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Abstract

This research investigates the personal and political emancipatory potential of digital media, specifically the weblog, and asks the following question: How does individual trauma translate into public space?

The research focus is the self-selected, unpaid and civilian bloggers forming the core of the Lebanese blogosphere during the 33-Day War between Israel and Lebanon in July and August 2006. Through the progression of their on-line narratives, I examine how traumatic events can be transformed into a narrative act. Blogging is a particularly apt medium for closing the 'historical gap' between an event and its reporting, and can facilitate the reflection and recovery necessary for cohesive individual and social identity after trauma.

I conclude that this transformation, from traumatic memory to narrative memory, has social implications in any context in which the democratisation of voice is important. The blogosphere provides an intimate public space for memory work: digital social networking can inspire reciprocal connectedness with others, and blogs can therefore function both as healing platforms for individual survivors of trauma, and as expressions of communal political will. This mediation, through self-selected structures, can only strengthen democratic practice – an idea which resonates particularly in repressive contexts.

Analysing the autobiographical records of ordinary people in the public domain requires a psycho-social approach drawn from literary criticism as much as from social sciences. This research therefore utilises aspects of both interpretive and critical approaches such as reader-response theory and constructivism, stemming from an underlying hermeneutic philosophy that promotes an empathic approach as well as the consideration of the influence of cultural and social forces that have been brought to bear in the context. This dialectic is essential for examining the relationship between blogger and reader, where the transmission of a first-person perspective to an engaged hearer-participant forms the key process.

Socio-politically, the incorporation of context, complexity and diversity are considered in light of the recent developments in the Arab blogosphere, and the cultural, historical, and literary context of the Lebanese blogs themselves. This research is therefore situated within a qualitative framework, utilising a small but focused sample, and investigating the meanings of lived experiences. Perceived problems of reliability in this imprecise mode of analysis are countered by the fact that qualitative research tends to be exploratory rather than conclusive.

This research necessarily concludes with critical social theory. I make recommendations for the further utilisation of the digitality of the medium, both in Lebanon and further afield, based on the urgent need for dialogue in multicultural societies, and the value of civil engagement in the rhetorical public sphere. The innovative potential of electronic public space for restitution after

trauma, and the support of alternative narratives, is clear.

University of Cape Town

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INTRODUCTION

Rationale/gap in existing research

The research problem addresses the clear lack of critical analysis of trauma narratives in the new and evolving media forms, specifically blogs.

The question - How does individual trauma translate into public space? - emerges from a broader set of disciplinary and professional issues. There is an established body of research and discussion with regard to trauma narratives in terms of traditional media (documentaries, newspaper features, public oral testimony, diaries and journals and so on, as will be discussed). Similarly, there is an established body of theory on dealing with trauma narratives in general (see References for more detailed information). However, blogging as a medium of communication is still under-represented in trauma studies. This research examines three basic aspects of the digitality and content of the blogs from Lebanon during the 33-Day War of 2006 – their function as detailed, intimate and first-hand corollaries to the accounts in the mainstream media; their status as reflective and katabatic (descent-and-recovery) narratives; and their ability to create affiliative activist communities online - an illustration of the blogosphere as a public space for functional dialogic engagement. This addresses to some extent the unique and difficult phenomenon outlined by Caruth (1995): the problem of how to help relieve suffering, and how to understand the nature of suffering, without eliminating the force and truth of the reality that trauma survivors face in transmission (vii). The warblogs were acts of rhetorical witnessing, individual narratives conveyed by motivated storytellers, that had visible socio-political implications.

By 1999, the tools needed to enable ordinary people to create and manage their own websites had been introduced. As Keren (2005) and others point out, as a research tool, this medium allows for a partial observation of consciousness before the mediators step in: 'We are thus given the opportunity to have a rare glimpse at memory's "ground zero", i.e. at the very moment in which consciousness turns into memory'. My research synthesises the areas of trauma and technology, and examines the attendant shift in power relations that is a unique by-product of these blog narratives.

Blogging is the combination of independent media, hyperlinked posting, and voluntary association that bypasses and critiques mainstream media (MSM). The following characteristics of blogs are their least controversial aspect. Writers agree that they are: written in the style of a

personal essay, journal entry, diary or memoir; interactive; contain posts of varying length in reverse chronological order; are embedded with hyperlinks within text; provide permalinks and allow trackbacks, and list other blogs (blogrolling and blog carnivals).

More controversially, the Internet has challenged mainstream media narratives, thereby changing the status quo. Objectified, disenfranchised, pathologised, and otherwise misunderstood groups - those who feel that their voices are under-represented or were unheard in the past - now have unlimited access to public forums. The marriage of means (the blog or forum) and content (personal trauma narratives) is particularly important in places where voicing factual, historical and emotional truths has been discouraged or prevented by the dominant socio-political structure. It should be remembered that the lack of censorship or constriction associated with new media is both the greatest strength and weakness of blogs, as many writers document. Blogs *are* edited - it is just not the same kind of editing process to which the MSM is subject, and includes self-censorship, pre-posting conferencing with other bloggers about the advisability of contentious posts and the editing (peer or site-managed) of profane or offensive comments in the threads that follow the posts.

Reconstructing trauma, however, does not address the social and relational concerns that gave rise to the original events. Hamber (2004) argues that public revelation of the traumatic past, or the process of narration, is not in itself a miraculous cure for conflict. Rather, it is the engagement and reflection by the listening other, a process that encourages us to reconsider our worldviews and assumptions, that provides support to individuals dealing with the ambivalences of the past. There needs to be a public space in which to grapple with the '...multiple histories, truths, complexities and inconsistencies as well as resistances that a truth recovery process implies' (Hamber).

