

CHAPTER ONE

Al-Dahiyya: Sight, Sound, Season

RESIDENTS and outsiders alike refer to the southern suburbs of Beirut as “*al-Dahiyya*”—a word that simply means “the suburb” in Arabic,¹ but that connotes “the Shi’i ghetto” to many in other parts of the city. More a conglomeration of multiple municipalities and neighborhoods than a single suburb, al-Dahiyya is bounded by the city to the north, Beirut International Airport to the south, the Mediterranean on the west side, and an agricultural area to the east. It used to be that due to this location al-Dahiyya was unavoidable. To get from the rest of Beirut to the airport or anywhere south of the city, you had to drive through it. Until recently, outsiders passing through caught glimpses of the area from the old airport road or from the coastal highway that leads south to Saida (Sidon) and Sour (Tyre). Today new highways, built to bypass al-Dahiyya, connect Beirut to the airport and to the south, allowing visitors and Lebanese alike to avoid acknowledging its presence.

The residents of this often ignored or maligned area of Beirut who were my interlocutors often referred to *al-bī’a*, the milieu, of al-Dahiyya as a critical factor in their religious, social, and political understandings, identities, and practices. The visual, aural, and temporal textures² of this milieu are the focus of this chapter, and frame the spaces of those that follow. These textures layer religion and politics into public space, and are pointed to as evidence of the spiritual progress of the community and of its recent visibility in Lebanon.

To focus is to allow the surrounding context to blur into white. Before permitting Beirut to fade like this, a few paragraphs are necessary to capture this city that—despite its betrayals and violences—is fiercely claimed as home by Lebanese of all persuasions.

¹ Although the southern suburb is not Beirut’s only suburb, popular usage has designated it “the suburb,” while other outlying areas of the city are referred to by name (e.g., Borj Hammoud).

² I take the term “textures” from Tacchi’s discussion of radio’s creation of a “textured soundscape” (1998: 26).

AL-DAHIYYA IN BEIRUT

Clarice, the glorious city, has a tormented history. Several times it decayed, then burgeoned again, always keeping the first Clarice as an unparalleled model of every splendor, compared to which the city's present state can only cause more sighs at every fading of the stars. . . . Populations and customs have changed several times; the name, the site, and the objects hardest to break remain. Each new Clarice, compact as a living body with its smells and its breath, shows off, like a gem, what remains of the ancient Clarices, fragmentary and dead.

—ITALO CALVINO, *Invisible Cities*

Beirut is a balance of constant stimuli and contagious ennui. The former assaults your senses and drains your energy, the latter emerges in the omnipresent hopelessness and a slow rhythm of bare motion. There is no way to capture the essence of Beirut: the romance, the dirt, the reality. It is a word the international media have turned into an epithet for destruction and that Lebanese expatriates have turned into the whimsy of a golden past. Much has been written about Beirut,³ its deaths, and resurrections, but this is not the place for me to recap that. Instead I simply highlight three aspects of the city that begin to give a sense of its rhythms: size, resilience, and traffic.

Lebanon, at a mere 10,400 square kilometers (roughly seven-tenths the size of Connecticut), is tiny relative to most countries in the world. Barring horrible traffic, you can drive its length along the coast in four hours, and its width in less than two. Centrally located Beirut is accessible from anywhere in the country. This smallness of scale creates a density of activity and relationships that intensifies and localizes experiences. At the same time, the fact that places are within easy reach of one another amplifies the impact of the immense psychological and ideological distances that divide them. Many residents of areas of Beirut I traveled between daily had never set foot in the “other” neighborhoods simply because they were “other.”⁴ Samir Khalaf, among others, has discussed this retrenching of sectarian identities in space:⁵

³A small selection; for history of Greater Beirut, particularly the southern areas, see Khuri 1975; for history, urban planning, postwar reconstruction see Khalaf 1993a, 1993b, 1998, 2002; Harb el-Kak 1996, 1998, 2000; and Rowe and Sarkis 1998; for a memoir portrait of the city see Makdisi 1990.

⁴The civil war amplified the sectarianization of space in Lebanon. Prior to the war, there existed many intersectarian social networks, especially among women (Joseph 1983).

⁵See also Khalaf 1993b, 1998, and 2001; Faour 1991; and Sennett 1993.

This compulsion to huddle in compact, homogenous enclosures further “balkanized” Lebanon’s social geography. There is a curious and painful irony here. Despite the many differences that divide the Lebanese, they are all in a sense homogenized by fear, grief, and trauma. (Khalaf 2002: 247)

The smallness of Beirut and Lebanon also emerges in the threads that connect people, strung throughout the fabric of the country. Six degrees of separation are rare; two or three far more common. There is little anonymity; even corporate institutions like banks treat their customers to coffee and conversation with business.

Beirut is also a city of unbelievable resilience. Surviving years of war is the city’s greatest testament to this. I witnessed a much smaller example on the morning of February 8, 2000. The night before I had awakened to the sounds of Israeli planes breaking the sound barrier and bombing infrastructure around Lebanon. They destroyed three power plants, leaving fires you could see burning from balconies in the city. Despite this, early the next morning a friend of mine picked me up for a meeting in al-Dahiyya. The only discernable differences during that day and those that followed were the dark circles underneath people’s eyes, the extra sweaters worn to guard against the cold in places that would have been heated with electricity, the flashlights carried to light the way up stairwells when elevators were not running, the simmering anger in voices discussing the events, and the constant whir of generators that had sprung up overnight. After a few days of darkness, electricity was rerouted and rationed throughout the country, generally on a six-hour on-and-off cycle.

Resilience is accompanied by adaptability and a coexistence with a certain level of chaos. This is represented in the illogic of traffic, something visitors and residents alike often find frustrating. One-way streets switched direction every block or two; traffic lights sometimes worked and sometimes didn’t, and were sometimes assumed to be merely suggestions; there were few marked lanes and many bottlenecks; and appropriate distance between vehicles was measured by the proximity of your neighbor’s car skimming yours.

