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**Crisis of Representation:
Experimental Documentary in Postwar Lebanon**

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**Crisis of Representation:
Experimental Documentary in Postwar Lebanon**

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2008

Dedication

For my family.

Acknowledgements

I have come to realize that a dissertation is a collaborative exercise. Although most of the pain and suffering rest squarely on my shoulders, there are many people I wish to thank in helping me stick to it and produce a significant piece of scholarship. Over the course of nine years, many people have played a role in different contexts and periods of this project. As the halls of academia are perpetually depopulating and repopulating with new faces, the cohort of students I began this doctoral endeavor with have either passed on or remain in a displaced field site or state of writing. In the first few years of coursework I learned more from these colleagues than any course of reading. Their intellect and creativity continually inspired me in my own pursuits. In no particular order, I want to thank several of these individuals by name, John Schaefer, Alisa Perkins, Afra al-Mussawir, Dan Gilman, Scott Webel, Nick Copland, Shaka McGlotten, Ronda Brulotte, Faedah Totah, Elizabeth Lafloure, Nafiz Aksehirlioglu, Amy Mills, Diya Mehta, Melissa Forbis, Heather Teague, Halide Veliloglu, Lynn Selby, Alice Campbell, Terra Edwards, Celeste Henery, Mubbashir Rizvi, Olivier Tchouaffe, Zeina Halabi, Ritu Khanduri, Mieke Curtis, Chantal Tetreault, Alice Chu, Frank Clary, Aja Bonsu, Hope Fitzgerald, Jonathan Nobel, and the students in Mia Carter's graduate seminar, "Global Cities, Imperial Cities," during the fall of 2001 when our world changed.

In addition to Mia's seminar, I would like to thank several faculty members who opened my eyes to new theories and challenged my critical analysis, including Martha Norkunas, Monika Mehta, Kamala Visweswaran, Charles Hale, Ward Keeler, Polly Strong, Jonathan Shannon, Samer Ali, and Yaron Shemer. Although they retired the year before I began, Bob and Elizabeth "BJ" Fernea provided a vital source of personal endorsement and social networking. They are my heroes. Several people nearing completion of their degree when I joined the Folklore and Public Culture Program also provided invaluable encouragement and guidance. Among these individuals are Lillian Salcido, Adam Frank, Pete Haney, Guha Shankar, Apen Ruiz, Ben Chappell, and Sharon Doerre.

More recently, after I returned from the "field" and progressed through the "writing up" process, I found a supportive community of friends and scholars who were also in the final throes of their dissertations or were new comers to the Anthropology department. During this manic period of "dissertating" I owe much to Christine Labuski, Maryam Kashani, Emily Lynch, Tessa Farmer, Claudia Campeanu, Jenny Carlson, Saikat Maitra, Siyar Ozsoy, Can Aciksoz, Amporn Jirattikorn, and Mathangi Krishnamurthy.

I also want to express immense gratitude to my committee. Thanks to Katie Stewart who has consistently provided me with intellectual stimulation and an open door. Thanks to John Hartigan for his frantic fits of boredom and advice. Thanks to Mia Carter for sustained commitment and emotional support. Thanks to Deborah Kapchan who, as my initial advisor and since, has always shown me a great deal of encouragement and endorsed me even when I felt unendorsable. But it is to Kamran Ali that I owe the greatest appreciation. His tender and eloquent critiques relentlessly challenged me to think beyond the security of my own ideas. Thank you all for your engaged participation in my development as an expert in the field.

Although impossible to name in their entirety, my research in Lebanon benefited directly from the endorsement and friendship of several key individuals in Lebanon and elsewhere. This dissertation pays tribute to their work, but here I thank them for their generosity. Thank you for opening yourselves to me, Jayce Salloum, Mohammad Hashem, Akram Zaatari, Christine Tohme, Ali Hammoudi, Nigol Bezan, Tony Chakar, Rabih Mroue, Pascale Feghali, Hania Mroue, Rasha Salti, Jim Quilty, Mohammad Soueid, Heiny Srour, Hagop Der-Ghoughassian, Dzovig Torikian, Wael Nouredine, Christopher Harker, Katalin Schaak, Habiba Sheikh, Michel Kammoun, Assad Fouladkar, Reem Salah, Paolo Campo, Laura Marks, Nadia Latif, Wissam al-Saliby, and Philo.

No list of gratitude would be complete without a show of appreciation to the administrators who helped me navigate the university bureaucracy. Thanks a thousand times over to Pam Becker, Adriana Dingman, Gabby Yearwood, Lindsay Hale, Celeste Neathery, Jenny Jones, Andi Shively, Heather Nathanson-Flowers, Amy Hendrick, Elaine Hrissikopoulos, Francis Terry, Hillary Hutchinson, and Chris Rose. Both James Brow and Sam Wilson in their roles as Chair of the department opened their door to me and went out of their way to help me. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Versions of this work have appeared in various earlier renditions. I would like to thank the panel organizers, conference committees, and co-participants of these events for responding to my work with critical, but sincere, feedback. I am particularly indebted to Jennifer Deger, Martine Markovits, Wilma Kiener, Jane Ferguson, Nadine Wanono, Majan Garlinski, Faye Ginsburg, Peter Crawford, Paul Henley, Chris Lippard, Terri Ginsberg, Zeynep Gursel, Joanne Nucho, Tom Blakeley, Jerome Crowder, Gail Thakur, and Jenny Chio. In this same vein, two transformational workshops had a dramatic effect on my visual sensibilities. David and Judith MacDougall's cross-cultural video methods workshop in Dehra Dun, India in 1999 and the multinational participants attending have

colored my vision of ethnography ever since. I am particularly indebted to Kate Solomon who supported and aided my work even while heading in more glamorous trajectories. In a more recent workshop held by Harvard graduate students, the participants and organizers – including Anal Shah, Diana Allan, Donna Mote, Alex Fattal, JP Sniadecki, Stephanie Spray, Damien Stankiewicz, Emily Zeamer, Toby Lee, Ronli Liaw, Tereza Porybna, Rebecca Baron, Lucien Taylor, Ilisa Barbash, and Michael Herzfeld – shared nonfiction visual work that crossed boundaries between art and ethnography in a stimulated effort to rethink the parameters of ethnography without text. These individuals have tangentially directed my critical navigation through the cross-cultural “mediascapes” of the twenty-first century.

There are several other people who have continually played an active role in my intellectual development as a researcher, scholar, and artist, not to mention also offering enduring friendship. Here I owe a special thanks to Tony Cherian, Ben Hodges, Leighton Peterson, Paige Schilt, Brian Rawlins, Rebecca Loirns, Bennie Klain, Lidia Marte, Lisa Kaselak, Virginia Raymond, Pete Elam, Erin Murphy, and Dana Deloca. Life, of course, begins before graduate studies. Friends who have endured this self-indulgent obsession deserve special credit, particularly for the way they continued to inspire my worldview and the meaning of friendship. Thanks David Meiggs, Andrew Robinson, Abe Penland, Peter Harrington, and Jamie Schardt. You are great friends. Thanks too to the more recent arrivals to this circle, Graham Chapman, Chris Cain, Rodrigo Alvarez, Lynn Boswell, Deb Palmer, David Greene, and Audrey Reynolds.

It is imperative to acknowledge the support and encouragement that my family has provided through this long and trying process, particularly my wife who has shouldered this doctoral endeavor more than anyone aside from myself. Thank you to my boys, Vojo and Veli, for reminding me that there are more important things than my

“book.” My mother and father also deserve a great deal of credit for enabling me to pursue this challenge and encouraging me to set my own path. My mother’s vocational enthusiasm and my father’s leisure sensibilities have found equilibrium in my academic pursuits. Also to my Uncle Mike, thanks for consistently challenged me to substantiate my radical claims.

And to those who have departed this world, if you can hear me from the other side, your fire continues to burn. My friends, Begonia Aretxaga and Ozlem Okur, rest in peace. My grandmothers, Avalon and Mabel, bless you.

**Crisis of Representation:
Experimental Documentary in Postwar Lebanon**

Publication No. _____

Mark Ryan Westmoreland, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2008

Supervisor: Kamran Asdar Ali

This dissertation investigates the social world of contemporary filmmakers in the Middle East and the way they use visual media to re-imagine existent forms of identity, envision new modes of social agency, and transform public culture in the face of dramatic instability. In the wake of the Lebanese civil war and through the tenuous postwar period, video art and experimental documentary have critiqued the politics of representation and negotiated the theoretical and structural difficulties in representing the war. These artists have activated intersections where experimental media has generated a vibrant visual culture by both building on local notions of cosmopolitanism and by participating in transnational sites of postcolonial representation. Methodologically, I employ ethnography to grapple with the public culture of Beirut as a site of avant-garde experimentation, but also to examine the city as a contested site affected by periods of rapid growth, intense violence, and urban reconstruction. To explain this cultural phenomenon, I advance the idea of ‘post-orientalist aesthetic’ to describe a mode of intellectual critique and artistic style that goes beyond Edward Said’s critique to give

greater attention to self-representation in the post-911 period. This aesthetic interrogates western representational practices and also develops a localized critical analysis of Middle Eastern visual culture. This aesthetic informs a better understanding of postwar subjectivity, particularly in the way memory and lived experience becomes mediated through the materiality of objects, images, and architecture affectively inscribed with destruction and violence. The notion of the archive or the personal collection becomes of particular interest here; especially in the way these artifacts embody personalized narratives and testimonials that push back from abstracted notions of a monolithic historical narrative. Drawing on visual anthropology, media ethnography, and nonwestern film theory, this text examines the way these artists challenge realist modes of representation by utilizing both ethnographic and artistic approaches to grapple with the experience of everyday violence. In order to explore methodologies for conducting visual research in conflict zones, I conclude with an experimental auto-ethnography that appropriates these aesthetics in an effort to interrogate my positionality as an American researcher in the Middle East.

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INTRODUCTION

Visual Research in Sites/Sights of Conflict

For within every documentary is a kind of cavity, the negative imprint of the missing persons and events which are not there. In struggling with this material, the documentary filmmaker is struggling not only with signs but also with the shadows of the living and the dead. If photography does not steal the soul it steals something very like it, something deeply enough felt to generate the fraught ethical debates that uniquely surround the making of documentary films and photographs. These debates more commonly concern what is shown than what is left out. But for the filmmaker the problem is truly one of disposing of the human remains (MacDougall 1998c:222).

These films construct a type of transnational individual who passes like a phantom through the world, gone half or wholly mad by cross-cultural confusions of travel as well as the horrors of war and colonialism. The central figure in them, far from finding in such travel a resolution to their personal problems or a satisfaction of their political ambitions, are shaken to their foundations, to the point of being nearly or completely destroyed (Caton 1999:48).

EAST MEETS WEST

Fading up from black, the first shot shows the corner of a hardbound book. In silver inscription, capital letters state, "THE BEDOUINS AND THE DESERT." A hand opens the book and begins to flip through the pages. Upon reaching the section entitled, "The First Pillar: The Desert," the screen cuts to a title card, "A work by Akram Zaatari." We return to the book flipping through pages and pausing on the photographs of camels and people living in arid conditions. Another title card announces the title of the video in English "This Day" and Arabic "*al-yeom*." *Al-yeom* is typically translated as "today," so Zaatari's inclusion of the English title points to the specifics of some particular day, possibly this very day or some day in the past. We return to the book being flipped through before cutting to an archivist's white gloves looking through a box of

photographic proofs of the same images we saw in the book. This scene cuts to another book, this time facing the opposite direction and written in Arabic script the title says, “The Bedouins and the Desert.” The book is opened and hands begin leafing through the pages. Cut back to the white archivist gloves. The hands pick up several photos, each in a protective wax sheath. They are from a series of shots of a vehicle in the desert.

We cut to a shot through the windshield of a car driving in the desert. We can see the driver’s eyes fixed on his path in the rearview mirror. In a long shot we proceed through the desert until coming to a low rock outcropping that prevents further passage in that direction. The driver stops the car and turns to look at the camera – at the viewer-through the mirror. We hear the extra-diegetic sound of waves washing onto shore. Cut to a tanker on the horizon of the ocean.

This opening sequence references multiple frames of reference – the books, archival photos, the windshield, and the mirror – in order to simultaneously reveal the archival record of the Bedouins in the Syrian desert, situate the constructedness of these representations, and embody the space of these media objects and frames of reference. This nexus of mediation draws the viewer into the imaginary world of the film to think critically of these representations, while vicariously feeling contemporaneous with these artifacts. Mediation in experimental documentary in Lebanon characteristically draws attention to embodied modes of spectatorship and accentuates feelings of proximity to the media objects as they are recovered from a state of dormancy. This aesthetic attention to frames of reference and recovered media objects characterizes one dimension of “post-orientalist aesthetics,” a term I advance through out this dissertation in order to elucidate the parameters of alternative media production in “postwar” Lebanon.

Following the desert drive and the ocean tanker, we cut to another title card, “East meets West.” Digitally panning across a black and white image of a broken down jeep in

the desert, we hear a woman's voice tell us in English, "It's a perfect picture of the East meeting the West, because the western jeep breaks down in the desert. And ah, taking photographs of the desert and of the camels is looking at an eastern object with a western optic, a camera. Already to take pictures of that is to document it. The spirit to document such a thing is a western idea, I think." This vision of the desert emerges around certain modes of transportation – like a broken down jeep, camels, and, of course, the "whole and noble" nomadic Bedouin, and a quest to document this "vanishing" culture. The narrator goes on in Arabic to discuss her grandfather's (Jabrail Jabbur a Syrian Arabist) interest in making this ethnographic study as emerging from a happy childhood and an intellectual interest. As she has been talking, the frame has been panning across different parts of the photo – the jeep and man working underneath it, other men standing around, camels, and the shadow of the photographer entombed on the sandy surface of this scene – exposing "an aesthetic sense for the desert," in which the photographer is imprinted in the image as an absent presence.

As Zaatari's research leads him into the Syrian desert in search of the participants photographed by Jabbur 50 years earlier, a new title card announces his destination, "Al-Qaryatayn (Syria)." In the courtyard of a small house, we see an elderly woman clad in black and thick eyeglasses trying to mount a large water jug on her head. Behind her a large satellite dish points to the sky. From this scene we cut back to Jabbur's granddaughter narrating her memories of his photographs, in particular a shot with a series of Bedouin women carrying water jugs on their heads. While digitally panning across several ethnographic photographs taken by Jabbur, his granddaughter narrates her memories of these images and retells Jabbur's ethnographic quest to document this "vanishing" culture.

Cut to a new scene. At a clean desk, in front of a plain wall, a monitor displaying time code plays an interview with one of the woman who had been balancing the jug atop her head in Jabbur's photograph. In front of the monitor to the left, we see two rows of mini-DV cassettes and an empty case lying in front of the monitor's screen. To the right a mini-DV deck sits outside the glow of a black desk lamp. A black book sits off-screen. In the lower bottom of the screen, opened on the desk is one of Jabbur's books on the Bedouin, the English version. This subjective space of the documentary filmmaker reviewing his raw footage, while flipping pages in this ethnographic study, again inscribes multiple layers of mediation within a single frame – monitor, time code, tapes, deck, texts, interview, and a lamp – photography is after all an art of light and shadows. We also occasionally see Zaatari's hands or under-exposed profile leaning into the frame as he looks at the text or adjusts the volume of the monitor.

Meanwhile, in the interview the woman is trying to remember the pictures she has on the wall behind her. Sitting on the end of the bed facing the filmmaker, the viewer can see several pictures hanging behind her, but she cannot see the pictures and her response suggests that Zaatari asked her to recount the pictures on the wall without looking at them in order to manifest her iconographic memory of the space in which she dwells. She talks about images of Christ, the Virgin, the last supper, archbishops, and relatives, but fails to remember Jabbur's image of her and the other women balancing the jugs captured fifty years earlier. When Zaatari hints to her about the picture he is thinking of, she laughs, "Important? No, the others are more important. We are not important, not me, not the girls. You might find it important. I'm not even aware of it." Her humble sense of self reveals a much different sensibility than the one that compelled the photographer. Without Zaatari's journey back to these women, we can only understand the image of the women with jugs balanced, as well as the other photos of the Bedouin, as existing in an

ethnographic imaginary. Instead, Zaatari brings these divergent moments together to recharge the archive with the personal accounts about the experience of being imaged.

Zaatari's videos tend to exhibit a subtle strain in the relationships between the filmmaker and the people being filmed. As he asks these elderly women to indulge his requests, the men's voices coming from off screen keep telling Zaatari to take the picture, probably assuming that Zaatari was taking a still image. Instead, as the video rolls we hear the off-screen commentary as a subtle critique of Zaatari's documentary objectification of its subject. Zaatari's ethics of nonfiction image making are not stated, but he often exposes himself as implicated within the hierarchies of representational politics. This documentary expedition into the archival past and ethnographic present continues further into the Syrian desert before culminating in a stunning layered montage of camels, horses, jeeps, Bedouin, men, women, and the desert. This attention to an indigenous elite Arabist and the visuality of orientalism brought back to the desert inhabitants then gives way to the second part of the video.

Looking back out to see at appearing and disappearing tankers, the video takes a turn to a vacated Lebanese urbanity, based on a fantasy of cosmopolitan sensibilities and neoliberal architectural projects. Akram Zaatari narrates this section beginning with a tour along the seaside corniche in Beirut in 2003. Layering still images of Beirut, snapshots of explosions, songs recorded from the radio, news reports, and Zaatari's childhood journal again reveals the urge to document compelled by cultural life ways vanishing. Juxtaposing journal entries he made during the 1982 Israeli invasion with pro-Palestinian propaganda circulating on the internet during the second *Intifada* (2000 to present). Through the city shots and the toggling of on/off switches and red/green streetlights, Beirut's past occupation is placed in close proximity to the violence between Israelis and Palestinians to the south of Lebanon. The shared experience of violence in

this region transcends national borders and sectarian identities and engenders an acute awareness of the way this political violence flips on and off, starts and stops, with arbitrary but recurrent repetition.

I begin this introduction with Zaatari's *This Day* as an ethnographic site, which is as a site of cross-cultural mediation that allows for another perspective to emerge about the representation of the Middle East. Throughout this dissertation I explore the film and videos of Lebanese filmmakers and artists as documentaries of these ethnographic imaginaries. These documentary experimentalists are acutely aware of the politics of representation and the way their "home" has been destroyed. Their work is faced with a crisis of representation in which news media and popular orientalist stereotypes have created a sphere of hyper-mediation around only a few over-determined categories. While biased and only partial in its perspective, these clichés nevertheless point to the recurrent violence that these cultural producers are faced with on a daily basis. In this way, the conflicted ethnographic imaginary depicted in their work also connects to the sites where this media circulates, particularly within the many festival events in Beirut and abroad in festivals, biennials, and art house cinemas, where the "mediascape" becomes material.

MEDIATING IMAGINARIES

This dissertation investigates the social world of contemporary filmmakers in the Middle East and the way they use visual media to re-imagine existent forms of identity, envision new modes of social agency, and transform public culture in the face of dramatic instability. By specifically looking at independent filmmaking and experimental video in postwar Beirut, my ethnographic study endeavors to understand how this cosmopolitan city becomes imagined as a superlative site for artistic experimentation, a crucial point in the flow of emergent transnational media, and a nexus for the mediation

of postwar and exilic subjectivity. Situated within the broader context of Lebanon's postwar renewal and the renewal of war on one hand and neo-orientalist anxieties intensified worldwide since 9-11 on the other, this research seeks to understand how local agency and global mobility enable filmmakers to create and circulate radical visual media. This research aims to broaden the anthropology of media by situating the processes of media production within a traumatic postwar setting and focusing on how filmmakers push media in new ways to grapple with both ossified narratives and disrupted histories. This illustrates how intimate uses of media connect to larger social conditions of displacement, violence, and politicized forms of 'othering'. This dissertation thus provides a timely demonstration of the global flow of media within the Middle East and offers a prism for understanding greater global processes at work in the region and the way individuals negotiate these forces in daily life.

Framing this dissertation around the notion of the documentary image does not privilege an evidentiary model of veracity. Instead, the documentary image, whether alluded to in narrative features, video essays, or installation performances, draws attention to the mediation of lived experience. By this token, Lebanese experimental documentary video, like all documentary images, bears the residue of its authorship. The trace remains of this subject position provide an embodied link to modes of self-mediation that always exceed the image in itself. As David MacDougall argues, "a residue of a clearly physical nature remains in film images which is not available in verbal narratives, and its importance should not be underestimated" (1998b:244). A leading theorist of visual anthropology and creator of ethnographic films and videos for forty years, MacDougall's recent proliferation of essays has created a crucial theoretical base for reconsidering the project of visual anthropology. These visionary essays point a way forward that rewires ethnographic visibility through the senses rather than through

rational thought. In this aim he reconceptualizes visual anthropology according to three principles:

1. To utilize the distinctive expressive structures of the visual media rather than those derived from expository prose.
2. To develop forms of anthropological knowledge that do not depend upon the principles of scientific method for their validity.
3. To explore areas of social experience for which visual media have a demonstrated expressive affinity—in particular, (a) the topographic, (b) the temporal, (c) the corporeal, and (d) the personal (MacDougall 2005:270).

Turning to another visual project, Steve Caton has reconsidered the epic David Lean film *Lawrence of Arabia* as a model of an “international cinema” of the 1950s and 1960s (1999). Read allegorically, the retreat of colonialism has an undertow of filmic adventures reclaiming that space for the memory of imperial power. Peter O’Toole’s rendition of T.E. Lawrence as a cross-cultural broker also provides an allegory of the anthropologist in the field. Caton’s “a film’s anthropology” retells the story of colonialism against the grain, including local conditions, and cultural and political contexts, but no where does he define this word combination – “a film’s anthropology.” His project is unique in its anthropological attention to a single feature film, however, he does not provide a theoretical analysis beyond the scope of this one film. Although I focus on many films and filmmakers rather than one, my project parallels Caton’s attention to the processes of mediation across cultural boundaries and the implicated positionality of the anthropologist and filmmaker. My project, however, attempts to probe further into an anthropology of film, which considers multiple subject positions, while remaining focused on the locality and virtuality of media production.

MacDougall and Caton thus provide an anthropological framing to my visual theory of postwar mediation of subjective experience. This theoretical subtext to the dissertation is further informed by my own experience as a cross-cultural filmmaker. By

grounding documentary images in the materiality of mediation, as media objects, I aim to highlight the invisible relationship between images, mimetic technology, and author/viewer subjectivities. The emphasis on the media object elucidates “the opacity and ambiguity of the visual,” in which “the invisible is not a negation or a contradiction of the visible but simply its *secret sharer*” (Taylor 1998a:17,13). Benjamin tells us that mechanical reproduction destroys the artwork’s ‘aura’, but in its absence photography and film create instead an ‘optical unconscious’ (Benjamin 1969). The camera’s eye, with its devices of slow and fast motion, close ups and zooms, offers us a different nature of seeing revealed only by a dependence on a technological apparatus. This disrupts notions of mimesis as direct representational transference between image and model. Instead, the mimetic apparatus and the media object occupy a “space between,” which Michael Taussig calls “a space permeated by the colonial tension of mimesis and alterity, in which it is far from easy to say who is the imitator and who is the imitated, which is copy and which is original” (1993:78).

Remaining focused on these intermediary mechanisms opens up documentary enquiry to sensorially embodied readings of images in a state of interplay between author and viewer, memory and media, imaginary and materiality. “And here again the connection with tactility is paramount, the optical dissolving, as it were, into touch,” what Taussig calls, the “physiognomic aspects of visual worlds” (1993:149). This tactile optics, which makes images “intensely visible,” endows them with a “magical value.” On a phenomenological level, Steven Caton argues, “the image in the photograph as well as on the screen seems to possess a subjectivity of its own” (1999:91). He says it is as if the image could tell us who we are. For these same reasons, Laura Marks argues, “the eyes themselves function like organs of touch,” which means that physical contact, rather than metaphor, encodes objects with meaning. Her notion of haptic perception, evidenced in

contemporary postcolonial film and video, describes “the way we experience touch both on the surfaces of and inside our bodies” (Marks 2000:162).

The reverberation between image and imaginary in this nexus of mediation elucidates the building blocks of “imagined worlds.”¹ Accordingly, the global flow of people, money, media, technology, and ideology constitute the underlying “imaginaries” that enable social and political participation. The imaginary thus provides a framework for critically engaging western-based, liberalized notions of citizenship, subjectivity, and agency vis-à-vis localized articulations of public culture. Taylor (2002) explains that the “imaginary” is not merely a set of ideas, but the process of articulation that enables social practices, or following Gaonkar it is a generative but inexplicable “symbolic matrix within which a people imagine and act as world-making collective agents” (2002). This dimension of social and political agency “is anchored in a cultural repository of largely unconscious discourses and images, modes of thinking and feeling” (Aretxaga 1997).

Consequently, my references to the imaginary at work in Beirut’s avant-garde sphere of cultural production is informed by various frames of analysis, including, 1) the practices and behaviors that contribute to the notion of Beirut as a site of experimentation, inclusive of modes of production, exhibition, and social activism; 2) the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that endorse experimental film and video as social projects, including the theoretical and political frameworks scaffolded alongside these expressive forms; 3) the conceptions of agency that “make sense” of social and political realities and an individual’s ability to act within these parameters both in Lebanon and transnationally; 4) the perceived potential for social transformation enabled by the articulation of personal histories and “public secrets” – that which is generally known but not expressed – in film

¹ Combining three concepts of image, he elucidates the imagination in social life: “the mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson’s sense); and the French idea of the imaginary (*imaginaire*), as a constructed landscape of collective aspiration” (Appadurai 1990).

and video; and 5) the notions of membership that mobilize around particular narratives of significance, regarding the celebration of Lebanese art by international critics and curators and the competition for acclaim in Beirut's art and film circuits. These frames elucidate a broader working of post-orientalist aesthetics that is not bound by filmic texts, but is transferred through modes of mediating the self in sites of conflict.

In this constellation of imaginaries, the personal collection serves as a site for the micro-ritualization of self-mediation. Self-mediation in this context extends beyond autobiographical narratives of the self and provides an auto-ethnography of documentary representation in crisis. Particularly relevant for these artists are the intimate relationships developed with various forms of media – the urge to collect, archive, and comment upon the constructed nature of media is pervasive in this work. Self-recordings in journals, photos, letters, and recordings on audio and videotapes provide a material artifact for the Lebanese citizen demonstrating co-existence with persistent conflict. The politics and aesthetics of this micro-ritualization appears to mark the distance of exile (*Measures of Distance*), the cinematic memory of the city (*Once upon a Time, Beirut*), the lost innocence of teenage youth (*West Beirut*), the photography of imagined events (*Mabrouk Again*), the suicide video confession (*When Maryam Spoke Out*), and the repetitious rehearsal of a martyr's final video statement (*Three Posters*), among many other that I will discuss herein.

Far from sterile or static, the impulse to record and collect one's social and political experience represents a strange sort of vitality in the act of mediation. A phenomenological engagement with the materiality of everyday forms of mediation starts to emerge from these experimental documentaries. It is insufficient to consider these critiques and self-fashioned "archives" on a merely textual or visual level. A variety of these projects are explicitly concerned with the form of mediated memory and its sensory

relationship with objects. Indeed, the micro-ritualization of mediating one's experience provokes some interesting questions about the tendency and desire to mediate the subjective experience of life falling apart.

Lofgren (1999) suggests that the tourist videotaping, photographing, and jotting postcards while on vacation demonstrates a ritualized and embodied act of documenting one's experience. On holiday or otherwise at 'play' in the world, the act of self-mediating has increased with the spread of affordable technologies. Today one can easily photograph with their cell phones, shoot video with their digital cameras, and create podcasts on the internet. The 'freedom' to publicize one's mediated existence creates new spheres of interaction. For my project, however, the question that emerges asks, how does one experience life mediated under these conditions? That is to say, what is the affect of choosing to actively mediate one's own experience of crisis? This provides an opportunity to disrupt "the ways film, video, and photography function as documents of physical and psychological violence" (Raad 2002b).

The political violence that occurred in recent Lebanese history and continues to occur in an uncertain present is trapped within ossified narratives that allow no room for escape, but instead remain trapped within recurrent conditions of violence. Under such conditions mis-representations, both by western orientalism and by sectarian discourses of competing nationalisms, only explain part of the situation. Besides it is not a matter of providing a correct representation, the key aspect of this postwar impossibility is that there is no true representation. And yet, representation remains a powerful force for shaping people's thoughts, beliefs, and knowledge. Rather these documentary endeavors are efforts to make manifest the imaginaries that haunt a landscape of forgetfulness, amnesia, and impossible representations. Documentary artifacts are thus not records of the real, but casings, hollow shells, empty remnants of remembering. By vacating the

interiority of these media objects – films, photos, cassette tapes, televisions, cameras, etc. – these media carcasses makes the hollow object stand for itself. That is say, these media remnants exist as fossils always decaying, but also always as an object simultaneously of the past and of the present. As history repeats itself through ever-recurring disaster, the horizon becomes a wasteland of artifacts and relics of the past. Evocative of Walter Benjamin’s Angel of Progress in its most literalized form, these radioactive media fossils drained of their representational veracity become powerful objects for addressing the “state of emergency.” By re-enchanting these mimetic artifacts, Lebanese documentary experimentalists break through the blockages of amnesia, to see around representational eclipses, and to rupture ossified narratives that reify violence.

The precedent of the personal archive or process of collecting during/after war demonstrates the way mediation of events and experiences at a time of violence provides an intimate glimpse into the experience of postwar society, but the gap inherent in act of representational media also reminds its users of their fractured relationship with the world they have recorded. Artifacts build up in an ever accumulating landfill, but our lived connection to the memories inscribed in these objects remain withdraw. It is only their materiality that remains of the present, but even this material object is in an endless state of decay. It may even vanish suddenly in a fire or explosion.

The risk of sudden disappearance, what Jalal Toufic calls a “radical closure,” necessitates an ongoing project of preservation to remediate extant forms of media before they become extinct. For these documentary experimentalists, the migration of digital data from one medium to another does not account for how these archival objects, images, and documents exist in a quotidian context. The mundane presence of these media objects bear a texture that is partially lost in the invisible codes of digitization. “Due to the omnipresence of the pixel in homes across the world,” Hadria recounts,

“Zaatari considers this ‘re-filming’ of the television screen as an act of civic responsibility” (2005:37). As the modern rituals of mediating one’s ordinary and extraordinary experience continue to become even more ubiquitous in public and private spheres, postmodern practices of remediation assert new subjectivities withdrawn from the veracity of representation but intently conscious of its phenomenological trace.

The proliferation of self-representations and “auto-ethnographies” provide important critiques of anthropological and postcolonial idioms. For example, video has played an instrumental role in the emergence of Lebanon’s independent cinema, creating many linkages between documentary, narrative, and experimental films. Some filmmakers use experimental approaches to challenge presumptions of objectivity and realism as well as the tautology of the Orientalist critique. Teaming with transformational and constraining qualities, acts of visual mediation have not been adequately explored in alternative, non-western settings. Film Studies rarely accounts for the embodiment and contextuality of film production. The ‘text’ becomes over-determined in a way that erases the phenomenological traces of authorship – a subjectivity of visibility. The suspension of disbelief that allows a viewer to be present in an inherently different time and place, also asks the viewer to be a different subject position, a different person.

A CONTESTED HISTORY OF LEBANON

Given the opacity of American pundits struggling with the most basic, albeit distorted, of questions – “Why do they hate us?” – it would seem that the American public could perhaps learn some answers or at least better questions to ask. The opacity of orientalist and neo-orientalist discourse prevents most Americans from seeing beyond it. The definitions remain conventionally basic. For president George Walker Bush and most Americans, only recently did they discover a Muslim distinction between Sunni and

Shi'a sects. While this sectarian duality has been used haphazardly to explain the violence occurring in Iraq under American occupation, it fails to explain to most Americans why "they" hate "us." A similar duality is often employed to "understand" the wars in Lebanon, typically rendered as a "civil war" between Muslims and Christians. The conflating of Lebanon's eighteen official sectarian identities, called confessions, into a civil duality belies the role of secular militias, shifting alliances, and prolonged history of foreign intervention.

Perhaps some historical context will help better situate this errant question. Through the following section I gloss the much more comprehensive histories provided by Robert Fisk (1992) and Kamal Salibi (1990). The history of Lebanon is hardly generic, but it does share commonalities with many other places, particularly those at the intersections between East and West. Looking out into the desert, like in Zaatari's *This Day*, imagines in the East a noble and nostalgic life, but staring out sea imagines the coming of cosmopolitan culture and territorial violence. Zaatari's attention to nomadic displacement of the Bedouin and the exilic displacement of the Arab/Israeli conflict in the two parts of this video has uneven points of contact. The space between these two halves is vague and undetermined, but they reference the historical influence of Arab society's nostalgic identity and a geopolitical cosmopolitanism. References to this historical current emerges at key points in the chapters that follow, however, here I want to briefly situate the history of Lebanon to help the reader track the references made later in this text.

Historically Lebanon refers to the Mount Lebanon area rising northeast from Beirut and the Mediterranean coast. This mountainous region has long hosted a large Christian Maronite population. While, to the south, the Chouf Mountains have hosted the Druze, a Muslim population that split from the Shi'a sects in the eleventh century. From

an administrative standpoint, these territories were part of Greater Syria under Ottoman control, but the proxy Sunni authority faced great challenges from local rebellions. With the conversion of the ruling Shihab family from Sunnism to Christianity, centuries old support for the Maronite community strained the relations with the Druze. This culminated in 1860 when tens of thousands of Christians were massacred in Damascus and elsewhere in Syria. The European powers concentrated behind France intervened to protect the Maronites and orchestrated a retooling of Ottoman rule to ensure international protection of the Christian population. This period also witnessed the incursion of western products into the local markets, which had a disruptive affect on the traditional economy.

British and French colonial projects regained new focus during World War One and helped to usher in the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In 1916 François Georges-Picot and Mark Sykes formed an agreement between Britain and France to divide their spheres of influence over the modern day countries of Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and a large part of southern Turkey. Meanwhile, the British Arab Bureau in Cairo promises Sharif Husayn, the Emir of Mecca and the patriarch of the Hashemites, his independent rule of an Arab kingdom in return for leading an Arab revolt against the Ottomans. The British government in India, however, maintained alliance with Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud, the Emir of Riyadh and the Wahhabi patriarch of the House of Saud. To make matters more complicated, The British Foreign Office and the World Zionist Organization orchestrated Balfour Declaration of 1917, which put British support behind the establishment of “a national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. In a bureaucratic breakdown of diplomacy and conflicting political interests, these competing visions of imperial control in the region paved the way for a century long conflict over these lands and its people’s resources.

In Lebanon, the French envisioned themselves as the protectorate of the Christian populations. Trying to undermine Sunni alliances with Damascus, France again intervened by convincing the League of Nations to partition this rich coastal region away from greater Syria in the wake of this First World War. In 1920, the State of Greater Lebanon became established under the French Mandate. Many “Lebanese” from this Syrian territory emigrated during these tumultuous times and consequently formed the basis of a large diasporic community concentrated in West Africa, South and North America, France, and Australia. Many other Lebanese are spread around the Arab world for vocational and familial purposes. As many were leaving, others were arriving from their own catastrophes. After the ‘genocide’ of the Armenian population in Anatolia during World War One, thousands of Armenian refugees found safe harbor among the other Christian sects in Beirut.

In the years that came, nationalism mounted around different sectarian identities. Under French authority, Pierre Gemayel founded the Maronite Phalange Party in 1936 after visiting Nazi Germany. After the Nazis occupied Paris in 1940, the Vichy French regime assumed control of the French mandate over Lebanon and Syria. The following year British and Free French forces capture Lebanon from Vichy control. Based on the demographics of 1932, Muslim and Christian leaders made an unwritten agreement about the division of political authority across the multiple sectarian groups. Known as the National Pact (*al Mithaq al Watani*), this agreement enabled the independence of the Lebanese Republic in 1943.

For the British, the issue of maintaining mandate control over Palestine proved particularly difficult as Jewish nationalists, arriving in increasing numbers from Europe and elsewhere, waged an aggressive insurgency against the British. Following the withdrawal of the British in 1948, the Zionists gained control over large sections of

historic Palestine and declared the independence of Israel. Arab armies from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt launched an attack on the Israelis. The Arab forces were largely repelled and Israeli independence meant the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, remembered in Arabic as a catastrophe (*al-nakba*). The war ended with the 1949 Armistice Agreements, which defined the borders until the 1967 Six-Day War.

During this time Lebanon became the outlet for the two largest oil pipelines in the world, feeding a huge amount of capital into certain sectors of the country. In contrast to the close relations Christian Lebanese shared with their European brethren, the Muslim Arabs in saw another form of secularism arising under the emergence of Gamel Abdel Nasser's revolutionary Pan-Arabism. He gained control of the presidency of Egypt shortly after orchestrating a coup d'état to remove the British-backed King Farouk I. Then in 1956 Nasser's gamble to nationalize the Suez Canal mobilized a post-war America to block a British, French, and Israeli invasion of Egypt. Nasser becomes a worldwide hero under the banner of Pan-Arabism. Two years later he became president of the United Arab Republic, which joined Egypt and Syria under one administrative vision briefly from 1958 to 1961. Nasser's influence in Lebanon sparks civil war between contingents of Pro-Arabism and Lebanese exceptionalism. Maronite president Camille Chamoun requested the aid of American forces and the U.S. Marines land in Beirut to an already dissipated conflict. Nasser's nationalization of most industries sent professionally enabled Egyptians to Lebanon for work.

The 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab armies of Syria, Jordan, and Egypt resulted in a massive land grab for Israel. At the end of the brief war, Israel occupied Syria's Golan Heights, the West Bank of the Jordan River, Gaza, and the Sinai. This resulted in another mass exodus of Palestinians into refuge. In 1970 the Jordanian army drove the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) from its land after King

Hussein feared a power struggle with Yasser Arafat was mounting. Many of these refugees and militants fled into southern Lebanon.

In 1975, the tension of a Palestinian organized war against Israel based in West Beirut and southern Lebanon sparked violence between the PLO and Phalange militias, which erupts into a loosely identified Muslim/Christian civil war. In 1976, Christian president Franjieh invites the Syrian Army to protect it from Palestinian and secular militias. In 1978, Israel invades southern Lebanon following a PLO guerrilla raid and creates an occupied zone. Syria turns against Christian militias and bombs East Beirut. In 1979, the Iranian revolution marks the rise of a Shi'a Islamic revival intertwined with postcolonial and anti-Marxist sentiment.

1982 witnessed an intense turning point in the "civil war" when Israel invaded Lebanon and captured West Beirut, thus forcing the withdrawal of the PLO to Tunisia under the supervision of the multinational force (MNF: U.S., France, and Italy). In the wake of the PLO withdrawal the MNF sided with the Christian government and attacked Druze and Shi'a positions in the mountains above Beirut. After a Christian secularist assassinated President Bashir Gemayel, head of Al-Kitaab Party and the Phalange militia, Christian militiamen under the supervision of the Israeli Defense Forces raided the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila and massacred hundreds of civilians. In 1983 the MNF faced dire losses during car-bomb attacks at the U.S. Embassy and the military headquarters for the American and French forces in Beirut. During this period Hezbollah emerged as a Shi'a centered resistance movement against the Israeli occupation. By 1984 the MNF evacuates Lebanon and the "western" hostage crisis" begins to mar the Regan administration.

In 1989 during a power vacuum, General Michel Aoun assumes the presidency and prime ministry (a post reserved for Sunni Muslims) and declares war on Syrian

forces in Lebanon. In response, Syria and its Lebanese allies besiege Christian East Beirut, thus forcing Aoun to surrender. Under the orchestration of Sunni business mogul, Rafiq Hariri, opposition parties sign the Taef Agreement in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia, in September 1989 agreeing to lay down their arms. The war officially came to an end, militants were granted amnesty, and reconstruction began in force. Lebanon remained occupied, however, by both Syrian “peace keeping” forces and Israeli proxy armies. Furthermore, Hezbollah did not surrender its weapons as it claimed legitimacy as the resistance army against Israeli occupation. Hostilities in southern Lebanon escalated with the Grapes of Wrath attack when Israeli bombers massacred 106 people in the village of Qana, a UN safe compound. Hezbollah declares Israel’s withdrawal from most of southern Lebanon in 2000 as a major victory. At this same time, the Oslo Peace Accord, which had ended the first Intifada in 1993, collapsed in 2000, marking the beginning of renewed violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

In the shadow of the September 11th attacks and the subsequent “war on terror,” which proclaimed the need for American reform through much of the Middle East, Lebanon’s “postwar” period prospered until the sudden assassination of Rafiq Hariri. Known as “Mr. Lebanon,” the political murder of this three-time prime minister billionaire set in motion another major shift in Lebanese historical conditions. Mass rallies by competing political sensibilities pitted a Western backed alliance against a Hezbollah alliance with Syria and General Aoun, freshly returned from exile in France and ready to be bedfellows with his former enemies. An ongoing UN investigation, and as yet inconclusive, implicates Syrian officials in the assassination of Hariri. Lebanon had again slipped into a political stalemate. This divided alliance did not prevent Hezbollah from withstanding a month-long war when Israel again invaded in 2006. Unable to route Hezbollah from southern Lebanon or from political sway, Israel ultimately retreated

under the supervision of the US and France, but the political situation in Lebanon continues in a state of uncertainty. Efforts to elect a new president have stalled for months and serious ruptures of political violence have been witnessed in car bombings, assassinations, street gunfights, and refugee camp battles with the Lebanese Army.

Given the prolonged experience of civil violence and exilic departure, it should not be surprising to find the majority of Lebanese films focusing on the war. Much of the official silence about the war conditioned on the mass amnesty ends up passively constructing Beirut as simultaneously a victim and the guilty culprit, as though no one but the city suffered its demise and only the city is to blame for its demise. Many film titles seem to beckon to this urban character, such as, *Beirut, Oh Beirut* (1975); *War Generation Beirut* (1988); *Between You and Me Beirut* (1992); *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* (1994); *This is not Beirut* (1994); *West Beirut* (1998); and *Beirut Palermo Beirut* (1998). Because Lebanese artists are grappling with the over-determination of historical violence on the one hand and the official amnesia of this crisis on the other, a cadre of intellectuals and theoretically informed artists and filmmakers have critically taken on these normalizing flows and tropes of orientalism. For those who remained in west Beirut during the war, the Beirut Theater provided a persistent voice against violence where creative, critical, and concerned citizens found release from their frustrations. Rasha and Mouhktar arranged a video screening. Video collectives found inroads among the theater crowd.

Trajectories set in motion in these early projects continue to play out in both diverging and converging projects of contemporary Arab representation. Moukhtar Kocache worked as the art curator for the World Trade Center's 91st floor gallery. After the towers fell, he took a position at Ford Foundation in Cairo. After studying in New York, Rasha Salti co-founded ArteEast festival in order to promote artists from the

Middle East and its diasporas. She now continues her work from Beirut. The tension between restricted movement and exilic excess is one of the main components of contemporary Lebanese art and cinema. And the historiography of Lebanese filmography reveals the contested identity of contemporary visual culture in Lebanon.

CRISES OF REPRESENTATION

The implied "versus" that traditionally separates ["fact" and "fiction"] has generated much of the scholarly focus on art produced in Beirut since the civil war. Indeed, critics from Lebanon and beyond have consistently noted, if not perhaps prescribed, that one of the most prevalent features of contemporary Lebanese artistic production is its preoccupation with the reassessment of the role and place of documentary evidence in constructions of historical truth. ... a number of Lebanese artists have spent the last fifteen years producing work that attempts to register the irresolution of the civil war's legacy (Feldman and Zaatari 2007:51).

Akram Zaatari, an experimental documentary video artist who curates at the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut, and Hannah Feldman, an assistant professor of art history at Northwestern University near Chicago, submitted a joint application to the Fulbright Visiting Specialist Program: Direct Contact with the Muslim World to bring Zaatari for six weeks in the fall of 2006 (Feldman and Zaatari 2007). On July 12, Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers near the border in an attack that also killed seven Israeli troops. In retaliation to these provocations, the Israeli government launched a military campaign against Hezbollah that displaced a million Lebanese and upwards of half a million Israelis, not to mention the death of over a thousand Lebanese civilians, with more dying each month from remnant cluster bombs. During this "July War," Zaatari was unable to obtain the necessary J-1 visa. Zaatari finally secured his visa ten days before the course would begin. In a moment immediately after Lebanon had endured a monumental crisis, a "surpassing disaster" as Jalal Toufic would say, what is the significance of Akram

Zaatari teaching a course with an American academic on art history in Chicago in 2006? What is happening in Lebanon and the United States that could warrant this academic exchange? What could the cycles of violence in Lebanon tell American students about the representation of disaster that could benefit their worldview? Boggled down in an unjust war in Iraq, what do the Lebanese artists and filmmakers documenting this experience know that we do not know? Walid Raad, a transnational art celebrity, affirms the role of the Lebanese, “We lived through so many of these events, we can prefigure some of the possible scenarios” (Quoted in Wallach 2004).

Given this over-determined history of violence, Zaatari and Feldman’s seminar endeavored to move beyond over-determined analyses of contemporary Lebanese visual culture. While this work typically bolsters claims about traditional documentary’s “incapacity to adequately communicate experience without reification,” they have become concerned that “assertions of representation’s impossibility threaten to trap representation in a cycle of diminishing returns” (2007:51). The question then becomes how does one escape the “cycle of diminishing returns”?

For Walid Raad, whose work is discussed at length in chapter four, the Atlas Group Archive provides an alternative archive with imaginary characters in order to affectively analyze the way history becomes documented and made believable. It is important to note here the way Walid Raad’s imaginary archive is often situated in contrast to the work emerging from AIF. There is a tendency to distinguish these two endeavors based on fiction versus fact, thus reifying AIF as a ‘true’ archive and Raad’s project as ‘false’. As Zaatari says, “Better would be to suggest that they represent different experiential approaches to history, neither fictional nor real” (Feldman and Zaatari 2007:57). Whereas Raad’s Atlas Group Archive foregrounds imaginary documents produced by fictitious characters in order to subvert the hegemony of the

official archive, AIF has fostered the preservation of “vanishing” archives with photographs from across the region and re-enchanted them with social and cultural contextual analysis. Both projects ultimately critique the traditional archive based on Enlightenment rationality and objectivity and both resurrect histories of the imaginary. In this regard, Zaatari argues, “the real fiction is that artmaking can avoid the document and that the document similarly avoids fiction” (2007:57).

Trapped within paradigms of fact and fiction, Zaatari and Feldman endeavor to move conceptual formulations away from bureaucratic disciplinary approaches to history by making shifts in terminology from the “archive” to the more personal notion of a “collection.” Rather than readymade “documents,” they employ the paleographic metaphor of the “fossil” to consider an unearthed artifact with “both its original integrity and its transformation over time” (2007:51). These shifts necessitated rearticulating both temporal order and spatial understandings of historical representation away from uniform totalities and toward the “divisions and misidentifications” of the border. These border approaches favor engaging the “contradiction, irreconcilability, and multiplicity” of these images and objects (2007:53).

Zaatari and Raad, among others, endeavor to make visible the processes that render certain perspectives silent, invisible, and dislocated in these popular histories of victimization and resistance. Given the limitations asserted by representational impossibility, Zaatari and Feldman ask an imperative question. How can the representation of Lebanon escape this predicament’s “cycle of diminishing returns?” This is a particularly important question on at least two fronts. First, it hints at the way representational critiques of Lebanon’s history becomes mired in over-determined categories of cosmopolitan excess and nationalist violence. Even while critical of these categories and their over-determined nature, one would wonder what other stories and

issues remain undisclosed? Second, it alludes to the mundane experience of ordinary people as a site for reinvigorating representation under more “possible” parameters. Indeed, Hadria argues that Zaatari’s engagement with “everyday life is claimed at a human, ordinary, and intimate level, transcending the eruptions, the curfews, the incursions, and suicide-bombings to counter-act the violence relentlessly spotlighted by the European [and American] news” (2005:38).

It is with this second point that I find Lebanese experimental documentary reverberating closely with the concerns and the methods of visual anthropology. In fact I would argue, that although very much part of the intellectual community discussed in the following chapters, Akram Zaatari’s work is distinct in its commitment to unearth the ethnographic image. Zaatari’s work shows parallels with anthropology’s concern for the everyday experience, particularly in the everyday encounter with mimetic memory objects and images. These recovered images and objects mobilize strategies of remediation, which engender elements of “vitality” through the creation of alternative archives that are capable of addressing under-represented social dimensions and issues as well as transcending the limitations of representational impossibility. In this way, I suggest that these advanced renderings of what I call post-orientalist aesthetics present importance efforts to move beyond the traps of orientalist critique and challenge the representational aporias facing visual anthropology, as discussed below.

Akram Zaatari engenders these ethnographic endeavors into the ordinary by critically engaging with the archival holdings of the Arab Image Foundation (AIF). In a widespread effort to collect visual artifacts made by people native to the region (rather than Westerners), AIF has created a massive archive of “indigenous images.” But Zaatari’s visual critique of these images and their attending modes of production also helps to acknowledge the unique ways in which modernity transformed sites across the

region without defaulting to a narrative of western destruction of the traditional, which unavoidably presumes static notions of nonwestern authenticity. The images collected from studio and amateur photographers show the emergence of new social and cultural structures of feeling and provide a reflexive record of modernity's own incursion into public and private spheres of interaction. Zaatari, one of the founders of this organization, has been chiefly responsible for overseeing the collection of an extensive photographic archive from flea markets, art collectors, photographic studios, and family albums. Zaatari's contribution to this endeavor is not limited to merely creating this alternative archive, but through exhibition and the production of several publications, videos, and installations his work constitutes an emergent site for reappraising the visual record of the Arab region.

Zaatari's work with AIF has provided a sustained interest in exploring photographic histories and sites of visual production in the Middle East. In his efforts to chronicle the work of Middle Eastern photographers through video, installations, and publications, Zaatari joins biographical narratives about photography with an analysis of modern desires to mediate the transformation of social identity. In this way the modern history of the Middle East re-emerges from this alternative record of snapshots and portraits. The photo studio has emerged as a site of intense focus and has generated important questions about the source of the archive. While the collection of amateur photos showcases middle class sensibilities through modern lifestyles and new acquisitions (automobiles, televisions, cameras, etc.), it is in the semiprivate space of the photographic studio that individuals imagine alternative self-identities – dressing up or dressing down depending on one's whim.

For instance, in *Her+Him Van Leo* (2001), Zaatari utilizes the AIF archive to explore the work of Van Leo, a prominent Cairene studio photographer during the mid-

20th century. At the beginning of the video we are told that the filmmaker has found a Van Leo portrait of his grandmother in his mother's closet. The discovery of this semi-nude photo among his family's belongings prompts Zaatari to immediately visit Van Leo in Cairo. As the video progresses the story about the photo of his grandmother starts to change. By destabilizing her identity Zaatari apprehends the desires of women like his grandmother to use these secret meetings at the studio to explore new forms of self-expression, including (self-)pornography. His conversation with Van Leo also allows Zaatari to call into question the relationship between the photographer and his subjects, and to juxtapose the tradition of studio photography with the practice of video art.²

In the context of Lebanon, photo studios have proven to be urgent sites of preservation due to their destruction during the war or by natural disasters. In Beirut, most of the photo studios, which were located in the downtown area, became destroyed during the early battles of the civil war. In this case, "the only remnants of their production were the prints collected from Beirut families" (Feldman and Zaatari 2007:55). Furthermore, the photographic collections of commercial studios have also faced their peril at the financial dissolution of these studios, which has often been marked by the selling off of their negatives for the silver content. The recognition of these lost photographic collections fostered the founding of AIF in order to acquire and preserve these vanishing documents and archives. The photo studio thus emerges as a site of loss. Not only are the negatives and photos at risk of vanishing, but the public space of the

² Although my discussion here focuses on Zaatari's engagement with the holdings of the Arab Image Foundation, his attention to the dynamics of sexual identity in *Her+Him Van Leo* gestures to another dominate theme in his work that deserves further consideration. For instance, his video *Majnounak (Crazy About You)*, 1997) features three working-class Lebanese men boasting about their sexual exploits as a way to critique notions of masculinity. In contrast, his video *How I Love You* (2001) features several young homosexual men, bathed in the anonymity of overexposed images, discussing their sexual identity vis-à-vis the illegality and social taboo of homosexuality in Lebanon. Homosexuality is again intimated at in *Red Chewing Gum* (2000), his contribution to the Hamra Street Project curated by Ashkal Alwan. These videos provide important countercurrents to the predominance of "war" stories.

photo studio is also in jeopardy of becoming withdrawn. Zaatari's engagement with the photo studio should not be mistaken as a nostalgic desire for recreating a lost form of public art, but instead as an effort to re-inhabit these sites and re-enchant their legacy within the present.

As Zaatari says, "The artist's intervention renders the past and the stories it might have preferred to keep repressed active, alive, and present" (2007:63). Rather than documents of an archive, he prefers to think of these remnants as "paleontological fossils," which "resist belonging to the present until a conscious act seeks to use them for a particular purpose, to reassign them a new function" (2007:64). The unearthing of these photographic fossils, however, relies on their current state of disappeared dormancy. While the re-appropriation of these fossils "are made to reveal narratives and desires in the present, they still tell of their original function, thereby speaking simultaneously in two different tenses" (2007:64). In this regard, Zaatari brings latent visual histories into the present in ways that challenge the blockage of traumatic amnesia. In other words, these forgotten photographic histories break through the eclipse of over-determined crises of representation transfixed by the legacies of violence and impossible representation.