Specifically, I am interested in examining the trauma content and themes of the blogs from Lebanon, which were prompted by a single and community-wide disruption in the form of the 2006 bombing by Israel, which resulted in a 33-day war. There was a torrent of protest and outrage from both local bloggers (self-selected first-hand witnesses, blogging autobiographical content and commentary) and the local and international readers of blogs (second-hand witnesses engaging in reciprocal dialogue). Blogging provided a means of interrogating the bloggers' own assumptions and reflecting on the effects of conflict, as well as conveying alternative narratives to those of the mainstream media, highlighting human rights abuses, and, in some cases, organising local social

action.

I examine some of the processes of remembering and commemorating in a social setting, with regard to the global audience and the Lebanese context. This representation is, for the purposes of this research, evident in both form (history-telling, monument-building and ceremonies, as Portelli, 1999; Keren, 2005; and Khalili argue) and narrative content. I analyse the role of the Internet in providing a public forum for individual and communal commemoration, and provide some discussion of social death and the replacement of dominant narratives by alternative voices when the context, institutions, and available transnational discourses change. As Dawahare (2000) points out, very little of the English-language literature on the civil war in particular, and Lebanon in general, emphasises civil society and public sphere theory in analysing the social and historical forces that have shaped modern Lebanon. While there are exceptions such as Messara (1995) and Traboulsi (2007), scholarship on the Middle East in the context of democratic public sphere theory is still in its infancy. This study intends to add to the growing body of research in these areas.

Perlmutter (2008) writes that political communication was transformed with the rise of blogging. People were bypassing regular big media; creating mass communication messages without formal training; and reaching, in some cases, large audiences; inviting others to 'wiki' or co-author accretive knowledge; and producing a range of effects on contemporary public opinion, political campaigns, public affairs argumentation, and even governmental policymaking (xvii).

These movements, from the individual to the collective, and from the virtual to the actual, are central to this research, as is the idea of transformation from fragmentation to coherence: of memory, transformed from traumatic memory to narrative memory; of individual morality, transformed from helplessness to renewed responsibility and activism; and of communities, transformed from fragmentation to wholeness.

A note on quoting conventions

Where I have used print references, page numbers appear in the text. When the source is digital, I have been unable to do so. The full digital references are provided in the endmatter, searchable alphabetically by author surname. A simple operation on each site involving the desired term and the 'Find' function in the toolbar will retrieve the quote in its original context.

Qualitative research in Information Systems

The study of narrative, trauma and the public sphere requires a variety of responses in working towards a unified theory, and the existing gap in our knowledge - between the traditional theory around narrative and trauma, and the analysis of technology offered by the Internet – necessitates a broad-based methodological approach. Following Kleinman, Andermann (2002) regards suffering as ‘...a social experience that connects the moral, the political and the medical, including health and social policy’. The analysis of its processes provides an opportunity to emphasise what Bochner and Ellis (in Tierney and Lincoln) term the common goals of much social science research – human solidarity, community, sense-making, coping, and improving life conditions (115: 1997). I thus examine the impact of trauma at the individual level, as well as analyse the social and institutional implications, making recommendations for peace-building and democracy.

The research method employed here is that of the case study, a fairly common qualitative method used in information systems (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Alavi and Carlson, 1992) and ...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin in Myers, 1997).

This research is based on case studies, the autobiographical accounts by self-appointed and unpaid Lebanese civilians of the bombing by Israel in July and August 2006. The bloggers were an easily accessible pre-existing group online, and the blogs themselves and their resulting comment threads function as transcripts. While pre-existing groups may present over-representation for some biases, this is an issue which is addressed by many writers, and of which I am aware.

There are clear benefits in conducting online qualitative research. As Clarke (2000) and others write, the Internet has created communities that would or could not have formed otherwise, resulting in the coalescing of interdisciplinary, heterogeneous groups. Online interactions exhibit a high level of responsiveness (Smith in Clarke, 2000). These activities are perceived as intensely real, interactive and, despite their text-based nature, akin to phone chat and face-to-face dialogue (Wittel in Clarke, 2000). There is therefore a higher likelihood of honest engagement around sensitive or personal information, and also a greater possibility of equality of participation,

when compared to the turn-taking procedure required for face-to-face interaction. While in many groups only a minority of core members generate the majority of contributions (Nielsen in Clarke, 2000), this pattern is replicated in real-time engagement.

Erickson (in Clarke, 2000) argues that asynchronous communication systems with persistent textual records ...allow people separated by time zones, work schedules, and other activities to interact with one another . This can facilitate narrative coherence, and also lends itself to reflection: content is structured and edited before it is posted.

Benefits noted by Gaiser (in Clarke, 2000) included a naturalistic setting for studying group dynamics in cyberspace; diversity of group membership resulted from recruitment from various locations globally; members of e-mail interest groups understood how the communication technology worked; and a more substantial time span for interviewing was possible than with face-to-face groups.

There are, of course, also potential limitations, such as bias through over-representation of a particular perspective; the lack of codification of ethical requirements for online research; the difficulty of ensuring privacy of information; the difficulty of sampling when the demographics of the Internet are constantly changing or difficult to establish; lack of body language, which can lead to miscommunication; and the difficulties of following a discussion thread when posts and comments are not always sequenced chronologically (Clarke, 2000). These will be addressed as they emerge as a result of the blogs content.

The anticipated regional skewness of representation (the 'haves' versus the 'have-nots'), age and gender will be similarly examined *in situ*.