Chaotic traffic, resilience, and compactness are notions that could describe almost any area of Beirut. Yet Lebanese who do not live in al-Dahiyya often assume these general characteristics to be especially true of al-Dahiyya. I had a hard time convincing many Lebanese, especially but not only those who were not Shi’i, to accompany me to al-Dahiyya, and sometimes even to give me a ride to an organization or an acquaintance’s house in the area. This reluctance sometimes stemmed from fears and false assumptions about what it meant to be in an area

controlled by Hizbullah. For others, however, it was simply an unwillingness to navigate the narrow roads, dead ends, and one-way streets that inevitably led to a headlock situation where one driver was forced to drive backwards the way she came, hoping there would be no other traffic behind her. A similar reluctance was expressed by many I knew in al-Dahiyya with regard to other areas of Beirut, particularly Ashrafiyye, the mostly Maronite Christian suburb to the east. Again, for some, it was a hesitation based in fear and stereotypes, while for others it was the same unwillingness to navigate the gridlock of an unfamiliar part of the city.

The responses I encountered when I first broached the subject of my research with residents of other parts of Beirut were typical of this. Time and again eyes grew wide, and “You’re going to do *what?*” was followed by a more cautionary “You will have to be careful.” Later responses included a note of admiration, disbelief, or simply, “You’re crazy.” This was not confined to Lebanese who were not Shi’i; if anything, wealthy Shi’is who did not live in al-Dahiyya responded the most stridently. To nonresidents, mention of al-Dahiyya often elicits such responses of discomfort, ranging from caution mingled with curiosity to outright trepidation: responses built on stereotypical associations of “al-Dahiyya” with poverty, illegal construction, refugees, armed Hizbullah security guards and secret cameras, and “the Shi’i ghetto.” Such stereotypes obscure al-Dahiyya’s complexity. Before moving on, it is necessary to address this complexity in order to undo some of these common assumptions.⁶

ASSUMPTIONS UNDONE

Al-Dahiyya Is Not Uniform

Al-Dahiyya encompasses several municipalities and a number of very dense neighborhoods, with a combined population of approximately five hundred thousand people in an area of sixteen square kilometers.⁷ Mona Harb el-Kak divides al-Dahiyya into eastern and western zones, with the former made up primarily of older villages that were incorporated into the urban fabric of the city and a few illegal sectors along the edges,⁸ and the latter consisting of a combination of dense illegal sectors and less urbanized areas (1998, 2000). Within these multiple municipalities and neighborhoods, there is immense variation with regard to class, length of

⁶For an excellent discussion of the complexities of “al-Dahiyya” and its neighborhoods, see Harb el-Kak 1996, 1998, 2000.

⁷See Harb el-Kak 1998. This was approximately one-third of Beirut’s total population.

⁸“Illegal” is a complex label in this context, often having to do with building codes and laws, in addition to real estate ownership.



1.1. A typical street in al-Dahiyya.

residency in the area, and political leanings, as well as some religious diversity.⁹

One of the characteristics of stereotypes is that they homogenize. As a real space, al-Dahiyya was not uniform; it was not *only* “poor,” “illegal,” or “Hizbullah.” The region signified by the term included areas where Harakat Amal¹⁰ was the principal political party rather than Hizbullah, and there existed older legal residential districts as well as newly built illegal neighborhoods, some lingering Christian residents, “original” residents mingled in among more recent arrivals displaced by the wars, and an emerging Shi‘i “middle class” living in constant contact with its poorer neighbors. During my field research, the *raʿīs baladiyya* (mayor) of one municipality, Haret Hrayk, was a Maronite Christian who worked in close cooperation with Hizbullah. And on some streets, elaborate homes and the latest model BMWs indicated wealthy residents, as did the shops selling European fashions that existed alongside internet cafés, vegetable stands, and corner markets.

Al-Dahiyya Has a History

Stereotypes also belie the fact that this area has not always been predominately Shi‘i or (sub)urban. Thirty years ago, much of it was semirural, its population a mix of Shi‘i Muslims and Maronite Christians. A quarter century and a civil war later, this had become the second most densely populated area of the country, exceeded only by the Palestinian refugee camps, and it was predominately Shi‘i Muslim.

Prior to the end of World War I and the subsequent French mandate in Lebanon, al-Dahiyya was rural and several of its current municipalities were villages. By 1970, one of these villages, Chiyah, had become two suburbs with a population of thirty thousand people and four thousand more households than had existed forty years earlier.¹¹ Much of this growth was due to the wave of rural to urban migration that occurred throughout Lebanon in the 1950s and '60s, though the southern areas of Beirut were mostly settled by Shi‘is from the south and the Beqaa.

Writing in 1975, Fuad Khuri described the suburbs thus:

A glance at the suburbs gives the impression that nothing is placed where it is supposed to be. The observer is immediately struck by the lack of planning,

⁹Lack of recent censuses made it difficult to assess levels of religious diversity in al-Dahiyya, though there were some Christian families residing there.

¹⁰Harakat Amal is the other major Shi‘i political party in Lebanon. It did not have a major presence in the neighborhoods where I worked.

¹¹See Khuri 1975.

zoning, a center to the town, straight streets, and standardized buildings. Apartment buildings of various sizes and indistinct style blotch the horizon. They are often separated by one-floor houses with concrete pillars on the roof to suggest that the unfinished part of the building will be completed soon; or by small, neglected orange or olive orchards; or by well-cultivated vegetable gardens. Goats and sheep are often seen roaming around the twisted streets, looking for garbage to feed on. Chickens are more frequently heard and are seen caged in small poultry runs in gardens, beside houses, or on house-top. (1975: 37)

Soon after, the remnants of village life vanished with the arrival of thousands of Shi'i refugees from the northeastern suburbs of Beirut, the south, and the Beqaa during the years of war. Refugees continued to pour into al-Dahiyya, as it grew southward and westward, throughout the violence, and especially in 1978, 1982, and 1993, as villagers from the south and the Beqaa fled Israeli invasions and bombardments.