These alternative archival sources thus allow Zaatari to address the civil war from indirect trajectories. Such is the case with his work on the photographic collection of Hashem El Madani's studio in Sidon (cf. Zaatari and Le Feuvre 2004). During the 1960s and 1970s, El Madani photographed dozens of individuals fighting with the pro-Palestinian militia, which in effect documents the mass arrival of Palestinian militiamen after the defeat of the PLO in Jordan. In interviews with Zaatari, however, El Madani points out that not all the individuals photographed were militants. Many of these men were simply the friends of militiamen playing out fantasies in front of the camera donning their friend's uniform and weapons. In this regard, Zaatari "recontextualizes not

only [photo studios'] relation to Lebanese history, but also their subjects' relationship to the identity they want to perform in front of the camera" (Feldman and Zaatari 2007:65).

In this sense, AIF presents significant transformative potential for steering the direction of visual culture studies in the Middle East, so long as its collection is spared the threat of violence itself. By simultaneously collecting the photographic heritage of the Middle East and North Africa and promoting photographic practices, AIF offers an alternative archive from which to advance critiques about the visual record of the region, which has helped artists like Zaatari avoid making a redundant critique of Orientalist representations of the Middle East. These efforts help galvanize the importance of reassessing the hegemonic archive vis-à-vis this re-emergent collection.

In an effort to relay these practices back to the visual anthropology, I want to note the way Zaatari makes these photos speak to the present. His work not only reinvents the archive, but makes its images travel back to the people documented (and documenting) and resituates them within the banality of their ethnographic contexts. These ethnographic explorations into the archive's history show "at once an extroverted voyage in geography and an introverted voyage in the recording of everyday" (Zaatari 2005). Such is the case with his journey in *Van Leo Him+Her* to talk with the once prominent studio photographer about the nude photo of Zaatari's grandmother or with his research on the photographs of Syrian Arabist Jabrail Jabbur in *This Day* (2003), in which Zaatari demonstrates the various frames from which the Middle East becomes imaged. These ethnographic visions are also evidenced in Zaatari's videos, *All's Well on the Border* (1997) and *In This House* (2005), which directly address the memory of the war and the way it becomes manifest in the present. These videos are discussed in chapter four, in order to elucidate Zaatari contribution to the visual critiques of representing the violence in the South (*al-Janub*).

NONWESTERN DOCUMENTARY

Documentary Studies have been slow to consider nonfiction endeavors made in nonwestern settings. Survey texts provide little localized context to nonwestern documentary traditions for the sake of drawing similarities in experience of colonialism. Based on thematic categories advanced in these surveys, the genesis of filmmaking in the nonwestern world is always told as a narrative of the colonial introduction of mimetic modernity. The story begins with colonial documentaries and newsreel propaganda. Sometimes early “ethnographic films” will be introduced in the pretext for an emergent national cinema. After this brief “contextualizing” history, western productions and ethnographic films evaporate from the historiography. The evaporated residue lingers on the nostalgic narratives of revolutionary nationalism and the continued dependence on colonial ancestors. In fact, almost all stories about the birth of cinema begin the same way – Thomas Edison and the Lumiere brothers sending cinematographers around the world to capture the sights/sites of exotic cultural landscapes. Shortly thereafter, a ‘big bang’ splinters the divergent narratives about the history of cinema into constellation of disaggregated stories. The introduction of Hamid Naficy’s *Accented Cinema* (2001) and Laura Marks’ *The Skin of the Film* (2000) has disrupted these constellations and forced new film studies to grapple with articulating new histories and new narratives of cinematic experience. Unbound by categories of national, documentary, and “world” cinema, this current project endeavors to take this challenge, not only considering a particular nonwestern film and video context, but also recouping the legacy of ethnographic film within this moment of historical revisions.

The crossing of disciplinary boundaries characterizes this revisionist moment, which also informs my approach to this topic as a visual anthropologist, not a film

theorist. Rather than a sloppy notion of dilettante hybridity, which presumes a generalizable quality of crossing different and multiple boundaries, my expertise as an anthropologist and a documentary filmmaker largely informs my impression of this traversal. The notion of crossing boundaries also suggests leaving one academic terrain and entering another, like a stranger in a strange land. The strangeness of this “cross-cultural” encounter indexes the inherent impossibility of translation. Rather than a crossing over, my project is more of a meeting in the margins. In chapter one, I give a reading of national and transnational film theory, but the interstitiality of this project is chiefly informed by my ethnographic encounter with Lebanese artists and filmmakers in Beirut (as well as isolated cases in Austin, Houston, Amsterdam, and Paris), where we met at the margin of public culture.

As cosmopolitan sensibilities inform this encounter, my ethnography is not situated in authentic isolation. While the trope of the authentically indigenous culture colors much of ethnographies legacy, in both text and film, visual anthropology has only recently begun to consider documentary films made by these “others.” The movement through the margins of transnational and urban cultural exchange situates these artists as the cultural brokers of the “Lebanese experience.” As such, their cosmopolitanism remains intently focalized on a particular idea of Lebanon by being politically and socially situated in Beirut. While ethnographically and historically contextualizing these artists and filmmakers, I treat them as the foremost experts in the cross-cultural representation of Lebanon.

And yet, many of these films and videos and other cultural productions mark the impossibility for speaking nationally about the Lebanese past except through a common experience of economic excess and political violence. Although these over-determined categories objectify and thus make generic the “Lebanese experience” of a prewar

“golden age” and a protracted “civil war,” these filmmakers advance an “ordinary” lived experience that is relentlessly subject to international geopolitical maneuvering and perpetuated national violence. In this way, my study of contemporary Lebanese documentary demonstrates the convergence of bohemian self-mediation and aesthetics of auto-ethnography, which enables a sustained critique about the representational agency in conflict zones. This is a domain visual anthropology has been hesitant to address. Although only tangentially grappled with here, the subtext of this dissertation repeatedly asks, how does one do visual anthropology in sites of perpetual violence and uncertainty?

The crisis of representation evoked in the title of this manuscript is meant to accentuate the struggle to represent the social, political, and cultural violence that informs the lived experience in Lebanon. But it is also meant to be evocative of the various crises that have transformed many of the academic fields I engage theoretically and methodologically in this work. For my purposes here, that sense of crisis is most directly felt in relation to visual anthropology and this dissertation is self-consciously an effort to engage visual anthropology as an emergent field – not new but renewed.

The ongoing “state of emergency” in Lebanon has precipitated a deep re-evaluation of documentary modes of representation. In this introduction I aim to shift the frame of analysis in a different direction, one that considers (post)war society through the lens of visual anthropology. By bringing this body of work into closer dialogue with anthropological practices of representation, I hope to trace the affinities between Lebanese experimental video and emergent practices in visual anthropology. This study builds on various efforts to problematize our understanding of cross-cultural filmmaking from visual anthropology and ethnographic film (Feld 2003, MacDougall and Taylor 1998) to documentary studies (Renov 2004, Russell 1999, Vaughan 1999) and to transnational film studies (Marks 2000, Naficy 2001). By reviewing the trends in the

field, I hope to show how efforts to define ‘ethnographic film’ in sharp opposition to ‘indigenous media’, ‘postcolonial film’, ‘exilic cinema’, etc. are at least partially flawed.

In one regard, it is imperative to delineate boundaries in order to understand different positions of cultural agency, subjectivity, and identity. By the same token, however, this approach risks reifying the boundaries of these genres and disciplines at the expense of finding commonalities. Method and approach should be able to adjust to the situation. For instance, a single approach to ethnographic film would result in a hollow discipline more obsessed with its propriety than the people and cultures it aims to elucidate. Fortunately, the multiplicity of approaches and concerns in the field of visual anthropology convinces me that there is room to consider new theories, questions, and aesthetics. Based on new openings in the field, particularly affinities expressed toward art practices and sensory experience, visual anthropology is well poised to adopt alternative approaches for conducting cross-cultural visual research in conflict zones. Indeed, the changing global “mediascapes” and “ethnoscapes” (Appadurai 1990) makes it imperative for today’s visual anthropology to engage with alternative sites and theories of cross-cultural visibility.

Accordingly, in these introductory remarks I offer a critique of the field of visual anthropology in order to reassess its abilities and objectives to undertake this challenge. In the section entitled, “Ethnographic film is dead! Long live the dead!,” I situate a crisis of representation within visual anthropology regarding the parameters and definition of ethnographic film. In the next section, “Visual Anthropology in the Crosshairs of Interdisciplinarity,” I shift the frame of crisis to consider the way the field is situated in relation to other disciplinary approaches to visual studies and visual research. A third section, “Salvage/ing Visual Anthropology,” pushes visual anthropology to consider new approaches to the study of visual culture. These innovations draw upon the aesthetics and

critiques asserted by Lebanese experimental documentary as well as the merits already earned by visual anthropology's innovative forebears and the trends more recently at work in the field. As such, I hope to channel the concerns raised in this dissertation into new theoretical terrain and thus open a creative space for alternative anthropological practices to take shape.

ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE DEAD!

The title of this section plays on the title of a book review by Lucien Taylor published nearly ten years ago – "Visual Anthropology Is Dead, Long Live Visual Anthropology!" (1998b). While his project is clearly intended to contest various "rethinking" in the field, he is equally invested in (re)defining the field according to its tradition of visually based research practices, *a la* ethnographic film. In this piece, he suggests that proclamations of a "pictorial turn" would seem to provide "a propitious moment for the revitalization of visual anthropology, a subfield that is at once highly visible and quite marginal to mainstream anthropological discourse" (1998b:534). In an effort to provide a definition and endorsement of "visual anthropology," Taylor turns on the meaning of 'visual' to show the field's dual projects. On the one hand, it denotes an anthropology that is conducted through visual media, while, on the other hand, it means an anthropology that is ostensibly interested in the visual domain of the material and sensory worlds.

A potential problem with the latter part of this definition, which Taylor rightly addresses, is the slipperiness of "visual culture" as an object of study. Since the visual is ubiquitously present in nearly all aspects of culture, defining a subfield by this parameter would in effect rendered its significance null – all anthropology is potentially visual. So what? When paired with the first definition, however, visual anthropology takes on

unique significance as a field invested in both critiquing and producing visual media in the interest of anthropological knowledge. Not satisfied with only linguistic description, advocates of visual anthropology rightly point to the way ethnographic film provides frameworks for accessing different cultures, states of consciousness, sensory experience, visual imagery, and embodied memories. The legacy of ethnographic film provides an important precedent for understanding the unique attributes of visual ways of knowing.

“Ethnographic film” is a term that came into use after WW II, but was subsequently applied to several anthropologically oriented film endeavors undertaken earlier. For instance, the recordings of Félix-Louis Regnault, A.C. Haddon, and Walter Baldwin Spencer around the turn of the century, Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922), and Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson’s work in the 1930s are all considered early examples of ethnographic film. These and many other predecessors demonstrated “a haphazard affair ... never employed systematically or enthusiastically by the anthropological profession as a whole” (MacDougall 1998a:125). In the 1950s, ethnographic film began gaining more attention, if not credibility, once an infrastructure emerged that could support the professionalization of the field (Ruby 2002). During the past half century, a professional corps of visual anthropologists has emerged to assertively rework the shortcomings of past endeavors and lay the foundation for a collaborative, self-reflexive enterprise that predicted many of the critiques of anthropology launched during the 1980s.

Unfortunately, the viability of ethnographic film remains a highly contentious issue and the more recent innovations are often dogged by the imperialism of their past. Fatimah Tobing Rony suggests, “Many anthropologists, although acknowledging particular ethnocentric biases of the filmmakers, still do not dispute the status of ethnographic film as empirical record. It is astonishing how often the constructed nature

of the ethnographic film is ignored...” (1996:12). Rony’s statement invokes the enduring perception, by even the most informed critics, that ethnographic filmmakers are exceedingly unaware of the ideological and aesthetic nature of their medium. The propensity for critics, both within the discipline and outside it, to wrangle over the same debates without much acknowledgement of genuine methodological and theoretical innovations reveals, first, the pervasive endurance of an imagined (and rather pejorative) understanding of “ethnographic film;” second, the sheer marginalization and ignorance about its most critical and self-aware proponents; and, third, the perpetuation of ill-fated ethnographic film projects that fail to consider the previous two points.

Accordingly, I aim to challenge Rony’s assessment that current scholarship on ethnographic films is “scarce” and mostly comprised of accounts “eager either to find totemic ancestors or to slay and denounce the colonial complicity of Oedipal fathers (and, when Margaret Mead is the target, mothers³)” (1996:12). In doing so, I will point to some of the predicaments that have endured within ethnographic film debates, showing how Rony’s appraisal is not unfounded but merely incomplete. I will also highlight some of the more innovative attempts to transform the field, which will provide an opening to consider the work of Lebanese experimental documentary and its potential to transform the field of visual anthropology.

What is Ethnographic Film? My aim would seem clear, but my target has proven illusive. Harald Prins (1997) has recently asked this same question rhetorically, acknowledging the general ambiguity that elides such distinction. Of course, there have been serious attempts to answer this question, to delineate criteria necessary for determining the degree of “ethnographicness” in a film (cf. Heider 1971), but these

³ Ethnographic film is partly dominated by a patriarchy – the field’s ‘big men’ (Banks 1992); and a recent interview with “women pioneers” (Asch et al. 2001) expressed the tendency for women to be relegated to operating the sound equipment in the past, but they suggested that now more women pursue visual anthropology than men.

efforts have been largely ignored or fallen into “academic quagmire.” Considering anthropology’s general vague articulations about the meaning of “culture,” Prins argues, “it would be amazing if visual anthropologists actually had managed to programmatically define ethnographic film” (1997:281). Sol Worth argued that there is “no way of describing a class of films as ‘ethnographic’ by describing a film in and of itself” (1972:9). Yet, the categorization of “ethnographic film” is at the core of nearly all debates within the field, whether favoring strict guidelines or resisting these limitations. Following Worth’s direction, in order to understand “ethnographic films,” we must examine why and how they are made and used, “not only within ethnographic research, but within the culture or the subculture that both produces and uses a film” (1972:9).

Worth’s statement identifies a question central to almost all debates in the field: What is the purpose of ethnographic film? This elicits a series of related questions, how is it to be used, what sort of work does it do, who is it made for, and who should be authorized to make it? Should it be for the collection of empirical data and used in research, for supplemental material usage in the classroom, or for the conveyance of public information? Are these categories mutually exclusive and how does the aesthetic value vary across these projects? These questions represent a veritable tug-of-war over the notion of ethnographic film. On one hand, there is the pull to quarantine aesthetic tendencies, reclaim it from “amateur anthropologists,” and make it conform to anthropological rigor. On the other hand, an effort persists to break the confines of scientific objectivity, logocentric iconophobia, and Western positions of privilege. Both endeavors endure in a political economy governed by restrictive institutions – sponsorial government agencies, higher education, broadcast television, etc. And yet, these self-reflexive (and at times self-reflective) debates have generated important insights about the ethnographic encounter, the internal qualities of the image, and the transcending

power of visual media. These points of recognition should provide important footholds to consider new theoretical and ethnographic dilemmas.

These debates over definitions and boundaries have been significantly controlled by the professionalization of ethnographic film and the institutionalization of the field, which owes much to Margaret Mead (the ‘mother’ of visual anthropology according to Jay Ruby (2002)). She played perhaps the most important role in establishing it as a credible anthropological pursuit. In her 1960 AAA⁴ presidential address she urged other anthropologists to more effectively incorporate film in their work. She believed anthropologists had become too dependent on words and an archive of images could be an invaluable tool for them to test theories, review “salvaged” traditions, and even provide a context for research to be done without going to the field (anthropology from a distance) (cf. Mead 1995).

While Mead presumed that “artistic endeavors” would only be fleetingly fashionable, the enduring appeal of “artistic” ethnographic films has posed a great deal of concern for critics. In particular, the films of Robert Gardner have consistently caused great consternation. Jay Ruby frets that Gardner’s continued antiquated approaches and high-profile status create a stumbling block for the development of ethnographic cinema (Ruby 1991). But how exactly should ethnographic cinema develop? Gardner has said film has the potential to confirm the humanity of another to an audience (1957). But for the purposes of ethnographic film becoming more accepted in mainstream anthropology, Ruby argues, the “chief criteria” should be its “ethnographic” qualities, “not the aesthetics of film” (1991:4). Ruby presents these “criteria” as being mutually exclusive. In order to bolster the status of ethnographic film within “mainstream anthropology,” he argues for the denunciation of all unworthy “ethnographic” film. As one of the most

⁴ The American Anthropological Association.

vocal visual anthropologists on the marginalized status of the “subfield,” he seems to favor assimilation within the greater discipline, while others favor fostering new conceptual frameworks that push the discipline forward.

Perhaps an outgrowth of the art/science debates, the merits of the visual versus the written for ethnographic analysis continue to be a point of contention. David MacDougall refutes attempts to conflate word and image in a discussion of “visual language.” The visual is another way of knowing filled with the potential to evoke and represent lived experience. He argues, “visual anthropology is not about the visual *per se* but about the range of culturally inflected relationships enmeshed and encoded in the visual” (1997:288). Similarly, Faye Ginsburg argues that films more readily reveal the “complex relationships of the parties involved in what we might call the ethnographic encounter -- the image-producer, the subject, and the audience” (1995a:367). And yet, Lucien Taylor has elsewhere identified a widespread reluctance to evaluate and accredit film with a value of its own, a condition he calls academic “iconophobia” (1996).⁵

While early ethnographic film is complicit with colonialism, “under Rouch’s care, the genre of ethnographic film acquired scientific and political as well as artistic stature in the postwar decade” (Brigard 1995:28). Peter Loizos contends that Rouch was drawing attention to the narrative and constructed components of his “film-text” decades before it was critiqued in ethnographic books. The destabilizing effects on the audience to constantly be in flux between ‘actor’ and ‘real people’, “acknowledgement and oblivion of the camera,” and “an informant-feedback method ... to shape the final text, was breaking very important new ground” (1993:53).

⁵ The American Anthropological Association has officially endorsed a statement “urging academic committees for hiring, promotion and tenure to evaluate ethnographic visuals as appropriate media for the production and dissemination of anthropological knowledge,” acknowledging how visual media employs theory and contributes to scholarship (Prins 2001).

Rouch consistently renounced any claims to “representational truths,” preferring instead to champion the “truth of fiction” (Stoller 1992:207) or what he called a “science fiction” approach that overthrew anthropological conventions, particularly, “the commitment to science, to the ‘primitive’, to the separation and hierarchy of ethnographer and subjects” (Grimshaw 2002:9). By interrogating the ethnographer/informant power structure, the field provided room to accommodate “indigenous media” (Conklin 1997, Ginsburg 1995b, Worth and Adair 1970). Although indigenous media has now earned the status of its own field, similar influences by “other” media-makers from different subject positions than “authentically indigenous” have rarely been embraced by visual anthropology in the same way.

And yet, these alternative perspectives, whether informed by the politics of race, ethnicity, or gender, also help to scrutinize the presumptions of ethnographic authority. Indeed, now that the “others” are representing themselves, Bill Nichols (1994) argues that ethnographic film is in trouble and can expect great change in its future. I do not share Nichols’ forebodingness, rather I think this provides great promise for the field. MacDougall (2001) also has a more optimistic projection for the future of the field. He suggests that digital video has begun to transform the field, both with increased accessibility and engendered experimentation. A younger generation of ethnographic filmmakers has shifted their focus from the description of discrete ‘cultures’ toward current concerns about identity and social experience amidst a globalizing and postcolonial world. As Barbash and Taylor suggest, “the most interesting filmmaking today is happening in a fuzzy area between objective and subjective ... [T]hese films combine poetry and performance with autobiography and archival footage in ways that sublate traditional distinctions between fact and fiction” (1997:21-22). Cultural critics

from various ethnographic contexts are now producing innovative and intelligent visual projects that both borrow from and rail against the anthropological discipline.

If anything, this should convince us that there are other questions that should preoccupy our thoughts in visual anthropology. Whether something is ethnographic or not matters little when frameworks of analysis now foreground issues of identity, subjectivity, and self, particularly in regard to modes and positions of authorship. Indeed, the positionality of a genre's author can no longer be assumed. While ethnographic film evokes the trope of a white colonial male intrepidly "hunting" for images, this image is no longer representative of cross-cultural filmmakers working with nonfiction materials (if it ever was). In a now dated call to action, Akos Ostor argues, "It is time to lay aside the old debate about visual anthropology failing or succeeding ..." (1990:722) and calls on the field to envision a new future. These shifts both within and beyond the field help pave the way for this future trajectory.

For its valuation of difference, particularity, and lived experience, the potential for visual anthropology to influence a more expansive genre of cross-cultural image-making has immense importance. A more substantial obstacle for visual anthropologists to consider is the way disciplinary boundaries have delimited cross-fertilization. The "others" who are producing important and interesting work on cross-cultural representation are more likely to be working in the fields of visual culture, art history, and film studies, rather than visual anthropology.

VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE CROSSHAIRS OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Taylor's review identifies another dilemma facing the field of visual anthropology. Although ethnographic methods and anthropological critiques of culture

have been readily appropriated by other disciplines (albeit in idiosyncratic ways), “Anthropologists have so far been largely absent from the debates raging in the humanities about the role of the visual in the world today” (Taylor 1998b:534). The significance of this statement is far reaching – not merely because anthropologists continue to be absent from interdisciplinary discussions of visual research – but, more to the point, because their participation in these interdisciplinary debates are principally worthy due to the simple fact that they are *anthropologists*. Although Taylor’s analysis hinges on the visual qualifier of this subfield, implicit in his review are the merits of anthropology in and of itself. In this sense, the major strength of visual anthropology is also a crucial flaw. The field’s “anthropological” parameter fosters an exclusionist framework that devalues interdisciplinary collaboration. Ironically, the earliest anthropological expeditions often employed an interdisciplinary team of researchers.

As I showed in the previous section, debates about “ethnographic film” are all but lost. The name is far too embedded in the public imaginary to be sufficiently recouped by academics alone; however, visual anthropology has more control over its own discourse. That is to say, to be considered a visual anthropologist, one would have to be first and foremost an anthropologist. The field largely presumes that membership requires “scientific” training in anthropology. Of course, this provocative statement is used here as a theoretical straw man, considering the divergent framings “visual anthropologists” use to define their own practice – visual communication, visual ethnography, audio/visual anthropology, media ethnography, not to mention the interdisciplinary constellation of visual sociology, visual culture, and visual studies.

In the same way that visual anthropology cannot contain the boundaries of “ethnographic film,” anthropology can no longer claim ownership of ethnographic methods and its discourses. In a similar way that media studies has begun to fetishize the

“ethnographic perspective” (Murphy and Kraidy 2003), the “turn” toward ethnography can also be felt in contemporary art practices. Infused with different modes of analysis, the meaning of “ethnography” takes on different discursive terrain. And yet, as a visual anthropologist it is strange to read surveys of “visual culture” with scant mention of anthropology (cf. Dikovitskaya 2006). Or, for instance, after drawing on anthropology to briefly situate a working definition of “culture” Sturken and Cartwright (2001) only fleetingly mention the field. Although they claim, “Visual and cultural anthropologists have done the most toward providing accounts of how specific Third World culture produce and use technologies and images imported from the industrialized West,” attention to this work covers only one-percent of the entire page count (2001:328). Known ostensibly as the “study of culture,” anthropology seems strangely excluded from material on visual “culture.”

Embedded within these articulations of “visual culture” and “visual studies,” a variety of assumptions reveal the Eurocentric bastions of art history and its fascination with modernist modes of analysis. In spite of W.J.T. Mitchell’s assertion that one must not privilege a method based on disciplinary ideologies but rather consider the types of questions one wants to answer, visual culture has tended to avoid ethnographic approaches while continuing to favor semiotics (Dikovitskaya 2006:78). Despite its celebration of interdisciplinarity, visual culture has only cursory engagement with anthropology preferring to draw its pedagogical identity from “cultural studies.” Cultural Studies’ close affinity with anthropology and its utilization of ethnographic practices have seemingly gone unnoticed. Indeed, anthropology is well poised to assess the lived experience of transnational art markets, the political economy of advertising’s labor force, and the social context of broadcast audiences, to name only a few trajectories.

Accordingly, it is necessary to explore the way these fields have encountered an ideological ‘crisis of representation’ in an effort to articulate a common ground as well as potential oversights. Considering the recent interdisciplinary turns in the humanities and social sciences – the narrative turn, the pictorial turn, the visual turn, the sensory turn, and the ethnographic turn – this convergence of disciplinary frameworks that reflect a broad critique of representation should help to elucidate the visual aesthetics and cultural conditions that inform Lebanese documentary video. And yet, if academic fields too strictly segregate their objects of study, there is a risk of creating artificial gaps in our knowledge. More than delineation of academic territory, finding overlap between fields stands to benefit the study of visual cultures. This assessment is not intended merely as an exercise of pedagogical comparison. Instead, it intends to accentuate the importance of “crisis” in my project, not just for Lebanese postwar visual culture, but also for the various visual disciplines grappling with their own hegemonic legacies.

If these disciplinary boundaries do prompt antagonistic responses, then what sort of dilemmas and potentials do interdisciplinary reconfigurations present for the integrity of visual anthropology? How are modes of exclusion and invitation reciprocated in other fields? Does the increased presence of collaborations across these divisions announce innovative and significant opportunities to move cross-cultural representation in new directions? How does visual anthropology stand to address these changes? Having said this, there are several important efforts in the field of visual anthropology that show openness to alternative modes of understanding. Among others, these include sensory-based analyses, convergences between art and ethnography, and experiments with auto-ethnography. Each of these responses challenges the predominance of written and otherwise logocentric modes of scholarship.

In an effort to account for non-discursive ways of knowing, MacDougall has been a stalwart advocate for reevaluating the anthropological role of the visual. His sensual visual anthropology makes use of principles of implication, identification, visual resonances, and shifting perspectives; it involves the viewer in heuristic processes and meaning creation; and it constructs knowledge not by “description” but by a form of “acquaintance” (MacDougall 1997:286). MacDougall says, “we may need a ‘language’ closer to the multidimensionality of the subject itself—that is, a language operating in visual, aural, verbal, temporal, and even (through synesthetic association) tactile domains” (2005:116).

In this task, MacDougall recoups the concept of ‘aesthetics’ from merely a dimension of art, ritual, and popular culture in order to explore societies “as complex sensory and aesthetic environments” (2005:95). In his Doon School project this includes, “the design of buildings and grounds, the use of clothing and colors, the rules of dormitory life, the organization, of students’ time, particular styles of speech and gesture, and the many rituals of everyday life that accompany such activities as eating, school gatherings, and sport” (2005:98). As such, MacDougall argues that aesthetics performs a regulatory function in our society, triggering feelings of contentment, pleasure, anxiety, disgust, or fear. Despite the immense impact of the “writing cultures” critique, experiments with aesthetic projects have not become commonplace. In fact, Chris Wright has argued that anthropological content is typically defined in opposition to aesthetics (1998).

Central to this argument is a deeper engagement with the convergence of art and ethnography. Art and ethnography offer a synergistic approach to researching, collecting, and presenting social and cultural forms that defy scientific and objectifying modes of description. Although Jay Ruby argues that visual anthropology “offers a perspective that

is *sometimes* lacking in other fields, that is, an ethnographic or ethnohistorical approach that entails going into the field for an extended period of time to examine, participate and observe the social processes surrounding these visual objects.” (emphasis added, Ruby 2005:162), Schneider and Wright demonstrate that ethnographic and artistic approaches often share “certain questions, areas of investigation, and ... methodologies” (2006:3). Accordingly, they argue that anthropology needs to critically engage with artistic practices that draw on material and sensual registers rather than only textual ones. These contemporary art practices provide means for apprehending the performative aspects of quotidian experience, embodied meaning, affective intensity, and agency of objects and images.

What are the potential perils and promises for joining art and ethnography? Is art + ethnography equal to ethnography + art? If so, then how should visual anthropology proceed to incorporate these aspects? If not, then are these differences necessarily debilitating for the field? If observational footage challenges the art/science dichotomy, then how should we assess the politics in such a scenario? What are the limits of observational approaches to convey lived experience if aspects of that experience are not observable? Does such an approach go far enough? If not, then what else needs to be incorporated? How do we approach issues that are not approachable through observational methodologies? How can visual anthropology employ new techniques to elucidate these life worlds? How can we frame alternative logics of representation without contrasting them with presumptions of an existent ‘reality’? Where does the line blur between research and advocacy?

This line of questioning does not suggest that alternative responses offer correctives capable of simply exposing misrepresentations and replacing them with accurate or true representations. Rather, the experimental videos made by Lebanese

artists, among other nonwestern filmmakers, deconstruct visual politics, insert divergent perspectives, and acknowledge that representation is fraught. While self-consciously critical of anthropology and western documentary practices there are affinities with ethnographic approaches. Anthropology has provided these artists with models for utilizing lists and inventories, site-specific fieldwork, interviews, and participant observation not to mention the theorization of cultural difference, ethnopoetics, and auto-ethnography.

With the ‘ethnographic turn’ in contemporary art (Coles 2000), qualitative shifts in anthropology, and advances in digital technology, Schneider and Wright argue:

This would seem to usher in a new period of creative potential for contemporary anthropology, but, if this is to be a reflexive practice transcending any art/science dichotomy and involve more than the production of illustrated multimedia ‘texts’, there needs to be a new approach to images and creativity in anthropology (Schneider and Wright 2006:3).

Unfortunately, the incorporation of anthropological perspectives into contemporary art practices has not resulted in a productive two-way dialogue (Marcus and Myers 1995). Examples of cross-fertilization are not without precedent, however, specific models are limited and anthropological attitudes typically seem disinterested in adopting less rational approaches. Nevertheless, some anthropologists are now making the same realizations that artists in Lebanon have made. They are showing a deep interest in the sensory and material aspects of collective memory by engaging the temporal and spatial dimensions of lived experience. The artists who draw upon ethnographic approaches share affinities with anthropologists in their exploration of non-rationalist modes of apprehending cultural worlds. As these issues of violence and displacement become evermore present in anthropological research, visual anthropology must continually consider how visual research practices might better address these issues.

Schneider and Wright (2006) suggest that a reevaluation of experimental film and video can provide new perspectives for visual anthropology to consider. By looking at experimental documentary in Lebanon and thinking of the ways that it engages with ethnographic film and visual anthropology, I am calling for greater efforts to think about doing visual research in conflict zones where "stable" notions of truth, subjectivity, and cultural identity are irrevocably disrupted. I argue that the goals of such research cannot presume to objectively situate cultural experience, nor that such stable categories can be reset through research. Instead, following Marks (2000), MacDougall (2005) and others (Shaviro 1993, Sobchack 1992), I argue that we need to embrace a more corporeal (haptic/phenomenological) dimension of visual research that does not aim to "make sense" cognitively but rather resonate affectively.

The work of experimental documentary filmmakers in Lebanon provides a poignant example of this convergence between art and ethnography. However, my intent here is not merely to make a comparison that notes the similarities and differences between contemporary Lebanese documentary and the genre of ethnographic film. Instead, I would like to carry that argument a step further to suggest that Lebanese documentary approaches, along with recent theoretical trends in visual anthropology, can co-participate in working through dilemmas raised about the cross-cultural representation. By bringing visual anthropology and Lebanese experimental documentary into closer dialogue, I hope to convey one significant benefit of inter-disciplinary cross-fertilization. That is to ask, what sort of questions and methods have Lebanese artists and intellectuals articulated in order to conduct visual research in conflict zones? If visual anthropology is both the study of visual culture and the use of visual media to conduct anthropological research, then how might the field appropriate the critiques and aesthetics of this Lebanese work in other contexts of conflict? My interest in bringing these two

representational frameworks into closer dialogue is not for one to replace the other or even for some sort of hybrid to take precedent, but it is an effort to shift the questions asked of visual anthropology. And yet, I am also asking Lebanese experimental documentary to shift its own project slightly in order to consider the affinities it shares with visual anthropology as a practice-based approach.

SALVAGE/ING VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Unlike anthropology's salvage project that presumed the death of authentic indigenous culture, these documentary projects salvage personal stories and everyday encounters with the historical record. Motivated by the unearthing of historical objects, these stories and everyday experiences are salvaged not from the past, but from the forgetfulness of the present. The incorporation of 'ethnographic' methods and topics in these critical art projects at once critiques the Orientalist modes of anthropological documentation and also reinvents ethnographic methods to be deployed in different contexts and with different moral sensibilities. This convergence between art and ethnography is of critical importance for re-evaluating the visual methods and aesthetics of research and representation in conflict zones. This is especially true for cross-cultural researchers whose national identity is entangled in the history of political violence in one's field site.

As new forms of representation emerge with the increasing accessibility of digital media, especially in the hands of those dispossessed of their histories, traditions, and land, we must continue to grapple with the role of media as an expressive tool in these contexts. It is particularly important to consider new renderings of "reality" in societies that have undergone forms of violence and trauma that undercut realist notions of truth and evidence.

By examining the broader convergence between art and ethnography vis-à-vis Lebanese experimental documentary and visual anthropology, I draw attention to the practice-based constitution of both these projects. I argue that the centrality of violence and trauma to the oeuvre of Lebanese experimental documentary provides an important case study on how to conduct visual research in conflict zones. My interest in bringing Lebanese experimental documentary and western visual anthropology into closer dialogue is not for one to replace the other or even for some sort of hybrid to take precedent, but it is an effort to shift the questions asked of visual anthropology. The video authors in Lebanon contribute important arguments, approaches, and examples to consider in this dialogue. These artists do not consider themselves anthropologists, but they are interested in many of the same issues and are grappling with new ways to mediate these issues. While they offer poignant critiques of western representational practices, they also provide salient interpretive approaches to the visual record of the Middle East.

The vibrant postwar visual culture of Lebanon has thus emerged around a crisis of representation, namely, official amnesia and modes of censorship, contested history, theoretical impossibility, and disputed politics of representation. There is no way the experience of the Lebanese civil wars could be summed up and contained within an historical narrative. Individual experience always exceeds the abbreviated narrative of history, but is also always infinitesimal within the broader experience of mass violence. The quotidian experience of violence ironically often exists in contrast to sectarian narratives of exclusivity. And the latent threat of violence exploding on the street or erupting across borders distorts euphemistic narratives of a “post” war period. The impossibility of representing the war must also contend with a temporal vacuum in which the trauma of the past casts a cloud of uncertainty over the future. Besides, any such

effort would have to pass through the gauntlet of censorship controls that polices an official amnesia about the war. Since the political violence of the war was brushed under the carpet and details about the war are censored, the social trauma of the war becomes reinscribed during “peaceful times.” And so, cultural critics must find expression through other means than official, objective, and factual ones.

Jayce Salloum reminds us that these artists use video for documentary research, not in an endeavor to establish a factual record, but to situate “representation itself as a politicized practice”⁶ and to critically engage the fantastic tendencies of media and its ability to make certain “realities” believably real. For many Lebanese in the diaspora, like Salloum, the experience of war existed first as a simulacrum. For those who lived abroad during the war, as part of the expansive Lebanese diaspora, salvaging alternative histories is a project necessarily imbued with the affective qualities of looking through the headlines, the TV screen, or the viewfinder. This aspect of exiles returning with a different point of view is important, because their relationship to “home” was necessarily mediated by distance and nostalgia. But with a critical eye, exiled returnees have infused the promise of renewing visual culture with self-reflective imagination of home and identity. Recollecting Jayce Salloum’s video, *This is not Beirut* (1994), he visually evaluates the way Beirut has come to evoke nostalgia and horror. By contrasting a hyper-mediate archive of news footage with moments of postwar lived experience and conversations, he shows the way it was hailed as exotic and cosmopolitan during the so-called “golden era” and then violent and chaotic during the Lebanese civil wars. In such conditions the very presumption of making sense or understanding a place becomes extremely fraught. The visual reflexivity, themes of self-mediation, memories of war

⁶ From notes on *Introduction to the End of an Argument/Muqaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal* (1990), See http://www.111101.net/Artworks/index.php?Jayce_Salloum/index.php.

objects, claustrophobic spaces, obstruction of movement, and the distance and density of exile, together provide an aesthetic critique on the mediation of war and social violence, but they also provide an embodiment of memory and lived experience.

By way of brief comparison, let us consider the work of anthropologist Diana Allan. Her work focuses on the creation of an archive of oral histories by Palestinian survivors of the 1948 Nakba who have been refugees in Lebanon for the past sixty years. The Nakba Archive, as it is called, provides a crucial intervention in the historiography of Palestinian nationalism told from the perspective of the non-elite. Although not invested in the same enterprise as Lebanese documentary experimentalists, this endeavor shares similar concerns about the memory of violent social catastrophes and the challenge to insert new perspectives within the dominant discourses of history in the eastern Mediterranean. In contrast to the hegemony of the official archive based on documents from the pre-mandate period and accounts from key political figures, the Nakba Archive “is intended not as a passive repository,” but as an active tool that enables “the victims of this conflict to document its complex legacy in their own terms.”⁷ In contrast, the oral testimony of ordinary civilians, hitherto excluded on a presumption of subjective inaccuracy, privileges the way the largely illiterate Palestinian elderly transmit their historical experience to younger generations.

In addition to the collection of oral testimonies and life histories, Allan has also fostered the preservation of personal photos in a companion project known as Photo48. The “intimate remnants of a history now largely invisible” enable an “affective transference: they evoke memories of the past that remain crucial to a present sense of self.” In this regard, Allan encounters another set of latent images. For instance, one Palestinian refugee provided Allan with a box of negatives taken during the British

⁷ Cited from the Nakba Archive website, www.nakba-archive.org, accessed April 21, 2008.

mandate that had remained undeveloped for nearly sixty years. In other cases, the photos reveal themselves as “sacred objects,” imprinted by the creases and tattered edges of careful but perpetual handling. These photos thus bear the “material traces” of people and places dislocated from the present.

In her own cross-cultural video work, Allan’s piece *Fire Under Ash* (2006), which follows Nabil, a Palestinian refugee illegally working as a cab driver in Beirut. Allan’s ethnographic relationship with Nabil takes on new dimensions in his taxi as “a space of disclosure – where memories that he was reluctant to share at other times, what he called “*Nar that al-ramade*” (“fire under the ash”), would come into view.”⁸ Maneuvering through the city in Nabil’s taxi, his commentary reveals the way violent memories map the space of the city.

The predominance of alternative archives, found objects, mediated remnants, and fossilized memories in both Allan’s anthropological work and Lebanese experimental documentary highlights the significance of “latent” images and repressed narratives to the project of remembering the experience of conflict. And yet, these projects are as much of the present as they are of the past, if not more so. Oral histories, representation of live experience, and site-specificity situate this project in close relation to a particular ethnographic context. In this regard, my effort to revive “salvage anthropology” endeavors to shift the questions asked of visual anthropology to more acutely grapple with the “impossibility” of representing traumatic experience. In this sense, “salvaging” visual anthropology is not an effort to save the field from itself, but rather an intervention to become more consciously aware of the issues and dynamics of cross-cultural representation in conflict zones. This mode of salvage visual anthropology intends to

⁸ Cited from the *Ethnographies Without Text* program.

recoup the intimate narratives and lived experience of those enduring mass social violence and regimes of cultural censorship.

In other words, my intervention draws on these “parallax” perspectives in an effort to retool and re-enchant an anthropology intent on salvaging lost life ways.⁹ In this sense, Diana Allan’s Nakba project, which set out to archive the remaining firsthand accounts of the non-elite Palestinians living in Lebanon since their displacement in 1948, provides one such attempt. And yet, this salvage project is not intended merely for the western researcher to “feel good” about his/her efforts to “save a dying culture” (for there is very little room for feeling good when faced with the graveness of these oral histories). Instead, it aims to offer beneficial elements for those who are offering up their stories and provide a critical awareness of the state of loss (rather than what is lost *per se*). This attention to salvaging historic remains for the purpose of accentuating conditions of loss correlates with the withdrawn subjectivity in the archive of the undead articulated by Lebanese documentary experimentalists.

In this introductory chapter I have tried to consider the creative affinities and logical differences between Lebanese experimental documentary and the media practices of visual anthropology. These two approaches share methodological and theoretical interests in social context, lived experience, and the sensory qualities of visual media, which enables both practices to dismantle simplistic representations of cultural difference. And yet, Lebanese documentary both disputes the veracity of the documentary form and also creatively inhabits the motifs and narratives of ethnographic and documentary genres. The comparison of these two approaches speaks to a larger

⁹ I borrow “parallax” from Faye Ginsburg, who has used this term to describe the alternative perspective, one from a different point of view, available in “indigenous media” (Ginsburg 1995b). To equate the cosmopolitan projects of postwar Lebanon to the media productions of “indigenous” or “Fourth Nation” populations, would erroneously conflate these subject positions. However, Ginsburg’s term has applicability in a variety of cross-cultural contexts where representation exists in contested terrains.

convergence between art and ethnography, which helps to open new questions and creative practices for anthropologists to explore and consider. Accordingly, Lebanese experimental documentary helps to contextualize the lived experience of ordinary violence as well as demonstrate methodologies for conducting visual research in conflict zones. It is imperative for today's visual anthropology to engage with these alternative sites and theories of cross-cultural visuality.

The concern about conducting visual (anthropology) research in conflict zones also speaks to a broader set of concerns on the role anthropologists should play in the 'war on terror'. If we take the mission statement of the AAA to heart, then we are obliged to obstruct "official" access to the details of our work. But if we take institutional review boards (IRB) by the letter, then the politics of representation become all the more contentious in its Kafkaesque bureaucracy. And yet, if we take seriously the critiques of representation made by these image-makers, then it is necessary to consider alternative ethical conditions and methods of analysis. Salvaging visual anthropology is thus not an effort to save the field from itself, but rather an intervention to shift the questions asked of the field in order to become more consciously aware of the issues and dynamics of cross-cultural representation in conflict zones. Rather than fetishizing exotic artifacts or preserving the human condition for posterity, this mode of salvage visual anthropology intends to recoup the intimate narratives and lived experience of those enduring mass social violence and regimes of cultural censorship.

LINES OF FLIGHT

In this dissertation I show how Lebanese experimental documentary and alternative visual culture have shifted the postcolonial and postwar frames of analysis away from monolithic understandings of war and political conflict. This body of work

exemplifies what Laura Marks (2000) has called “intercultural cinema” in the way it negotiates the discursive fields of divergent cultural regimes. In the context of contemporary Lebanese alternative media, I situate this intercultural phenomenon within a post-orientalist aesthetic. This analytical framework identifies the visual cues of agency in a radical appropriation of the archival sphere. By reflexively referencing the objects of mediation – radios, tapes, photos, lenses, monitors, crosshairs, etc. – Lebanese experimental video draws upon its historical record to critique the constructed nature of its own legacy. Rather than a rationalist discourse that favors meaning-based structures of knowledge, these alternative archives help to “make sense” of the war by joining a collective traumatic memory, personal narratives, and phenomenological experience. This archival aesthetic frame also draws upon the ethnographic record and documentary legacy to elucidate the affective registers of (post)war subjectivity. Memory, narrative, embodiment, lived experience, site-specificity, social and geographical context provide a toolbox for recording the sociocultural landscape of war-torn Beirut. These are characteristics shared by Lebanese experimental video and ethnographic filmmaking alike. This affinity should foster interdisciplinary analyses about the relationship between ethnographic visual culture and mass civil violence.

The dissertation is divided into three parts. The first two-chapter section, “Post-orientalist aesthetics,” aims to situate Lebanese Cinema within a set of over-determined categories and mark out a new space for situating Lebanese experimental documentary within a terrain of post-orientalist aesthetics characterized by the deterritorialization of locality in the eastern Mediterranean. I advance the idea of post-orientalism in order to describe a new mode of intellectual critique and aesthetic production as demonstrated in the recent trends in Lebanese film and video production. While these filmmakers and their work are staunchly positioned within a contemporary context of Lebanon, I argue

that their work provides important interventions into the critique of Orientalism developed by Edward Said and his commentators. These filmmakers' engagement with postcolonial aesthetics and postmodern theory demonstrate efforts to move beyond the ossified narratives of modernity vs. tradition, authenticity and self-deprecation, nationalism and humanism. While their work is contingent on the personal and social effects of long-term instability, rigid structural obstacles, and intensified vilification, it also refutes the absence of self-determination and social agency.

In this section, chapter one, "Between Post-National and Exilic Cinema," develops a historical and political context for the emergence of this new trend in an effort to situate aesthetic renderings of lived experience within the cultural conditions of (post) war society. In chapter two, "The Paradox of Impossible Humanism," I extend these questions to consider the framing of cinema around notions of regionality and shared experiences of historical violence that give way to circuits of cosmopolitan urban identity. In this section I highlight several feature films and documentaries to elucidate the historical context of film culture in Lebanon and regionally.

The second section, "Post-Hariri Mediascapes," provides an urban media ethnography of Beirut's bohemian public culture during a period between catastrophes. Chapter three, "Contested Publics," narrates the experience of Lebanese cultural producers by engaging the lived and mediated experience of Beirut as a site of experimentation. In an ethnographic montage of the film and art world of Lebanon, I describe the intersections of culture that present both obstructions and flows in this production of identity. Rather than celebratory, this chapter reveals the competing efforts to establish an indigenous documentary enterprise in a conflict zone. Post-orientalist aesthetics in this frame reveals itself not as a coherent category, but as emerging from

incongruent social and political conditions that recurrently sabotage personal and collective advancements.

The final section, “Archive of the Undead,” I focus on the work of several key figures, who have interrogated the way the Lebanese wars have been remembered and forgotten. An essential aspect of post-orientalist aesthetics calls attention to its own constructed nature, the perpetual reference to media or rupture of narratives with the objects that have been entrusted to record events, to provide evidence for what really happened. While these technologies have betrayed them in the hands of western journalist and movie producers, by claiming this media toolbox now, younger artists and filmmakers have found ways to simultaneously critique the uses of the media and its integral weaknesses while also playing on its strengths to document different ways of seeing. These projects often parody the authority of experts in order to expose the ideological constructions embedded in “facts” and evidenced in “documents.” This slippage of facticity is a key ingredient of post-orientalist aesthetics.

This subversive historiography is particularly noticeable in the work of Walid Raad, to which I devote an entire chapter. Chapter four, “Impossible Historiographies,” provides a broad survey of Raad’s work in parallel with a deep engagement with the history of southern Lebanon as the frontier of perpetual foreign intervention. The implications of withdrawn historical memory inform radical readings of (post)war subjectivity. Chapter five, “Catastrophic Subjectivity,” features the work of Jalal Toufic on the post-traumatic condition of “undeath.” This intermediary subjectivity, neither alive nor dead, draws on the power of mediation to engender incarnate images endowed with the vitality of imaginary futures. The convergence of alternative archives and (post)war subjectivities enables these artists to assume the “expert” position in order to advance their own deconstructionist projects. This assumed expertise is particularly important for

thinking about the ways in which cosmopolitan artists and filmmakers perceive dominant histories and social politics to be ossified and requiring urgent response.

In the conclusion, I return to the questions posed in this introduction about the convergence between art and ethnography and the renewal of visual anthropology. In order to consider the work of nonwestern documentary experimentalists in relation to an ethnographic project, I revisit Akram Zaatari and his work with the Arab Image Foundation. Analyzing the visual heritage of the Middle East, Zaatari's work employs ethnographic explorations into the archive's history, "at once an extroverted voyage in geography and an introverted voyage in the recording of everyday" (Zaatari 2005). Finally, I employ the aesthetics of post orientalism to advance a new initiative in my research. Building on the adolescent experience of an American diplomatic mission to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, shoestring travel through the eastern Mediterranean, and anthropological research in Lebanon, "The P.S. Westmoreland Project" envisions an experimental auto-ethnography of the self in relation to the American wars in the (Middle) East. In this way, I attempt to bridge cultural analysis with the experience of ruptured subjectivity in order to mediate an informed position within a landscape of impossible imaginaries. Each chapter thus provides a slightly different frame of analysis for understanding post-orientalist aesthetics and the flourishing alternative media being made and exhibited in Beirut and also traveling elsewhere. These films and experiences of mediating Lebanese postwar conditions bear important consideration in the current geopolitical climate clouding the Middle East.

SECTION 1: POST-ORIENTALIST AESTHETICS

Chapter 1: Between Post-National and Exilic Cinema

INTRODUCTION

My intention with the following chapter is threefold. First, I aim to provide the reader with a political overview of Lebanon in order to situate the development of particular media industries at different historical moments within the national narrative. Second, I draw upon this historical narrative in order to identify a constellation of aesthetic sensibilities that disrupt the official historiography of Lebanon. Third, I intend to complicate several theoretical frameworks used to situate Arab cinema in order to address the way these discourses delimit the influence of contemporary Lebanese experimental cinema. This endeavor is of vital importance, because critically grounded voices are consistently sidelined by a neo-orientalist ‘war on terror’ discourse that presumes that there are no moderate Arab perspectives. This projection of social sensibilities relies on two critical flaws of logic. First, it assumes that “moderate” perspectives in the Middle East are synonymous with “moderate” perspectives touted by pundits in the west. Second, the western fascination with the “Arab street” fails to account for the particular structural and conceptual obstacles facing the cultural producers who do actually provide the most cogent critiques of Arab society. In the case of Lebanon, these cultural critics play a crucial role in redressing the traumatic legacy of political violence. As such, this text hopes to examine how experimental documentary practices engender and/or hamper the ability to critically engage the Lebanese past and the recurrent political violence that has perpetually destabilized Lebanon.

In this opening chapter I endeavor to situate these practices in relation to the cultural and historical legacies that have shaped the Lebanese national experience. Politically speaking, Lebanon has struggled to negotiate a series of competing

relationships between its extremely diverse population and a variety of colonial and foreign interest groups. Part and parcel to this national experience are the competing discourses of Lebanon as a “playground” for exotic adventures and war games. The waxing and waning of these tendencies coupled with Lebanon’s position as a threshold between western and (middle) eastern worlds significantly contributes to a dimension of Lebanese identity intertwined with diasporic dispersion and gathering. These postcolonial legacies become inscribed in the political economy of nonwestern film production and their reliance on European beneficence to “make up” for the lack of local film industries. This transnational hybridity combines a variety of locally ‘authentic’ and globally ‘modernized’ sensibilities, but this dialectic model tends to preclude the rich modes of sharing occurring trans-locally.

Accordingly, the first chapter of this section on “post-orientalist aesthetics” problematizes “Lebanese cinema” from the perspective of ‘national cinema’ and ‘transnational cinema’, whereas the second chapter assesses “Lebanese cinema” in relation to ‘Arab’ and ‘Middle Eastern cinema’. This broad perspective on the cinematic cultural practices of Lebanon will enable me to speak in subsequent chapters more specifically about the labor and leisure of experimental documentary practices engaged in zones of violent conflict. Within these discussions of national, transnational, and regional cinema, I endeavor to insert another layer of analysis aimed at elucidating the aesthetic sensibilities crucial to understanding the particular affective, material, and cultural dimensions of Lebanese postwar documentary. As such, I advance the idea of ‘post-orientalist aesthetic’ to describe a new mode of intellectual critique and artistic style found in recent Lebanese film and video production.

POST ORIENTALISM

Discontent with the politics of representation inherited from the West and the ossification of national narratives in the Middle East, these filmmakers and artists find ways to move beyond simple critiques of ethnocentrism and sectarian self-righteousness. In this way, they employ stylistic and thematic motifs that transcend Edward Said's monumental critique of Orientalism (1979) as an intellectual extension of colonial politics. One of the critiques of Said's argument was the lack of agency and influence by those considered the object of Orientalism. I argue that these filmmakers shift the conventional boundaries of orientalist discourse, not only by critiquing western representations of the Middle East, but also by demonstrating critiques of the Middle East from localized positions. This parallels recent efforts to expand Said's conceptualization of Orientalism to include a broader range of cross-cultural exchange in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century visual culture (Beaulieu and Roberts 2002).

Having said this, even the most earnest critics of orientalist power dynamics seem to rely on, if not reify, binary conceptual frameworks. As will become more evident in chapter two, cinema in the Middle East, like much of the developing world, has recurrently been situated between frameworks of postcolonial nationalism on the one hand and westernized liberalism on the other. Inherited from the tradition/modern debate the oppositional charge in this nationalist/humanist struggle too easily dismisses alternative renderings of this tension. The ideological split between "escapism" and "liberation" found in Media Studies scholarship further cobbles this tension into simplistic dualities. Hidden within this oppositional framework are modes of self-critique empowered by both their ability to move through the margins of cultural regimes and occupy localized sites of articulation. These critiques present challenges to imperial

frameworks of representation and political power, but also engender critical readings of locally situated culture and politics.

My assertion of a post-orientalist aesthetic that characterizes postwar Lebanese cinema, however, is also decidedly different than a mere outgrowth of orientalism and its auxiliary trajectories. Nor am I necessarily trying to assert something new and fresh. Indeed, my usage of “post” should flag it as something tired and overused. In a way the moniker of “post-orientalist aesthetic” feigns newness, originality, and excitement, in order to accentuate a certain fatigued redundancy. Among the debates about postcolonialism, if not also postmodernism, are assertions that mark the insufficiency of periodization based on conclusion-oriented rhetoric. The examples and effects of colonialism and modernism alike are far from complete, but an argument that challenges the notion of “post” as a marker of a new phase in these traditions does not presume that colonial and modern “moments” have remained static. Indeed, if anything, the most poignant assertions of “post” in contemporary theoretical debates suggest that colonialism and modernism, if not also structuralism, urbanism, fordism, etc., have exceeded their definitions. In other words, at the core of such periodization is the presumption that modernism and colonialism are somehow closed systems with definable beginning and ending points. In this way, “post” does not denote a conclusion as much as a spillage.

