causes motivates Naoum's writing, which "constitutes indirectly a form of resistance to the Western media's one-sided approach to Middle Eastern affairs" (Khalil 1996, 555). Londoner Tony Hanania in *Homesick* describes the "phantasmogoric Orient, this Araborama" depicted by the

1990s British press (113). In *Beirut Fragments*, Makdisi describes the disconnect between Western broadcasts claiming Israeli justification for its attacks on Lebanon and local experience. “In our own perception, Israel was an unshackled aggressor, being granted a moral cloak by the world’s—at least the western world’s—unquestioning acceptance of its claims to morality” (158).

Moving beyond criticisms specific to Lebanon and the Middle East, authors address war reporting more broadly. Armenian Lebanese American Patricia Sarrafian Ward’s novel *The Bullet Collection* (2003) comments on the disengaged nature of foreign reporting. The protagonist describes the interview of her family in Beirut by an “American journalist” who, during the peak of civil violence, “visited us in Beirut to ask why” the family stayed on in the face of the war (51). Years later, having moved to the U.S., the family watches the journalist still broadcasting his banal programming from Beirut, asking those there “that same bemused question, *Why do you stay?...We didn’t*, I addressed him bitterly, willing the message to wherever he was. *A whole war*, I told him. *And now this*” (55).

Lebanese authors critique international media for its lack of complexity and depth. In Hoda Barakat’s *The Stone of Laughter*, the protagonist and his friend make fun of the naïveté and even ignorance of foreign journalists. Later in the novel, Barakat writes,

When the bombing is in full swing the foreign correspondents will laugh because it gives them juicy stories to work on...the journalist will laugh because time will fly by and his newspaper will be completely ready before eleven at night, even the fourth-rate newspapers. The photographers will laugh because their horrible pictures will remind the executives just what

the photograph's status is, when they are printed on the most important pages (122-123).

In *DeNiro's Game*, Hage depicts the banality of newspaper headlines his protagonist reads at a newsstand on the street:

Israel moving on the southern borders. Fighting in the mountains between the Christians forces, the Muslims, and the socialist forces. Long, empty speeches by ministers and clergymen. A model or Hollywood actress marries a Saudi millionaire. Woody Allen plays the clarinet. Saheeb Hamemeh declares his love to an Egyptian actress. (142).

Tony Hanania's *Homesick* portrays a "group of foreign reporters" clamoring around a Lebanese militiaman, who shows off for them and launches a missile into East Beirut.

Novelists comment on how notions of journalistic "objectivity" distort representations of war in Beirut. The title of Dana Kamal Mills' *Beirut in Shades of Grey* reflects the complexity of life in Beirut, as opposed to the tendency of journalists to try and see Beirut in black and white. The plot of the book revolves around the lack of understanding and subsequent perils of an English photojournalist who frames Beirut through an "objective" lens. As the Lebanese love interest of the photojournalist tries to explain to him,

From my subjective point of view, as someone who's had to live through the war, it seems to me we only make headlines when they're sensationalized. Or when it involves the superpowers...Media coverage has gotten us nowhere. We're still in the same mess we were in seven years ago, and most international intervention is half-hearted and in the end futile (215).

Further indicting journalism and its distortion of reality, the novelist depicts a journey by the young Lebanese woman to the southern suburbs of Beirut:

A meandering route that gradually revealed the immeasurable destruction in areas she had not visited for years. Those were suburbs transformed into battlefields that Rasha had only seen in pictures. What she knew of them, the atrocities they had suffered, cold statistics of their dead and wounded, she had in the past gleaned while leisurely reading the newspapers over morning coffee. However much she had tried to picture them, what unfolded before her eyes now put imagination to shame (258).

Hanan al-Shaykh in *Beirut Blues* describes a character wishing another character would “go back” to his old self, when “the dead were merely statistics in newspapers” (72). In *School of War*, Lebanese Parisian Michel Najjar asserts that “objectivity” enables the international community to “ignore this horror” of the Lebanese civil war:

How can this still be possible? Where is the international community? According to which criteria does it select the causes that are worth defending? Is it like the stock market? Is there a quotation for the value of human lives? The international community does not exist—it is an abstraction. A news flash on the radio announces thirty-seven deaths (78-79).

From London, Mai Ghoussoub (2007) cynically accepts that stereotypes are part of journalism, and that Lebanese have merely been caught up in the game of archetypes.

As these examples demonstrate, in critiquing the global media’s insufficient coverage of the experience of war, Lebanese authors react to “objective” renditions of the war that erase experience and historical detail from their media content. Although the Lebanese civil war was, according to historian Albert Hourani’s

(1991) description, a conflict between “the main political forces in the Middle East: the Arab states, the PLO, Israel, western Europe and the superpowers” (429), “objective” discourses and journalistic narratives dispersed via global print and broadcast media interiorized such violence solely within Lebanese borders and among Lebanese society. Lebanese author Amin Maalouf (2000) describes how the objective impulse to bracket and “soundbyte” depictions of violence in Lebanon reduce such a multifaceted conflict into easily understood and politically convenient binaries--Muslim/Christian, traditional/modern, civilized/uncivilized, and so on. As a British Broadcasting Corporation journalist described:

Providing effective media coverage of the war was a nightmare for international news organisations. The Lebanon conflict was a dangerous assignment, its complexity was almost impossible to compress into a short news report, and to make matters worse, outside the Middle East there was widespread public ignorance, even apathy, about its causes. <sup>14</sup>

British journalist Robert Fisk, a specialist on Middle Eastern politics and Lebanon in particular, commented about journalism during the war: “When we reported events at face value, we fuelled the belief that there was something unsound about the people there, that there was a contagion, a plague let loose” (1990, 602).

Despite the absence of historical detail and context in “objective” journalism, semiotic analysis demonstrates that history cannot be absent from the sign. History is inherent to the temporal condition created by *difference*, the absence or presence of language (Derrida 1966/1978). Thus the present,

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<sup>14</sup> [Hamish Robertson, “Correspondent’s Report,” Australian Broadcast Radio, 28 September, 2003.](http://www.abc.net.au/correspondents/content/2003/s955025.htm)  
<http://www.abc.net.au/correspondents/content/2003/s955025.htm>

constructed through language, dialectically creates the form of “history” to be signified. Insisting on “objectivity,” journalism inserts a flat rendition of history that lacks the richness of perspective. Yet, as Heidegger asserts, the value of representation lies in the interpretive breadth and depth it invokes (1950/1960, as cited in Megill 1985/87). As “objective” discourse lacks such details, it strips away the aesthetic “truth value” of representation. As Mahmoud Darwish (1986/1995) complains of a sterile, “objective” radio broadcast during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Beirut: “‘Intensive bombardment of Beirut.’ *Intensive bombardment of Beirut!* Is this aired as an ordinary news item about an ordinary day in an ordinary war in an ordinary newscast?” (23).

In response to these failures of “objective” discourse, Lebanese novelists during and since the war have displayed in their works what Edmund Husserl (1913/1982) called “the restoration of the power to signify.” Since the 1970s they have countered “objective” forms of language and expression by employing in their writings alternative symbolic systems in which an objective totality is notably absent (Meyer 2001). Elias Khoury’s novel *Little Ghandi* intentionally disrupts time and formal narrative conventions. The author situates himself within the narration, dismissing “the idea of a god-like author” (Ghandour 1994, xi). The narrative structure of the novel consists of seven chapters, the first and last very brief, and the middle chapter the longest. “This structure is inextricably intertwined with the contents of the novel” (xii). The beginning and end of the novel relate Little Ghandi’s death, while the middle chapters of the narrative relate his life. Within the story, small stories and substories are embedded. The story

moves in and out of three time frames, the first being the 1982 invasion of Lebanon by Israel; the second time frame is the narrator's narration and position as a character in the novel; the third is the telling of the stories to the narrator by Alice, a prostitute who disappeared when opposition forces pushed President Amin al-Jumayyil's forces out of West Beirut in 1984 (Ghandour 1994). Similarly, Aliwiyah Sobh's *Dunya* moves between the past, present and future in its narration. Sobh moves through generations in order to investigate social authority and how war corrupts potentially just causes.

Various scholars note the tendency of Lebanese civil war novels to experiment with mimesis, or the relationship of symbolic representation to the "real." For instance, Rabih Alemmedine's *Kool-Aids: The Art of War* compares the war in Lebanon to the AIDS epidemic in the U.S.--and the role of the media in perpetuating both. Alemmedine treats Lebanon during the war as what Dominique LaCapra (1998), informed by Rene Girard and Jean-Francois Lyotard, calls the "prototypical sublime-sacred spectacle (of) the traumatic killing of a sacrificial victim" (32).

Most generally, the author compares AIDS and the Lebanese civil war in terms of the "war profiteers" who benefit from the suffering of others.

"AIDS™ is a registered trademark of Burroughs Wellcome...How much money has [Burroughs Wellcome] made on our suffering? How much money have the doctors, pharmacists, and various medical personnel made? I do not even want to consider the books published, the stories in the media...War profiteers...has anybody ever tried to figure out what the average daily profit was? They did in Beirut. The cost estimate was about fifteen million dollars for one night. That is for one night of a war which



started in 1975. How many years is that? The Lebanese Civil War™ is a registered trademark of Martin Marrietta (167).

This commentary is followed by a surreal/dream sequence in which Arujna and his charioteer Krsna are on a battlefield with Eleanor Roosevelt, Krishnamurti, Mame Dennis, Jalaleddine Rumi, Julio Cortazar, and Tom Cruise, all of whom offer platitudes about the “meaning of life” in the face of death.

Alemeddine focuses on Lebanon as “victim” at several levels: as a political entity vulnerable to domestic militarized conflict arising from competing national ideologies and external interference; and as a life-world to its inhabitants. The author describes a 1984 exchange of corpses between sides in Lebanon:

The Christians found out they had eighteen unidentified corpses. They weren't sure whether to send them to West Beirut or keep them. Bashir Gemayel told them to undress the corpses. If they were circumcised, send them to West Beirut. If they happened to be circumcised Christians, they deserved to be buried with Muslims” (62).

Alemeddine also highlights the interrelationships between war in Lebanon, mediated representation of the war within the U.S., and hegemonic constructions of U.S. cultural superiority. For instance, in a 1987 diary entry, a character writes,

Americans make fun of us. They mock us. My son told me they even had a comedy skit about us on *Saturday Night Live*...They think we are all crazy, maybe even degenerate. The only way they make our suffering palatable is by envisioning us as less than human. We are human. What happened to us could happen to anyone. They refuse to see it. They think all of us just go around killing each other. My son said they had film showing all the bullets flying over at night and the announcer says in a serious voice, “Come visit us in Beirut, where it is Fourth of July every night.” I don't think that's funny (53-54).

Alemeddine follows this critique soon after with an explanation of U.S. financial and military support for Israel and Christian militias committing horrific atrocities in Beirut. Like other Lebanese writers, Alemeddine re-projects the media's interiorizing representations of violence back "outside" of Lebanon. He seeks to demonstrate that the violence of the civil war is not the result of Lebanese being "less than human" (53). The process is akin to Freud's "inner-outer switch." Freud's concept describes the simultaneous introduction into the subject, and expulsion from the subject, of that which the ego rejects as incompatible with the subject's own understanding of reality.

Lebanese criticisms do not focus solely on global and Western media. As reflected more broadly in Arabic literature, the Lebanese Civil War novel portrays Lebanese distrust of and cynicism regarding local and state media. This stems in part from historic efforts by the Lebanese government to politically "sanitize" Lebanese media in order to maintain confessional unity (Kraidy 2003). In particular, early in the civil war the Ministry of Information instructed Lebanese television officials to make sure "the Lebanese ... not sense (experience) the war" (Browne 1975, 695). Such censorship included omissions of vital security information. In Makdisi's *Beirut Fragments*, the people of Beirut wait "desperate for news" of Israeli's 1982 bombardment of south Lebanon (160). Makdisi writes of a woman answering a question about news from the south as she switches a radio off and on, "I know as much as you do, and the radio is no help" (161). In *The Stone of Laughter*, Hoda Barakat describes how local newspapers sensationalize instances of death.

In Jad el-Hage's *The Myrtle Tree*, a village leader and his nephew debate what action the village should take in the face of impending sectarian strife. The young nephew says, "But we heard on the radio that a compromise..." The uncle interrupts. "Radio talk. It's their business to sedate. It's ours to protect." (15). Later, the novel describes the state of media in Lebanon during the war. As the television centers had been bombed, citizens relied on radio.

People took their radios with them everywhere. Each had his favourite station. Radio Volcano, for instance, promised nothing less than the end of the world. Its airwaves were served by speakers straight out of Armageddon. They vowed to kill everyone including babies and the unborn. On another wavelength, Radio Valium had an announcer nicknamed Dead Man Talking. He uttered sweet nothings and people put down their heads, complacent like sheep. But the weirdest of all was Radio Anarchy. This one transmitted a freakish mish-mash of sound effects: children crying, explosions, ambulance sirens, parodies of songs, recording from live battles, street commotion, soundtracks from hospital operating theatres (113).

Tony Hanania's protagonist in *Homesick* describes of the start of the Lebanese civil war, "Initially I suspect that the press have commissioned the attack themselves. The local papers are having a feeding frenzy, providing commentary from every party and pundit, delirious eye-witness accounts, photographs of the shot-up bus from many angles, artists' reconstructions of the attack in various phases..." (126). As the young character cuts out articles on the start of the war for his scrapbook, he notes the "indifference" and "the disconnectedness of things" (127).

Writers also depict the sectarianization of local media. In Ward's *The Bullet Collection*, a young protagonist explains "One night we heard on the radio that the cease-fire was almost over. Mummy joked that there was order to this war because the combatants politely warned each other when the fighting was about to

resume" (100). In *DeNiro's Game*, the protagonist repeatedly describes the omnipresence of radio transmissions in Beirut. Focusing on the sectarian affiliations of private broadcasting, Hage writes "Then we hopped back on the motorbike and drove under falling bullets, oblivious. We drove through the noise of military chants and a thousand radio stations all claiming victory" (13). Rashid al-Daif's *This Side of Innocence* portrays the local media as complicit with the warlords. Subsequently, citizens have nowhere to turn for justice or to make sense of their experiences. The story relates the protagonist's agonizing mix of paranoia and real violence, and ultimately, his descent into madness. In Elias Khoury's *The Journey of Little Ghandi*, Khoury provides details of how the Israeli's used radio during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Beirut to "warn" Beirutis of their imminent invasion. Media was not background to military engagement, but an actor and component in it.