As Curtis (2007) points out, the most relevant concern here is that of assessing identity: 'Because there is no way for me to verify the identity of all of the participants in my research, I have made the decision to adopt a policy of "believing the interviewee."' Similarly, and as with any social scientific investigation, I have had to rely on the veracity of the statements of the sources. While the Internet can be at risk in terms of unreliable information – where bloggers blur the line between objective truth and unverifiable rumour, for example – I accept the narratives here as genuine and truthful. Where there are factual discrepancies, these have generally been uncovered by the more traditional media (which is not immune to manipulation, as in the highly publicised case of

'Reutersgate', when the photojournalist Adnan Hajj doctored his photographs of a bombed-out Beirut to play up the devastation). Nearly two years after the ceasefire, the statistics are freely available online in a number of local reports such as Samidoun's [http://www.lebanon-support.org/resources/SamidounMappingSouthDamage\(Social\)](http://www.lebanon-support.org/resources/SamidounMappingSouthDamage(Social)); E-petitions.net, on <http://julywar.epetition.net>; and the Lebanon Higher Relief Council ('Lebanon Under Siege', on <http://www.lebanonundersiege.gov.lb/english/>). Mainstream international newspapers and television stations (including Al Jazeera) have also collated their conclusions on the effects of war on the Lebanese population and infrastructure. Utilising qualitative research methodologies, and the transparency advocated by Miller (1984) and others in my writing, I am most interested in representing the emotional effects of trauma on the narratives of individuals, and how that dialogue is rendered in the social space of the blogosphere.

Denotations of 'narrative', as Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (2007) point out, are various: '...the narrative structure that we confer on our lives, or the communal narratives created by a nation or an ethnic group, or to individual narratives about personal experiences, or to the narratives of literature' (viii).

For the purposes of this research, and following Fisher and Ricoeur, a 'narrative' is an expression of a world view that is historically and culturally grounded and shaped by human personality. Narration makes sequence and meaning from disparate actions, words and deeds for the people who live, create or interpret them. Information is presented through anecdotal storytelling that contains characters, plots, motivations and actions, and, most importantly, provides individual and social identity. The research that follows focuses particularly on the connection between individual and collective identity made possible by interdependent (intertextual) narratives.

Blogging as a medium provides an additional layer of meaning: to a certain extent this research concerns itself with what Caruth (1996) describes as 'the story of a telling', or meta-narrative. There are implications for content through the medium itself, as we shall see.

The analysis of the blogs included a range of readings across the subjects of narrative and trauma and its effects, as well as the larger social concerns that emerge with the examination of new media, citizenship and the public sphere. Both print and online resources were consulted. In addition, e-mail contact, discussion with practitioners, and my own participation on the blogs

www.extrange.com and www.thoughtleader.co.za (what Ewins [2005], after Holt, terms autoethnography) informed the investigation process, a multiplicity of approaches suitable to the digital nature of the research, as well as its implications.

Methodology, sampling parameters, terminology and ethical considerations

Hezbollah (in Arabic, حزب الله, hizbu-llāh, literally ‘party of Allah’) is rendered variously Hizbullah, Hizballah, Hizbollah, and Hezbollah in primary and secondary sources. This is due to the rendering of the Arabic phonetic-syllabic structure into English. I use one of the contemporary spellings - ‘Hezbollah’ - throughout this research.

‘The term weblog covers a multitude of approaches and styles with many weblogs dealing with matters of purely personal interest’ (Ó Baoill, in press). Methodologically, this research is restricted to the Lebanese warblogs of July and August 2006 that are concerned with individual trauma and the resulting dialogue in the socio-political domain outlined by Habermas (1997) – places that facilitate the organized discussion among private people that tended to be ongoing (ibid).

I use ‘warblogs’ in reference to the Lebanese blogs I have selected for commentary. This term is a more specific one than ‘milblogging’ – blogging about the military, which includes blogging by any group but particularly by American soldiers in and veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq. The term ‘warblogs’ is intended to indicate the chronology of the posts under scrutiny: those written voluntarily by unpaid Lebanese civilians during the 33-Day War during the months of July and August in 2006. This demographic has been chosen in the interests of narrowing the research focus to a single, community-wide set of traumatic events, which illustrates aspects of both structural and historical trauma. I have elected not to correct the misspellings and ungrammatical sentences in the blogs. This is due in part to my desire to retain their orality links, and partly to retain the urgency with which they were written. The extracted blogs I have selected here are intended to represent a wide (and colourful) range of the opinions and articulations of Lebanese warblogging. They do not provide an exhaustive examination of all the blogs available from the Middle East in 2006, and they certainly do not pretend to represent an overview of, for example, the Israeli blogosphere. ‘Toxic’ blogs are necessarily excluded. While it is beyond the scope of this research to include bloggers in other countries, Ward (2006) argues that bloggers of Lebanese

extraction, although situated elsewhere, were also uniquely positioned to analyse and comment on the conflict, often criticising traditional Western news outlets for their biased coverage, which they could compare with Arabic news sources and personal reports from intimate contacts still in Lebanon. The fact that the Lebanese diaspora blogged the war demonstrates the potential of the medium in ‘...bringing together shifting and disparate commentaries, and in juxtaposing multiple overlapping identities’ and illustrates the influence of Lebanese bloggers worldwide (2006). As Ward and others point out, there is clearly scope for further research that distinguishes between bloggers inside and outside Lebanon, as well as work that examines internal sectarian differences: what my research is intends to illustrate is the globalising potential of the Internet as a communication medium.

As we have seen, blogs are slippery artefacts in the sense that they are always unfinished: Bloggers can continue, extend and revise their work at will. It is, however, possible to examine a cross-section of the warblogs produced during the particular Lebanese conflict of 2006.

