

## Streets of Beirut: Self and the Encounter with ‘the Other’

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*Steven Seidman argues “that the culture of Hamra tolerates considerable diversity in personal styles and itineraries, but non-sectarian others (gender, sexual, and ethnic) are sites of anxiety and mistrust; they survive on the borders or back regions of Beirut.” By comparing the street topography and the contours of the self he attempts to demonstrate how streets become social enclaves or security combat zones rather than serving as gathering spaces or public spheres. This shapes the construction of the self and how the self engages with the other, where urban topography intersects with Beirut’s unique history of shaping the contours of the self.*

*“Women share the streets with men, but not their power” according to Seidman, who examines the limits of tolerance towards women, foreigners, and non-heterosexuals. Though a culture is “taking shape in Hamra”, it is at odds with cosmopolitanism having a “hard edged culture of civic indifference and mistrust”. This cultivated indifference towards others gives to Beirut’s streets something of its speed, its impressive play of form and movement, its fluidity and apparent lightness of being, even if this surface conceals passions fired by fear and loathing, dread and hatred.*



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Before the war years (1975-90) most neighborhoods in Beirut were confessionally mixed, even if one sect secured a clear majority. In the Central District and Ras Beirut, ethnic and sectarian mixing and a lively public culture flourished. The war years dramatically altered the social landscape of Beirut. The Central District, the heart of Beirut's public life, was left in varying states of ruin, with sixty percent of its housing destroyed (Rowe 1995). Postwar Beirut was divided between the east and the west along sectarian lines. Within this global division of a Christian and Muslim Beirut, further ethno-religious territorialization occurred, for example, a Shiite stronghold was established in the southern suburbs of West Beirut (Nasr 1993, Khalaf 1993a). Furthermore, an already weak state was further weakened by the war, opening the door to the privatization of urban social space. Sectarian control tightened in many neighborhoods and speculators took advantage of the political vacuum by appropriating valuable lands to build high-end exclusive resorts, residences, and commercial complexes (Shwayri 2002).

While urban planners, public officials, and citizen groups battled over the shape of the postwar Central District, many observers concluded that socially diverse urban spaces that foster a robust public life had all but disappeared. Reflecting on the state of postwar Beirut, the sociologist Samir Khalaf lamented the "destruction of Beirut's ...common spaces. The first to go was Beirut's central business district.... Virtually all the vital public functions were centralized there: the parliament, Municipal headquarters, financial and banking institutions, religious edifices, transportation terminals, traditional souks, shopping malls, entertainment, etc. ....There, people of every walk of life and social standing came together.....Alas the war destroyed virtually all such common and porous spaces" (Khalaf 1993a 31-32, Nasr 1993).

It is still too early to judge whether a reconstructed Central District will be able to recover its pivotal place in Beirut (Sarkis 2006; Kabbani 1998, Sarkis and Rowe 1998). However, Hamra, a neighborhood in Ras Beirut, is often considered the one exception to urban privatization and to the

decline of a cosmopolitan public culture. Historically, this neighborhood has been home to internationally recognized universities (American University-Beirut and Lebanese American University) and a refuge for persecuted cultural producers, minorities, and immigrants.

Between 1947 and 1967, the population of Hamra increased from 2400 to 15,000. Many of its residents were young, educated, middle class and well aligned with an essentially service oriented, white collar economy. Despite being disproportionately Christian, its white collar, secular, professional and entrepreneurial population forged a dynamic public culture of cinemas, clubs, cafes, theatres, and bookstores (Khalaf and Kongstad 1973, Khalaf 1979). Longtime residents and visitors recall Hamra in the 1960s and the early 1970s as a magnet for adventurers, tourists, intellectuals, political activists, and writers and artists from across the Middle East. It was also Hamra's good fortune to have avoided becoming a key battleground during the war years. In fact, as merchants and bankers abandoned the ruins of the Central District for outlying regions, Hamra benefited. Its educated, relatively affluent population and proximity to the Central District and to the sea, and its intact infrastructure attracted waves of capital and human investment through the 1990s.

Today, as the reconstruction of the Central District continues, Hamra is as much the social and cultural hub of Beirut as is possible in a city lacking an undisputed center. Despite a series of political crises (political assassinations, July 2006 Israeli assault, and governmental paralysis) the recent arrival of high-end stores such as "Vero Moda," new cafes such as Costas and Linas catering to a global middle class, and the construction of high end residential and commercial buildings throughout Hamra suggests a neighborhood confident of its future.

The restless, dynamic spirit of Hamra immediately struck me upon arriving in Beirut in the summer 2007. As I got to know other neighborhoods, my perception of Hamra was sharpened. In the aftermath of the destruction of the Central District, neighborhoods such as Ashrafieh and Verdun

flourished, along with Hamra. Still, Hamra strikes me as distinctive in its sectarian and ethnic diversity and in establishing a secular culture tolerant of experimentation in personal and cultural expression. Indeed, in the course of conversations and interviews with residents, shop owners, and intellectuals, Hamra's culture of individualism and cosmopolitanism was repeatedly celebrated as unique in Beirut.

As an American with wide exposure to European cities, I have been impressed by the self-assured, free-wheeling spirit of the denizens of Hamra. But, self-regard can take many forms, not all of which promote a robust public life and a cosmopolitan culture. Self-regard may cultivate a spirit of generosity towards the social world or turn inward and offer a callous surface to others. What sort of self is it that has taken shape in Hamra? Likewise, the presence of social diversity does not necessarily invite a cosmopolitan culture. Otherness may be threatening or inviting, tolerated or valued. Cosmopolitanism requires selves whose boundaries are porous enough to 'let in' difference, and whose sensibilities are enriched by the challenges to the life-world that otherness presents. And, my own view is that only when otherness is "communal" and publicly marked does it encourage a "robust" cosmopolitan culture. Stated analytically, I am suggesting that 'individualism' and cosmopolitanism overlap but operate on distinct 'tracks.' Whereas the former speaks to the scope of personal expression, the latter refers to the way selves relate to 'the other.' I will argue that the culture of Hamra tolerates considerable diversity in personal styles and itineraries, but non-sectarian others (gender, sexual, and ethnic) are sites of anxiety and mistrust; they survive on the borders or back regions of Beirut.

Between September 2007 and June 2008 I lived in Hamra. I spent countless hours walking its streets, attending cultural events, frequenting cafes and pubs, observing and taking notes, and speaking with dozens of residents, workers, artists, intellectuals, and shop owners. Additionally, in the spring semester 2008, I trained students in the skills of urban studies. These students mapped the streets, observed public

spaces, and collected some 50 interviews, which supplemented my own formal interviews. As an outsider to Beirut, I have drawn on Anglo-European traditions to pose my 'problematic' and for my conceptual resources. At the same time, I have tried to stay close to the life-world of Hamra's residents and visitors in order to challenge and revise my categories and viewpoints.<sup>1</sup> I have sought an 'embedded interpretation,' recognizing that my situated standpoint both enables and angles my interpretive claims. There is no escaping the hermeneutic circle. Finally, although my research focus is Hamra, at certain points in this essay it seemed appropriate to broaden my horizon to Beirut. I have kept these occasions to a minimum

### **Street topography and the contours of the self**

Streets form the skeletal order of urban social life (Benjamin 1978, Gutman 1986, Jacobs 1961, Lynch 1960, Vidler 1986). They are the bare surface enabling the circulation of bodies, machines, and objects. Steady flows require that streets are furnished with the 'hard' landscaping of navigational signs, sidewalks, litter bins, phone boxes, parking lots, and streetlights (Jefferson 2001, Southworth and Ben-Joseph 1997). Unimpeded movement, incessant flow, this is the life blood of cities undergirded by a subterranean labyrinth of pipes, drains, tunnels, and wires.