These consecutive surges in migration altered the sectarian makeup of the suburbs. The original village of Chiyah had a Maronite Christian majority and a Shi'i Muslim minority, a ratio that was gradually reversed over the next few decades through both Shi'i migration to the area and Maronite emigration to South America (Khuri 1975). Before the wars began, there was still a slight Maronite majority in the southern suburbs. By the late 1990s, approximately 70–80 percent of the population was made up of Shi'is who were displaced during the wars.¹²

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, when you enter al-Dahiyya from many other areas of Beirut, there is generally no clear marker of division, but there is a palpable change. Your senses clearly indicate that you have entered an area that is dominated by a particular mix of politics and piety. The recent demographic changes that have occurred in al-Dahiyya marked a new visibility for many Shi'i Muslims as a presence in Lebanon, and especially in Beirut, inscribed on public space and time. In what follows, I render the temporal, visual, and aural textures of al-Dahiyya that contribute to the sense of community cohesion held by those located within the pious modern.

Although most of my interlocutors resided in al-Dahiyya and it was their shared values that dominated public space in the area, al-Dahiyya was not coterminous with Shi'i "Islamism" or piety in Lebanon. On the one hand, while urban Lebanese Shi'i Islamism was concentrated in this suburb, its roots and reach extended throughout the country, and especially into the south and the Beqaa Valley. On the other hand, there

¹² See Harb el-Kak 1998. Faour (1991) notes that by 1988 the population of al-Dahiyya was mostly Shi'i Muslim.

existed within al-Dahiyya other political perspectives, religious beliefs and identities, and lifestyles. Yet my focus lies with those who both claimed a particular religious identity based in authenticated Islam and were active participants in shaping their social landscape in accordance with that religious identity.

As I move to describing what pious Shi'is called *al-bī'a* (the milieu), I want to emphasize that the forms I discuss are those that were both ubiquitous and hegemonic,¹³ both at first glance to an outsider *and* to the particular public of the pious modern. So, for example, in describing the plethora of signs that papered al-Dahiyya's streets, I focus on images of orphans, religious leaders, and Resistance martyrs.¹⁴ There were also pictures of other political figures and candidates, especially around election times. And there were other sorts of images—building names, signs advertising commodities and services—but these were not what were perceived to set the cityscape apart from other areas of Beirut. Nor were these images the ones people pointed out to me when describing the positive changes that had occurred around them over the past few decades. As Susan Ossman notes, understanding the meanings of particular portraits and their place in the hierarchy of images that dot the urban landscape “depends on a personal and collective narrative” that leads to specific interpretations (1994: 144). The dominant collective narrative that framed images of orphans, religious leaders, and Resistance martyrs is that which unfolds throughout this book.

Additionally, the rapid growth, shifts in population, and surges in building that have come to characterize al-Dahiyya were experienced by many residents as the making of an area of Beirut that was explicitly Shi'i—essentially as the creation of a place for the religious-political-social movement they were working to forge.¹⁵ For them, the various textures of al-Dahiyya's milieu that I describe in this chapter were significant

¹³I use “hegemonic” here to highlight the relationship between cultural dominance of these particular images and the political dominance of Hizbullah in these neighborhoods, and to note the relationship between this particular milieu and the social order of the pious modern.

¹⁴While martyrdom was originally linked to “witnessing,” in the contemporary meaning to be martyred is to be killed for a belief or principle. In the United States the term is used more narrowly to mean to be killed for one's religious beliefs. In Lebanon, one can also be martyred for one's nation. Indeed, all political parties and militias in Lebanon use “martyr” to indicate members who died during the civil war (AbuKhalil 1991). The concept of national martyrs is equally important in the United States though the term itself is rarely used. I use “martyred” rather than “killed” in order to convey my interlocutors' emphasis on the sacrifice made by those killed for religion and/or nation.

¹⁵See Houston's discussion of Islamicized public space as a space connoting “empirical presentations of an imagined social order even as they constitute it” but whose meanings can also be subverted by different consumptions of those same spaces (2001: 82).

because they represented the rooting of the uprooted, and because they were evidence of the “rise” of “the Shi’a” as a critical community in Lebanon. As we will see in the next chapter, many experienced this as movement from a position of deprivation and marginalization relative to other groups in Lebanon, to one of visibility and influence within the city and nation-state. I now turn to the details of this visibility.

TEXTURES OF AL-DAHIYYA

Sight

The first time I entered al-Dahiyya, I went by taxi. My luck was with me that day, as my driver was both loquacious and from one of the neighborhoods that would eventually become part of my field site. After I explained that I would be working with the *jam'iyya* (social welfare organization) where I had an appointment that day, he began to point out landmarks to help me get my bearings. As we turned off the old airport road, we joined a slow stream of traffic, with men pushing vegetable carts wandering between the cars, and pedestrians crossing at will. *Servīces*—ubiquitous shared taxis that are always old Mercedeses—held up the flow, and young men on motorbikes whizzed loudly around weaving closely between cars. The buildings looked taller, something I immediately attributed to less regulated construction, and there seemed to be a lot of billboards with pictures of children on them. Similar pictures dotted many of the electrical poles, alongside posters of Nasrallah, another sayyid who looked a lot like him to me, and Khomeini. When the driver saw me looking at a huge canvas painting of Khomeini that leaned against the side of a building, he gestured to it and said simply, “*qa'idna*” (our leader).

Several months later, I was driving myself around al-Dahiyya with relative ease, though I still dreaded parking and frequently had to ask for directions. I had learned that that other sayyid who had looked a lot like Nasrallah was in fact Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi, the previous Secretary General of Hizbullah who had been assassinated by Israel along with his wife and five-year-old son. And I now knew that those children's faces were the faces of need, of orphans representing the many charitable organizations that worked in the area.