It should be remembered that no means of cultural expression can represent thoroughly an entire group, nation or country. We can, at best, gain some idea of the myriad issues involved in documenting this specific conflict, from the subjective points of view of civilian bloggers who had both access to the Internet and the time and inclination to record their ideas. Ward (2006) writes that a new realm of online interaction brought with it further inequalities of access in a society already divided along sectarian or confessional lines:

In Lebanon, blogging tends to be a hobby of the wealthy, socially conscious, and usually urban elite. In the sectarian terms pervasive in Lebanese politics, this translates to a heavier online representation of Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims.

However, in response to this criticism of skewed online representation in public sphere theory, it should be noted that Internet access is available cheaply at the myriad local cafés in urban areas (particularly in Beirut, the city which bore the brunt of the Israeli bombings), or freely in libraries and community centres. During the war itself, inter-civilian aid centres were also set up, and these

also had the capacity to provide relevant communication channels for those who required them.

Furthermore, there is no lack of diversity of viewpoint among bloggers. The Lebanese blogosphere, as Ward admits, is both influential and diverse, and a few, highly influential bloggers have already wrought change in other Arab countries.

Bloggers are collectors and collators of existing information, as well as revisers and extenders thereof. While these citizen-journalists were initially self-appointed investigators and reporters, they have increasingly been utilised as analysts and watchdogs by the mainstream media (MSM). In an attempt to supply alternative viewpoints, I am including some extracts that did not necessarily begin as ordinary civilian accounts but are included here because they repeat or crystallise conclusions that have featured in the majority of the other available accounts. Where they appear, they will be identified as such.

Methodologically, the focus of this particular research is twofold. In terms of a closer textual analysis, I am interested, firstly, in excerpts from blogs that manifest a self-reflexive narrative from the traumatic events on an individual level – How has the writer tried to comprehend or make sense of the events? How have they attempted to examine their own role in the historical proceedings? – and secondly, that generate meaningful dialogic engagement and measurable social activism.

Blogging is partial and fragmented by nature. The absence of information can be as significant as that which has been selected, as will be discussed further. The excerpts are not traditional narratives in the sense that they contain a beginning, middle and end, but they are narratives in that each post, or series of posts, makes sense of the events that have disrupted life routines. The excerpts from these weblogs are necessarily restricted to the events that affected the entire community identified as geopolitically Lebanese during the period of the Israeli bombing.

Some writers in this study blog first in their home language (often Arabic) and then translate their own posts into English, so that the versions appear simultaneously. The implication is that they do not have to relinquish creative control of their work. Most write in English initially – the lingua franca of the blogosphere – although considerable blogospheres exist in French, Turkish, Persian, Hebrew and Arabic. As Hayden (2006) argues, English language blogs represent either small communities, or are written in anticipation of an English-language audience. In response to the obvious criticism that the translation of blogs from their original languages results in a loss of

accuracy or levels of connotation and idiom, Haugbolle (2006) and others point out that there are functional advantages of writing in and translating into English rather than, for example, a more exclusionary language such as Arabic. It allows bloggers to communicate with ...international human rights groups, media, researchers, and, most importantly, a community of other bloggers worldwide – what Hayden calls a roundabout means of impromptu cultural diplomacy in the emergent forum of international dialogue (2006).

It can also be argued that the move to another language, such as the more universal English, for example, implies a move to a whole other site of engagement – one that is removed from the traumatic events and is therefore ‘neutral’ territory, where writers and readers may co-construct meaning in a safer public space. Freud called this ‘leaving the site’ (*‘die Stätte verlässt’*). The departure from the language of the original implies a departure from the context of the chaotic events themselves, and opens up the possibility of recovery.

Cultural differences can be an opportunity for engagement rather than the repetition of the easy assumptions of stereotype. Certain bloggers profess their interest in investigating alternatives to the stereotypical assumptions associated with national character and culture. To a certain extent all bloggers are bridgebloggers in the sense that they are providing explanations of attitudes, and framing traumatic events in their social, historical, cultural and political context.

(It is possible to consider the Internet in much the same way. As a medium for public engagement it provides a medium situated away from the actual site of trauma - for example, the deaths of Lebanese civilians at Qana - and in a broader and less specific context, one that requires a different interlocution process, and an eventual integration facilitated by a listening other. This process is very much one of ‘going public’, as will be discussed in further detail.)

There are usually two standard layouts for the multilingual blog. The first is the appearance of all the versions (for example, Hebrew, Turkish, French, Arabic and English) on a single page. While this is inclusive, it can be hard on the eyes because the typeface is often very small so as to accommodate the simultaneous occurrence of the posts.

The second, more reader-friendly, layout includes a link through to the desired language option, which goes straight to the page required by the monolingual reader. Both options retain a sense of the writer’s voice and identity, and are, as a result, arguably more authentic and reliable

than translations.

Occasionally the posts are undated, but it is safe to assume that they were written during the conflict of 2006: their presence in 'blog carnivals' supports this assumption. Where the blogger remains anonymous, I have used the relevant pseudonym, which respects the chosen online identity of the writer. I have included the links to the blogs cited in my research in the list of References in the endpages, for ease of navigation and for the sake of less disrupted prose.

There is some debate around whether posted material should be categorised as public or private. As evidence in social scientific investigation, blogs are primary sources rather than literary ones. The ordinary permissions process is circumvented in the case of blogs because they are online. As published - not private - texts, blog posts are 'public acts deliberately intended for public consumption' (Paccagnella in Serfaty, 12: 2004).

The Ethics Clearance required by (and supplied to) the university for this research functions as an illustration of the dual nature of blogs: while they are undoubtedly highly personal in content, the fact that their writers have posted them on the Internet means that they are available, free, in the public sphere, and because they are already in the public domain, they do not require Ethics Clearance.