In the context of Lebanon, post is most often associated with the notion of “postwar” society or a “postwar” period. This model of a discernable historiography relies on a series of presumptions. First, it presumes that political and civil violence gave way to reconciliation. The event principally credited with ending the war, however, is also largely credited with sowing the seeds for future discontent. While the signing of the Taef Accord did have the result of militias laying down their weapons, the general

amnesty granted to all parties involved, not only prevented war crimes from being tried in court, but also enabled the perpetrators of this violence to resume positions of political authority in the new government. Second, it presumes that the Lebanese were able to put the war behind them and begin the process of collective healing. This “peaceful” agreement, however, had the additional outcome of officially imposing a public amnesia on “the events” (the war is commonly referred to as *l-ahdaath* (Volk 2001)). This euphemistic moniker dilutes the gravity of the Lebanese wars, and yet remains unencumbered by narrow definitions of “civil war.” The “events” remain mysterious in the term's multiplicity and accommodate potentially any of the events of violence during the so-called “civil war.”

The lack of a public “truth and reconciliation” process contributes to society’s inability to properly mourn and put these events behind them. Instead, to evoke the psychoanalytic potential of this framing, accountability has been ‘swept under the rug’ and the trauma has been ‘pushed into the closet’. Third, it presumes that political violence ended and that civil antagonism would be publicly addressed. Instead, crimes are so heavily policed as to foster interpretations of sectarian conflict even where it may not be the case.¹⁰ Furthermore, the ongoing political hostilities enacted by outside players, namely Israel and Syria, and the bitter sectarian divisiveness between domestic political entities have ensured the continued presence of destabilizing violence. While the “civil war” in Lebanon is typically bracketed by a fifteen-year period beginning in 1975 and extending to either 1990 or 1991, the “south” (*al-janub*) remained occupied until 2000. The amnesty that allowed the Lebanese to forget about the “civil” conflict conveniently consolidated all animosity toward an official enemy in Israel. Meanwhile, the concurrent

¹⁰ This is demonstrated in a performance by Rabih Mroue, *Who’s Afraid of Representation?*, which is discussed in chapter three.

Syrian occupation, celebrated for maintaining the “peace,” only ended in 2005. The chronology of the “civil war” fails to address the way Syrian and Israeli political violence has escalated in Lebanon to new heights, since their withdrawals in 2000 and 2005. Even prior to the intense political hostilities witnessed in the wake of Rafiq Hariri’s assassination on February 14, 2005, the vacuous temporality conveyed to me by many Lebanese delineated a vision of time that had stalled after the “civil war.” All the hope and dreams suspended during the war stagnated in the “postwar” period as a new and promising future remained elusive and vaguely uncertain. Put simply, “postwar” framing of Lebanon is not tenable, because recurrent violence continues to structure the emergence and sensibilities of public culture.

Post-orientalist aesthetics thus also suggest a contentious and cynical sensibility. Neither have orientalist (mis)representations ended, nor has the political opportunity for reconciliation emerged. Indeed, it is the contentious quality of this terminology that I wish to explore. The problematics of these terms will hopefully affect a politics of representation akin to that inscribed in the aesthetics of Lebanese experimental cinema. In part, this is my effort to not feign objectivity in these matters, but assert my own discontent at the current state of politicized representation occurring in the absence of historical and cultural context for the purposes of enacting mass violence. While my consternation is the product of an ongoing personal transformation of political consciousness, the rationale exceeds the temporality of my engagement with this particular material or even within the span of my lifetime. The political violence of cross-cultural representation is as old and tired as yesterday’s news. The potential to freshen this discourse cannot alone come from reversing the myopia of journalistic historiography. Instead, newness is created by altering the aesthetic codes typically assigned to recording, documenting, and archiving the historical record.

This particular tension between stale modes of historiography and generative reframing of aesthetic codes will be addressed at length in section three of this dissertation, “An Archive of the Undead,” where I address the role of the archive in articulating Lebanese postwar subjectivity. For the remainder of this chapter, however, I would like to turn my analysis of post-orientalist aesthetics to a broader survey of Lebanese cinema in order to identify a contemporary inventory of stylistic cues. In order to do this, I will disaggregate the notion of post-orientalist aesthetic to more thoroughly evoke the properties I am trying to elucidate with this terminology. First, I will reorient my critical assessment of “post” in order to read the notion of “post-national” cinema through a particular framing of nationalist excess. Second, I engender the dialectics of “orientalism” in order to provide a more nuanced reading of cross-cultural representation within the context of transnational cinema. In chapter two, I explore the relationships enacted across “aesthetic” borders with Palestinian and Syrian cinemas in order to disrupt the short-circuit that typically delimits readings of nonwestern cinema when confronted with the polarized issues of corrupted authenticity and universal humanism.

As such, the following sections attempt to provide a historical, social, and political context for the emergence of contemporary Lebanese experimental cinema. In part one, I present a historical overview of Lebanon and give perspective on its cinematic traditions leading up to the breakdown of civil society during the prolonged Lebanese civil war (1975 ~ 1990). This enables me to describe the historical context for production and exhibition of independent film and video in Lebanon during the war and after. This framework also allows me to challenge the notion of ‘national cinema’ typically used to talk about cinema made beyond Hollywood, e.g. French cinema, Japanese, cinema, or Iranian cinema.

In the second part of this paper, I further challenge the concept of ‘national cinema’ by considering the transnational influence of exile on Lebanese filmmakers after the presence of recurrent war alters the terms of film production. This section follows recent efforts in cinema studies to situate an independent transnational cinema. Such a framework is necessary for understanding the development of Lebanese cinema over the last two decades.

POST-NATIONAL CINEMA

Although any nation may struggle to define its “imagined” unity in relation to its heterogeneous population, Lebanon’s unique demographic distribution distinguishes it from any other country in the region. A multi-sectarian populace has always characterized Lebanon, where Muslims are both official minorities and the demographic majority. Lebanon, from the Arabic *Lebnun*, refers directly to the Mount Lebanon area – home to hundreds of Christian Maronite hamlets. Along with the Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, and Armenian Catholic, among other Christians, the Maronites in collusion with France convinced the League of Nations to partition a rich coastal region away from greater Syria after the First World War. Indeed, “Lebanese” immigrants who fled during the final throes of the Ottoman Empire¹¹ were ostensibly from Syria until 1926, when the Lebanese Republic became an officially recognized protectorate under the French Mandate of Syria. When Lebanon gained its independence in 1943 and Lebanon’s national borders were finalized, a much larger area than Mt. Lebanon enjoined disparate sectarian groups under the banner of a common nation. In effect, people with mutually antagonistic histories became trapped in close proximity

¹¹ The Ottoman Empire existed in different formations over six centuries, beginning in 1299 and finally collapsing in 1922. Lebanese emigration increases in the 1880s and eventually peaks during World War One.

during a period of rapid modernization. Despite a concurrent reputation as an enclave for oppressed minorities, political jockeying for economic control of the country distributed wealth unevenly across the resident sects (*aka* confessions). Coupled with historic inter-sectarian violence, this political disparity sowed the seeds for future conflict.

In an effort to prevent such future conflict from coming, the National Pact (*al Mithaq al Watani*), an unwritten agreement made between Muslim and Christian leaders in 1943, endeavored to set the terms of a unified nation-state based on the distribution of power across confessional groups. The integrity of the Lebanese nation was contingent on Muslims forfeiting ambitions to reunify with Syria and Christians accepting an “Arab” foreign affiliation rather than a “western” one. Although the long-term application of this pact has been disputed, the basic tenets became initially challenged in the mid-1950s when the Maronite President, Camille Chamoun, and the Sunni Prime Minister, Rashid Karami, battled over divergent political endorsements of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. The two Lebanese leaders first split over Egypt’s nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 when Western powers militarily confronted Nasser’s authority over the canal. Having endorsed the Eisenhower Doctrine, which stipulated that Lebanon would accept American intervention if confronted by aggressive forms of ‘international communism’, the path to conflict had been set. Two years later political tensions had heightened between the Pan-Arab and the Lebanese “Phoenician” camps and the first Lebanese civil war began after the creation of the United Arab Republic that joined Egypt and Syria as a pan-Arab state. After Muslim-Druze revolts erupted in street fighting and Karami’s insurgents blockaded Tripoli for several weeks, Chamoun called on the Eisenhower Doctrine and the United States sent 14,000 military personnel into Lebanon to quell the conflict. Ultimately, the Americans forced Chamoun to resign to keep the peace.

Despite this international crisis, Lebanon remained lauded as the “Paris of the Middle East” and “Switzerland of the Orient.” These clichés reveal the hybrid imagination that privileges the notion of a European site within the East. Conversely, the discourses and depictions of Beirut as a war-torn haven for Arab terrorism narrate an orientalist discourse of blame for the destruction of this utopian landscape, which in effect redacts the culpability of western political and economic interests in Lebanon. Like Istanbul, Tangier, or other cities that served as corridors for Europe to access the Orient, Beirut is a postcolonial, cosmopolitan threshold in which East meets West. The exotic fantasies celebrated by the western visitors and marketed by Lebanese businessmen during the pre-war “Golden Age” too easily dismiss the impact of generating an image of Lebanon as the playground, not only for tourists, but also for spies and mercenaries.

After gaining independence from France, an economic model was implemented that would “globalize” Lebanon. Political scientist Fawaz Traboulsi traces the first use of this verb in 1950 to Lebanese journalist Georges Naccache, who used it to distinguish the new Lebanese economy (see Wright 2002). During this period, Lebanon’s southern coastal city Sidon became the outlet for the largest oil pipeline in the world. Tapline, as it was called, pumped the Arabian American Oil Company’s (Aramco) reserves from Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean for worldwide (read: western) distribution, while the northern city of Tripoli hosted the outlet for the Iraq Petroleum Company. Hosting two of the largest oil outlets in the world within about 80 miles of each other, Lebanon’s intermediary capital city quickly became the region’s most important banking center. By the mid-1970s, Lebanon hosted 38 banks. These enabled extensive financing for Lebanese trade, transportation, communication, and recreation industries, while providing facilities trusted by the oil-producing Arab countries (Hoye et al. 1982). Lebanon became

a globalizing site of exchange, “a nation of services, middlemen, agents, idle rentiers and hotel keepers [?!]” (Khalaf 2001:307).

Cinema proper flourished in Lebanon during this period. Fostered by Nasser’s nationalization of the Egyptian cinema industry, many Egyptian film directors and stars and Lebanese financiers relocated production to Beirut in order to capitalize on Lebanon’s diverse settings and liberal society. Lebanese financiers had previously invested in the Egyptian studio system. During earlier periods of Ottoman cosmopolitanism, the “Lebanese” ancestors of both actor Omar Sharif and director Youssef Chahine had established themselves as merchants in Alexandria, Egypt. Omar Sharif, born Michel Demitri Shalhoub to a Lebanese-Syrian family in Alexandria, changed his name when he converted from Roman Catholicism to Islam in order to marry Egyptian film actress Faten Hamama. By the time Sharif had found success acting in international productions, his wife had also left Egypt to work without political impositions. During the mid-1960s she acted in a series of films in Lebanon with Egyptian directorial legends Youssef Chahine and Henry Barakat. Nasser apparently wooed her back to Egypt in 1971 after labeling her a “national treasure.” She and Sharif divorced a few years later. While she continues to star in Egyptian films, “he self-consciously constructed himself as simultaneously ‘Arab’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ in order to ‘travel’ across artistic and cultural boundaries” to work in big-budget Hollywood films, French ‘new wave’, and Egyptian cinema (Caton 1999:29). These film career trajectories reflect the various intersections occurring within the region and beyond. Like transnational cinema, the movement of actors through the international film industry remains understudied, but has the potential to reveal surprising aspects of cross-cultural representation.

In the case of Youssef Chahine, he returned to his Egyptian home after studying in the United States at the Pasadena Play House. But during the nationalization of the Egyptian film industry, his Christian heritage helped him secure Lebanese citizenship during his collaboration with the Rahbani brothers. Famous in Lebanon for their music theater, Assi and Mansour Rahbani made their break on Lebanese Radio in the 1940s where they met voice-legend Fairuz. Their music success prompted the British-run Near East radio station to relocate its office from Cairo to Beirut. In the 1950s they wrote the *Rajoon* operetta in support for the Palestinian cause. In protest over the British attacks on Suez, the Rahbanis quit Near East and joined the Baalbek festival where they began writing musical dramas. In the 1960s the Rahbanis transformed their musicals into film adaptations. Chahine directed the Rahbanis' first film musical, *The Ring Seller / Biya el-Khawatim* (1965), which featured Fairuz in this tale of a quaint and naïve Lebanese village terrorized by a mythic renegade. The recreation of this quintessential village in a studio allowed Chahine to choreograph masterful movement of actors and camera, but in the future the Rahbanis chose actual settings to film their bucolic narratives of village life.

On their next two films, *Exile / Safar Barlek* (1967) and *The Guardian's Daughter / Bint El-Hares* (1968), they again partnered with a Christian Egyptian director, this time Henri Barakat. The Rahbanis' decision to work with Christian Egyptians meant that Chahine and Barakat could approach the projects at once outside a Lebanese nationalist perspective, but inside an Arab Christian worldview. Ibrahim Al-Ariss argues that a Muslim director, Egyptian or Lebanese, would not have understood the “mentality of Mount Lebanon” and its negative attitude toward the Ottoman presence in Lebanon. He also notes that at this time ninety percent of films made in Lebanon used Egyptian

vernacular, but the Rahbani made an ideological statement by using the Lebanese dialect in their productions (al-Ariss 1996:29).

Although the Rahbani musical theater was overtly supportive of the Palestinian cause, Christopher Stone argues that their folkloric vignettes naturalized a Christian-centric conception of the Lebanese nation that was necessarily suspicious of strangers (2007). Al-Ariss explains that their concern for Palestine came “through the legitimate religious yearning of Arab Christians for Jerusalem” (1996:28). The reputation of Lebanon as a haven for persecuted people, such as the Armenian population that flourished in Lebanon through the twentieth-century, reveal a complicated terrain of competing ideologies and sensibilities.

This liberal reputation along with Lebanon’s burgeoning leisure industries helped foster the image of Lebanon as a playground. The iconography was made all the more alluring with Lebanon’s ancient ruins, sunny beaches, and snow-capped mountains all packed into a country smaller than the US state of Connecticut. The convergence of cosmopolitan multiculturalism and the laissez-faire economy of services made Lebanon a very welcoming and tolerant society for both European and Arab Gulf sensibilities. For some, Beirut was capital of the Arab Riviera, providing both casinos and belly dancers. Lebanon claimed international status for its exotic beauties when Georgina Rizk won the Miss Universe contest in 1971. The height of “golden age” decadence is demonstrated in Lebanese cinema by a string of sexually indulgent films that bordered on soft pornography, such as *The Guitar of Love / Guitar el Hob* (1973, dir. Mohammad Salman). Rizk stars in this romantic musical comedy that portrays the tale of lovers brought together across class differences. High society darling Rizk is growing tired of her party going friends and desires a deeper sense of purpose in her life. Along comes a handsome young man aspiring to become a music star. The power of music wins out in

the end as man and woman join in the happy embrace of true love, however, along the way subplots brush with the disintegration of both traditional and western dress codes in scenes of heightened sexual desire.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian *fedayeen* were fighting a proxy war with Israel on Lebanon's southern frontier. After they were brutally driven from Jordan by King Hussein in 1971, Yasser Arafat relocated the PLO headquarters to Beirut. It is in this context that Georgina Rizk, *aka* Miss Universe, married PLO officer Ali Hassan Salameh. Known as the Red Prince, the playboy Salameh is believed to be responsible for the Black September massacre of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. His assassination by Israeli Mossad agents is now dramatically depicted in Steven Spielberg's 2005 film *Munich*. The convergence of a western celebration of debutante femininity and the violence of Palestinian terrorism may seem bizarre to those in the west today. The representations inherited by western readers and movie goers reifies an incompatibility between western cosmopolitanism (feminine) and Arab terrorism (masculine) as evidenced in the *Little Drummer Girl* novel by John le Carré and film adaptation directed by George Roy Hill. In this story an English woman, Charlie, is recruited by the Israelis to infiltrate a Palestinian terrorist network to assassinate the leader, Khalil. But Charlie's sympathies for the Palestinians find her in an irreconcilable identity crisis. In the end Khalil is killed and Charlie has a breakdown. This same cross-cultural incompatibility informs the narrative of *Lawrence of Arabia* in David Lean's film. Peter O'Toole, as T.E. Lawrence succumbs to a state of withdrawn emotions and vicious fits of madness after being sodomized by Ottoman policemen (Caton 1999). For cosmopolitan Arabs, this incompatibility is experienced differently. On the one hand, the Palestinian resistance fighter and the Lebanese exotic starlet exemplify the intersection of two popular modes of public interest in Lebanon during the early 1970s, however,

together they also reveal the excesses of geopolitical and cultural hybridity. On the other hand, the large presence of Palestinian refugees and *fedayeen* in southern Lebanon and Beirut, although idolized throughout the Middle East, helped precipitate Maronite hostilities, which initiated the protracted Lebanese civil war(s). The PLO remained entrenched in Beirut until Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, when under international "protection" the PLO retreated to Tunisia.

Today Georgina Rizk is often seen at Chez Andre drinking and smoking to the good ole' days. A fate also shared by the Fatah Youth Brigade, tenderly mocked by Lebanese documentary filmmaker Mohammad Soueid in his documentary *Nightfall* (2000), which portrays these aging drunkards as hollow heroes living in memory of yesteryear's lost glory. The arch of Rizk's life and the youth brigade is not unlike that of Lebanon or Beirut as a city – national roots, cosmopolitan fame, violent disarray, and broken beauty. Indeed, Beirut is often referred to as a lecherous woman – an unfortunate, misogynistic metaphor that embodies a cruel love interest for some men (cf. Ali Zarakat's *Bi Ma Ino Boukra* discussed in chapter three). The allure and excitement some experience in Beirut may be akin to the intoxication of love, and so its bitter demise and hostility may also be felt to be similar to a cruel, double-crossing breakup. As might be expected, however, women were largely not responsible for the demise of the nation and have evidenced efforts of cross-sectarian collaboration (Joseph 1983, Joseph 1993). This is to say, the metaphoric referentiality of gendered representations may rely too heavily on simplistic tropes and delimit the complexity of personal experience. As such, this reveals the imprisoning power of ossified nationalist narratives devoid of generative qualities and renewed outlooks for the future. One of the defining characteristics of new experimental cinema and documentary in Lebanon (and elsewhere) is a refusal to rely on these

representational models, however, optimism for the future does not necessarily follow suite.

The impossibility of representation is one of the primary dynamics at play in the construction of postwar Lebanese visual culture. That is to say that there is no way the experience of the Lebanese civil wars could be summed up and contained within an historical narrative. Instead, much of the experimental documentary and feature films build on individual testimony, not directly about bearing witness to collective victimization, but a reclamation of personal narration. While ultimately contributing to the creation of a collective memory, these individual stories also reveal a fragmented “Lebanese” nation. Rather than privileging sectarian divisions, these individual renderings of the war shift the politics of violence to evoke the commonality of suffering. When faced with divergent narratives of Maronites and Druze, Sunni and Shi’a, not to mention Palestinian refugees, Armenian exiles, and Sri Lankan and Ethiopian servants, the shared trauma of war and exile shifts from ideological commonality to a more humanistic story of violence and lived experience.

Once Lebanon slid into irrecoverable conflict, the nascent national cinema abruptly slipped into the unrecoverable past, as did the glorious Golden Age. The shifting demographics disrupted the tenuous National Pact, based on population figures garnered in a national census from 1932. By the mid-1970s the Muslim population had overtaken the Christian population, not to mention the infusion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees into the country, but the Maronite power-hold prevented any new census that could reconfigure the distribution of political power. The Palestinian incursions against Israel from southern Lebanon put a great deal of strain on national sovereignty. This was further exasperated by the latent tensions between a pan-Arab political perspective that was largely sympathetic to the Palestinians and a uniquely

Phoenician perspective engendered by the Maronites that was not sympathetic to the battles being waged on their land (Salibi 1990). The “imagined community” evoked during a nation building project typically relies on an impossible task of disavowing a nation’s diversity and naturalizing the homogeneity of its cultural identity as if it were fixed and thus never-changing (Anderson 1991).

Utilizing ‘national cinema’ as a naturalized category poses certain conceptual problems when considered in relation to empirical conditions. With interest in understanding the conditions that led to Nazi Germany, Siegfried Kracauer argued, “The films of a nation reflect its mentality in a more direct way than other artistic media” (1947:5). This definition presumes several conditions: a homogenous national mentality exists across a diverse audience; national mentality correlates with state policies; filmmakers are in a position to represent society at large; and cinema has the capability to mimetically reproduce national realities. Andrew Higson (2000) has scrutinized the notion of the nation as a finite entity with clear boundaries, instead he pushes for a more transnational understanding of the processes associated with the nation-state.

By way of comparison, the tension of ‘national cinema’ can also be demonstrated within Turkish cinema. Under somewhat different conditions, a similar homogenizing strategy is exemplified by the Turkish notion of “deep nation” – a collective process that normalizes the reification of a unified national identity (Robins and Aksoy 2000). This is further enforced by the bureaucratic role of governing institutions at the nation-state level, which “substantially regulate and control film subsidies, tariff constraints, industrial assistance, copyright and licensing arrangements, censorship, training institutions, and so on,” (Crofts 2000:5). Accordingly, Crofts advances the notion of “nation-state cinema.” By resituating cinema within a geopolitical framework rather around notions of national identity affords closer attention to “the spatial concentration of

capital, personnel, and technology by studying its stability or movement, the locational decision-making process, the impact of capital movement on various peoples,” etc. (Macdonald 1994:27).

And yet, the multiplicity of perspectives existent within a national space defies the homogenizing categories of “national culture.” When interrogated closely, ‘national cinema’ reveals “histories of crisis and conflict, of resistance and negotiation” (Higson 1989). In fact, in opposition to a monolithic version of the Turkish nation, “the story of cinema in Turkey ... can be told in terms of the progressive disordering of the ideal of the Kemalist nation, which may be regarded as a productive disordering” (Robins and Aksoy 2000:215). But if the Turkish state was able to dismiss “the non-existent problems of non-existent people” (Robins and Aksoy 2000:216), then the Lebanese state lacked the cohesiveness to maintain a homogenizing national project. By the doctrine of the National Pact, Lebanon sealed its national discourse within a structure of reified sectarian identities. The structuring of the Lebanese government according to demographic quotas – the President must be Maronite, the Prime Minister a Sunni, and the Speaker of the House is a Shi’a – disaggregated sectarian identity within the national culture and relied upon a euphemistic vision of Lebanese modernity (as a golden age) to obscure power differentials.

These competing images of Lebanon thus offer a surface topography of a political sphere emboldened by drug and arms trading, in which dynastic families battled for clout and control of Lebanon’s future. Once subsumed by the intensity and uncertainty of mass violence, Lebanon could no longer claim a unified historical narrative in regards to sectarianism or modernity. These ideological differences became actualized during a series of shootings and civilian massacres principally between the Maronite Phalange and Palestinian PLO militias. What is now known as the “Lebanese Civil War” is shorthand

for a protracted series of hostilities between various militias and foreign forces between the mid-1970s and the early-1990s. The perpetually shifting alliances between these armed forces preclude any clear-cut binary understanding of the war as a Muslim/Christian conflict, even though this is how it is generally characterized. The details of this conflict could fill many thousands of pages and is beyond the scope or interest of this paper, but for those interested one well-respected account is detailed in Robert Fisk's *Pity the Nation* (1992). Instead, I'm interested in exploring the way individual experience of this conflict is portrayed in contemporary documentary and narrative film.

EXILIC CINEMA

Hamid Naficy has taken the critique of 'national cinema' several steps further by breaking from the national category to describe a widespread interstitial transnational filmmaking, in an effort "to identify and analyze the common features of the cinematic productions of a number of filmmakers from diverse originating and receiving countries" (2001:3). While he acknowledges that there is nothing in common about exile and diaspora, he contends that "deterritorialized peoples and their films share certain features, which in today's climate of lethal ethnic difference need to be considered, even emphasized" (2001:3). Independent transnational cinema or "accented cinema," as Hamid Naficy (1996a, 2001) has called it, is one of the most important genres for understanding the therapeutic and strategic approaches to the disaffections of transnational identity. This cinema elucidates a position in-between multiple sites of belonging, which enables these filmmakers to challenge hegemonic representations and produce "ambiguity and doubt about the absolutes and taken-for-granted values of their home or host societies" (1996b:125). Laura Marks elaborates with the notion of an

“Intercultural cinema ... operat[ing] at the intersections of two or more cultural regimes of knowledge” (2000:24). And yet, since power mediates the relationship between these regimes, the dominant regime sets the terms and thus limits how other knowledges are expressed and verified (2000). If transnational filmmaking elucidates a position in-between multiple sites of belonging that enable these filmmakers to challenge the hegemony of their home and host nations, then we need a better understanding of how individuals and groups engage with this condition.

In the case of Lebanon, national identity is dominated by two historic themes, the prewar “Golden Age,” celebrated as an ideal multi-ethnic society, and the “civil war,” replete with mass displacement. The theme of displacement emerges from the violence that devastated the country during the Lebanese civil wars between 1975 and 1990. So powerful was this theme that it effectively superseded the myth of the golden age and replaced it with chaos and sorrow. The critical sensibilities of contemporary Lebanese visual culture emerged during this period. For most Lebanese the war meant displacement and uncertainty as depicted in Borhane Alaouié’s *Beirut the Encounter / Beirut al Likaa* (1981, 125m).

In this film shot on location during the war, two young friends are briefly reacquainted in a chance meeting. As Zeina is Christian and Haidar is Muslim, they had lost touch after the war began, but now decide to reconnect before Zeina leaves for America where she plans to pursue her studies. Rather than overt violence, the backdrop of war shows a society paralyzed by the material signs of disjuncture – sporadic power, water, and phone connectivity, as well as roadblocks and traffic jams. In fact the film is ostensibly about the way these material ruptures hinder, if not prevent, social connectivity. The film mediates the frustrations of basic communication and transportation – time is hostage, no one knows how long it will take to cross the city or

for the war to end. The two friends spend the entire film trying to reconnect before Zeina departs. Finally reaching her on the phone the day before she leaves, Haidar agrees to meet her at the airport so he can bid her farewell. They decide to make audio recordings for each other in which each tries to explain why the war persists. Haidar stays up all night drinking whiskey and recording his intimate thoughts about life, love, and the war onto an audiocassette he intends to give Zeina. He arrives at the airport, but cannot find her. She is stuck in traffic and running very late. As he gives up and leaves, she arrives only to have missed him. In the taxi ride home he destroys the tape, breaking it in half and then unspooling it out the car window and onto the street. In this way the taxi also becomes an indeterminate vessel, leading nowhere in particular, uncertain if it will arrive on time or at all.

Featured prominently in Lebanese culture as a master symbol of departure and disconnection, the airport serves as a site of impossible goodbyes. Likewise, the audiocassette holds the promise of mediating the man's feelings, but its failure to be delivered instead disrupts communication. Lebanese cultural productions during and after the war consistently feature the tools and objects for recording fleeting memories, as a central motif and key device in post-orientalist aesthetics. Although not always intentionally destroyed, as was the case in *Beirut the Encounter*, these mediated objects consistently betray their material permanence. Despite being fixed on film or on tape, these objects also decompose with time and the memories associated with them fail to be salvaged by these recording devices. The excess of violence and the surplus of experience resist containment within these mediums as they also resist being defined by meaning. And yet, rather than abandon the project of archiving the experience of war and exile, these films consistently accentuate the slippage between experience and meaning as a commentary on these social conditions.

Although some of the filmmakers active today remained in Lebanon during the war, many spent some or all of it in exile. In the case of *Beirut the Encounter*'s director, Borhane Alaouié's story is also informed by exile and return. He studied filmmaking in Europe at INSAS (*Institut national supérieur des arts du spectacle et techniques de diffusion*) in Brussels (Malkmus and Armes 1991:43). Foreign training and funding may further destabilize claims of national solidarity, but these transnational linkages enable filmmakers to produce films that may otherwise never get made. Furthermore, it is important to recognize how 'national cinemas' already exist in conversation with other cinemas, since they circulate transnationally along with various other forms of mass media. Together these media provide the material for the "image-centered, narrative-based account of reality," which Appadurai argues, forms scripts for "imagined lives" both within the nation and beyond it (1990). That is not to say that these imagined scripts are optimistic, but they provide a means for reflecting on one's condition. Unlike the "happy endings" of classical Hollywood cinema that provide closure for the characters, not to mention the audience, these war and postwar era films typically resist closure as the protagonists struggle to discern an end in sight. Although departure may provide one means of closure, escaping to safer climes presents another set of ruptures, from both one's home and host society.

For Ziad Doueri, who escaped the war to live in the United States and work in the film industry as a cameraman for Quentin Tarantino, his 1996 film, *West Beirut*, reflects a wave of films made after the war by returnees still fascinated by this traumatic event. *West Beirut* offers audiences an opportunity to experience the early stages of the Lebanese civil war vicariously through the perspective of a secular Muslim teenager named Tarek. For those uninformed about the history and politics of Lebanon, however, this film does little to convey the context of the conflict. Only well-informed audiences

would understand the significance of refugees from the south or the protest rally for the political assassination of Kamal Jumblatt, the political patriarch of the Lebanese Druze. And yet, the worldview of Tarek and his friend Omar are not much better informed. The focalization of Tarek and Omar's innocence and ignorance about the world they are inheriting allows audiences to make light of this devastating experience. Indeed, this superficial reading of the film, of innocent youth at play in their world, would then reify national narratives that blame the war completely on outsiders – Palestinians, Israelis, Syrians, etc. If this were all the film provided, it would offer audiences little more than a compelling coming of age narrative.

Fortunately, Doueri's nostalgic look at the past is tempered by a reflexive strategy that can facilitate more nuanced readings of the war experience. In fact, these same simple tropes take on a critical edge when infused with reflexive techniques. While Doueri provides us with means for critiquing the naiveté of the main characters, we are nevertheless made to sympathize and identify with them. For instance, the beginning scenes with Tarek mocking the snobbery of the French school system poignantly critique the racism inherent in the colonial relationship, but the consumption of American popular culture – music, movie posters, and Camel cigarettes – instead humanizes these Arab Muslim characters from a decidedly western perspective. Indeed, the playfulness of American culture is subtly contrasted with the negative characterization of Muslim sensibilities through the Islamification of Omar's strict father. Perhaps one of the most nuanced characters in the film is Tarek's father, whose patriotism is undermined by his fatalism. He would rather risk staying in Lebanon than face the marginalization of a refugee in Europe. The complexity of Tarek's father is matched by the unconventional portrayal of his mother. Lina Khatib's analysis of gender representation in *West Beirut* shows a contrast to the way most war films privilege a masculinist sensibility that

relegates women to passive victims. Rather than reiterating the tropes of woman as feeble victims, the nation's mother, or even as empowered women combatants, Khatib argues that *West Beirut* portrays "the experience of women trying to cope with 'ordinary' life in wartime" (2006b:69). So despite nostalgic naiveté, the portrayal of characters in the film suggests more sophisticated understandings of war.

Closer attention to the reflexive strategies used throughout the film also has the potential to provide alternative critiques. The opening scene of the movie is presented in grainy black-and-white and cuts back and forth between our main characters on the playground of their school and two enemy fighter jets maneuvering against each other in the sky. The juxtaposition between the "playground" for leisure on the one hand and the battleground for hostilities on the other should not be lost on us here. The collapsing of the battleground and the playground in this film visually articulates a critique presented by Khatib about the cinematic production of space in Hollywood action films versus Arab drama films. She points out that Hollywood films set in the Middle East typically push space to the background, whereas Arab films pull space into the foreground. This distinction builds on a long-standing political imagination about imperial landscapes and the way the west makes sense of foreign territory through narrative conventions of masculinist mastery, i.e., the theatrical background of heroic stories. In contrast, Arab dramas situate the story within interior "feminine" space (Khatib 2006a:15-60). I argue that *West Beirut* presents a critically nuanced understanding of this spatial representation. Rather than generating a distinctly feminine and Arab spatial sensibility, Doueri juxtaposes Hollywood and Arab aesthetics in order to accentuate a critique of representation. For example, the classic Hollywood opening that begins with an aerial or landscape establishing shot followed by a series of tighter shots that ultimately reveal the protagonist (cf. Hitchcock's *Psycho*) is inverted here as the protagonists in *West Beirut*

are looking up from their particular lived context to witness larger geopolitical forces at “play” in the skies above.

Rather than an objective lens on the world mimetically reproducing reality, the integrity of the super-8 footage is constantly undermined by self-referentiality. In these first scenes, not only do we hear the motor winding without the record of other diegetic sound, but we also see the super-8 camera somehow magically recording its own presence. The contradictory layering of self-referential media works to create a more phenomenologically holistic experience for the viewer and thus accentuating the experience of filming for the audience. This creates an effect of bearing witness, the feeling that one is given the embodied sense of not merely watching but documenting the observable world. The presence of the super-8 camera clearly provides a Brechtian critical awareness of representation as constructed, and yet the evocation of amateur cinematics resists simple categorization. Although the foregrounding of the super-8 camera critically undermines the veracity of mimetic recording devices and the discourses they facilitate, the small-format home movie is also significant in the micro-ritualization of documenting personal experience in times of conflict. Like with the cassette tape in *Beirut the Encounter*, the mediation of personal experience during times of public violence presents a site of intense generative potential.

And yet, the conflation of audience with the filming eye also engenders a voyeuristic vantage point that encourages the audience to identify with the youthful, male gaze of the main characters. For example, later in the film the super-8 camera reappears to undress the young wife of Omar’s uncle. The desire to see these images moves the plot along as the boys search out a place to develop the film. But then sporadically throughout the film appear footage of wounded and maimed victims of the war silently staring back at the camera. The combination of these scenes with archival footage from the war and

the reversal of the gaze in these brief scenes force the audience to again become aware of the mediation of violence. For instance, during the rally for the assassinated Kamal Jumblatt, we move from TV footage to Tarek and Omar's super-8 footage as they blindly follow along in the protest. Their apolitical ignorance becomes accentuated in this scene as they march along shouting slogans, one says, "Who's Kamal?" and the other replies, "I don't know." Although this creates a sense that the average Lebanese (or at least those who the audience identifies with) is politically clueless, a uniformed audience cannot but acknowledge its own ignorance. The temptation to present these political events as understandable could undermine their inherent complexity, so to leave them decontextualized could force the audience to grapple with their lack of understanding. The thrust of this reflexivity is recognized in the final scene, in which Tarek's mother apparently becomes a victim of the war. The slow motion, frame by frame, stutter of the black-and-white super-8 movie suggests the impossibility of media to "capture" the real. The grainy realism of the black-and-white footage relinquishes its verisimilitude to make room for narrative suspense. Although the disappearance of the mother can easily enough be interpreted from these final scenes, the mood of uncertainty clouds narrative closure for Tarek and his father, not to mention the rest of the Lebanese waiting for the war to conclude.

While displaced by traumatic events at home, the proliferation of modern media may serve as a surrogate for those in exile. "[I]ntensive identification with national politics and the rhythm of life lived elsewhere is made possible through new communications technologies" (Humphrey 2001:5); however, the steady stream of disembodied and violent news footage may dominate one's visual relationship to a place called "home." Not only is the violence of the war mediated by the evening news, but also home itself is mediated through these lenses that claim objectivity and realism.

Indeed, for most of us in the west, headlines about conflict in the Middle East dominate our understanding of this region. The dominance of international news media serves as yet another aesthetic dimension of Lebanese visual culture. Reference to televisual imagery and newsreel footage figure strongly as a reflexive commentary on representation in Lebanese film and video.

In the experimental documentary *Introduction to the End of an Argument / Muqaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal* (1990, 45m), a collaboration between Lebanese Canadian Jayce Salloum and Palestinian Elia Suleiman, the filmmakers present a powerful montage of dozens of clips from American news and Western popular media to create a cutting critique of the media coverage of the Middle East. These artists use video for documentary research, not in an endeavor to establish a factual record, but to situate “representation itself as a politicized practice”¹² and to critically engage the fantastic tendencies of media and its ability to make certain “realities” believably real. While these artists endeavor to show how these representations fill a particular western imagination, they also try to re-calibrate interpretive frameworks and offer new perspectives to consider.

Salloum’s video, *(This Is Not Beirut) / There Was and There Was Not* (1994, 49m), is a similar endeavor, but with particular interest in the way Beirut has come to evoke nostalgia and horror, both in the way it was hailed as exotic and cosmopolitan during the so-called “golden era” and then violent and chaotic during the Lebanese civil wars. In such conditions the very presumption of making sense or understanding a place becomes extremely fraught. In this video the critique of anthropology comes front and center as a discipline intent on attaining ‘local knowledge’ by spending a few months or years in a place, but under conditions of elusive political violence even those who have

¹² See http://www.111101.net/Artworks/index.php?Jayce_Salloum/index.php

spent their entire lives in Lebanon do not understand the situation. These filmmakers reference western media sources, but also put themselves in compromising situations, in order to problematize documentary methods for both procuring knowledge and producing meaning.

Although Jayce Salloum was born in Canada, he embodies the traumatic condition of exile that most of Lebanese filmmakers with ties to western countries convey in their work. Many individuals who fled during the civil war and trained in western countries now exhibit transnational aesthetic and theoretical sensibilities that complicate notions of an authentic national cinema (Naaman 2002). Some filmmakers have “returned” to make their films but still maintain a primary residence elsewhere, usually in Paris, London, New York, Brussels, or elsewhere. For some more permanently rooted in Lebanon, these visiting filmmakers perpetuate the image of Lebanon as a “playground” and disprove the existence of a national cinema (Westmoreland 2002). The lack of a film industry in Lebanon, however, requires those wanting to produce feature-length narrative films (ideally on aesthetically coveted celluloid film) to secure funding from elsewhere. For instance, France offers generous funding for postcolonial francophone filmmakers, but this may be a mixed blessing for those trying to maintain creative control. Some filmmakers complain that funding often dictates the prominence of French dialogue and favors narratives of war and violence over other topics and storylines. It is rumored that the funders of *Autour de la Maison Rose* by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige required 50% of the dialogue to be in French. The shortcomings of the film are thus blamed on jolting linguistic limitations.

While notions of a tainted authenticity typically foreground analysis of nonwestern film, the idea that western aesthetics homogenize local media practices is terribly reductive and requires a more detailed analysis of how global and local processes

intersect. This is not reducible to simple dichotomies of either/or, west/east, center/periphery, but must be considered in a more nuanced understanding of how various cinemas may both compete and be complicit with each other. The dominance of American and European cinema consumption in the rest of the world significantly influences viewers' technical and thematic expectations and poses increased challenges for filmmakers wanting to deviate from these conventions. Nevertheless, both radical and conservative independent cinemas at home and abroad do confront Hollywood. These alternative cinemas forge their own transnational liaisons and garner international financing in the face of geopolitical hegemony. Likewise, the notion of universal western sensibilities must also be tempered against the transnational consumption of non-western cinemas, particularly regarding the widespread popularity of Indian (Desai 2004, Gopalan 2002, Larkin 2003) and Hong Kong cinemas (Shu 2003, Srinivas 2003, Wong and McDonogh 2001).

The flow of these transnational filmmakers and their work demonstrates a dynamic model of migration, informed by "mobile scenarios, axial stories, multisited lives and itinerant identities" (Göktürk 2002:203). In today's global film market, transnational collaborations, multinational productions, and international crews further challenge the implied unity and coherence of 'national cinema'. Furthermore, the exchange of personal videos, bootleg markets, and international film festivals marks important connections between the diaspora and the nation, thus revealing how the creation of a national cinema takes shape across transnational channels. A fluid array of human networks and zones of exhibition provides linkages for these individuals to situate their work in the global marketplace and enable critical discourse to flourish.

These sites of exhibition also become incorporated by cities vying for international status in ways that preempt the nation-state (Stringer 2001). So while Beirut

vies for festival prestige, the independent transnational filmmaker operates across borders, traversing cosmopolitan linkages between global cities, exhibiting in a widespread web of festivals and conferences. But the contemporary, transnational Arab artist has an especially charged vocation that confronts her or him at every border crossing, checkpoint, and pat-down designed to scrutinize his/her identity. This interstitial movement (Naficy 2001), operating in between cultural regimes (Marks 2000), enables the Lebanese filmmaker and artist to claim an authority of the margin. Fluent in Arabic, English, French, and perhaps also Armenian, German, Russian, Swedish, Spanish, Italian, Polish, the cosmopolitanism of Lebanon is matched by the dispersed diaspora. Travel and exile are key motifs in Lebanese mass subjectivity.

During the “civil war” and since, many filmmakers worked for foreign media outlets as journalists, cameramen, producers, fixers, and/or translators. This provided another site for positioning oneself professionally in between different global sites. In fact, several female journalists for international news stations produced films during the war and still constitute one of the strongest contingents of Arab women filmmakers (e.g., Heiny Sour, Jocelyn Saab, and Danielle Arbid who all reside in Paris). The spontaneous capabilities and low costs of video enabled camera crews to gain close-range footage of the conflict. The development of a documentary genre rooted in social critique laid the foundation for future productions to flourish. Many of the most prolific and talented narrative filmmakers began their careers documenting conflicts in Lebanon and Palestine. For some documentarians and journalists, being so fully submersed in mediating the conflicts in their actuality have prompted a desire to revisit these issues in narrative feature films. While this may provide a means for addressing the conflict on one’s own terms, the return to the war in narrative films by many Lebanese documentarians suggests the difficulty in moving beyond the traumatic events for many of these individuals. Such

endeavors are often autobiographical and convey a deep desire to relive and make sense of a disturbing past, such as Jean Chammoun's *Shadows of the City / Taif al Madina* (2001). Jean Chammoun and Mai Masri have made numerous documentaries on Palestinian refugees and the resistance in southern Lebanon, finding play on American PBS stations. Chammoun's narrative film, however, dispenses with political context to tell his own coming-of-age story, Displaced from the south as a child, he grows embittered and succumbs to desires for revenge. At the end of the film the war is over, Chammoun's alter ego is maimed and resentful. In a brief moment of hope he sees his old lover for a fleeting moment before she gets in an expensive European sedan and drives away.

CONCLUSION

The signing of the Taif Accord in 1989 paved the way for fighting to end, however, critics challenge that the agreement institutionalizes sectarian divisions and thus retains the seeds for further discontent. Nevertheless, since the end of the civil war Beirut has re-emerged as a regional center of entertainment and finance. Beirut has become one of the premier cities for Arab mass media, well known throughout the Middle East for its popular satellite television entertainment and the production of Arabic music videos. Initial market research indicates that older, male audiences gravitate toward the Gulf stations, like *al-Jazeera*, while the Lebanese channels attract a younger audience more balanced between males and females (Alterman 2000). And while Egyptian dramas respect the male/female sensibilities in the Gulf, the more flirtatious Lebanese programming enjoys huge audiences all the same.¹³ These various modes of popular

¹³ Marwan Kraidy (2005) has recently elaborated on the increasing popularity of Lebanese satellite television with provocative "reality TV" shows.

media demonstrate the importance of images for the Lebanese to mediate their “imagined scripts” between national and transnational currents.

Many of these artists sustain their creative work with day-jobs at a satellite television station or as lecturers in the highly popular audio/visual programs at area-wide universities. Unconfined by market forces in Beirut, “artists do what they do through a sense of urgency,” according to Akram Zaatari, “it makes the art hard-edged, and allows for experimentation” (Wright 2002:15). A forerunner in the innovative video art movement, Zaatari co-found the Arab Image Foundation to provide a salon for visual artists and to archive photographs taken by Arabs throughout the Middle East (Love 2001). The combination of salvaging an authentically Arab way of seeing and the production of radically experimental video art demonstrates the breadth of work performed by these filmmakers in order to re-imagine Middle Eastern iconography.

Despite the difficulties in producing independent film and video – securing funding, resources, and audiences – the conditions in Beirut have fostered an environment where many of these filmmakers can sustain their creative output across transnational and local “mediascapes” (Appadurai 1990, Appadurai 1996), while remaining artistically, politically, and ordinarily situated in their national “homeland.” Although not operating on the same level as mainstream mass media, this work has the potential to influence the perceptions of both internationally attentive western audiences and locally demobilized urban poor. In Beirut, public production and exhibition may provide a direct connection to the city’s residents, while these productions find their way into film festivals and art exhibitions abroad where they can challenge orientalist ethnocentrism. The international film festival serves as a site for the negotiation of social conflicts outside the nation-state. While charged with the potential for transformation, the tastes and sensibilities of international film festivals may also delimit the aesthetic and

political parameters of films screened as well as set trajectories for future film productions to follow.¹⁴ Accordingly, the next chapter further interrogates the over-determined categories of nation and exile in an effort to situate the “cinema of Beirut” and its urban cosmopolitanism.

¹⁴ This dynamic is well demonstrated by Diawara (1994) in the context of African cinema and Zhang (2002) regarding Chinese cinema.

Chapter 2: The Paradox of Impossible Humanism

INTRODUCTION

Scholarship on cinema in the Middle East had remained scarce until only recently. Until *Arab and African Film Making* (Malkmus and Armes 1991) appeared in the early 1990s, the translation of Georges Sadoul's *Les cinémas des pays arabes* (1966) provided the sole source on the topic available in English. While these volumes challenged the way film histories typically neglected productions from the Middle East and Africa, they also treated Arab cinema as a self-evident category. Viola Shafik challenges the monolithic construction of the Arab world in her introduction to *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (1998), however, she quickly dispenses with this critique, as "most Arab countries possess a comparable history regarding colonialism and dependency on foreign powers" (1998:1). Given the heterogeneity that Shafik delineates initially, her framing seems overly reliant on the notion of a common colonial history. The social and historical contexts across the region tend to be considerably more disparate than Shafik suggests. According to her criteria, not only do Arab, but also many African, Asian, and Latin American countries possess comparable histories of colonialism and postcolonial dependency. Indeed, comparing and juxtaposing the development of cinema under colonialism can be rather instructive, such as cinema in its various settings under French colonial rule (Sherzer 1996). This, however, is not Shafik's project.

As hinted at in the book's title, her primary theoretical orientation is concerned with the "cultural identity" of Arab cinema on a formal level, which allows her to "show the extent to which Arab cinema is rooted in so-called Arab-Muslim culture and what are known as traditional or native arts" (Shafik 1998:4). While ascertaining a series of cultural identities provide a framework for associating disparate national identities across

the Middle East, Shafik makes little more than superficial connections between this unified Arab cultural identity and the diverse body of cinematic work she references. While there are certain merits available to a broadly encompassing survey of cinema across the region and each of these texts provide invaluable analysis, the tendency to move fast and loose between micro and macro frames of analysis runs the risk reifying cultural essentialisms and decontextualizing sociopolitical experiences. In an effort to resist the simplistic associations and homogenizing discourses typically used to contextualize the various “world cinemas,” I have chosen to not situate Lebanese cinema within a broader framework of “Middle Eastern Cinema.” Instead, I would like to narrow the scope of analysis to orient Lebanese cultural identities in relation to populations with adjacent, if not overlapping, social and historical contexts.

This chapter works to challenge the national/transnational dichotomy juxtaposed in chapter one and the over-determined categories of Arab and Middle Eastern, by placing Lebanese cinema in relation to its neighboring contributors, specifically Palestinian and Syrian cinemas. Rather than framing regional cinematic influences according to a colossal mapping of the “Middle East” or the “Arab world” or even the “Islamic countries,” I put Lebanese cinema in dialogue with the people who have shared broad cultural and historical experiences in proximity with the Lebanese. This translocational comparative approach is not grounded in a common “cultural identity,” but rather parallel historical experiences. By tracing commonalities in these cinemas, I also hope to reveal important distinctions, particularly regarding the divergent nationalist narratives of these three “nations.” This provides me with the additional opportunity to disrupt particular recurrent modes of analysis that perpetuate over-determined categories. In other words, the problems and conditions facing filmmakers from Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine may be distinct from one another, but they are nonetheless connected through

shared social conditions and historical events. In contrast to Shafik's broadly defined comparative history of colonialism, I argue that the impact of the Arab/Israeli conflict has impacted the cultural identity of Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese in poignantly comparable ways largely because these experiences overlap in geographical as well as social and historical contexts. I do not suggest that European colonialism has impacted the Arab world less than the Zionist colonial project, but the focused site of conflict means that it is impossible to speak of a Lebanese cinema without also speaking of Palestinian and Syrian cinemas, if not also Egyptian, Jordanian, or even Armenian cinemas.

LOCALIZING DETERRITORIALIZATION

By considering how these contiguous but divergent experiences inform stylistic commonalities between and across these cinemas, I endeavor to complicate both the 'national' and 'transnational' frameworks discussed in the preceding chapter. Pursuing recent challenges to the concept of 'national cinema', I trace a line of demarcation between the local and global that presents unavoidable challenges to the identity of the filmmaker. And yet, by shifting the 'transnational' framework to discuss Lebanese cinema in relation to its neighboring influences, I disrupt the assumptions about cross-cultural filmmaking. Productive in their own right, I propose a fourth frame of analysis, neither nationally, transnationally, nor culturally predetermined, but based on "translocality" in order to disrupt the presumptions about nationality, locality, and identity. Accordingly, I will utilize this comparative framework to situate the contours of "post-orientalist aesthetics" as it relates to this Levantine regional locality and the shared features of what Naficy calls "deterritorialized" cinemas (2001).

In this vein, I will briefly discuss the work of four exilic “Lebanese” filmmakers/artists, two women – Mona Hatoum and Heiny Srour – and two men – Omar Alawiyah and Nigol Bezjian, in order to understand the translocality of cinema in Lebanon.

Known principally as a performance artist, Mona Hatoum has worked with video in stand-alone and installation pieces. Like many other Palestinians refugees who settled in Lebanon after fleeing hostilities in Palestine, Hatoum became doubly exiled after the civil war in Lebanon exploded around the refugee population. Attending art school in London during the war, she became separated from her family in Beirut except through sporadic letters and intermittent phone calls. In her video, *Measures of Distance* (1988), she layers several modes of communication between her and her mother that exemplify the epistolary motif of exile (Naficy 2001). Layering letters and recorded conversations with her mother with fragmented and obscured nude photos of her mother, Hatoum narrates in English the trauma of separation. But rather than a narrative of nostalgia, her commentary and translations reveal a deep animosity toward patriarchal authority.

Heiny Srour, a Lebanese Jew, launched her film career with a documentary about the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO). *The Hour of Liberation has Sounded / Saat El Tahrir Dakkat* (1972) joined a Marxist ideology with a feminist social critique that would inform Srour's critical trajectory. “As an Arab woman,” Srour says, “I was excited by the fact that this revolution put forward the principle that there could be no true liberation for men without a conjoint and simultaneous liberation of women” (cited in Hennebelle 1976:8). Unlike other Mizrahi Jews (Jews from the Orient contra Ashkenazi Jews from the Occident) who were lured by Israeli citizenship, Srour remains an ardent critic of Israel. Her next film, *Leila and the Wolves / Leila wal zi'ab* (1984), utilized the episodic narrative style of *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* to examine

the role played by Palestinian and Lebanese women in their national struggles. For the past two decades she has carried on her struggle from Europe, first London and now Paris.

Omar Alawiyah best known as a social justice documentarian from Syria, he is equally at home in Lebanon carrying passports from each country (Amiralay and Soueid 2006). His Circassian patrilineage is from a line of soldiers hired by the Ottomans to keep the Arabs in order – a strategy of empowering immigrant minorities against indigenous populations. Beginning with his critique of the Syrian government in *Daily Life in a Syrian Village / al-Hayat al-Yawmiyya Fi Qaria Suriyya* (1974), he has become a distinctive voice in Arab cinema, remaining committed to producing biting documentary critiques on the abuse of power. His documentary portrait of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, *The Man with the Golden Soles / L'Homme aux semelles d'or* (2000), challenges the man responsible for negotiating an end to the civil war and ushering in a period of postwar reconstruction. Despite the critiques, Amiralay's unprecedented access to Hariri reveals the sway and charm held by this powerful and wealthy leader. In the wake of Hariri's assassination (February 14, 2005), "Mr. Lebanon's" legacy has since gained indemnity.

Although rarely mentioned in surveys of Middle Eastern cinema, Armenian cinema and filmmakers have had significant influence in the region and more broadly as transnational and exilic filmmakers. When Armenian film is discussed, however, attention typically focuses on Egyptian-born, Canadian filmmaker, Atom Egoyan. Indeed, Naficy has written extensively on Egoyan (1996a). Although many of Egoyan's films exemplify Naficy's 'accented cinema', Egoyan has only made one film in the region – *Calendar* (1993), an experimental narrative about exile and homeland. The

merits of Egoyan's films notwithstanding, many other Armenians who work in the region also exemplify the 'accented' aesthetics, like Naficy's UCLA classmate, Nigol Bezjian.