I had also learned that, contrary to what some people from other Beirut neighborhoods had indicated, in certain ways al-Dahiyya looked a lot like many other regions of the city. Some of the buildings were indeed taller and more closely spaced, and that did have to do with unregulated building. But this was not unique to al-Dahiyya. Nor was the high level of pedestrian traffic in the streets unique to this particular part of

Beirut, although the especially high population density was probably reflected here to a certain extent. Yet in other ways, there was something that set al-Dahiyya apart. This was the presence of a particular politics of piety, a sense of publicly displayed and claimed piety: what my friends at the American University of Beirut glossed as “Hizbullah” but what was in fact far more complicated than a political party.

This public piety appeared in the higher prevalence of women who wore Islamic dress and the *hijāb* than in perhaps any other part of the country, and certainly in the numbers of women in Iranian style ‘*abāyas*.¹⁶ It was also manifested in the ease with which I and other women could walk through the streets. Al-Dahiyya was the only area of Beirut where I was never subject to a single catcall. The only comment ever made to me by a strange man was a singular occasion when someone said “*Allah yahdīkī*” (May God give you guidance), apparently in reference to my modest but unveiled appearance, something that my (at the time) new Shi‘i acquaintances found quite amusing. Another area where public piety appeared was in the pervasiveness of certain images: portraits of orphans, religious leaders, and martyrs.¹⁷

As I noted above, these were not the only signs in al-Dahiyya. Billboards and posters advertising products were also common, as were political signs during elections. These specific portraits also existed in other areas of Beirut, especially during *jam‘iyya* Ramadan fund-raising campaigns or when Hizbullah and Harakat Amal were competing for visual dominance in a neighborhood or at a prominent intersection. But unlike in other areas of the city, these particular portraits were commonplace in al-Dahiyya, accepted by many as a natural and comfortable part of the cityscape. Some residents of other areas responded negatively to the explicit presence of Shi‘i public piety in their neighborhoods as an encroachment. For example, when one woman saw the poster of a Resistance martyr plastered on a wall near her home she said, “See, al-Dahiyya is creeping up on us.”

In contrast, within al-Dahiyya, a person would sometimes point to a poster of a martyr while describing her solidarity with the Resistance, or to a portrait of a religious figure while explaining “how far the

¹⁶ ‘*Abāya* is the Arabic term for the full-length loose black outer garment worn by women in Iran (where it is called a *chador*) and some Shi‘i women in Iraq.

¹⁷ Kratz identifies three—often overlapping—genres of portraiture common to the United States, Africa and Europe: personal, governmental, and journalistic (2002: 119). In the Middle Eastern context we might add political or public portraiture to that taxonomy. Berger lists three types of public photography: scientific, political, and media/communicative (Berger and Mohr 1982: 98). The portraits I discuss here are both political *and* communicative—part of a mass media of images that inscribe a political community and identity.



1.2. Image of an orphan.

community had come.” For many, the iconographic salience of orphans, martyrs, and religious leaders lay in the ways these images claimed and defined the space of al-Dahiyya as belonging to their community.¹⁸ Through these visual signifiers, al-Dahiyya was claimed as a place for the Shi‘i Islamic movement and a place within which (a particular) piety would be nurtured. At the same time, the presence of these particular portrait images exemplified the freedom pious Shi‘is felt within al-Dahiyya to claim this piety publicly. As will be discussed later, many felt strongly that they were part of a communal group that had always been dispossessed in the Lebanese polity. The images that filled al-Dahiyya were evidence to them of the progress their community had made within the nation-state. Increased piety—visible spiritual progress—was linked to political success.

Images of orphans, martyrs, and religious leaders were read differently by those who felt a part of the Shi‘i Islamic pious modern than by

¹⁸This mirrors at least one of the intentions behind the display of these portraits. As Mona Harb related to me, when she asked a Hizbullah representative why they put up pictures of martyrs, he answered that it was so that when you entered the area, “You would know where you are” (personal communication).

those who did not. Outsiders sometimes saw photographs of orphans as children being used for fund-raising purposes. Depending on one's political leanings, portraits of sayyids and shaykhs might be read as frightening evidence of an insistence on an Islamic state, or as a distressing reminder of the failures of the secular left, or as elements in an internal iconographic war among Shi'i political parties. Responses to the renderings of martyrs often seemed to vary with the political climate and latest events; in the months leading up to and following Israeli withdrawal in 2000, they were regarded by many as national heroes who liberated the south.

Obviously these meanings and valences change when the spectator identifies with the images and their collective narrative. In the case of orphans, the differences relate to a different set of values through which images are interpreted. So within the community, the power of orphans in fund-raising did not stem merely from their embodied innocence as children, but also from the shared assumptions of viewers that orphans were the children of Resistance martyrs.¹⁹ On the other hand, in many ways the salience of portraits of religious leaders emerges from a set of meanings shared with other communities in Lebanon. Here what differs is not understandings of what images represent, but responses to those representations.

Portraits of sayyids and shaykhs are not solely religious images, rather they are part of the plastering of public surfaces with the images of prominent political figures that is common to all of Lebanon and much of the Middle East. In Jordan, posters and large paintings of the late King Husayn and the current King Abdullah fill public space. In Syria one finds omnipresent images of late President Hafez al-Asad and his successor and son, President Bashar.²⁰ Similarly in Morocco images of the king are mandatory in all public buildings and often appear in homes and offices as well.²¹ The lack of one dominant political persona in Lebanon, the lack of a singular face confronting spectators at every turn, reflects the sectarian political system in the country and underscores the usage of portrait images as weapons in a continuous turf war. The prominence of particular leaders declares political loyalties and produces the effect of territorial claims that may, whether intentionally or not, influence the fears and resegregation of Lebanon's various communities. In

¹⁹ During Ramadan 2004, this was highlighted in Martyrs' Association billboards juxtaposing images of orphans with an image of Nasrallah.

²⁰ See Wedeen's discussion of what she calls "the Asad cult" in Syria (1999). See also Özyürek (n.d.) on images of Atatürk in Turkey.