This has, in fact, been initiated by the stakeholders themselves. Bloggers are cognisant of the fact that when they post a blog, they are disseminating information and allowing readers access to their work. By speaking for themselves as 'natural authors,' in their own words, bloggers provide narratives that exist in their entirety in cyberspace and are not open to abuse. This empowerment – the direct control of information in a public forum - is one of the revolutionary ideas about intellectual property that has been stimulated by the Internet, and is unique to it. Bloggers are increasingly influential, having gone from what Jarvis (in Perlmutter) terms 'the pyjama media' (12: 2008) to a more mainstream status. In their most extreme form, blogs can also become media elites: this can happen through the 'A-list' of influential bloggers (Salam Pax and The Angry Arab, for instance), which can create a self-sustaining web of influence when it is used as a reference to the exclusion of other voices; through flags (PR blogs), sponsorship or advertising on blogs, where content serves a corporate agenda; and through the mainstream media itself, where citizen journalists, often recording events *in situ* with their cellphones, are incorporated into the existing

media structure – what Livingston (in Perlmutter) terms ‘the Nokia effect’ (24: 2008).

There are obvious pitfalls in attempting to analyse the socio-psychological effects of a technology still in its infancy. One mitigating factor is that, while there will be further technological evolution - even by the time this work is published - the issues raised are fairly clear, and were so with first-generation Internet use.

The codes of ethics applicable in the blogosphere itself centres around issues of permissions and copyright, as well as individual privacy and civil rights. These have been widely discussed by practitioners and theorists involved in narrative and the Internet. Tim O’Reilly, in particular, has been active in the standardisation of behaviour and expectation management. (His ‘Call for a Blogger’s Code of Conduct’ is available at <http://radar.oreilly.com/archives>.)

Many bloggers utilise a version of the BlogHer Community Guidelines, based in large part on The Electronic Frontier Foundation’s Legal Guide for Bloggers, which states in summary:

We embrace your diversity of opinions and values, but we insist that your content may not include anything unacceptable. We define unacceptable content as anything included or linked that is:

1. being used to abuse, harass, stalk or threaten a person or persons
2. libelous, defamatory, knowingly false or misrepresents another person
3. infringes upon any copyright, trademark, trade secret or patent of any third party. (If you quote or excerpt someone’s content, it is your responsibility to provide proper attribution to the original author. For a clear definition of proper attribution and fair use, please see The Electronic Frontier Foundation’s Legal Guide for Bloggers)
4. violates any obligation of confidentiality
5. violates the privacy, publicity, moral or any other right of any third party
6. contains editorial content that has been commissioned and paid for by a third party, (either cash or goods in barter), and/or contains paid advertising links and/or SPAM.

This negotiation by the stakeholders has concluded that issues of intellectual property on the Internet follow, in general, the same laws of the physical world; bloggers who flout those laws find themselves faced with very real legal action. This research on blogging is bound by the same ethics, particularly points 2, 3, 4 and 5 above.

Literature review

A particularly wide-ranging and accessible essay on trauma is Susan Brison's 'Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self' in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall of the Present* (1999). Her first-person narrative combines with an extensive theoretical background, as do the contributions of Delbo (1990) and Laub (1991).

Different kinds of witnessing and the issues around it are explored by Hesford (2004), who argues that there are four modes of rhetorical witnessing at work in testimonial speech contexts. Further research coalesces particularly around Lederach's ideas on expressive culture after trauma (1995), Hayes's assessment of the impact of the TRC (1998), Gobodo-Madikizela's ideas about the language of trauma (2003), and Mack's studies of the modern artefacts of memory (2003). Morgan's work on South Africa narrative therapy (2000) and his collaborative work with the Bambanani Women's Group on body-mapping (2005) is also vital for the comprehension of the effects of trauma on individuals.

Key writers on the impact of trauma on individuals and communities include Herman (1992); LaCapra (1994); Caruth (1995 and 1996); Minow (1998); Simpson (1998); and Brison (2000). Herman's ground-breaking *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* is still considered the basic text for any work on trauma, its symptoms and implications. Frankl's seminal work, *Man's Search for Meaning*, provides answers to existential questions. Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela's most recent work, *Narrating Our Healing: Perspectives on Working Through Trauma*, (2007) is vital to this research in that it provides an exhaustive theoretical background on trauma before going on to explain implications for the South African context and beyond.

Initial research on blogs by others leaned towards the quantitative and empirical. Several blog search engines - blogdigger, Feedster, Technorati - searched blog contents, providing current

information on both popular searches and tags used to categorise postings. Other projects, such as BROG (We)blog Research on Genre), based at Indiana University, are ‘informal research collaboration dedicated to the conduct of empirical, social science research on weblogs’ (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). BROG is best known for an article published in January 2004 entitled, ‘Bridging the gap: A genre analysis of weblogs’, which applied content analysis methods to a random sample of 203 blogs and characterized blogs as an emergent genre of computer-mediated communication. For a thorough statistical analysis of blogging characteristics, Barbara Kaye’s ‘Blog Use Motivations: An Exploratory Study’ (2007) is an excellent source.

But blogs are intersections of the public and private, the confluence of historical and emotional memory. As such, they can simultaneously be analysed in Marxist media theory terms as examples of the rendering of a specific event, as well as ‘...mass-mediated products determined by various factors - the systems of ownership, the process of cultural production, the level of struggle, the state of consciousness in society at a given time, and so on’ (Kumar, 2006). Internet and weblog theory include the nature and function of the blog, discussed most comprehensively by Herring, Scheidt, Bonus and Wright (2004), and Miller and Shepherd (2004), in ‘Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog.’ This last essay appears on the site *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*. Edited by Gurak, Antonijevic, Johnson, Ratliff and Reyman, the site is the single most comprehensive and valuable resource for any research on blogging. Lampa’s essay, ‘Imagining the Blogosphere’, deals most critically with the role of the blogger, their perceived and actual audience, weblog-based journalism, and the status quo. Rodzvilla’s *We’ve Got Blog: How Weblogs Are Changing Our Culture* (2002), in which various writers contribute essays analysing the effect of public forums for blogging, has been an important print source, as has Perlmutter’s *Blogwars*, the incisive and wide-ranging commentary on media old and new. Ó Baoill’s essays, overviews and commentary (2000; in press) are invaluable sources of commentary for this research.