Novelists also describe how, like media, other forms of communication failed them during the war. Through both commentary and aesthetics, novelists are critical of the war's systemic obstacles to post, telecommunications, and local travel. In al-Shaykh's *Beirut Blues*, characters exchange addresses as they depart Lebanon, "I'll write to your address in Lebanon. The Lebanese post is bound to start working again" (84). The characters fall out of touch. In Tony Hanania's *Homesick*, the young protagonist and his sister in London only intermittently have contact with their parents due to failed phonelines. Hanania's *Unreal City* depicts a similar estrangement between a father and a son initially arising out of obstacles to means of communicating between London and Beirut. In Jabbour Douaihy's

*Autumn Equinox*, a young man just having returned to his village from college in the U.S. attempts to maintain contact with his American love interest by mail. He writes letters that he does not know if she will receive, or even if they will be mailed. Through the letters, the young man explores his re-arrival in Lebanon and the violence escalating around him. His existential uncertainty, even futility, is underscored by the fact his letters will most likely never make it to their intended recipient.

Authors comment on the importance and urgency of communication during conflict. In *DeNiro's Game*, a character describes the trials of contacting his son in Kentucky. "The telephone is hard. You know the lines...He tries to call. He is always worried...They see the news there...And we cannot call him, my wife tries for hours..." (60). Various authors describe the haunting unreliability of communication permeating their dreams (al-Shaykh, 2002; Alameddine 1999). In Dana Kamal Mills' *Beirut in Shades of Grey* the protagonist endures nightmares in which she cannot reach her family because the "phone lines are dead" (154). In *School of War*, Najjar depicts the disconcerting isolation of being disconnected from those in his own city, both by physical checkpoints and by telephone. Mai Ghassoub relates the emotional intensity of phone contact both within Beirut and overseas. Of a largely autobiographical character, she writes,

She thought she would never get used to the indifference with which the phone was treated in Paris...As soon as she lifted the receiver she knew, from the slight, familiar disturbance on the line, that the call was from Lebanon...Her heart sank. She could never help feeling nervous when she was connected to Beirut (16).

In *A Short Life*, Renee Hayek writes, “When the phone rang she and her mother were immediately gripped with fear and panic. Nobody ever called them unless there was death in the family” (101).

Lebanese authors emphasize how these communicative failures are defining of their experiences of war. In *Beirut Fragments: A War Memoir*, Jean Said Makdisi (1990) includes a chapter on ‘Crisis, with a Glossary of Terms Used in Times of Crisis.’ She writes:

rah yiftah al matar	the airport is going to open
rah ya salhu al kahraba	they are going to fix the electricity
mishi at telex	the telex is working
telefoni mishi	my phone is working

As demonstrated in these examples, the Lebanese civil war novel depicts the centrality of communication and media to experiences of war. Authors criticize global and local media for their stereotypes, their omissions, and their inadequate portrayal of violence and conflict. They point out the alienating effects of disrupted communication. Yet these authors’ writings do not merely constitute a complaint. They also provide a vision of media and communication based on local needs and experience. Authors depict modes of communication and media use that arise out of their own unique situations, for instance, their use of local neighborhood “grapevines” for information about conflict and access to resources.

#### *Media poetics of emergent communication practices*

The Lebanese civil war novel contains within it not only negativity, but also utopian visions. Within these works, the reader can detect new ways to codify

communications. Forms of communication such as the novels themselves speak “to the tenacity of life in the midst of conflict,” (Hahn 2006, i). Like the Green Line<sup>15</sup> that divides Beirut, modes of communication constitute “a roadway filled with weeds pushing their way through the hard asphalt” (i). Novelists work through their writing to articulate a poetics of presence, in which historical detail, experience, subjectivity and multiple perspectives characterize media and communication. Through telephone and Internet connections family and friends reestablish severed bonds and family connections. Authors depict a media realm in which representation and communication of information are autonomous.

Various writers emphasize the importance of detail and personal perspectives in conveying political violence. Jean Said Makdisi explains why it took her so long into the war to begin keeping the journal that provided the basis for *Beirut Fragments*:

Part of the trouble with a diary is that it limits one to one’s personal experience or that it reduces vast events to small anecdotes, for that is often how vast events are experienced. What, indeed, are vast events but ones that affect a great number of people...

Such vignettes tell more about the realities of Beirut life than the reams of newspaper articles with their interminable political analyses and predictions, most of which prove, sooner or later, to be quite wrong (26-28).

Makdisi emphasizes the importance of details to understanding the lived experience of war. In Hanan al-Shayk’s *Beirut Blues*, a character describes

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<sup>15</sup> The Green Line demarcated East Beirut, controlled by Christian militias, and West Beirut, controlled primarily by Muslim-affiliated militias. The boundary, which ran through the destroyed central market in the heart of the city, constituted a notorious area of militarized conflict, destruction, and terror.

becoming “the only link to the outside world” for another housebound character. She becomes his “newspaper.” In al-Shaykh’s telling, the “news” includes details about militarization and everyday life:

I tell you about the people who have taken refuge on the stretch of beach off the Corniche between the British and American embassies, and about the rifles abandoned on the sands at the knees of a mother or wife in case a fighter comes back from the sea, about the backgammon tables, about how people are scrambling to get food, water, generators, and kerosene lamps (73).

Patricia Sarranian Ward’s *The Bullet Collection* juxtaposes the experiences of watching news about Beirut while in Italy, where Western global media emphasize the perspectives of leaders and official versions of events, with gleaning the local details of actual events. Upon the young protagonist’s return from Italy to Beirut at the end of summer 1982, the girl describes

Bit by bit, the stories of what happened trickled in, from Alaine, from neighbors, from overhearing snippets of conversation late at night. I learned *phosphorus*, bombs that burned a person upon on the inside, and *cluster*, bombs that blew tiny pieces everywhere shredding flesh and bone; Like a shawarma, the concierge said blandly, which made me see the commonplace sandwich with new eyes (163).

Rabih Alameddine’s *The Hakawati* (2008) uses detailed storytelling to link personal experiences and events of the civil war to broader contexts of Lebanese and Arab culture and history. Samuel Hazo’s (1989) *Stills* depicts a war photographer who, in his photojournalism of Beirut, seeks to convey the sense of war by linking conflict to broader contexts and also capturing its specific details. For this photographer, the war had an “international dimension;” and its own mode of militarization: “it was a time of kidnapping, of car-bomb assassinations, of vendettas, of unexpected attacks on innocents in unexpected places...it could break



out anywhere;" and simultaneously, it had the smell of "orange blossoms, and there was the scent of bananas too. And then there was the smell of smoke from the fires that the bombs started in the orchards. There was a smell of napalm. And cordite. All mixed together" (43). These were the juxtaposed contexts the photojournalist hoped to capture in order to portray the complexities of violence. As Rawi Hage asserts, it is only the telling of the details of war that can bring about a translocal understanding of local conflicts (Gatzmaga 2009).

Lebanese authors repeatedly emphasize the importance of local perspective in relaying details and perspectives on political violence. In Tony Hanania's *Homesick*, the Lebanese protagonist has been sent to boarding school in England during the civil war. The schoolboys are charged with being "correspondents" of global news, and they maintain elaborate notebooks of articles on the topics to which they are assigned. As an English student in class reports on Palestinian terrorism in Lebanon, the young Lebanese student contemplates details about the topic that the class "correspondent" has omitted, despite the correspondent's extensive research:

I have no memory of ever learning these details about Lydda, nor of being told these things directly, by my father, or Omer, or anyone else. There is a type of knowledge that seeps into us and which we silently absorb as coral dumbly acquires mazes under the sea (108).

Jad el-Hage's *The Myrtle Tree* juxtaposes the inhumanity and disconnectedness of radio broadcasts during the civil war with the detailed first-hand perspectives of diaries and letters sent between dispersed villagers. These personal accounts

demonstrate the agony of violence and displacement, unlike “Radio Volcano” or “Radio Anarchy.”

Authors depict the importance of details and multiple perspectives in the form of their novels as well. In *White Masks*, Elias Khoury applies a “patchwork journalism” of multiple truths and perspectives to relate an event (Meyer 2003). The plot revolves around a narrator who reads a bland, sterile news report about a mutilated male body discovered in a dumpster. The narrator seeks to recover the background of the person and his death. The story unfolds through a juxtaposition of real and surreal scenes and narratives, depicted in non-linear sequence. Similarly, Lebanese author Jabir alternates between realism and surrealism as the protagonist explores the details behind a death. According to Mostafa (2009), these authors create a genre of a “war story” that is multifaceted and open to many interpretations. In *I, the Divine*, Rabih Alameddine repeatedly begins “Chapter One.” Every chapter is “Chapter One,” started differently and told according to a different sequence of events. In such way, Alameddine demonstrates how the same set of events can be told in multiple ways. Various novels are told from the perspective of multiple characters, such as Alameddine’s *Kool Aids* and Khoury’s *Gate of the Sun*. Through the juxtaposition of different styles and voices of narration, these novels displace a typically omniscient narrator and assert the value of multiple perspectives. Etal AlAdnan’s *Sitt Marie Rose* fictionalizes the real-life assassination of a teacher in Beirut from the perspective of each of her seven assassins and one of her students. The novel embodies the “incredulity toward

meta-narratives that Lyotard characterizes as the post-modernist condition” (Foster, 1995).

In line with their attention to multiple perspectives, Lebanese novelists assert the value of local networks and information sources. Hoda Barakat’s *The Stone of Laughter* describes how locals glean information on the status of events and the safety of the streets through a “hidden network of communication” that includes various neighbors and a retired police officer. In *The School of War*, local networks of information are portrayed as more reliable than “news.” The neighborhood men gather at the barbershop “even before the newspapers come out” in the mornings to begin to accumulate and piece together updates. In a similar vein, Emily Nasrallah’s (1992) short story “The Green Bird” tells the story of a Beirutite who maintains a diary of “war days” that includes not only newspaper headlines and radio reports, but also “rumours and stories that float in the air.” When asked “what good are the details since the whole is lost?” the Beirutite replies: “Ah, but some details are important. Some details carry within them the essence of the whole” (59-60). Jead Said Makdisi explains the utility of multiple sources of local news in times of war. In particular, she points out how warnings from embassies to foreign nationals serve as a “barometer” for impending violence. “Foreigners were often asked if they had heard from their embassies yet” (159). Rawi Hage’s *DeNiro’s Game* points out the utility of grassroots communication versus the banality of information gleaned from news: “Each daybreak, the women of our building gathered over morning coffee. They talked about the price of

vegetables, meat, and fruit. They repeated what they'd heard on the news, like colourful parrots on a pirate's deck" (46).

Novelists see the utility of these local details and multiple perspectives not only in the transmission of information and revelation of experience, but also in the very act of their telling. Novelists express the "low exhale" of telling stories and easing years of pent-up pain. Based on extensive interviews of Lebanese survivors of war, Gail Chehab's *The Echo of Sand* portrays the existential weight of painful memories that are "fired" into "the back of the brain" (138). Through fictional characters, Chehab describes how those living through sustained conflict eventually develop "numbness" when confronted by violent events, but how these initially ignored events reoccur in memory, producing a war "that's history in books but still present in my mind" (159). The writer compares the intersubjective experience of telling these pent-up stories to "pushing the old air out" of lungs and replenishing it with new (206).

In contrast to the absence of an "international community" established through the media status quo, as described in Najjar's *The School of War*, novelists depict how their characters use media to construct a connected international communication space. In such a realm, local voices access the technological means to express themselves. For instance, Lina Mounzer depicts a war survivor relocated to Canada, estranged from his family and isolated from those around him. This character assumes his Canadian friends cannot understand his life experiences. Enroute to Beirut, Ali uses the telephone to begin to rekindle his intersubjective relationships with those in Canada and Beirut. In Iman Humaydan

Younes's *B is for Beirut*, a woman's only potential link to her daughter abroad is the telephone. Gail Chehab's *The Echo of Sand* depicts the importance of telephone communication between those in Beirut and beyond, including the relaying of family information and the maintenance of family ties. For more than 25 years a torn-apart family sustains communication with an immigrant son through a weekly call. "It doesn't matter how terrible our lives are, as long as Saleh will call" (49).

Authors emphasize the importance of autonomy of communication during conflict. Liana Badr's *The Eye of the Mirror* portrays the importance of communication to Palestinians in camps during the war. As neighboring camps fell to attacks and siege by Christian militias, the camp inhabitants "feverishly resorted to their radios to seek the details. They crowded around telephones" (119). The independence afforded through autonomous communication is depicted in one of the main characters, Hana. Hana is a young woman who works the local wireless radio (Ham radio) on behalf of Palestinian fighters. Her skills on the wireless ensure her continued employment, despite her unwillingness to abide by many of the village's dominant codes. Through her communicative autonomy, the woman escapes the patriarchal limits faced by many other women in the village:

She would lose her temper and argue when something displeased her, and would change the texts of messages she was assigned to send on the wireless by throwing in a comment or curse for the benefit of the enemy picking up the coded words...She would say what she pleased, and her superior could tell her off to his heart's content later on. What mattered was saying what she thought, however chaotically (77).

Hana's connections and position diminish the emotional trauma she experiences during the war, relative to other women in the camp to whom she is contrasted.

In these utopian visions, novelists are centrally concerned with a fluid but grounded "code" of media practices. Thus a poetics of presence is not merely relativism, but it is the expression of local experience in order that expression may be translated and positioned within broader contexts. As demonstrated above, Lebanese novelists address media and communication practices in terms of both local and global relationships. They describe connections running the gamut from interpersonal relationships to mass international relations. Thus novelists articulate a cosmopoetics of presence: they depict overlapping global media and communication realms made up of multiperspectival, non-normative practices rooted in lived experience but shared across spaces for broader reflection and understanding.

### **Literature as a public sphere**

Proposing a space made up of multiple perspectives and dialogue, Lebanese novelists articulate a version of a "public sphere," an "arena for discursive interaction" (Fraser 1992, 110) on issues of the "common good" (Habermas 1991). As conceptualized by Immanuel Kant and then Jurgen Habermas, a public sphere is a space of reason, in which rational beings transform themselves into "citizens" through discourse on the "common good." For Kant, writing within the context of Enlightenment Europe, such political public sphere forms the foundation for the "liberal state." Later, Habermas elaborated the notion by investigating the

emergence of a bourgeois public sphere in Europe during the 1600 and 1700s as a result of the tension between capitalism and the state. Habermas articulated the public sphere as a communicative ideal, a dialogic and egalitarian space.

It is their position within the social, as intersubjective expressions of subjective experience, that moves novels into “the public.” As Raymond Williams (1989) asserted, “cultural formations” are simultaneously a social location and an artistic formation (174-175). Habermas (1992) pointed out that, through literature, authors “experiment” with subjectivities and practice the art of rhetorical persuasion within broader intersubjective realms. Postcolonial literature takes on the dual rhetorical burden of “rehearsing” public spheres that appeal to both postcolonial society/ies and the dominant/colonial cultures with which the postcolonial authors consider themselves to be in dialogue (Graiouid 2008).