Urban streets promise more than steady flows. They offer sensual and intellectual excitements by exposing us to a collage of sounds, scents, sights, and chance happenings. Streets need to be generously outfitted with 'soft' furniture to become spaces of pleasure (Glickman 1983). A well-placed bench allows a respite from movement, a chance to settle inside ourselves and take in city

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<sup>1</sup> For example, as an American I initially assumed that Lebanese would understand Africans and Southeast Asian migrant laborers in racial terms. I learned otherwise. Most of my informants relied on a nuanced language of nationality. Thus, domestic laborers were differentiated as Sri Lankan, Ethiopian, or Filipina. Race thinking is though beginning to surface. As Arab domestic laborers (Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese) have been replaced by non-Arabs, some middle class Lebanese described themselves as "white" in contrast to "black" domestic laborers.

life. Trees wedged between the sidewalk and street softens the hard edge of concrete and glass surfaces and also may allow us to enjoy the contrast of 'nature' and civilization.

City streets may, at times, prompt us to appreciate their aesthetic qualities. A landscape that encourages the inventive play of surfaces can alert us to the beauty in the ordinary pathways of city life. Then, there is, in rare moments, the subtle beauty of an urban topography that balances complexity and order. Certain proportionality in its figurational forms may present an aesthetic experience of variation without disorder or order without tedium. One thinks of the way that Amsterdam "projects a vigorous contest between complexity and orderliness (which is) ...what makes it an aesthetically and ...emotionally rewarding city" (Smith 1983).

Streets are also spaces of sociality. We encounter others, in stunning variety. The pattern of streets, narrow or wide, short or long, linear or curved, may enhance opportunities for social mixing by inviting individuals to slow down, and pause in a shared space (Broadbent 1990, Celik et al. 1994, French 1983). A wide sidewalk allows folks to congregate without impeding flows; a street that winds into a square encourages us to suspend our movement. A street may vanish into a park or a cul de sac, kids playing, art or politics happening. Even in the most cramped city quarters that seem to crowd out common spaces, people manage to find 'loose spaces' where gatherings happen, collective life unfolds, perhaps under a bridge or on the steps of a public building or on a subway platform (Franck and Stevens 2007). And, under certain conditions, these shared spaces become 'public spheres.' People exchange ideas on matters of common social interest--an abstract sense of citizenship edges into concrete political engagement (Jacobs 1961, Khalaf 2006, Sennett 1970).

Cities that lack common spaces used by diverse individuals and groups threaten to turn streets into just pathways of circulation, suggesting an urban topography designed chiefly for motion. In such a cityscape, state and municipal policies would aim

at maximizing flows, multiplying nodes and circuits of exchange, and quickening time-space compression. Social controls would be relaxed in order to release the forces that drive circulation. Such an urban topography is disdainful towards the past and towards damaged or worn-down machines and bodies which slow-down flows. Movement can always be quickened --more exchanges, speedier flows, expanded accumulations; this is the spirit of circulation.

A cityscape that lacks common spaces for social mixing may alternatively suggest a concept of the street as a territorial enclave or a security or combat zone. Each of these street topographies presents a somewhat specific urban dynamic.

The aesthetics of a street may signal a distinct social quarter. Wandering through narrow bare surfaces until arriving at streets that are wide, rich in hard and soft furniture, and elegantly landscaped brings awareness of the territorialization of social class. Similarly, street names may signify a social enclave. Crossing Eighth Avenue onto "Oscar Wilde" street in Manhattan's West Village announces one's arrival in a gay enclave. Turning onto "the street of resistance and liberation" (share al moukawama wal tahrir) in Beirut with posters of Sayeed Nasrallah plastered on telephone poles and buildings leaves little doubt that you have entered a Shiite enclave. As social identities are territorialized, there will be fewer common spaces for exchange between individuals of different cultural backgrounds. But, also, mistrust, indifference, and unease with 'otherness' undermines the possibility of shared space becoming a public sphere.

The organization of urban space into social enclaves might also indicate that certain streets are viewed as security risk areas. Streets and neighborhoods may be viewed as dangerous because they are imagined as spaces of moral corruption (prostitution, drugs, homosexuality, gambling) or violence (gangs, crime, terrorism). These streets may be isolated, physically and symbolically, from other quarters by regulating points of entry and exit, by erecting barriers and walls or by surrounding security risk areas with

neutral or emptied space. Classifying specific urban quarters as dangerous accelerates the privatization of urban space by providing a rationale for establishing "safe" spaces. The spread of gated communities, privately owned and patrolled malls and parks, fee based recreational and leisure spaces, sequestered tourist zones, fortified business complexes ("citadelization"), and the creeping commercialization and suburbanization of land are telling signs of the erosion of urban public space (Abaza 2006, Blakely and Snyder 1997, Denis 2006, Marcuse 2003).

Streets that become social enclaves or security risk areas turn into combat zones if they are militarized, for example, regulated by checkpoints and military patrols, cordoned off by fences or walls, subject to surveillance camera networks, or zoned to deny ordinary citizen's access (Lyons 2003, Misselwitz and Rieniets 2006, Sorkin 2003, Warren 2003, Weizman 2003). As a combat zone, the street is framed as a battleground, a territory populated by enemies and allies, and a space to be conquered and controlled. During Lebanon's war years (1975-1990), the streets of Beirut, especially arteries linking neighborhoods to the Central District and the airport, became a combat zone. Circulation was impeded by barriers, armed checkpoints, roving militias, and periodic outbursts of street violence (Yahya 1993).

As streets become social enclaves or security or combat zones, they cannot serve as gathering spaces or public spheres. Instead, streets are subject to private control as neighborhoods are segmented into socially homogenous quarters with entry and exit points closely guarded and selves carefully screened to exclude undesirables or potential trouble-makers. Circulation takes a back seat to the priorities of safety, social protection, communal solidarity, or calculating strategic military advantage.

These different street topographies shape the construction of the self and ways the self engages 'the other.' For example, streets that are divided into safe and dangerous quarters encourage a self with rigid ego boundaries who will be defensive and suspicious towards the other.

Distance and mistrust will characterize encounters with the other. By contrast, urban streets that are rich in common spaces and attract people of diverse cultural backgrounds fashion a self with porous boundaries who will be comfortable with the challenges presented by encounters with the other. Empathy and sympathetic engagement will define the texture of such exchanges. In the remainder of this section, I offer a sketch of the way urban topography intersects with Beirut's unique history to shape the contours of the self.

Topographical traces of a one-time robust public culture are suggested by Hamra's wide sidewalks, stop signs, phone boxes, streetlights, green spaces, squares and its many cinemas and cafes. However, except for Bliss and Hamra streets (the former across from American University-Beirut, the latter the commercial center of Hamra), neglect has taken its toll. Sidewalks suddenly break off forcing pedestrians to walk on the street or a dirt walkway; streetlights brighten Hamra and Bliss but many other streets stay darkened in the evening; navigational signs, marked pedestrian crosses, public restrooms, and public clocks are either absent or impossible to locate. The soft furnishings that provide urban comfort and aesthetics have fared worse. Benches, monuments, and landmarks are absent; many streets lack any green space while those with planters or trees often betray long term neglect. On almost every street, there are buildings in various states of disrepair. Many apartment complexes are in frightful shape, some emptied of tenants and others seemingly abandoned by their owners. A cityscape dotted with empty lots, deserted squares, abandoned buildings, vacated galleries, cafes, and cinemas, and neglected or commercialized common spaces underscores a deteriorating public culture.