Three ground-breaking essays by Poster (2005), Haugbolle (2006) and Lynch (2007) were the starting point for the research on the state of the Arab blogosphere. Coturnix’s *Meta-Carnival* publishes a digital monthly round-up of all the blog carnivals currently online, providing a vital tool for the archiving and accessibility of thematically related weblogs.

The examination of the Internet as a functioning public sphere along with social, cultural, religious and political spheres has been documented by, among others, Habermas (1989; 1991); Fraser (1990); Boyer (1993); Davies (1993); Ziv and Zajdman (1993); Hauser (1999); Dawahare (2000); Ó Baoill (2000); Hourihan (2002); Nakamura (2002); Shirky (2002); Anderson (2003); Miller and Shepherd (2004); Fraser (2005); Lederach and Maise (2005); Levitt and Dubner (2005); Achcar and Warschawski (2007); and Hovsepian (2008). In essence, where there are multiple spheres, there is variation in belief systems and accompanying conflict. Counterpublics arise: thus, participation in dialogue can perform a personal and emotional function, as well as a wider political one.

Methodology, research design and analysis of data

My research rests on three key aspects: my own experience as both a practitioner in the blogosphere and a language teacher; interviews with self-identified professionals in southern African literature and psychology (Professors Gobodo-Madikizela and Van der Merwe of the University of Cape Town); and an interpretive-critical (hermeneutic) analysis of the content of the blog narratives themselves, utilising aspects of narrative theory and therapy, as well as psychoanalysis and constructivism.

My research is transparent and incorporates my own participation in the blogosphere. I maintain a blog, *The Portable Pilgrim*, at www.extrange.com, and contribute to the *Thoughtleader* site run by the *South African Mail and Guardian*. This activity allows me to better understand the blogosphere through my experiences as a blogger in online communities. I am aware that, although I engage in participant-observation by keeping a blog and contributing to the blogosphere, the narrative experts in this area are self-identified bloggers and media professionals.

Any interviews I carried out included information about the goals of my research and the methods I employed. The bloggers are participants through their posts in the public sphere. I am interested in making ‘efforts...to reduce the interpretive authority of researchers and expand those of participants in the analysis of social movements’ (xxiii: 2002). This is a feature of open-ended interview or interview-guided research, useful for ‘...understanding social movement mobilization for the perspective of movement actors or audiences’ (xxxvii: 2002). No questionnaires were

involved in this study. The blog transcripts are available online (see References section), allowing readers direct access to the words of others. This choice addresses intellectual property, as well as the civil rights of interviewees. The blogging code of conduct, as will be discussed, also impacts on engagement in the public sphere.

There are difficulties specific to research about the Internet. I have summarised the potential advantages and pitfalls of online research here: for a fuller discussion, see Frankel and Sanyin's 'Ethical and Legal Aspects of Human Subjects Research on the Internet' (1999). Clarke's (2000) work, 'The Internet as a medium for qualitative research', provides a particularly lucid and accessible account of the implications for southern Africa and beyond.

By examining modes of transmission, circulation and reception in Lebanese warblogs, I hope to add to the body of research on trauma narratives. The initial source of the blogs for my own reading came, fairly ironically, from a double-page spread in a 2006 story in the South African edition of *The Sunday Independent*, which led to further research.

Overview

Part One sets the scene with a summary of the literature on narrative and trauma, both at an individual level and with a collective focus on the Middle East.

Ricoeur and others have suggested that there is a personal narrative identity and that life is perceived as plotted, with a series of continual and causal events. This structure is disrupted by traumatic events such as human rights abuses. The disjunction between one's past and one's present is confusing and contributes to 'the undoing of the self', in the language of Herman, Brison, Ricoeur, and Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, who go onto explain the 'loss of control, loss of one's identity, loss of the ability to remember, and loss of language to describe the horrific events' (vii: 2007).

The traumatic disruption is rendered 'containable' through a narrative act like reflexive writing, an opportunity to fashion a causal narrative out of seemingly random events. Narration is a valuable act because it involves '...the restoration of the self and reclaiming of one's sense of control of memory, of the capacity to reflect, understand, and to perceive things as they are or were, requires transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory' (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-

Madikizela, vii: 2007). Narrators are therefore engaged in the search for cohesion, coherence and meaning. Narration *is* examination, a conscious attempt at reflection on and reconstruction of the events: lives are autobiographies and ‘emplotment’ is a way of creating coherence in the seemingly confusing course of our lives (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, 2: 2007).

I examine the impact of these alternative narratives in the public sphere. ‘People often find it of value to tell their life stories to others who can empathize with, validate, or even be inspired by them’ (Albright, Duggan, Epstein and Jeji, 2006). The formation of communities for mourning and social reconstruction is made possible in the digital realm, and I comment on existing Internet commemoration processes in general, and the Lebanese blog commentary in particular.

Part Two examines ‘new media’ (a term already archaic) in general and the weblog in particular as relational phenomena. Recent developments signify the growth of the blogosphere and social networks in the form of various forums and online lifestyle pages such as Face Book and MySpace. Blogging has been accepted as a technologically accessible activity to the point where the term ‘metablogging’ (blogging about blogging) has been coined.