Habermas’ historicizing and conceptualization of the public sphere has been critiqued for not adequately addressing issues of marginality and exclusion (Fraser 1992). In the aftermath of these critiques, the notion of the public sphere has been elaborated in key ways. First, contrary to Habermas’s singular, all-inclusive public sphere, Nancy Fraser argues that “the ideal of participatory parity is better achieved by a multiplicity of publics than by a single public” (Fraser 1992, 127). Second, much of the recent literature on public spheres in the Middle East and North Africa has challenged the normative, Western “rational” basis of the Habermasian public sphere model. Research focuses on the emergence of local, culturally-suited public spheres. For example, Lisa Wedeen positions Qat chews in

Yemen as local public spheres (Wedeen 2007). Third, writers have criticized the taken-for-grantedness of nations and the national paradigm in Habermas' writing. For instance, Armando Salvatore has argued for the existence of a transnational Islamic public sphere (Salvatore 2007). Finally, as described in the following paragraph, Habermas' "thinking on the public sphere...provides the bases for a related set of insights on media activism" (Carroll and Hackett 2006, 97-98).

Addressing communication and public life, Graioud (2008) argues that, within Moroccan postcolonial literature, authors actually rehearse normative versions of a public sphere. I assert that Lebanese authors do just the opposite. As Foster (2006) argues regarding cultural locations such as music and literature, they can create "vernacular spaces for the formation of counterpublic deliberation and the formation of a new 'public culture'" (8). The Lebanese civil war novel purposefully and strategically presents a version of local and global communicative spheres that differ markedly from either normative, "rational" theorizing on the public sphere or the profit-driven status quo. They present a communicative realm that is polyvocal and driven by the need to express experience. Such experience counters dominant media forms in that it expands rather than reduces or erases detail, information, and content.

I hypothesize that Lebanese authors create non-normative public spheres in large part due to their prolonged experiences of internationalized conflict during the civil war, which they attribute in part to media. Their critique includes the alibi of "objectivity" within a supposedly rational global media sphere. Lebanese authors understand how this objectivity strips the normative public



sphere of the subjective meanings necessary to a translocal understanding of conflict and war. For instance, in their “chaos” of time and perspective, Lebanese civil war novels depict the convoluted translocal structures, powers, and experiences that characterize conflict. As Jager (2000) asserts, it is the telling of suffering, and the bringing of such personal experience into the public, that can bridge the “agonal” and “modern” so prevalent in Hannah Arendt’s work on the public sphere (Benhabib 2003). Descriptions of suffering are necessary for intersubjective understanding.

Habermas described an ideal of a democratic and participatory mass-mediated space. Yet, structural qualities such as journalism-as-business, concentration of ownership, and growth of media conglomerates frequently prevent the realization of Habermas’ ideal (Calhoun 1993). Media conglomeration affects not only nationally-located news structures, but, through globalized acquisitions of news agencies and distribution of content, international news media structures as well (Croteau & Hoynes 2003). Thus, in considering “public spheres” as multiple, discursive spaces that facilitate an issue-specific critical dialogue, the Lebanese civil war novel merits further examination. Such examination is especially due as one of the primary issues around which this community of authors coalesce is the very failure of the press to provide such space, thus necessitating the location of alternative realms.

As scholars debate the extent to which the Western public sphere model is a suitable context for discussing Arab media, Naomi Sakr (2007) echoes Nicholas Garnham to argue that the public sphere can demonstrate the “institutional

foundations” necessary to establish “citizen rights to free expression and debate” (Sakr 2007, 12). According to Garnham (2000), public sphere theory addresses the “problem of constructing the institutions and practices of democracy at the level of both state and civil society” (169). Thus, as a “normative ideal,” the public sphere can be useful for both “criticizing current power constellations and as a compass for restructuring the public space towards more democratization” (Miloni 2009, 410).

In considering institutions, some scholars advocate abandoning a highly normative, homogenous approach to public sphere theory (Dahlberg 2001). Rather, a deliberative-discursive model less narrowly defines the public sphere. According to this more liberal definition, the public sphere constitutes “arenas of public communication, including day-to-day communication and communication by civil society actors, as well as mass communication” in which “cohesion develops through issue-specific communication communities above the nation state” (Hahn 2007, 18).

Looking at the potential for a transcultural public sphere between the Arab world and the West, Hahn (2007) makes important observations regarding conflict, transcultural communication, and dominant media practices. Elaborating on “glocalisation” as translation of the Japanese *dochaduka*, or “global localization,” Hahn points out that “different conflict perspectives” based on divergent “politico-cultural foundations” direct the framing of audience-centered global news (23). Even in an era of Arab satellite news, in which global journalism constitutes a more level playing field than during the Lebanese civil war, Hahn sees the absence of

shared media frames as prohibiting the emergence of a shared critical dialogue between the Arab world and the West. This is especially true during crises, when journalists “self-censor” according to the expectations of the political establishment in which they are situated (Hahn 2007, 23).

As demonstrated previously in this chapter, neither the Lebanese news media nor the global news media demonstrated the institutional capacity to create a national or transnational public sphere of critical dialogue around the issue of the Lebanese civil war. As indicated at the start of this section, Habermas’s original notion of the public sphere has been expanded in ways that make it more useful for analyzing non-Western and non-hegemonic communication spaces. One such way is the suggestion that rather than concentrating on the formation of one dominant discursive realm, we consider diverse but overlapping “public arenas” (Fraser 1999) in which “communities of interest” can “articulate their own discursive styles and formulate their own positions on issues” before bringing them into a broader context (Forde, Meadows, and Foxwell 2009, 131). Carroll and Hackett (2006) see within Fraser’s (1997) ideal of the subaltern counterpublic, in which “members of subordinated groups invent and circulate counter-discourses” (81), a dual potential for assessing media activism. First, a subaltern counter public sphere can provide space for a counter public to find its political voice; and second, a subaltern counter public sphere can allow that group to discern how best to articulate its positions within wider publics. Thus the poetics of these spaces provide the strategies through which communities “shape counter discourses and engender alternative public spheres” (Salazar and Cordova 2008, 40).

We can locate the civil war novel, then, as an alternative public sphere in which writers produce a cosmopoetics of presence. Much like other cultural producers in the aftermath of the civil war, such as film directors and artists, Lebanese promote discursive relationships that are local, national, transnational and universal in communicating about militarized violence (Haugbolle 2010). Lebanese authors articulate and practice a mode of representation full of details, multiple perspectives, and divergent voices. Through this shared poetics of multiple attachments and positions, Lebanese novelists engender transnational dialogues on war and new possibilities for understanding.

In the estimation of Carroll and Hackett (2006), much “democratic media action” “seems especially prone to ‘getting stuck’ at the first stage” of media activism, in the stage of merely finding their voice (98). However, as I demonstrate in the next chapter, global Lebanese use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to produce autonomous narratives and ways of representing conflict in Lebanon through blogging. Reflecting the communicative visions of grassroots Lebanese communicators such as novelists, bloggers incorporated many of the practices articulated within the Lebanese civil war novel. Additionally, these emergent practices have influenced the content, frames and practices of “traditional” journalists and dominant news organizations in their reporting on conflict in Lebanon. Thus, the Lebanese civil novel demonstrates the “crucial role” of counterpublics to be “their transformative, instead of merely replicative orientation” (Miloni 2009, 411).

## CHAPTER 6

### Negotiating Traditional Western Journalistic Authority: The Lebanese Blogosphere

Web-based personal logs, or “blogs,” comprise an increasingly influential source of citizen-produced media. Research demonstrates a reciprocal sharing of content and ideas between prominent political blogs and traditional journalism, both within countries and between them (Carlson 2007; Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun and Jeong 2007). Traditional journalists, the “professional gatekeepers” who “filter through the happenings of the world, select the significant events, and report them for their audience” (Nip 2006, 216), monitor blogs to gather information. News organizations offer content and editorials via blogs, and traditional journalists and journalism educators describe professional news delivery as more participatory and interactive since the advent of blogs (Chung, Kim, Trammel and Porter 2007). However, in terms of journalistic standards and ideologies, existent research indicates the relational influence between traditional journalists and citizen bloggers to be ambivalent and contested (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2010).

Although internet-enabled citizen journalism (such as news blogs and Indymedia.net) can circumvent traditional gatekeepers—e.g. mainstream editors and corporate producers, owners, and distributors—while still providing “original” interviewing, reporting, and analysis (Nip 2006), news professionals and journalism educators do not extend journalistic authority to bloggers (Chung, Kim, Trammel and Porter 2007). In other words, these professionals do not consider the routines of citizen journalists to produce a “legitimate”/authoritative version

of events (Zelizer 1992, 188). Conversely, as blogs continue to “bring...public participation and debate into the everyday practice of journalism,” (Rutigliano 2007, 255), they challenge “conventional notions of who is a journalist and what journalism is” (Regan 2003, 69). Bloggers challenge the dominant notion that news merely reflects rather than constructs events; they subsequently bring into question the supposed “naturalness” of professional news coverage, narratives, and choices. Thus debates over journalistic practices “are carried out across the cultural spectrum—by journalists, but also by scholars, politicians, artists, filmmakers, and religious leaders” (Russell 2007, 286).

To further explore this hegemonic tension between traditional journalism and emerging forms of citizen journalism, or what Carlson (2007) describes as the “symbolic competition over credibility, legitimacy and cultural authority” between mainstream and participatory forms of media (265), I examine the interrelationship between the Lebanese “blogosphere” and traditional Western news during the Summer 2006 Israel-Hizballah war. The conflict between Israel and the Lebanese Shi’ite organization Hizballah, or “Party of God,” was an event of “substantial significance, widely covered by news media outlets throughout the world” (Rill and Davis 2008, 612). In many countries in which “the corporate news media” covers the Middle East only when conflict erupts, with coverage by journalists who lack both an understanding of the Middle East and “the budgets needed to cover it well” (Athanasiadis 2008, par. 5), the Israeli-Hizballah conflict led in the news for weeks (Ricchiardi 2006). Simultaneously, bloggers in Israel, Lebanon, and beyond shared information, opinions, and alternative views of

events, rendering the conflict “the most blogged about war in history” (Ward 2007, 5). As demonstrated by the graph below, Technorati.com determined the Israel-Hizballah conflict to have generated more blog posts per day (over 2.5 million) than any other event up to February 2007.<sup>16</sup> As bloggers reported on traditional media and traditional media reported on blogs, these frequently dichotomized practices jointly originated “a new cross-format trend” (Ward 2007, 3). I seek to demonstrate that the symbiotic relationship between blogs and Western traditional journalism went beyond sharing of content and extended to journalistic standards and norms.

My analysis focuses on the construction, negotiation, and maintenance of journalistic authority, a mode of occupational professionalism constructed through

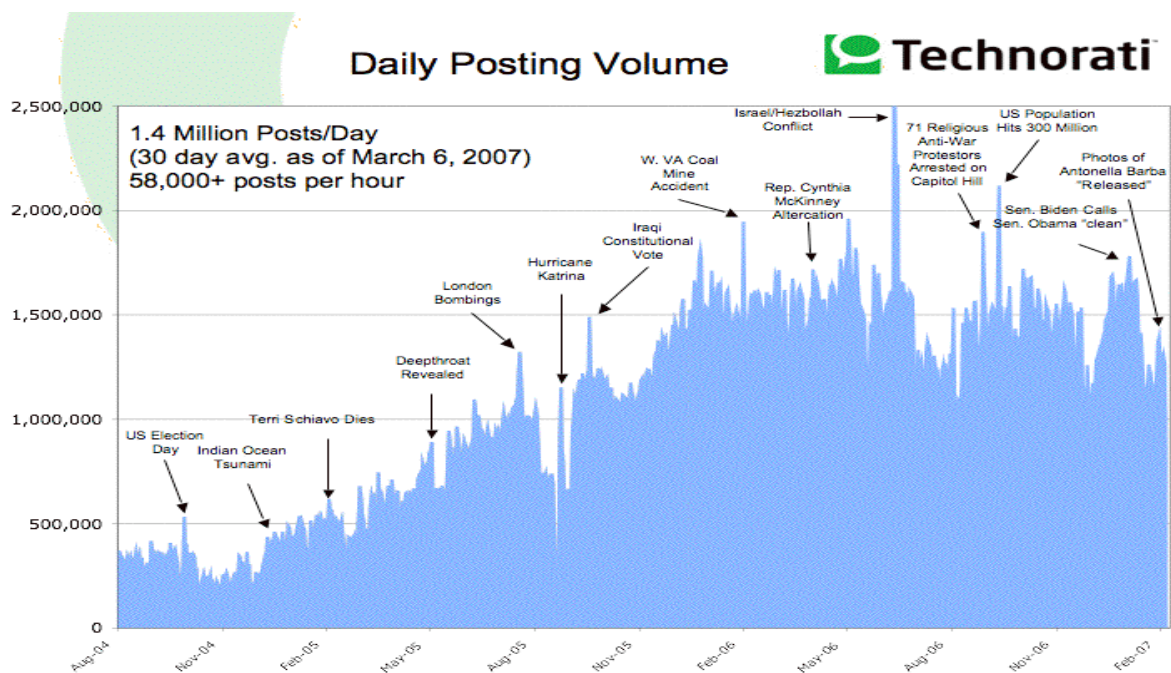


Figure 3: Courtesy of Technorati.com

<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, in recent years Technorati has changed their fields of analysis and do not provide specific issue-driven posting data. This is largely due to the exponential growth of the blogosphere and difficulty in monitoring such data.

journalists' efforts to claim for themselves a "monopoly" on "journalistic expertise" (Anderson 2006, 19). Journalistic authority is fluid and shifting, contingent on the various struggles from which it emerges. A look at the negotiation and maintenance of such expertise in relationship to blogging can reveal subtle and not so subtle ways in which non-professionals use emerging forms of media to influence dominant news production.

A focus on local agency can also "decolonize methodology" (Smith 1999) and redirect academic imaginaries from westernizing the non-West. Research on Arab blogs primarily focuses on their influence within Arab publics, such as among youth publics or religious-based political communities, within a national or regional context (Otterman 2007; Radsch 2008; 2010). As per the trend in global studies of blogging generally, scholars apply in their research ideals rooted in Jurgen Habermas's notion of a "public sphere" (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2010). Based on Habermas' model of a democratic space of "reasoned" political debate, researchers and journalists consider the capacity of Arab blogs to transform public opinion and political activism within Arab countries and/or among Arab publics (Anderson and Eickelman 1999; Beckerman 2007; Lynch 2007), and to render Arab leadership more responsive to Arab publics by influencing mainstream Arab media (Hamdy 2009; 2010). I repose this focus of research. I question, how do Lebanese blogs influence Western traditional journalism?<sup>17</sup> Do Lebanese bloggers transform Western public opinion and transnational structures of power? Rather than examining local experiences in

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<sup>17</sup> "Western" as applied here is a cultural rather than geographic indicator to designate societies with Euro/Euro-settler origins and dominant cultural contexts.



universalistic terms, I consider how local practices and experiences with media help shape forces of globalization (Rantanen 2005). Hopefully, I also raise critical questions about representation, international conflict, and global power.