The deterioration of Hamra's public space is not for lack of urban planning. Since independence (1943) urban planners have drafted a succession of plans aimed at maintaining a robust urban culture (Ecohard Plan 1942-44, 1954, Atelier Parisien d'Urbanisme [1977] and Institut d'Amenagement et d'Urbanisme de la Region d'Ile de France [1983]. In each instance, these plans have been shelved to gather dust in some library

or archive, signaling the triumph of private interests (capital, political bosses, feudal lords, patriarchs, and landowners) and a culture of civic indifference and depoliticization (Khalaf and Khoury 1993; Rowe and Sarkis 1995).

The postwar decline of Hamra's public space does not extend to circulation. The streets are cleared of debris, garbage is removed, mail is delivered, and order is more or less maintained. Machines, bodies and goods flow—up, down, and across surfaces. Wandering its streets I feel that circulation has become the chief priority of the 'merchant republic.' In Hamra, there are no traffic lights, and while there are stop signs, no one obeys them. Cars routinely ignore one way directional traffic rules; motor scooters and motorcycles freely move between crowded streets and sidewalks; parking space is expanded by using sidewalks; vendors use street corners or sidewalks to hawk their goods regardless of pedestrian traffic; grocery stores turn into cafes as tables are squeezed onto sidewalks even as pedestrians are nudged into the street. Zoning laws seem equally optional. Shop owners, residents, real estate speculators, and builders rearrange space without concern for the law or the public good (e.g. Fawaz 2003). Concerns of scale and land use are ignored so long as circulation can be accelerated.

The streets of Hamra are today chiefly about the flow of bodies, goods, and machines. Life is to be lived on the go, here and now. Impediments removed; rules kept to a minimum. Space bends to temporality, to a driving impulse to free circulation of all constraints. This restless desire produces a phantasmatic collage of sounds and sights and bodies and machines colliding, exchanging, and always, moving on.

In the circulatory flows of the streets, and in the cleansing of its surface of unnecessary impediments, an urban topography gives shape to a lean, minimally unencumbered or what I call an "unburdened" self. This self, this unburdened self, is not a self of temporally layered depths, not a self whose thick past, a past layered into body and psyche, is 'in play.' Instead, this self imagines suspending time itself in order to live intensely in

the here and now. This is also not a self whose inner life is to be dwelled upon, examined, or shared. Hamra's streets may be a space of desire and longing but in a street culture bent to flows and speed it does not encourage intimate sharing. To the contrary, this unburdened self stays close to the body, to the surfaces and facades, and to those desires and impulses that immediately bind the self to the visual and sensual excitements of the street. This is a self that flourishes in the drama of the discrete gesture—a self who enters and exits, stops and goes, greets and departs, spends and moves on; a self that doesn't linger too long anywhere, with anyone or anything.

But, exactly what burdens is the self relieved of in Hamra's streets? Here I need to shift from a 'topographical' to a sociological line of reasoning. Hamra's urban streets promise some release from the twin burdens of "authenticity" and "routine." For many of us, if I can press a cautious analytical generalization, the 'private sphere' of intimates—kin, family, lovers, friends—is the place where we expect to be recognized and respected for who we are; its where we, in our inner core, hope to feel loved and a deep sense of belonging. It is with intimates, and only intimates, that we feel safe enough to regularly reveal ourselves. But this demand that intimates validate our core self also functions as an obligation to present a true self. We are expected to be who we are, and not otherwise, if we are to receive love and solidarity. The daughter loved by her parents for who she is must also repeatedly and consistently be 'herself.' Who she is, is linked to her gender, class, or age status as well as to her 'personality' as it has been established through a history of self presentational practices. If she departs from these identifying practices, her parents may no longer recognize her, and may threaten to withdraw some of their love. The expectation to present a true self is then also experienced as a constraint, a power that regulates our behavior.

The burdens of this self disciplining are in part what make the public institutional world appealing. Work, the military and public service potentially frees us from the demand of always having to be ourselves. But, as we know, these institutions impose their own weighty demands, obligations,

and constraints linked to more or less fixed social roles and routines. Moreover, the public world regularly prioritizes institutional interests and goals over our personal needs and desires; this organizational dynamic can feel at times self denying or 'alienating.'

As a space bordering the private and the public, and as a space that edges into liminality, the urban street makes it possible for the self to suspend, however incompletely and briefly, the demands of authenticity that weigh heavily in the private sphere as well as the rigid statuses and roles of the routinized institutional orders. There is a kind of fluidity and porousness, even unruliness, to urban street culture that allows for self improvisation and social innovation (Sennett 1977). An unexpected purchase prompts new forms of self relation and expression; a stare returned by a stranger leads to an exchange and a new social bond; an unintended encounter with street protests catches you in a moment of civic discontent, prompting political engagement.

Of course, this unburdened self is not free of all social regulation; conventions and sanctioned routines sustain urban order. These rules however are general, abstract; there are rules governing pedestrian traffic, consumer and crowd behavior, waiting, greeting, exiting, and so on. Street regulation, I would say, is 'thin' in contrast to the 'thick' regulation of kin and work. However, there are times when controls thicken. The border status of the urban street periodically may fuel collective fears and moral panics, which can propel the elaboration of an apparatus of police-military-medical regulation.<sup>2</sup> But, in Beirut, owing to its weak state, and especially in neighborhoods where kin and sect are removed from street life, as in Hamra, thin regulation seems to be the rule.

The tension between regulation and release seems especially intense in Beirut. Despite an official narrative that contrasts Lebanon to other

Arab nations by its laissez faire individualism, Lebanese live in a densely rule-bound order. Sect, village, kin, family, patriarch and patron, gender code and social class encircle the self in a seamless-like web of rules, customs, and rituals (Joseph 1993, 2002, Khalaf 1987). If state and legal regulation has only a weak presence in daily life, informal controls operate like a spiders web radiating from the inner layers of the Lebanese self to outer behavior. Hamra's street culture holds out the promise of some release from customary rule, from the layers of regulation that, at times and for many Lebanese, may feel like a crushing weight on personal life.

Something of this unburdening seems also to be driven by a flight from history. For Lebanese, the present is thick with feelings of loss, with barely contained feelings of fear, rage, and vulnerability, and with unresolved feelings of betrayal and shame, as the present remains deeply wedded to a 15 year period of civil violence (e.g. Saghie 2004). For those who came of age during this time, those young men and women who are the face of Hamra, there is perhaps no escaping its formative power. But, also, if this nation has been unable to render the war years coherent and meaningful, and to ritually enact a national drama of forgiveness and reconciliation, it seems unlikely that individuals can do so. In contrast to nations that have found ways to "process" periods of protracted civil violence, there have been no collective acts of memorialisation in Lebanon, no judicial accountability for massacres and assassinations, and no public rituals of truth telling and reconciliation that might facilitate a national catharsis.