²¹ As described in Ossman 1994.



1.3. Image of martyred Shaykh Raghīb Harb.

al-Dahiyya, the dominant faces were those of Hizbullah political leaders, with competition in some areas from Harakat Amal.

The political, rather than religious, significance of these images is reinforced by who was not represented among them, namely Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlullah. Those who were represented were all religious leaders who had clear political roles: Ayatollah Khomeini and his successor Ayatollah Khamenei; Secretary General of Hizbullah Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah; his martyred predecessor Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi; Shaykh Raghīb Harb, another martyred Hizbullah leader; Sayyid Musa al-Sadr, the original mobilizer of the Lebanese Shi'a; and even Shaykh Subhi Tufayli, whose movement split from Hizbullah during an internal conflict in the early 1990s. But there were no posters of Fadlullah hanging from electrical poles or balconies. Many of his followers had framed

photographs of him in their offices or homes, but this was a personal statement of religious allegiance and admiration, rather than part of the political iconography of the area. Indeed, when I asked people why Fadlullah's picture was not prominently displayed, given his clear importance as perhaps the most influential Shi'i religious leader in Lebanon, the response occasionally indicated that it would be somehow polluting to his role in the religious realm to treat him as a political leader, especially as he has staunchly refused to affiliate with any one political party, calling instead for unity among all believers and coexistence among all Lebanese.

A similar negative association was expressed to me by a close relative of Sayyid Musa al-Sadr, perhaps the religious leader most frequently pictured in posters and paintings in the country:

He said that it really upsets him, "the whole thing with the pictures," and tears welled up in his eyes. He continued, saying that he has thought about this a lot and that it is clear to him that these pictures are being used for political goals, to help people win elections, because they always put a picture of Berri [Amal's political leader], of the exact same size, next to al-Sadr's image. He then added that he thinks some people just put the pictures up everywhere out of ignorance, because they loved [al-Sadr] and think this is a good way to show it: "It's an ignorant expression of love."

This man resented both the political uses to which al-Sadr was being put and what he perceived as the misplacing of admiration in political positing. Indeed, al-Sadr is perhaps one of the most contested faces in al-Dahiyya. The turf wars expressed through these portraits are often strongest among political parties affiliated with the same sect. In al-Dahiyya, as well as some other areas of Beirut and Lebanon, the political and territorial battles between Hizbullah and rival party Harakat Amal have been played out in images since the end of the civil war.²² Amal has always claimed al-Sadr, yet Hizbullah also utilizes his image, as they claim descent from the same origins. Each party believes itself the true heir to al-Sadr's movement and political goals. Few other crossover associations take place, although I did see at least one painting of Khomeini with Amal symbols around it.

Turf wars also emerge in less sanctioned images. In a few streets in al-Dahiyya, small spray-painted stencil images of renegade Shaykh Subhi Tufayli covered the cement walls of buildings. This was not official positing associated with a party, but an expression of loyalty to the shaykh and his movement by area residents. Again, it is the political leadership

²² During the civil war, especially in the late 1980s, these battles over territory were fought in street-by-street violence throughout al-Dahiyya.



1.4. Image of a martyr; it reads “The martyred fighter [so-and-so].”

of the shaykh that is emphasized through his representation, rather than his religious position.

Like pictures of religious leaders, portraits of martyrs work to indicate political loyalties and claim territorial space. Yet these images also carry a duality that emerges from their memorializing aspect. This duality is related to “the tension between personal identity and social identity, individual and type, a tension integral to portraiture” (Kratz 2002: 119). In contrast to the sayyid pictures, images of martyrs are invested with an intensity of personal meaning. As photographs of individual martyrs, these images work as expressions of grief; they play a role in memorializing particular loss. Even though martyr images were displayed publicly, on streetlights and electrical poles, the smallness of al-Dahiyya and the few degrees of separation among members of the community guaranteed that some of those who passed the photographs on a daily basis would know one of the martyrs or his family, or at least be familiar with

them. Just as there was little anonymity in life, there was even less in death.

But just as martyr photographs are individualized and localized, at the same time they facilitate mourning on the community level, and promote and declare community solidarity and political loyalties. Any display of martyr photographs in al-Dahiyya contained an element of homogenization of form. Take, for example, the signs placed by Hizbullah's media and art department on electrical poles and streetlights along many of the main streets (illustration 1.5). Each sign showed the head and shoulders of a martyr against a bright pastel background, with the yellow Hizbullah flag flanked by pink at the top and blue at the bottom. Written in white along the blue at the lower edge was the name of the martyr, with a caption "The martyred fighter so-and-so" or "The martyred brother so-and-so." These signs followed you down many of these roads, different faces gracing streetlight after streetlight. Or are they different? The uniformity of the signs has the effect of rendering the martyrs themselves faceless, like indistinguishable masks. They become both metonymic pieces of a collective and the whole itself—each in itself representative of the Resistance, and simultaneously each part of the inseparable whole that is the Resistance, along with all who have sacrificed for it, past, present or future. In martyr portraits, this duality links to the binary function of memorial photography: to remember death and to remember the life that has ended.²³ Public portraits of martyrs did exactly this: they memorialized the deaths of individuals while representing solidarity with the community epitomized by the lives that were sacrificed.²⁴

The duality inherent in the tension between the personal and the collective in martyr photographs is present to a lesser degree in images of religious leaders and orphans. It is the duality common to all photographs that Roland Barthes describes in his contrast between the *punctum* and the *studium*, the two aspects of looking at a photograph, the former a private emotional experience and the latter based in culturally mediated and shared experience and meaning. "To recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them, to argue them within myself, for culture (from which

²³ See Ruby 1995.