In recent decades, global means of information and communication have generally accumulated into the hands of a few Western elite. Since the 1980s and 90s, an acceleration of privatization, mergers, and monopolies has whittled away at what Ben Bagdikian (2004) describes as “the new lineup of communication,” a dwindling number of Western corporations in control of information flows and communication media (McChesney and Schiller 2003). The six largest media and entertainment corporations, of which General Electric (owner of NBC) is largest, are based in the U.S. (Flew 2007). Reuters Television and Associated Press Television News provide the bulk of world news footage (Thussu 2007). Although national media markets remain strong in many countries (Straubhaar 1991, 1997), and regional media entities such as pan-Arab satellite television news garner significant portions of audience share, global corporations like Newscorp continue to expand their scope and scale of operations outside their home base—in large part, through joint ventures with local and regional providers (Flew 2007). Media conglomeration affects international news structures through globalized acquisitions of media outlets and global distribution of content via multi-channel platforms (i.e. cable and satellite, the internet) (Croteau & Hoynes 2006). As explained later in this chapter, such structural control deeply influences the production of information on international conflict. The drive to maximize profits, professional news ideologies, and Western-centric news frames generate

truncated, over-simplified, and essentialized versions of events that perpetuate rather than interrogate the global power relations that propel many militarized conflicts. It is this “monopoly on history” and “control of our situation” maintained by Western traditional journalism that Lebanese bloggers roundly sought to contest in Summer 2006.

This chapter contains three sections. In the first, I discuss traditional journalism and describe some characteristics of historic coverage of conflict, including in Lebanon. I argue that the earliest coverage of the Summer 2006 war emerged from specific limitations of the “news as business” model, particularly the tendency to frame events as culturally salient for intended audiences. The second section focuses on Lebanese blogs and bloggers: I provide an overview of select blogging coverage of Summer 2006; ethnographic data on the objectives and experiences of Lebanese bloggers during the war; and quantitative and qualitative data suggesting that Lebanese blogs influenced constructions of traditional Western journalistic authority. In the final section, I analyze the complex relational interplay between various institutions, events, actors, and processes that fused to produce emergent positions of journalistic authority during the Summer 2006 war. I draw on Stuart Hall’s (1996) notion of a “conjecture,” or a plane of historical specificity and contingencies that create that moment’s “common sense.” Conjectural analysis exceeds mere “context” in its focus on contradiction, or “the changing configuration of forces that seeks and sometimes arrives at a balance or temporary settlement” (Grossberg 2006, 5). By dialoging with different histories, I

aim to explain how the Summer 2006 Lebanese blogosphere modified Western journalistic discourses and helped correct corporate media's various erasures.

***Traditional Western journalism and conflict: structure, frames, and ideologies***

In this section I focus on Western traditional journalism. Despite globalizing trends in journalism, particularly the global dominance of "professional" news standards and "objective" practices (Golding and Murdock 1979, 1991; Hallin and Mancini 2004) "geography of news broadcasting remains decisive" in the coverage of conflict (Hahn 2007, 19). Differing conflict perspectives, rooted in discrete politico-cultural contexts and backgrounds, differentiate news selection and presentation between U.S./European and Arab news organizations (Hahn 2007). Granted, Western news outlets increasingly borrow pan-Arab satellite news footage for use in their own coverage. However, in contrast to what some researchers see as a nascent "Al-Jazeera effect" in which pan-Arab satellite news can facilitate transnational communication and global diplomacy (El Nawawy and Gher 2002), "intercultural friction" and international relations collapse any potential global media sphere into a "kind of 'arms race'" between Western and Arab media worlds when news outlets cover conflict in the Middle East (Hahn 2007, 19). "Instead of concealing their significantly different viewpoints, the two sides both use them for self-promotion" (19-20). Therefore, this study distinguishes between Western and Arab satellite news coverage of conflict in Lebanon.

Similarly, this study does not address Lebanese mainstream journalism during the Summer 2006 war. During times of conflict, journalists covering their own country “should be conceptualized as professionals trapped between nation and profession” (Neiger, Zandber and Meyers 2010, 392). Additionally, while scholars deem Lebanon’s press scene to be among the most pluralistic and open in the Arab world, collectively representing all parties and positions within Lebanon (Rugh 2004), the historical affiliation of Lebanese media outlets to political personalities and parties renders them unable to “criticize or harm the hand that feeds them” (Dabbous 2008, 3). Political loyalties shape newspaper, radio, and television in Lebanon, and have so deeply permeated the journalistic culture that many journalists define journalism as a “patriotic duty” and political entitlement (7). Some Lebanese journalists assert that, in light of Lebanon’s long-standing political volatility, international criteria of fairness and balance do not necessarily apply (7). Unsurprisingly, quantitative content analysis demonstrates television and newspaper coverage to have been deeply sectarianized in its support of either Hizballah or the Lebanese Prime Minister during the Summer 2006 conflict (Dabbous 2007). Therefore, Lebanese mainstream coverage of the conflict can be ideologically distinguished from Western traditional journalism and is not considered in this study.

I do not discount a potential accumulative influence of blogs, local Lebanese journalists, and mainstream Arab media on Western traditional journalism. In fact, such collective influences are likely, particularly in light of the content sharing and dialectically constitutive antagonisms between Western mainstream media and

Arab satellite news. However, based on empirical research, in this study I focus on a distinct and direct relationship between the Lebanese blogosphere and Western traditional journalism during the Summer 2006 conflict. In doing so, I seek to facilitate future studies of more diverse sets of actors.

### **Traditional Western coverage of conflict**

All journalists, including citizen journalists, face the disciplinary power of traditional journalism, professional news, and the media industries (Lull 1995). The dominant journalistic normative of “social responsibility,” premised on the journalistic ideal of objectivity as it emerged in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century (Kaplan 2002), promotes factual and investigative reporting, balanced viewpoints, and neutrality on the part of the journalist (Schudson 2001). Although this ideal has achieved global dominance (Hallin and Mancini 2004), journalistic theories of social responsibility do not account for capitalist media ownership and funding (McQuail 2005). Nor do they consider the various politico-cultural contexts in which journalists and their audiences are embedded (El-Nawawy and Iskander 2002). Thus professionalism and objectivity are “fuzzy and flexible concepts...not likely to override the claims and demands of deeper power and control relationships” (Herman 2000, 101).

Hegemonic notions of objectivity are dismissed by many critical scholars as unattainable, undesirable, and redundant due to information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Hall 2001; Campbell 2004; Soffer 2009). In fact, some media scholars consider traditional journalism to be biased not in spite of standards of

objectivity, but because of them, especially due to the reliance of traditional reporters on “official” and elite sources of information (Bennett 2003). In relation to “the distinctive genre of war reporting,” objectivity and related news values elicit much debate (Knightley 1996). Most of these debates focus on the desirability of “objectivity” as a goal when reporting experiences of violence and conflict (Harb 2008; Schwenkel 2009; Sontag 1990). As Kate Adie (1998), former chief BBC news correspondent describes, “the very nature of war confuses the role of the journalist...any belief that the journalist can remain distant, remote or unaffected by what is happening tends to go out the window in a hurry” (44). Such experiences lead war reporters to question their role and responsibilities (Allan and Zelizer 2004; Schwenkel 2009), subsequently resulting in descriptions of reporting as “eye-witnessing” or “dialogic” rather than “objective” (Soffer 2009; Zelizer 2007).

Yet, despite tension between their lived experiences and professional constructs, traditional Western reporters operate within a journalistic culture that tends toward perpetuating the status quo (Pedelty 1995, 2003; Schudson 2004), particularly at the start of any crisis and conflict (Berkowitz 2000; Katz 1992; Neiger, Zandberg and Meyers 2010; Schudson 2002; Wolfsfeld 2004). Thus, in the West, the code of objectivity continues to stand “as a fundamental cornerstone of journalistic professionalism and integrity” (Campbell 2004, 153). Objectivity functions as the basis of the norms, codes and language that loosely define journalistic culture (Allan 2004; Soloski 1999).

Anthropological research supports popular portrayals of the foreign correspondent as operating within a globally networked culture with consensual codes (Allan 2004; Bird 2010; Pedelty 1995; Hannerz 2004). Although “the privileged correspondent” is not isolated from managing editors and stringers, these international journalists horizontally constitute their own “high slice” of news work situated within a journalistic hierarchy that spans low-ranking local reporters, fixers, and stringers through elite managing editors of the “prestige press” (Pedelty 2004, 340-341). Trained as researchers and writers, correspondents are ritualized into routines of “parachuting” into locales and “whisking off” to the next story (Hannerz 2004; Pedelty 2004). Thus, no matter how much training, or how socially conscious and responsible (Cottle 2003), the journalist must work within structures and contexts that shape the production and distribution of her or his reporting. As media anthropologist Mark Pedelty (1995) asserts, journalism is a culture and news production is its “disciplinary regime” (43). As Pedelty continues: “News production is more than a question of ‘censorship’. [It is] an active, productive, and creative form of power, a more subtle, sophisticated, penetrant, and effective means of control than that which is implied by the term ‘repression” (43). For instance, although the high-profile foreign correspondent maintains a degree of “agency” from the news center (Hannerz 2004), those journalists whose ideologies and discourses are incompatible with corporate institutions have been “winnowed” from the news ranks before structurally ascending (Pedelty 2004).

A consideration of journalistic coverage therefore necessarily starts from an overview of the political economy and institutionalized routines that shape such coverage. Journalistic content is determined by the conditions of its production. “News for profit,” or “infotainment,” has globally trumped the public service model of news and thus traditional news is effectively a wholly commercial enterprise (Thussu 2007; Vesperi 2010). Subsequently, at every stage “news” is determined by profit. The drive to lower costs and increase advertising revenues influences decisions on how to collect, process, and disseminate information; the selection of news subjects; the choice of areas of coverage; the hiring of journalists and other professionals, etc., some of which I explain below.

Traditional journalism positions audiences as “passive consumers” of texts (Deuze 2003). Therefore, media executives, whose drive for profit orients their attention to audience share, cater to limited audience attention spans. For instance, as U.S. audiences undervalue international news, the average length of an international story in U.S. television is 1 minute and 20 seconds; the average length of a broadsheet story of international coverage is 150 words (Moeller 1999). The emergence of “24/7” news has created a new genre of news reporting that focuses on news as “infotainment”: high-tech reporting, graphics, virtual and bloodless coverage of war (Thussu 2003).

A preoccupation with ratings leads news organizations to over-rely on coverage of conflict and crisis—the worse the crisis, e.g. the more sensational the images of destruction, the better (Livingston 1996). The media emphasize violence and follow the “low road” of conflict journalism, which includes chasing wars and



emphasizing a “win-lose” outcome (Galtung 1993). The need to be “first” with a story results in shallow reporting of conflict designed for the most heterogeneous of audiences (Thussu 2003). These tendencies compel Howard (2003) to distinguish between “traditional journalism” of bad news, blame, and emotional language, and “conflict sensitive journalism” (15) of balance, emotional restraint, and input from all sides in pursuit of “win-win” solutions.

As only a few hundred foreign journalists cover the world in the production of international news (Moeller 1999; Ricchiardi 2006), “parachute journalists” are frequently dispatched to collect the minimum information necessary, often within the span of just a few hours (Hammock and Charny 1996; Livingston 1996). As conflict coverage is directed by accessibility, out of the way “small wars” are frequently not covered (Evans 2010; Sonwalkar 2004). Outlets with smaller budgets rely on large news organizations like CNN, which sells its international news media (Thussu 2007; Winseck 1992). All organizations take advantage of easy access to military “experts,” military personnel trained by public relations firms to “manage” information on military missions (Shaw 1996). This includes joining “newspools” created to supposedly ensure the safety of correspondents, a model taken to its extreme in the “embedding” of journalists with U.S. military during the second Gulf War. Such collusions relocate journalists from a position of objective distance to one of proximity/partiality, producing more editorialization from the reporter on behalf of the side with which she is embedded (Tumber 2004).

When crisis ends, generally so does the coverage of that issue or locale. Diamond and McDonald (1996) note: "Conflict and violence make news and peace doesn't. News is perceived as what's exciting and different...People living happily together are of no interest to the public. Violence is reportable; nonviolence is boring" (124). For instance, images of Ethiopia only reach the West in the form of anonymous starving masses in urgent need of being saved; images of Ethiopians rebuilding, self-governing, or collectively pursuing sustainable resource management do not make Western news (Hammock and Charny 1996). Subsequently, U.S. and Western audiences perceive peoples of Africa as incapable of solving their own problems; they even question the rightness of African decolonization (McNulty 1999).

These forces of production are institutionalized into journalistic routines, which shape how news is framed. News "frames," the ways in which media stories are organized and explained for audience understanding, inevitably emphasize some aspects of a story in order to make particular connections and meanings. Frames operate through the use of familiar symbols (Entman 1993). They are closely aligned with prevalent news values, which direct how journalists select information and package it (Gitlin 1980). In a bottom-line focused news paradigm, news frames are culturally congruent with the expectations of the audience for whom they are intended (Gamson 1989; 2004). They are drawn from collective myths and narratives, and resonate with broader cultural themes. These frames are shaped by the routines and practices of journalism (Gitlin 1980).

Within the process of framing, journalists rely on certain rhetorical devices to make news stories accessible for their audiences. They use metaphors with which their audiences are familiar; thus, the December 2008 bombings in Mumbai are explained to Western audiences as “India’s 9/11.” Nelson Mandela becomes South Africa’s “George Washington” or “Abraham Lincoln,” providing a familiar face to U.S. audiences (Moeller 1999). Oversimplified binaries correlate to easily understood conflicts, particularly when events are reduced to a victim and a hero, or good and evil. International coverage of famine in Africa or natural disaster in Haiti focuses on “heroes” of the Red Cross or Doctors Without Borders, instead of focusing on communities and local leaders (Hammock and Charny 1996). Coverage of Africa during the 1990s largely veered between African “savagery” and Western “humanitarianism” (Carruthers 2004). In the case of both Gulf Wars, U.S. journalists maintained no critical distance in their coverage; they blatantly demonized Saddam Hussein as “the butcher from Baghdad” while glorifying U.S. soldiers (Shohat 1991). Multifaceted postcolonial conflict in Northern Ireland is frequently reduced to religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants, a convenient binary used to explain any expression of political aggression (Holland 1996). Regarding Somalia, postcolonial complexities have been erased in favor of the easier-to-sound bite demonization of Mohammed Aidee (Hudson and Stanier 1997). Military experts frequently rely on binary narratives in order to convince audiences that war is a conflict between the civilized and the savage, forces of good and evil, or Christians and Muslims (Shaw 1996; Shulman 1994).