Bezjian grew up in Aleppo, Beirut, and Boston. His family's history is filled with a series of exiles, first fleeing Anatolia during the Armenian genocide, then escaping Syrian social authoritarianism, and then immigrating from rising hostilities in Lebanon, to eventually land in the midst of civil rights tensions on Boston's south side. Attending UCLA's film school with other notable filmmakers (like early African Americans cineastes Haile Gerima, Tony Woodberry, and Charles Burnett), he convinced his faculty to let him produce a feature-length narrative for his thesis film. The strain of such an endeavor kept Bezjian in film school for many years.

Chickpeas (1992) explores the dynamics of exile among a group of Armenian friends who fled Beirut (like Bezjian) and are now trying to find their way in Los Angeles. Although an unremarkable film in many regards, its flaws are indicative of the independent transnational filmmaking to which it belongs. Shot in piecemeal when actors and crew were available, the final wedding scene was shot in three parts and several months apart. Confronting complications in Los Angeles, Bezjian and his editor traveled to Bulgaria to take advantage of the shifting market structure of post-soviet European film industries. After months of editing, conditions in Bulgaria shifted from opportunity to obstruction and he barely got the film out of the country. In this context, the imperfections of this student film open themselves to new readings of diasporic cinema.

In the late 1990s, Bezjian returned to Beirut to work at Future Television (*al-Mustaqbal*), a satellite station owned by Rafiq Hariri. In Beirut his work began to proliferate with the autobiographical, experimental documentary *Roads Full of Apricot* (2001) and the ethnographically infused documentary about the making of Armenian

holy oil in *Muron* (2003). During the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006, he was in Armenia shooting his second feature film.

So while each of these filmmakers can individually be read according to Naficy's transnational accented cinema, by bringing them together, the collective experience reveals something both localized and fleeting. In this context, Lebanese cinema can be read alongside other national cinemas in the Levant (*al-Mashriq*) without reifying the category of the nation. In this regard, my reading of Lebanese cinema alongside Palestinian and Syrian cinemas endeavors both to push film analysis beyond national/transnational categories and to ground "deterritorialized" cinemas within localized practices. Whereas Naficy expresses concern with the films made by postcolonial filmmakers in their sojourn to the west, I am interested in understanding how interstitiality influences the production of films and videos within the more narrowly defined space of Lebanon and concentrated mostly within the capital city of Beirut. I share Naficy's interest in exile and have a strong interest in the representation of this rupture, but I am also concerned with the centrality of the (civil) wars and the localized representation of ongoing violence. These dual forms of localization and deterritorialization cannot be adequately assessed with national, transnational, or broadly defined Arab frameworks. Instead, I will draw upon recent volumes devoted to Palestinian (Dabashi 2006a) and Syrian cinemas (Salti 2006b) in order to "make sense" of recent Lebanese cinema. A brief comparison between Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese cinemas will help reveal the features shared and unshared by common histories of deterritorialization.

THE PARADOX OF SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN CINEMAS

Cinema in Syria is produced under conditions considerably different than its neighbors and most cinemas around the world for that matter. Syrian cinema operates under the state authority of the National Film Organization (*Al-Mu'assassah al-'Ammah li al-Sinamah*). In her introductory essay to *Insight into Syrian Cinema*, Rasha Salti (2006a) outlines four paradoxes that face cinema in Syria. First, there is no film industry or sector of production typically associated with a national cinema, but at the same time the body of work produced over the last few decades offers a number of masterpieces. Second, Syrian films often garner awards from international festivals, but remain known only to cinephiles at home. Third, Syrian cinema has been completely reliant on state sponsorship, but remains one of the most critical sites of subversive politics. Lastly, the conditions of Syrian national cinema since the 1980s have fostered the production of “profoundly subjective and independent-minded auteur films” (Salti 2006a:22).

Although public exhibition remains limited in Syria, state funding has freed cinema “from the debilitating demands of the profit-generating creed of market-driven production” (Salti 2006a:22). Whereas cinema in Egypt is compelled to appeal to a mass market and cinemas in Lebanon and Palestine are generally reliant on foreign funding, Syria’s state sponsored cinema has fostered “artistic expression in its own terms” (2006a:22). With the influence of many filmmakers trained in the former Soviet Union, Syrian cinema tends to utilize more formal composition and poetic symbolism than other Arab cinemas (Alexander 2006). This attention to detail and concentration on a limited number of films gives Syrian cinema a level of quality uncommon in many postcolonial cinemas.

The politicization of Syrian cinema can be traced to the revolutionary fervor that ran throughout the region in the decades after World War Two, on the one hand, and the

humiliation felt with the loss of Palestine, the dispersion of its people, and the defeat of the Arab armies in 1948 and 1967 by Israeli military forces, on the other. The structural support and restrictions engendered by state sponsorship ensured that Syrian cinema “was not crafted to entertain, it was impelled by a duty to crystallize the aspirations of the people and to represent their struggle” (Salti 2006a:26). As such, the poor peasants became the face of Syrian cinema, rather than the “educated urbanites who led the ‘national’ struggle for liberation” (2006a:27). In films like *The Leopard / al-Fahd* (1972) by Nabil Maleh, the peasant, imprisoned after feudal landowners have confiscated his land, becomes extremely evocative of the Palestinian displacement. In this way the impoverished, working class became symbolically conflated with the Palestinian tragedy (2006a:28).

By privileging the Palestinian metaphor and channeling resources into the militarization of society, Syria, like other Arab regimes, “subverted vital resources from attending to pressing social problems” (2006a:30). By the 1980s, the official discourse was growing thin for the impoverished Syrians who had continued to make sacrifice for this cause but gained nothing. With this turn “away from grand narratives of heroism and glory,” Syrian national cinema “became a repository of thwarted ‘national’ aspirations, failed promises, and disillusioned subjectivity and citizenship” (2006a:33-34). With the films of Mohammad Malas and Abdellatif Abdul-Hamid we see stories emerge about the end of innocence and the crisis of patriarchy.¹⁵ These auteuristic creations have fostered poignant critiques of both patriarchy and absolute rule, which are clearly evocative of the late president Hafiz al-Assad.

¹⁵ See Malas’s *Dreams of the City / Ahlam al-Madinah* (1983) and *The Night / al-Layl* (1993) and Abdul-Hamid’s *The Night of the Jackals / Layli Ibn Awah* (1989), *Verbal Letters / Rassa’el Shafahiyyah* (1991), and *At Our Listeners’ Request / Ma Yathubuhu al-Mustami’un* (2003).

In recent years, the system has begun to change with the permission of international coproductions, the increased accessibility of digital video, and the influence of satellite television serials. Salti calls this new generation of Syrian cinema a “third way.” Unharnessed from the National Film Organization, filmmakers are free to experiment with form, critique, and new visual vocabulary, but must navigate an unregulated private sector “ruled by the chaos of market speculation ... and animated by greed” (Salti 2006a:43). Salti says that this younger generation of filmmakers has more in common with their peers in urban centers across the region than their predecessors. “They transit between Europe and Syria, relentlessly interrogating artistic and cultural expression in contemporary Syria, collective memory, the violence of the present regime, the overwhelming alienation of their generation, and the virtues of exile” (2006a:44). This transnational cosmopolitan constitution of new filmmakers connects Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese filmmakers in webs of production and exhibition.

If the (Palestinian) peasant vis-à-vis the authoritarian patriarch dominates the thematic motifs in Syrian cinema, then nationalist nostalgia for the rural landscape vis-à-vis the trauma of Israeli occupation articulates a similar dynamic in Palestinian cinema. The fundamental challenge facing Palestinian national cinema is the absence-presence of a Palestinian nation, which can be characterized according to at three attributes or paradoxes: the absence of a state, trauma as an originary moment of nationalism, and the privileging of the absent nation over all other social issues.

The first paradox of Palestinian nationalism, in which there is no state to bear the name of a nation, presents an insurmountable obstacle in a world dominated by the ‘international’ organization of nation-states based on alliances and resources between these states. Since individual rights are manifest in the national passport as a document that either hinders or facilitates global movement, civil regulations concerning refugee

status generally proves untenable. For Palestinians, the lack of political sovereignty necessarily means the instability of location. This deterritorialization is not restricted to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of refugees in 1948 and 1967. This condition is further exacerbated by the violent and inhospitable lack of integration by the continued disaggregation and oppression of Gaza and the West Bank, the neighboring countries that host the Palestinian refugee camps, and the extensive dispersion of Palestinians exiled beyond the Middle East. Bresheeth describes the ambivalence of this continual loss as a state of “living in the lost country” (2002:34). Although the nationalist revolutionary projects that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century to shake off colonial control have generally run their course, Alexander points out that most Palestinian filmmakers remain compelled by the issue of the nation and utilize aesthetics that mark the national space as both home and exile (2005:158). So whether empowered or disempowered, the conceptual and ideological projects of Palestinian filmmakers “must operate on the interstitial space between cultures” (Bresheeth 2002:37).

The second paradox of Palestinian nationalism arises with a traumatic loss as the source of national identity. *Al-Nakba* (Arabic for “the catastrophe”), which witnessed the Palestinian eviction during Israel’s 1948 war of independence, provides the originary moment of Palestinian nationalism. An aesthetic of “traumatic realism” is borne in the “remembrance of the lost homeland” (Dabashi 2006b:11). Following Nurith Gertz and George Khaleifi, Palestinian national narrative revolves around three pivotal points: memory of a lost paradise, lamentation of the present, and portrayal of the anticipated return (Gertz and Khaleifi 2003). What should be noted in this constellation is the absence of the actual tragedy of loss. According to Joseph Massad, Arab commercial

cinema does not make films about the Palestinian tragedy.¹⁶ He argues that this cinematic absence relates to its unrepresentability, or put differently, “To represent the Palestinian tragedy and trauma is to relive it and to give credence to its permanence” (2006:4). In this way, if the traumatic loss of the Nakba remains unrepresented, then nothing can be claimed to actually have been lost. This also relates to the Israeli erasure of Palestinian history, in which “The ultimate loss is losing one’s story and the right to tell one’s own story, one’s own history” (Bresheeth 2002:37). Although Dabashi recognizes that the absent presence “at the creative core of Palestinian cinema ... has made it thematically in/coherent and aesthetically im/possible” (2006b:10), Alexander problematizes the centrality of nationalism “at the heart of Palestinian cinema” (2005:150).

This intensive obsession with the absent nation creates the conditions for the third paradox. Since the absence of the ‘nation’ assumes the role of a Palestinian master narrative, cultural criticism of other social issues has remained limited. Whereas the Palestine Film Units (*Wihdat Aflam Filastin*) of the 1960s aimed to document the coming revolution and the documentaries of the 1970s aimed to simultaneously incite and critique politics, after defeats in Jordan and Lebanon the films of the 1980s showed more interest in political commentary than incitement or celebration. “If political instrumentalism defined the aesthetics of the 1970s,” Massad suggests, “the new crop of films engage both European avant-garde as well as Palestinian folk aesthetics” (2006:39). For example Michel Khleifi’s films from this period show a deep nostalgia for the rural landscape (Alexander 2005) and folkloric reenactment (Gertz and Khaleifi 2003). In the post-Oslo era (1993-), however, some filmmakers are presenting a more conflicted relationship to their homeland. Elia Suleiman and Nizar Hassan both “appear in their

¹⁶He cites three exceptions to this observation, *The Duped / al-Makhdu'un* (1971) produced in Syria by Egyptian Tawfiq Salih and based on the book by Ghassan Kanafani, *Kafir Qasim* (1974) by Lebanese filmmaker Borhane Alaouié, and the more recent *Gate of the Sun / Bab el shams* (2004) by the Egyptian director Yousry Nasrallah and based on Elias Khoury’s book.

films in journeys of self-investigation and social exploration,” which Alexander argues, characterizes “the transnational genre and the critical inquiries prevailing among Western intellectual circles” (2005:163). They tell non-linear stories that exist always between states of being, in a process of becoming, which are also characteristics of post-orientalist aesthetics. “The mutation of the politically repressed into the aesthetically representational becomes a defining moment of Palestinian cinema,” and Dabashi further argues, “The representational im/possibility is deeply rooted in Palestinian realism and constitutional to its crisis of mimesis” (2006b:12).

BEIRUT, ONCE UPON A TIME ...

In both Syrian and Palestinian cinemas one notices a gradual shift from ideologically driven narratives about Arab nationalism and revolutionary glory to more ambivalent, experimental narratives about the internal divisions and hopelessness that emerge in the face of unachieved national projects. Lebanese cinema differs from its neighboring cinemas in the lack of a coherent nationalist agenda, but the despair of being enveloped in seemingly insurmountable political violence situates current work in each of these cinemas in a similar light. Here I shift from a review of film criticism on Syrian and Palestinian cinema to a visual register in order to offer a reading of one definitive example of post-orientalist aesthetics in Lebanese cinema.

Jocelyn Saab actively challenges narrative convention in her experimental re-editing of Beirut’s cinematic record. *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* (1994) subverts the narrative to give greater dominance to an alternative poetics of representation. *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* actively seeks to understand how media representations have manipulated the identity of Beirut and the film reveals an explicit interest in memory, particularly traumatized memory, but the insurmountable political violence always

remains hidden, somewhere else, and unspeakable in the film. Nadia Seremetakis suggests that sensory memory is a form of storage and assemblage of this memory is always an act of imagination, not necessarily causally linked (1994). In this spirit, Saab strings together a cinematic memory of Lebanon that pays little attention to causality for constructing its narrative chronology.

One way to envision this film is as a historical mapping of the cinematic landscape of Lebanon. Culling from hundreds of films, Saab portrays the cinematic fantasies that proliferated in the prewar era. From temptresses to spies to villains, Beirut is seen as a playground in which consistently fantastic narratives took place. Saab moves the film's two female leads and us through cinematic spaces that draw attention to Beirut's own cinematic construction, creating fantastic worlds within the recycling of cultural productions. *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* employs a structure that ensures the audience will not make causal connections by jumping through space and time with a liberty atypical of the classical Hollywood paradigm. Quoting a screenwriters' manual, Bordwell reminds us that it was believed that the "unmotivated jumping of time is likely to rattle the audience, thereby breaking their illusion that they participate in the lives of the characters" (1985:43). Saab either rejects this belief or is utilizing its anxious capabilities, in which case the rattled viewer becomes aware that he or she is not participant in this imagined world, only an observer or witness.

By going back to a "once upon a time," Saab takes the viewer as a witness to remediate the memories of Lebanon and Beirut as sites of intense trauma. The film opens with an epigraph announcing the film's preoccupation with memory (translation from subtitles):

Like you, I have forgotten. Like you, I wanted my memory to be inconsolable, a memory of shadow and stone. I struggle for myself, everyday, with all my might, against the horror of no longer understanding the reason for remembering. Like

you, I have forgotten. Why deny the obvious need to remember? Listen to me, listen to me once more, it will start again. — *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (A. Resnais / M. Duras)

In this introductory caption, Duras acknowledges that memory is withdrawn, and yet, without reason is compelled to remember, to repeat the memory one more time, presumably never finding closure. The withdrawal of memory and the fetishization of mimetic media to revive it serve as the core axis of Lebanese post-orientalist aesthetics. The relationship between memory and media exists in oppositional tension and yet bound by an intensely over-determined charge.

After the epigraph, we cut to a taxi driving through war ravaged city streets exposing bombed-out buildings on either side. We see a girl blindfolded in the back of the taxi. Yasmine begins giving an internal commentary about it being her 20th birthday. She and Leila are going to see Mr. Farouk. They want to watch his films and to share some of theirs with him. Leila and Yasmine's journey to visit Mr. Farouk offers a narrative structure with defined characters; however, the characters' motivation does not offer a clear-cut narrative structure and guides us into an endless series of film clips, moving quickly through space and time, but always grounded in Beirut with Leila and Yasmine. The blindfold, the taxi, and the unviewed film reel left in the back of the car, all serve as iconic modes of structuring visuality, a key trait of post-orientalist aesthetics.

After the taxi driver delivers them to an abandoned theater, we are left to wander the cinematic terrain with our heroines. Mr. Farouk says that he has been hiding out there for years with his films. Now the two young women are prepared to show him a film clip of theirs. A title card announces, "*1914 Leila and Yasmine play a trick on Mr. Farouk.*" In early documentary archival footage of people in markets and accompanied by extra-diegetic music of a classical Middle Eastern variety. Cut to an obviously simulated anachronistic film texture, we pan to the two girls on screen and they announce, "These

are the only images that we've found of our city, Mr. Farouk. They are undoubtedly very beautiful, but, frankly, a little out of date." More archival footage with music follows, and Leila continues:

We haven't found anything else, Mr. Farouk. Yasmine tends to fib, but for once, she is telling the truth. We found nothing else, except some clichés as: Beirut, the pearl of the Middle East, hidden in the blue casket of the Mediterranean. Lebanon, the Switzerland of the Orient. A haven of peace in the heart of a tumultuous region. Beirut, a cosmopolitan city where East meets West. That's all we've managed to come up with, on our city, Mr. Farouk. A head-spinning series of clichés.

Yasmine follows:

You know, nowadays, guys don't say to us: "you've got beautiful eyes." They say: "You have machine-gun eyes." I thought that, maybe, with you, we would find a little *savoir-vivre*. We came to ask you some questions. If you could answer us ... It's true, we were told that you were Beirut's living memory.

As children of the war, Leila and Yasmine are tired of the old and clichéd representations of Beirut. Their desire for a "real" Beirut seeks resolution in the media landscape of Mr. Farouk's secret archive of films. Mr. Farouk will show them "his" Beirut. He leads them to a huge archive of films that the women explore. This scene abruptly ends as we enter another film; the title card says, "*The 1950s Leila and Yasmine meet two handsome young men.*" We see a montage of city scenes from the period; we also get a sound montage of film music. A young girl is helped out of a speedboat and then suddenly we see Yasmine and Leila walking with boys at seaside as if part of the same diegesis. This quickly turns to another film with a woman listening to a record. Then music introduces the audience to a series of sexualized romance scenes, presenting Beirut as a place of emerging sexual desires. The romance soon takes on a more dangerous genre, the title card announces, "*the 1960s Our two heroines become besotted with a gangster.*" We see a drug-running gangster movie unfolding, which then merges

with *Garô*, a bandit hero compared to Robin Hood. From a nearby window, Leila and Yasmine overlook, watching him climbing over the city rooftops.

Our narrators have the uncanny ability to move between Mr. Farouk's theater and the films we presume they are watching. We are rarely sure if the protagonists are in the archive of in the images themselves. In the darkened bunker of cinematic contraband, Leila and Yasmine move through imaginary landscapes of Beirut. Blending the diegesis of several films along with that of the current one starring Yasmine and Leila, Saab's creative geography draws attention to the devices used to meld cinematic space, even as it ruptures our expectation for consistency. While the Hollywood paradigm restricts the ability to jump through time, "the most evident traces of the narration's omniscience is its omnipresence ... The camera can roam freely, crosscutting between locales or changing its position within a single room" (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985:30). Saab takes this a step further by cutting between different diegetic temporalities as if they had no distinction. Back at Mr. Farouk's theater, a strange fellow enters playing cowboy. He is appointed by Mr. Farouk to show the girls "the real Beirut, without lies or illusions." Yasmine replies, "One day, I'll tell you about my Beirut filled with lies..." She never does and this reveals Saab's betrayal of memory. Our journey through cinematic Beirut tells us very little about Leila and Yasmine. Does "Beirut" exist only in cinematic montage or is there a lived experience of Beirut filled with lies that we never hear about? Why this structuring of silence? What do these films eclipse? Does Saab critique the embedded clichés or reify them? Jalal Toufic has critiqued the way Saab assumes that the images reveal themselves, despite being withdrawn. He asks, "Is there a more effective way to hide that the images are inaccessible than to have the characters enter in them?" (2000:68).

Later a title card announces, “*The 1960s Leila and Yasmine ‘star’ in ome [sic] big budget foreign films.*” A French movie shows a man checking in at the airport just before he sees a plane explode at takeoff. We cut to an American film with people flying into Beirut and an airport police officer confronting the protagonist. After he leaves the airport, the American and French films are suddenly intercut to seem concurrent. A series of agents, voluptuous women, wire-tapping, and assassinations foreshadows a scene in which we are told Beirut is due to blow up in two days. Embedded within the scene, Leila and Yasmine comment on James Bond, bombs, and how all this chaos started during this period (1960s and maybe early 70s). “All these spies in Beirut at the same time. And nobody here seems to suspect a thing,” say the girls. An evil mastermind announces that his bomb will kill Beirut’s people while leaving its vaults intact for him to clean out. Immediately following this we witness apocalyptic scenes and footage of a haunting drive through the war torn damage of Beirut. We are led to believe that the destruction of Beirut was the result of an evil conspiracy, thus erasing the culpability of Lebanese and Palestinian militias and the Syrian and Israeli armies.

The film continues to meander through “history lessons,” the streets of Beirut, and Lebanese folksongs. We eventually return to more war and intrigue movies before the cab driver returns with a second film reel Leila and Yasmine had accidentally left in his cab. The film is of a religious school, with various Muslim religious leaders commenting on the notion of “truth”—all in contradictory metaphors. A student exposes the ruse and calls “truth” a monkey. One teacher agrees, saying that that student is wiser than the Masters. The last shot in the film shows Mr. Farouk’s child assistant (grandson?) laughing at the monkey joke. Fade to black.

How do we make sense of the dizzying array of plots and people? The last clip offers the most substantial hint. There are various notions of truth, but they are ultimately

contradictory, and like a monkey, make a fool of you. For in the story portrayed by Jocelyn Saab, the lack of causality and a clear-cut ending most appropriately characterize the impossibility of “making sense” of the war or the forces at play that lead up to it. Saab’s acute interest in revealing the artifice of the craft relates directly to her presentation of Beirut’s history through cinema. The inherent crisis of representation, representations of ‘truth’ are actually ‘false’ so any representation falsifies understanding, finds only comedic resolution. And yet, if Saab goes to the effort to cull through hundreds of films to achieve this, then crisis presents a paradox in which Saab still relies on representation. Like the Duras quote, Saab is compelled to remember without knowing why, but unlike the quote she seems optimistic for a depoliticized resolution.

In fact, Lebanon’s protracted domestic conflict, further complicated by the nationalist agendas emerging from Syria, Palestine, and Israel, provides filmmakers and cultural critics with aesthetic sensibilities that echo similar shifts in Syrian and Palestinian cinemas. Bound by over-determined categories of national trauma, recent endeavors in Syrian and Palestinian film have begun to dislodge the nationalist discourses within their narratives. As Lebanese cinema has been faced with the burden of representing the withdrawal of the nation and its replacement with prolonged political violence, these filmmakers have long turned to more experimental approaches that mark representational impossibilities. Nonlinear personal narratives, embedded lived experience, and media recycling that blur boundaries between fact and fiction, art and documentary, and identity and subjectivity characterize these aesthetics. Nonlinear and non-causal narratives disrupt humanist expectations and leave room for interpretation and confusion. That said, the intense silencing of the Lebanese official amnesia has prevented most overt political critiques from emerging. By necessity artists and filmmakers had to find new registers for conveying their experiences, which required Lebanese filmmakers

“get over” their nationalism perhaps sooner than their Syrian and Palestinian counterparts. That said, these cinemas have in common a critique of master narratives inherited from orientalism, nationalism, and sectarianism. While the peasant and the rural folkloric landscape dominate the iconography of Palestinian and Syrian cinemas, Beirut’s urban modernity dominates Lebanese iconography. Coupled with the structural limitations in their home societies and the opportunities of foreign sponsorship, these new cinemas must negotiate a field of competing interests throughout the production cycle – from planning to exhibition. A closer look at the relationship between space and cinema will elucidate this dynamic relationship of modernity.

CINEMASCAPES

In recent years there has been an increased interest in understanding the spatial dynamics of cinema (Aitken and Zonn 1994a, Clarke 1997, Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2001). Rather than merely a reading of the spaces represented on-screen, these endeavors work to situate cinema in its social and political contexts and to think about the power dynamics that effect a film shoot’s location, its venues for viewing, as well as the proximity between represented and lived worlds. Spatially and socially this has significant implications for filmmaking practices in Lebanon. First, the use of non-actors (non-professional) means that the disenfranchised, urban poor find their way onto film casts, but this does not translate into a monetary or vocational future. Second, the goal of informal populations to maintain their autonomy (and presumably a certain level of anonymity) may preclude their collaboration with a privileged class of filmmakers. Third, the self-proclaimed political and social efforts of several filmmakers and artists may elide or deride some of the more conservative portions of the urban poor, but the often champion the cause of the disenfranchised Palestinian refugees.

Grappling with the “postmodern condition,” some geographers have become interested in the ideologically charged dimensions of the cinematic landscape (Aitken and Zonn 1994a, Lukinbeal 2004). Following postmodern theories that challenge the distinction between political culture and celluloid culture – “between real-life and reel-life” – they argue that film constitutes rather than represents reality. “The camera does not mirror reality but creates it, endowing it with meaning, discourse, and ideology. And this endowment can and should be contested” (Aitken and Zonn 1994b:21). So the production of meaning is not about media’s realism, but the ability to construct a set of narrative conventions understood within “the specific geographical and historical contexts in which they are produced and consumed” (1994b:14). Following Hay, who decenters film as an object of study, I endeavor to focus “on how film practice occurs from and through particular sites ... re-emphasizing the *site* of film practice *as* a spatial issue or problematic” (1997:212). Independent transnational cinema in Beirut gives shape to “sites of assimilation and cultural reinvention” (1997:213). So rather than privileging the notion of a ‘Lebanese cinema’, I opt for the ‘Cinema of Beirut’ to appreciate the way independent visual media are both localized and globalized.

Both the city and cinema are sites of intensity where multiple social forces intersect, mutually informing each other. While the place and function of the city are integral to the processes that enable the flow of cinema, the spatiality of cinema simultaneously represents space and shapes social processes. The growing body of literature on the city/cinema dynamic primarily focuses on the representational relationship, however, this approach risks eliding the ways in which representational modes are enabled and/or contested.

Another strand of criticism instead remarks on cinema’s exceptional ability to conceptualize the city. Shaviro contends that the representational frameworks of

contemporary film theory¹⁷ fail to account for this “perceptual intensity/immediacy of images and movements in time and space” (1993:36). The capacity of the movie camera to capture the kinetic motion of urban life and also to travel through this space presented cinema with “a striking and distinctive ability to capture and express the spatial complexity, diversity, and social dynamism of the city through *mise-en-scène*, location filming, lighting, cinematography, and editing” (Shiel 2001:1). Stout argues that the cinema is a machine with urban origins. “The great themes of the city – its kinetic activity, its juxtapositions and ironies, its massive forms and tiny details ...” (2000:146), parallels the aesthetics of cinema. I thus follow Shiel and Fitzmaurice (2001), who endeavor to place the city and cinema in relation to broader global processes and “lived social realities” (Shiel 2001:2). Contending that cinema is more a spatial system than a textual one, Shiel follows Soja (1989) and Jameson (1992) respectively to argue that power relations are inscribed into the spatiality of both social life and cultural texts, as well as “the spatial organization of cultural production” (Shiel 2001:5). Film effects social processes like globalization, rather than reflect them.

Since visual productions being produced in Beirut operate alongside other industries (satellite broadcast, music videos, advertising, etc.) without themselves constituting an industry, these independent productions must travel through alternative channels of communication. The ways in which this media garners audiences and is experienced in various venues helps us understand the circulation of independent visual media across transnational channels and on ‘location’. At the same time we account for the fluidity of the city, demonstrative of global flows and flexible accumulation, we must ask how is it not. Furthermore, Shiel argues that in the face of dominating film industries

¹⁷ He identifies semiotics, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism as the cornerstones of contemporary film theory.

in the United States and Europe, “resistance to the homogenizing tendencies of global capitalism is possible ... only in a limited way, by atomized groups at a grass-roots level with largely defensive agendas or, possibly and more hopefully, through the development of localized networks of individuals, agencies, and communities” (2001).

For independent filmmakers in Beirut, the city itself is the object of intense scrutiny and their work reflects a deep concern for the visual and spatial dynamics of a war-torn and divided city. Re-imagining the city relies on the camera’s ability to enter the city and record the various life worlds demonstrated therein. Camera crews have the potential to record the processes that alter the urban landscape and to elucidate the concurrent social transformation. Walking through the city with a camera enables a form of witnessing that becomes an integral means for understanding postwar subjectivity. By mediating Beirut’s contested terrain an alternative site for public engagement emerges. But various forms of censorship potentially limit the ability of the camera to mediate contested spaces and thus curtail the ways one occupies particular sites. Today certain preserved areas of Beirut have become nostalgically favored sites for film shoots, which may intentionally avoid encounters with difference.¹⁸ The visual record of the city will likely differ between large film crews shooting primetime commercials or big budget music videos in the rebuilt areas of the central business district and small crews surreptitiously shooting on small format digital video.

The urge to film in downtown seems more common to the exiles returning to shoot their stories. For instance, Michel Kammoun’s short *Shadows* (1996) also features downtown after the war. And now that it is rebuilt, others have used it anachronistically, like Hany Tamba’s short *After Shave* (2005). Like the beginning of *Once Upon a Time*,

¹⁸ See “Gemmayzeh draws Lebanese filmmakers: Street’s 1970s ambience shows modern and traditional Beirut” by Jessy Chahine, in *The Daily Star* on February 12, 2005.

Beirut, Ghassan Salhab's *Beyrouth Fantome* (1998) begins with a long take through the window of a car driving through demolished down town Beirut. This sequence captures not only the destruction of public space, but mediates it through the windshield of a moving vehicle. The car offers a semi-private space to move through the battlefield landscape. The car inscribes the claustrophobia of a small interior onto the urban environment. A vehicle in Lebanese iconography may also evoke the fear of a car bomb. And yet, the opportunity to wonder through the labyrinth of destruction must have been so banal as to seem permanent.

UNIVERSAL HUMANISM

Despite the hardship of having no industry, limited access to audiences, and a relationship of foreign dependency, contemporary Arab (and other postcolonial) filmmakers are typically critiqued for giving up on ideological critiques of power and catering instead to a cosmopolitan sense of taste. As many of these filmmakers are now based in Europe and make their films in a relationship of international co-production, Alexander argues that their work aesthetically fits within "the European art house sensibility" circulating "primarily on the international film festival circuit" (2005:154). While most Palestinian filmmakers are still compelled by the issue of the nation, Alexander notes that in a post-Oslo era some filmmakers are presenting a more conflicted relationship to their homeland. The concurrent angst of nationalisms and tastes for cosmopolitanisms refer to a complicated period of Arab filmmaking, in which celebration and renaissance compete with censorship, violence, and defunding. The bastions of Third World Cinema – revolutionary in its use of the camera as a weapon, but codified by rigid readings of nationalism and postcolonialism – plague contemporary readings of "world" media with an inescapable parable of us and them. According to Alexander, the collapse

of revolutionary nationalist cinema has been “replaced by a depoliticized, universally humanist cinema” (2005:161).

She follows Stam’s pessimistic assessment that the larger workings of transnational capitalism and globalization have forced the revolutionary third worldist cinemas to “wither.” In spite of the increased militancy of Palestinian society, she argues, recent Palestinian films show little violence and do not foreground the armed struggle. Instead they focus on “the humanist aspect of their struggle,” which shows a “departure from the image of the terrorist” and an avoidance of images that would reinforce western stereotypes of violent Palestinians (Alexander 2005:161). By appealing to international audiences with a language of universal humanism, based on nonviolence and victimization, “this approach both deprives Palestinians of their greatest asset—the vitality of their long and active struggle against Israeli occupation—and echoes Israel’s own long-standing claim of victimhood” (2005:161-2).

This seems excessively dismissive given that the transformation of nationalist to humanist aesthetics has also revealed tension between revolutionary ideology and critical discourse around other (more domestic) sites of oppression. In contrast to the early “third worldist films”, which focused on anti-colonial narratives and increased engagement with the public sphere, Alexander follows Shohat and Stam to say that the postcolonial cinemas of the 1980s and 90s “use the camera less as revolutionary weapon than as a monitor of gendered and sexualized realms of the personal and the domestic, seen as integral but repressed aspects of collective history” (Shohat, 1994 #421:288 cited in Alexander 2005:153). But Crofts worries that “art and substate cinemas” are prone to ethnocentric readings or incomprehension, in which depoliticized art cinemas facilitate essentialist humanism (2000:9).

Why is Alexander discounting these inquiries? If Suleiman's and Hassan's films both characterize "the transnational genre and the critical inquiries prevailing among Western intellectual circles" (Alexander 2005:163) as referenced earlier, then how does this relate to Crofts concerns of ethnocentrism? These readings of reception make two critical flaws. First, they always presume a western reading of these films screened from a decontextualized site in New York, Los Angeles, or elsewhere. Aside from venue, what does a slow paced Iranian narrative have in common with experimental Arab documentary films any more than a Hong Kong thriller or a Senegalese oral tale? Why do all non-revolutionary cinema become reduced to art house humanism? If, in which case, all these art house showings qualify as universally humanist, then are they all read the same way? The second flaw with these critiques is the presumption of a narrow demographic of interpretation, in which incomprehension defaults to ethnocentric readings. If these films indicate a prevailing transnational genre, then how do the recurrent critical inquiries in which Alexander participates reduce understandings of these films? Is it merely that they prevail among Western intellectual circles?

These flaws of logic assume that the incorporation of radical Arab art within European art circles and international festivals is not transformative for western audiences, not to mention the reception in Arab cities, even if limited in comparison to New York. While some work indulges in contemplations on bourgeois suffering, much of this work may actually radicalize western artists. Even if we accept this reductive assessment, the impact of these films on audiences abroad does more than merely inform them. These films are often challenging and there is prerequisite level of knowledge needed to assign meaning – names of places, certain dates, and historical figures are taken for granted, mentioned, but unexplained. These hints are embedded in personal memories fictionalized (performed narratively) and mundane experience of latent

violence. These documentaries and video performances refuse to give themselves away too easily. According to Rabih Mroue, he does not want to reduce the social and political complexity of the situation in Lebanon for the sake of offering western audiences the satisfaction of comprehension. This pushes against the formulaic way in which the region is rendered understandable in popular media and news. Understanding and meaning are elusive in these works. By leaving open these circuits, artists like Mroue challenge the way they are typically closed. Croft warning about difficult art films easily being reduced to ethnocentric readings notwithstanding, if sought out, these films provide alternative representations for audiences abroad, and also fosters the publicity of Arab agency.

Furthermore, self-authored representations of Arab history and experience provide sites to revitalize the struggle for self-determination. In a context where self-narration has literally been stolen from the Palestinians such endeavors are of imperative significance, but this self-critical experimental work no longer valorizes the nationalist discourse nor does it presume the possibility of creating a tenable master narrative. Having said this, if the national identity is built on the crisis of the Nakba, then how might Palestinian filmmakers resituate the terms of national representation? In an extreme proposition, the idealism of a two state solution would give way to a single democratic state, inclusive of Palestinians and Israelis, in the way South Africa restructured after apartheid (Abunimah 2006). Nothing suggests this would be a viable solution with current geopolitical conditions, but it provides a new vision unencumbered by national essentialism. The point being, if the nationalist model is fetishized and the humanist model dismissed, then the recurrent tropes of victimization can never be surmounted. In such conditions, an alternative aesthetic must emerge to disrupt the ossified narratives so deeply engrained. This interstitial critique re-imagines not only the master narratives, but also the forms by which they take shape. “In order to have some

space to live in, to bring an end to personal and political melancholia, one must employ fiction, one must tell stories” (Bresheeth 2002:38).

Perhaps, the “third way” presented by Salti in regard to new Syrian cinema signals one possibility. At the core of this trend is the recognition of cross-cultural exchange, both with transnational coproductions and exhibition as well as more localized trans-regional cross-fertilization between Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Istanbul. This restructuring of cinema, which moves beyond national boundaries and takes advantage of intersections of exilic mobility, favors sites like Beirut, because of the way it speaks to deterritorialization. The production of this public culture turns on both the disruption of ongoing violence and the cosmopolitan sensibilities of transnational subjectivity. In this context, Beirut’s bohemian visual culture disrupts the identity making process of the nation-state and the depoliticization of neoliberal humanism. The vibrant, if elitist, cinema and experimental media public culture in Beirut becomes an alternative site to New York and Paris. The deterritorialized Beirut thus becomes an essential hub in the reworking of representational paradigms. As discussed in the following chapter, the decentering of critical discourse to the “periphery” does not preclude other forms of over-determination. Rather than a fix-all, this alternative aesthetic works to become unencumbered by patriarchal hegemony and self-indulgent humanism. Although such an approach obviously presents particular limitations, it would be a mistake to dismiss this work for abandoning revolutionary agendas or for complicity in a generalized liberal humanism.

A post-orientalist aesthetic problematizes this simplistic duality. Whereas “Celik and Benjamin argue that the work of indigenous artists can be interpreted as an expression of cultural difference despite its visual similarities to Western Orientalism” (Beaulieu and Roberts 2002:10), I suggest that contemporary Arab filmmakers and artists

also assert their cultural difference despite participating within western film festivals and art house cinema. In this way, post-orientalist aesthetic challenges the “dogmas of Orientalism.” Rather than a primordial difference between East and West, difference is situated contextually. Pushing against notions of monolithic authenticity presents new renderings of Arab subjectivity, in which identity is authenticated by political disempowerment rather than cultural essentialism. Acknowledging the poignancy of these Arab self-critiques disrupts the orientalist assumption that the “orient” requires imperial control. These aesthetics also grapple with Said’s shortcomings. Whereas his initial critique implied the uniformity of hegemony, history shows that hegemony is a process of fluid self-preservation. Post-orientalist aesthetics do not favor one hegemony over others, but critiques its various manifestations. Whereas Said implied that the west is ideologically uniform, discourse is itself heterogeneous. Post-orientalist aesthetics privileges multiplicity and critiques the uniformity of ideological discourse, whereby challenging form and content.

Some suggest that since violence is over-determined in the Middle East and more attention should be turned to the ample other ways that the region could be discussed. While these critics sure enough realize that the representations perpetuated on the evening news in American and other nations’ televised programs more often than not convey shallow caricatures and reiterate stereotypes, which miss a great deal of realm of individual and collective experience, I fear that these warnings risk recoiling from the hard issues. We in the west of course need fuller representations that present people in their contexts if we hope to understand them as humans with human needs, emotions, and desires. Despite the media frenzy to deliver evermore-horrifying violence to readers and viewers, the fact that violence is happening in the Middle East is by definition mundane and unremarkable. This occurs in part because it has become so routine and naturalized

as well as disembodied and decontextualized. But rather than take violence off the table and quarantine it with gestures of taboo, my research argues for the importance of keeping it under the gaze of scholarship. This scholarly gaze must be prolonged enough to allow context to reenter the otherwise amnesic site of news coverage. But this gaze must also be sustained long enough to allow for a reflexive awareness to emerge.

This is of course where a humanist perspective may privilege non-violent perspectives, which risks whitewashing cultural, social, and political contexts that make populations distinctly different. These tensions between nationalist and humanist aesthetics reveal an anxiety about the disaggregation of the collectivity – the same fear that in nationalism refuses the diversity of the nation can be traced in the humanist discourse of universality. Indeed, anthropology, as a discipline dedicated to cultural relativism, has to toggle between conceptual frameworks that either aggregate people into atomized grains of uniqueness on the one hand or a homogenizing universal humanism on the other hand. This tension is not unique to anthropology, but characteristic of cross-cultural experience in general. Those who traverse boundaries of cultural distinction, no matter how subtle or quotidian in routine, must negotiate homogeneity and heterogeneity on an on-going basis.

While modernity has been of great interest to scholars in the Middle East, postmodernity and the attending theories of post-structuralism and deconstruction have been less well addressed. The postmodern conditions of global capitalism, ethnic violence, and transnational migration have given rise to a theoretically influenced, artistically expressive, and politically active class of Arab intellectuals. This is a significantly overlooked sector of society that plays an important role in how issues of Arab identity and Middle Eastern politics are translated globally. Indeed, these individuals thrive on crossing borders for their very existence, by globally populating

conferences, film festivals, art openings, guest lectureships, etc. While this production is dependent on the global flow of people and capital as well as the circulation of media exhibition, it is also intimately situated in and staunchly committed to a specific locale. Postmodernism in an Arab context, extends beyond the politics of the nation contra global interests, and provides embodied critiques of cosmopolitan subjectivity and sensibilities.

My project honors the contested meanings and negative charge associated with ‘post’, ‘orientalist’, and ‘aesthetics’ in an effort to frame a cosmopolitan, bohemian, intellectual, and artistic sensibility. Critical of nationalistic and imperialistic violence as well as fundamentalist and orientalist patriarchy, these individuals embody the euphemistically “absent (Muslim) moderates” – a sensibility that western media and politicians frequently say is missing in the Middle East. In between notions of fanatic Islamic fundamentalists on the one hand and passive Muslim women on the other, exists a diverse spectrum of ideological perspectives neither passive nor fatalistic, but necessarily politicized by the ever-present violence and instability of routine lived experience. Typically disinterested in rationalist ideologies if not outwardly critical of them, the subject position in experimental Levantine cinema has endured a “surpassing disaster” – having witnessed the death of tradition and the loss of society. This experience disrupts the notion of coherent subjectivity addressed in chapter five. I’m not presuming that coherent subjectivity is ever achieved, but the organization of social myths around the militarization of loss attempts to discipline subject obedience into narrowly defined terms. The process of thinking visually through this wreckage enables a critique with affective intensity. A careful reading of post-orientalist aesthetics in Lebanese experimental documentary provides new theoretical considerations about visual registers of difference.

CONCLUSION

Although I argue for a reassessment of the impact of Arab filmmakers participating in western and international sites of exhibition, this mosaic of filmmakers who have emerged from, passed through, or returned to Lebanon should not suggest an encompassing coverage of social perspectives. Cinema is an exclusionary art if only based on the financial requirements necessary for acquiring equipment and developing the film reels, but even the more “democratic” technology of video poses accessibility issues. Beyond this economic explanation, there is another barrier (one among many) that delimits social perspectives. The structural dependency on non-Lebanese funding, resources, services, and audiences caters to certain sensibilities. The subjectivity articulated by post-orientalist aesthetics is of an elite cosmopolitan sensibility, but it is not the normative elite sensibility. The secularization of the bohemian public sphere in Beirut is partly due to the bastions of European acculturation, but this also provides an alternative to replicating disaggregated sectarian ideals.

Here I want to make an important distinction. The argument that Arab (or indeed any nonwestern) filmmakers who engage in a working relationship with the “west” must either compromise their “authentic” sensibilities or pander to western aesthetics, if not both, naturalizes the west as the site of exhibition and precludes perspectives that do not engage with the west. In other words, if various structural and aesthetic issues make Arab cinema more easily accessed in New York than Ramallah (as described by Alexander), then the assumption is that the filmmaker will only cater to audiences in New York. The structuring of nonwestern art and cinema according to western festival circuits and funding networks notwithstanding, the conditions of production and circulation must be complicated to reflect other sites in the transnational flow of alternative media.

This media may diverge from revolutionary agendas, but its cross-cultural positionality engenders an embedded potency with radical qualities. Of course, like “alternative” modernities, cosmopolitanisms exist in distinct social and political contexts that resist generalization. An east/west transnationality does not account for localized divisions in Lebanon, which include groups of people disinterested in participating in these cosmopolitan venues, if not actually invested in maintaining an autonomous anonymity (Bayat 1997). There are those who chose not to participate in these modes of cultural production, because they have no interest in the associated spectatorship, whether in New York or Beirut.

And yet, these perspectives do slip through, but it would be false to assume that they emerge naturalistically. The radical aesthetics of this work may not be aware of its own presumptions. For example, Jayce Salloum and Walid Raad’s video, *Up to the South / Talaeen a Junuub* (1993), begins with a very poignant example of this. A woman critical of the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon (1982-2000) aggressively asserts the compromising situation her participation in the video presents for her, “... if I don’t do this interview, I cannot express this refusal.” Unfortunately, a thorough assessment of Lebanese perspectives that diverge from this particular set of transnational alternative media remains beyond the scope of this work. Having said this, however, the following chapters endeavor to trace some of the boundaries and points of contention that reveal ruptures in the visual culture of Lebanon. Eclipsed subjectivities “irrupt” in these documentaries, but their presence in the bohemian image rarely correlates to their presence in cosmopolitan sites of production and exhibition.

Consciously or not, the films and videos discussed in this dissertation endeavor to participate in both western circuits of cross-cultural exhibition and localized circuits of Lebanese and Arab cultural exhibition. In this sense, they very much fall into the

categories of independent transnational cinema described by Hamid Naficy and Laura Marks that work in between specified cultural identities. I depart from this generic perspective, by giving more attention to a constellation of work that centers on Beirut. By offering a focal point, I provide a more grounded assessment of transnational alternative media. As such, I resituate the importance of place and lived experience within a neo-liberal, globalizing flow of media, technology, ideology, capital, and people (Appadurai 1990).

SECTION 2: POST-HARIRI MEDIASCAPES

Chapter 3: Contested Publics

ETHNOGRAPHIC INTRODUCTIONS

Saturday, 24 September 2005

I arrived in Beirut just before 4am. Immigration didn't ask me a single question. The customs officer only wanted to know my nationality. Given the tense political situation, I was surprised that nobody seemed bothered by me or anyone else as far as I could tell. "Dima"¹⁹ had ordered me a taxi, which was waiting for me outside. On the way to Dima's apartment, Beirut was dark and quiet. After several minutes on the airport expressway to the Beirut Central District, we turned east down Charles Malek Avenue. Turning off into a residential district, we approach the Orthodox Hospital and turn east again along Al Roum Hospital Street. The driver called Dima to get directions. After dumping my luggage on the street, I paid the driver and climbed the stairs with my suitcases. Dima met me at the door holding back her dogs.

Dima was the former student of a film professor I knew in Beirut. He had put me in touch with her about a room she had available in Getawi, a historically Greek Orthodox neighborhood. She rented the second floor from an Armenian landlord, who lived upstairs and ran a photo shop nearby. She worked as a television producer at a Saudi owned station in Jounieh, a Christian port town (suburb) just north of Beirut. She

¹⁹ This chapter employs aliases for "informants" who conveyed their thoughts and opinions with me in private settings. I indicate these aliases with quotation marks the first time I reference the person, e.g. "Dima." In addition to these "false" identities, I also refer to people by their real names when their work is referenced. I maintain name recognition of these public figures even when engaging me in private. On occasion, these "real" individuals revealed something to me in private that could potentially compromise their integrity. While sensitive to the perils facing human participants in anthropological research, I have chosen to maintain their true identity in these settings. I justify this decision on two counts. First, I refrain from using aliases for public artists who could potentially benefit by my scholarly reference to their work even if potentially scandalous. Second, all the potentially compromising comments are already part of a public discourse, so I am not introducing something new.

showed me the flat and my room. We spoke briefly before she retired. The dogs, Snowy and Lucky, didn't particularly take to me, but Dima said to give them a little time, as they were jumpy around new people. Dima had "temporarily" adopted them for some friends who place abandoned animals with families desiring a pet. Snowy and Lucky had not found a home and both evidenced their own trauma of violence. For most of my three months staying with Dima, her dogs remained skittish and barked at me ferociously. Occasionally, they would permit me to stroke their ears and backs, but only occasionally.

I had hardly slept on the plane from London and was exhausted. Dima agreed to wake me by 9am so that I could attend a morning panel on violence and memory at al-Madina Theatre. Although I was comfortable getting there myself, Dima insisted on escorting me. Walking down to the main road, she pointed out where the most recent bomb attack took place a few days earlier. Only a few blocks from my new home, a person was killed and 20 injured in this explosion, but she says it wasn't a target bombing like the other recent ones against anti-Syrian journalists and politicians. This other variety had targeted the popular nightlife area on Monot Street. I guess just scare tactics, but who is trying to scare whom? Everyone wanted to blame Syria, but conclusive opinions were ultimately withheld.

We first took a service to Tabariz, where we got out and waited for another service taxi to take us to Hamra. This bifurcation of transportation would remain a recurrent theme in my travels between East and West Beirut(s). Dima paid the service driver and accompanied me to al-Madina Theatre to make sure I could find it. Deserted during the war, this newly remolded cinema sat in a prominent location on the main shopping drag in West Beirut and served as a spatial center point for most of the events I attended during the fall festival season in 2005. Although some of the same faces would be seen at many of these events, each attracted a different sector of Beirut's middle class

public culture. Over the next couple months this theater would host Docudays 7th annual documentary film festival (November 6th-12th), a tribute to filmmaker Borhan Alaouie (also spelled Bourhan Alawiye) (November 13th-15th), Zawaya Encounters with cultural expression (November 13th-16th), and Ashkal Alwan's third Home Works forum on cultural practices (November 17th-24th).

In this chapter I recount my second period of fieldwork in Beirut. On occasion I will refer to my earlier pre-dissertation fieldwork in order to elaborate on the ethnographic context and give contrast to the changes occurring during this extended period. My aim here is to ethnographically engage Beirut as a site of deterritorialized and localized alternative media production and exhibition. In this way, I privilege Beirut as a site of cosmopolitan experimental culture. Building on notions of the playground, I investigate the competing discourses that both engender and restrict public engagement in projects documenting, narrating, and curating the Lebanese experience with political violence. As such, this chapter toggles between moments of public interaction, private conversations, and urban description. Ultimately, I attempt to elucidate a complicated set of conditions that co-exist with the celebration of Lebanese art and film by western audiences and critics, discussed at length in the third section of this dissertation, "Archive of the Undead." For now, I enter the fall festival season amid a pensive moment of civil unrest and political upheaval. That is a moment of uncertainty, between the assassination of Rafiq Hariri and the 2006 July War between the Israeli Defense Forces and the Hezbollah militia.

MASSAKER

The "Civil Violence & War Memories: Here and Elsewhere" film series and panel discussions had begun a few days prior to my arrival. UMAM – Documentation and

Research, a non-profit funded by European cultural missions, had organized the conference with the premiere of their film, *Massaker*. The aim of UMAM “is to address the necessity and feasibility of actively revisiting Lebanon’s violent past” (UMAM 2005:3). Over the next two days, round tables on “Outspoken suffering vs. silent ‘evil’: To whom shall we give the voice?” and “Paths to reconciliation: Amnesty vs. justice and where memory dwells” featured participants from Lebanon, Algeria, France, and Germany. The discussion mostly focused around the politics of representing the victimizers in the historical record of a violent event. This multi-language event was simultaneously translated into French, English, and Arabic via wireless headsets provided free of charge. The immediacy of translation was provided at nearly all the conferences, lectures, and discussions I attended at al-Masrah Theatre. A service the trilingual Lebanese could easily offer their visiting audiences.

Massaker, the main event of this short conference, was a new documentary that features the testimonies of Christian militiamen recounting their attack on the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps during the 1982 Israeli siege on Beirut. That evening, hundreds of people crowded into the newly remodeled al-Madina Theatre. Akram Zaatari, a prominent video artist and archival curator at the Arab Image Foundation introduced the filmmakers and translated their opening remarks into Arabic for the audience. He would later be tasked with moderating the question and answer session, which extended for over two hours after the screening.

Massaker features interviews with six members of the Christian militia that conducted the slaughter of men, women, and children in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps during the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982. The ninety-eight minute film cuts between these interviewees, all obscured by lighting and framing, to recount the build up to and slaughter of men, women, and children. Much as everyone already suspected, the

Maronite Phalange militiamen, not only gained tactical support from the Israeli Defense Forces, but they also traveled to Israel to receive training prior to the attack. The minute details slow the delivery of the actual massacre. Rather than suspense, since everyone knew the outcome already, the focus on the soldier stories that told of friends bonding in times of crisis tries to humanize these killers. The claustrophobic space of their interview locations, however, emulates the simplistic emptiness of an interrogation room. Incessantly smoking, these men refuse to be hated and regret is largely absent from their testimonies. Through one stretch of interviews, the filmmakers show the militiamen photographs taken of corpses strewn in the streets after the massacre. The decision to include this evidentiary device was no doubt included to provoke the men's emotions for the men. Remarkably, these horrific images hold little emotive intensity for these men.

The public screening of this movie to a packed theater (est. 400-500 people), perhaps as many as were killed in the massacre documented, perhaps not so many. The screening prompted a long and heated discussion afterward that revealed many of the problems existing since the war. Based on remarks, these problems continue to haunt the Lebanese memory of the past and understanding of the present. At the center of their project the filmmakers said they wanted to provoke discussion and the decision to give voice to the victimizers revolved around an unresolved question about the ethics of objectivity and the potential for empowering them rather than holding them accountable. As a historical document, the film has huge merit for contextualizing and embodying the political violence of this event and its build up. Of course, the details of the political alliances with Israel and the delineation of killings and massacres are already well known, even if enveloped in official amnesia. As the organizers of the UMAM event state, at the end of the war a Lebanese regime emerged on the promises of forgiveness

and “closing the files,” but former supporters now characterize it as “an oppressive security establishment” (UMAM 2005:3).