²⁴ This tension is also related to the temporal disruption created when any photograph is taken and later looked at, the gap in time between its taking and viewing (Berger and Mohr 1982). Kratz notes that this temporal difference links a portrait to the life changes that have taken place since its capture (2002: 119). With regard to martyr portraits, this effect is intensified because the image "seems to confirm, prophetically, the later discontinuity created by the absence or death" (Berger and Mohr 1982: 87).

studium derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers” (Barthes 1981: 27). In relation to portrait images in al-Dahiyya, the *studium* captured the intentions of the displayer as well as the photographer, and the communal solidarities expressed and provoked by the act of displaying these particular images. The *punctum*, in contrast, disturbed (punctuated) the *studium*: “it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (26). It emerged from the personal relationships a member of the community may have had with a martyr, an orphan (whether the one pictured or not), or a sayyid or shaykh, one’s own feelings of faith, doubt, oppression, or solidarity.

In this regard, these portraits fall into a space between private and public photographs, between the affective and the collective. This distinction is linked to the relationship between the context in which the images are taken and the context in which they are read.²⁵ For personal photographs, these contexts are generally similar, so their meaning remains intact in ways that are not possible for public photographs that “offer information severed from all living experience” (Berger 1980: 55). Dislocation between the contexts of creation and consumption allow public photographs to be used chaotically, by anyone who provides narrative context. But narrative context itself can bridge this gap, as in the 1955 photographic exhibition “The Family of Man” where images from around the world were presented as though part of “a universal family album” (961).²⁶ In that case, the globe rather than the family became the context for the “family” photo. Similarly, in al-Dahiyya, the Shi’i Islamic movement and the community of the pious modern stood in for “family.”

One did not have to have a personal relationship with a martyr, religious leader, or orphan to understand his image as part of one’s “family.” The smallness of social scale that heightened the chances that one would actually have such a personal relationship served to intensify a sense of community solidarity, but that sense was there nonetheless. At the same time these portrait images were public: displayed in such a way as to provide an iconography of community, incorporated into a narrative of collective identity, one in which leaders, ideal participants, and those in need were all represented.

Like images anywhere, martyr, religious leader, and orphan portraits in al-Dahiyya did not possess inherent meanings. Nor were meanings solely determined by the production and display of these images, which

²⁵ See Berger 1980.

²⁶ In contrast, Sandeen (1995) argues that “The Family of Man” contained a political narrative based in an antinuclear stance and constructed around a politics of human commonality that emerged from the historical moment in which the exhibition was constructed.

frequently was controlled by *jam'iyyas*, political parties, and other institutions. Instead, the meanings carried by these photographs and paintings were situated in a wider social and narrative framework. In al-Dahiyya, the particular iconography associated with the Shi'i Islamic movement dominated the visual landscape, facilitated by the hegemonic character of its narrative framework in the area. It emerged from a complex context that included social welfare and political institutions, the residents of al-Dahiyya, Lebanese national polity and public(s), and the global order. Spectators played a crucial role in this process. Through the meanings they brought to the images around them—whether personal mourning, solidarity, a sense of belonging in a place, or something else—pious Shi'is were participating in the creation and maintenance of the context within which the images carried meaning: the framework of the pious modern. I now turn to another key element in its manifestation, moving from the visual to the aural.

Sound

Along with images, the cityscape of al-Dahiyya is textured with sound. This soundscape had regular features. Most prominent, after the din of the streets, were sacred sounds, again reinforcing the sense of public piety that characterized this area of the capital. Perhaps the most constant feature of the soundscape were the regular calls to prayer, the *adhān*, projected five times a day over loudspeakers from each of the many mosques in the area. One effect of the *adhān* is to sacralize space. In al-Dahiyya, this transformation was acknowledged through gesture: even if she was not going to pray at the time, a person would often shift her posture, uncrossing crossed legs, and straightening her back, and would touch her hand to her head quickly when the *adhān* began.

The *adhān* also marked time in al-Dahiyya. Rather than, "I'll meet you there after lunch," or "I'll meet you at 12:30," I was often told, "I'll meet you there right after the noon prayer." The significance of the *adhān* to the daily rhythms of life was highlighted for me when we set our clocks back an hour in the fall for daylight savings time. I had noticed, as I always do, darkness creeping in earlier, but for Aziza the change was even more striking: "I can't believe it's only 11:35 a.m. but it's already *al-dhuhr* (time for the noon prayer)!" she exclaimed upon hearing the call to prayer. The sound of the *adhān* is what divided morning from afternoon and afternoon from evening. Because the *adhān* is set by the path of the sun, and not the clock, daylight savings had the jarring effect of abruptly bringing afternoon an hour earlier, shifting the divisions of the day. For Aziza, afternoon began shortly after 11:35 a.m. that day.

In addition to marking space and time in al-Dahiyya, *adhān* in Lebanon marks sectarian space and identity.²⁷ There are areas of Beirut where it has always been typical to hear churchbells and *adhān* sharing the soundscape,²⁸ but most neighborhoods of al-Dahiyya did not fit this description. Moreover, in Lebanon, the details of the *adhān* declare the sect of the mosque. Shi'i mosques are distinguishable by an added line bearing witness that Ali is the *walī* (deputy) of God.

Other related sounds do not mark daily time, but are instead weekly, like the sermons, Qur'anic recitations, and noontime prayers that emanated from many mosques on Fridays. This mosque-based soundscape also included seasonal elements, discussed further below. Also important are occasional manifestations of sound that can be read by residents, such as the Qur'anic recitations that took place when someone had died. On several occasions I would be visiting someone in al-Dahiyya when the recitation slipping in the window prompted her to wonder aloud who in the area had passed away. Ears would then strain to hear the announcement that would follow, informing the community of who had died and when the burial would take place.

Sound in al-Dahiyya marked time, transmitted religious and community knowledge, and engendered or facilitated emotion. Most crucially, elements of the soundscape underscored the indissolubility of religion from everyday life, linking the mundane to the sacred. These sacred sounds were everyday sounds, part and parcel of the spaces where people live.