Lebanon's war years have been met with a numbing silence and a conspiracy of forgetting (on Lebanon's 'war amnesia,' see Khalaf 1993b, Sarkis 2006, Tueni 1998, Yahya 2007). Denial though hardly seems possible. How does one forget the death, exile, or betrayal of kin, the loss of home, family, and community, or the paralyzing shame or rage for deeds witnessed or done? Indeed, how is forgetting possible under conditions in which the very culture of social polarization and sectarian enmity, which fueled the collective madness of the war years, has been

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<sup>2</sup> As streets become "enclaves" or sites of danger or militarization, regulation is thickened. However, whereas militarization suggests heightened "formal" regulation (checkpoints, patrols, state surveillance), identity or class enclaves enhance "informal" controls (heightened group loyalties or increased pressure to social conformity).

reproduced by a postwar history of spectacular assassinations, heightened class and sectarian division and political paralysis? If neither reconciliation with a violent, disfiguring past nor forgetting is an option, perhaps it is possible to wall off emotions tied to the past and to disassociate the personal and the political by surrendering to the surface dramas of city streets with their promise of some relief, however temporary, from the anguish of the past.

The struggle to escape a troubling past by embracing a worldly ethic of restless movement and by self immersion in a thickly elaborated "here and now" lived out in its discrete moments is captured in one of Mai Ghoussoub's autobiographical stories tellingly entitled, "An Uneasy Peace." With the ending of the war, the narrator returns to a Beirut reawakened to worldly delights and indulgences. She wishes to share in the spirit of renewal and hope that seems to be sweeping across Beirut. However, she is troubled by a nagging restlessness, an inability to be alone, to be at peace with herself. "Whenever I had a minute to myself I felt a strange malaise taking hold of me. My initial solution was never to be alone, never to give myself time to face my thoughts. Run for your peace of mind—keep running....How am I going to deal with the feelings of vulnerability that creep in every time I stop running"(Ghoussoub 2007: 34-5)? "Running" strikes me as a telling metaphor for the Lebanese struggle to forget an unsettled and unsettling past by a relentless search for 'experience.' And yet, it is an impossible struggle since there is always a 'before' and 'after' running, a time at rest, which for many Lebanese is an 'uneasy peace.'

### **The limits of tolerance: the politics of group difference**

The streets of Hamra belong to the young men and women who give to them its emblematic aura of immediacy and intensity. You can't help but notice them. They barrel down Bliss and Hamra streets in their high end German autos. They crowd its streets, cafes, pubs, and gyms--mornings, afternoons and evenings. They populate the night as I head out for dinner. I watch

from Linas as they stride by, barely noticing me. The men, dreamily handsome, with their designer jeans and sneakers, three day beard, and the much fussed over hair. They stride purposefully and confident. And the women, clothes hugging their bodies exposing every curve. They seem to glide along the surface tuned in to the pulsating rhythms of the street.

The streets may be claimed by these young men and women but it's not their world equally. Men rule the streets. They're the ones behind the wheels of the BMWs and Mercedes, driving the taxis, gathered together in front of shops or hotels, talking, or playing cards or backgammon. Its men who own the flower, sporting goods, electronic, clothing, or grocery shops. And, its men who are the construction workers, the police and military officers as well as the waiters, dishwashers, street cleaners, newspaper and mail deliverers.

Women share the streets with men, but not their power. Women walk the streets of Hamra aware of the lurid looks and gestures that follow them. I've watched men look as a woman walks by; one comments to a companion, they smile, as if acknowledging a brotherhood of male gender power. Women know that they walk the streets alone at night at some risk. Stories circulate of women attacked in front of their apartments or dragged into alleyways or cars, and raped (statistics on sexual violence are not available to the public, if they even exist). In fact, as darkness descends, women are rarely seen alone. After 8PM, as most shops close (except some cafes and pubs), the lights dim in many streets and police are rarely seen. Precautions must be taken: walk with others, avoid dark streets, bring a flashlight, carry mace.

Women are exposed to another equally serious risk: losing respectability. As a space where desire is closer to the surface, where men's sex is more in play, women have to tighten internal controls as they negotiate the streets. No doubt class matters. For at least middle class women, social respectability is wedded to controlling desire. Women step onto the street as bearers of their fathers and families honor, and as responsible for regulating men's desire. To

surrender to her sex risks moral ruin, dishonor for her family, and social disrespect for unleashing male sexuality.

Unlike in the US or Western Europe, single women, even class privileged women, do not have the option of exploring their sex. Respectability and a 'good marriage' depend on presenting a virginal status. Self presentation does not however always align with behavior. Many women surrender to desire. Hymenoplasty is one option in order to stage a virginal wedding night. And many women choose abortion to avoid moral pollution. As is so often the case in Lebanon, the real business of life is negotiated informally. Here's how it often works. A woman tells a gynecologist of her pregnancy. She explains that having a child is not an option either because she is unmarried, married but pregnant from someone other than her husband, or that neither she nor her husband want or can afford a child. If the consulting physician does not accommodate, she will be referred to a doctor who will perform an abortion, for roughly \$400. The operation will likely take place in a hospital. Doctors, nurses, and administrators are aware of this practice but ask no questions. Doctors cannot be legally prosecuted except if a lawsuit is filed against them. Then, the state can intervene, but this rarely occurs (Fathallah 2008).

There are no legitimate alternatives to marriage. A respectable Lebanese woman cannot choose to be sexual and single, cannot choose cohabitation (illegal and would mark her as disreputable), cannot choose another woman as her life-partner, and cannot choose to remain celibate and single without being stigmatized as a failed woman.

There is, moreover, no social movement or political organization--not in Hamra and not in Beirut--that is currently challenging women's lack of intimate choices as indicative of an unequal gender order. In Lebanon, women's limited erotic-intimate freedom is part of a pattern of gender subordination that includes, for example, the lack of political representation (since the Ta'if Agreement in 1989 there has been just one woman in the ruling governmental institution, the Council of Ministers), the absence of legislation or

laws criminalizing spousal rape or domestic violence, and the legal incapacity to confer citizenship on their spouse and children (M. Khalaf 2002). In the end, women must rely on their personal resources and informal networks to negotiate their life chances.

Like their mothers and grandmothers before them, a young middle-class woman is still judged by the status of her husband and his family. However, these women experience considerable social pressure to be sexual in order to gain men's interest and approval. Many women, veiled or not, may resist sex or stop at coital sex, but project a sexy public self--skin tight jeans, low cut shirts, some flesh exposed. As I learned teaching mostly young women at the American University in Beirut, these women struggle mightily with negotiating the contradictory demands by sect, family, and peers to be "pure" but also to be sexual. Often, a compromise is reached: an eroticized public self coexists with a still honorable (virginal) private self (R. Khalaf 2006: 184-85).

Men may rule the streets but these are not the men of America's city streets. To state the difference in strong terms: apart from sect and class, the men of Hamra display primarily individual, stylistic differences. By contrast, in Manhattan, Chicago, Atlanta, or Los Angeles, there are differences among men that are "collective" or group based and publicly marked. There are men who are culturally identified with hip hop or punk subcultures, or with Black, Puerto Rican, Jamaican, or Korean ethno-national cultures, or with gay or bohemian cultures. These cultural identities represent diverse cultural values and viewpoints; they are moreover publicly marked by the stylization of the body, e.g., by manner of dress, grooming, walk, piercings, tattoos, and so on. And some of these cultural identities are territorial, for example, Black Harlem, the Jewish lower East side, gay Chelsea, or the Puerto Ricans who live below Avenue A in the East Village while the bohemians and artists occupy the streets above Avenue A.

Are there no status differences among the men in Hamra that are collective and publicly marked

(apart from sect)? I think there are but they survive on the margins of city life.

Consider ethno-national differences. At first glance the bodies that populate the streets of Hamra seem strikingly uniform--shades of Mediterranean 'Caucasian.' But now and again, dark-skinned and Asian figures interrupt that impression. These are the men--and women--from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and Africa. There is almost a sense of surprise at their presence not because there are so few of them but because there are so few visible. These figures inhabit the back regions of Hamra. They are the street cleaners, dishwashers, janitors, and domestic workers in the cafes, shops, gyms, and homes of the Lebanese. Hardly noticed, notoriously underpaid, and lacking state protection, they occupy the bottom rung of the social hierarchy.