Although Sabra and Shatila infamously remembered for the massacre of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Palestinians in 1982, the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon have consistently been the sites of uncompromising brutality. The Palestinian refugees suffered other massacres during the war, at the hands of both the Maronites and Muslims. Between 1985 and 1988 the Lebanese army with Syria’s support, engage a “war of the camps” to prevent the resurgence of Palestinian power (Norton 2007:23). Both the Shatila and the Burj-el Barajneh Palestinian refugee camps were attacked in May 1985, with much fewer voices of condemnation compared to the reaction to the Sabra and Shatila massacre. According to UN officials, 635 were killed and 2,500 wounded in that massacre. A Palestinian refugee camp again became the site of mass violence in the 2007 summer battles between the Lebanese Army and “terrorist infiltrators” (*Fatah al-Islam*) in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp outside the northern city of Tripoli again brought the country to the brink of disaster. Initiated after a group of bandits robbed a bank in Tripoli, while the army pursued them into the refugee camp, an act prohibited to the Lebanese Army under the Cairo Agreement of 1969. The army’s pursuit of these bank robbers cost many lives of soldiers, militants, and civilians and displaced most of the inhabitants once again. And yet, the mission was a success, the refugees migrated back to their rubble homes, and the head of the Lebanese Army is now heralded as the best “compromise” candidate for the presidency – currently vacant for past several months during the ongoing political stall. Meanwhile, these refugee camps remain over crowded, poorly served, and a major site of neglect.

The comments after the screening of *Massaker* raised at least two important points to draw attention to here. First, the issue of amnesty for all militias involved has

meant that, not only has the process of bringing people to justice been displaced, but it has also allowed these alleged war criminals to continue serving as the spokesmen of their sectarian enclaves as members of parliament. The potential for this violence to return is captured in two commonly used metaphors: the problems have been “swept under the rug” and “the seeds for future conflict have been planted.” This idea of hidden or buried problems convey a great deal about the visibility of past trauma in Lebanon. This public secret or official amnesia generates a discourse of invisibility and hypersensitivity. Of course, the potential of the negative is ever-present in these sorts of ‘cover ups’.

Taussig’s characterization of truth and secrecy draw on Benjamin, he says, “truth isn’t a matter of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does justice to it” (1999:2). As truth is equated with the public secret (as opposed to the secret), for Taussig knowing the “truth” means, “knowing what not to know” or “that which is generally known but cannot be articulated.” Taussig argues that the secret does not really exist (truth is known all along) but from the public secret comes the great “as if.” Retracing several ethnographies on “secret societies,” he marks the problem faced by anthropologists unable to master the secret. The “‘object of study’ curls back on one, enmeshing in its coils the analysis supposed to master it.” In fact, he speaks of the secret’s ability to “contaminate” the study, and questions “the possibilities of determining truth in a social field in which knowledge is power and the reality of illusion serves the social contract” (1999:104).

Documentary experimentalist Akram Zaatari conveyed the dynamics of public secrecy in Lebanon to me. He told me that scandal did not exist in Lebanon, because everything is already known and the government tightly controls the limits of permissibility. If defacement enacts Hegel’s notion of the “labor of the negative” in its

manifestation of outrage, then the official suspension of outrage holds at bay the return of the negative. But seen another way, the Lebanese wars are the irruption of the negative that revealed the public secrets already embedded in the multicultural golden age. The aftermath of this massive release of the negative has not dissipated and the state fear of scandal has evacuated justice from its of amnesiac security apparatuses. This discourse exists alongside others that are often contradictory, like the hopeful sentiment that the Lebanese have learned their lesson and would never let another civil war happen again. This also means that there has been no closure to this trauma and it always threatens to return.

The second issue that emerged from the *Massaker* discussion involves another form of invisibility, the absence of Palestinian victims at this event. Audience members complained that the event was not even announced in the Palestinian camps, however, the organizers claimed there that they had made an effort to place announcements in Cola (one of the city's main transportation hubs near the camps). Speaking with a colleague working in one of Beirut's refugee camps, who virulently denounced the film for its poor taste, said that she had serious doubts that the Palestinians would want to see it. To relive the experience of the massacre through the empowered voices of the victimizers provides little closure for the victims. In which case, one has to wonder for whom the filmmakers made the film. If the film was not intended as a trial, but as a social enquiry on violence, then who stands to benefit from it? Indeed, the growing popularity of these events are typically attended by a particular class of society that has bohemian, liberal, and western theoretical sensibilities, while remaining essentially inaccessible for poorer communities, namely the Palestinian refugees, working class Shi'a, Syrian laborers, Asian and African domestic servants, etc.

Massaker certainly was not made with Jalal Toufic in mind. At an earlier screening sponsored by the American University in Beirut (AUB), Toufic declared, “I can’t tell you how many things I dislike about this film.” The effort to make these militiamen unidentifiable (at least working within an aesthetic of anonymity even if tattoos or something else could ultimately give them away) strained the latent desire to name and identify the culprits. He critiqued the use of the photos shown to the men for fully giving in to the objectivity of the image. He critiqued the film for its evidentiary pretenses and dismissed the piece for not being in line with the standards developed by him and other artists. Contrasting this film with the work created by the Lebanese artists attune to the latency of images – that is archivists of the “undead” like Walid Raad, Joanna Hadjithomas, Lamia Joreige, and Ghassan Salhab – Toufic suggests that the filmmakers of *Massaker* had made it the wrong way. For these theoretical elites, who have grappled most rigorously with the crisis of representing the war, assertions like Toufic invoke another mode of othering. One reporter described it as a club that had some sort of moral authority on how to represent the war and that the *Massaker* filmmakers were not part of it. The connotation being that a dogma has emerged that has a very narrow frame of acceptance. This implicit cultural arrogance should be kept in mind when the work of this moral authority is discussed in chapters four and five.

A couple of weeks after the screening a friend introduced me to Monika Borgmann, the German woman who made *Massaker* with her Lebanese husband Lokman Slim. She was very excited to talk to me about her film. She seemed very drunk and was standing so close to me that I had to turn my face to the side so that our faces did not touch. The café lobby of al-Madina Theatre often became very crowded and loud between events. In fact, many people remained in the lobby during screenings or performances, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, and conversing with friends. I asked

Monika how they had obtained permission to screen *Massaker*, given its sensitive topic. She told me how they had been struggling with this issue and only got permission the afternoon before the screening. She relayed their plan of action dependent on what they heard from the censorship authorities. If they had not heard from the censors, then they would have gone ahead. But had they been told that they could not screen it, then they would have made a big media protest.

Given the clamorous reception during the question and answer session, I asked her what she thought about all the debating after the film. She happily replied, “The purpose of the film was to open discussion.”²⁰ This is fitting with UMAM’s belief in the unalienable right to remember even if not protected by legal code. Since she privileged discussion in and of itself, I wondered what she envisioned was the importance of this discussion or if there were other motives driving her. Rather, it is perhaps the narrow intentions of her motives that reveal the machinations of European humanism and American neoliberalism, one that favors political transparency in nonwestern situations but refuses its own accountability. Monika and Lokman were already working on their next film. She would not tell me about the topic, but confirmed that it would be another controversial, debate stirring film. Maybe her drunkenness was showing through, but she seemed very pleased with this notion of stirring debate. What sort of ethics does this motive presume? How do the ethics of Jalal Toufic and the other avant-garde elite differ from her? What does she imagine are the worst consequences of her provocation?

²⁰ My usage of quotations in these ethnographic utterances is meant to evoke a spoken sentiment, but I have editorialized these comments for the sake of clarity.

BOHEMIAN PLAYGROUNDS

After building up the merits of Lebanese experimental documentary, this ethnographic chapter intends to demonstrate the fragility and tension of this work and the conspiratorial context in which it contends. While these endeavors do create new media flows with transformative potential, to characterize them strictly within a celebratory dynamic belies a more complicated terrain of overlapping but disaggregated spheres of participation differentiated by modes of production, circulation of exhibition, and ideologies of aesthetics. This is not a reception study, however, as my questions are not about audience interpretation. In one regard, the audience is incestuous, insular, and closed around particular cliques of artists and bohemian groupies. Tracking the appearance of certain middle class desires and sensibilities within Beirut's cosmopolitan and bohemian art scene could easily evidence an illusion to elitist gangs of art snobs marauding the city's bourgeois public culture. For instance, during my 2001 summer research trip, the Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie organized a traveling film festival, Ciné Caravane, featuring films from across the Francophone world and beyond. The opening event was a screening of *Le Roi Danse* (2000), a French-Belgian-German coproduction about Louis XIV, at the ancient Roman Hippodrome in Srou (also known as Tyr). "Hanan" and "Zein" agreed to chaperone me to the festival. We encountered traffic on the way from Beirut, so when we arrived the movie was already in progress. Several dozen people sat in rows and clusters of folding chairs. I looked at the audience to see if I might recognize someone. They were generally well-heeled and most seemed disinterested in the historical drama unfolding on screen. My escorts later remarked contemptuously, "Everyone there was from Beirut." The Beirut elite hoping around the country's historic sites watching the best of "world cinema" revealed an

ambivalent scene about elite cultural consumption, further evidenced by Hanan's own contempt.

Two weeks after my trip to Srour's Hippodrome screening, I organized a trip to Sidon (south from Beirut on the road to Srour) to attend a Palestinian film festival. AL-JANA and the Maarouf Saad Cultural Center organized this four-day festival called, "Between two Intifadas: Palestine in the new cinema." Before the screenings, an Australian reporter accompanied me to the Shouf Mountains to visit the Beiteddine fortress and spend the day hiking around the historic Druze villages. On the drive down to Sidon, my friend suggested that I claim Canadian citizenship if anyone asks. "The people here have bitter memories of American interventions," he said. In contrast to the outdoor screening in Srour, this festival crowded hundreds of people into a hot ballroom with poor ventilation. The attendance was high and dress more conservative than Beirut's cosmopolitan elite. In addition to the young and glamorous, the elderly, families, and young children also attended these screenings. Nobody seemed concerned about our presence.

Although cliques and gangs do perpetuate an incestuous public sphere, on the other hand, the production and disruption of cultural objects, images, and discourse in these sites also evidence heterogeneous, poly-vocal, and transnational sensibilities. The diversity of Lebanon has long been its defining characteristic in its celebrated status as a multicultural democracy. But like other celebrated examples of compatible diversity (in particular the former Yugoslavia), their "failure" radically transforms their positive representations into its opposite, violent sectarian conflict. I highlight this binary transformation to also hint at another binary ubiquitously used about Lebanon is as a threshold between east and west, someplace with the sensibilities of both eastern traditions and western liberalism. Like other port cities, Istanbul, Tangier, Mumbai, Hong

Kong, etc., Beirut's coast provided a literalized line of demarcation, not only between land and water, but between ideological terrains and cultural regimes. Indeed, the Lebanese coast is where petroleum transformed from a piped extract to a tanker's cargo, which engendered the emergence of Beirut as the major banking center of the region. The influx of capital without the loss of natural resources followed a succession of colonial influence. During 500 years of Ottoman rule the Christian communities huddled in enclaves. These times of conquest followed the crusader alliances with divergent Christian sects. Over a succession twenty-five centuries, armies have written their victories on the canyons of *Nahr el-Kelb*. So when European expansionist projects intersected with the tumultuous power differential being played out during World War One, newly drawn borders suddenly made contiguous populations into distinct national subjects. During a period that celebrated revolutionary nationalisms, however, a unified national vision struggled to engender a Lebanese identity. When annexed by the French to antagonize the Syrians, the Muslims lost colonial favor to the Christian communities, particularly the Maronites. The very assertion of a Lebanese nationalist identity occurred in confrontation with the revolutionary assertions of pan-Arabism.

Cultural geography has played a significant role in the construction of social and cultural identity of Lebanon and engendered a population of linguistic and cultural polyglots. The Lebanese under such diverse and uncertain conditions have fostered a translatability to their identity composition, which echoes Salman Rushdie's assessment of exilic subjectivity. Remarking on the etymology of "translation" as "carried across," Rushdie says, "Having been borne across the world, we are translated men" (1991:17). While issues of identity are important, I am also trying to give more attention to the spaces where these types of critiques become public and to decipher who occupies these spaces and draws on the agency of these sites. This means scrutinizing both the emergent

high culture scene in Lebanon and the flow of participation in the global circuit of film and art festivals. If I privilege the position of the cosmopolitan artist-filmmaker, I must be careful to consider what that position entails. That said, close attention to the sociopolitical dimensions of these transnational “agents” enables a better analysis of how these circuits operate and thus how they are manipulated both by “subaltern” individuals and “imperial” ones.

The lingering imagination of both a cosmopolitan “golden age” and a violently divided “civil war” inform the way Beirut’s public spaces take shape and become embodied. Concurrent with postwar Beirut’s emergence as an Arab media center, its high-profile reconstruction projects nostalgically perpetuate the city’s transnational history as a “contact zone,” where the Occident and Orient “meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt 1992). If, as Borneman argues, the Middle East has become the “new epicenter of world power” (2003), a site conceptually triangulated within the heightened polarization between the United States and Europe, then the transnational life worlds of individuals situated in Lebanon help to reveal the personal and social dimensions of this imagined structure. Guyer helps elaborate this point with her recent assessment of the new scholarship on the Middle East. “The most striking singularity,” she says, “... and what may make it an intellectual ‘epicenter,’ seems to me to be its principled framing of contingency, the creation of events” (2004). In regard to Arab avant-garde art and cinema, Beirut has become positioned as a site for radical experimentation. In order to understand how this non-western location enables the experimental production of radically oriented and globally influential media, I explore the intersection between the global and local as “sites of assimilation and cultural reinvention” (Hay 1997:213). The intersection of the global and local fosters certain fantasies about Lebanese cosmopolitanism and the way Beirut opens itself to experimental pliability.

Samir Khalaf shows ambivalence to these notions in his consideration of Lebanon as a playground. He characterizes the use of this cliché in two ways, as either “an ultra-desirable place, such as the ‘Switzerland’ or ‘Paris’ of the Middle East or, on the other hand, as a flawed and “artificial entity bent on self-destruction” (2001:302). He offers five manifestations of the playground. First, as a free and open space, “a place of refuge for dissidents or a gateway for itinerant groups” (2001:303). Second, as a site for the Lebanese to act out their “proclivity for playfulness” (2001:304). Third, a place thriving on gamemanship in which everything becomes possible legitimately or otherwise, but here Benign play may “degenerate into malevolent and foul play” (2001:305). Fourth, as a place of “convivial and gregarious character” that favors family and community at the expense “of the broader loyalties to public welfare and national consciousness” (2001:306-7). Fifth, as an international resort, which Khalaf blames for increasingly making Lebanon “a nation of services,” filled with “its full share of houses of ill-repute, casinos, gambling parlours, nightclubs, discos, bars, escort bureaus and other dens of *wickedness*” (2001:307-8).

While this list of characteristics is certainly useful for tracing the multifaceted discourse of Lebanon as a playground, there is an underlying notion of right and wrong embedded in Khalaf's descriptions. In this manner he seems to rely heavily on a notion of liberalism, in which he suggests that a playground “has also cathartic and redemptive features,” but only in so far as it “becomes an ideal site for cultivating the virtues of civility and commitment to the courtesies of the rules of the game” (2001:302). Inherently Khalaf expects that people can and will behave according to “the rules of the game.” Bringing Khalaf's portrayal of playground to light here is important for foregrounding the way the Lebanese in the diaspora come to Lebanon to make their films (referred to as “tourists” by resident filmmakers), but it also foregrounds the way postwar

Beirut has become, or is becoming, a site of experimentation. The vital urgency of this experiment draws not just, if importantly, on playfulness, but also of a deeper pursuit to transform the social imaginary and resist the downward spiral of hopelessness.

For independent filmmakers in Beirut, the city itself is the object of intense scrutiny and their work reflects a deep concern for the visual and spatial dynamics of a war-torn and divided city. Public space is increasingly re-imagined as a site for staging media and art events as well as fostering public participation. Toward the end of the prolonged war, several artistic collectives emerged and began presenting theatrical dramas, reciting poetry, and exhibiting deeply personal video essays about the war. During this time the well-known novelist Elias Khoury reopened the Beirut Theater and generated a creative and critical art scene. Later, the Ayloul Festival under his direction broadened art exhibition spatially across several sites in the city. The influx of “returnees” further revitalized independent art and media. This served as the precedent for several art and film festivals to materialize in the years to come. These endeavors joined eclectic forms of art – drama, music, poetry, video, etc. – and set the tone for performatively mediating the war and other social issues.

This provided a variety of venues dotted across the city as important sites where the public can engage art and films from Lebanon and further afield. The exhibition of work intensified with seasonal festivals, particularly dense in the fall. Many of these events are designed to build cultural capital and prestige for Beirut as it tries to reclaim a cosmopolitan allure and compete with other cities in the region. In fact, due to the combination of transnational populations, freedoms of expression, and intellectual traditions, Beirut is deemed “the only city in the region where Arab artists can show their work” (Wright 2002:16). As indicted earlier, the Beirut cultural scene often extends across the country with festivals and screenings that take place in ancient amphitheaters

or other historic settings, but these events may not be effective in or even intended to attract local audiences.

The relationship between modes of social membership and spatial participation are central to these new critiques of civil society in urban environments. In the case of Beirut, the disjunctures between adjacent neighborhoods (Khuri 1975), the participation in inter-sectarian organizations (Joseph 1983), the modes of rapid urbanization (Khalaf and Kongstad 1973), the violent destruction followed by post-war reconstruction projects (Harb El-Kak 2001, Sawalha 2002), the restriction to refugee sites (Peteet 1991), and the emergence of uncanny, fantasy spaces (Volk 2001) all mark the charged relationship Beirutis have with their city. Furthermore, the various ways these filmmakers channel finances, materials, ideas, and their films and videos between Beirut and sites around the globe are contingent on their ability to participate in, if not belong to, multiple transnational sites. In Beirut, their membership in particular social groups and the sites they occupy informs the way they participate socially and politically in Beirut.

DOCUMENTARY DEPRESSION

When I met with Mohamed Hashem, the director of the DocuDays festival, in 2001, he was cobbling together the funding and entries for the third installment of this annual festival. When I met with him again in 2005, DocuDays, then in its seventh year, remained the only documentary festival in the Arab world. The festival had gained a reputation in Europe and has garnered increasing credibility in the region. During this festival season, Hashem expanded the program to include a full-day conference on the state of documentary in the region followed by a pitching session where filmmakers could get feedback and attract potential producers. In Hashem's assessment, despite the proliferation of filmmakers, the lack of documentary producers rendered the industry

null. His ongoing efforts and this “Documentary Encounter” round-table intended to change the situation and foster a network of filmmakers, producers, and distributors.

We met at Lina’s café on the upper end of Hamra. Lina’s was one of the new cafés to emerge in the wake of Modca’s closure. Mohammad ordered an espresso and I ordered an American coffee, the two cheapest items on the menu. Mohammad lit a cigarette and slumped against the wall. I asked him about the UN investigation of the Hariri assassination, the Syrian withdrawal, and the ongoing car-bombings. He talked about a general state of depression in society. Not restricted to Lebanon, he spoke of a general depression throughout the region, in which artists, filmmakers, and intellectuals are over-burden by the political impossibility of their cultural creations. Mohammad said that people are making films out of obligation, but that the quality suffers. Mohammad blamed the lack of a coherent industry for this poor quality, but also implied that the social and political turmoil delimited rather than fostered creative responses. Embedded in Mohammad’s reading of the situation, Arab documentary required normalized conditions of political stability and social dependability. The celebration of Lebanese experimental art in contrast would suggest both different readings of “quality” and different structures of production at work in the public culture of Beirut. Rather than entirely celebratory or depressed pessimism, I suggest a more complicated and multifaceted depiction of Beirut as a site of assimilation and innovation.

Although the social malaise referenced by Mohammad emerged from the state of political uncertainty, other discourses also highlighted the economic stall as delimiting opportunities and sociability. Talking with the Scandinavian proprietor of a local café, she told me that business had suffered from the bombings. She said, “People don’t go out as much. A friend tells me that her boys never go out any more. They just stay home.” A friend on his way to study in France told me that the French embassy had received a

record number of scholarship applications that year, because everyone wanted to leave. He said, “It’s the economic situation.” This phrase betrays a class sensibility that takes for granted the ability to form an exit strategy. Although hundreds of thousands of people in Lebanon are living in poverty conditions or worse, these people do not have the agency to pursue a western “economic situation.” Why is the economic explanation so normatively blanketing? These economic narratives participating in reifying discourses initiated under the postwar Hariri reconstruction plan, which attempted to capture the economies of contraband dominant during the war. Along with this went selling the Lebanese on a neoliberal conception of the productive individual. The “failure” of these policies remained strangely invisible. Despite the economic stagnation, many people continued to frequent cafés, go shopping, drive expensive vehicles, and vacation abroad. How does not leaving the house translate to economic motivation for emigration? How do codes of claustrophobia, depression, and stagnation hint at a different public secret about the ‘economic situation’? How do distracted notions of middle class downward mobility relate to the prevalence of suspicion, paranoia, and conspiracy theories?

Starbucks cafés across Beirut attracted dozens of middle class college students attending one of the city’s foreign universities, the American University in Beirut, the Lebanese American University, the University of St. Joseph, the University of the Holy Spirit. Corporate cafés like Starbucks provide a sanctuary of modernity for young adults feeling restrained by parents and other social expectation, but these places are not cheap by Lebanese standards. A large cup of black coffee cost \$3-5 dollars, as Starbucks encourage you to upgrade your drink or add edible items to your order your total may double. At prices like these only certain “economic situations” are welcome, which financially restricts clientele, but the ubiquitous security checkpoints at entrances to malls for security measures makes the policing of these sites more literalized. Beirut is

notorious for its high culture nightlife, a reputation from the “golden era” that lived on through the war and thereafter. Western journalists from the war era typically wax nostalgically about how much fun it was to be in Beirut (see Raad 1996). The expense associated with popularity in places like Monot Street and Gemayze, however, seemed in drastic disjuncture with the narratives of downtrodden economic situations. How do cultural excesses like experimental film and art “make sense” in a city where the cosmopolitan is so contentiously intertwined with the politics of international authority? How do the disenfranchised relate to these narratives? The majority of my data comes from interviews and conversations I had in cafés and bars like these. In this way, my study remained narrowly confined to the discourses of bourgeois drinking establishments. The personal and familial lives of these individuals remained hidden from me. By delineation of my study, they were solely public individuals, but in these public moments they shared intimate stories and ideas, dreams and failures, love and loss.

This state of depression, which Mohammad personally exhibited and publicly diagnosed, sits in contrast to the atmosphere I experienced in 2001. I remember that summer with great fondness and feelings of being alive in the world. In great part, this state of feeling in the field rose from the excitement the Lebanese had about the near future of industrial success (Westmoreland 2002). Over the course of a six-week span, I met with and interviewed more than forty individuals who were in an informed position about film and media in Lebanon. These expert “informants” included, individuals working with film, video art, documentary film, those working within the satellite TV industry, festival organizers, curators, editors, music video producers, students, instructors, and administrators of A/V programs, NGO members, ciné-club founders, painters, photographers, writers, critics, journalists, theorists, officials at the National Cinémathèque and the National Film Organization, among others.

While the disparagement regarding the various limitations in local production, exhibition, and distribution as well as the ambivalent dependency on foreign funders permeated the discourse on filmmaking in 2001, the constant appearance of feature productions, film festivals, ciné clubs, and university programs often eluded to a “renaissance” of Lebanese cinema and art. Ironically, during the interim years, Beirut’s art and film culture did grow in scope and benefited from post-911 funding fetishes. Since I came in 2001, dozens of international artists, curators, and art critics have explored the emergence of Beirut as a superlative site of postcolonial avant-gardism. Several art journals and international festivals have featured Lebanese media art and cinema (David 2002, Naaman 2002, Wright 2002). These events and publications generally feature the same dozen or so people, sometimes reprinting a short essay several times. The international focus on these individuals articulate Beirut’s art elite through a series of transnational associations. This elite, referred to earlier in their moral authority over representations of the war, have produced vibrantly poignant critiques of orientalist and nationalist representations, which I discuss in the following chapters. However, their situation is not indicative of all Lebanese.

FLÂNEUR PARANOIA

Experienced through individuals like Mohammad, the current state of depression occurs at an ambivalent juncture for Lebanese experimental art and film. The political situation in Lebanon in 2005 faced its greatest challenge since the official end of the war. While the withdrawal of the Israeli Defense Forces and the collapse of the South Lebanon Army ushered in a victorious spirit of perseverance, the withdrawal of the Syrian Army imposed by international intervention left many in fear and despair. This is not a

statement of political endorsement for Syria, but the manifestation of uncertainty in the wake of political violence.

I agreed to meet with Mohammad again in a few days to work on the abstracts for the panels he wanted to organize around different themes of documentary development in the region. I had volunteered to help him with the festival so that I could get a better sense of the everyday obstacles faced by event organizers in Beirut. On my walk home I reflected on my meeting with Mohammad and the task he had assigned to me. I attached a small microphone to my iPod and began recording my observations. Holding the iPod to my cheek allowed me to walk through the streets appearing like I was talking on the phone. By disguising the suspicious activity of talking to myself with a cell phone charade, I also appeared to be camouflaging my surreptitious act of recording secret memos. Initially, I gave little concern to this potentially duplicitous performance and this method of immediately reflecting my fieldnotes orally became a ritual for my evening walks back to Getawi.

In the early weeks of my research, I spent much of my time re-exploring Beirut. The walk from Hamra back home would take at least an hour and would require that I pass through many different sections of the city. I'd head down from Hamra to Ras Beirut. Sometimes, I'd walk along the Corniche up to the McDonalds and Hardrock Café, where the American Embassy used to stand before exploding under a massive car bomb in 1983. A little further along was the site of the Hariri assassination. The crater in the street remained blocked off. Just off the street St. George Hotel stood derelict with its windows all blown out. Walking past the Holiday Inn, a massive ruin destroyed in 1975 before it ever opened, I cross over into the Beirut Central District. Amid lots bulldozed empty, relics of the past rise from the rubble in their newly refurbished splendor. Near Martyr Square, I pass by the newly erected Mohammed Al Amin Mosque, where Rafiq

Hariri's tomb awaits completion. Crossing Martyr Square into Gemayze, I walk past the popular bars built into historic souk stalls. At the end of Gemayze, I climb the hill to Orthodox Hospital and then proceed another fifteen minutes to the Getawi Hospital, where my building is located. Day after day I repeat these steps, changing course here and there. Following paths to events and appointments, I tracked the city and the city tracked me.

I had two frightening incidents that put an end to my long evening walks. One late evening as I neared the end of Gemayze two men approached me from out of the shadows. I played the dumb American, but they insisted on searching my backpack. I asked if they were police as they had no uniforms and presented no identification. They said they were, but as one of the men was pulling out my laptop I became concerned that they were unscrupulous vigilantes. I rambled on in English and they let me go, but watched me suspiciously as I hurried off. My late night wonderings through East Beirut with a large book bag presented a rather suspicious act during a period when bombs were exploding every few weeks. I began taking service taxis in the evening, but one evening I was dropped on the main road and had to walk several blocks home. Heading up to the turn I passed by several policemen and an idle black Ford Blazer, while talking on my iPod. As I turned to head across the passover, I became aware that the vehicle was slowly following me. I quickly turned off my iPod and put it away. I could hear the deep bass of its muffler as I walked up into the Getawi neighborhood. I kept telling myself, "Act normal. Don't turn around. Just keep walking." They followed me four blocks like that. As I turned right in front of the hospital, the truck sped up past me and several men in military fatigues jumped out and surrounded me. I cooperated. After they left, I pulled my iPod back out and began to recount the event:

Well, my nerves are a little rattled after that, after being followed for several blocks by a ... hee hee hee ... by a black blazer with four or more military personnel inside. Followed me ... they followed me very slowly, behind me ... I knew they were there, but just kept walking. Eventually they pulled up in front of me and got out, wanted to search my bag. And ah, asked what I was doing here in Lebanon. Asked if I was with the CIA. But I ... ah, no such luck. So um ... I um ... I told them I was studying Arabic at the *markaz al-francawiya* and the *markaz al-russiya*, umm ... and ... and ... umm ... and asked if I was working with the CIA and I said, "no." And asked if I lived near here, indeed I do. And they were nice and said, "Have a nice night. Thanks for your cooperation." Oye. Um ... I have a feeling that I might be arousing more suspicion while I am here. Uh, that is not wanted, but what can I do?

What did I know at that moment about the suspicion I might arouse? I knew primarily that I was a suspicious body and that I would have to be vigilant about negotiating my identity in a variety of settings. For instance, in a service taxi on the way to a friend's house for dinner, a young woman learns my nationality and asks, "Are you a detective?" Or, for example, taking architectural pictures one day in Aschrafiya's historic neighborhoods, a man chased me down on his scooter and interrogated me about the camera. Dima suggested he was concerned that I might be scouting for sites to bomb. Again, on a weekend hiking trip, as I ascended to the top of Mount Lebanon, a middle aged Lebanese man, perhaps sensing that we were alone, said I could now admit my true identity as a spy. Also, having coffee with an acquaintance, she says, "All of a sudden George Bush is in love with Lebanon. We see FBI on our streets. People don't want the Americans here. Except for you, of course." But when writing down my contact information for a Lebanese producer, he read my last name and began to laugh, "It's too good to be true." In the postscript of an email from a Lebanese academic, he channels the thrust of these suspicious assertions straight into my name, "PS your name sounds scary. hope no relation to the vietnamese war criminal [*sic*]." My suspicious body bore a suspicious name and my suspicious project unfolded in suspicious time.

Since the assassination of Hariri, tensions had continued to rise. The convivial solidarity of mass demonstrations after his death had given way to a political vacuum, international intervention, recurrent violence, and a pensive social condition. The removal of Syrian troops, the ongoing UN investigation, and assassinations targeting opponents of Syria in press and politics, encouraged my presence to be read according to easy conspiracy theories. How did these pensive conditions affect the work of artists and filmmakers? How did these conditions manifest in the lived experience of creative endeavors? Despite the political context of uncertainty, 2005 had proven a stellar year for Lebanese art and cinema. Several feature films premiered in Lebanon and had gained international attention, but these isolated successes obscured the ordinary difficulty faced by various media artists.

INDUSTRIAL SUBJECTIVITY

When I got home, Dima was engulfed in a cloud of cigarette smoke and I could see the glow of her computer screen illuminating the smoke. She said some friends were coming over and that I might like to talk to them. “Nisreen” and “Ammar,” her boyfriend from Algeria, needed a place to stay the night. Nisreen had attended university with Dima, where both had studied filmmaking. After graduating, Nisreen talked her way into a job at one of the new post-production facilities that had opened in Beirut in recent years. She dedicated herself to learning how to operate the high-end equipment. For months she stayed after hours to watch the European trained colorist and practice intensely, before they let her start working on projects. The bulk of the work services the post-production process of television advertising produced in the Gulf States. These companies hire European directors to shoot commercials. Nisrene says, “The Italian cinematographers are the best to work for, because they are so good that their work needs

very little correction. The French are too technical.” In this environment she had learned a great deal about the filmmaking process and was trying to position herself for schooling and work abroad.

Dima talked about her efforts to find work after graduating. Unwittingly, she auditioned for a film with Samir Al-Ghosseini. Known for his “soft porn” films from the “golden age,” like *Kitat Sharee Al-Hamra’ / The Cats of Hamra Street* (1971), he wanted Dima and the other women auditioning to perform a wet T-shirts scene. She had abandoned acting ambitions after that incident and found her current job as a current affairs television producer. She liked the people she worked with at this station, but often complained about the way the company was taking advantage of its employees – refusing to pay people, firing people without notice, expecting people to work impossible hours. Eventually, Dima left Beirut to work in the media industry in the Gulf. These women’s stories did not fit with the description one film professor had relayed to me. He bemoaned how tedious teaching had become with uninspiring students. He said that most of his students were women, but that the majority of them were only there to get a degree to increase their marriageability. “They are not very committed or talented toward cinema.” He said that the males pursuing this path were generally very serious. Since there is so much expectation on them to lead the family and be breadwinners, he suggested that the male students make a bigger commitment by choosing a field like this.

In conversations like the one with Dima and Nisreen, a variety of individuals relayed the challenges they faced in their professional pursuit of a media career. “Hovig”, an Armenian filmmaker, told me about the scripts he wrote after the war that were inspired by walking through the remains of ‘no man’s land’. One of the scripts had been accepted at a screenwriting workshop in France, where a producer offered him US\$100,000 to shoot it on video. At the time he refused because he wanted to shoot on

film, but in hindsight he realized this as a terrible mistake. He would willingly shoot it on anything now, but the problem is that the landscape has changed and he cannot make the film without reconstructing the postwar deconstructed landscape. He introduced me to another Armenian filmmaker, “Anoush,” who had worked on several Lebanese feature films as well as for an advertising production company.

Anoush talked about the way Beirut had become a major advertising center during the postwar era. The Gulf companies hire European directors and cinematographers, use Lebanese production and screen talent, and shoot in Lebanon, because of the diversity of the Lebanese landscape. “If you shoot in Dubai it looks like Dubai, but Lebanon can easily be made to look like some place else.” In addition to ecological and architectural diversity, Lebanon’s cultural diversity manifests in desirable phenotypical traits, like a blond hair, green eyed, Arabic speaking actresses. The inclusion of these Aryan fantasies within Byzantine or Haussmann inspired architectural schemes designed to sell products to a distinctly conservative businessman and housewife in the Gulf deserve more attention as sites for re-imagining modernity. For now, I merely want to gesture at some of the fantasies entertained by Gulf Arabs when selling their products that draw on Lebanon’s reputation as a buffer between converging cosmopolitanisms. The confluence of various sensibilities converging at this site has apparently afforded the Lebanese only one favor, the fluidity of identity, the translatability of discourses, and the diversity of expertise. The Lebanese are the great mediators of the region, transforming public memory simultaneously in Arabic, French, English, and sometime Armenian. Appealing to the fantasies of oil sheiks and western foundations simultaneously is both their asset and their plight.

Anoush pays her bills by working for an advertising production company owned by some friends. She said that most work comes from elsewhere and that the amount of

money spent on advertising was massive. “The money to make one 30 second commercial could finance 3 features.” With US\$500,000 budgets on hand, these Lebanese production houses were not interested in producing a feature for a fraction of the income. Anoush thought that with a good distributor a film could easily make its money back.

The conversation turned to censorship issues and the Armenians brought up Randa Shahal’s *Civilisées / Moutahaddirat* (1999), about a group of people living in a derelict mansion during the war. Anoush said that getting a permit to shoot was not so much the issue as a permit to screen or distribute. For example, *Civilisées* played for two days at a film festival in Beirut before the censors said Shahal would have to cut the majority of the film. The issue apparently was with all the inflammatory dialogue. The authorities took her passport and harassed her into silencing the film. In Lebanon, I’m told, you can be arrested if you have a copy of this film. Even if she released it in Europe, Anoush says, “In a heartbeat someone would bring a copy here and it would be duplicated and suddenly appear everywhere.” In which case, the authorities might make it impossible for Shahal to continue working on films in Lebanon. Anoush mentioned that she probably has the only copy of *Civilisées* in Lebanon. She agreed to arrange a special screening for me. While Anoush can arrange a private screening for me to see this film, she can’t permit it to circulate. This is an example of how the informal forces of circulation could actually be counterproductive for the filmmaker who has had a silencing imposed on his or her film. Anoush ultimately retreated from this invitation and the private screening never happened.

In a conversation with an acquisitions officer in one of Beirut’s major stations, he told me how independent artist approach him, perhaps seeing him out on the town among the other filmmakers and hoping his position and sympathies will benefit them. They say

that he could buy their films for the television station, so that they could have their work shown in their own country. Sometimes he reviews their work, but usually he grows irritated. His voice thrust toward me reprimanding, "This is a business. We can't give handouts. I'd lose my job." Across the desk of the acquisitions supervisor, the booming mass media industry and the struggling cinema and video industry meet in conflict of interests. While money and local production does not flow freely here, he discussed the way he diverts censored material to other employees. Things, like a Fellini film, he thinks would never get an audience in Lebanon, "People wouldn't understand it. What does Fellini have to do with their lives?" He also informally circulates anti-Arab media or simply material critical of the Arab Middle East, material otherwise banned. "I do my part to keep people informed. They need to know what is being said by the western media." Handing a tape to a colleague, they tell me it is a BBC special on terrorism. We all laugh.

In a series of conversations with "Hussein," I learn the plight of a low level employee at one of these satellite stations. Born and raised in Kuwait, Hussein's parents were part of a larger population of Lebanese from various sects living and working there during the war. His father managed a movie theater, which fostered Hussein's interest in cinema. His family would visit their village – Khiam! – during the summer. As expatriates working in Kuwait, they could easily get a permit to travel though the occupied south. He said, "As long as you never talked politics or speak against the Israeli occupation you were fine," however, he remembers seeing busloads of blindfolded prisoners being taken away.

In 1993 the family came to Beirut for the summer and never went back to Kuwait. Shortly thereafter Hussein left to study in the United States. After his bachelor's degree, he started a masters program in Chicago, but dropped out. Unable to find media work in

the US, he called home and said he was coming back to Beirut. His brother advised him not to come back, “There is nothing for you here.” But Hussein was insistent. He spent a year in Beirut looking for work before landing an editing position at one of the satellite stations. For editing one episode a week and producing a series of short piece on independent cinema he earns US\$1100 per month, but he is discontent with the job. With all the graduates on the market, he knows he could be replaced immediately. This cut throat aspect of the TV industry, coupled with the plethora of production houses working in advertising and on music video clips, means there are likely plenty of lost dreams and misfired ambitions filling the fissures of this industry.

In Lebanon different groups influence different sectors of media production. For all the complaining about a lack of industry, Lebanon has a huge media industry in satellite television, music videos, and advertising. But more alternative media survives instead through foundation sponsorship, organized collectives, and as personal projects. In the documentary sector, Mohammad Hashem hoped his Documentary Encounter would foster new opportunities to bridge these divergent media publics, where forty odd people assembled at Hotel Geffinor Rotana from throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe. Filmmakers, producers, distributions, television executives, festival curators, and academics attended the three panels that Mohammad and I had organized. Mohammad initiated the discussion on the notion of a documentary database. He said, “Now a filmmaker has to go to Europe to find a good Arab producer.” Some spoke with frustration at the problems facing documentary filmmakers, while others gestured toward utopic futures. Some said the social parameters made it impossible to support a documentary industry, while still others seemed outraged at the same tired debates. Some of the European participants became defensive. One of these men suggested that with all the people attending the film screenings that the solution was merely a matter of raising

public awareness, organizing conferences and festivals, and build up training at the films schools. Many of the Arabs in the room protested at the nonchalant opacity of this man's statement and his reticence to oblige Arab documentary with his endorsement.

CONTESTED DOCUMENTARY

During a panel discussion on cultural sponsorship, I had made the acquaintance of a woman from the Maghreb (western Arab world in north western Africa) who was organizing a documentary film festival and came to DocuDays to make connections with people working on documentaries and seeking additional sponsors for her event. She expressed concern about DocuDays endorsing Hezbollah, because she saw representatives from al-Jazeera and al-Manar Television (the Hezbollah station) and thought that that meant DocuDays was a front for fundamentalism. She wanted to partner with DocuDays but had great concern about inviting a fundamentalist perspective into her festival. She adamantly said, "I do not want these people in my country."

Despite the diversity of perspectives on documentary, the boundaries of permissible sensibilities manifested in drastically different ways. For example, at the opening screening, a small "war" was waged on DocuDays. Wael Nouredine approached Mohammad Hashem with a small video camera mounted on a pistol grip and challenged him on the definition of documentary. The interrogation seemed like a playful performance. Smiling uncomfortably, Mohammad causally lit a cigarette. Others were trying to figure out if they should laugh or show concern. Then Wael told Mohammad that he didn't know what he was talking about and stormed off as quickly as he had arrived. I can't remember exactly when I first saw Wael, but I recognized him as part of the al-Madina crowd. His lanky frame and tumbled curls made him stand out among his boisterous group. I learned that his submission to DocuDays had been rejected and that

he wanted to make a video war against its organizers. None of the DocuDays people seemed interested in talking about it, but dismissed Wael's work as self-indulgent.

At a later event, I asked another acquaintance to introduce me to Wael. He and I had a long talk about the Lebanese film scene. His perspective claimed a conspiracy theory about "the Lebanese", especially artists and filmmakers. He told me about a Lebanese Jewish filmmaker who had been essentially erased from the discourses on Lebanese cinema, even though she had made films critical of Israel. He described a situation in which filmmakers have become resentful and do not want to see others succeed. He recounted how Mohammad Hashem had told him that a documentary is when you record reality and from that recording make a narrative to tell a story. Since Wael's film, *Ce sera beau: From Beirut with Love*, did not fit this structure, DocuDays would not accept it. In response, Wael accused Mohammad of being a *hajji* (one who has gone to Mecca on pilgrimage) and not wanting to show something controversial. He said the real problem was that his film showed people shooting heroine and dealing with other social taboos. Instead of acknowledging the issue of censorship, Wael felt that his film was dismissed for aesthetic reasons. In contrast, Wael said that the Home Works festival planned to screen it as a special unannounced performance on the last day of its festival. He said the festival's director will get in trouble for showing this film, thus the necessity to keep the screening secret.

The contest over aesthetics troubled Wael, since he had already gained recognition in France. While attending film school in Paris, he secured a contract for three films and had been given hundreds of feet of 16mm film stock. He said that the media scene in Beirut was distorted, because people are under-skilled and overpaid. Speaking about a project in development, he had asked a guy named "Abdella" to be the Director of Photography, but Abdella, who had introduced himself to me as a

“cameraman of war zones,” had asked Wael for US\$5000 per month. Wael scoffed at the arrogance, saying that these Lebanese cinematographers don’t know how to shoot film, because they only work with video, whereas his crew from Europe have more experience and want half as much.

The next time I saw Wael, he and a journalist were fist fighting in the lobby of al-Madina Theatre. I began enquiring about him, why wasn’t his film accepted. I learned that Mohammad and the programmers had rejected *From Beirut with Love*, because they did not think the film was right for the festival. Apparently the situation escalated over a series of emails and the DocuDays people speculated that the drug use shown in his film meant that Wael needed mental help. When I tried to talk to Wael a second time, he acted as though he had never met me and seemed very dismissive. I would not have a chance to talk to him again until the coming spring, when I would see him in Paris. At the time, I did not know that Wael had been told to stay away from the American spy.

The documentary aesthetics endorsed by the DocuDays program does show a propensity for conventional documentary approaches, however, conservative social sensibilities are more difficult to attribute to the organization. In fact, a documentary by another Lebanese filmmaker reveals some of the same taboos breached in *From Beirut with Love*. Ali Zarakat’s *Bi Ma Ino Boukra* (2005) follows the relationship that four different artists have developed with Beirut in order to trace the location of Beirut’s cosmopolitan and violent legacy. One of the main characters in the video is a junkie who lives at an artist residence. His failed artistic attempts are framed by his disgruntled contempt for the dominant art scene in Beirut. He says in the film, “If they don’t like you they don’t let you in.” His suicidal frustrations are channeled through performative modes of social rebellion, like caressing oil paintings in one of Beirut’s high culture

galleries. Although he launches a few poignant critiques, his rants seem pathetic and without hope for redemption.

Although much anticipation had been generated about this film, its premiere offered a mix reaction. I remember walking out and seeing my friend Hanan and asking her opinion, “Rather boring, self-indulgent, too long, frustrated, ...” her litany of complaints trailed off. While made with the same general theme in mind and featuring some of the same junkies, Wael Nouredine’s *From Beirut with Love* achieves a more powerful critique and more dynamically edited cinematography than *Bi Ma Ino Boukra* with a fraction of the commentary. With a series of false expectations, *From Beirut with Love* achieves an affective critique. A professional journalist, Wael Nouredine’s documentaries engage both sensationalized and overlooked aspects of Lebanese society. His *From Beirut with Love* plays with a series of cinematic suspense devices, particularly with the soundtrack and editing, to fill mundane moments and scenes with nervous anticipation. After the opening sequence of police, fire, and mayhem, filmed immediately after the Hariri bombing, Wael’s “story” unfolds in pensive episodes where nothing seems to happen, however, his searching camera evokes the texture of a lived world. Scenes observe soldiers standing around watching protests in martyr square, who seem undisturbed by Wael’s groping eye. As they sit perched on an overpass, Wael watches them causally watching the demonstrators and draws attention to their surveilling eyes and M-16 machine guns. Wael’s camera lingers long enough in these scenes to make the audience more aware of its nuances, but then quickly moves into other spaces. We see militiamen with their parents showing off their guns and chickens. Young men shoot heroine, get chilled, smoke cigarettes, and pass out. We hear invisible chanters for Haidar, “Lion! Lion! Lion!” (a reference to the courage of Imam Ali, the first of the twelve Shi’a imams), echoing off graffitied walls, but only the fists rising at the bottom

of the screen offer any embodiment of these voices. A man talks about his suicide, calmly but indulgently detailing the way the bullet would blow the back of his head off.

“Nothing” happens in Wael’s documentaries for those who expect to see a conventional documentary narrative unfold. As discontinuous elements are brought together, Wael’s “story” is less about an unfolding narrative than a refolding with new associations and resonances. His editing in these scenes has removed frames and reconnects them in a series of jump-cuts; evocative of both music videos and hypersensitive awareness of gaps in the representation of the “ordinary.” Aside from some song lyrics, there is almost no dialogue. Not until twenty minutes into the thirty-minute film, during a scene with several men shooting heroine, does anyone address the filmmaker. The stoned man reclining on the bed says, “Dude you know it is your show ...” As he starts to continue with what he was saying, he realizes he still has the needle stuck in his arm and fumbles to remove it. For Wael the junky is a vehicle to the withdrawn subjectivity occurring at the site of a surpassing disaster. On a certain level, the video may seem self-indulgent for its existentialist singularity, but he explains to me, when I see him in Paris, how the junky subjectivity is something he falls into when he comes back to Lebanon. Something unavoidable for him, he hates it. He was disgusted with Lebanon and didn’t want to return. In France, he had potential projects in Iraq and Yemen with interested producers and was dating a French avant-garde film diva who was championing his work. He talked about the benefits of reverse racism in France and taking advantage of opportunities when they arose.

CINEMATIC SPACE

The suspenseful city scenes in Nouredine’s film did not show in Beirut until the following year at another festival. I saw it for the first time in Paris at a festival co-

sponsored by né a Beyrouth, an annual festival in Beirut during the summer. I had missed their festival in Beirut, but I learned of this Paris festival when I met with the founders.

Né a Beyrouth was having a DVD launch at the Beirut Book Fair held at Beil Exhibition Hall at the Beirut Harbor. At the end of the Beirut Central District, a jetty stretched out into the harbor to a man made island built up with the bulldozed remains of the city's postwar rubble. A long line of cars was waiting to cross the jetty. The service taxi refused to take me through the traffic jam, so I got out and walked several hundred meters to the hall. At the CDtheque booth I met several filmmakers, whose films were featured on the DVD, and two of the founders of né a Beyrouth. They told me that they would be sponsoring a retrospective of Lebanese cinema in Paris in April. The third founding member of this organization, Danielle Arbid, had recently released her first feature film, *In the battlefields* (*Dans les champs de bataille / Maarek hob*, 2004), which had screened for several weeks at the Sodeco cinema during my stay in Beirut. Pierre and Waddieh said it had been a huge critical success and had been playing all around the world, but financially it was failing. Pierre seemed optimistic about my research. He told me about a study on cinema in Lebanon conducted by the European Union the year before, but after conducting the research and writing the report the EU refused to publish it. He envisioned my anthropological study enabling them to better address the shortcomings of the film industry, but I was not in a position to offer solutions, I was still trying to figure out the problems.

Like many Lebanese films, Arbid's *In the battlefields* demonstrated conflicted relationships with space. Arbid's film centers on the relationship of two young women coming of age during the war. Nearly the entire film takes place in suffocating spheres of domestic violence. In Arbid's case, the confining cinematic space of the family apartment served a vital aesthetic purpose, but for many filmmakers the choice to shoot in

claustrophobic spaces is a decision to avoid unwanted attention from both authorities and the masses. In Ghassan Salhab's *Terra Incognita* (2002), scenes shot outside required the police to control a throng of spectators trying to walk onto the set. Salhab's aesthetic choice to focus on Beirut's vacant sites, empty lots, and traffic overpasses, required him to negotiate the spectacle of the film crew in these otherwise "empty spaces." The tension between interior and exterior constantly faces the legacy of urban permeability, in which obliterated walls reveal the private sphere of the family available to public gaze. Some films reverse this gaze from the subject position of a sniper peering threateningly down on the streets, as in Samir Habchi's *Tornado* (1992) or the short film, *11 Rue Pasteur* (1997), by the now famous music video and feature film director Nadine Labaki. Filmed entirely in one shot with overlaid cross-hairs to represent the scope of a sniper's rifle, *11 Rue Pasteur* invisibly embodies the suspicion and contempt for those on the street. The viewer peers down on the street with the sniper as he comments on the people on the street below from the safety of an unseen vantage point. By marking the invisible presence of the sniper, the viewer is made aware of the similarities between the sniper's scope and the camera lens and the slippage of meaning in the act of shooting (film/ammunition). Unavoidably, the viewer is focalized to identify with the subjectivity of this uncomfortable voyeurism.

THE SPACE OF CONSPIRACY

Visual political messages displayed publicly constitute a major aspect of political practice and the *mise-en-scène* of urban politics force citizens to be aware "of the saliency of politics within their society" (Freeman 2001:37). The visibility of art and cinema festivals, series, and collectives in Beirut serve as a similar public *mise-en-scène*, but their role in political consciousness remains to be confirmed. The pensive tension in

Beirut after the Hariri assassination could also be detected on both a visual and discursive registers.

During the build up to the release of the UN's Mehlis Report, which would report the findings of an investigation of the Hariri assassination according to Security Council Resolution 1595, the major intersections began to host a variety of military vehicles. The general depression turned briefly toward suspense in anticipation of the "truth." Posters and banners strewn throughout the Sunni neighborhoods and the Beirut Central District all gravitated on this one word. The Mehlis Report was at first erroneously released as a Microsoft Word document, which retained the history of editorial changes made to the report. In an earlier saved version the report fingered several high-ranking Syrians by name. The officially released report removed these direct references and requested an extension of the investigation. Nothing happened. The suspense has been withdrawn and this inconclusive accusation ultimately stalled another opportunity to deface the conspiracies that float through public discourse.

After the screenings in Hamra I would either walk toward Sanayeh Park to try to catch a service taxi all the way to Getawi or head up the hill to the number two bus line. One evening as I headed toward the bus line, I stepped into a phone store to recharge my minutes. Two men were sitting around smoking cigarettes and drinking *chai*. As the proprietor charged my phone minutes, his friend wanted to discuss with me the way the West undervalues and delimits Arabs. He said, "Better qualified Lebanese get passed over for jobs given to Europeans and North Americans." Then he went into a diatribe about the US being run by "the Jews." According to him, they want all the lands of the Levant. I tried to make a small corrective that it was the Zionists in particular, but he went on to ask why the Christians in America let the Jews occupy all the holy land. He answered his own question, "Because the Jews are in charge!" I tried to get him to

account for the Christian fundamentalist movement that supports Bush, suggesting that the situation was more complicated. “You know George Bush’s mother is Jewish?” He suggested, “You are too close to the situation; your vision is clouded.” He proposed an analogy that foreigners who come to Lebanon can see clearly what is wrong here, because local perspectives do not cloud their analysis. By this logic, I was in no position to judge the validity of his statement because my inside position invalidated it. He of course didn’t realize the implicit contradiction here, in which he could see the situation in Lebanon clearly enough to be able to confirm that the foreigners were correct. For if indeed one cannot see the situation locally then one could not be in a position to validate the truth of outside perspectives.

Once my phone was ready I hurried on. This conversation haunted me with frustration. Frustrations desire resolution. For some the urge to find simple patterns of meaning had the potential to fill the void of uncertainty and inconclusive investigations with powerfully obvious narratives. For people like this man, they find fixity in conspiracy theories. Still frustrated, I didn’t see a bus coming, so I opted to take a service taxi to Sodeco. The taxi dropped me on the far corner of the double intersection. Walking past two tanks and a troop transport, I headed to Furn an-Nasra to buy some croissants for the morning. Sitting under the decimated 1920s Barakat apartment building and facing the 1990s Sodeco Tower along the historic “green line,” this bakery serves as an icon of a withdrawn time. The proprietors often gave me a free cookie and the Syrian workers enjoyed challenging my Arabic. I would often stop there for breakfast or lunch when I walked to the French cultural center for my Arabic class. On this evening, there were several policemen being rude to the Syrian worker. When he turned his back, one cop stole some cookies. And while the Syrian man was busy preparing their food the cop kept shoving money in his face, repeatedly saying, “Khoda!” (take it). The Syrian man kept

his cool and eventually the unruly police left. Immediately after Hariri's death, accusations implicating Syria prompted several attacks on Syrian laborers. The ambivalent relationship with Damascus ruling Lebanon by proxy and thousands of Syrian menial laborers placed these men in a precarious situation, all the more since Syria's withdrawal of its military.

Outside the bakery the cops were standing at their vehicle eating their falafel sandwiches and I saw the number two approaching. I ran across the street and climbed on board. The bus jerked forward and sped through an opening in traffic up the hill to Sofil square, where I got out. The memorialization of Bashir Gemayel, the assassinated Phalange president, dominates the iconography of Sofil, the commercial center of the Christian Ashrafiya neighborhood. Facing west, one is struck by the massive banner of Gemayel's likeness. On the eastern corner, a blocky, concrete monument towered above passer-bys with another tribute to Gemayel's likeness. The intense modes of identification in these sites subvert the anonymity of the urban experience. The suspicious body indexes the conspiracy of foreign domination. The scandal is never revealed, because its secrecy is not public only official. The "truth" makes sense in the intersection of evidence and fabulation, knowledge and belief, where official memory orchestrates what "needs to be believed."