In the contemporary moment, the mosque is not the only source for pietistic sound in al-Dahiyya. It has been joined by cassette tapes of sermons and Qur'anic recitation,²⁹ as well as two major radio stations and a television station. The radio stations—al-Bashā'ir (the Messenger or Herald) affiliated with Fadlullah, and al-Nūr (the Light) affiliated with Hizbullah—broadcast a variety of programming, the former primarily religious and social, and the latter a mix of religion, politics and current events/news updates. The television station, Al-Manār (the Lighthouse), is affiliated with Hizbullah, and also has a wide variety of programming, ranging from news updates and in-depth current events discussions,

²⁷ On the *adhān* as a marker of spatial boundaries and community identity, see Khan (2001) on colonial India, and Lee (1999) on Singapore.

²⁸ This is not to say that people *necessarily* find “other” religious sounds upsetting; rather, on a few occasions I caught older Christian residents of Beirut humming along with the *adhān*.

²⁹ Cassettes of sermons, especially Fadlullah's, are readily available at stores throughout al-Dahiyya. The importance of religious cassettes in Islamic movements has been discussed by Eickelman and Anderson 1999b, Hirschkind 2001, Larkin 2000, and Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi 1994.

interviews, and debates, to children's shows and fictional serials, often based on religio-historical events.

All these media pause their programming in order to sound the call to prayer, and to broadcast Friday sermons and prayers. Many commented on the importance of these media, emphasizing their contribution to the religious milieu as well as their educational value. Religious radio and television were also contrasted positively with past practices of playing nonreligious music, like the classic Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum, in public spaces like shops. There was a sense that these particular media represented progress for al-Dahiyya: a sense related to the feeling that these media provided an outlet, a voice, for the pious modern in Lebanon.

Neither the soundscape nor the visual cityscape were uniform throughout the year in al-Dahiyya. It is to the cycle of seasons and the related shifts in texture that this chapter now turns.

Season

The standard visual and aural textures of al-Dahiyya were supplemented by seasonal additions, following the ritual cycle of the Hijri, or Islamic calendar. The first month of the year is Muharram. For Sunni Muslims, 1 Muharram is celebrated as the beginning of the New Year. Yet for Shi'i Muslims, the year begins in tragedy. The first ten days of Muharram are commemorated as days of hardship for the Shi'i leader Imam Husayn and his followers, leading to their martyrdom on 10 Muharram.

Imam Husayn was the grandson of the Prophet, the son of his daughter Sayyida Fatima and his cousin and son-in-law Imam Ali. In 680 CE, Husayn was killed in battle by an army sent by the Caliph, Yazid, on the plain of Karbala, now in Iraq. This was perhaps the most major of a series of conflicts over succession to the leadership of the Islamic community that divided Shi'i and Sunni Muslims. A group of Shi'is in Kufa, also in Iraq, had called upon Husayn to lead them in revolt against Yazid. He agreed and set out on the first of Muharram, taking with him armed guards and his family. They were intercepted and besieged at Karbala. The battle began on the tenth of Muharram, and by the end, all the men except one of the Imam's sons had been killed and the women and children taken captive.³⁰ The entire ten-day period that culminates in the commemoration of the battle and martyrdom on the tenth of Muharram is referred to metonymically in Lebanon as "Ashura."³¹

³⁰ For more on this history see Ayoub 1978, Jafri 1979, Momen 1985, and Pinault 1992.

³¹ "Ashura" (from the Arabic root meaning "ten") technically denotes the tenth of Muharram, the day on which the battle took place, but Lebanese Shi'is use "Ashura" to refer to the entire ten-day commemoration period.

For Shi'i Muslims, Ashura ushers in a season of mourning and darkness. The details of Ashura commemorations and their meanings are discussed in depth in chapter 4, but for now it is important to note the general atmosphere of solemnity that pervaded al-Dahiyya during Ashura and for several weeks following it. People generally dressed in somber clothing—black, perhaps navy after the tenth of the month. Celebrations, such as weddings or birthday parties, were frowned upon. Ritual mourning gatherings were held throughout the season, continuing for forty days after the day of the martyrdom, and many in al-Dahiyya considered the second month of the calendar, Safar, to be a time of year as sober, if not more sober, than Muharram itself.

The religious seasons in al-Dahiyya were reflected in the imagery and soundscape of the area. During this period of solemnity, it was common to hear the lamentative strains of at least one *majlis 'aza* (mourning gathering, plural, *majālis*) radiating from a mosque, *husayniyya*,³² street corner, or private home. The recent use of microphones in privately held *majālis* has increased this in the past decade. Many pious individuals listened to tapes of *majālis* or *nudbas*, which are like dirges, mourning songs commemorating the events around the martyrdom. Radio and television programming on the Fadlullah and Hizbullah frequencies also reflected this mood, broadcasting *nudbas* or educational programming about the life of Husayn and the meanings of Ashura.

The standard portrait imagery was supplemented with black banners hung from buildings and balconies, strung across roads, and attached to streetlights and electrical poles. Written on these banners were texts commemorating Husayn's martyrdom: sayings of the Prophet, verses from the Qur'an, or quotes from Khomeini and other important figures, all of which highlight Ashura's importance to the contemporary era. While some of these carried no political insignia, and were erected by mosques or religious organizations, others were clearly linked to territoriality and political affiliation. In 2000, two black bridgelike structures spanned a highway south of Beirut a short distance apart, one clearly marked with Amal signs and the other Hizbullah. In Hizbullah territory, the standard yellow flags of the party are usually replaced by red and black ones.

After the season of mourning, the rest of the year is one of neutrality marked with joy. Some people insisted that Shi'i Muslims exist in perpetual shadow, in a state of constant sadness. However, they were

³²Named after and built in honor of Husayn, *husayniyyas* are buildings used primarily for mourning gatherings, but also for other religious, family, political, and community events.