These shadowy figures are rarely seen in public roles or places unrelated to the management of human waste. They are not the service providers at banks, restaurants or hotels; they are not the patrons of the fancy shops on Hamra Street; they don't frequent Starbucks, Costas, or Linas; you don't see them strolling on the corniche in the evenings; they are not the drivers of the taxis; they are not in the movie theaters or the clubs in the evenings; they are not among the men huddling on the street corners or playing backgammon; they are not the booksellers or the shopkeepers. They are hardly noticeable despite the fact that they number somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000 (in a nation of 4 million), and despite the fact that they are everywhere bodies and its waste products are to be cared for, collected, and disposed of.

There are no walls dividing this neighborhood and city into quarters. Beirut is not Bethlehem or Hebron. But, there are hidden, sequestered populations, not just the armies of dark skinned, Asian immigrant workers but the undocumented refugees from Iraq, east Europe, and Russia who become sex workers or survive in a criminal underworld, and the Palestinians and Syrians who live on the edge of the city, in its squalid refugee camps or its slums (Nasr 2005). Disenfranchised,

poor, and polluted, these populations, whose deprivations are often passed onto successive generations, are barely visible.

There are significant differences among these disenfranchised ethno-national populations. For example, Palestinians, who make up roughly one-tenth (400,000) of the Lebanese population, are mostly confined to refugee camps in (West) Beirut. These are quasi-sovereign, self governing territorial enclaves heavily dependent on the UN and NGO's for basic services (e.g. education, healthcare, housing assistance). Despite a history in Lebanon stretching back generations, Palestinians lack the most basic rights granted to Lebanese citizens. As "foreigners" they cannot own property, hold office, vote, or use Lebanon's state services. If individual Palestinians are able to gain work permits (which is rare), their employment is generally restricted to low paying market sectors--typically agriculture and construction. Recent surveys, moreover, underscore considerable Lebanese resistance, except among Sunni and Druze populations (most Palestinians are Sunni), towards the incorporation or "resettlement" (Tawtin) of Palestinians (Haddad 2004). So, while Palestinians have a collective and public status, it is as a sequestered, disenfranchised community, invisible in the public life of Hamra (Peteet 2002).

If a political crisis (the *Nakba* of 1948) drove Palestinians into Lebanon, economic immiseration fueled the immigration of domestic and other migrant laborers from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Africa (Ethiopia, Sudan, West Africa), and Southeast Asia. Like Palestinians, domestic laborers, to consider perhaps the largest segment of this migrant labor population, have no legal standing in Lebanon. They are not protected by citizenship or labor laws. The power of employers (families) over domestic laborers is virtually unchecked by the state. Despite severe restrictions on their mobility (e.g. surrendering their passports to their employers or madams who deny live-in maids a day off), networks of domestic workers have coalesced around their nationality. They provide moral and social support and at times financial aid, safety, and access to illegal work or services (Jureidini 2006). Typically,

networks form around a church or business that caters to domestic laborers or, for freelancers, a communal household (Beyene 2005). These networks, however, remain loose, informal, resource poor, and survive at the margins of city life, virtually invisible in Hamra. According to one researcher, "as far as I know, and as far as those I've asked (including other researchers and Filipina women who have been in Lebanon for a long time), there has thus far been no formal collective protest (by Filipina domestic laborers)" (Hayeon Lee 2008).

To further illustrate the marginal and muted status of the 'social other,' consider the status of nonheterosexuals. I talked with students, shop owners, ordinary residents, and nonheterosexuals, as well as consulted the available research to understand something of this population. I had the exceptional good fortune of working with a graduate student whose research on nonheterosexual men taught me much (Moussawi 2008).

Needless to say, the world of nonheterosexuals in Hamra is not the lesbian and gay world of US cities. The association of sexual desire with sexual identity, and the tight link between identity and community, so salient in the States, cannot be assumed in Hamra or Beirut. There are individuals for whom nonheterosexuality is only a desire or behavior; they reject the language of sexual identity. There are, as well, individuals who use the language of sexual identity but only to refer to a sexual preference, not a stable personal identity. Finally, I encountered individuals for whom being gay or lesbian is a social identity, a status closer to an American urban 'ethnic' model.

Informal networks form the glue of anything we can call a gay or lesbian community in Hamra. Through the internet or otherwise, nonheterosexuals find each other, become sex partners, friends, lovers, or long term partners. A web of contacts and connections form a social network, often porous around the edges and exhibiting varied degrees of thickness and duration depending on the types of relationships and the mobility, age, career status, and so on of its members.

These networks take shape in relation to a larger social world in which homosexuality is disrespected and criminalized. Although, state persecution is rare (no data is collected or publicly available), periodic harassment and scandals remind Beirutis that only heterosexuality grants full rights and respect. Of course, Lebanese hardly need reminders since their sect, kin, family, and peers permit no legitimate alternative to heterosexuality (McCormick 2006; Moussawi 2008).

These networks function as safe spaces for nonheterosexuals, similar in many respects to networks in the US or Europe. As an enclave set apart from an almost seamless normatively heterosexual public culture, its members invent ways to identify each other. Certain self presentational styles, behaviors, and language use acquire sexual meanings that mark a boundary separating nonheterosexuals from heterosexuals. In Hamra, piercings (right ear, I'm told), language use (playful referencing of feminine names or characterizations for men) and most importantly knowing the public spaces where nonheterosexuals gather are key ways of identifying one another while not being recognized by the general public.

Between Hamra and Manhattan or virtually any mid-to-large American city there is some affinity. This is not entirely unexpected since many Lebanese have been exposed to American gay/lesbian life through popular culture or travel. Yet, they are worlds apart in one important way: informal networks have not produced a public gay and lesbian culture. This would include lesbian and gay businesses, social and political organizations, institutionalized cultural production (e.g. publishers, newspapers, magazines, fiction, scholarship, art, theatre, music), and territorial enclaves. In Hamra, there is a 'gay' bar ('Wolfs'), housed in a little trafficked, dimly lit side street, and one café (Bardo), located at the border of Hamra, that is friendly to nonheterosexuals. One gay bar and one or a few friendly cafés do not make a public culture.

Walking the streets of Hamra and Beirut, I've been struck by my inability to identify

nonheterosexuals. Gradually, I've come to realize that there does not exist in Hamra what I would call a "homosexual sign system." This refers to a cluster of public practices that signify a gay or lesbian status. Homosexual signifiers may be invented by a gay and lesbian community in order to recognize one another and at times to claim a public status; they also allow heterosexuals to identify nonheterosexuals and to project a public heterosexual status by avoiding 'gay' signifying practices. In the US, gender play has often served as a gay/lesbian signifier. For example, an emphatically stylized and sculpted male body that avoids stereotypical masculine color schemes might reasonably raise suspicions of nonheterosexuality. In Hamra, nonheterosexual men appear to embrace conventional masculine styles (Moussawi 2008). Gender tweaking or blending does not signal sexual status. Neither a hyper masculine nor a non-stereotypical man will be publicly understood as anything other than heterosexual, unless accompanied by an exaggerated femininity or unless one is seen in the company of known or suspected nonheterosexuals. So, except for the very few men who exhibit such stereotypical markings (I've seen two in my 10 month stay), nonheterosexuals are invisible on the streets of Hamra.