As journalistic coverage is shaped by broader sets of structural forces and cultural norms, “news” reflects existing power structures, hierarchies, and discourses. In Lebanon’s case, these contexts include colonial histories, orientalist cultural hierarchies, and the explanatory power of previous violence. Regarding colonial histories, Western traditional journalism reflects past and present relationships of colonization (Jung 2005). Colonial hierarchies produce cultural stereotypes frequently employed as easily digestible explanations. These stereotypes reflect deeply embedded orientalist constructions of the Arab world as exoticized, uncivilized, and violent (Said 1978). Western discourses about Lebanon oscillate between “romantic idealization of its role as a cultural bridge between the East and West and revulsion over persistent intercommunal strife in the 1970s” (Matar and Dakhallah 2009, 22). Although the Western press helped construct Lebanon’s “patina” of Western modernity and glamour (Mackey 2006, 23), such frame provided an easy orientalist construction of Lebanon’s complex 1974-1990 civil war as a clash between the forces of “civilization” and savagery, between modernity and traditionalism, between Christians and Muslims, and between the West and the East (Maalouf 2002).

Perpetuating the “pathologization” of previously colonized societies (Fanon 1965), journalists generally “cast doubt” on the capacity of post-colonial societies to self-govern (Hughes and Pupavac 2005, 874). Lebanon is frequently represented as a “failed state.” Comparative discourse study of editorials during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon demonstrates that the *New York Times* focused on Lebanon as a failed nation, rather than investigating or describing the

regional and international politics that instigated the invasion (Vaughan 1995). Over time, this supposed lack of capacity for self-government becomes explanatory, excising other facets of history. Conflict is reduced to being “irrational” and “cyclical,” overshadowing “the complexity of interrelations between the state, society and international or transnational forces in a globalizing world” (Hughes and Pupavac 2005, 874).

Subsequently, Lebanon’s conflict during the 1970s and 80s has come to constitute a journalistic short cut for providing salience and meaning to events in Lebanon. For instance, after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, Western traditional media contextualized the Hariri assassination in terms of the Lebanese civil war (Van Melle 2006). Analogies were drawn to demonstrate that “violence of this caliber was not an aberration to Lebanon’s pathology of violence” (Van Melle 2006, 107). This “usable past” provided an easy explanation that subsumed other trajectories of information, with different facets of the war emphasized for different populations. The Lebanese press and politicians focused on sectarian fragmentation and the potential for further sectarian-based violence, while the United States press made specific references to the 1983 Beirut bombing in which 241 U.S. Marines were killed. Lebanon was depicted as prone to violence and state-failure, overcome with a savagery and despotism supposedly typical of the Middle East. Such “new barbarism,” or the tendency to frame conflict as a clash between civilization and barbarism, situates violence only in terms of local culture, with no regard for political or economic conditions (Tuastad 2003). Just as orientalist depictions of Muslims and Arabs as “backward” constructed Europe as

“civilized” and justified colonization of the Middle East, new barbarism works to justify continued U.S./Western military and political intervention in the Middle East.

Inherent to these ongoing orientalist constructions of Arabs as barbaric is traditional Western news coverage that “underexplains” and/or misrepresents Hizballah. Hizballah’s military wing emerged during the 1980s as resistance to the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon, from where the majority of Lebanon’s Shi’ite population is descended. The party has “evolved” into a politically successful, albeit oppositional, presence within the Lebanese government (Norton 2007, 27). The dominant Shi’ite political party in Lebanon, Hizballah maintains a broad based of Shi’ite support throughout the country (Norton 2007). Composed of various associations, including philanthropic, educational, women’s, agricultural and infrastructural and rebuilding subsidiaries, Hezbollah’s slogan is “One hand resists, the other rebuilds.” Yet Western representations of Hizballah depict only an armed militant Islamic group that commits “terrorist” acts (Husain and Rosenbaum 2004; Jabber 1997). Since 9/11, and the addition of Hizballah to the U.S. list of terrorist organizations, the Western press has predominantly focused on Hizballah’s war-time activities in the 1980s (Firmo-Fontan and Murray 2010). Some analysts attribute this to the utility of such representation to neo-conservative U.S. policy. As journalist Robert Fisk (2007) asserts,

Once you put Hezbollah through the filter of the very gutless and cowardly reporting of [the U.S.’s] journalists, it filters out into what the White House wants or what the Pentagon wants or what the State Department wants or what the Republican party wants...anyone who opposes the United States power or opposes Israel becomes a “terrorist” (n.p.).

Regardless of their motivation, dominant Western media representations depict Hizballah as “shadowy,” faceless evil rather than explaining their various functions and complexities within Lebanese society (Firmo-Fontan 2010; Ghrrayib 2002; Saleh 2001).

### **Summer 2006: Traditional media coverage**

The Israel-Hizballah conflict of July and August 2006 was sparked by a Hizballah incursion into Israel to kidnap Israeli soldiers. After Israel’s departure from south Lebanon in 2000, Hizballah’s leader Hassan Nasrallah repeatedly vowed to liberate all Lebanese fighters from Israeli jails (Matthews 2008, 29). In the years leading up to 2006, Nasrallah made clear his intentions that Israeli soldiers would be captured in order to negotiate with Israel a prisoner exchange. On July 12, 2006, Hizballah operatives acted on long-standing orders to take advantage of any Israeli military weakness that would allow the capture of Israeli soldiers (Matthews 2008; Crooke and Perry 2006). During the skirmish, eight IDF soldiers were killed—including four whose tank drove over a landmine on the Lebanese side of the border--and two IDF soldiers were captured by Hizballah.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert surprised Nasrallah by declaring the operation an act of war, despite previous successful prisoner exchanges between Israel and Hizballah (Matthews 2008; Crooke and Perry 2006). Israel commenced air attacks on “strategic” targets in Lebanon, hitting bridges, roads, power plants, the Beirut airport and *Al-Manar*, Hizballah’s television station. Hizballah launched Katyusha rockets into northern Galilee. Israeli intelligence, having reputedly

infiltrated Hizballah with secret agents during the previous years, believed that Israel possessed information on Hizballah's military strategies and locations of Hizballah arms. Therefore, Israeli political and military leaders anticipated a quick, successful operation. Having been fed misinformation, however, Israel's airstrikes against Hizballah targets were not successful and therefore the scope of Israel's air raids increased (Crooke and Perry 2006). Additionally, Israel engaged a full-scale land invasion of south Lebanon. By the time the United Nations negotiated a ceasefire on August 15, 2006, more than 1,000 civilians had been killed, 43 of them Israelis.

As per most conflicts in the region, this one directly and/or indirectly involved a variety of international actors . The U.S. government condemned Hizballah's "act of terrorism." U.S. President George W. Bush announced that Israel had a "right to defend herself" against terrorist attacks. Within the U.N. Security Council, the U.S. and the United Kingdom opposed Lebanon's request for an immediate ceasefire, fuelling perception in the Middle East of Anglo-American support of Israel. The U.S. also condemned Syria and Iran for their support of Hizballah. Some analysts positioned the war as a proxy war between Iran and the United States, fought between Israel and Hizballah (Fisk 2006).

Western media outlets reported extensively on Summer 2006's events in Lebanon and Israel. Corporate media considered U.S. audiences to "identify" with this story of Middle Eastern conflict, to consider the Israel-Hizballah war as having "far reaching implications" (Amanpour 2006, par. 2). Additionally, the story was



easier to access than conflict in Afghanistan or Darfur, and it delivered high-impact drama and newness (par. 5).

Yet, due to cuts to foreign news budgets over the last two decades, at the start of the war, few Western journalists were stationed in Lebanon (Richiardi 2006). During the first days of conflict, “thinned-out” ranks of foreign press corps made their way to Beirut via back roads from Damascus, due to Beirut’s non-operational airport and a blockaded coast (Ricchiardi 2006). In the interim, only a few locally based and “well-connected” journalists covered the conflict, which diminished the ability of Western news outlets to provide local coverage. For instance, Anthony Shadid, Middle East correspondent for the *Washington Post*, one of only two reporters for large U.S.-based news outlets stationed in Beirut at the start of the conflict, could not depart for south Lebanon from Beirut until a colleague from the Post arrived several days after the start of the conflict (Ricchiardi 2006).

Upon the arrival of the “frenzied migration of correspondents” to Beirut, these newcomers lacked experience in the region. As a result they generally produced the “crisis-driven and episodic reporting” that characterizes foreign news reporting for profit (Ricchiardi 2006, 43). Corporate media emphasized the “bang-bang, so to speak” aspect of war (Amanpour 2006, par. 4). Lawrence Pintak (2006) describes, “There was endless reporting of, ‘this just happened. A rocket came over. We barely got missed.’ There was too much ‘I, I, I’ about what the reporter was doing” rather than context and analysis. To demonstrate, in almost

nine total hours of coverage of the conflict by the U.K.'s British Broadcasting Corporation and ITV, only 34 minutes of what could be defined as "context" were noted (Gaber, Seymour, and Thomas 2009, 249).

Besides a depleted foreign press corps at the start of the war, Western journalists faced other sets of obstacles to reporting in Lebanon. Most Western reporters lacked access to Lebanese and Arab leaders (Amanpour 2006). Both Hizballah and the IDF curbed journalists' efforts at coverage in Lebanon. Hizballah restricted which areas journalists could enter, with whom they could speak, and what they could see; Israeli forces did not distinguish between journalists and combatants in their military operations, and several times bombed coordinates provided by journalists to the IDF of their geographic positions (Provence 2007). The economics of war put a rein on journalistic operations as costs of products and services, particularly local transportation, escalated drastically. The availability of hard currency decreased. Notably, communication, including cell phone and Internet, increased in cost and diminished in availability and reliability, frustrating efforts to relay timely press coverage (Allbritton 2006).

Still, even for well-funded organizations, large budgets did not translate into more information and context. As stated by one North American blogger, CNN's coverage of the conflict was "just as inadequate as other TV channels" (Newmedia Directory 2006). With a lag in time behind events, sometimes nearly an entire day, and continuous repeat coverage of the same information and footage, traditional media failed to provide information to those "desperately"

seeking it in the U.S. Additionally, initial coverage relied heavily on existing understandings of Lebanon and the politics of the Middle East (Kalb and Saivetz 2007; Pintak 2006). The war was framed at the outset in terms of Israeli insecurity at the hands of a “terrorist” group backed by the governments of Syria and Iran “whose leaders are motivated by the desire for Israel’s annihilation” (Parry 2010, 70). Western outlets failed to provide background information on Hizballah, either as a viable political party or as a military group committed to “liberating” and defending south Lebanon from Israel. Western news did not address Israel and Lebanon’s history of swapping soldiers. These understandings, which have been shaped by U.S. foreign policy and oil interests in the region, depict Israel as a victim and the surrounding Arabs as aggressors (McAlister 2005).

In the aftermath of Israel’s pullout from South Lebanon in 2000, widely portrayed as an Israeli military failure by the Arab and Israeli press, the Israeli Defense Forces have focused on media management as a prime component of war (Matthews 2007). In Summer 2006, the Western press easily accessed explanations of war from top institutional spokespeople, such as Israeli military commanders. Western media outlets emphasized that Israeli actions were justified within the context of Israel’s national security, as her “right to defend herself against terrorist acts” (Rutenberg 2006). As Marvin Kalb and Carol Saivetz (2007) describe based on content analysis of coverage, “early in the war, reporters routinely noted that Hezbollah had started the war, and its casualties were a logical consequence of war” (9). Many outlets frequently reiterated Israel’s

military language of “surgical strikes,” in which “clean” war technologies could minimize “collateral damage” (Sites 2006).

Yet, during the course of violence in Lebanon, a nascent transnational network of bloggers commenting on Lebanese politics and events quickly expanded. Lebanese blogs interrupted traditional journalistic discourses of blame, stereotypes, and militarized language. By the end of the war, the dominant Western news frame was “the human cost of the war for the Lebanese people” (Gaber, Seymour and Thomas 2009, 27). This frame correlates to the reality of the conflict, as Israel intensely bombarded Lebanon in an effort to destroy Hizballah’s arms. Still, media does not necessarily always represent such intense human and/or material damage, as represented by conflict in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia (Hughes and Pupavac 2005). In the rest of this chapter, I describe the Lebanese blogosphere and explain how it came to influence journalistic authority in traditional Western media coverage of the 2006 conflict.

### **The Lebanese blogosphere, Summer 2006**

A “blogosphere” comprises blog posts, comments, hyperlinks, and individuals that create a networked discursive space on the Internet (Treyman 2007). Increasingly, these spaces constitute “national blogospheres,” as norms for forming links are produced within national contexts, around nation-state based issues (Zuckerman 2008). “Networked public spheres” in the Arabic-speaking world are noted to adhere to “cluster nationally” (Etling, Kelly, Faris and Palfrey 2010, 1225). Due to Lebanon’s history of migration and transnational politics, the

Lebanese blogosphere is constructed through the efforts of individuals both within Lebanon and abroad, not necessarily all of whom are Lebanese or of Lebanese descent. Many are interested in Lebanon due to cultural or political affiliations with other regional states. For various reasons, multiple actors write about events and politics in Lebanon, and through hyperlinks, comments and repostings, their work jointly constitutes a discrete discursive space, or a Lebanese blogosphere.<sup>18</sup>

The point of this section is to highlight the permeability of boundaries between traditional and citizen journalism, not to assert that the Lebanese blogosphere necessarily reflects broader public opinion. Some scholars assert that the “elite” social, economic, educational and/or transnational background of Lebanon’s bloggers distinguishes their views and positions from broader currents of opinion (Haugbolle 2007). Conversely, the supposedly elite background of Lebanese bloggers may be exaggerated by the representational politics of traditional journalism. Writings on blogging by Beirut’s *Daily Star*, affiliated with the U.S. edited *International Herald Tribune*, focus on the transnational and educated background of many bloggers writing about Lebanon (Ohrstrom 2006). In my own experience, a producer for *CNN International* requested that I put her in touch with a Lebanese blogger for a news story. She requested a blogger that was “Western, not scary” and “pro-government.” This demonstrates the questionable relationship between representations of bloggers and their position vis-à-vis broader currents of public opinion. Majority public opinion does not bear a “natural” relationship to mediated communication. Cautioning against Western

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<sup>18</sup> For ease, I refer to those contributing to the Lebanese blogosphere as “Lebanese bloggers.” This reference does not necessarily denote their national background.

traditional journalists' tendency to signify particular mediated images and events as representative of an "Arab street," a fabricated "mob" of undifferentiated Arab/Muslim consciousness and public opinion, Tarik Sabry (2008) writes, "Why should there be an Arab street where there is not talk of a European, American or Indian street?" (159).