CURATION AND CENSORSHIP

In this chapter I have attempted to trace a pensive outline of the tenuous fall festival season in Lebanon during 2005, six months after the Hariri assassination and after the Syrians pulled out, but prior to the 2006 Israeli invasion – a time in limbo. This is a liminal space, a state of experience that is between ideals of social stability, between a glorious past and an impossible future, it is what Walter Benjamin evokes in his

announcement of a “state of emergency.” Emboldened by their wartime perseverance, many of these individuals feel more threatened by defunding. And yet, ironically, the violence fosters funding interests, requiring Lebanese curators to bridge a loaded divide translate across incompatible discourses. In my ethnographic trajectory, this chapter investigates the notion of the moderate Arab intellectual and attempts to place this subjectivity within a lived context. In the cafés or walking along the streets, in the theater or the lobby, in the service taxi or in the bus, the moments I shared with these individuals revealed to me a fantastic and frightening world. For these cultural critics, the monsters and violence of their memories and movies serve as an allegory for the way the politics of public art stymies efforts to critically celebrate and engage the work of the “moderate Arab intellectual.” Whereas the contentious imaginaries frequently cast people within narrow roles of difference that narrate a clash of civilizations, my ethnographic material in contrast consistently points to the lived experience of artists and filmmakers within the Beirut public sphere. This allows me to trace the contending discourses at sites of articulation and as embodied practices of identity production.

Some feel that the collective of filmmakers in Beirut is so small that it prohibits a positive critical environment. A reporter explained to me, “Since everyone knows everyone else it limits a distance necessary for critical perspective, so when critiques are made they are taken in the sense of a personal attack.” This reporter said, “If they want to be taken serious, then they need to be open to criticism. They should not expect just because they are Arab filmmakers that they should get raving support. This would ultimately diminish the quality of their work.” Others talk about the rapid increase of foreign curators and the way it has “disturbed the cultural scene before it was ready. It lost its inner view.” By gaining the gaze of the west, this Lebanese curator felt that granting networks have generated closed circuits, where artists are working in networks

defined by the western funding agents, like the Ford Foundation. Notions of Beirut as the “preeminent site of experimental art in the Middle East” have granted Beirut a status to claim authority over “new Arab representations.” In this bohemian project, Beirut becomes an important intersection where the ambivalence toward western liberal sensibilities struggles with the authority of social traditions and emergent politics.

At the Zawaya roundtable on foundation sponsorship in the Arab world, Christine Tohme spoke with frustration at the double bind she faces with funding her Ashkal Alwan (Shapes Colors) organization. She talked about the way the organization-foundation relationship put a heavy burden on both them and her, since she would have to quit if they did not renew her grants. She has tried to get local funding from the Ministry of Culture, but has given up. The strings attached to foreign money also presented a serious dilemma. She talked about how the Ford Foundation required her to sign a form stating that she does not support terrorism, but Tohme asks, “Does this mean I can’t support Iraqi or Iranian artists? I refused to sign it.” Pierre Abi-Saab adds a rejoinder directed at the foreign funders on the panel, “I need your money, but you need me more. You need me because you have migrant workers dying on your borders.” The success of these cultural projects relies heavily on the generosity of foreign funders, but also on their continued status as western fetishes.

When I met Christine in 2001, she was busily preparing for the first Home Works forum on cultural practices. On my visit in 2005, the third installment was scheduled at al-Madina Theatre. In the opening remarks, Christine talked about the various delays that each installment had faced, the first because of the aftermath of September 11th, the second because of the US invasion of Iraq, the third because of the Hariri assassination. As I write this chapter the fourth installment is about to get underway, after the Israeli

rampage and amidst uncertain political outcomes. These delays caused by mass violence seemingly also ensure their success.

In an effort to more critically engage the public sphere, curator Christine Tohme has been involved in “expanding artistic practices into used and disused public spaces with the intention of re-inhabiting spaces and enhancing lateral dialogue with the public and critical thinking among participants.” Tohme suggests, “These [artistic] projects are not so much exhibitions as they are landmarks, a form of self-affirmation to mark out our space in the city” (Wright 2002). By visibly reclaiming spaces in the city to exhibit radical media and independent art, these artists and intellectuals invest these sites with a new public awareness of post-war trauma and new bohemian artistry, if not also, at least potentially, civil inequality and economic disparity.

Home Works III opened at the Sfier-Semler Gallery with exhibitions and installations. Since Sfier-Semler is located in Jisr near to where I lived in Geitawi, I had decided I’d walk. Going down my alley in a direction I’ve never passed through before, I reached the end of the street and found a long, dark and damp stairway down to the next street. Wondering across a few blocks I reached the Charles Helou expressway. After getting my bearings in the rapidly approaching headlights, I finally found a space to venture across the 3 - 4 lane road (assessed by how many cars were squeezing into the space). Once across the street I was faced with a decision to walk down to the next expressway and walk along its edge to approach the gallery from the advised direction or try to go through the smaller streets to approach the gallery from the back. I opted for the short cut.

Using the recently released *Zawarib Beirut*, “The 1st fully comprehensive street atlas for the greater beirut [sic] area,” I navigated a path through the back streets. Once off the expressway I entered into a dimly lit industrial landscape with a mattress factory

and steelworks. Although I started second-guessing my decision, I continued into a small and dimly lit residential strip where several young boys were rowdily kicking around an old water bottle half filled with dirt. I walked through their makeshift soccer game and headed for the next street. With each turn I became less convinced that I would be able to find a route through these back streets. I greeted a man coming toward me and asked directions, “*Marhaba. 3am bishouf gallarie sfier-semmler. Bt3araf bina3 Tannous?*” He said he didn’t know and kept walking quickly past me. I walked down another street and could make out a figure standing in the road. I greeted this man and he fortunately knew a “Tannous Tower,” but told me that I had to go back to the main road.

I quickly headed back through the industrial landscape to Charles Helou expressway where I turned and walked down to the exit ramp. Walking along the edge of another busy street I came across a dark road where expensive BMWs and Mercedes were exiting. I decided to follow this road and soon came across a parking lot of similar vehicles. I approached a well-dressed woman and ask her if she knew about a gallery. She sent me down the edge of an industrial building; around the corner I found an entrance to an industrial elevator. I entered the elevator with two other foreign men. The elevator operator closed the gates and we began heading up. Looking through the metal elevator gate we could see a vast room full of cars and car parts, the next level revealed a huge room of cubicles and people huddled over computer terminals, the third floor was dark and filled with unidentifiable mounds of objects, lastly we arrived at a busy gallery full of well dressed wine drinkers socializing. I very quickly circled around the gallery once and then twice. I saw a few people I knew, but they were deeply engaged in convivial exchange. Rasha Salti approached and told me, “The buses are leaving. You will need to head down if I want to catch them.” After another quick circle, I decided I

did not want to have to walk back out of here and should take advantage of the bus to al-Madina Theater.

In the public sites of bohemian art and film festivals, the revelation of “public secrets” typically occurs under the radar of state interests. But its absence is always a potential presence. During the Home Works festival, a performance by Rabih Mroue and Lina Saneh came under the scrutiny of the censors. The title of the performance asks, *Who’s Afraid of Representation?* – clearly the censors are. After the first performance, someone called the censors and reported a complaint. The performance juxtaposes a reading of contemporary art with the local events of a murder case. I met with Mroue to discuss the performance. He said officially with theatric performances one is supposed to submit the script to get approved first and then the censors will come to the performance to make sure it is followed. But because his work is for a small crowd, usually only done a couple times at a festival, he doesn’t bother and they usually turn a blind eye. After being reported, Mroue and Saneh had to go in and negotiate. Mroue tries to challenge societal censorship and the way these issues always have to be addressed indirectly, but he was told to remove the vulgar language and direct references to sectarian identity. “The official,” Mroue recounts, “was very proud of himself saying that he helped improve the script, that it is more nuanced now.” Mroue scoffed at the man’s arrogance, saying that such changes completely defuse his critique. “This is the way society is,” said Mroue, “like a school yard principal, who only interferes when someone says so and so did such in such. Otherwise he ignores what’s going on.” The artists nevertheless cooperated for the second show, changing the Arabic parts but not the English subtitles delivered in a PowerPoint presentation. As a result of this official attention, Home Works did not show Wael Nouredine’s *From Beirut with Love* as planned, but programmed *Who’s Afraid of Representation?* for a third show as the final mystery slot of the festival.

On the third extra show Mroue and Saneh went back to the original version figuring that no one would come to supervise the third show. The arrogance of the censors notwithstanding, these officers are tasked with policing a sensitive terrain, one deemed more volatile than Monika Borgmann's desire to "stir debate" would presume. Mroue's performance of course rejects the way these policies reify the official amnesia.

The night before my departure, I had become obligated to criss-cross the city in a series of farewells. Rolling my new suitcase along the dark streets of west Beirut, I looked for transportation options to get to Sofil Square, where I could walk the remaining twenty minutes or catch a service for two dollars (3LL). Well off the main drag of Hamra Street, sporadic streetlights cloak this side street in the shadows of over-flowing dumpsters and remnants of building projects. The luggage slowed my progress as I tried to sight a service taxi or bus number two emerging from its terminus. The traffic moves irregularly at this hour. In this cloud of darkness faces were obscured and strange, so when I encountered Jalal Toufic transfixed by some unseen intentionality walking toward me, my surprise startled him. We briefly, albeit awkwardly greeted each other and then passed on.

But then he excitedly turned back and asked, "You'll tell them you saw me out on the streets?!" I interpreted this cryptic request as a message from a ghost, a vampire lurking the streets of Beirut an absent subjectivity that he and other elite artists have advanced in their work and which I analyze in the following chapters. But Jalal's giddiness at the effort to turn back and remind me of his whereabouts and associated nocturnal intentions spoke to an errant haunting. The artists and cultural critics of Beirut are haunted by the uncertainty of vocational sustainability. Perhaps like all the misunderstood geniuses, Toufic's theoretical brilliance has struggled to attain worthy academic recognition in its own time. The bittersweet rejection of American academia

haunts Toufic in his enduring pursuit. His esoteric dissertation confounded his doctoral committee. A string of visiting positions at several notable universities and art schools led him back to Beirut's 'intellectual backwaters'. Here Toufic has found a community of latent subjectivities capable of making sense of his radical ideas, even while he confounds many others in Lebanon's greater art scene and confronts those who work against the avant-garde's moral authority.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM PARIS

The following spring I attended the Côté Court film festival in Paris. With the cooperation of né a Beyrouth, the festival featured a retrospective of short Lebanese films from 1995 to 2005 and hosted two panels. Here I finally was able to watch Wael Nouredine's film, as well as many others I had not been able to access. When I met Wael he had cut his unruly locks and appeared considerably more relaxed than when I saw him in Beirut. We met at the Institut du monde arabe, because he said, "They have excellent tea." I took the opportunity to do some research there among the archive of films. They held a small collection of dated Lebanese documentaries. We chatted about the attention he had been garnering in France. *From Beirut with Love* had just been release by a French distributor called Lowave as one of eight experimental films on a compilation of Middle Eastern and North African artists. We talked about Beirut and his future plans.

Then he confided that he had been instructed to stay away from me, because I was suspected of being a CIA operative. He then asked if I wanted to smoke a joint. I wanted to gain his trust and get to know him better, so I said, "Sure, but where?" We went over to the bazaar and he suggested that with people smoking *shisha* and cigarettes that nobody would know. I doubted this assessment, but didn't protest. As we walked about

the coffee table books on oriental art and Islamic architecture, he broke the hashish apart in his hand and rolled a joint. He started asking around for a light. The security guard nodded with pursed lip in negation. Eventually someone gave us some matches and we smoked out in front of the *institut*.

During the summer of 2006, when everything would drastically change for Lebanon once again, I heard from Wael about his new film. That summer Wael returned to Beirut during the war and made another experimental documentary. In *July Trip*, Wael searches through Beirut's rubble and chaos, before traveling south during the Israeli invasion. Recording the country unraveling in war torn, heroine induced montages, we gain little knowledge about the battles. He provides no objective perspective. Instead, he spirals the viewer through moments of lived chaos and affective intensities, where "nothing" seems to happen.

When exhibiting abroad, the work of these Lebanese documentary experimentalists creates fantastic sites that mix bohemian sensibilities with intellectualist critiques. These films also engender the transformation of western viewers by dislodging the certainty of their own national histories. These sites foster alternative political sensibilities even if not fully informed and generative in their uncertainty. In the following chapters, I consider the work of several artists, who have captured the attention of the western art world with their creative critiques of Lebanese historiography and postwar subjectivity.

SECTION 3: ARCHIVE OF THE UNDEAD

Chapter 4: Impossible Historiographies

INTRODUCTION

In the following two chapters, I review the work of several Lebanese artists and filmmakers to elucidate a radical historiography of Lebanon's wars. I will be working with several theoretical concepts advanced by these cultural critics to address (post)war subjectivity and memory. These concepts are foundational to my assertion of a post-orientalist aesthetic. In this chapter I examine the way the archive has been appropriated as a crucial site for critical revoicing. The disruption of historical continuity is the driving force behind the work of Walid Raad. Rather than advance his theoretical concepts through written treatises, Raad develops his theoretical thrust through visual and performative registers. The affective potential of this critique is not entirely determined, but it provides an important assertion about the convergence of subjectivity, mediation, and violence.

Accordingly, this chapter aims to elucidate Raad's critique of historical representation and the strategic potential of the archive as a theoretical site. Juxtaposed with the historical performance of the archive, I provide a reading of the history of southern Lebanon (*al-Janub*), where the disenfranchised and militarized Shi'i population (among others) has endured the greatest casualties in the ongoing Lebanese wars. These withdrawn subjectivities pave the way for Tony Chakar's concept of "catastrophic time and space," in which the wars of the past and the wars of the future become continually reinscribed in the ordinary spaces of the present. The subversion of the temporal order and the dislocation of spatiality provide crucial contextual information in order to situate the ghostly memories reinscribed on Beirut's landscape of forgetfulness.

WALID GHANEM RAAD

In a special issue of *Rethinking Marxism* dedicated to Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Régulier's theory of rhythmanalysis, Walid Raad published a collection of photographs from Beirut's Al-Hadath archive designed to document the cultural life of Lebanon (Raad 1999). Described as "a non-profit visual and cultural research organization," Raad presents one project initiated in 1975 that recruited one hundred photographers "to photograph every street, storefront, building, sign, vegetation, moving vehicle, and other spaces of aesthetic, national, political, popular, functional, and cultural significance in Beirut" (1999:17). The mission statement explains that custom made cameras were made for the photographers in order to "hinder the uses of our images by any of the warring parties" (1999:17). In addition to these measures, the photographers were instructed to provide the location of each photograph with three addresses, "only one of which corresponding to the actual place where the image was produced" (1999:17). The eighteen images reproduced therein show a series of storefronts. Many of these images give no indication as to the commercial business conducted on those premises and none of them include the proprietor or any other persons in frame, however, each image is accompanied by detailed archival notation. For example, the tenth image has the following caption, "10. 84.XM.956.1064, 1977, 8:34 AM, D7/G2/X3, The Islamic Museum, New York, USA." Each image, numbered in sequence, includes exactly the same year and time, but each bears a different international source.

The expansive ambition of the project, the criteria required of the photographers, and the esoteric notation should alert a reader to the fictitious nature of this archive. And yet, the presentation of Al-Hadath archive – replete with post office box, mission statement, and archival aesthetics, not to mention the list of (fictional) board of directors, staff, and funders – demands to be taken seriously by its performance as an archive.

Indeed, the fictional elements notwithstanding, the critical potential of this archival performance requires serious consideration. As explained in a forward by Fouad Boustani, Director of Beirut Photographic Center, (potentially a fictional authority), “Al Hadath’s photographic project examines the possibilities and limits of imagining a history of Lebanon and of the Lebanese civil war” (Raad 1999:18). Such a project aims to expose the archival fetish for historical veracity, even while subverting access to these sites with imaginary addresses and special equipment. It tries to expose the inherent contradiction with mimetic technology, which can accurately produce an image but can also dislocate its contextuality. And the fact that this alternative archive accompanies several articles on rhythm analysis, helps to connect Raad’s project to the temporal disjuncture of rationalist historiography that conflates mundane everydayness with naturalized cycles of violence.

Accordingly, Al-Hadath’s project reveals the inherent tensions when creating a photographic archive in a city where buildings, objects, and people are constantly disappearing and then being rebuilt, relocated, or returned. Employed for the benefit of retelling history, the imaginary archive does not dabble in nostalgic humanism or proclaim national righteousness. Rather, Raad makes the imagination work to dislodge the structures of meaning by which violence is perpetuated through mediated representations of civil war. Raad and other artists working in Lebanon argue that looking directly at the war provides little understanding about how the horrors of war are experienced. By obscuring the vision of dominant modes of mediation, Lebanese experimental documentary forces audiences to look peripherally at the space where daily life unfolds. Rather than reproducing images of violence and providing a commentary of meaning, this work rescues alternative narratives from forgetfulness and reincarnates imagined subjectivities from the shadows of the city. This imaginary archive served as a

prototype for Raad's more enduring project known as The Atlas Group Archive, discussed later in this chapter.

While the archive provides a crucial site for Raad to advance his critiques of representation, the more crucial point is that this site provides him with a space for images and objects, stories and performances, and beliefs and knowledge, to converge in a densely concentrated formation. But the site of acquisition is also crucially embedded in the archival collection. These "documents" – removed from their original context – bear markings that show their pattern of use. In the archival performances, installations, and publications of Lebanese historical experience, Raad presents the archive not only as a referent of the past, but also as an object of the present. By framing these documents as objects of the archive, their material quality foregrounds their constructedness and thus their connection to some media producer. The latent emphasis on production returns the focus to aesthetics, both the aesthetics of the archives and these "documents." As many archives collect the images of photojournalists, it is fitting that Raad would have assessed the representation of photojournalism during the Lebanese civil wars. In the following section I discuss Walid Raad's analysis of Maroun Baghdadi's *Hors la vie* (1991), which helps articulate a refined and critical version of post-orientalist aesthetics.

HORS LA VIE

Raad earned his Ph.D. from the University of Rochester in the Visual and Cultural Studies program in 1996. His dissertation provided a cultural analysis of the representation of the "western hostage crisis" in Lebanon in the 1980s. His critique of the way neo-orientalist representations of and narratives about these abductions delimited culpability of western foreign powers in the Lebanese "civil" wars provides one of the first theoretical articulations of post-orientalist aesthetics in the Lebanese context. His

dissertation provides a formal analysis of both hostage narratives published in the wake of their release and the US's official investigatory reports on the abductions, but here I would like to limit my review to his reading of the film *Hors la vie* (1991), by Lebanese director Maroun Baghdadi. Attention to Raad's visual analysis provides an early connection between media analysis and aesthetic techniques identified in previous chapters as the Lebanese post-orientalist aesthetic. An aesthetic critical of the politics of representation, but also belabored by recurrent (absent) presence of violence.

Before I do this, let me first situate his argument more fully. Raad's central hypothesis is that the "hostage crisis" is not a self-evident historical episode nor is it a unified and coherent object. From this premise Raad asks a misleadingly simplistic questions, "How does one write a history of 'The Western Hostage Crisis'?" (1996:2). In his later work this question will transform into a broader concern for how to write a history of the Lebanese wars. He argues that popular analyses have treated the captivity narratives as mimetic replications of the hostage experience and have been preoccupied with recreating an "accurate chronology" of events (1996:3). Raad instead proceeds with the understanding that these representations of captivity are culturally constructed. In this way he shifts the structure of meaning from treating these narratives as "facts" to "signs." In other words, Raad's simple question aims to understand, not what these signs mean, but how they mean – that is how they "make sense."

Inspired by photojournalist Roger Auque's real-life account of his abduction, captivity, and release, *Hors la vie* mirrors this story with the protagonist Patrick Perrault. Raad is particularly concerned with the character's identity as a French photojournalist and the way the presumed mimetic objectivity of the journalist's camera erases his national biases. As he says, the "politically and ideologically neutral witness" enables the construction of "uncontested proof" (Raad 1996:85). Raad points out that there are two

dominant, yet contradictory, narratives of photojournalists: as “neutral observers” on the one hand and as thrill seekers on the other. He cites several foreign correspondents who have spoken of Beirut as a “playground,” including Steve Hagey of United Press international, “The dirty little secret about Beirut is what fun it was. It was often scary and creepy, but it was absolutely hilarious fun. I can’t remember anything that was as much fun or as exhilarating” (Raad cites Hagey from Debra Gersh’s article in *Editor & Publisher*, 6 April 1991).

Photojournalism’s ability “to ideologically neutralize and ontologically naturalize” the Frenchman’s relation to the war presumes and reifies the semiotic supposition of photography (Raad 1996:91). Despite the absence of a direct critique of French political involvement in Baghdadi’s film, Raad argues that there are more subtle critiques of western influence and representation at work. First, the sequence that leads to Perrault’s abduction moves from the heroics of an intrepid photojournalist, then to militiamen forcing him to witness and photograph them standing proudly over a fallen corpse, and then to his intentional exposure of the roll of film to daylight, and finally to his capture and blindfolding. The symbolic importance of Perrault’s blindfolding during his abduction makes a link between his and his film’s ability to alternately witness and be blind to images of violence. The blindfold means that he cannot directly witness his abduction, but must look peripherally through the gaps in his blindfold. The peripheral gaps in the blindfold suggests that the abductors’ counter “violence on photography” does not blind Perrault entirely, but spatially reorganizes vision “from the center to the margin” (1996:118-19). Raad points out that this shifts the “representational authority from the French photojournalist to the Lebanese filmmaker” (1996:92).²¹

²¹ Raad argues that Baghdadi’s production experiences in Lebanon and Europe gave him the perception of a balanced view. “Baghdadi’s film projects have ranged from a series of short documentaries for the Lebanese National Movement (LMN) – a political and military coalition formed in 1969 by Kamal

Second, representation of the city juxtaposes the cinematic devices of panning and tracking shots. The panning shots of Beirut present it as a city like any other with minimal traces of the war, while the tracking shots of Beirut “through the windshield of a moving vehicle as we are led through the rubble and debris of streets” and “decimated buildings” (Raad 1996:102-3). “The destruction evidenced” in the tracking shots of Beirut “is of an unimaginable scope,” the audience can only assume that this decimation extends indefinitely through a labyrinthine “no man’s land” (1996:103-4). Khatib’s juxtaposition of background/foreground in the cinematic space of Hollywood and Middle Eastern films discussed in chapter one parallels Baghdadi’s divergent aesthetics of panning and tracking shots.

Inter-cutting these disrupted scenes of violence with Perrault in his cell “day-dreaming” cause a slippage of these “real-life” images from the factual record into “reminiscences” and “hallucinations” haunting the Frenchman (1996:104). The repetition of these scenes in his imagination can be quickly interpolated into a post traumatic stress disorder as “a process of retroactively managing trauma,” but repetition also “acts as a link to this ‘forgotten and repressed’ occurrence, event, and history” (1996:106). Here Raad suggests that in *Hors la vie* these repeated representations of Beirut’s streets, not only correspond to the “experience of captivity,” but also work “to master retrospectively some other trauma” (1996:107). That is, the trauma of colonial occupation.

FOREIGN INTERVENTIONS

Although sensationalizing the image of a devastated Beirut, Baghdadi’s “expansive cityscape” more accurately represents the area around the “green line” that

Jumblatt, and which grouped socialist, communists, Arab nationalists, and various other leftists and secularists – to fiction and non-fiction films for French and British TV” (Raad 1996:93).

divided the center of the city during the wars. The fact that the “green line” runs from the city center down Damascus Road bears an important reference to French colonial intervention (if not also Syrian). Raad remarks, “The construction of the road and the rail tracks linking Beirut to Damascus as well as the expansion of Beirut’s harbor were crucial in the establishment of Beirut as a military, economic, and political base for the French and other European powers” (Raad 1996:108). Raad argues that Baghdadi’s disruptive repetition of a de-centered cityscape bears “the mark of a nostalgic yearning for a centered Beirut where violence against French nationals is unimaginable” (1996:110).

Franco-Lebanese history is briefly discussed in chapter one regarding the role France played in sequestering Lebanon from Syria and securing mandate control over both countries between the first and second world wars, however, there is an important dimension to this relationship that needs elaboration to understand Raad’s critique. While *Hors la vie* erases any direct reference to France’s “special” historical relationship with Lebanon, Raad makes a case that Baghdadi’s inclusion of photography as a narrative device enables him to resist “complicity in the forgetting of France’s colonial history,” and provides a crucial shift in the analyses of the “western hostage crisis” (1996:117). The symbolism of the blindfolded French photojournalist and the strategies of repetitive tracking shots make demands for re-reading this history “not straight center, but on the periphery of this crisis, on the margins of the hitherto dominant representations of Lebanese civil war, along that temporal and spatial boundary known as the colonial periphery” (1996:120). In this early generation of Raad’s work, he provides a veritable road map to understanding his version of post-orientalist aesthetics, which include the themes of photography, blindness, occupation, and captivity. His critique on the so-called

“objective reporting” of Lebanese history will engender the archive as a site where these processes converge in object form, as media objects, artifacts, and documents.

In *Hors la vie*, the social disenfranchisement of the Shi’a, their wretched impoverishment, their loss of life as political pawns in a Lebanese/Palestinian/Syrian power struggle, and their occupation following the Israeli invasion in 1982, provides “the primary basis and motive for the young militiamen’s involvement in the abduction of westerners” (1996:112). Raad argues that the victimization of the Shi’a explains the violence toward a French national as “unreasonable and cruel yet understandable displaced aggression toward an innocent person,” and yet, this victimization eclipses the source of colonial complicity that has made the Shi’a “hostages of a different sort” (1996:111). This dramatic production of a “neutral” Frenchman’s captivity narrative held by Shi’a militiamen performs a historical allegory about colonialism’s winners and losers. In other words, this reading links “the most politically, economically, and socially disenfranchised and least empowered confession by the Lebanese political system” to a colonial intervention that is largely responsible for establishing the Lebanese political structure (1996:111). Based on the written account by Auque, who was but one of eighteen French nationals who escaped or were released from abduction between 1985 and 1991 (1996:83), Perrault’s captivity story belies the moral influence of France in the Middle East since the seventeenth century. This civilizing mission that impacted the political, social, and economic fabric of Lebanon had a distinctly religious focus as the “protectorate of the Christian subjects” (1996:97). Under French intervention Maronites ascended to political domination “at the expense of the numerically dominant but politically weakened Muslim majority of Syria and Lebanon” (Raad 1996:98-9). The juxtaposition between Christian and Muslim majorities belies the authority of sectarian minorities in each country.

AL-JANUB

Part 1: Assassinations

Although Shi'a only account for 10% of Muslims in the Arab world, their oppression by the dominant Arab Sunnis is the result of a contentious and bloody dispute over Islamic entitlement beginning in the seventh century with the martyrdom of Mohammad's grandson, Hussein. Starting in the fourteenth century with the rise of the Shi'a Safavid Dynasty, Ottoman rulers historically suspected the Levantine Shi'a as "a stalking horse for Persia" (Norton 2007:13). By the time the Europeans had wrestled Lebanon away from both the Ottoman Empire and Greater Syria, the Shi'a of Lebanon were struggling under their own corrupt leadership (*Zu'ama*) that controlled a traditional system of patronage.

When the last national census was taken in 1932, the Shi'a only comprised around twenty percent of the population. Today they are often considered the unofficial majority, but the threat that this poses for both the Christian Maronites and Sunni Muslims has prevented another national census from being taken. Foreign interventions into the politics of Lebanon by French, American, Russian, Syrian, Israeli, and Palestinian interests have typically further disadvantaged the Shi'a. The influx of Palestinian militias in the 1960s and 1970s also had a huge impact on the Shi'a population in southern Lebanon. *Al-Janub*, "the South," borders historic Palestine and modern day Israel. This mountainous frontier has witnessed recurrent political instability since the 1948 *Nakba* displaced thousands of Palestinians (still in refugee camps in Lebanon today) and redefined the border politics with Lebanon's new southern neighbor.

After the events known as Black September (1970) during the Jordanian civil war, the PLO militia was forced to transfer their base of operations to Beirut. Southern Lebanon became the frontlines of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. This state within a state exacerbated the politics of Phoenician/Pan-Arab heterogeneity. Although typically read as a Christian/Muslim religious conflict, the legacy of Ottoman, French, Maronite, and Sunni oppression emboldened those Shi'a who were drawn to Marxist critiques and secular revolutionary fervor to join the Palestinian resistance movement. For the disenfranchised Shi'a, their ideological commitment was ameliorated by decent wages in a society with severely limited economic opportunities. The large number of armed, organized, and politically motivated militiamen, however, posed a serious threat to Lebanon's ruling elite.

In addition to the PLO, there were other parties and militias that attracted Shi'i recruits. Most were multi-confessional and secular, but in the early 1970s Amal emerged as an Islamic Shi'i party (Norton 2007:20-21). Under al-Sayyid Musa al-Sadr, Amal opposed Maronite political dominance and initially allied the party with the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) - a front of leftist multi-confessional parties and organizations – led by Druze leader, Kamal al-Jumblatt. When the issue of Palestinian militants in southern Lebanon and Beirut officially ignited the civil war in Lebanon, Norton says, “the Shi'a became the cannon fodder for the fedayeen” (2007:17).²² Given the LNM's unrelenting endorsement of the Palestinian struggle, Al-Sadr accused Jumblatt of being “irresponsible and exploitative of the Shi'a” (2007:19). Al-Sadr's discontent with the Palestinian political dominance in southern Lebanon prompted him to

²² According to Augustus Norton, “more Shi'a died in the fighting than members of any other sect” (Norton 2007:17).

shift Amal's allegiances to Syria, who shared mutual interest in challenging Palestinian power.

When Maronite president Sulayman Franjieh requested Syria's military intervention to block the PLO and LMN forces from defeating the Christian militias, al-Sadr endorsed Amal's support for Syria. Syria had historically shown no interest in any single political force triumphing in Lebanon and Amal provided a means for keeping Palestinian power in check in Lebanon. As Jim Quilty puts it, "Lebanon has a long history of international intervention, often invited by one element of the Lebanese polity against another" (2006). Previous alliances between the Shi'a, Palestinian resistance, and the Lebanese National Movement began to deteriorate (Norton 2007:22).

In August 1978, Musa al-Sadr joined the ranks of the politically assassinated, including Kamal Jumblatt (1977), George Hawi (1977), Bashir Gemayel (1982), Rashid Karami (1987), Rene Mouawed (1989), Elie Hobeika (2002), Rafiq Hariri (2005), Pierre Gemayel (2006), among many others. Although most of these assassinations took place in Beirut with a massive car bomb, al-Sadr simply disappeared during a trip to Libya. His erasure has made him more pronounced in death than in life. Al-Sadr's "absence was far more decisive than his presence," according to Abu Khalil (1987),

It came as Lebanese Shi'a, disenchanted with the conduct and slogans of the Lebanese and Palestinian left, were looking for a new political formula. It also coincided with the Iranian revolution. The context became appropriate for comparing al-Sadr's fate with the "hidden" Twelfth Imam.

Part 2: Massacres

In the early 1980s tensions between Amal and the Palestinians were running high, when Israel unexpectedly invaded on June 6, 1982. Working against the interests of the PLO, a renegade Palestinian group led by "Abu Nidal" (Sabri al-Banna) had provoked

Israel with an assassination attempt on the Israeli ambassador to the United Kingdom (Norton 2007:32-33). The ambitions of the Israeli defense minister, Ariel Sharon, to destroy the PLO and install a “pliant government in Beirut” gave no consideration to how the Shi’a would be impacted by this invasion. In fact, the 1982 Israeli invasion completely shifted the dynamics of the civil war: the Israeli Defense Forces partnered with the Maronite militias to oust the Palestinian powerbase from Beirut; Syria became a political counterweight with cold war overtones; the US became embroiled in a prolonged struggle between Zionism and Arab radicalism; the influence of the Iranian Islamic revolution would challenge secular movements; and the Israeli occupation would galvanize Shi’a revolutionaries around the resistance mission of Hezbollah.

Despite two UN resolutions that demanded Israel withdraw all its forces from Lebanon, international pressure on Israel went ignored. A third proposed resolution was ultimately vetoed by the US, thus implicitly condoning the invasion. Against the ropes, Yasser Arafat negotiated a cease-fire with American diplomat, Philip Habib that called for the withdrawal of both Israeli and PLO combatants. This included bringing a multinational force to oversee the PLO evacuation and to protect the Palestinian and Lebanese civilians. On August 21, 1982, the Multinational Force (MNF), comprised of US, French, and Italian troops, began arriving to oversee the PLO withdrawal. After the Maronite president-elect, Bashir Gemayel, along with 25 others were killed in an explosion on September 14, Lebanese Forces “Phalange” planned their retaliation. Concern that PLO militiamen remained in hiding in the camps, Israel aided the Phalange militia in their attack on the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila two days later. Although, Habib Tanious Shartouni, a Maronite Christian member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, confessed to the crime, the Maronite militiamen nevertheless perpetrated a massive massacre that killed hundreds of innocent civilians on September

16, 1982. Amine Gemayel, Bashir's less charismatic brother, would assume the presidency.

With this accentuated internationalization of the Lebanese civil wars, the violence increasingly targeted foreign entities, both Israel and the MNF. Sheik Ahmed Qassir, renowned in Lebanon as the "first suicide car bomber," drove his explosive load into the Israeli headquarters in southern Lebanon on November 11, 1982 and "managed to kill or wound 141 Israeli soldiers" (Davis 2007:78). While this remains the deadliest disaster in Israeli history, Hezbollah celebrates the anniversary as a major holiday – Martyrs Day (2007:78).

By early 1983, the MNF, under the pretense of neutrality, had become a public ally of the Christian government in its civil war against the Muslim majority (Fisk 1992:477). As a result of this alliance and placing the Palestinian refugees in the Sabra and Shatila in harms way after removing their PLO protectors, the US would face horrific reprisals. On April 18, 1983, a pickup truck carrying 2000 pounds of explosives drove through the lobby door of the US embassy in Beirut and obliterated the building and over sixty of its occupants, including most of the CIA's Middle East experts. In the following months, on-going bullet and mortar fire at the US military barracks resulted in a string of US Marine casualties, the US Navy were under order "to bombard Druze militia who were storming Lebanese Forces' positions" (Davis 2007:82). American general Colin Powell reflects on this tactic, "the battleship U.S.S. New Jersey start[ed] hurling 16-inch shells into the mountains above Beirut, in World War II style, as if we were softening up the beaches on some Pacific atoll prior to an invasion." As Robert Fisk points out, "the moment the Sixth Fleet opened fire to help Gemayel's forces the Marines in Beirut would become participants in the civil war. ... Every self-imposed rule of the 'peace-keeping' force would have been broken" (1992:505).

Furthermore, the US enlisted the Lebanese Army to attack “inhabitants of a sprawling Shiite shantytown that adjoined the US Marine encampment at the Beirut International Airport,” which resulted in several deaths and the destruction of homes and a mosque (Davis 2007:82). “Although this little massacre as well as the resulting destruction of the mosque hardly figures in most histories of the American experience in Lebanon, it probably enraged local Shias – including a prominent resident of the airport slums named Imad Faiz Mugniyah ...” (2007:83). American amnesia notwithstanding, consider Powell’s empathy in this assessment (Powell and Persico 1995:281):

What we tend to overlook in such situations is that other people will react much as we would. When the shells started falling on the Shiites, they assumed the American “referee” had taken sides against them. And since they could not reach the battleship, they found a more vulnerable target, the exposed Marines at the airport.

Mugniyah, who had fought with the PLO, planned the second major reprisal against the Americans in Lebanon. On the morning of October 23, a speeding Mercedes dump truck delivered 12,000 pounds of explosives to the US military barracks at the airport, killing 241 US Marines and Navy corpsmen. Two minutes later, another car bomb detonated at the French barracks. “If the airport bomb repaid the Americans for saving [Amine] Gemayel and inflaming the Shiite slums, this second explosion was probably a response to the French decision to supply Saddam Hussein with Super-Etendard jets and Exocet missiles to attack Iran” (Davis 2007:87). The American and French “peace keeping” missions had taken it on the nose and by early 1984 the US was withdrawing its Marines from Lebanon.

Of course, these tactics are not exclusive to the “Islamic fundamentalists.” After these brutal losses, CIA director William Casey and the Regan administration adopted the car bomb in a fight-fire-with-fire strategy. In an effort to assassinate the Hezbollah leader, Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, “Casey subcontracted the operation to

Lebanese operators” to detonate 750 pounds of explosives parked across from Fadlallah’s home (Davis 2007:91). The timing of the explosion coincided with the end of Friday prayer as hundreds of women were leaving the Imam Riad Mosque. The explosion killed eighty people and severely wounded 256, however, Fadlallah escaped unharmed (2007:92). These newly acquired techniques would be carried over to Afghanistan as the US trained the *mujahedin* to use hidden explosives against the Soviets (2007:93).

This state endorsed terrorism would also be linked to Israeli initiatives. Twenty years after the Sabra and Shatila massacre, as Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon faced allegations of war crimes by a Belgian tribunal, a key witness (Elie Hobeika, a high ranking Phalange militiaman) was assassinated in Beirut after announcing that he would testify against Sharon (Davis 2007:79). Imad Mugniyah finally faced his demise on February 12, 2008 when a car bomb exploded in Damascus. Speculation in the press suggested Israel sought revenge and wanted to flaunt their power under Syria’s nose. Others indicated that Mugniyah had fallen in the ranks of Hezbollah and was dispensable.

The cyclicity of Mugniyah’s return and departure shows the slippage of the past tense in a misnamed “post” war era and the specter of foreign intervention returns strangely through the same portal from which it came. Today, the US has again sided against the Lebanese Shi’a and maneuvers the U.S.S. Cole just over the horizon as a symbol of support for the pro-West government and a poised threat to Hezbollah and Syria (Abdallah 2008). The symbolic presence of the U.S.S. Cole – attacked by Al-Qaeda militants off Yemen in 2000 – aims to control the iconicity of terror. The synchronicity of American intervention in the early 1980s and the early twenty-first century ensures the critical importance of assessing how these representations correlates within a violently parasitic structure of neo-colonialism.

The militarization of the Shi'a and other groups evolved into an intensified resistance movement against Israel after the withdrawal of the Multinational Force. Although largely the work of small revolutionary clusters, these "military and political successes that humiliated both the United States and Israel" helped to galvanize the resistance movement (Norton 2007:41). The Lebanese Resistance Front (JAMOUL), founded by the Lebanese Communist Party, provided the initial organized resistance to the Israeli occupation and its proxy army, the South Lebanon Army. Other secular groups formed, like the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and the Popular Nasserist Organization. For those disgruntled with secular militias, "Hezbollah was convened as a constituency of anti-imperialist, Islamist guerilla factions that were eventually unified under a single leadership" (Feldman and Zaatari 2007:49). While the young Shi'a revolutionaries had been antagonistic in spirit toward Israel before, this invasion created the conditions for intensified political violence, in which Hezbollah's political ambitions were all-encompassing and ideologically opposed, not only to Israel, but also to cold war party lines. Conflict with the Communist Party, spiraled into a "brutal, bloody campaign of suppression and assassination in 1984 and 1985" (Norton 2007:37). As described by Norton (2007:37), Hezbollah clearly defined their hard-line stance in a publicly released statement:

In Hezbollah's worldview, compromise and mediation were no answer. Where fractiousness existed among Muslims, it had to have been the product of imperialism. Disunity was caused by imperialism and its agents, including compromisers, evil 'ulama, and the leaders imposed by colonialism.

This uncompromising line was answered by the equally obstinate thuggery of the occupation. During the 1996 "Grapes of Wrath" attack on southern Lebanon, Israeli air and ground forces bombed the village of Qana, a UN safe zone. The massacre of 106 civilians "has inspired more hatred for the Jewish state" than any other "incident in recent

memory” (Norton 2007:84). This episode repeated itself in the 2006 July War, when dozens of people were killed in Israeli air strikes.

Part 3: Hostages

In 1988, Soha Bechara, a twenty-one year-old woman from a Greek Orthodox family involved with the Lebanese National Resistance, attempted to assassinate Antoine Lahad. As the commanding general of the South Lebanon Army, Lahad served as the head of Israel’s proxy militia installed to police the south. Severely wounded, Lahad survived and Bechara spent 10 years in the infamous Khiam prison. Lahad now runs a Lebanese restaurant in Tel Aviv and Bechara studies international law in France. Considered a “living martyr,” Bechara has gained much attention as an opponent of the Israeli military project. Jayce Salloum’s “untitled” series demonstrates an effort to move beyond a critique of representation and find a viable way to proceed.²³ Salloum’s video *untitled part 1: everything and nothing* (2001) is ostensibly about Soha Bechara and her detention in Khiam Prison in southern Lebanon, but by extension she bears witness “also to the broader detention of Lebanon and its people” (Harker n.d. in press). Although the filming in her Paris dorm room mimics the confinement of her prison cell, this space is not reducible to exilic claustrophobia.²⁴ Harker argues that the ordinary everydayness of the dorm room enables an intimacy between the filmmaker and the film-subject as well as with the film audience. Since there is no language to describe the horror of touching bottom, and a non-survivor can only experience it mediated, this intimacy establishes a

²³ I am deeply indebted to Christopher Harker for sharing his insights about Jayce Salloum and his work, which have significantly influenced my understanding of space and media as well as the potential for alternative spatial readings of the work situated in Beirut.

²⁴ Naficy (1996a) demonstrates how claustrophobic spaces configure a key iconography of transnational cinema.

fleeting bond between Soha and the audience in an intersubjective space of witnessing personal and collective violence.

Jayce Salloum, a Canadian video artist born “to a family of old Lebanese résistants, aims to deconstruct the legacy of ideological representations that presides over late neo-orientalist articulations” (Hadria 2005:40). His work in Lebanon after the proclaimed end of the civil war provided crucial transnational influence on the cultural critics experimenting with ways to represent the war. Including the video *This is not Beirut/There was and there was not* (1994) and the installation *Kan Ya Ma Kan* (1995-2000), Salloum collaborated with Walid Raad on the experimental documentary *Talaeen a Junuub / Up to the South* (1993), which challenged the simplistic representation of the resistance against Israel in southern Lebanon. Combining interviews with footage collected in the South, these two diasporic Lebanese artists had to confront their own discursive assumptions. In the opening interview with Zahra Badran, a fiery woman involved with the Lebanese resistance, she calls them out on the predicament of representation, “If I simply wanted to refuse, I would not be doing this interview. But if I don’t do this interview, I cannot express this refusal. You put me in an uncomfortable position, because even this refusal you will use to your advantage.” This challenge sets the tone for the rest of the documentary and the ambivalent participation of counter-voices affirms the impossibility of understanding the situation based on dominant discourses, if indeed at all.

Salloum draws on a toolkit of techniques to rupture expectations about narratives, images, subjectivities in what he calls a ‘reluctant documentary’ (Salloum and Hankwitz 2002:93). Designed for the “suspension of belief,” not the “suspension of *dis*-belief” that Classical Hollywood cinema is based on, Salloum’s list of aesthetic elements informs the

broader aesthetic field of post orientalist documentary filmmaking. The breadth and precision merits reproduction here (2002:90):

There was also the ‘tools’ of the process, the syntax structure or editing system and the critique inherent in it, the methodology of research, the shooting mannerisms, the collecting of appropriated footage, the intricate obsessive logging of all, the refining and slicing up of the material, building of sequences, the re-joining, the deliberate weaving and layering, the conceptual and physical shifting, the building of narrative through reoccurrent images and metaphors, the spreading out of narrative, fragmenting it in continuous and discontinuous threads, the use of disjunctive video and audio elements, the matching & mismatching and editing of audio from material recorded and gathered, the use of text in titles, subtitles, inter titles & headlines, the lack of easy monikers, the use of visual and aural jokes, using laughter as a critical tool, the suspension of belief, the ending of information, the insistence on moments of pleasure and the production of frustration. These are all elements or ‘nuances’ if you like, that I had been developing in my work in video and other media since 1978.

Up to the South foreshadowed other experimental documentaries on the resistance in the south, such as Akram Zaatari’s *All’s Well on the Border* (1997). He recovers the “images of resistance” from the leftist and secular militias in order to bring to light the “incomplete documentation” of an alternative history “from the vantage point of those excluded from its dominant representations—the prisoners, the traitors, the exiled, the coerced, the opportunistic” (Feldman and Zaatari 2007:61). Interweaving interviews with members of the resistance, archival television footage, and letters home from a prison detainee, he both critiques representation and implicates the resistance “in its originary codification” (2007:61). Rather than heroism or victimization, the montage provides “a more integrated understanding of the a priori conditions of the original exclusions that led to their military and political engagements” (2007:61). What emerges is the vile “sense of paranoia” where the shifting alliances have rendered “everyone from the shopkeeper to the mayor of the village ... suspected of betrayal and collaboration” (2007:61). More than mere patriotic duty or economic viability, participating in the resistance was the only choice available to young men in the face of conscription into the proxy South Lebanon

Army. This paranoid tension embedded in the social conditions of occupation remain charged even after the withdrawal of Israel in 2000, evidenced in Zaatari's short documentary *In this House* (2005).

In This House (2005) traces the history of a simple letter in order to explore "the dynamics that govern image-making in situations of war." Most of the video uses a double-channel split screen to reveal multiple timelines, locations, events, and pieces of information simultaneously. As the video begins, one "channel" reveals a medium-wide shot of a garden laborer being instructed to dig for an object in the ground. The camera is on a tripod pointed at the hole the man is digging. On the opposite channel, we are introduced to Ali Hashisho in an interview discussing his participation in the Lebanese resistance against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. But rather than sensational stories of war, the man talks about the house he and his troop based their resistance. When the Taif amnesty was signed and the militias were ordered to surrender their weapons, he wrote a letter for the owners of the house and buried it in their garden inside an empty bombshell.

Compelled to unearth this object, Zaatari reveals the way political forces become activated by the search for wartime documents. Indeed, the idea of unearthing something buried since the war era in the garden of the house's suspicious owners was enough to prompt the presence of several members of the police and military during the excavation. As they arrive we hear their conversations with Zaatari and Charbel, the owner of the house. As the digging progresses, they gather around the hole. We only see their feet clamor above the hole as they tell the laborer how he should be digging and place doubt in Zaatari's directions. By showing the way this banal object suddenly requires surveillance, Zaatari tries to demystify the process of intelligence gathering. Instead of

claiming to uncover undisclosed images or even alternative histories, which would privilege the status of the archive, he endeavors to map a terrain of permissible visibility.

The fact that the gardener, who Zaatari hired in Sidon for day labor, is the only person permitted to be filmed shows a rupture of representational authority. The only person who Zaatari was presumably not obliged to seek consent, remains the focus of attention through the entire video. Not to say that the prominence of the lower class laborer on screen implies his agency. On the contrary, the prolonged gaze on this man accentuates the typical invisibility of his agency. “Faisal is fasting” is the only thing we learn of this man during the video, which makes digging a deep hole under the sun particularly draining. Meanwhile, the figures of authority and the ambivalent landowner are off screen as a prerequisite for letting Zaatari film. The suspicious air of this event has vacated the video frame as these officials refuse to be fully seen, while still demanding to be present. Even when Zaatari comes in frame, we only see him from the waist down wearing black, contemporary, urban attire. This obscuring of authority is further accentuated by a tonal code the sounds in accordance with the people present. Each “agent” and “policeman” as well as Charbel and his wife have distinct tones that correlate with a legend of the top right corner that highlights who is speaking.

While those at the excavation are obscured by framing and high tones, Ali and his letter remain an absent presence. The decision not to bring Ali to this site could be motivated by various factors, including his consent and desire to do so. However, there is also an aesthetic effect employed as a consequence of his removal from the site. The fact that Ali’s narrative remains dislocated, on the other channel or mediated through Zaatari’s explanations, shifts the authority of his memory elsewhere. The only physical presence of Ali is the elusive letter, now fossilized in his memories. At one point Zaatari attempts to call Ali on the phone to clarify the location described to the filmmaker. After

several failed attempts, Zaatari reaches him and confirms the location. Ali's sudden virtual presence at this site, mediated by the cell phone, marks his subjectivity as removed from the actual site.

In post-orientalist aesthetics, the witness of history reveals her- or himself through mediated forms of self-referentiality, thus inserting a physical referent (a media object) as a gap between history and memory, between the 'real' and the 'image'. The physical presence of these objects and devices disallows the short circuit of representational mimesis, but it also accentuates the subjectivity of the witness as withdrawn. "Postwar" Ali is present at this excavation site only by way of Zaatari, who is mediating technology and political apparatuses to invoke the absent presence of Ali and thus the troubled history of the occupation and the resistance. In contrast "war era" Ali is only (absent) present in the mediation of his 'radioactive' letter, which remains in a state of volatile uncertainty until its archaeological recovery lays claim to its actuality. The narrative of this letter and the letter as an artifact remain separated until its canister is finally uncovered. Charbel takes the shell casing from Faisal, removes the letter, and reads it to the throng of spectators encircling the hole by this point.

Hearing Ali's story for a third time, the first to Zaatari in the interview and the second as Zaatari explains it to the agents in Charbel's garden, with the evidence of its material recovery extinguishes the anxiety and tension of the suspicious act. Instead of revealing the spectacle of war, the letter's simple poetics reveals Ali's desire to mediate the mundane details of his residence at this house during the war. He thanks the residents for allowing his troop to use the house and assures them that they tried to respect the house and preserve the land from poachers.

This momentary release of suspicious anxiety accentuates the looming fear that permeates these postwar sites and the memories fossilized therein. Furthermore, the

assassinations, massacres, detainments, and conscriptions mark a paradigm of disappearance that elucidates a political logic of erasure and return. Including these other forms of disappearance, hijacking have proven a useful negotiation tools for those who have no access to legal recourse. For example, in 1985 Imad Mughniyah, the car bomb mastermind, skyjacked TWA flight 847 en route between Athens and Rome. Landing in Beirut, he held passengers hostage for seventeen days before Israel agreed to release Lebanese Shi'a prisoners. Kidnapping and hostage taking also enabled those, who wished to employ fear tactics, to send political messages, but these tactics are not exclusively the domain of Shi'a militants. After the Israeli invasion, the first foreigners kidnapped were "four Iranian diplomats snatched by the Maronite Lebanese Forces militia and subsequently murdered" (Norton 2007:73). The convergence of erasure in these various forms of political violence provide a vortex of disappearance that gesture to a chronic official amnesia. The interpretation of disappearances during the Lebanese wars remains mired in historical forgetting and simplistic representations. For instance, despite popular renderings of Islamic jihad, "This distribution of suicide missions between secular and Islamic-leaning groups illustrates that the tactic of mounting suicide attacks was motivated more often by nationalist and patriotic impulses than by religious inspiration" (2007:80-1). Much of the work of Walid Raad, Jayce Salloum, Akram Zaatari, and others has aimed at making visible the processes that render certain perspectives silent, invisible, and dislocated in these popular histories of victimization. That is to say, the discourses of victimization advanced by American and French histories in Lebanon as well as Lebanese claims to victimization under foreign interventions and occupations.

In order to make this intervention, Raad's elaborates his investigation of "the western hostage crisis" from the perspective of the subaltern Arab man through the fictive creation of a Kuwaiti embassy employee held captive with the American hostages.

Bringing these types of fictive histories to bear on discourses about terrorism, *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes* (2000) introduces Soheil Bachar, an imaginary character inspired by real-life Soha Bechara. In this way, Raad pairs the narratives of the western hostages with the occupation of southern Lebanon and the captivity of its people. So instead of trying to author a narrative that stands in opposition to the dominant one, Raad inserts an alternative story within the master narrative to rupture its integrity. And using the guise and terminology of historical research allows Raad to cloak his fictions in fact and thus to subvert the meaning constructed in western discourse about Lebanon and the Middle East more broadly.

Hostage begins with an informational intertitle that credits 53 video tapes to Soheil Bechar, who has donated the tapes to the Atlas Group, but only allowing tapes #17 and #31 to be screened in North America and Western Europe. We learn that Bechar was held hostage for ten years in solitary confinement “except for 27 weeks in 1985 with Americans Terry Anderson, Thomas Sutherland, Benjamin Weir, Martin Jenco, and David Jacobson.” At the beginning of his video entitled *Hostage* Bechar provides very explicit directions for how his materials should be presented, evoking the rigorous expectations often applied to western documentary practices. In this case, also pinpointing the way dubbing and subtitles often silence or distort spoken words. Over a grey background we hear a male voice speaking Arabic and subtitles in English instruct us,

Please translate what I say in Arabic in the following video segments into the official language of the country where the tapes are screening. ... I also ask that you dub my voice with a neutral-toned female voice. Subtitle what I am currently saying. Let the subtitles appear on a grey background, or if you prefer ... use a blue background ... blue just like the Mediterranean.

At this moment the screen turns blue for several moments before cutting to Bechar sitting in front of the camera. This amateur looking footage has Bechar framed in

the lower middle of the screen. He has affixed a muted background cloth behind him, taped to the wall, but the camera is not zoomed tight enough to obscure this aesthetic decision. As he lowers the remote control, he begins speaking. He is dubbed over by a woman's voice with a North American accent. She says, "Yes, our story is tragic. Yes, our story is sordid. But you have to remember that it is first and foremost a story. And in this way it is familiar to you."