If, as I have established in Part One, trauma subverts identity and continuity, then blogging is a continuing and active attempt to live meaningfully through narrating the traumatic events. Posting a blog goes some way towards reclaiming identity through the bloggers’ own words, and in their own time.

There are wider social implications: we are unable to separate our story from that of others, and we are all characters in other people’s stories. Blogs make the personal political through the manifestations of communal identity, cultural identity and historical identity. According to Ricoeur, constructing a life-narrative is a responsibility or moral duty; it is both a constant and ethical process, so that the narrator’s aim for ‘the good life’ (the critically examined existence) multiplies out into the social sphere and manifests in ‘just institutions.’ The blogosphere is potentially one such platform. ‘[T]he benefits of disembodiment, the lack of systematized corporatization...the possibilities of free speech, and the spread of information originating from non-hegemonic sources’ make the Internet an interactive space that supports democratic principles through its polyvocality’ (Curtis 2007). It is a public sphere, as envisioned by Habermas (1997), and applicable to the activism in Lebanon, as Dawahare (2000) explains. I use the three features of Habermas’s

theory to state that the Lebanese warblogs function as a social space for dialogue: they are inclusive, disregard status, and address issues of the speaker's choice.

Blogging is important because of its implications for empowerment and critical thinking at both the personal and socio-political levels. Web pioneer Berners-Lee (in Curtis 2007) envisioned a system that was equally readable and writable. Prompted by the desire to disseminate their particular experience, individual bloggers can thus circumvent traditional mainstream ('lamestream,' in the contemptuous parlance of the radical blogger) news networks and media centres, which operate in the interests of the government or multinational they represent. Bloggers are 'natural authors': they speak only for themselves, and their narrative versions make for polyphonic forums. By allowing commentary on intensely personal narratives, blogs translate private individual experience into a public issue by providing a space for communal discussion that may add to or adapt the original narrative. They allow change and development, the flexibility which Ricoeur included in his discussion of mutability within cohesion of a single life-narrative.

Witnesses traditionally perform an archival function. However, this has been problematic because of the 'historical gap' that existed between the occurrence of atrocity and its reportage in the mainstream media. In this traditional model, physical obstacles frustrated attempts at record-keeping, and personal experience narratives had to be reconstructed after the fact (Laub, 1991). If healing is the re-linking of the events in a life-narrative, the picking up of the storytelling thread (indeed, the psychological integration required for the restoration of the self), then this process is necessarily delayed.

Blogs close the historical gap. They are instantaneous eye-witness accounts, serving a journalistic and vicarious function: they are reportage. There is a sense of immediacy and intimacy, the 'reality' or 'authenticity' that blurs another boundary - that between fact and fiction. The notion of a single unassailable 'truth' is no longer possible: we must accept the witnesses at their word.

Because blogs - unlike a court appearance, lecture tour or documentary, for example - require only Internet access, postings can be made from anywhere in the world. They are at once resonant and immediate reports on actual events, and modern artefacts of memory. Theoretically, they exist in cyberspace forever, flouting the usual conditions associated with traditional media and imposed on us by time, space and resources.

At the same time, blogs are constrained in their structure. They contain dated entries, starting with the most recent. Blogs are composed of ‘posts,’ which include a date, a time stamp, and a permalink and often include a link for commentary and the author’s name. The reverse chronology and time-stamping of posts create an expectation of updates, or progress. The present tense is used in the dated entries, as in diaries - the closest traditional rhetorical equivalent. The concern with authorship or ownership of one’s own life-narrative is part of the acknowledgement process of healing after trauma, and one of its spin-offs can be the empowerment of the community – what the medieval Arab scholar Ibn Khaldūn referred to as *asabiya*.

Part Three briefly examines warblogs in general before moving on to the particular Lebanese warblogs posted during the 33-day conflict with Israel in 2006. This forms the core of the research. An underlying hermeneutic philosophy is used to locate the blogs in a social-constructivist context. This narrative-reflexive approach is used to focus on the similarities and contrasts in the content of the Lebanese blogs, which share a common traumatic event. I am particularly interested in the disruption of routine presented by the military threat, and the reactions of people who became ‘citizen journalists’ as a result.

One of the manifestations of Lebanese identity, in danger of breaking down in the face of the military presence, was blogging. The bloggers were ordinary people, unschooled in the theory of trauma or narrative, who narrated their experiences spontaneously in a reaction to socio-political disjunction and the attendant attack on identity: these are attempts to pick up the ‘narrative thread’ of disrupted life.

There was another, more wide-reaching effect of this narrative reconstruction. For many bloggers, this contact with both their own community (more united in a war situation than by its usual confessional make-up) and ‘the outside world’ was their only way of resisting Israeli aggression and the actions of their own government. By sharing individual experiences, they were alerting people in other communities and in other countries to the facts of - and their reactions to - inexplicable acts, when these same acts had been officially discussed in print, on television and online around the world. As ‘natural authors’, bloggers provided alternative first-hand viewpoints to those interests of mainstream media, creating what Fraser refers to as a ‘counterpublic’ (1990). Civil resistance followed, and I outline the context and progress of the ‘Lebanon: An Open Country for

Civil Resistance' movement.

One unexpected finding of my research was the massive and almost ubiquitous upsurge of humour contained in the Lebanese warblogs. The psychological functions of humour are classified by Martin (2007) and others into three categories: the cognitive and social benefits of mirth; social communication and influence; and the relief of tension (the coping mechanism) engendered by shared laughter. The Internet provides an ideal platform for the dissemination of current-event and context-dependent jokes. Speed of transmission means that thousands of people can share in-group humour and enhance group cohesion and identity ('we-feeling') when it is perceived to be under threat. The Lebanese humour in the warblogs manifested itself in a number of forms, from plain puns and sarcasm to interminable 'shaggy-dog' stories. It was often, and understandably, bitter.