Leaving public opinion aside, I focus on the contestation and negotiations surrounding journalistic authority between blogs and traditional Western journalism. I start by describing the Lebanese blogosphere. Through textual analysis of blog posts and comments, I demonstrate how blogging provided a means for correcting corporate media's various erasures and Orientalist oversimplifications. Based on ethnographic research, I describe what bloggers saw themselves as doing, including the reasons behind and the effects of their blogging. I relate how, in Summer 2006, bloggers worked to reposition themselves from subjects cloaked by hegemonic journalistic practices to objects of explanatory discourse. Then, after describing the blogosphere, I present quantitative and qualitative data suggesting an appropriation of bloggers' non-"objective" narratives and positions by traditional Western journalists. Doing so, I argue that citizen journalists succeeded in challenging the "dominant practices of professionalized journalism" (Atton 2009, 284).

## **Blogs**

Blogs can relate an assortment of stories, quickly. With their hyperlinks and comment boards, web-based personal logs harness the interactive potential of

“2.0” technologies to network a variety of actors and conversations. Thus blogs are characterized by an emphasis on mutual knowledge construction (Matheson, 2004). They generate a polyphony of voices rather than the “monologic professional voice” of the traditional journalist (Soffer 2009, 486). Additionally, blogs lack the many processes and actors involved in producing traditional journalism, therefore they can utilize portable, inexpensive digital technologies to make media coverage of events available immediately. Thus blogs produce a symbolic space more porous and dynamic than those of top-down, gate-kept traditional media (Tremayne 2007).

The Lebanese blogosphere, a brief history of which is provided later in this chapter, reflected from its outset “the global blogging culture of outspokenness” (Hamdy 2009, 93). With the onset of violence between Israel and Hizballah in July 2006, bloggers and those posting comments to blogs began contesting dominant journalistic narratives and constructing alternative meanings of events. Contributors to the blogosphere monitored and analyzed traditional press coverage, and they described the various historical and political contexts in which the militarized violence was situated. They facilitated and relayed on-the-ground networks of situation monitoring and information. Through these dialogic, “bottom-up” efforts at symbolic agency (Haas 2005; Soffer 2009), bloggers positioned themselves as activists, experts, and eyewitnesses, rather than positioning themselves as detached, “objective” reporters.

Efforts at monitoring, analyzing, and critiquing traditional Western journalism constituted a mode of media activism. Contributors to the Lebanese blogosphere mobilized around “perceived threats that commercialized media may pose to humane, non-commodifiable, democratic values” (Carroll and Hackett 2006, 85). Such mobilization, the creation of a “community of interest,” forms the basis of organized, political action (Dewey 1916). A comment posted to *Electronic Intifada’s* “Letters from Beirut” demonstrates such media advocacy: “talk to people about what is going on especially those of you in the States... your media coverage is quite disturbing from what I can see... very one sided and misinformed about the real issues” (Codsi, 2006b). Similarly, Blogger Z (2006) in Quebec posted a letter to his blog from an “American in Beirut” stating

I want to reiterate that we need your help in disseminating this information and hopefully getting it to the press. The news you are receiving is skewed. This is a well orchestrated war that Israel is carrying out. This is not a reaction to Hizbullah’s apprehending two of its soldiers.

Blog Rubber Nose (2006) circulated a letter by Mahmoud al-Batal and Kristan Brustad, authors of prominent Arabic textbook *Al-Kitaab fii Ta-alum al-Arabiya*, pleading

everyone who would like to do something, anything, call a congressman, call the media, call someone and say whatever you think will get someone's attention...this is creating hatred of the US in a new generation of people, not only here but around the world as everyone watches pictures that I am sure are not being shown on US TV.

Blogger Z wrote, “what we need so much of is media coverage that highlights the reality of the situation in Lebanon. I watched a bit of CNN today and I was



shocked.” The blogger follows with a “how you can help” list of tips for media activism.

Such comments demonstrate not only an awareness of the power of media to construct events, but also an intent to interrupt such power through the use of emerging forms of media. They symbolize the efforts of bloggers and posters to make available broader currents of information and analysis, to reject dominant Western accounts of conflict in the Middle East, and to confront militarized aggression against civilians through citizen journalism.

History and Context. Just as novelists rejected the Western media’s internalization of the complex, multi-actor 1974-1990 Lebanese civil war within Lebanese borders and society (see Chapter 5), bloggers rejected stereotypical, easy media narratives that under-explained Lebanon, Hizballah, and international politics surrounding the 2006 war. As one poster to a comment board prefaced a lengthy account of world history and Lebanon, “things are not always black and white, good or bad” (Wizard July 2006). Yet power is silent within traditional journalism (Golding and Elliot 1999). Rather than explaining colonial contexts and histories, traditional journalism pathologizes particular countries and situates them as “failed states” within a world hierarchy of nations (Maalki 1995). Rather than explaining the complexities of Hizballah’s political status in Lebanon, traditional journalism relies on the language and imagery of “terrorism” as a shorthand for Hizballah (Husain and Rosenbaum 2004). These suppressed discourses, or “silences,” become “a sign of something ultimately unknowable,” something too complex to understand (Morris 1997, 27). Thus power perpetuates

itself through what is “left out” of dominant language and accounts (Foucault 1984; Phillipson 2007).

In response to such silencing, contributors to the Lebanese blogosphere worked to depict the various historical and political contexts surrounding the 2006 conflict. They provided information and opinions on Lebanese politics, on the history of the Israeli-Hizballah conflict, and on broader geopolitical and imperial frameworks. In their efforts to “unhide” history and power, bloggers engaged in what Foucault (1984) called “genealogical analysis,” or a de/construction of knowledge that acknowledges and makes explicit its underlying worldview and political purpose. Rather than feigning “objectivity,” many bloggers and contributors to the blogosphere worked to de/construct contextual information surrounding the conflict for avowedly persuasive and political purposes—to argue against conflict, to propose certain geopolitical solutions, or to promote a particular cultural and/or political vision of Lebanon.

Contributors also dialogued about broader contexts of regional politics, international relations, and imperialist frameworks. Blog “Jeha’s Nail” included explanations of processes and jargon surrounding international ceasefires. Several comments to the blog invoked the framework of human rights to contest the bombing at Qana. Wizard of Beirut (August 2006) argued against U.S. foreign policy in the region with a detailed explanation of how the U.S.’s stated objectives were not being accomplished through Israeli military action. A poster to “Lebanonheartblogs” argued,

US policy seems to be that Israel has a legitimate right to do whatever they want... A war is always horrific on both sides of a conflict, but since Hezbollah is an organisation and not the legitimate government of Lebanon, one has to ask if Israel has the right to act the way they have done and continue to do. All but one of the International community says "no", and it's no surprise that the one saying yes is US (Fakty 2006)

Within the context of imperialism, bloggers contested the terms used by traditional Western media to describe the conflict.

Bloggers gain their readership in part through their willingness to be argumentative (Lawrence, Sides and Farrell 2010). Yet these debates on Lebanon transcended efforts to gain readership; they reflected competing agendas and political visions for the Lebanese state. Thus, blogging during the Israeli-Hizballah was not clearly distinguishable from other subjective positions, such as academic, editorialist, or political activist.

"Eye-witness" war monitoring During experiences of mass militarized violence, as the "everyday" and catastrophic come together, information and resources are necessary to basic survival (Nordstrom 1995). Reflecting the utility of blogs to provide immediate information, contributors to the Lebanese blogosphere worked during Summer 2006 to gather and relay first-hand information on the details of war. Through networks of on-the-ground war monitoring, bloggers gathered information on damage, imminent danger, and status of essential supplies.

From the outset of war, bloggers in Lebanon and abroad worked to monitor and predict militarized violence. A commenter to "Blogging Beirut" wrote, "A friend from Beirut is telling me leaflets are being dropped above Beirut and some areas of the south...I don't know the content of the leaflets but I assume it's along

the lines of 'leave the city'." Another commenter reported, "Dahyeh was hit 20 mins ago. Source: my Dad. Not Reuters, but pretty reliable though."

Bloggers and posters utilized the immediacy and availability of blogs to compile and distribute information on resources and conditions. At "Lebanesebloggers," posters helped compile information on status of supplies. The sidebar at "Blogging Beirut" carried information on what infrastructure had recently been hit and where supplies were reported to be running low. Bloggers and posters organized and disseminated information on what supplies were needed for relief. Blogger Ali Abunima (2006) organized a page on "Electronic Intifada" where firsthand stories and information could be uploaded.



Figure 6: From "Blogging Beirut." Blog Caption: "What's left of the meat section. Photo taken at Monoprix Achrafieh, Beirut, Lebanon late afternoon on July 13, 2006."

Bloggers also circulated detailed information on damage to infrastructure. One blogger produced a map of areas hit in the strikes and linked it to Google Earth (Al Mashriq 2006).

Information and communication technologies enable broad segments of people to document and circulate their experiences of conflict and violence. Through narrative acts, victims and witnesses of violence work to bridge private, subjective knowledge and the public intersubjective (Jackson 2005). In other words, “storytelling” about violence is meant to bring personal suffering into what Arendt described as the public realm of politics (Jackson 2002). “Subjective” modes of eyewitnessing constitute a political reaction to privations and silences of “objective” journalism and “official” news.

### **Bloggers: an ethnographic view**

The previous section employed textual analysis to “decode” media items and to situate their form and content within broader social and historical contexts. Yet signs are polysemic, open to many interpretations, and texts can have multiple meanings to both their producer(s) and audience (Hall 1980). Internet and other media practices must be “understood in their full contexts, including their relation to cultural meaning” (Anderson 2007, 533) and “the materiality of life” (Tarak 2007, 529). Through ethnographic methods, I explore blogging as part of an individual’s “response to his or her social conditions” (O’Sullivan 1994, 239). Based on interviews and participant observation, I investigate how bloggers

actually use and make sense of blogging and the meanings they ascribe to what they do.

For this study, I formally and informally interviewed more than twenty four bloggers active in the Lebanese blogosphere. I began conducting ethnographic research of citizen journalists writing about Lebanon in summer 2005, in the aftermath of the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. That summer I interviewed bloggers and other media producers in Lebanon, Damascus, and Washington, D.C. During the 2006 Israeli-Hizballah conflict, I monitored the Lebanese blogosphere and conducted on-line interviews with bloggers. Later, from November 2006 to May 2008 I conducted field research on blogging in Lebanon, and through snowball samples, I interviewed bloggers and interacted with them in daily life. Many bloggers self-reflexively analyze their journalistic and Internet practices, thus I aimed to collaboratively produce knowledge with them. Lebanese used media as activists, experts, and eyewitnesses to help correct corporate media's various erasures.

### **Shifting traditional Western journalistic authority**

This section focuses on the relationship between the Lebanese blogosphere and Western traditional journalism during the Summer 2006 Israeli-Hizballah war. Quantitative and qualitative data demonstrates that Lebanese bloggers influenced traditional Western coverage of the conflict. Quantitative content analyses conducted by multiple groups of researchers show that, by the end of the war, individuals and contexts frequently obscured by mainstream Western media were

no longer entirely absent from the coverage on Lebanon. Granted, reporting continued to lack context regarding the conflict (Dente Ross and Tehranian 2009; Gaber, Seymour and Thomas 2009), and Hizballah remained “shadowy” and under explained (Parry 2007). However, the journalistic content went beyond previous stereotypical oversimplifications and militarized, sterile language to emphasize the human and material cost of the war to Lebanese civilians. Additionally, as I demonstrate through qualitative textual analysis, the influence of bloggers on traditional Western journalism was not limited merely to content and ideas. Many Western journalists commended the blogging coverage and extolled the utility of bloggers’ subjective journalistic positions. They also appropriated some discourse in the Lebanese blogosphere critical of traditional Western coverage.

*Quantitative content analysis: Making present Lebanese subjects*

This section summarizes quantitative content analyses of coverage of the 2006 Israel-Hizballah war by various media, including U.S. cable, network, and local broadcast news; the *New York Times*; U.K. television broadcasters *BBC* and *ITV*; and U.K. print media *The Times* and *The Guardian*. A quantitative frame analysis looks at the ways in which frames select and highlight elements of an event or issue (Entman 2004). Researchers code these elements and analyze the number of times they appear in a news item. In the following paragraphs, I briefly summarize various research results relevant to this study on journalistic authority.

In contrast to previous coverage of conflict in Lebanon by traditional Western media, and initial coverage of the 2006 Israeli-Hizballah war during its

first week, later coverage predominantly focused on the war experiences of Lebanese citizens. Rather than prioritizing coverage of the threat of Hizballah “terrorists” to Israel, and Israel’s “precision warfare,” Western news outlets came to convey armed conflict as terrorizing and destructive to non-armed combatants. For instance, based on a general content analysis of U.S. coverage of conflict, Marvin Kalb and Carol Saivetz (2007) assert an “anti-Israeli” bias to U.S. coverage during the latter part of the war:

Early in the war, reporters routinely noted that Hezbollah had started the war, and its casualties were a logical consequence of war. But after the first week such references were either dropped or downplayed, leaving the widespread impression that Israel was a loose cannon shooting at anything that moved (9).

The authors assert that from July 19, 2006, the U.S. media focused on “disproportionality” (9) of Israeli response against Lebanese citizens in the conflict.

Similarly, Bahador (2008) conducted a frame analysis of the television news coverage on *ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*, *CNN* and *Fox* and notes that after July 30, 2006, a 11-20% increase in news images that focused on the damage to Lebanese civilians after that date. Meanwhile, broadcast news contained a 5% more frames of Israel as the aggressor, and 6% fewer frames of Hizballah as the aggressor. Cavari and Gabay (2010) analyzed U.S. local and network news. Local news relied on official government sources and therefore their coverage of Hizballah as the aggressor remained consistently high throughout the cycle of the news event. However, U.S. network news shifted from predominantly framing Hizballah as the aggressor to



predominantly framing Israel as the aggressor. By the end of the conflict, network news had framed Israel as the aggressor in 53.2 percent of the news during the entirety of the 33 days of coverage of the conflict. Words frequently used in U.S. network coverage included “bombardment,” “crippled,” “demoralized,” “seizure,” and “targeting bridges and food reserves” (Cavari and Gabay 2010, 19).