Indeed this notion of a narrated story is key, not just as fictions, but also the way narrative works to subjective stories into believable and ostensibly objective histories. For example, he analyzes the way the other five American hostages depoliticized their captivity narratives. Each of the five men reputedly confined with Bachar has written a full account of their version of the hostage crisis, critically reviewed in Raad's dissertation. Removed from historical context, these men use their kidnapping to tell a tale of personal transformation. Driven to the Middle East to escape social norms at home, or as Bachar/Raad says, "failed masculinity relations to heterosexual domesticity" (Raad 2002a). The perceived threat of homoerotic desire among each other and by their captors apparently rehabilitates each of them to become recommitted heterosexuals. Bachar thus uses his fictional experience, as an Arab hostage among these western men, to analyze the way they document their captivity to both emasculate Arab masculinity and strip their captivity of social and political context. By imagining an Arab man among these American men, Raad evokes the homoeroticism of the hostage narratives and challenges the importance of these narratives in relation to both the thousands of Lebanese kidnapped during the civil war and Lebanon held hostage by occupying armies.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE ATLAS ARCHIVE

Walid Raad, certainly the most acclaimed Lebanese contemporary artist of the last decade, has earned his fame on the clever performance of an earnest archival researcher investigating the history of the Lebanese wars. Like many other Lebanese artists and filmmakers, Walid Raad began collecting materials and chronicling his experiences during the war from a young age. He has formalized this endeavor by establishing the Atlas Group (www.theatlasgroup.org), an imaginary foundation created for the purpose of researching the contemporary history of Lebanon. The fastidious nature of the Atlas Group's projects enables Raad to convincingly combine the practices of traditional historic research with fictitious narratives. Set within the political environment of "postwar" Lebanon, these narrative excursions allow Raad to make fabulous critiques about the representational models inherited from western modernity and challenge official modes of erasure. The "mimicry of the archive" thus helps bring into question the authenticity of history (Rogers 2002). And since Raad hints at his disguise, his performance becomes a self-reflexive effort to trace the transformation of objects into documents and documents into facts. Referring to Raad's work, Schmitz reminds us, "It is no coincidence that the concept of the document originally comes from the corpus of juristic terminology ... [as] the basis of a generally accepted procedure for establishing truth" (2006:46).

Under the banner of the Atlas Group, Raad has created a series of performances, installations, and videos that investigate the way the war and Lebanon come to be represented and understood. In multimedia demonstrations that draws on a produced archive of images, objects, and documents, Raad's fictitious histories exploits the power of narrative and image to present an audiovisual approach to critical theory. These projects pose subversive challenges to the historiography of the civil wars by inserting

“questions about subjective impressions and personal experience” and exploring the way “individuals remember and fabricate ‘history’” (Nakas and Schmitz 2006:39). While historians situate the Lebanese civil wars between the years of 1975 and 1990, Raad’s work traces the effects (and affects) of this violence into the present moment. By exposing the representational tropes of documentary practices and elucidating the corporeality of mediation, Raad examines “the ways film, video, and photography function as documents of physical and psychological violence” (2002b).

Readings of Raad by western critics typically celebrate his work for its creative and critical potential. While these reviews provide an erudite analysis of his aesthetics from positions of art criticism, they rarely extend their analysis beyond Raad’s “texts.” Furthermore, the positionality of Raad as a New York based artist dislocated from Lebanon is taken for granted. For my purposes here, I retain these privileged readings and I draw extensively on these reviews here to elucidate the discourse advanced about Raad’s projects.

The Atlas Group critiques the “common-sense definition of facts ... as self-evident object[s] always-already present in the world” (Raad 2004:44). Raad thus advances the understanding of facts as “processes” and his critical project attempts to answer how to approach facts “through the complicated mediations by which facts acquire their immediacy” (2004:44). In other words, Raad does not examine these “objects and stories” based on a distinction between fiction and non-fiction, but rather on the way that they “circulate widely” and “capture our attention and belief.” In this work, the concept of “belief” stands in dialectical opposition to “knowledge.” Raad does not favor one over the other, but he challenges claims that knowledge provides a correct “cognitive relation to the world” and belief a flawed one. “If we proceed from the understanding that belief is the fundamental attitude that a person has when he or she

holds that a proposition is true and that knowledge is certified true belief (by virtue of evidence),” then Raad asks “how any proposition becomes true or false and what constitutes evidence” (2004:45).

These documents and archives serve not as “emblems of fact or scraps of evidence but traces, symptoms, and strange structural links between history, memory, and fantasy, between what is known and what is needed to be believed” (Wilson-Goldie 2004). Raad’s work peers around the edifices of war and political violence and “explores feelings of political saturation and linguistic nausea” (Hadria 2005:34). The combined assault in a war of words and a war of bombs and bodies “served to bring the country to exhaustion,” as Hadria says, “This double attack on the body and the senses is undoubtedly intended to demoralise the public and at the same time break its grip on reality” (2005:34). The representational manipulation faced by internal and external forces cast a shadow across those who experienced these traumas. In this sense Raad tries to elucidate the elisions in the representation of Lebanon’s history. Working to fill in these omissions in the public memory, his “self-mythologies” enable the exposure of “symptomatic collective amnesias” that serve as “defenses ... of a traumatised civil psyche” (2005:35).

The fact that he places this critique within “the venerable if uninspiring neutrality of an archive system, where series of potentially documented events are safeguarded,” (Schmitz 2006:42) enables Raad to appropriate the austerity of the archive and re-inhabit sites of historical mediation. By engendering imaginary intimacies with archival objects, documents, and images, Raad subverts the disembodied and rational renderings of historic significance. If we recall the ubiquity in which narratives of self-mediation and scenes of contextualized media in the examples discussed in this dissertation, then we can literally “see” the way these artists “offer us an image of what can be imagined” (Raad

2004:44). That is to say, in their quest to understand “the possibilities and limits of writing their histories,” they generate “cultural fantasies erected from the material of collective memories” (2004:44).

Raad calls these documents (images, objects, and stories) “hysterical symptoms,” which provide viewers with referents of impossibility and representations of fantastic imaginaries. The blurring and dismantling of binary categories of fact/fiction as well as the assertion of “the ‘plurality’ of experience, as determined by manifold class, sexual, gender, religious, ideological, and political locations,” inform integral aspects of Raad’s and others’ projects (2004:45). Raad pushes these critical interventions to ask, “How do we represent traumatic events of collective historical dimensions when the very notion of experience is itself in question?” (2004:45). This question again illustrates the tension between knowledge and belief as modes of experience.

In his projects, Raad presents a number of imaginary individuals who have reputedly donated their documentary collections to the Atlas Group. A narrative that chronicles their producer’s observations during the war always accompanies these collections, which shifts the focus from the archival object to the individual’s story. In his project entitled, *Missing Lebanese Wars* (1999-2001), Dr. Fadl Fakhouri, who is introduced as the foremost historian of the Lebanese civil war, donated his notebooks to the Atlas Group upon his death. One details every car bombing during the Lebanese civil wars with fastidious notes attached and the other chronicles the gambling of historians at the racetrack, not on the ponies, but on the photo finish. These documents include notes on wagers made by different historians, who were not gambling on the race itself but on the position of the winning horse at the moment the finishing photo is snapped (see Raad, Awada, and Abdallah 1999). Presented as historical evidence, the comical absurdity of this scenario works to deconstruct the way the war has come to be represented. Like the

Eadweard Muybridge motion studies in which they mimic, these stop motion photographs elucidate the tension between historical accuracy (read: reality) and a betting man's game of chance (read: representation). Like Muybridge's series of still frames, the concatenation of movement reveals "the impossibility of documenting the 'exact' moment" when the horse crosses the finish line, but reveals this piece of evidence as a "false moment" (Schmitz 2006:43). In this sense the historians at the racetrack not only miss the war through idle wagering, but also miss the evidentiary moments that connect objective historiography with quotidian pastimes.

In the work entitled, *I only wish that I could weep*, Raad draws on the Lebanese Army's postwar practice of surveilling Beirut's seaside promenade in order to insert a narrative of spatial longing borne from life in a fractured city. In a series of short video clips made by an individual only identified as Operator #17, we learn that this intelligence officer who grew up in East Beirut during the war is compelled to divert his surveillance camera from its intended object each evening to record the sun setting over the sea. Built up over the industrialized port, "East Beirut turns its back on the sea,"²⁵ so for someone growing up in East Beirut during the war, the allure of the corniche could only be imagined. For Operator #17, the succession of sunsets, each zoomed slightly closer than the last, inscribes the pleasure he received by shifting his surveilling mimetic machinery from an objectifying tool to one of individual agency. In this way, the quotidian and personal aura of the Atlas Group Archive "paradoxically becomes manifest in the seeming absence of violence" (Nakas 2006:50). When war and violence surfaces in this archive, they "are always and solely present as abstractions" (2006:51).

Operator #17's fascination with the sunset subverts the disembodied voyeurism of the surveillance camera and enables a rupture of archival objectivity and historic

²⁵ Interview with Tony Chakar June 21, 2001, Beirut.

temporality. The repetition of sunsets encoded on surveillance footage dialectically thrusts together both cosmic and modern logics of time. That is to say, in a time neither completed nor begun both past and future converge in an open-ended present. Invoking Henri Bergson's concept of time in *Matter and Meaning* – that the past is “that which acts no longer” and the present is “that which is acting” – Lepecki reiterates that anything that still produces sensory affects occurs in the present (cited in Lepecki 2006:64). The inclusion of affects and effects provides “an extraordinary expansion of the notion of the present” (2006:64). This has huge ramifications for a society stalled in a state of postwar amnesia. The density of the past and the phantasmagoria of the future create a temporal vacuum in present day Lebanon, in which only immigration promises escape. But the stoppage of time at the horse races and the diversion of the official gaze by Operator #17 have serious implications for the production of memory and the sanctions on forgetfulness.

If creating awareness and challenging thought are the impetus behind the Atlas Group Archive, instead of accumulated knowledge and authenticity as Nakas argues, then what purpose does historical context and subjective experience serve the interpretation of these collections? Perhaps Lepecki's summation provides an answer, the Atlas Group is an archive “that privileges memory (... as imaginative actualization of an event's nameless multiplicities) rather than history (... as an ossified reification of a named event)” (2006:62). In other words, Raad's memory/history dialectic subverts authenticity and objectivity of the historiography of the official archive by inscribing, not only subjective experience, but also inserting the elusive qualities of fictitious memories. But rather than reifying the fact/fiction and objective/subjective division, the combination of these elements destabilizes these neat divisions.

Referencing Raad's project that scrupulously documents 3,641 car bombs detonated during the civil wars, Lepecki envisions Raad re-imaging the disparities of wars within a cloud of exploded particles – “political particles, religious particles, bodily particles, colonial particles, affective particles, memory particles” – and inducing audiences into “a sensation of contemporaneity” with the Lebanese wars (2006:62,64). In files produced by Dr. Fakhouri, page after page affixes a newspaper image of car engines lying in the street (Raad 2002c). Appending the images are notes in Arabic about the vehicle description, make, model, year, and serial number. The only thing surviving a car bomb, we are told is the engine, which is thrown several hundred feet from the explosion. Parodying this explosive event, Raad produced a large magazine spread of a vintage Alfa Romeo with its engine suspended thirty feet above. The fantastic advertisement is an allegory of a “dislocated time,” says Raad, in which “victims of car bombings construct for themselves, in which there is no past, and there can be no certain future but only the present experience of trauma and its inescapable aftermath” (Wallach 2004). Raad explains, “What I like about this piece is that it is literally creating a cosmology.” Rather than ancient constellations, he suggests that there are new stories about the sky, “Now is the fetish moment of the car engine” (Quoted in Wallach 2004).

Elaborating on these new constellations of particles, Lepecki says, “When the virtual mist is produced by the reiterative dust clouds of endless explosions,” the ephemerality of these histories extends to the images, objects, and documents of the produced and presented archive (2006:64). The newspaper clippings, photos, and scribbles produced in Fakhouri's notebooks “are never presented in their original materiality but always as ‘treated’ pieces of archival evidence in digital printing technology” (Nakas 2006:51), that is “as lights and shadows, as pixels, as optical beings” (Lepecki 2006:64). These imaginary histories rely on the authenticity of re-mediated

evidence, produced, cataloged, and exhibited not as images of war, but as objects of an impossible archive.

For Raad fiction offers the opportunity to imagine the impossible, not the sensationalized spectacle of mass violence spread across the news media, but rather intimate encounters with traumatic memories of the war. As the archive becomes both the site of critical performance and mediated embodiment, these imaginary stories draw attention to unconscious fantasies and their Freudian potential to heal, if appropriately revealed. As Hadria suggests, “he inoculates the body of a diseased reality with an antidote of invention, the denial, the return, the subversion, in brief, the escape towards the fiction at the root of the massive blockage of the collective psyche” (2005:35). Alienation from the historical record, made all the worse by an official silence, perpetuates a collective amnesia. As the amnesty granted by the Taif Accord to all parties involved in the war allows men accused of war crimes to serve as members of parliament, Borneman (2004a, 2004b) argues that new narratives must emerge able to disturb ossified perspectives, situate accountability, and release future generations from permanent liability. A reinvention of the archive in Lebanon may provide these potentials.

This archival transformation not only dismantles the presumed opposition between fiction and history, but also reveals the performance of cultural memory and the way ideology transforms mundane details. The ultra hygienic and seemingly affectless environment of the archive merges the intimate organization of a personal collection with the magic of digital replication and manipulation. This transformed archive drastically differs from the traditional use of visible evidence to establish “what really happened.” Rather than simply critiquing the rampant misrepresentations in the popular western media or abandoning documentary for its betrayal of veracity, Raad utilize the critical

potential of mimetic media to document the way “‘truth’ continually changes, or more accurately, it adjusts to the respective unique situation” (Schmitz 2006:45).

Kassandra Nakas argues, “A psychological dimension is contained in this mode of allegorical doubling, in saying something else in reference to something non-sayable, non-representable, ...” (2006:51). Nakas connects Raad’s photographic aesthetics to western postmodern photography, “practices which challenge the medium’s reproductive, indexical function as well as trace its utilization by different discourses” (2006:49). From this critical position, photographers like Victor Burgin, Martha Rosler, and Allan Sekula “advanced” photography to a “discursive” medium. While the powerful agency of this postmodern photography asserts discursive critiques of representation on the viewer, Nakas draws attention to the way these concepts assume “a more or less clearly defined addressee” (2006:49). In contrast, the Atlas Group Archive challenges both notions of authorship and audience. Nakas asks, for whom these photographs are made. I suggest that the missing audience and obscured authorship of the Atlas Group Archive account for this “psychological dimension” of allegorical doubling, but I would refer to it as the phantom subjectivity of postwar Lebanese experimental film, video, and photography. The disrupted archive provides a creative critique of documentary practices by merging a discursive critique of the politics of representation with the phenomenology of absence. The archive survives like a ruin to provide evidence of the people who violently disappeared from these sites. The recurrent re-mediation of imaginary histories and impossible futures enables a critical reworking of representation that evokes the dead, a subject position I elucidate further in the next chapter.

This phantom subjectivity that indexes both an absent author and an absent audience also performs a commentary on the limited spectatorship of Lebanese experimental documentary and Lebanese social history more generally. To archive

something assumes it will have a future audience worthy of its material record, but it also implies that the documents may not currently have an audience interested in such materials. Imagining history thus requires one also imagine an audience. As such, Raad engenders subject positions imprinted on the materials of the archive and their performance of narrativity. This focalization of intimate narratives draws on autobiographical motifs to implicate the viewer's subjectivity within the same frame where representation is revealed as constructed. The multiple layers of media referenced in a single frame create a density of re-mediation and perform a subversive repetition of the mimetic function. Instead of fully available and self-evident images of some recorded "reality," re-mediation accentuates representational mediums in the literal sense of being material objects. Highlighting media as containers of images situates the image as an artifact within the present moment, rather than an indexical referent to an absent past. By affectively evoking the materiality of the media object, the viewer phenomenologically experiences these images and documents in a contemporary state of preservation and decay. The contemporaneity experienced by the viewer is thus with the archive, not the represented historical moment. And yet, these artifacts are never presented in their true materiality, but only as digital reproductions. By animating collections of fossilized objects, Raad embodies these objects, images, and documents with fabricated narratives of research as lived experience.

Raad's archival intervention provides a radical reassessment of Lebanese history, but without adequate context, these divergent iconographies become difficult to interpret. For some audiences, particularly western, these "text" are very hard to "read" without the "code." The constructedness of the self-produced archive encourages audiences to assume the subject experience of an archivist perusing a collection, however, the experience of watching historical fictions that use documentary stylistics confuses the

affective expectations of the audience. For audiences used to being fed simplistic representational formulas, “making sense” becomes a politically charged eruption of affective confusion. Based on the way these artists are dialectically interfacing with both content and form, opens questions and aspirations about the merits of affect-based critiques of representational frameworks. These projects provide a powerful critique of representation and explore new terrain of media subjectivity, however, the deferral of these representations continue to dislocate these critiques away from the sites and histories addressed. This ability to reconcile this disjuncture is of course extremely fraught within a context of contested publics, which my previous chapter attempted to reveal.

CONCLUSION: THE PRESENT THREAT

Walid Raad’s critique of the discourses created around the “Western hostage crisis” reveals the same myopic framing that led pundits, commentators, and ultimately the public to ask, “Why do they hate us?” after September 11th, 2001. The deceptively simple question belies the complexity required to answer it. In a similar fashion, to focus attention on why the hostages were taken or to lament only the western military casualties erases the culpability of American foreign policy and denies the victimization of its Arab “enemies.”

In 2005 Raad collaborated with the Visible Collective on *I Feel A Great Desire To Meet The Masses Once Again* to scrutinize “extraordinary rendition” as a political strategy in the “war on terror.” During a multimedia lecture performance at the Home Works III festival in Beirut in November 2005, Raad weaved together the ordeal of Canadian Maher Arar, who was detained in transit in the US and sent to a Syrian prison for 10 months, with Raad’s own fictionalized narrative of being detained and questioned

for hours in the Rochester airport. As the interrogating officer asked him a series of questions about the items in his luggage, he noted the way any seemingly mundane representation can be used to render his identity suspicious. Item after item is pulled from his luggage and used in his interrogation, which he humorously recounts. Photos from the 1982 Israeli invasion, nude self-portraiture, and an airplane safety card, among other items, take on new meaning and new immediacy within this constellation of suspicion. This, it would seem, is particularly disconcerting for artists whose work often intentionally challenge normative representational discourses. For instance, when Raad's colleague, artist Steve Kurtz, was arrested on suspicion of bioterrorism, one of the pieces of evidence used against him was a flyer for one of The Atlas Groups shows that happened to have Arabic text printed on it.²⁶

Raad's performances on "extraordinary rendition" and the kidnapping of the Lebanese nation lead him back to his personal archive of childhood photos. Showing photos taken by a young Raad of some Israeli soldiers sitting around a military tank as well as images of bombs falling on West Beirut illustrate a commentary on the estrangement he now feels to a self that took these photos without concern for his city and the people living in it. The implicit schizophrenia of this photographic event traces the social fracture in Lebanese society that enables him as a Christian teenager to blithely photograph Israeli soldiers, while the Israeli Defense Forces are besieging the Muslim sections of the city. His proximity to these occupying soldiers stands in contrast to his distance from his countrymen and women under siege across the city. By using a telephoto lens, typically deemed ideal for viewing objects far away, he critically questions how one could get close to a violent event without delimiting its complicated uniqueness. At the age of fifteen, Raad's family shipped him from Beirut to Boston, "just

²⁶ The documentary *Strange Culture* (2007), by Lynn Hershman Leeson, reenacts these events.

ahead of the militias that were targeting teenage men for enlistment,” (Wallach 2004) where these concerns could foment in exile. In this way, Raad begins to address his dislocation from these histories and ideologies.

In my brief historical narrative of *al-Janub*, I too tried to address the way the violence of these wars becomes dislocated in the historiography of foreign intervention. My chronological examples point to dozens of other assassinations, kidnappings, and massacres, however, the expanse of this historical record tends to eclipse other aspects of political violence – literally and figuratively. In this way, my historiography of the South partly betrays a strict post-orientalist aesthetic that looks askance rather than straight on. And yet, the cyclical repetition of historical discourse scattered throughout this dissertation attempts to reveal “parallax” perspectives and my historical account attempts to recover and recontextualize the historical baggage critically assessed by Raad and others.

In closing, let us ponder the significance of media as an intermediary object, neither sign nor signified, and yet imbued with the magic of both. In the information age our images and sounds no longer move on the recorded medium without special viewing mechanisms capable of translating the algorithmic data. The filmstrip, projector slide, phonograph, and even the photographic negative all bear tangible or visual likeness to both their referent and referred. Digital data, on the other hand, is inaccessible without computer technology. Today the archive is migrating to towers of hard drives, perhaps quadruply backed up to protect against hardware failure or corrupt data patterns. And yet, the sudden death of the hard drive on a pandemic scale could potentially decimate vast quantities of archival documents and memorabilia from the collective human record. The archives of tomorrow are faced with storing all the data generated online and remotely. Buildings filled with computer chips will be the libraries, museums, and recreation spaces

of tomorrow. So when war comes and destroys our archives, flattens our museums, makes our leisure sites ruinous, will the digital future leave a record? What will critical thinkers understand from our age of information if we leave no trace of it except the e-waste of failed hard drives? If our current archives are filled with spectacular violence, then would it not be advantageous to forget? To forget our tired narratives of sectarianism, nationalism, humanism, modernism, orientalism, colonialism, sexism, etc. Would a blank slate enable a less violent human civilization? Perhaps. But this is a question for the dead, or rather the 'undead', which I will resurrect in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Catastrophic Subjectivity

People are asleep, and when they die, they awake.

-- Prophet Muhammad

I don't have a homeland to say I live in exile...

I live in postmortem... daily life, daily death.

-- Elia Suleiman

On the one hand, this invitation to meet the corpse should not be mistaken for a call to embrace materiality, a return to hard facts and familiar corporeality. For a corpse is precisely that which sheds its own name, becomes unfamiliar. Unnamable, the corpse is unrecognizable and yet tangibly available. On the other hand, it would be equally mistaken to consider the work an invitation to side with a subversive historical narrative written from the point of view of the defeated. Rather, a corpse is governed by a downward-spiraling dialectic coursing endlessly toward ruination; it is incapable of safeguarding a memory.

-- Walid Sadek

INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter, I provided a critical assessment of Lebanese experimental historiography that disrupts the modes and forms of documentary “truth telling” as a genre for creating officiality and objectivity. Walid Raad’s intent is not to replace one ‘false’ history with another ‘true’ one, but to go against the grain of sanctioned forgetfulness. Like Raad, a cadre of experimentalists, who dominate the public culture of art, documentary, and cinema, have engendered a mission to challenge the dominant political, historical, social, and cultural discourses implicated by the Lebanese wars. Much of the Lebanese experimental documentary produced during the last decade explores the everyday violence that permeates the social landscape and perpetuates a tyranny of uncertainty about the future. This particular constellation of artists has kidnapped the historical record in an act of urgent sabotage. This provides a distinctly different approach to the spectacular and sensational reporting provided by Western

media. Critical of naturalized notions of cultural predispositions toward violence, this work embeds everyday anxieties within historical and political contexts, which have been inscribed with temporal and spatial catastrophe (Chakar 2006). This mode of critique is all the more significant considering its emergence during Lebanon's so-called "postwar era," which has been rendered oxymoronic in the return of widespread bloodshed during recent years.

This chapter builds on the mediated subjectivity identified in Raad's archival work, which takes form, or rather "makes sense," by way of fictionalizing authorship and erasing discursive viewership, what Nakas described as a "psychological dimension." Despite, or perhaps because, this subjectivity is withdrawn, mediation takes on new phenomenological terrain that exist in chronological and geographical dislocation. The experience of exile within one's own nation – not contingent only on nostalgia but also on impossible futures – ruptures both the time and place of "home." Whether in exile or in residence, Lebanon exists as much as an idea, or an imaginary image, as it does in bodies, buildings, rubble, and dirt. Experimental Lebanese documentary endeavors to critique the representational frameworks inherited by rational modes of objectivity, while also engendering new modalities for documenting Lebanon's dislocation in images, objects, and narratives.

In a hypermedia world, the virtuality and materiality of mimetic mediums evokes a magical object, at once tangible and intangible. If a photograph is both an artifact and a representation for something else, then to produce a virtual image of this artifact (a representation of the object bearing another representation) does not disable its ability to "touch" the viewer. By affectively implicating the viewer in the contemporaneity of the media object rather than the media representation, the constructedness of the event draws the viewer into the subject position of the author rather than into the contemporaneity of

the historical moment and its representative subjects. The author of these “documents” narrates and shows an observational subjectivity, which implicates the production of historical content as culturally constructed instead of as a “real” thing. The archival object, displayed with annotation, asserts its authority as evidence, but the fictive narration accompanying the visual representation gives it a subversive pulse. The immutable realness of the mimetic artifact hides an invisible author somewhere behind the lens. In another time, this image appeared for the first time in a viewfinder of a camera mask. So to put one’s face in the “same” image, to look through the screen, maintains the traces of the face behind the camera and engenders an intersubjective experience of dislocation.

While this experience may prove transformative for the viewer, able to encounter historical remains subjectively, what does the author achieve by making this media object? Furthermore, what are the implications for ascribing authorship to fictional characters? In Raad’s case, it is interesting to note that aside from Soheil Bechar, none of his characters are ever imaged; they are always the observing authors of archival documents. The (absent) presence of these authors invites the viewer to witness an imaginary world where the disappeared can be mediated, but not necessarily imaged or rendered visible. For like vampires, the phantoms of Lebanon’s wars bear no reflection and they can no be imaged directly. Perhaps the magic of mediation engenders an affective residue of invisible subjectivity, in which “incarnate images” resurrect monstrous subjectivities from the ashes of war in a vital rejection of “radical closure.”

Indeed, the concept of mortality has emerged as an imperative issue in Lebanese experimental documentary and narrative film and video. Jalal Toufic’s notion of the “undead,” developed around his reading of vampire cinema, has taken literal formation in Ghassan Salhab’s *The Last Man / Atlal* (2006), in which a city coroner is mysteriously

linked to a series of nocturnal murders. Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige have together written and produced films, videos, and installations around the concept of “latency,” evocative of an absent presence in both undeveloped film and postwar subjectivity. Thus this chapter traces the mediation of latent subject positions in the work of several Lebanese artists and filmmakers. This intervention aims to reconsider the significance of postwar experimental media as a site for the incarnation of monstrous subjectivities. In other words, in this chapter I will try to harness my assertion of post-orientalist aesthetics and its emphasis on remediation in order to assert an “invisible” postwar subjectivity. I should note that although I continue to use the term “postwar” – sometimes in quotes or parentheses for emphasis – I remain suspicious and antagonistic to the falsely forwarded premise that postwar means the end of violence. I addressed this at more length in chapter one, however, I want to remind the reader that I retain this terminology precisely for its contentious ramifications, contradictory claims, and tired insufficiencies. Thus, my use of “post” is always issued as a critical prefix. When the Lebanese are celebrated as resourceful people, resilient in the face of despair, and playful despite bombardments, this “postwar” tendency forgets the draining depression, horrific hopelessness, and virtual violence that Lebanese resilience must endure on a daily routine.

“Post” nevertheless engenders a periodization by marking moments of significant transition. Robert Fisk notes the mythology of Lebanon’s history is premised on a recurrent destiny of destruction and revival. North of Beirut at *Nahr al-Kelb*, “Dog River,” “inscriptions, steles, cuniform reliefs and plaques” commemorate 2500 years of conquering armies, from Nebuchadnezzar the Second to the British army in 1941 (1992:53). The Lebanese spirit of rejuvenation that is quick to say, “Beirut will rise again,” fails to mention that by the same premise it will likely fall again, too. How does

one write a history of violence? What are the connections between the historical discourses and the mundane lived experience of those who witness the demise of their social fabric? Can the representation of monstrous specters elucidate the invisible, unsayable, and unrepresentable of postwar subjectivity? Can mimetic media resurrect the martyrs of the Lebanese wars?

LATENT PYROMANIACS

In the Atlas Group's archival intervention, the post-orientalist aesthetics not only foster an awareness of constructedness, but also an affective experience of embodying the dislocation between the historical record and sites of acquisition. The contemporaneity, virtuality, and psychological qualities of this imaginary archival record suspend subjectivity within a mist of pixels and particles. This mediated suspension focalizes a viewer's perspective, not in the world of car bombs, snapshots, and assassinations, but within a world of photography, filmmaking, and archival research – an imaginary world of historical acquisition as the site of interpretation where history becomes fact. Like Walid Raad's fictitious historical figures – Dr. Fakhouri at the races, Operator #17 in this surveillance van, and Soheil Bechar held in confinement – Abdallah Farah is another mediating character obsessed with documenting the effects of war through the photographic medium.

A creation of Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige in their *Wonder Beirut: The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer* installation series (1998-2006), Abdallah Farah is introduced as a photographer who began working in his father's photography studio in the mid-1960s. Located in downtown Beirut, Studio Wahad received an order from the Lebanese Tourism Agency to produce three-dozen images of Beirut for the official calendar and a series of postcards. These photographs were meant "to reveal the most

beautiful tourist sites in Beirut” (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2006). In this case, the most beautiful sites are deemed to be the cinemas, souks, hotels, avenues, beaches, and banking district. In other words, “the city’s modernity, its diversity and its richness” provide an iconography of photographic idealism (2006). We are told that these same postcards can be found for sale today, “despite the fact that majority of the sites they represent were destroyed by armed conflicts and the Lebanese wars,” thus implicating a postwar nostalgia for a bygone era (Chouteau 2006).

Although the bikini clad tourists and multicultural modernity of these images highlight an ideal Lebanon, this “prewar” period already bears the markings of a contrary political climate. In the wake of the 1967 “six-day war” between Israel and several surrounding Arab states (not including Lebanon), in which Israel occupied Gaza, the Sinai, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights, political violence loomed large on the southern frontier. Sarah Rogers points out that in 1968, “the Israeli Army destroyed thirteen planes of Middle East Airlines (the Lebanese civilian airline) as they sat on the tarmac in retaliation for the activities of Palestinian commandos operating on the border” (2007:12).

In the 1960s, the Lebanese Riviera had become a globalizing site of exchange through petroleum, finance, and leisure, described by Khalaf as “a nation of services [and] middlemen” (2001:307). Inheriting the hybrid sensibilities of a colonized nation, plus the amalgamated identity of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish confessions, a modernizing and mediating Lebanon could accommodate both Arab customs and European exoticism. Often remembered as the “Paris of the Middle East” amid the “Switzerland of the Orient,” Beirut’s cosmopolitan history is deeply entangled in a decadent and violent past that precedes the “civil war” and implicates the duplicity of an ‘other’ Paris existing in ruins. By the end of the conflict known as the “civil war,” the

bombing Arab banking industry would have vacated Beirut to reemerge in the Gulf. And the flow of oil to Mediterranean ports would later pollute Lebanon's beaches in a massive oil spill during the July War in 2006, when the Israeli Air Force bombed Lebanon's oil reserves.

Traditional historiography depicts the Janus face of Lebanon's past as an opposition between cosmopolitanism and political violence. By grouping this strange binary according to periodization practices – with the 1960s golden era preceding the 1970s and 80s civil war – frames each of these excesses in exclusion of the other. What much of these experimental historiographies indicate is that both qualities are always already present, but more poignantly they hint at the interconnectedness of this dichotomy. If we accept this “golden age”/“civil war” periodization, then the so-called “postwar” era has re-engendered both qualities under new frameworks and the current transitional crisis in Lebanon has already begun to rework these frameworks yet again.

For Abdallah Farah, photography became a site to mediate this violent convergence. After the civil war broke out in 1975, we are told that Studio Wahed was destroyed in a fire. However, Abdallah did succeed in rescuing some of his negatives and hundreds of virgin film rolls, unshot and unexposed. “For an unexplained reason,” Hadjithomas and Joreige explain, “Farah kept quiet about embarking on a new venture. Three years after the start of the war, and a few months after his father's death, he began to damage his postcard negatives ... as if seeking a way to have their states conform to his present” (2006). On these images of Beirut, Farah would trace the destruction of the city by methodically burning the negatives “in accordance with the street battles and bombardments which were then in progress” (Chouteau 2006). Farah's act of “burning” the negatives (systematic exposure) corresponds to the “burning” of the city. As described by Rogers, “The boils incurred on the surface of the photographs are at once

symptomatic of the tensions underlying the city's image of modernity and parasitic of such representational coherency" (2007:13). Furthermore, by burning the image it takes on textured qualities that ground the representation in its materiality and evoke an affective ephemerality, in which the image becomes stuck in the representational gap, neither allowed to stand for what it indexes, nor be fully available in its object form. This is further manifested in the way Hadjithomas and Joreige reproduce and distribute these altered postcards for sale at their exhibitions.

Chouteau remarks that the narrative about Farah's photographic experiments provides a coherency to the visual fragments. She says, "this commentary confers a documentary status upon the images," which in turn supports the believability of this "reasoned fiction" (2006). Hadjithomas and Joreige expand the Farah narrative to examine the prospects of image-making under conditions of mass civil violence. Not the adventurous war reporter of Baghdadi's *Hors la vie*, Farah remains confined to his house through the war. Using the virgin film rolls salvaged from Studio Wahad, Farah takes photos of his neighbors and neighborhood. Without the lab chemicals, Farah's photos remained undeveloped, waiting for a safer day to be printed. After the war he kept this habit, feeling satisfied just to shoot the photos, well, that is almost satisfied. Without a need to see these images again (as he did see them once when shooting), "He nonetheless precisely documents each photograph he takes in a small notebook, describing it thoroughly, ... [but] leaving an immense space for the imagination" (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2006). Cited on their website, Pierre Ménard speaks admiringly of Farah's work, as if he were a real artist, as "a subterranean body of work, endlessly heroic, unequaled and, certainly, perpetually unaccomplished, a sublime attempt to capture each passing minute ..." Farah calls this work the "invisible image" or the "image in the text," but, for Hadjithomas and Joreige, they see it as a latent image.

In photography, a latent image is literally an image on an exposed film or print that has not yet been made visible by developing, so a “fundamental question remains” about “the revelation of these images.” Hadjithomas and Joreige ask, “At what moment, and to what purpose, would Abdallah Farah choose to develop his films...?” (2006). If you recall the description of *West Beirut* from chapter one, do you suppose Tarek and Omar ever developed their super-8 film of Omar’s curvaceous young aunt? If after the war ended they were able to process their footage, what would they see? Remarking on the fastidious notation by which Farah documents his unexposed images, Jalal Toufic considers this “a contribution to the resurrection of what has been withdrawn by the disaster” (2006a). Chouteau identifies this latent image, with force enough “to transform violence into critical freedom,” as an “incarnate image.” She says (2006),

To incarnate is not to imitate, reproduce or simulate. The image is fundamentally unreal. To incarnate is to give flesh, not to give body. The image which gives body, which incorporates, is that which includes the other, without leaving the other space for thought. The incarnate image, however, contains three entities that are indispensable to each other: the visible, the invisible, and the gaze, which brings them into relation.

This gestures to the invisible subjectivity in Walid Raad’s work as well as the usage of “latency” in the work of Hadjithomas and Joreige, which they define as follows: “Latency is the state of what exists in a non-apparent manner, but which can manifest itself at any given moment. ... Latency is the introduction to the possible, to the state of becoming” (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2002:40).

In their second feature film, *The Perfect Day / Yawmon akhar* (2005), the members of a Lebanese family exist in a state of latency. Malek is a handsome, young professional with a sleeping disorder. Whenever he stops moving, Malek instantly falls asleep. He must then stay distracted in order to not fall into a latent state of slumbering. Through the film, Malek is trying to contact his ex-girlfriend in a desperate desire for one

“perfect day,” but his nostalgia lulls him into sleep and she escapes as he slumbers. Although referencing the American film, *Groundhog Day* with Bill Murray, Toufic’s notion of a “perfect day” elucidates an anti-nostalgic temporality – “The perfect does not induce nostalgia” (2000:77). Toufic explains, “A man [sic] stuck in the same day tries to get released from it as it repeats itself a stupendous number of times, and he manages to do so only when at last he wills its eternal recurrence” (Toufic 2000:76). For Malek, willing the eternal return of the same day means to relinquish his nostalgic desire for being awake and remembering and to will the eternal return of the latent state of becoming in the ritual of sleep. But Malek’s distraction enables him to fleetingly forget the death-time of sleep and in particular the death-time of his father who disappeared during the war.

For Malek’s mother, the perfect day is held at abeyance because she has not mourned her husband. She refuses to leave the house in case he might return. If mourning is the acceptance of loss, then to not mourn causes the eternal return of trauma. This repetition only ends once the desire for this eternal loss is appropriated. But Malek and his mother’s distraction hint at a broader condition of postwar latency, a subjectivity that refuses the future because it has not accepted the past. But it is Malek’s father, who disappeared years earlier, who (dis)embodies the state of latency as an absent presence. For he is one of 18,000 who disappeared during the war and who has not received “proper” burial. For this reason he is not of the dead, but of the undead, a state of latency that exists in “a diffused state, uncontrollable, underground, as if lurking, as if all could resurface anew” (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2002:40).

The notion of the missing corpse plays central in Hadjithomas and Joreige’s short film, *Ashes / Ramad* (2003), which depicts the struggles of Nabil (played by Rabih Mroué) to honor his father’s cremation request, while also orchestrating a façade to

appease his extended family's expectation to have an open casket viewing and burial. While poignantly presenting the struggle with social customs, *Ashes* evokes a powerful metaphor about the war's "disappeared" and society's inability to mourn without accounting for those missing corpses. This obsession with latency in Abdallah Farah's photography, Malek's sleeping condition, and war's missing corpse, stems from the fact that Khalil Joreige's uncle disappeared during the war. Neither he nor his body were ever recovered. "He is still reported missing; and, the circumstances of his disappearance remain a mystery" (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2002:47). In 1995 a law was issued that defines the status of these disappeared people as "kidnapped," but after four years the family can petition to have the missing person declared deceased. Joreige points out, families in this situation face a difficult choice, "To declare someone dead without a trace, without the physical presence of a body, a corpse" (2002:47).

Khalil's sister, Lamia Joreige, has also explored this traumatic site. Her video, *Here and Perhaps Elsewhere* (2003), probes the social memory of kidnappings during the civil war, by confronting people along the "green line" and probing their memories. Rather than an investigative journalism approach in search of the "true" story, Lamia's video reveals the multiplicity of reactions, not the least of which is refusing to remember. Furthermore, those who choose to remember and talk with her do not provide coherent accounts and her provocation confronts the "official amnesia" that has persisted during the "postwar" era.

Like Lamia's latent witness accounts, Khalil warns that with latency is a risk of loss ... it constitutes the hope of something that will be revealed; the confrontation with a real that can be potentially disappointing" (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2002:47). He discusses the difficulty he faced when uncovering a latent 8mm film reel that his uncle had never developed. Khalil's uncle enjoyed amateur photography and filmmaking. This

errant reel that lay dormant for fifteen years could contain his last images, however, Khalil pondered for a long time whether to develop it, knowing “that this ‘latent’ image may reveal nothing, causing a disappointment, which would be impossible to compensate” (2002:47). When he did decide to develop it, the film came out mostly blank, with a few shadowing images sometimes appearing. But like the mourning for the dead, latency presupposes “the acceptance of being revealed and the risk of loss” (2002:48). This acceptance means to live with one’s ghosts and “to long for” them. Hadjithomas and Joreige say that by being haunted they “do not succumb to cynicism in the acceptance of images and of realities in a continuous present” (2002:48). Instead, their work explores questions about the convergence of the self, the social body, and the individual body “in a communitarian society ... where it is difficult to pose oneself as an individual ... a singular subject” (2002:48).

MONSTROUS SUBJECTIVITY

The fragmentation of the singular subject stands in direct contradiction to the Liberal notion of subjectivity advanced by Hobbes and Locke, in which “individuals are viewed as naturally free, rational, and equal and are assumed to have an interest in their preservation, their liberty, and their property” (Mehta 1992). Under this framework, the pursuit of these interests requires “a superintending authority” to prevent a “*state of war*” (1992). Given these parameters, Lebanon would seem to lack the authority necessary to ensure the liberty, rationality, and equality of Lebanese subjectivity. Considering the integral importance of institutions and technologies to mold and transform “the individual with strange passions, with a frenzied imagination, with undisciplined and chaotic urges ... to be rational and self-interested ...” (1992: 85); do we suppose “a state of war” would

have the opposite affect, making unmolded and untransformed individuals. Or perhaps, instead it merely produces withdrawn, latent subjects.

In other words, liberalizing “institutions and technologies” are not capable of replacing the “strange” individual with a “rational” one, because this dualistic pairing at once assumes the exclusion of all others and confers onto subjects an either/or status established by a “superintending authority.” To be sure, institutions and technologies may also mold and transform individuals in ways not deemed “rational and self-interested.” In the absence of a superintending authority during a state of war, what promise do institutions and technologies offer? In an age marked by the disintegration of the state and the rational subject, the intensified globalizing flows of media, capital, ideologies, and weapons has pronounced effects on people, institutions, and authority. Under such conditions, the state of war is perpetually recurring even when not marked as such. Under such conditions, the strange and violent exists along with the rational and self-interested.

In Lebanon’s “postwar” era, several “institutions” have emerged as facilitators of Beirut’s nascent bohemian culture. Largely dependent on funding from international foundations, the main contribution they provide is the creation of sites where the public can engage contemporary cultural production of Lebanese art, cinema, and scholarship. As discussed in chapter three, I participated and/or attended several festivals and events sponsored by these institutions during the fall of 2005. As with the preceding chapter on Walid Raad’s work, however, this chapter is more concerned with the “technology” used for mediating between contested publics and divergent subjectivities. In fact, the mediation of subjectivity must assume a new model that does not presuppose the existence of a superintending authority. One that grapples more directly with the state of war that produces different subjectivities, without abandoning entire societies to predetermined behavioral clichés.

In the following pages, I address an endeavor to rework notions of subjectivity by destabilizing the notion of a Cartesian rational subject, which foregrounds Liberalism's structuring of citizenship. Resisting a philosophy that might be nostalgic for the lost subject, Rei Terada (2001) attempts to reclaim the self-divided subject as a norm. She assumes that there never were any subjects, that subjectivity in the rational self-knowing sense was a fiction. In American "cold war" culture, this fiction manifests as the perfect consumer, that is, as a zombie. In Steven Shaviro's reading of George Romero's "living dead" films, he explains, "The life-in-death of the zombie is a nearly perfect allegory for the inner logic of capitalism ... [c]apitalist expropriation involves a putting to death, and a subsequent extraction of movement and value – or simulated life – from the bowels of that death" (1993:84). The absence of emotion in the death-time of the zombie – "that we would have no emotions if we *were* subjects" (Terada 2001:4) – is contrasted by the emotional nonsubject. The Cartesian subject, in its rational wholeness, is a subject devoid of affective intensities, and the zombie is a consumer of intensities who even when attacked exhibits zero change in disposition, or as Terada (2001:156) puts it,

[T]he living dead emblemize postmodern subjectivity: everyone knows that if there's one thing dead subjects don't have, it's emotion. Actually things are the other way around. Romero's living dead are notably undivided about their desires ... they are mere needs and compulsions ... they are pure intentionality.

But let's not forget that there is a deep "evil" at work in the zombies' consumerist intentionality. The zombies with their pure intentionality are directional in only one direction at a time, whereas the non-subject as a "living system" is multi-directional, self-differential, and self-divided. "When critics literalize the 'death of the subject'" says Terada, "[t]he persistence of monstrous metaphors suggests that the non-subject the functional but self-differential being needs to be seen as someone else" (2001:154). Monstrous subjectivity manifests in depictions of Reganomics' rationality in Mary

Harron's portrayal of Bret Easton Ellis' novel, *American Psycho* (2000). In this film, we witness the breakdown of the pure subject through a violent misogynistic rage at its impossibility. This allegory of male entitlement and the various challenges to this site of authority entangles the notion of a pure subject within the crisis of masculinity that presupposes a white male as the model of Liberalism's subjectivity. Near the beginning of the film we see Patrick Bateman preparing himself (played by Christian Bale), while giving a detailed inventory of his morning hygiene ritual with dozens of products used to engender a young and healthy look. He says:

There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory. And though I can hide my cold gaze and you shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours, and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable, I am simply not there.

In this incarnation of a 1980s Wall Street yuppie, Bateman strives with pure intentionality for the "perfect surface," but in the suppression of emotional complexity and "individual interiority" Bateman is threatened by the impossibility of this perfect project.²⁷ Unlike the zombies, when affective intensities rupture his perfect subjectivity Bateman constantly slips into a murderous rage. At the end of the movie, after we have traveled a dizzyingly murderous journey with Bateman, unsure if the violence unleashed was a psychotic fantasy or reality, Ronald Regan's address about the Iran-Contra scandal prompts Bateman's business colleague to comment, "He presents himself as this harmless old cotter, but inside, but inside..." As he trails off, Bateman offers the audience an internal response:

But inside doesn't matter. ... There are no more barriers to cross. All I have in common with the uncontrollable and insane, the vicious and evil, all the mayhem I have caused and my utter indifference toward it, I have now surpassed. My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact, I

²⁷ The notions of "perfect surface" and "individual interiority" I borrow from the DVD's special feature *American Psycho: Book to Screen* (visual essays).

want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no one to escape. And even after admitting this there is no catharsis. My punishment continues to elude me and I gain no deeper knowledge of myself. No new knowledge can be extracted from my telling. This confession has meant nothing.

This anti-cathartic transformation parallels Hadjithomas and Joreige's acceptance of the repetition of loss and the latent risk of disappointment. In Bateman's "perfect" day "nothing" happens. He confesses to the breadth of his murderous rampage, but those he confesses to refuse to believe him. Despite his fantastic rages of violence, which erupt in his struggle to maintain the "perfect" subjectivity, everything in his social world remains disaffected and seemingly unchanged. His eruptions of violence are invisible to them. In this sense, Bateman's transformed subjectivity abandons nostalgia and blind hope for catharsis as the one true intentionality of the zombie. Bateman's new subjectivity relates to Jalal Toufic's work on the "undead," which should be differentiated from Romero's "living-dead." In a jab at the ivory tower, Toufic has said that he "has more affinities with the 'un-dead' and the vampires of cinema than with the 'living-dead' who populate much of academia" (Bensmaïa and Toufic 1998:15). Toufic's un-dead stand in stark contrast to "Romero's zombies [who] seem almost natural in a society in which the material comforts of the middle class coexist with repressive conformism, mind-numbing media manipulation, and the more blatant violence of poverty, sexism, racism, and militarism" (Shaviro 1993:83).

This state of distraction means that the zombie, with "no conscious knowledge of the history from whence they come, are unable to mourn past wars and are haunted by the images of the dead who they have outlived" (Chouteau 2006). Like Malek with the sleeping disorder, the zombies live nostalgically in ever-reoccurring "imperfect" days. In contrast, Terada evokes Philip K. Dick's treatment of "replicants" crying when one discovers she is not a human, which indicates, "destroying the illusion of subjectivity

does not destroy emotion, that on the contrary, emotion is the sign of the absence of that illusion” (2001:156-7). In other words, zombies are non-feeling subjects, while those who have experience what Toufic calls a “surpassing disaster” are feeling non-subjects. As explained by Terada (2001:156),

Romero’s zombies have no feelings *because they are subjects*. They do not represent the poststructuralist post-human; they represent the ‘death of the subject’ in the strongly genitive sense, the sense in which if there were subjects, they would have to be dead.

Since emotion is often experienced as an uncontrollable and unknowable eruption, as an irrational state, then the presence of emotion produces non-subjects as subjects do not have emotions. When we feel emotion we are strange to ourselves. The antithesis of the zombie is then the unmaking of the subject, what Deleuze and Guattari would call becoming a “body without organs.” Brian Massumi suggests, “Think of the body without organs as the body outside any determinate state, poised for any action in its repertory; this is the body from the point of view of its potential, or virtuality” (1992:70). In an inorganic and undetermined state of becoming the nonsubject is an intensely feeling body without organs. And yet, when building a body without organs but full of virtuality, one must be cautious of self-destruction. As Massumi says, like Bateman’s ruptured subjectivity, since the process of becoming-other engenders “the madness of the imagination” (1992:108). Thus, Toufic’s advancement of “undeath” ushers in unimaginable potentials – becoming a non-subject, becoming latent, becoming monstrous – then enables the resurrection of imaginary memories that may or may not have occurred in the past as a way to mourn the invisible and disappeared, if only by witnessing it askance. The disappeared, the undead, can never be imaged directly.

WITHDRAWN VAMPIRES

Several filmmakers and video artists have endeavored to address the current state of post-war recovery and dire economic recession, which filmmaker Ghassan Salhab describes as a crevice: “Beirut *is* a crack,” one in which daily life cannot escape from a perpetual present; the past is irretrievable, the future unavailable. Every moment contains the potential for “radical closure,” which denies access to temporal escape. Toufic’s concept of “radical closure” relates to the post-traumatic, postwar existence in Lebanon in which he grew up, before leaving with his mother and siblings during the 1982 Israeli invasion. Under such conditions, the disappeared face a radical closure if they are forgotten, so Toufic asserts, “the presentation of the withdrawal is an urgent task for the present” (2000:67). In other words, if the desire for preservation indicates that “tradition” is already withdrawn, then according to Toufic it is imperative to document the withdrawal rather than a nostalgic vision of tradition. Toufic’s work on the threat of a radical closure of memory represents the “irruptions” of withdrawn entities as a declaration that “they are not party to their desertion by the rest of the world” (2000:98). Toufic prefers the term “irruption” instead of “eruption” in order “to described the sudden appearance of unworldly entities in radical closures,” because the latter could be misunderstood as the breaking out of a rash or as a “return of the repressed” (2000:250,n.49). The representation of withdrawn memory as an irruption in the image, in contrast, “does not do what memory otherwise often does: falsify, beautify, interpret; it does not even fool one into believing/feeling that the event happened an original time” (Toufic 1993:10). Rather, the irruption of unworldly entities in Lebanese experimental film and video puts the authenticity of the image in doubt.

By way of example, I discussed Jocelyn Saab’s *Once Upon a Time, Beirut / Kan ya ma Kan Bayrut* (1994) in chapter two, as an example of critical remediation of Beirut,

which characterizes a post-orientalist aesthetics. While employing techniques that accentuate mediated constructedness, embed a critique of (mis)representation, and focalize the narrative around a crisis of violence and exile, *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* does not exemplify the radical closure of memory advanced by Toufic. In fact, his critique of the film elucidates an imperative perspective on the mediation of “postwar” (non)subjectivity. If *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* is a film about forgetting, Toufic regrettably reflects, “unfortunately mainly in the sense that it is an unmindful film” (2000:68). Saab’s major flaw, says Toufic, is that she limited memory “to human recollection and archival images” (2000:68). By bestowing the “memory of Beirut” to an elderly projectionist who lives in the bombed out ruins of Beirut in a secret archive of cinema reels, Saab constructs a “[m]emory of what has thus been withdrawn,” which Toufic dismisses as, “a betrayal of it, a false memory” (2000:68). Furthermore, because Saab places the two young actresses within these archival images, she in effect “hides that the images are inaccessible.” To show the images as inaccessible, would instead acknowledge the impossible referentiality that results in the wake of a disastrous ordeal, what Toufic calls a “surpassing disaster.”

Toufic argues that in the threat of a radical closure of memory, characters more accurately “irrupt” inside the images even while remaining withdrawn (2000:69). Whereas he champions the Arab avant-garde as cognizant of the withdrawal of authenticity, Toufic decries the way Saab, as a journalist, represents Beirut with “bad Egyptian movies.” More critical still, he connects journalism to popular culture, which has not demonstrated the need for resurrection because it has not acknowledged the withdrawal of memory (perhaps, in part, due to state censorship and official amnesia, if not also the myopic amnesia of popular culture). The naming of catastrophe directly or the viewing of it in focus fails to witness the surpassing disaster, but instead blinds the

viewer to the withdrawal of subjectivity. Like Walid Raad's analysis of blindfolding in *Hors le vie*, the withdrawn undead, nonsubjects can only be seen peripherally. By Toufic's assertion, the direct embodiment of Beirut's images by Saab's characters engages the image as if the simulacrum was actually "real."

In a demonstration of the way post-orientalist aesthetics reveals withdrawn subjectivity, Toufic elucidates "two fundamental kinds of out-of-focus and/or of sloppy compositions in the photographs, films and videos of the period around the 'civil'-war" (Toufic 2000:70). From the period of the civil war, he identifies the first version by one of four factors: the threatening conditions in which they were taken, the aversion of the gaze at decomposing corpses; the proximity of the dead as creatures of the undeath realm; and as entranced states. The second version of "haphazard compositions" taken in the aftermath of the civil war is identified instead by "the withdrawal of what was being photographed" (2000:70). The sloppy aesthetics appears to be the result of hurried photography under the threat of imminent danger, but Toufic argues that these framings were not the result of "a formal strategy but due to the withdrawal and thus unavailability to vision of the material" (2000:71).

Although *Once Upon a Time: Beirut* provides an experimental approach to remembering the war, Toufic's reproach of Saab's journalistic sensibility stems from a deep reverence for the dead. He scolds Saab for carelessly transgressing the prohibition on the sayable, on the impossibility to speak of death or of the dead without mediation. Toufic defends the dead from this naming, "Even the dead (as revenant) does not speak in the name of the dead (as undead); even the ghost, ostensibly a revenant, is not allowed to speak about himself or herself as dead, to fully be his or her own emissary" (2000:62).