1.5. Ashura banner; it reads “Hussein’s choice is our choice, Khamenei is our leader, and the Resistance is our Karbala.”

rare individuals whose piety approached asceticism. Two other major commemorative times mark the Hijri calendar: Ramadan and the *ḥajj*, both of which are shared by Shi‘i and Sunni Muslims alike. Before turning to them, however, I want to touch upon the smaller celebratory moments, the *mawlid*s. During the last week of the month Safar one year, I was at a *jam‘iyya* while some volunteers were planning a fund-raiser. They had wanted to hold this event for some time, but were waiting for “*mawsim al-mawālīd*,” the season of *mawlid*s (birth celebrations), as one woman put it, to do so. When I asked why, she responded: “Just as

God gave us Ashura which is a sad occasion, he gave us the *mawlid*, the happy occasion of the Prophet's birth.”

A *mawlid* commemorates the Prophet Muhammad's birth (in Rabi I) in a celebratory event that often includes professional religious singing in his honor. Shi'i Muslims also hold *mawlids* to mark other occasions, like the birthdays of Imam Husayn (in Rabi II), Imam Ali (in Rajab), and Imam al-Mahdi, the twelfth Imam (in Shaban). The fund-raiser this particular *jam'iyya* was planning was to coincide with the anniversary of Imam Ali's marriage to Sayyida Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, one of the numerous annual commemorative dates that are noted in al-Dahiyya. *Mawlids* generally did not affect the public sound or cityscape in al-Dahiyya, because they were usually held as private gatherings.

The next major moment in the religious calendar is the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the year and one whose importance is emphasized by all Muslims. Ramadan is the month in which the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad. The night on which this is believed to have occurred, the twenty-seventh of the month, is commemorated as *laylat al-qadr* with special prayers.³³ For all Muslims, observing Ramadan involves prayer and fasting—meaning abstaining from food, drink, smoking, and sex—between sunrise and sunset throughout the month. At sunset, the fast breaking meal, or *iftār*, has become a lavish undertaking for many, though this has been criticized by those who fear that Ramadan is losing its religious significance. The end of Ramadan is celebrated as Eid al-Fitr, also called Eid al-Saghir (the minor holiday).

Because Ramadan is a month of reflection and generosity, many *jam'iyyas* conducted their primary fund-raising activities during this time. Some held large banquet *iftārs*, placing an envelope underneath each plate for donations. Others placed advertisements asking for donations, and reminding pious individuals of their religious duty to help the less fortunate. Ramadan fund-raising made use of a wide variety of media, and contributed to the particular textures associated with the month. This is the season during which the orphan as icon took center stage. Billboards and signs showing forlorn yet happy orphans sprouted up all around al-Dahiyya as well as other parts of Beirut, often accompanied by a verse from the Qur'an or a *ḥadīth* enjoining passersby to remember the orphans during the month of generosity, or reminding them that those who help orphans will secure their place in heaven. The radio waves were not immune to this either, as various *jam'iyyas* placed ads that combined children singing with requests for donations.

The other seasonal markers that appeared with Ramadan were

³³ There is debate as to whether *laylat al-qadr* is always on 27 Ramadan or on another of the odd-numbered days during the month's final ten days.

celebratory lights and decorations reminiscent of Christmas in the suburban United States. Strings with colorful lanterns, lightbulbs, and paper decorations hung across intersections in al-Dahiyya, and neon lights, including some of the Hizbullah symbol, lined many roads. In 1999 and 2000, the coincidence of Ramadan and Christmas prompted the trimming of Hamra Street—a major road outside al-Dahiyya in Ras Beirut—with neon blue and pink signs alternating “*Ramaḍan karīm*” with “Merry Christmas” and “Happy New Year.” Those same years, Hizbullah constructed a large nativity scene in an al-Dahiyya neighborhood.

The two months following Ramadan are relatively quiet, as people resume their normal schedules. Around this time a flurry of banners began to appear, advertising different *ḥajj* organizers, called *ḥamlāt*.³⁴ The *ḥajj*—the pilgrimage to Mecca required for Muslims who are able to go once in their lifetime—takes place during the first ten days of the last month, Dhu al-Hijjah. At the end of the pilgrimage is Eid al-Adha (the holiday of sacrifice), also called Eid al-Kabīr (the major holiday), during which families slaughter a sheep or other animal and distribute the meat to the poor, in commemoration of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael at God’s command and God’s mercy in substituting a lamb for Ishmael. During these festivities, which like most holidays include feasting and visiting, the houses of people on the *ḥajj* were decorated with streamers, often extending across the street or over balconies. Driving through al-Dahiyya, one could easily identify many of the households who had a member on the *ḥajj*. When family members returned, dressed in white to signify their completion of this sacred duty, they were welcomed by celebratory crowds at the airport. Visiting then commenced for weeks, as friends, family and acquaintances came to greet the new Hajj or Hajjeh, who had brought tokens of the voyage to distribute, including prayer beads, Qur’ans, jewelry, and *may al-zumzum* (water from the sacred Zumzum well in Saudi Arabia).

For Sunni Muslims, this Eid and the close of the *ḥajj* season marks the last major moment in the Hijri calendar until the new year a couple of weeks later. Shi’i Muslims, however, mark one more day, the eighteenth of Dhu al-Hijja, or Eid al-Ghadir, on which they quietly acknowledge the moment Muhammad made Ali his successor. From that point, the calendar begins its shift from the seasons of joy to the season of mourning, as Muharram and Ashura approach once again and black returns to shroud al-Dahiyya.

The creation and claiming of a place for the Shi’i Islamic movement and its constituents in al-Dahiyya, a place where the milieu is established

³⁴ *Hamla* literally means “campaign,” but the term is used for the groups that travel together on the *ḥajj*.

in part through the various textures of piety and politics described in this chapter, is crucial to the totality of progress. Yet places and communities are not claimed or created through texture alone, but also through a shared sense of history and shared practices and meanings. The latter are the subject of the bulk of what follows, but first, it is necessary to backtrack a bit, to provide some of that shared sense of history. To that end, I now turn to a brief summary of some of the basic tenets of Shi'ism and the history and institutionalization of the Shi'i community and Shi'i Islamic movement in Lebanon.