I've heard it said, and occasionally argued against an American model, that the absence of gay/lesbian signifiers allows nonheterosexuals considerable personal freedom. Unlike in the US, where public behavior is routinely interpreted in sexual identity terms, this is not the case in Beirut. No one suspects because everyone is assumed to be heterosexual, but this paradoxically is said to allow nonheterosexuals to live undetected or below the public radar screen. Perhaps, but, without a public lesbian and gay presence, for example, organizations advocating sexual/gender/intimate variation, the presumption of heterosexuality as normal, and its compulsory status, will go unchallenged (Merabet 2006).

In talking with nonheterosexuals, and in interviews with self identified gay and lesbian individuals, my overriding impression was that Beirutis have little choice but to present a gender conventional self and to organize an intimate life that publicly

admits only opposite gendered desires and partners. I did meet some individuals who were 'open' about their nonheterosexual status to some family members (typically female siblings or the mother, almost never to the father), friends, and to coworkers (almost always in occupations associated with the arts). However, this openness did not extend to urban public space, apart from the few bars and cafes friendly to nonheterosexuals. As one young gay man remarked, "[In Hamra], nobody cares if you're Christian or Sunni or whatever so long as you are straight, blend in. But if you look or act gay you will be stared at, talked about, maybe laughed at, and will feel or [be] made to feel shame. Really, you just don't see openly gay people..." For men and women in their 30s, there is considerable pressure from kin, sect, and peers to organize a public heterosexual life. A doctoral student I met, who self identified as a lesbian, informed me that women who live as lesbians in their 20s expect to be married by their 30s, or else leave Lebanon. For Lebanese who have not joined the sixteen million or so in the diaspora, the compulsory enactment of heterosexuality in public compels them to either confine nonheterosexual desire to a private and secretive underworld or to risk social ostracism or exile by kin, sect, and peers.

In Hamra, then, the gender, ethnic, and sexual other is publicly presented as an individual status. Of course, individuals may be understood as representing a population (e.g. women or homosexuals) or even a group status (Palestinians). However, in the case of women and homosexuals, these statuses are understood, as best I can tell, as part of a natural hierarchical order that assumes the normative and socially privileged status of men and heterosexuality. In the case of ethnicity, the absence of a collective public presence means that these statuses are either barely noticed or, if betrayed by skin pigmentation or dialect, are marked as inferior. Without a collective and public presence, the inferior outsider status of the gender, ethnic, and sexual other is uncontested. While social networks have formed around these statuses, for a variety of reasons such as social repression, fear of exposure, lack of resources or lack of a

sense of entitlement, they survive in the back regions of city life.

Apart from sect, there is one social difference that is publicly marked in Hamra, social class. Class is on display day and night. Of course that is the point of class difference, to be noticed. Class is publicly marked by the stylization of the body—dress, demeanor, language use, voice inflection, and so on. However, in Hamra's fast-moving street culture, the car, in particular the BMW and the Mercedes, is the iconic emblem of social class. It can be seen and heard, and in Hamra it is both—as the sounds of motors revved up, rubber burning, and screeching stops command attention. Why the car? I suspect that it evokes the wish for a life that is secure, where the self feels in charge. It is the illusion of being able to escape victimization by the machinations of anonymous others that is perhaps the source of this fetish. This high-powered Western luxury machine allows a weary, beleaguered population to imagine a life of self possession.

Social class divisions seem to elude public commentary and politicization, even though class privilege is flagged by education (private schools), work (highly paid professionals and finance workers alongside laborers paid a minimum wage of \$200 per month), residence, travel, along with everyday signifiers of class, e.g. car, dress, grooming, or domestic help. By the end the 1990s, researchers point to the "increasing pauperization" of the Lebanese, with nearly one third of all households living in poverty and unemployment exceeding 30% (Nasr 2003: 156, Diab 1990, Traboulsi 2007). No doubt, the manipulation of sectarian divisions by a venal political class has contributed to masking class polarities. But also, a culture of heroic individualism has obfuscated the reality of class division. Social success is imagined as an expression of the charisma of the individual. The muting of class divisions also gains legitimation from the myth of Lebanon as a nation of entrepreneurs. This narrative may be largely fictional, especially today when success relies so heavily on family businesses or associations, corporate ladder-climbing, speculation, government employment linked to political

clientism, landlordism, and remittances from the Diaspora, but it resists revision and rebuke to the extent that it is tied to a nationalist discourse of Arab exceptionalism.

In Hamra, social class has not coalesced into spatial enclaves. There are no rich and poor quarters. The very rich and the very poor are unlikely to live in Hamra. Still, class polarization establishes a vertical hierarchical order. Class is fundamentally about social distance and relies on the 'fetishizing of commodities' to publicly assert its claims to moral and social superiority. Like gender or sexuality, class is often understood as an expression of individual talent and effort. But unlike gender, sexuality, or ethnicity, class difference is not understood within a moral discourse of otherness. The poor or the rich are not "other" but ordinary 'statuses' reflecting a seemingly random or individualized logic of fortune and misfortune.

### **Cosmopolitan Beirut?**

Talking with students, residents, shopkeepers, and intellectuals, Hamra was consistently described and celebrated as a unique blend of commerce and cosmopolitanism. "I don't live in Hamra but I've been coming here since the 1960s, commented an owner of a music shop. "I've seen it change. During the war many Christians left.... [Even though I'm Christian] I have a business in Hamra. Today it doesn't matter what [religion] you are. You find people of many different backgrounds, classes, and countries living here. Hamra is the center of culture, its very cosmopolitan....Arabs, French, Armenians, Americans, and people with different politics and lifestyles, they all mix."

My field research however suggests a more nuanced and contradictory picture. Tolerance of otherness is considerable as it pertains to individual differences. Compared to other neighborhoods in Beirut, the streets of Hamra are graced with a dazzling range of bodily surfaces, varying in color, costume, and social and aesthetic style. This diversity of individual bodies, selves, and 'lifestyles' is, I think, what is justly

celebrated in Hamra. This parade of individual differences speaks to an urban terrain driven by circulation and relatively unimpeded by state power or sect; it also says something about its young, spirited and well to-do population.

But, which differences are tolerated and which cross the border into the illicit? If by tolerance we mean something like a 'right' to occupy and circulate freely in public space, such a right would suggest an abstract identification with the other as "human" or a "person." From this perspective, nonheterosexuals and gender nonconformists would, I suspect, fall outside the scope of tolerance. I've been to places and events at which individuals engaged in non-normative gender and sexual practices. The absence of such practices in Hamra's public space, and I mean the thoroughgoing evacuation of all traces of such behavior, suggests that such practices, and the social status they mark, are illicit, and not tolerated.

As "foreigners," non-Lebanese ethnics occupy an ambiguous moral status, tolerated yet denied citizenship. This population includes all domestic laborers, all East European and Russian sex workers, most Palestinians, and many Kurds and Syrians. These statuses are tolerated in the sense that their movement in public urban space is not impeded; they are more or less free to patronize shops, to stop on the streets to talk or observe happenings in a sidewalk café. But tolerance does not mean equality.