The undead serve a critical purpose in the mediation of postwar society, they "come to prevent the world's desertion of those suffering a surpassing disaster from

turning into a radical closure” (Toufic 2000:70). The undead, as a allegory for postwar subjectivity, builds its constitution in opposition to a particular fantasy about memory. This fantasy presents an imagined idea of how memory works without reliance on accuracy. Toufic writes, “To think and write about the dead as they were when still alive is already a forgetfulness of them—as undead” (2000:61). This is the presumption objective documentary theories make about evidence – that what is indexed is still available. This is why the mediation of the undead is of critical concern to the Lebanese documentary experimentalists, who are faced with representing the erased history and disappeared bodies. Toufic believes that artists who have experienced a “surpassing disaster” must acknowledge the “withdrawal of tradition” that occurs therein, that tradition “has effectively disappeared even in cases where it seems to have survived” (Colla 1998:308). The resurrection of the undead in films is not a preservationist compulsion, but a desire to acknowledge the passing of traditional subjectivity. He connects the withdrawal of the referent (not as real but as another image) to the withdrawal of “postwar” subjectivity, which as the result of witnessing a surpassing disaster has had tradition withdrawn. In circumstances where one has suffered a surpassing disaster, Toufic warns, “one must be sensitive to the eventuality of the withdrawal, and, in the absence or failure of the resurrection of tradition, of the obligation to suspend transmission, so as not to hand down counterfeit culture” (2000:75).

For Toufic, *Once Upon a Time: Beirut* was not sensitive to this eventuality and instead recycled tropes and clichés of Beirut as something only artificial. The rejection of binaries in the work of these experimentalist documentarians, does not claim a “counterfeit cultural, “ that is as something “mis”-represented, as something “artificial,” or “fictitious.” These categories remain as “real” as facts, documents, and historical archives. In this regard, the undead, as non-subjectivity, enables Toufic to trace the

process of depersonalization and disrupt the transmission of counterfeit culture. His use of vampires—the undead—is not reducible to mere “literalization.” According to Colla (1998:n.8, 315), Jalal Toufic ...

would insist that he is not using a metaphor in describing the experience in that way since what has happened is an actual change in experience: a different state of mind has come into place, one which is not unlike how vampires would be if they existed or as (for Toufic) they do exist in the survivors of the [Lebanese] Civil War or other disasters.

The fragmented existence of postwar survival is a notion Toufic would consider oxymoronic. To experience an event as a surpassing disaster does not allow for escape. The notion of escaping with one’s life means of course to experience one’s ultimate death. Toufic sees communities as defined by the disasters they have survived. As Elliot Colla comments, “Toufic suggests paradoxically that the heart of community and culture is a recognition of loss. ... it may appear that some people and objects actually survive a catastrophe. The fact is they do not, because what survives the catastrophe is no longer what was before the event” (1998:308).

Of course, not everyone is capable of grappling with these modalities. “One has to have died before dying to encounter modalities of the dead-undead, those who do not know and are alien to the laws of the living,” as Toufic says, those who have been typically banished to the asylum or the ship of fools under a sociophobic pretense of madness (2000:61-2). An extended section of Toufic’s video, *Credits Included: A Video in Green and Red*, takes place in an insane asylum in southern Lebanon. A man interviewed at the asylum claims to be the Prophet Mohammad, Jesus, the Son of God, and several other identities. With this array of personalities that manage to exist within a single body, Colla suggests, “we begin to get a glimpse of what the history of the Civil War would look like if it were incorporated in one body.” But “rather than seeing [him] as a once-unified individual now broken into parts, it is as if he were the embodied,

impossible emblem for the integration of Lebanon's contradictions" (1998:310-11). This is the manifestation of the impossible "I" not in a rational subject but in a necessarily irrational one. Laura Marks affirms, "Madness ... is not only the most logical way to respond to war; madness is also an image of ruin, an image that cannot be connected to memory, much less to chronology" (2000:206). This "madness" relates to the un-death of all postwar "survivors," a becoming-undead that is necessarily schizophrenic and non-subjective.

CATASTROPHIC TEMPORALITY & SPATIALITY

In earlier sections I intimated the notion of "catastrophic time and space" advanced by Lebanese artist and author, Tony Chakar. He argues that the space and time of catastrophe is the opposite of rational space, because you always see the end of things rather than their beginning and people are already dead even if they appear alive. Chakar endeavors to subvert the way sensational scenes come to stand in for everyday lived experience, and thus reveal the ghostly and phantasmic idioms and characters that haunt the war torn landscape of Lebanon. In an effort to despectacularize the city after the 2006 Israeli invasion, Chakar gave a walking tour to some European artists in an area of East Beirut (2006). This unbombed neighborhood does not produce the spectacle engendered in the southern suburbs. Instead, the architectural details of the houses in this Christian neighborhood bear the traces of architectural decisions made in expectation of future wars, thus inscribing them with a latent violence rather than a spectacular violence. In this way, catastrophic time and place have indelibly inscribed war and violence into the cultural patterns of everyday experience. Chakar's disruption of both the temporal and spatial planes of catastrophic subjectivity gestures toward both Walid Raad's explosive historiography and Toufic's notion of labyrinthine ruins.

Originally included in Toufic's dissertation-turned-book, *(Vampires) An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (1993), and reprinted a decade later (2003), his essay on "Ruins" has recurrently been reproduced in expanded form in various volumes on Lebanese experimental visual culture (2002, 2006b, 2006c).²⁸ In this essay, we learn how Toufic and his family deserted their apartment when fleeing the war. Rather than physical destruction, Toufic says that the act of desertion constitutes a place ruinous. Neither its destruction nor its reconstruction affects its state of ruin. Ruins can be identified as "places haunted by the living who inhabit them," be they refugees or squatters inhabiting the damaged buildings or the vacant houses of dead owners (Toufic 2006b:8). As described by Hadjithomas and Joreige, ruins exist as both "[o]ccupied uninhabitable areas, and deserted habitable areas" (cited in Toufic 2006b:8). In contrast to the living haunting those ruins, the undead vampire does not inhabit the houses that he or she haunts, evidenced by his failure to appear in a mirror.

The "labyrinthine space-time" of these ruins, Toufic says, "undoes the date- and site-specific" (2006b:9). He recounts the story of a woman who visited downtown Beirut on an architectural tour just after the war. On hearing the names of streets and buildings, the decimated city scene could not accommodate the mental map created from memories her parents had told. After the tour she had difficulty recalling the destroyed city and it was only after several visits and noticing the presence of refugees living in the buildings that "she really felt that the destroyed city center was the reality" (Toufic 2006b:10). Remarking on the massive reconstruction of Beirut's Central District and its prerequisite bulldozing of much of downtown, Toufic calls this destruction "sacrilegious because of the brutal unawareness it betrays of the different space and time ruins contain" (2006b:11). In fact, he suggests that this reconstruction exhibits the brutality of the war,

²⁸ The 2006 versions are accompanied by French and German translations.

“the war on the traces of the war is part of the traces of the war, hence signals that the war is continuing” (2006b:11).

In these conditions threatened by radical closure, Toufic calls for a “relay between documentary and fiction” in order to address the withdrawal of a surpassing disaster. In settings that have experienced such a disaster, he warns, “fiction is too serious a matter to be left to ‘imaginative’ people” (2006b:13). The ghost or vampire is fiction, not because it is an imaginative creation, but because fiction provides the “main loci for his appearance.” Toufic considers the absence of specters in the fiction of a postwar society to be a dangerous sign of collective amnesia. In Lebanon, Ghassan Salhab²⁹ provides the exception. Salhab’s films explore the disaffected subjectivity of postwar Beirut haunted by phantoms, ghosts, and vampires. *Beyrouth fantôme / Ashbah Beyroot* (aka *Phantom Beirut; Ghosts of Beirut; Bring Back*, 1998) tells the story of Khalil’s mysterious return after disappearing during the war. Presumed dead for ten years, his old friends sight Khalil (played by Aouni Kawas) at the airport, a master symbol of departure and return. But reoccurring sightings begin to enrage his friends who had stayed in Beirut to fight. When they confront him about the truth of his disappearance, his withdrawn emotional state provokes an intensified self-examination of their existentiality. Unlike Bateman, Toufic’s “vampire” subjectivity never reveals the violence of his or her emotions. While the nonsubject is intensely emotional, its affect is withdrawn and seemingly dispassionate. These undead entities have been rendered mute, and yet, their “invisible” presence is evoked in the image, revealing their withdrawn absent presence.

As this experimental thriller unfolds, Salhab intercuts interview segments with the cast commenting on the film’s narrative, creating a multi-diegetic approach for reacting to the war. These self-referential “documentary” moments, when we have stepped outside

²⁹ Born in Senegal, Salhab moved to Lebanon in 1970, where he spent much of the war years.

the story of Khalil and into the history of postwar Lebanon, bears witness to the experience of war and survival characterized by fleeting encounters with phantoms from the past and ever-present uncertainty about the future. Nearing the end of the film, “in a symptomatic structural mistake,” Khalil is mistaken for someone else and kidnapped, which reveals him as a phantom of “objective chance” (Toufic 2006b:n.9,15). In other words, his return to the world of the living was a fluke; his fate had already been determined, so his abduction also serves as a rescue mission if it delivers him from the cycle of immortality.

Salhab again actualizes Toufic’s vampiric vision in his latest feature, *The Last Man or Atlal* (2006), meaning “ruins” in Arabic. Khalil Shams (Carlos Chahine) is a general physician participating in the autopsies of a rash of victims drained of their blood. As the movie slowly progresses, Khalil begins to link himself to the victims and suspects that he is responsible for their deaths. Khalil Shams, literally “the companion of the sun,” is another ironic name for a character becoming a vampire repulsed by the sun. Engulfed by the darkness of night, his film reveals a “concealed space that slowly swallows him” (Chakar 2007:71). Shams has entered a new world, one in which he is withdrawn, “made of darkness, of quiet, of wet, of stillness, of loneliness, and of blood, lust, and hunger” (2007:71). Retreating from the light and the distracted people living in the sun, Chakar calls the vampire “a metaphor for the extreme isolation of individuals, and their perpetual fight to remain individuals ...” (2007:71). Both Jalal Toufic and Aouni Kawas (the Khalil from *Beyrouth fantôme*) make cameo appearances, Toufic as a psychiatrist Shams is consulting about his malaise and Kawas as the Lestat-figure (2006) – the vampire responsible for Khalil’s affliction. This intertextual film traverses catastrophic space and time and bears witness to the process of depersonalization in postwar Lebanon. Witnessing the process of becoming a nonsubject, a body without organs, reveals a

double violence, first, in having to bear witness to an originary violence, and second, as withdrawn from the violence by the repetition of its representational occurrence. Acknowledging a lost space and time inhabited by the parasites of the underworld, requires one to confront the deep violence invoked in the mourning for one's vampires.

The absence of citizenry in Lebanon, sectarian affiliations notwithstanding, is pervasive and multifaceted. From the 75 year-old census that has ossified the political demographics, to the half-million resident Palestinians refused citizenship and its attending rights, to the 150,000 deaths during the "civil" wars, to the 18,000 disappearances, to the detainment of prisoners without legal recourse, to the occupation by foreign armies, to the millions of Lebanese living in exile, to those assassinated by bombings, to those massacres of victimization, faced with all these violent forms of disappearance Lebanese experimental documentary has endeavored to resurrect these latent bodies in order to break the official silence and collective amnesia that keeps the Lebanese distracted by nostalgia. The next section I stay with the work of Jalal Toufic, but move from his "fictional" articulation of postwar subjectivity to the realm of ritual withdrawal in order to argue for a *shaheed* subjectivity. Defined precisely, *shaheed* subjectivity implies a martyr who has "witnessed" a surpassing disaster and accepted the repetition of loss. This move attempts to ground the ephemerality of vampiric non-subjectivity back into the ordeal of the ordinary and establish the vitality of postwar mediation.

SHAHEED SUBJECTIVITY

The word used in Arabic for martyr is *shaheed*. My use of this term, on the one hand, is meant to disabuse the understanding of martyr in its universalist application that otherizes the orient and in its synonymous status as a *jihadi* terrorist. On the other hand,

the usage is for precision of meaning. A martyr is one who dies for his/her cause, but a shaheed is a witness, one who bears witness. Of course, to witness the ultimate suffering could cost one his/her life, but even if not murdered in a massacre, the withdrawal of subjectivity for the witness is imminent. A living martyr, like Soha Bechara parodied by Walid Raad's Soheil Bechar, has "witnessed" her own death as a surpassing disaster, but remains among the living as a withdrawn subject – a spokesperson for the dead. Since there is no language to describe the horror of touching bottom, a non-survivor can only experience it mediated. Through deep intimacy with withdrawn subjects, documentary experimentalists establish a fleeting bond between the undead and the viewer in an intersubjective space of witnessing personal and collective violence.

The "evil" of this violence intimated earlier, requires that we do not given in to an urge to valorize the undead, rather the undead require both mourning and public trial. The undead spread their affliction throughout society, but the engineers of distraction banish this affliction to invisibility. These artists employ post-orientalist aesthetics of withdrawal and latency to engender representations of unacknowledged specters forcibly silenced by way of official discourses and the state apparatus. These subjectivities irrupt in Lebanese experimental film and video in ways that remark on the latent violence still invisibly walking the streets of Beirut. In other words, among the undead are militiamen whose amnesty has not provided them with redemption, but confines them to stalking the darkened avenues and government buildings. Based on the definitions provided of witnessing, the mass murderer and the militiaman are then the ultimate witnesses of suffering, able to kill and "live" to tell about it. But if the undead cannot name the dead by name, we must ask how can the guilty bear witness against himself or herself, what evidence does the murderous body provide besides a confession? This issue emerged in the controversial screening of *Massaker*, by featuring several Maronite Phalangist

militiamen who recount the way they perpetrated the massacre of Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila in 1982. For Toufic, *Massaker* also failed to acknowledge the withdrawal of these killers' affect. By showing them photographs of their victims, reveals a false expectation that the images will provoke an irruption. These men too are victims, the victims of lost innocence, fallen to sectarian distraction and desire for killing.

In *Massaker* we hear the "confessions" of militiamen who worked on the darker side of "evil" distractions, like Jason Bourne and the men he eludes or kills in the Matt Damon spy thriller trilogy. Lurking in the shadows of diplomacy, Bourne is a man conditioned to kill under the cloak of espionage. He has witnessed horrible violence at his fingertips, but remembers nothing. Nostalgia for his "real" identity has blinded Bourne to the death haunting his present. If he were capable of acknowledging that his amnesia would be a recurring nightmare full of pure intentionality, his zombie subjectivity could be resurrected as undead. If he were afflicted with something besides a cold-blooded thirst for revenge, perhaps this blemish could enable him to recognize his withdrawn subjectivity. The murderous rage of Patrick Bateman and the violent vengeance of Jason Bourne demonstrate different parameters of undeath, than with the Lebanese vampires. In these counter examples, the haunting and unasked question remains, how to interpret these violent zombies of American empire, teetering on resurrection, as manifestations of the "white man's burden?"

The most compelling tragedy about Jason Bourne's character is not that he has been trained to be a ruthless killer or his unstable amnesia. No, the most compelling tragedy facing Bourne is that the other zombies keep pursuing him, no matter what he does, or perhaps precisely because of what he does they relentlessly haunt him. He reveals his betrayal of the dead when he asks, "Why won't they leave me alone?" The tragedy is not that he may never know who he was, but that his nostalgia for this lost

subjectivity prevents him from acknowledging his present withdrawal. Despite the rupture of his surpassing disaster, he remains falsely hopeful for a nostalgic conclusion to his endless amnesia. But Bourne's pursuit of pure intentionality references a state of becoming other in his quest to stop a radical closure of significant legal ramifications and sensational news worthiness. In this threshold of becoming, Bourne must decide between the distraction of nostalgia that propels him to consume the social structure that conditioned him or instead to mourn for those in the wake of his affectless rampage. Unlike Jason Bateman's irruptions on the perfect surface of 1980s Wall Street, Bourne's irruptions remain devoid of emotion, without feeling. Like the zombies that haunt American and Lebanese shopping malls in a state of distraction, Bourne remains an agent of pure intentionality, even if pursuing a renegade quest to kill his way to an originary point of self-actualization. The undead may already know that they are dead, and yet, they thirst for life. Perhaps, they thirst for resurrection, because they have not been mourned. Perhaps, they thirst for judicial closure, because their crimes have been ignored. Because they are not regarded as withdrawn by popular discourse, the threat of radical closure compels them to thirst for life, to thirst for blood. Until the undead can be put to rest, they will further compel violence. My reading of subjectivity and non-subjectivity, juxtaposing zombies/living-dead with vampires/undead, should not delimit the range of other possible postwar subjectivities. Furthermore these categories are both slippery and contradictory. The assigning of categories becomes tenuous in the dislocated space/time of catastrophe. Nevertheless, these representations provide a generative effort to talk about the various forms of violence of bearing witness in postwar societies.

ENTRANCED BY TOUFIC

I already feel even the blood in my veins to be spilled blood irrespective of any wounds suffered in my life; since I already feel that I am bleeding in my veins.

-- Jalal Toufic³⁰

Despite the latent violence of the vampire, Toufic seems principally concerned with those who have witnessed a surpassing disaster without necessarily perpetrating it, but he would insist that even a perpetrator must be revealed as withdrawn by his own violence. Since shaheed subjectivity must accept the repetition of loss in martyrdom, a mediation of the everyday must provide an examination of the mundane rhythms of violence and the ordeal of the ordinary. This type of examination engenders the sites of everyday lifeworlds with the vitality of self-mediation and the empowerment of the incarnate image. This is a tentative theory that applies to the mediated subjectivity enacted by post-orientalist aesthetics, or rather a mediated subjectivity *entranced* by post-orientalist aesthetics. Here I sketch out a hypothesis about the vitality of mediation, which will require fuller ethnographic and religious research in order to elaborate.

As pointed out by Boris Groys (2007), Toufic's videos lead the viewer to feel like a witness of a ritual. This is literally the case with Toufic's pieces on the Shi'a tradition of *ashura*, which commemorates the mourning of saint Hussein ibn Ali. Groys also notes the more private rituals mediated in *The Sleep of Reason*, which uses long extended takes of sleep followed by the slaughtering of cattle. Groys says, "The ability to reveal the inner complicity between ritual and the medium of video is one of the reasons Toufic's videos so powerfully capture the imagination of the viewer" (2007:83). He goes on to proclaim that religion is not based on a set of opinions, but that rituals preclude opinion.

30 See Toufic (Toufic 2000:42).

These rituals of Toufic's are neither true nor false, neither sacred nor profane they are rituals of the mundane.

The image's magical ability to captivate audiences, is inextricably implicated in the "soul" stealing modernity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, these artists of a post orientalist digital age draw on multiple registers of mimetic layering to participate in the revoicing – remediation of these "captivity" narratives. As Groys indicates, the repetitive reproducibility of video enables Toufic to reveal the ritual protagonists "in a state of ecstasy, or in sleep, or in a mood of deep mourning" (2007:83). "The video image is the moving icon of the unmoving and invisible digital code," so by foregrounding a deep connection between mediation and ritual enables video's hidden digital data to visualize the invisible, to render visible the "invisible God" (2007:83). The mechanical reproduction of the dead image and its loss of aura constitute "the most radical religious experience under the conditions of modernity" (2007:84). For Toufic's, the repetition of ritual and video provides the possibility of deferring the loss.

Toufic's 2005 "short" video, *The Lamentations Series: The Ninth Night and Day*, subverts time to enact a feeling of eternity. For "sixty minutes,"³¹ we watch a continuous shot of an Ashura rite of self-flagellation. In endless repetition, the men swing their arms up to strike at their forehead or crown. Most of them have blood flowing down their faces from these self-afflicted wounds. After about a minute, the video slows to a fraction of its normal speed as we watch the same ritual scene unfold. After several minutes, the viewer cannot help but become entranced with a single man staring directly at the camera. The rhythm of this commemorative self-flagellation at extremely slow speeds gives way to a slower, more latent, rhythm of entrancement. While his compatriots remained entranced

³¹ The movie only last about half an hour, but several listings accessed by the author erroneously say sixty minutes. I suspect that this farce is intended to challenge peoples expectation of cinematic time.

by the mourning ritual, this transfixed man, entranced by the camera, looks into the eyes of the audience thus captivating them in the entrancement of a staring contest. Noting the acknowledgements to Shi'a Imams who had given Toufic permission to film, one Lebanese artist commented to me that the man was probably instructed to keep an eye on Toufic. Since his eyes never leave Toufic, does suspicion entrance? If so, in what way does Toufic's video camera mediate this trance to viewers? While the man on screen is forced to repeat this entrancement regardless of audience, the audience can try to refuse the hypnotic trance. In fact, it is common to see people walkout of Toufic's screenings. "Nothing happens."

But what is the Shi'a man really looking at? Is he looking at Toufic? Is he looking at us? No, he is looking at the camera. Of course, the camera is also looking at him. Toufic asks, "In what state may I feel that an object is gazing at me? Vice versa in trance, when an object gazes at me, either I enter into trance or this indicates that I am already entranced" (2004:9). But more importantly, looking through the mimetic object entrances Toufic who stands behind the camera. Jean Rouch describes his work on spirit possession as a choreography of entranced participation, "it is the 'film-trance' (ciné-transe) of the one filming the 'real trance' of the other" (1978:8). Given the parameters of the spirit world with "fragile mirrors," Rouch asserts, "the observer's presence can never be neutral" (1978:7). In the case of Toufic, recording the ashura mortuary rite also activates suspicion through the gaze of entrancement. This entranced intersubjectivity implicates the viewer in the realm of suspicious complicity.

VITALITY OF MEDIATION

For Jalal Toufic, the unconscious acceptance of the ontological link between model and image remains powerfully in play. He attributes this belief not to its realism,

but to the laws of magic, particularly “contiguity and similarity” (see Mauss 2001). Images have a very important relationship to the ghostly figure of the undead as the magic of mimetic technology provides the only means for revealing evidence of these ghostly figures. The evidence produced is not one of “reality” – you do not see ghosts on the street if distracted by dominant discourse – but the incarnation of a latent imaginary. The ecstasy of entrancement presents an opportunity to visit with the undead, ghosts, and phantoms of Lebanon’s cultural amnesia. The incarnate images provides media with a vitality capable of resurrecting the dead even at the risk of disappointment.

Naficy suggests, “for such a person [an accented filmmaker] mediation is somehow life itself” (1996a:217). By intimating at the vitality of media, Naficy identifies an affective relationship between filmmakers and their tools of mediation. Unfortunately, Naficy did not elaborate on the way mediated vitality informs larger social conditions of displacement, violence, and politicized forms of ‘othering’. In context of Lebanese experimental documentary I offer five possible explanations for why Naficy ascribes this “vital” attribute to accented aesthetics: First, the micro-ritualization of the moment provides simple joy in its experience, like a tourist, but also the “demand to activate all the senses” (Löfgren 1999:98). Second, one is compelled by a sense of duty to bear witness to the disappeared and occupied. Third, a desire to replace tired and ossified narratives with alternative imaginary ones. Fourth, one maintains belief in resurrection or hope in psychoanalytic recovery. Or, fifth, one has become entranced by mediation.

If we further consider how “media are not merely conduits for social forces, or expressive of social realities, but possess logics and power that are constitutive of thought, identity, and action” (McLagan 2003:605), then the vitality of mediation should translate to audiences in particularly significant ways. The circulation of these sensibilities through “new media” and “small media” and their ability to embody, act

upon, and think through contemporary forms of social disempowerment presents an important context for understanding connections between personal agency and public expression.

The vitality of mediation signals the latent images of Hadjithmas and Joreige's unexposed rolls of film, the incarnate image of nocturnal ruins of the undead, the repetition of video ritual; but why photograph an image if never to develop it? This freezes the image before it has become an image, it cannot be imaged but by the material reference to drawers full of film spools – media objects in a latent state. Representation revealed, not as the mimetic image, but by the materiality of its mediation, not as a photograph, but as a spool of latent images. Trapping the magic of mimesis in invisibility corresponds to both the virtuality of digital information and the corresponding invisibility of undead subjectivity.

The urge to collect, archive, and comment upon the constructed nature of media is pervasive in post-orientalist aesthetics. The impulse to record and collect one's social, cultural, and political experience represents a strange sort of vitality in the act of resistance to radical closure, a vitality based not on life per se but on the deferral of loss in order to reclaim it without denying its inherent absence. By way of comparing the deferral of invisibility, Group Tuesday, an informal think tank consisting of Walid Sadek, Bilal Khbeiz, and Fadi Abdallah, considers the image suspect, but the potentiality of mimetic tools sustains their critical commitment to the visual. Critical of the image and its representational presumptions, these artists prefer to write their witness accounts. Sadek (Wilson-Goldie 2007:27) says,

What we try to do when we write is slow images down. We try to give them weight. We experience, we who live in the third world, that to be in an image, to be photographed, is almost like a death warrant. But we are equally uneasy about standing behind the lens. We work and live somewhere between the lens and the photograph.

In Toufic's reading of Nietzsche, escape is only achievable by embracing the repetition, and denying the desire for escape, that is, as Hadjithomas and Joreige say, to live with your ghosts, to mourn their loss. This recognition of loss is what the distracted zombies in Lebanon ignore in their official amnesia, but for the undead nonsubjects, who have witnessed the surpassing disaster, they are cursed with not being able to forget, particularly those who perpetrated the violence. The counterfeited Lebanese culture, nostalgic for the "golden age" and the "civil war," exists in a withdrawn public imagination. In other words, the excesses of cosmopolitanism and civil war co-exist in the violent excess of present potentials for reenacting a sectarian war.

CONFESSIONALITY, AGENCY, & THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

In the most recent Bourne movie, *Bourne Ultimatum* (2007), the ending unfolds in Morocco, a place that can represent itself. Because Morocco is not withdrawn, but has been withdrawn in memory, it can also represent places currently withdrawn. For instance, in *Spy Game* (2001), a recent Hollywood espionage film starring Brad Pitt and Robert Redford, a third of the action transpires in "Beirut" during the civil war, but all of these scenes are filmed on location in Morocco. Beirut, as a ruinous withdrawn city, does not represent itself in this movie. Indeed, if one thing is already clear from post-orientalist aesthetics, then it is that "Beirut" cannot represent itself, because Beirut is withdrawn. Instead, it can only reincarnate itself until the moment of radical closure erases all memory.

The Lebanese film and video makers have an accented and charged relationship with mimetic tools. These tools have been used to fix Lebanon within clichéd absolutes that naturalize "fun" and "violent" as the two faces of Beirut. The imaginary narratives of Lebanese experimental film and video intently explore this binary world in efforts to

expose the latent violence in the cosmopolitan city. This binary is also read between fact and fiction, past and future, day and night, life and death, but in each case these artists reveal the binary structure while also situating subjectivity elsewhere. Since the Christian/Muslim cultural dichotomy enabled politics to hide behind discourses of difference and violence, these documentary experimentalists must map the traces of these latent politics in sites of the ordinary.

If affect is indeed about ruptures of rational subjectivity occurring in the commonsense patterns of the ordinary, then how to hold back from meaning making, how to suspend the naming and organizing of thoughts? My project is necessarily a betrayal of these potentialities as I try to engender the terminology of post-orientalist aesthetics to define and categorize impossible historiographies and catastrophic subjectivities. But these latent tendencies are also ethnographically “real.” The ghostly shapes of Beirut’s nocturnal underworld seem to desire fixity. The form and content of these ghostly mediated shapes remain in a strange sense of tension and the act of *becoming* struggles therein to resist *being* with every act of naming. The potentiality of the visual as advocated by MacDougall and others in the introductory chapter, enables sensations of acquaintance with this tension, because it is about the qualities that are not nameable, that are not logocentric, but belong to affective registers. And yet a “structure of feelings” mold and shape bodies in potentially rigid ways. Here too is the tension I feel with the notion of agency and the way it has been impregnated by notions of the “voice.” Re-voicing claims a site of “resistance” in that it can challenge presumptions and the authority of other voices, and even strategically implemented silences can also disrupt the authority of the voice. But are these endeavors always pushing toward becoming a realization of agency? Is agency bound to subjectivity? What does the transfer of subjectivity to mediated forms imply about non-voiced forms of embodiment and

experience? How do these voices slip into other forms of reification? How do images enable mediated agency from slipping into reification? The revelation of incarnate images and invisible subjectivities also becomes trapped within new aesthetic structures, slowly reifying their predictability.

In his evaluation of the “death of the subject,” Heartfield asks, “What if the free subjectivity at the core of our social order is all used up?” (2006:10). In the context of western literature, he implies that “we” have exhausted our narratives. And even in “our” poaching from other cultures, we appropriate difference into our tired ossified structures of telling and feeling. If the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of the literary heroic human subject, then Heartfield declares its marginality and erasure in the twentieth century. This trend flows the opposite direction of documentary films, in which Renov notes the increasing prevalence of autobiographical documentaries as an assertion of subjectivity (2004). This disparity makes one wonder if we are witnessing the transference of subjectivity from a primarily written medium to a primarily visual medium. The absent audience and author of Walid Raad’s Atlas archive and the phantom subjectivity of Hadjithomas and Joreige’s latent themes, Ghassan Salhab’s nocturnal world, and Jalal Toufic’s ruinous anytime all mark a withdrawn subjectivity – both present and absent – embedded in the mediated object but never fully available. The tracing of mediated subjectivity in experimental documentary reveals a withdrawn subjectivity, one enacted by the virtuality of the medium. While I find these textual representations of subjectivity and non-subjectivity compelling and revealing of a broader social condition, I am not prepared to dispense with the notion of subjectivity. Whether in a monstrous or deathly state or mediated between documentary veracity and aesthetics, I follow the definition of “subjectivity” employed by anthropologists Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman. They describe subjectivity as, “the felt interior experience of the person

that includes his or her positions in a field of relational power” (1997:1). This is clearly not the same sense of subject portrayed by Patrick Bateman without individual interiority. In a Deleuzian reading, Bateman has no interiority because his guts are full of organs, but if he were to become a body without organs, he would regain his interiority. Furthermore, Das and Kleinman argue that the occurrence of state pathologies happening in the everyday requires a closer examination of the ordinary, as they ask, “Is the ordinary a site of the uneventful, or does it have the nature of something *recovered* in the face of terrible tragedies?” (1997:7). In order to represent the ordinary, one must show that “nothing happens.” If one can sustain this narrative of uneventfulness, then the entrancement of peripheral vision allows viewers to see the ghosts in the walls of ruinous catastrophe.

Here I am interested in the production of a mediated subjectivity that attempts to transcend confessional identity. By connecting the disappeared, captive, exiled with remnants of real and imagined wars, these docu-artists sidestep “confessional” differences to form coalitions of aesthetic competition, alliances of vitality, asserting critiques with social, political, and historical intentionality. Through out this monograph, I have intentionally not identified these artists by their confessional identity unless they directly reference it in their work. This is a strategic move that I hope is in fitting with the critique being made by these artists. In this way I try to represent them as they have chosen to represent themselves. Because the Lebanese ability to determine confession is usually as forward as asking your family name, these artists are already known by family if not individually. “Beirut is small,” I was repeatedly told. “Everyone knows everyone.” If the name fails to reveal the answer, the Lebanese are reputedly well adept using an interrogative toolkit to determine another’s cultural identity. As Norton puts it, “Lebanese are adept at discerning cues and clues that reveal an interlocutor’s confessional roots and

cultural identity, but, at least until recent decades, public religious ritual was often spurned to avoid provoking sectarian tension” (2007:52).

Again, the temptation to make some sort of categorical determination about the use of confessional erasure in these works, however, would mistake the intense reality of confessional identity politics. Even if we take seriously the critique of latent confessionalism by these artists and cultural critics, it is important to show that the erasure of these identities performs a latent structuring of silence. Furthermore, issues of class are only tangentially confronted in this work. The self-righteous arrogance of this elite cultural group engenders an oppositional framework with only unmentionable vampires and senseless journalists held accountable. That said, the confessions of Lebanon have a diversity of religious practices, all of which inscribe themselves onto these experimental projects in revealing ways. For instance, we should recall that martyrdom is not limited to Hezbollah or the Shi’a. Recall that Soha Bechara, the exemplary living martyr, is Greek Orthodox and Norton attributes many suicide missions to secular groups. Shaheed is not sectarian specific, rather it is a political subjectivity. The general erasure of confessionality in Lebanese film and video contrasts with the subtle reminders of that identity in ways that challenge the proscribed attributes of these identities.

Meaning is so slippery in Lebanese society that people perpetually try to affix it to simplistic narratives of confessionality, conspiracy, or one of several binary essentialisms. Rabih Mroué complicates these tendencies in his performance and video pieces. In his collaboration with the well-known Lebanese novelist, Elias Khoury, *Three Posters* (2000) is a video-performance about the representations of martyrdom made by jihadist groups before their suicidal missions. Mroué explains how the practice of videotaping martyr testimonials would be screened on the evening news after they had

executed their missions. Because government-run Tele-Liban was the only operating TV station in Lebanon, the majority of Lebanese remember this as a singular element in the finality of this man's death. Mroué and Khoury attained the "uncut rushes" of a fourteen year-old testimony made by Jamal El Sati, a combatant for the National Resistance Front in Lebanon. Disguised as a local sheikh, El Sati loaded a donkey with explosives and exploded it at the headquarters of the Israeli military governor in Hasbayya.

In the rushes of El Sati's martyr testimonial, he repeats his testimony three times, making slight changes in each attempted version. Although the differences between the versions may be inconsequential, his hesitation in the repetition of his rehearsal signals an awareness that the testimony had more significance than the actual mission, as a final statement of his manhood and humanity before leaping into the void of radical closure. And yet, these televised testimonials recurring on the nightly news engulfed individual identity in the seriality of forgetting. In which case, the official celebration of collective death in the name of ideological slogans quickly slips into amnesia. By recouping this repeated testimony, the artists obstruct the commemoration of heroic death and reveal the human being, who even in the preparation for death has accepted the responsibility of representation. This footage reveals the space-time of the undead, the liminal state between El Sati's testimonial rehearsal and detonating his donkey. This deferred testimony must bear the weight of a corpse, because Mroué reminds us, "we know the body of the fighter will never be found. He has disappeared ..." (Mroué 2002:117).

The tension between resurrection and martyrdom has latent political symbolism in this work. Remembering that demographically the Lebanese Shi'a were a historically small proportion of the population, their presumed status now at the top of the demographic charts usually ascribes their ascendancy to high birthrates. This potentially derogatory assessment of populations fails to address the equally high mortality rates of

the Shi'a. I am not advocating the crunching of numbers to sociologically address population research, rather I question whether the centrality of death and its ritual acceptance are not better suited to describe the Shi'a's political ascendancy, namely the emergence of the powerful "party of god" (Hezbollah). According to Norton (Norton 2007), these rituals of communal mourning continue to attract participants despite the official condemnation. The disenfranchised in society never or rarely have opportunities to create public discourses about society in general or their part in particular, but entranced in communal ritual they advance their heroic martyrdom.

Given the dynamics of identity politics in Lebanon, what makes this experimental documentary a particularly middle class interest and preoccupation? What can be said of the desire to document, archive, and narrate imaginary futures that are not specific to class conditions? If Walid Raad's alternative historiography aims to break blockages in Beirut from New York city, how does this endeavor impact notions of oppression, solidarity, and reification? What role does the image play for those who have been over-imaged by others without the opportunity to image themselves? For those who claim the status of the "most" disenfranchised, Palestinians and Shi'a in this case, what is at stake if they abandon their claims to revolutionary endurance and a refusal of victimization?

END TIME

In Lebanon, where society has undergone a "surpassing disaster," it is important to acknowledge that not only is justice withdrawn but also the materials of tradition. In the labyrinthine space-time of Beirut's ruins, one finds interlocutors with the dead. You can visit them if you have witnessed your own surpassing disaster in a massacre or in the rituals and technologies of repetition. The undead live in catastrophic time and space, taking form across non-linear time and dislocated space. Their subjectivity emerges not

as distinct entities, not as individualists, but as dividualists on the highest order. These withdrawn vampires feel intensely and violently, but their violence is not inbred. On the contrary, their violent urges have been manifested from the evil lurking behind the ruinous rubble and in the walls and foundations of construction sites. It waits in the dark, in the long sleep of life, in the rituals of martyrdom and resurrection, in the incarnate images of Lebanese experimental film and documentary video.

By mediating subjectivity, demarcating thresholds of referentiality, these works invite the viewer into an embodied experience of contemporaneity and intersubjectivity. The documentary experimentalist invites the viewer to see, not through his or her eyes, but through his or her camera eye. As stipulated by Walid Sadek's epigraph (2007), "this invitation to meet the corpse" is not about embracing materiality, or a return to familiar corporeality, but it is about embracing virtuality. That is, the ephemerality of digital media which is tangibly available, but still nameless and unrecognizable as virtual data. This invitation does not narrate the legacy of the defeated and victimized, but marks the endless ruination and constant risk of historical withdrawal.

Conclusion: Post Script

THE PS WESTMORELAND PROJECT

In the shadows of this dissertation, my presence as a researcher lurks behind a voice of authority. While my critical efforts in this text work to undermine the prejudices of scholarship based on the intellectual authority of privileged, white, male, hetero-normative researchers (my “white man’s burden” according to one Lebanese scholar), my own positionality remains largely unchallenged. Through living, breathing, and eating with Lebanese filmmakers and artists as well as with their films and texts, my subjectivity entered a time warp, telescoping several life experiences in a way that “othered” me to the American state-apparatus. That is to say, I encountered moments when my exposure to taken-for-granted truths disarticulate my national identity.

Having said this, in the conclusion of this dissertation I would like to introduce a new initiative in my research entitled, “The P.S. Westmoreland Project.” This endeavor envisions an experimental auto-ethnography of the self in relation to the American wars in the (Middle) East. Building on the adolescent subjectivity of an American diplomatic mission to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, shoestring travel through the eastern Mediterranean, and anthropological research in Lebanon, I probe the trauma of difference on a variety of subjective and objective registers. Rather than a self-indulgent exercise in personal exploration (which of course it is), this experimental auto-ethnography attempts to bridge critical cultural analysis with intimate irruptions in national structures of feeling. Although not limited by name recognition alone, the association of my last name with General William Westmoreland provided a site of intense articulation on several occasions.

While intimacy with this historical figure in the United States is typically limited to older generations, his name and legacy during the American war in Vietnam proved more commonly recognizable to a younger generation of Lebanese. Upon learning my last name, these Lebanese often expressed both surprise and suspicion as the affective reverberation that interpolating me within broader theories of American conspiracy. Westmoreland as a site of articulation thus becomes referential not just to this American Army general, but also to the militarization of American foreign policy in general. My critical engagement with these instances of articulation aims both to make sense of this suspicion and to juxtapose these fabulated anxieties with the mundane experience of expatriate diplomatic missions. In other words, I connect my personal lived experience to competing structures of feeling as they relate to American interventions in foreign lands and also try to disaggregate the ordinary experience of residing abroad from the machinations of geopolitics.

Typically popular representations of cross-cultural encounters maintain universalist paradigms of experience even while becoming aware of cultural difference. This structure delimits the need to question the authority of the self and the immediacy of the representation. But by fore fronting the difference of subjectivity and the invisibility of mediation, the paradigms of experience become entangled in webs of complicity. In this way, PS Westmoreland participates in the deconstruction of “Westmoreland” as an identity that engenders conspiracy theories and thus performs a reconstruction of new imaginaries of identification. Although derivative to an extent, this imaginary project attempts to appropriate post-orientalist aesthetics in order to self-reflexively reassert my positionality within the publics I ethnographically participate.

ALTERNATIVE ANTHROPOLOGIES

Let me take a few additional minutes to talk about a dimension of this research that was not discussed in the dissertation, but nevertheless co-existed with the arguments set forth therein. I'd like to briefly talk about an experimental filmmaker working in Beirut called Marhaba Tata. I believe a brief review of this artist and his work will elucidate the complicated terrain of postwar representation. Furthermore, Marhaba Tata's work provides a poignant case study of the way experimental documentary in contexts of recurrent violence engenders alternative archives, fabricated narratives, and critical auto-ethnography in order to imagine the intersection of postwar subjectivity and the mundane experience of geopolitical processes.

The breadth of Tata's work has fallen under the banner of "The Post Script Project" or sometimes just "The PS Project." He explains the rationale of this project, based on the notion of an addendum to a written document, as accentuating the idea of an afterthought. Like the appended postscript to a letter, he says, "An afterthought is a latent reverberation, something that occurs out of time, displaced from its originary instance. In the days of letter writing, the postscript accommodated a thought that occurred after the letter was already finished, but now in the age of email, when afterthoughts can easily be edited into the body of the correspondence, the postscript serves as a more nuanced function, one potentially against the grain of the preceding message."

Having said this, we can see Tata's work as revisionary. His "post script project" is comprised of several short videos, photographic albums, and found objects. All of these materials, we are told, Tata found in the rubble of war-torn Beirut after the Israeli invasion of 1982. He re-enchants these found objects with subversive narratives about the politics of foreign intervention. Most of this work, he says, "interrogates the history of American wars in the Orient." Provocatively, he addresses these issues primarily through

a re-mediation of an American expatriate child living in the Middle East during the early 1980s. Marhaba Tata's efforts to re-voice the American diplomatic missions in the region draws upon objects he found in the debris of the US embassy after it had been obliterated by a car bomb in 1983. In the rubble he found this bag containing a child's memorabilia: toy camels, home movie videotapes, audiocassettes of bootlegged music, a Walkman, an illustrated story written for school, among other things. Inscribed inside the bag is the name P. S. Westmoreland. Tata re-enchanted these mundane objects as latent evidence of imperial domination. In his video, *Objects of Oppression*, he juxtaposes this childish collection with a history of American intervention abroad. A slow montage of these lost artifacts is accompanied by a monotone male voice listing the casualties of political violence in Lebanon.

In Marhaba Tata's next piece, *In a Family of Hearts and Minds*, he traces the origins of P. S. Westmoreland's belongings, first to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which is depicted in the home movies recovered from the rubble. Saudi Arabia also proves to be the source of the bootlegged cassettes and toy camels. Here he learns that a Westmoreland family worked for the Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation, a diplomatic project that was to foster relations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States. Following this lead, Tata locates this family now residing in the US. Here he confronts them about their past in an escalating series of interrogating interview questions, in which he accuses them of being related to General William Westmoreland, who led the American war in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968 and then served as US Army Chief of Staff until 1972. For critics, General Westmoreland is often accused of escalating the war in Vietnam under false pretenses. Bordering on documentary, but always infused with fictional elements, Marhaba Tata's work implicates the Westmoreland family in a massive conspiracy.

What is interesting about this video is the way Tata's representation of these people inscribes them within over-determined ideas of conspiracy, of which they claim no knowledge. While he interrogates the meaning of a diplomatic mission and the ubiquitous presence of American expatriates living in the Middle East, one cannot help but to be struck by the mundane ways these individuals talk about their experience.

I met with Marhaba Tata when I was doing my fieldwork in Beirut. When he learned my name, he became instantly excited and suspicious. Westmoreland is certainly a unique enough name to stand out among the Smiths and Jones, but this correlation between my identity and this P. S. figure proved too coincidental for Tata to accept at face value. He refused to talk to me more about his project and said he quickly had to leave for another appointment. After this encounter, Tata refused to take my calls and when I saw him at al-Madina Theatre he acted as if he had never met me. I later learned that he was telling people that the CIA, presumably referring to me, had interrogated him and demanded the return of the bag and its contents. Furthermore, people began confronting me in public as the spawn of a war criminal, saying things like, "We know you are a spy."

Marhaba Tata's subversive ideology runs deeper than merely experimental art, he has also been accused of assuming a false identity. In a recent copyright infringement case, the Tata Group sued Marhaba Tata for falsely associating himself with the industrial magnate, Ratan Tata, who runs the Tata Group. It seems that Marhaba Tata's claims to be related to Ratan were initially ignored as a harmless prank, but the Tata Group was forced to take legal action when Marhaba Tata's true identity was allegedly linked to an American network of counter-insurgents. The Tata Group's reputed connection to this dark figure had mired the company's ambitions to acquire the Jaguar and Land Rover car companies in scandalous criticism. The outcome of the case required that Marhaba Tata

stop making claims that involved the Tata Group and family, but could continue to use Marhaba Tata as a pseudonym. Looking into these court documents, I made a startling discovery. The courts identify Marhaba Tata as one P.S. Westmoreland.

Of course, Marhaba Tata and P.S. Westmoreland are imaginary as are the conspiracies and structures of feeling they inhabit. Though these characters are my creation, the structures of feeling are not. My point here is to elucidate the way fictional characters become believably real when placed within these structures of conspiracy and suspicion. My rationale for this fabulated research is three-fold. First, it is an attempt to parody the post-orientalist aesthetics I ascribe to experimental Lebanese documentary, which asserts new methodologies for analyzing histories of violence by appropriating mundane archival objects and imbuing them with a radical affective force. Second, I utilize this narrative to draw attention to the way taken for granted personal histories reverberate with over-determined historical narratives, but ultimately critique cross-cultural representation and geopolitics through the body of an individual. And lastly, I create this project to assert a self-reflexive critique of my positionality within a public that I claim intellectual authority over. Since the subjects of my research already scrutinize this problematic relationship, this endeavor aims to take ownership of this troubling positionality, to redefine the terms of this scrutiny, and to open myself to my research subjects in a way that doesn't retreat from these complicated issues. This fabulated deviation aims to grapple with the subjectivity of cross-cultural research in zones of conflict.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the PS Westmoreland Project, this dissertation serves as a primer for what is yet to come. The questions that emerge in each chapter do not find resolution

so much as they ask for continued consideration. The core question in this text – how to represent the lived experience of political violence? – remains echoing through these final examples of alternative archives – Nakba, AIF, Atlas, and PS Westmoreland. While an answer to this question remains a theoretical impossibility, the arguments advanced herein do provide poignant examples of earnest efforts to grapple with these aporias. For the author, the journey taken through the pages of this text helped to crystallize various insights and questions that had previously remained amorphous or unarticulated. On the one hand, these points of crystallization provided sites where deeper enquiry could plumb the depths of Lebanese postwar subjectivity, but on the other hand they provided stepping-stones for ricocheting across the surface of Lebanese experimental representation. Employing what George Marcus (Marcus 1994) calls an ethnographic style of “cinematic montage,” these chapters often refrain from direct assertions in favor of building resonances, associations, and identification through the acquaintance of shifting perspectives. This experimental writing style has endeavored to mimic the techniques utilized by media experimentalist in Lebanon, while remaining grounded in the multifaceted context of postwar Lebanon.

Having said this, this text has aimed to critically contribute to a series of media-focused fields. The most forceful intervention is directed at the field of visual anthropology, by asserting a nonwestern parallax perspective on cross-cultural representation and pushing the field to grapple with both the challenges of conducting visual research in sites of conflict and the attending breakdown of objective modes of representation. While visual anthropology is already attentive to cross-cultural representation, documentary studies could gain important insights by considering the way documentary practices operate in sites that do not claim dominant cultural traditions. This point also relates to the way this study contributes to the increasing interest in nonwestern

filmmaking. My effort to localize deterritorialization with the moniker of post-orientalist aesthetics builds on recent efforts to disrupt reified notions of national and regional cinemas. By grounding these practices within historical, political, and cultural contexts, my study brings attention to the conditions of alternative media production in Lebanon. This dimension of emergent media worlds is typically not engaged by media anthropology, which instead generally favors the analysis of reception. Beyond these media fields, this study provides an important contribution to Middle Eastern studies, which has been slow to consider Arab postmodernity, cosmopolitanism, and transnationality beyond reified binaries of tradition/modernity, authenticity/appropriation, and nationalism/universalism. Furthermore, this study points to important considerations about the prevalence of violence and the way those affected engender modes of revitalization – an imperative dimension to consider in the ever recurrent deterritorialization of locality.

Appendix A – Filmography

11 Rue Pasteur (1997) Nadine Labaki

After Shave (2005) Hany Tamba

All's Well on the Border (1997) Akram Zaatari

American Psycho (2000) Mary Harron

Ashes / Ramad (2003) Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

At Our Listeners' Request / Ma Yatlubuhu al-Mustami'un (2003) Abdellatif Abdul-Hamid

Autour de la Maison Rose / Al bayt al zahr (1999) Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

Beirut Palermo Beirut (1998) Mahmoud Hojeij

Beirut the Encounter / Beirut al Likaa (1981) Borhane Alaouié

Beirut, Oh Beirut (1975) Maroun Bagdadi

Between You and Me Beirut / Bayni wa Bayniq (1992) Dima Al-Jundi

Beyrouth Fantome (1998) Ghassan Salhab

Bi Ma Ino Boukra (2005) Ali Zarakat

The Bourne Ultimatum (2007) Paul Greengrass

Calendar (1993) Atom Egoyan

The Cats of Hamra Street / Kitat Sharee Al-Hamra' (1971) Samir Al-Ghosseini

Ce sera beau: From Beirut with Love (2005) Wael Nouredine

Chickpeas (1992) Nigol Bezjian

Civilisées / Moutahaddirat (1999) Randa Shahal

Credits Included: A Video in Green and Red (1995) Jalal Toufic

Daily Life in a Syrian Village / al-Hayat al-Yawmiyya Fi Qaria Suriyya (1974) Omar Alawiyah

Dreams of the City / Ahlam al-Madinah (1983) Mohamed Malas

The Duped / al-Makhdu'un (1971) Tawfiq Salih

Exile / Safar Barlek (1967) Henri Barakat, Assi and Mansour Rahbani

Fire Under Ash (2006) Diana Allan

Gate of the Sun / Bab el shams (2004) Yousry Nasrallah

Groundhog Day (1993) Harold Ramis

The Guardian's Daughter / Bint El-Hares (1968) Henri Barakat, Assi and Mansour Rahbani

The Guitar of Love / Guitar el Hob (1973) Mohammad Salman

Her+Him Van Leo (2001) Akram Zaatari

Here and Perhaps Elsewhere (2003) Lamia Joreige

Hiroshima Mon Amour (1960) Alain Resnais, Marguerite Duras

Hors la vie (1991) Maroun Baghdadi

Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (2000) Walid Raad

The Hour of Liberation has Sounded / Saat El Tahrir Dakkat (1972) Heiny Srour

How I Love You (2001) Akram Zaatari

I only wish that I could weep (2001) Walid Raad

In a Family of Hearts and Minds (2001) Marhaba Tata

In the battlefields / Maarek hob (2004) Danielle Arbid

In This House (2005) Akram Zaatari

Introduction to the End of an Argument / Muqaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal (1990) Jayce Salloum and Palestinian Elia Suleiman

Kafir Qasim (1974) Borhane Alaouié

The Lamentations Series: The Ninth Night and Day (2005) Jalal Toufic

The Last Man / Atlal (2006) Ghassan Salhab

Lawrence of Arabia (1962) David Lean

Le Roi Danse (2000) Gérard Corbiau

The Leopard / al-Fahd (1972) Nabil Maleh

Leila and the Wolves / Leila wal zi'ab (1984) Heiny Srour

Little Drummer Girl (1984) George Roy Hill and John le Carré

Mabrouk Again (2000) Hany Tamba

Majnounak (Crazy About You) (1997) Akram Zaatari

The Man with the Golden Soles / L'Homme aux semelles d'or (2000) Omar Alawiyah
with Rafiq Hariri

Massaker (2005) Monika Borgmann and Lokman Slim

Measures of Distance (1988) Mona Hatoum

Missing Lebanese Wars (1999-2001) Walid Raad (performance)

Munich (2005) Steven Spielberg

Muron (2003) Nigol Bezjian

Nanook of the North (1922) Robert Flaherty

The Night / al-Leyl (1993) Mohamed Malas

The Night of the Jackals / Layli Ibn Awah (1989) Abdellatif Abdul-Hamid

Nightfall (2000) Mohammad Soueid

Objects of Oppression (2001) Marhaba Tata

Once Upon a Time, Beirut / Kan ya ma Kan Bayrut (1994) Jocelyn Saab's

The Perfect Day / Yawmon akhar (2005) Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

Red Chewing Gum (2001) Akram Zaatari

The Ring Seller / Biya el-Khawatim (1965) Youssef Chahine, Assi and Mansour Rahbani

Roads Full of Apricot (2001) Nigol Bezjian

Shadows (1996) Michel Kammoun

The Sleep of Reason (2002) Jalal Toufic

Spy Game (2001) Tony Scott

Strange Culture (2007) Lynn Hershman Leeson

Shadows of the City / Taif al Madina (2001) Jean Chammoun

Terra Incognita (2002) Ghassan Salhab

This Day (2005) Akram Zaatari

This is not Beirut/There was and there was not (1994, 49m) Jayce Salloum

Three Posters (2000) Elias Khoury, Rabih Mroue (performance)

Tornado (1992) Samir Habchi

untitled part I: everything and nothing (2001) Jayce Salloum

Up to the South / Talaeen a Junuub (1993) Jayce Salloum and Walid Raad

Verbal Letters / Rassa'el Shafahiyyah (1991) Abdul-Hamid

War Generation Beirut (1988) Mai Masri and Jean Chamoun

West Beirut (1998) Ziad Doueiri

When Maryam Spoke Out / Lamma hikyit Maryam (2001) Assad Fouladkar

Who is Afraid of Representation? (2005) Rabih Mroue and Lina Saleh (performance)

Wonder Beirut: The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer (1998-2006) Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige (installation series)

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