Quantitative analysis of the U.K.’s *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)* and *ITV* by Gaber, Seymour, and Thomas (2009), indicates that “the dominant news frame was the impact the Israeli attacks on Hezbollah were having on the Lebanese civilians caught up in the fighting” (246). 23.5 percent of the *BBC*’s coverage and 27.1 percent of *ITV*’s “was focused on the direct impact of the war on Lebanon and its population” (246). More specifically, the frame was one “of innocent civilians caught up in a conflict between a state power and irregular forces” (252). These researchers note a shift in frames employed between the beginning and the end of the crisis.

In a similar vein, through a visual framing analysis of photos published by U.K. newspapers *The Times* and *The Guardian* between July 13 and August 23, 2006, Parry (2008) demonstrates that Lebanese civilians were the most prominent photo subject of both papers. *The Times* ran more pictures of Israeli soldiers early in the conflict. *The Times*’ second largest category of photo subjects related to the war was Israeli military personnel and hardware, as opposed to *The Guardian*’s second largest category, which was destruction to Lebanese infrastructure and homes. Parry demonstrates that both U.K. newspapers *The Times* and *The*

*Guardian* ran graphic pictures of violence, with *The Guardian* running a front page, close up shot of dead bodies. Previously, studies of photographs used in war coverage have deemed such photographic coverage of death as rare (Entman 2004; Griffin 2004).

### *Qualitative data*

Qualitative data also demonstrates the focus of U.S. broadcasting news on the human and material cost of the war for Lebanon. Cavari and Gabay (2010) describe a report by *ABC* anchor Charles Gibson on July 20, which begins with images from an airstrike in Beirut and a description by Gibson of Beirut as “an urban wasteland” (13). The broadcast contains “images of a heavily ruined area and a Lebanese citizen shouting to everyone to escape because another Israeli warplane circles overhead” (13). The *ABC* reporter in Beirut then goes into a hospital and interviews an eight-year-old girl covered in burns who “lost her parents. Her doctors do not even know her name.” The reporter then talks to a Lebanese parent at the hospital who expresses his fear for his children. This segment is followed by an interview of an Israeli journalist about a potential ground invasion; a report by Gibson on U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan condemning “Israel’s disproportionate use of force and collective punishment of the Lebanese people”; and a clip of the Ambassador of Israel comparing Hizballah to a cancer. In this instance, Western traditional coverage of militarized conflict in an Arab country leads with the human cost of war and local voices, rather than official narratives and militarized sources (Cavari and Gabay 2010).

Munif's (2006) quantitative analysis of *The New York Times* demonstrates that, although the paper maintains orientalist frames and stereotypes throughout the course of its coverage, there is a marked difference in later coverage from that of early coverage of the conflict by the paper. Whereas early coverage entirely "silence[s] the Lebanese population and offer[s] a loudspeaker to Israeli politicians and military 'experts'" (136), later coverage does give some voice to Lebanese. In Munif's analysis, these episodes reiterate stereotypes and position the Lebanese population as needing saved from a "Shiite monster" (136).

Within Israel, *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Haaretz* gave outlet to voices within the IDF critical of the military operation, and journalistic criticism of the war as a public relations disaster (Neiger, Zandberg and Meyers, 2010). A July 30 *Haaretz* headline read "Images of destruction from Lebanon are changing European public opinion" (Neiger, Zandberg and Meyers, 2010, 390). Similarly, the *Jerusalem Post* on July 30, 2006 described the war as a public relations disaster (Hoffman 2006).

Besides working to have their own bloggers in Beirut—Fox hired a U.S. college student living in Beirut to blog during the war—traditional media celebrated both Lebanese and Israeli blogging during the war. The sympathetic narrative by mainstream media about bloggers highlighted the bloggers' subjective positions. In a magazine style story on blogging in both Israel and Lebanon during the war, the *New York Times* compared bloggers to Anne Frank. The article described "Blogging Beirut" "as an embattled—and embittered—document of life

irrevocably changed by war” (Zeller 2006). The article commented on the value of the “intimate details of everyday life” in conveying the experience of war.

Traditional media discourses particularly emphasized the ability of blogs to “eyewitness.” As *CNN* (2006) reported, bloggers provide “insight into the world that we have never seen before.” The report also covered “Blogging Beirut” and remarked on the sites’ ability to provide “a sense of what's happening on the ground. Never before, never before have we been able to get right there with citizen journalism, and find out exactly what's happening” (*CNN* 2006). *BBC* celebrated blogs for adding “a new dimension to war reporting.” The article noted blogging for its “diary-style reportage, eye-witness accounts and photographs, and intense scrutiny and analysis of the coverage of events by traditional media.”

The *San Francisco Chronicle* emphasized the use of media technologies by bloggers to “let Internet viewers hear the rockets, feel the terror” (Garofoli 2006). The *Chronicle* predicted that bloggers’ efforts “will influence traditional broadcast news by infusing it with the passion of citizen journalists, who are reporting as rockets crash onto their neighborhoods.” Within the article, a blogger described the difference between traditional Western journalism and local bloggers: “There is a (TV journalist) standing on a hill with an exploded building behind them far away. They are reporting without passion,” he said. “They are not living there.” As I explain in the following section, particular sets of processes and events helped bring about the emergence of subjective positions of journalistic authority during

the 2006 Israeli-Hizballah conflict. These factors demonstrate again how relationships between people and media are complex and highly contextual.

### **Conjectures and contact: emergent news values in context**

The Lebanese blogosphere is not ahistorical, and its influence on traditional Western journalism must be situated within broader media and cultural contexts. A variety of actors, processes, and events contributed to the emergence of subjective positions of journalistic authority during the 2006 Israel-Hizballah conflict. In this section, I describe some of those factors. I draw on Stuart Hall's notion of a "conjecture," or a plane of historical and contextual specificity in which contradictory forces shift and contingencies take on new alignments.

Within this plane, I describe the "temporary settlement" (Grossberg 2006, 5) of various forces and contingencies into an emergent value system of journalistic authority. Doing so, I examine "the logic of key...intersubjective constructs" that can help make this emergent system intelligible (Biehl 2007, 10): activism, expertise, and eye-witnessing. As Zelizer (2007) asserts, terms such as "eye-witnessing" constitute "keywords" (Williams 1983), "the vocabulary of a crucial area of social and cultural discussion, which has been inherited within precise historical and social conditions and which has to be made at once conscious and critical" (24, as cited in Zelizer 2007, 409). To further such critical analysis, I consider activist, expert, and eyewitness positions as "keywords" and I work to explicate their historical contexts. I examine what Pratt (1991) describes as "contact zones," or

social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today (33).

Similar to Anzaldúa's (1999) "borderlands," social zones "emphasize how contact occurs in particular sites that accrue histories of cultural negotiation" (Lai and Smith 2010, 411). As discussed previously, Lebanese media practices reflect zones of colonialism, diaspora, and armed conflict. I therefore locate constructions of activism, expertise, and eye-witnessing within these particular zones of cultural accrual as I explore contradictory forces at play in Summer 2006.

Although in the following paragraphs I treat each contact zone—colonialism, diaspora, and armed conflict—as distinct, they are interrelated. The historical phenomenon of colonialism included the practices and effects of sectarianism and migration. Armed conflict bears relationship to practices of both colonialism and diaspora. Similarly, each journalistic position—activist, expert, and eyewitness—has within it elements of other positions. For instance, "experts" and "eyewitnesses" are "activists," and, arguably, eye-witnesses are hermeneutic experts that seek to contest hegemonic misinformation. However, despite their interconnections, I explain these terms and zones as distinct concepts in order to fully illustrate their cohesiveness within the conjecture of the 2006 Israeli-Hizballah conflict.

### **Activism**

By the time of the 2006 Israeli strikes on Lebanon, a variety of individuals, groups, and organizations inside and outside of Lebanon were using information

communication technologies (ICTs) to pursue political, social, and economic support from outside Lebanon, and/or to assert issue-based platforms and campaigns. These efforts demonstrate two key historical factors underpinning the emergence of activist journalism within the Lebanese blogosphere: a media culture of autonomous communicative action, independent from the state, and the widespread routinization of ICTs as a political tool among global Lebanese.

Lebanon's media culture, or cultural meanings constructed primarily within the everyday contexts of media flows (Hepp 2008), reflects an appreciation of individual autonomy in communication and media use. This autonomy is rooted in cynicism and the active patterns of media use such cynicism generates. Granted, scholars note a marked cynicism toward public communication in many Arab countries (Silverstein 2000; Wedeen 1999). Yet cynicism emerges from experience, and therefore it bears "cultural contours" (Ries 2002). Such mediated cultural meanings must be situated within the "concrete historico-economic situation" of every day experience from which they emerge (Bignell 2000, 5). As I explain below, Lebanese media cynicism, produced through contexts and practices of colonization, diaspora, and armed conflict/rebuilding, positions communication in Lebanon as a do-it yourself, renegade endeavor.

Colonialism and political sectarianism helped shape the Lebanese media sphere from the emergence of the press in the 1800s. Lebanese media outlets have long been affiliated with and funded by particular parties, sectarian leaders, and those leaders' foreign supporters. Subsequently, many Lebanese are sharply

attuned to the affiliations and relationships that shape news production. In interviews and daily conversations, Lebanese openly recognize the affiliations and political leanings of local, regional, and global media outlets.

Just as news is produced through culturally-salient frames (Entman 2003), audiences also “frame” their reception of a news story according to their lived experiences. News images and meanings are refracted through a cultural, positioned individual lens (Baudrillard 1985; Terranova 2004). Even post-positivist literature on media effects highlights how characteristics such as media literacy and discussion with peers “can alter the effects of media frames” (Rill and Davis 2007, 611). Interpretive and critical modes of audience scholarship are ontologically founded on the active and situated viewing patterns of audiences. Political theory recognizes that audiences are “composed of the same people” that make up “publics”—engaged realms of “collective, politically efficacious action” (Livingstone 2005, 17).

As a result of their deeply embedded media distrust, Lebanese engage in patterns of hybrid media use. Although some Lebanese express a sense of allegiance to particular media outlets, e.g. they adopt a “home station” to which other media outlets are compared, Lebanese indicate that they seek a “cocktail” of media coverage (Matar and Dakhlallah 2006). Such active patterns of media use, in which audiences read/watch/listen to various sources in dialogue, “spill over” from print and broadcasting and permeate the uses of new communication technologies (Miller and Slater 2004). Ethnographic research indicates that



Lebanese at “home” and in diaspora go to multiple news sources and forms of media for information and analyses of events.

These active media habits stem in part from prolonged experiences of conflict. During the 1975-1990 Lebanese Civil War, the Lebanese government failed to maintain Lebanon’s communication systems, including telephone lines and postal services. Such lacunae helped create a vigilante culture of “do it yourself” public services in Lebanon, as militias, entrepreneurs, NGOs, and civil society stepped in to fill government voids (Harik 1994; Kraidy 1998). For instance, “illegal” phone lines were laid to Cyprus, an island off the Western coast of Lebanon, thus “circumventing unreliable and monopolistic government telecommunications services” (Kraidy 1998, 3). These illegal phone lines were the start of Lebanon’s extra-state realm of communications, situated within a culture of autonomy and contexts of militarization.

Also during the civil war, private and pirate radio broadcasting emerged. News provided by these stations demonstrated the extent to which Lebanese authorities had previously “sanitized” Lebanon’s media “to preserve the country’s stability and national unity” (Kraidy 1998, 4). The severity and implications of such censorship were compounded by the public’s need and desire for vital security information during times of conflict, which the government had failed to provide. This suppression deepened Lebanese distrust of official government media.

Distrust of Lebanese media outlets created an audience for foreign media such as Radio Monte-Carlo, the BBC, and Voice of America (Kraidy 1998). As foreign governments historically sought to strengthen their cultural and political position in Lebanon through broadcasting and newspapers, Lebanon's media sphere included from its inception a significant portion of transnational influences. These foreign news sources, and the significant number of Lebanese who traveled or had family outside of Lebanon during the war, provided the Lebanese a relatively high exposure to Western media coverage of the Lebanese civil war. In the opinion of many Lebanese, Western media coverage did not adequately represent or deal with the Lebanese civil war. Therefore, individually and within popular culture, Lebanese express cynicism of news producers and notions of "objective" journalism.

This culture of cynical "do-it-yourself" communicative action in Lebanon also reflects the influence of diasporic forces and the efforts of Lebanese to secure outside help for postconflict reconstruction since 1990. At all levels of Lebanese society—individually, locally, and nationally—Lebanese have worked to secure outside political and economic support for post-war social and physical reconstruction. Early USEnet networks between Lebanese in Lebanon and the U.S. provided a space for discussion on Lebanese politics and rebuilding. Through technologies, Lebanese abroad provided a range of political and economic support to individuals and groups still in Lebanon. Young professionals utilized transnational Lebanese list-serves for political and professional dialoguing and connections. Lebanese Christians globally organized political and cultural groups

online. Lebanese expats and members of diaspora provided economic assistance to families, groups, organizations, and villages.

Significantly, centralized, state attempts to garner transnational Lebanese economic and political support mirrored local appeals for assistance from outside. During the 1990s, Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri spearheaded Solidere, a private enterprise specifically oriented to the redevelopment of Beirut. In 1993, Solidere, backed by the Lebanese government, launched “Horizon 2000”—a US \$20 billion reconstruction program funded primarily through foreign reserves and international loans. Criticized at the time for pushing ahead his vision with little input from the general population (Fisk 1992), Hariri focused on drawing international businesses and worked at redeveloping the center of Beirut to entice foreign visitors. International analysts agreed on the importance of foreign support to Beirut’s reconstruction (Stewart 1996).

Seeking domestic and overseas support for Solidere, Hariri’s narratives on reconstruction depicted the rebuilding of downtown Beirut as the return of a “modern culture and civilization that were missing for so long” (Aldoukan n.p.) At the end of a long civil war, the process of rebuilding Beirut would allow the forces of “civilization” to finally win (Cooke 2002). Besides reinforcing the importance of neoliberal processes to “recivilizing” Beirut (AbuKhalil 2001), Lebanon’s discourses on reconstruction reinforced the importance of telecommunications in the dawning “information age.” Telecommunication was represented as vitally

important to individual, collective, and national success in Lebanon (Kisirwani 1997; Jaoud n.d.).