Hamra's public space is ethnically stratified. In an interview with one of my students, the owner of a well known café spoke expansively of its cosmopolitanism (Ghanem 2008). Located in the center of Hamra, this café projects a worldly, intimate charm in its music, teas and coffees, and clientele. And, yet, while everyone is welcome (circulation is unimpeded), only some patrons are encouraged to become "regulars." "I do not let Filipinos come into [the café]. Would you come have coffee or a drink at this place with a house worker sitting next to you? I don't think so. ....Also I do not like it when blacks come here. ...I wouldn't kick them out if they happen to come in once or so. But I would make it obvious that they

are not welcome to have [this café] as their new hangout place." Furthermore, in researching users of public space, two of my students observed that the prime common space in Hamra (around Starbucks and the Crowne Plaza Hotel) was occupied exclusively by Lebanese and Anglo-Europeans. Syrians and Kurds congregated in marginal public spaces, on street corners at the edge of Hamra. They were apparently not interfered with by police, shop owners or other urban dwellers, but then they were hardly visible (Saccal and Zeidan 2008). In the course of four months of observations, Filipinas and Africans were never seen 'hanging out' in any of Hamra's common public spaces, though other researchers have observed them lingering at their local churches or a friendly cafe on Sundays (Beyene 2005; Lee 2008).

If certain gendered, sexual, and ethnic identities occupy a borderline moral status in Hamra's urban culture, tolerance is stretched to the very edge if they coalesce, however loosely, and claim a public voice. As we've seen, non-sectarian identities or 'subject positions' are either denied a legitimate group status (gays/lesbians, domestic laborers), territorially contained (Palestinians) or forced to the social periphery (Kurds). Neither nonheterosexuals, feminists, nor Ethiopians, Filipinas, Kurds, Syrians or Palestinians are recognized as legitimate cultural populations deserving full enfranchisement and respect. (e.g. on Kurds, Kawtharani 2003, Meho1995; on Syrians, see Chalcraft 2005).

Why this unease surrounding social otherness? Partly, I think, the explanation speaks to Lebanon's confessional political and social order. By tightly linking political power to sect, nonsectarian political groups are viewed as threats to sectarian power. By contrast, individual 'lifestyle' differences are tolerated because they don't challenge the confessional order. But also, to acknowledge the disrespected, outsider status of immigrant and refugee communities as well as ethnic and sexual "minorities" would threaten a core part of national identity--that of the Lebanese as the exceptional Arab nation, cosmopolitan and forward-looking in a region understood as mired in national parochialism and backwardness.

The linking of Lebanon, especially Beirut, with cosmopolitanism seems crucial to both the official and folk image of Lebanese national identity. So frequently did I hear this claim in conversations and in official (commercial, governmental, and scholarly) pronouncements that I grew suspicious. It would take me too far a field to ask what this rhetoric obscures or enables; instead, I want to comment only on its 'resonance.' Initially, though, I wish to press an analytical distinction. It is somewhat misleading to confuse the tolerance of diversity with cosmopolitanism. The former is surely an aspect of the latter but primarily concerns the scope of legitimate personal or cultural expression; the latter speaks to the character or the texture of the encounter between self and 'the other.' Two points need to be further highlighted. First, not all difference represent 'otherness.' The latter suggests a status that transgresses in some small or large way what is taken to be normative or rightfully dominant. Which differences count as otherness, and their salience, varies considerably within and across societies. Age, class, nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, region, tribe, gender, and so on are all possible but hardly inevitable axes of difference and otherness. Second, otherness is always concretized in a specific symbolic language, for example, as pathology or evil or sin; each vocabulary speaks to the unique texture of encounters between self and other. Cosmopolitanism refers to a specific type or pattern of engagement between self and other.

As I see it, 'urban cosmopolitanism' assumes a self whose boundaries are somewhat porous, who can 'let in' otherness or empathize with people from different cultural backgrounds (Gadamer 1975). An 'empathetic engagement' stipulates that the other is not viewed as radically different; that there are points of commonality between self and other which makes 'identification' possible at least at the level of shared humanity and personhood. To say it differently, otherness may be unfamiliar but not necessarily a threat. This identification allows the self to sustain an engagement with the other. Sustained engagement means that the self has the forbearance to hear and consider cultural values and viewpoints that may challenge her or his own; encounters with 'social others' may then

be approached in part as opportunities for edification, occasions to possibly revise one's own beliefs and expand one's psychic and cultural boundaries by incorporating otherness into what one considers to be 'familiar' or 'ordinary' or 'normal.' This incorporation of otherness drives a dynamic of the revision and the hybridization of the self and social life (e.g. Hannerz 1996, de Konig 2006, also, essays in Vertovec & Cohen 2002).

I take this process of cultural revision and hybridity to be at the heart of the concept of cosmopolitanism. But for this cultural process to be "robust" the other must assume a collective and public status. Only then can otherness avoid being reduced to a personal idiosyncrasy or style. Difference that is understood as only personal will lack the social force to compel societal-wide encounters of revision and hybridity. For example, if self identified lesbians lack a public status, if they have not, to use Lefebvre terms, staked out "counter-projects" and "counter-spaces" (1991: 381-2), it is entirely incidental whether any given individual has the opportunity to engage this other. Only if difference is collective and public would selves encounter otherness on a routine, systemic basis. If there is a public lesbian space and counter-project, most citizens will be compelled to engage this sexual/social other in their ordinary course of life. In other words, only in a social field in which "others" coalesce and acquire a public voice would individuals be compelled to reflect on their own cultural standpoints as one interpretive position among many; only then would exchange across cultural difference become routinized. And, finally, only in such a condition of on-going interpretive contestation would a culture of revising viewpoints and producing hybrid forms of personal and collective life become a regular feature of social life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> My take on cosmopolitanism is roughly speaking poststructural, rather than liberal or Habermasian. Accordingly, cosmopolitanism is less about resolving or superseding an agonistic order; instead, social conflicts are the very source of hybridization and revision. Further, the "productivity" of cosmopolitanism (fusions, revisions, innovations) depends on the possibility that "the other" can coalesce into a collectivity, thus ensuring a public voice with sufficient constancy and volume to be heard. I make no

These then are the ingredients of a robust culture of cosmopolitanism: porous selves, a culture anchored in notions of shared humanity or personhood, counter-projects and counter-spaces, reflexive selves, communication oriented to edification, cultural fusion, and hybridity. Given their century-long status as interlocutors between Anglo-European and Arabic cultures, Beirutis can rightly champion their cosmopolitan heritage. However, it is primarily elites who have sustained and significant exposure to Anglo-European cultures through schooling, professionalization, or transnational careers and travel. Ordinary Lebanese encounter 'Westerners' as consumers whose otherness is presented by their demeanor, dress or language, not by their cultural values and viewpoints which cannot be accessed through brief, superficial interactions.

Sect has served as the exemplar and indeed the only fully legitimate form of social otherness in Beirut. The major sectarian communities (Maronite, Greek Catholic, Druze, Sunni and Shia) have their own clerical hierarchy, laws governing personal and familial affairs, media (newspapers, TV and radio programs), and political organizations and representatives. In principle, a social field of multiple sectarian groupings could provide fertile ground for cultural exchange and hybridization. Unfortunately, a history of sectarian conflict and polarization stretching back at least to the beginning of the twentieth century has hardened the boundaries separating these cultural agents. As Lebanese retreat into sectarian enclaves for protection, support, and communal solidarity, empathetic communication, edifying exchanges, and a dynamic of revision and fusion is less possible. Sect seems to function in contemporary Beirut as a 'pure community' demanding unquestioned loyalty--not a recipe for cosmopolitanism.

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assumptions about what form this collective coalescence should take, for example, whether it should be a territorial enclave with rigid borders, high demands of loyalty, and few exit options or a dispersed and diverse "population" which coalesces into a loose network with porous borders, minimal loyalty demands, and easy exit options. I'm wagering that this normative indeterminacy might go some way towards eluding a narrow "Anglo-Eurocentric" standpoint (Cf. Fraser 1997 and Young, 1990).

Sadly, a culture is taking shape in Hamra and perhaps Beirut that is in many respects at odds with cosmopolitanism. Beneath the official talk of tolerance and pluralism is a hard edged culture of civic indifference and mistrust. Within the sectarian community the self may find safety and solidarity but at the cost of cultural insularity and a weariness and enmity towards outsiders. Beyond the sect, there is, among varied possibilities, an urban culture, especially salient in Hamra, promising a certain 'release' from the burdens of the present and past. This unburdening, as I've called it, is a site of potential improvisation and collective effervescence. Hamra remains a fertile ground for creative, unruly impulses. Still, unless I am terribly mistaken, the conjuncture of urban topography and history has conspired to promote a culture of civic indifference and paranoia. Specifically, whereas a heightened sectarianism shapes a disposition of fear and barely contained loathing and rage towards 'the other,' an urban culture oriented to circulation cultivates a studied insularity, as if nothing is owed to the other beyond a minimal tolerance and benign indifference. This laissez faire ethos may give to the streets of Hamra something of its aura of freedom but its freedom as mere release. It is, if you will, a freedom to be indifferent to the other, to approach the other as a potential impediment or resource whose engagement involves minimal psychic and social demands. This insularity and indifference or instrumentalism is the antithesis of the 'empathetic engagement' that is the spirit of cosmopolitanism. Its historic roots lay in the war years.

### **Lebanon's war culture & the politics of paranoia**

The fighting ended in 1990 but the culture that took shape during the years of civic violence did not abruptly come to an end. It isn't only that memories of the war years are still vivid for many Lebanese; Beirut's postwar topography is a daily reminder of these years. The bombed out buildings and the once stunning Ottoman villas that were abandoned to squatters or militias and then simply abandoned, bear witness to years of rage and ruin; the landmarks that secured a sense

of place, a tree lined street or the family's butcher, these too are gone and the awareness of their absence evokes a past that cannot be easily forgotten. Gone too are the neighbors or friends of the family who fled to avoid the violence. Closer to home, there is the brother or cousin lost in battle or to a stray bullet; the sister or uncle who chose exile; the best friend whose leg was lost or psyche traumatized; or the parents who survived and endured the war years but now live in a state of dread. These losses and dislocations evoke a past very much alive in the present, and infuse it with a profound sense of melancholy (Makdisi 1999: 76-77; 258).

Some of the most poignant and compelling writing of the past two decades in Lebanon has underscored the point that the culture formed during 15 years of social fracturing and polarization, often brutally intimate violence (170,000 dead), and traumatizing psychic and social dislocations (almost one million citizens left Lebanon while well over a million were internally displaced) has not surrendered its force in the postwar years (Alameddine 1998; al-Daif 2007; Mills 2007; Najjar 2006). At the center of this war culture is a construction of the 'sectarian other' as an enemy, as a threat so immediate and consequential to self, kin, and nation that it has the resonance of a force of "evil." It is as if all of the ordinary and not-so-ordinary anxieties, fears, and hatreds shouldered by Lebanese were projected onto the sectarian other. It is perhaps this inflation of the sectarian other into an archetypal evil figure, and the simultaneous purification of one's sectarian self and community, which made possible the seeming banality of killing (e.g. Najjar 2006: 56; Younes 2008: 223). To annihilate the sectarian other, and to destroy or degrade all of her traces (flags, icons, bodies, buildings, property) became, at least for some, an act of personal and collective redemption.

This culture of sectarianism, with its polarizing moral logic of evil and redemption has been sustained by the territorialization of sectarian identities and the hyper-politicization of sectarian conflicts in the postwar years. However, the cessation of civil violence has meant that sectarian hatreds and hostilities have had to take

refuge inside the sectarian community, and in the interior of the Lebanese psyche. The appearance of a personality cult around sectarian leaders, public rallies brandishing the emblems of collective identity (martyrs, flags and insignia), and the demonization of the sectarian other perpetuate a heightened sectarian solidarity that pivots on the denial of the shared humanity of the sectarian other. As many Lebanese turn to their sect for security and belonging, and for a sense of self ennoblement and transcendence, a culture of fear and rage towards the other is given fresh sustenance. Sectarian identity is still the chief axis dividing insider and outsider; all 'others' are either compelled to accommodate (e.g. Kurds gain public representation only as Sunni's) or are forced to the social margins, if not simply denied a public status beyond a spectral one (nonheterosexuals).

In this moral drama, the sectarian other is not just a 'stranger' but is a menacing power threatening collective degradation and abjection of the pure self and community. The sectarian other is imagined as an unrepentant and unredeemable figure of fear and loathing. While acts of collective annihilation are not possible today, symbolic evisceration is possible. After the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005, Lebanese politics regressed into a war by other means. The politics of accommodation, compromise, and ideological conflict has been overwhelmed by a politics of rage whose aim is to obliterate political opponents by exposing their nefarious machinations. This is a politics that trades on appeals to shadowy, haunting dangers and gives shape to a political culture of intrigue, pervasive mistrust, and apocalyptic calls for new beginnings. This politics of paranoia is a recipe for a stalled, barely functioning government which has been Lebanon's fate since the 'Cedar Revolution.'

Today, outward accommodation to sectarian difference coexists with a barely contained rage, what Jean Said Makdisi once referred to as "a generalized rage." How is this coexistence possible? What sort of 'defense formation' takes shape in Beirut's street life?

Like other core affects such as shame or fear, rage is less a discrete, separable 'unit' than a diffuse 'energy' that structures the psyche's emotional economy; as such, rage cannot be easily dissipated, walled off, or left in the past. And, if it is not (individually or collectively) "processed" or "worked through" it can at least be managed, and indeed must be if this affect is continuously reproduced by the social order.

At the level of street life, rage may be managed by cultivating a self who turns away from the other, all anonymous others. This self, at least as s/he ventures beyond her sectarian enclave, displays an opaque surface as a curtain is drawn around her interior. The 'private territory' of the self can only be pierced if invited inside. The other, effectively all others since insider/outsider status is often not outwardly marked, especially among men, is to be engaged minimally, sharply compressing gestures of recognition. Eye contact is to be avoided, communicative exchange narrowed to polite, highly-scripted essentials, and expressive embellishments minimized as the self negotiates a terrain populated by anonymous and potentially threatening others.

This urban self cultivates an indifference to the other that might appear to the foreigner as a steely self regard. Such selves are able to move speedily and with apparent ease through urban

space as they are relieved of the burdens of having to thickly consider or engage the other. This cultivated indifference towards others gives to Beirut's streets something of its speed, its impressive play of form and movement, its fluidity and apparent lightness of being, even if this surface conceals passions fired by fear and loathing, dread and hatred. Something of this troubling affective underworld bubbles up, disturbing the smooth urban surface. Amidst the flows and steady movements of bodies and machines, 'micro-wars' are taking place, for example, in the all-too-serious jockeying for 'position' and advantage among drivers, in the rivalry between pedestrians and motorists as they intersect, in the sidewalk battles between pedestrians as they maneuver to claim its narrow space, and in the notorious free-for-all that passes for waiting on "lines" in Beirut. These civic skirmishes, at odds with a polite culture that places enormous significance on glossy, inviting surfaces, betray a world in which a "generalized rage" is still pervasive. This urban self should not be confused with the remoteness of Simmel's "stranger" or the clinically observant gaze of Benjamin's flaneur; Beirut's urban dweller assumes the pose of a battle scarred, war weary self who is still 'inside' a war culture that is driven by paranoid fantasies of an other plotting to bring about her annihilation.

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