Such representations worked to help justify the borrowing of large sums of money for rebuilding. After the war, a new telecommunication system had to be built “from scratch—a brand new network” (personal interview with telephone executive, July 2007). Between 1993 and 2003, the government borrowed US \$1 billion to invest in infrastructure, it entered into contracts for US \$600 million for switching equipment, and it laid more than 1,500 km in fiber optic cables. Yet, although many countries in the world were reforming their state-run telecommunication sectors in the 1990s, Lebanon maintained its pre-war institutional framework at the end of the civil war. The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPT) remained the single overseer of policy-making, operation, and regulation. Subsequently, telephony licensing, provision, and access in Lebanon have been hindered by issues of sectarian power (Nash 2007, 2008). For instance, between 2002 and 2010, the formation of a telecommunications regulatory body in Lebanon was politically blocked. Subsequently, despite an outdated infrastructure, cell phone tariffs established by “temporary” cell phone providers are the highest in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region (Orhstrom 2006). Some critics assert that government actors—still members of Lebanon’s sectarian *zi’am*, or feudal lords—have intentionally stalled telecommunication regulation, privatization and/or development for their own political and economic interests (Gambill 2003; Hankir 2007; Orhrstrom 2006).

Cultural constructions depicting the interrelationship between telecommunications and “civilized” Lebanon deepened the collective sense of disappointment surrounding Lebanon’s continued telecommunication dysfunctions. Disparities between expectations and realities reproduced and maintained subjectivities of cynicism and autonomous communicative action (See Nash 2010, “Goodbye Internet cable” and the posted comments for an example). As the so-called information age requires “contact” for the pursuit of social, economic and political capital, Lebanese repeatedly push the boundaries of technology and regulation to access affordable means of communication within and outside Lebanon. The telecommunication sector lacks public legitimacy, thus the Lebanese effectively ignore demarcations between “legal” and “illegal” telephony use. For instance, Lebanese circumvent government bans on Voice over Internet Protocol telephony. This broad culture of cynical “do-it-yourself” communicative contributed to the volume of Lebanese blogging during the 2006 Israeli-Hizballah conflict.

### **Expert**

Political use of media in Lebanon is generally oriented to “the outside.” Throughout Lebanon’s modern history, sectarian factions have actively sought the intervention of external agents—France, the U.S., Syria, Israel, the PLO, Iran and Iraq—to “enhance their internal leverage” (Hudson 1999, 102). The implementation of the Ta’if Agreement in 1989, negotiated through considerable input from Syria, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, promulgated the “shadows of external involvement” in Lebanon (Hudson 1999, 6). Additionally, domestic sectarianism

and socioeconomic conflict render Lebanon's government and population less able to deal with regional pressures (Hudson 1999), resulting in collective fear of renewed civil violence. Therefore, Lebanese political action has long been oriented to the outside.

As various scholars note, from its start, the Lebanese blogosphere was oriented to Western media attention (Ward 2007; Lynch 2007). Prior to the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, a few local and diasporic Lebanese bloggers commented on regional events, but not very much on local Lebanese politics. With the assassination of Hariri and subsequent escalation of political and media events in Lebanon--including demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon—many Lebanese in Lebanon and diaspora began blogging. The public debate and polarized political visions that emerged in 2005 were a turning point for Lebanese blogging in Arabic (Hamdy 2007). Like other Arab bloggers, early Lebanese bloggers wrote predominantly in English (Lynch 2007; Radsch 2008). The technology for writing in Arabic improved in 2003 and 2004, and therefore the assassination of Rafik Hariri in February 2005 resulted in the emergence of a number of Arabic-language blogs (Hamdy 2006). The use of blogs and Internet to organize, represent, and analyze the events that spring marked the “birth” of the *paysage blogue* (blog landscape) in Lebanon (Phil 2007).

The majority of Lebanese bloggers continued to write in English, although the expanded 2005 Lebanese blogosphere included a wider-array of Arabic-

language viewpoints and repostings of conversations. In the heated political atmosphere of 2005 Lebanon, the blogosphere reflected a wide variety of ardent political opinions. Their acrimonious and contested dialogues drew press attention in Lebanon (Ohrstrom, 2006), heightening the profile of blogging within Lebanon. Media attention led to more bloggers, which led to more media attention. During 2005, media outlets throughout the world did stories on blogs in Lebanon and how they were helping bring about a democratic, “Beirut Spring” of counter-Syrian political action. Additionally, journalists interviewed young political activists who organized via the Internet and maintained websites and news aggregators like *Tiyyar Al Watani*. One blogger considered this media attention to have been catalyzed by “the global media’s thirst to see *homosapiens Arabus* revolt against the axis of evil” (Phil 2007, my translation from French).

World media attention to citizen journalists and activists in 2005 reemphasized to young adults and political activists the potential of new information technologies for political action. In interviews during summer 2005, young adults ascribed to ICTs a primary function of political organization. These Lebanese perceptions of ICTs differ significantly from similar research conducted among young adults in the U.S., for instance, who consider ICTs primarily as a tool for shopping, socializing, and gaming (Lenhart, Madden, Hitlin 2005; Mcmillan and Morrison 2006). Significantly, the political energy and demonstrations of Spring 2005, facilitated by new media, (re)produced the activist notions surrounding ICTs in Lebanon. These notions included both the potential of ICTs for accomplishing political action and the potential for those literate in information technology use to

overcome sectarian and class based hierarchies to become middle class technocrats. In interviews, activists emphasized the fundamentality of Internet and small message systems or “texts” to the 2005 “Cedar Revolution.” Many female activists described that they were only granted familial permission to participate in the demonstrations and sit-ins because of cell phones and text messaging, which helped them stay in touch with their families. This tendency to correlate social change and media technology among activists was reflected later by descriptions of the summer 2006 conflict as a “war of the blogs,” and of the May 2008 conflict between Hizballah and the Sunni-dominated Al-Mustaqbal as a “cell phone war” (Blanford 2008), and as a war characterized by use of “Facebook chat” (Malik 2008). These notions demonstrate how technologies and their uses are shaped through experience and its broader contexts.

### **Eyewitness**

As anthropologies seek to explain the “everyday” effects of political violence, they frequently include the dissolution of institutions (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007, 11). For instance, Nordstrom’s (2004) “shadow networks” or war include not only the trafficking of arms, drugs and telecommunication equipment, but also informal networks of transnational power-- in the form of NGO coalitions, social movements, or diasporas—that frequently take the place of, or fulfill some of the functions of, weak or absent states. These transnational effects constitute what Della Porta and Tarrow (2005) refer to as “complex internationalism,” in which the locus of institutional power shifts from the national to supranational and regional



levels through the strengthening of various international and economic institutions.

In this section, I explain the emergence of “eyewitnessing” as a journalistic position of authority at the juncture of local and global processes and discourses. Emphasis on the value of local perspective and knowledge emerged as the result of a unique combination of local and global civil society activism in Lebanon. In the aftermath of the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war, Lebanon’s civil society comprised “old” activists and Leftists, and “new” activists not connected to any broad movements. Between 1998 and 2001, the old left started to break down into individual, single-issue groups such as labor and civil marriage. Meanwhile, “new” activists were engaging in “nascent Internet activism” on issues related to “anti-globalization, the environment, and issues related to sexuality,” particularly gay lesbian bi and transgender rights (personal interviews, April 2008). The new movement was “self-consciously” connected with the anti-World Trade Organization movement and established a Beirut Indymedia center. In the lead up to the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, Beirut’s internet-based activism moved into “high gear.” Links were developed between the “old” and “new” left in Beirut, while additional links were developed between Beirut activists and transnational anti-globalization groups.

Within the transnational anti-globalization groups, discourses on political agency and change emphasized the right to communicate. During the 1980s and 90s, as counter cultural production and organization led to political change

throughout Eastern Europe, Western activists and scholars celebrated the potential of a transnational “civil society” to facilitate a more “democratic” global public sphere. Inherent to these hopes was the optimism generated by emerging new media and information communication technologies “to serve as lightning rods for the rapid flow of new and empowering ideas, and for the sharing of collective interests” (Calabrese 2004, 321). Human rights discourses and activism has long addressed communication issues, but with the “digital age” and heightened attention to the social, political and economic potentials of emerging information and communication technologies, human rights arenas were permeated by communication issues as well (Padovani 2005). A discrete global movement focused on communication rights and/or media justice emerged, with connections to the human rights-focused anti-globalization movement, which is both universal and particular. The communication rights movement is universal in a overlapping sphere of core concerns, but particular in articulating discrete sets of issues at individual, local, state and regional levels (Padovani 2005). In the case of Lebanon, communication rights discourses locally coalesced around Lebanon’s autonomous culture of communication, and its culture of media cynicism, including the pervasive notion that media coverage can directly influence conflict.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I demonstrated some ways in which media systems shape and are shaped by the contact zones of colonization, diaspora, and armed conflict. These zones of cultural accrual construct and are constructed through emergent journalistic values of activism, expertise, and eyewitnessing. Such descriptive

keywords demonstrate how, within “glocalized” media paradigms, journalistic authority is constantly “re”produced. As Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun and Jeong (2007) assert, due to new media technologies, “it is in the cross-referencing, pooled consensual understandings, in the interactive ‘conversation’ that authority now resides” (259). Such conversations are historically bound.

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusions

Media use must be situated within both local histories and broader sets of social, historical, and cultural processes. As emphasized by Edward Said and postcolonial studies scholars, discourse and knowledge construction frequently perpetuate cultural hierarchies rooted in colonial and imperial histories. In a related vein, world-systems/globalization theorists describe how dominant power is reproduced through planetary economic structures and material relationships. Although the field of critical media studies has long reflected these concerns with symbolic and material power, new media studies theorists, influenced by “romantic” discourses on the power of technology to cause social, political, and economic change (Streeter 2004), focus on new media as technological “progress” (Bauman 2008). As they work to gauge relationships of causality between technology and society, many new media scholars and theorists ironically overlook the historical, economic, and cultural contexts surrounding new media use. To help reposition emerging forms of media in relation to ongoing practices and structures of power, I have emphasized postcolonial and world-systems contexts in my investigation of Lebanese media use and subjectivity.

In this dissertation, I pointed out examples of Lebanese subjectivities and media use that interrupt globalization as a hegemonic discourse (Lopez 2008, 509). I showed how Lebanese novelists employ a poetics of presence to reimagine a cosmopolitan public sphere of multiple perspectives to replace the homogenized

“objective” status-quo of for-profit news. I then demonstrated the manifestation of such subaltern counter poetics in emergent forms of journalistic authority during the Summer 2006 Israeli-Hizballah conflict. Through a contrapuntal analysis of imperialism in terms of both domination and resistance (Said 1993), I showed how Lebanese use media in ways that not only perpetuate, but also sometimes transform and resist, imperialism and sectarian logics through media use.

Although Lebanese subjectivities and identities are nominally related to the nation-state of Lebanon, their construction must be historically positioned within a global sphere of processes that includes media and communication. Prior to the nineteenth century, several centuries of colonial processes had exacerbated material and sectarian divisions in the Mount Lebanon area. Ottoman Turkish and European agents vied for political power among the groups around Mount Lebanon after the sixteenth century. These social and economic interactions drew Mount Lebanon and the nearby Mediterranean coast into the world capitalist system (Fawaz 1994; Traboulsi 2007). Meanwhile, religion provided the “site” of their “colonial encounter,” resulting in the demarcation of “sect” as a social category within Lebanese public space (Makdisi 2000).

These colonial practices and subjectivities influenced the mutual construction of “Lebanon” and Lebaneseness between Lebanese “at home” and in diaspora during the first half of the twentieth century. Articles from *The Oklahoman* demonstrate how syndicated newspaper articles in the U.S. helped standardize discourses about Ottoman Syrian immigrants as “alien” and exotic

during the first decades of the 1900s. However, these articles also reveal how Syro-Lebanese immigrants used processes of self-representation to negotiate and modify these discourses within the context of their sectarianized Christian, pro-Western identities rooted in colonialism in Mount Lebanon. International wire services situated the construction of Lebanese Oklahoman subjectivities within processes of international relations. Subjective processes like racial hierarchies and international relations organize, and are organized through, local and global media practices.

The “unstable” subjectivities negotiated and (re)produced by colonialism, including electronic colonialism (McPhail 2010), combined with the opportunities for outside interference such social divisions present, contributed to the prolonged civil war in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990. In the absence of a mediated public sphere facilitated by local or global media during the Lebanese civil war, Lebanese novelists have used a poetics of writing to construct the Lebanese civil war novel as an alternative public sphere. Lebanese writers and their readers use the novels as communication spaces to, among other things, express their experiences of war, address issues of exile and migration, and design alternative media and communication systems. They address communication not only through critique but also in their articulation of utopian visions, in which Lebanese civil war novelists depict a fluid but grounded “code” of media practices. The poetics of these spaces provide the strategies through which communities “shape counter discourses and engender alternative public spheres” (Salazar and Cordova 2008, 40).

In the Lebanese civil war novel, authors codify media and communication practices in new ways. Lebanese novelists describe autonomous media and connections running the gamut from local to global and from interpersonal to mass. Thus novelists articulate a cosmopoetics of presence: they depict overlapping global media and communication realms made up of multiperspectival, non-normative practices rooted in lived experience but shared across spaces for broader reflection and understanding. Such sphere reflects the ambivalent potential of “actually existing cosmopolitanism,” which moves between a non-national “fundamental devotion to the interests of humanity as a whole” and the transnational (Appadurai 1991) and vernacular (Bhabha 1996) processes that are the reality of our existence (Robbins 2000).

A poetics of presence is not merely relativism, but it is the expression of local experience in order that expression may be translated and positioned within broader contexts. Proposing a space made up of multiple perspectives and dialogue, Lebanese novelists articulate a version of a “public sphere,” an “arena for discursive interaction” (Fraser 1992, 110) on issues of the “common good” (Habermas 1991). The Lebanese civil war novel purposefully and strategically presents a version of local and global communicative spheres that differ markedly from either normative, “rational” theorizing on the public sphere or the profit-driven status quo. They present a communicative realm that is polyvocal, and driven by the need to express experience. Such experience counters dominant media forms in that it expands rather than reduces or erases detail, information, and content. These poetics were reflected in Lebanese practices of alternative

journalism and “blogging” during the 2006 Israeli-Hizballah war.

In the context of political instability, the ethnographer moves through social spaces more akin to gyres than fields (Zabusky 2002). As per William Butler Yeats’ “The Second Coming,” “turning and turning in the widening gyre...things fall apart; the center cannot hold” (Zabusky 2002, 113). For the ethnographer,

Centers displace other centers, peripheries mutate into centers, and centers and peripheries pile atop one another, now dissolving the distinctions, now recreating them in another place...no one is in control of this ongoing ‘gyration’ this making and unmaking of centers—people stumble through these gyres, improvising some place to stand for a moment, a place where they try to get something done (Zabusky 2002, 113).

These volatile gyres resemble what Hall called “a conjecture,” or opposing forces that briefly find some sort of equilibrium before they move on. Communication constitutes a key element in the production, experience, and negotiation of conflict.



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