Finally, the historical information and insight gained through the Lebanon blog narratives is examined in the Conclusion, which also deals with the implications of theory and its possible applications, as well as gaps in the research that imply further possible study areas by other researchers. There are clear implications for the rise in individual trauma blogging: psychological and literary, as well as communal, historical and socio-political. The mass media, like any other interlocuter, selects and foregrounds information. As Noam Chomsky, on <http://blog.zmag.org/node/2723>, commented on the mainstream coverage of the bombing of Lebanon: 'When we look at what is swept under the rug, or grossly distorted, the extreme imbalance of coverage becomes much more severe.' If coverage is routinely distorted by the official channels of communication, then blogging is both a subversive and necessary narrative act - the voice of polyphonic opposition, a way to convey alternative eyewitness perspectives in the public sphere, as well as a means of healing and recovering the lost threads of individual life-narratives.

PART ONE: NARRATIVE, TRAUMA AND RESTITUTION

Narrative and identity: A host of stories

‘We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative – whose continuity, whose sense is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a “narrative”, and that narrative is us, our identities’ (Sacks in Mack, 2003).

That the plot or life-narrative has a logical and causal structure has been advanced by, among others, Fisher (1984), Ricoeur (1986; 1995) and Brison (1999), drawing substantially on the philosophies of Locke. Ordinary narratives synthesise reality by uniting permanence and change: ‘plot fuses together intentions, causal relations and chance occurrences in a unified sequence of actions and events’ (ibid). This ‘emplotment’ creates a pattern in a seemingly chaotic series of events, ties them together, and makes them meaningful wholes.

Narrative context is everything. According to MacIntyre (in Snaevarr 2007), our utterances are only understandable because of it, and personality is regarded as unified. ‘We can for instance be held responsible for actions we did a decade ago. This can only happen because others regard us as having a narrative totality’ (ibid). This unity is in turn a function of the unity of the narrative.

Ricoeur (1986; 1991) accords a narrative dimension to actions: We fuse the temporal units of our actions together in the same way as in a story. Stories are told, lives are lived - but narratives still play a decisive part in our lives in the creation and sustenance of identity,

by mediating between two basic aspects of our identities. On the one hand, we can talk about our identity as *idem* (the simple identity of a person as a thing in time and space, the answer to the question ‘What am I?’), or sameness, or on the other hand as *ipse*, or selfhood (conscious reflection, ‘Who am I?’).

The tension between the involuntary *idem* and voluntary *ipse* is driven by the presence of both permanence (‘concordance’) and change (‘discordance’) during our lives. As we will see later, it is the unexpected or overwhelming events that disturb our sense of permanence and characterise trauma.

Narrative identity is not static. Snaevarr (2007) writes that it ‘...demand[s] openness and freedom. The self is not [a] given; it is something that must be created.’ This takes place through a shared medium, thus, ‘...all of reality is presented in the form of language – the poet’s wisdom, and also the structuralist’s’ (Barthes in Sontag, 74: 1982). As a result, as Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela point out, ‘In the interaction between individual and collective narratives, the personal identity is continually created and recreated’ (5: 2007). This co-construction of meaning and identity occurs necessarily in communication with others and with the aid of stories, and the relationship between individual and social identity is a dialectical one. Ewins (2005) argues that Foucault’s remarks about discourse also apply to narratives: in any society, ‘...the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed...The stories we tell are often reshaped in and for the public sphere. And then, when these narratives are in the public sphere, they shape us.

The difficulty of negotiating meaning on even the simplest individual level is clear in Frankl’s analogy of life-as-film (144: 1984), which he presents as a dialectic:

[I]t consists of thousands upon thousands of individual pictures, and each of them makes sense and carries a meaning, yet the meaning of the whole film cannot be seen before its last sequence is shown. However, we cannot understand the film without having first understood each of its components, each of the individual pictures.

This impacts on our interactions with others. We are obliged to be constant as far as possible in each context, in order to maintain the constancy of identity that has an ethical impact on our communities. Ricoeur insists on the primacy of ‘just institutions’ as the highest goal of a good life, ‘with and for others’. On the basis of this individual responsibility lies much theory – beyond the scope of this research and thoroughly plumbed in much other research – about citizenship, governance and democratic ideals.

As Snaevarr (2007), following Schapp, writes, we live in ‘a host of stories’, which connect with the stories of other people:

...[O]ur selves are nothing but cross-sections of stories. Our identities are created by a vast web of stories, as is our relationship with reality. We understand and identify things by placing them in the stories we tell about them: just like selves, things do not really exist outside of stories. We are caught in this narrative web because we cannot exist outside of it. There is a world-wide web of stories: the world is that web.

Our narratives are thus always bound up with the narratives of others – our families, communities and institutions – in several and occasionally conflicting capacities. We may, as MacIntyre (1981) points out, be the products of our past, but we have multiple identities in the present that depend on the discourses and our contexts of interaction. While we cannot choose the culture into which we are born, we can choose our positioning and attitudes towards it.

Lampa, following Anderson, argues that all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined (2004). Bhabha (1990) is of the same school, writing that Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Following Arendt, Bhabha writes that the society of the nation in the modern world is that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance, with the two realms flowing unceasingly and uncertainly into each other like waves in the never-ending stream of the life-process itself. Bhabha goes on to argue, like Fraser (1990), for a new, transnational culture.

Our need for affinity has not decreased with the advent of mass communication. Lampa (2004) writes that the blogosphere is a decentralised, imagined community & based on a new form of amateurized and personalized journalism practiced by persons who may never meet one another yet can engage in conversation and share a common identity. What the Internet does is allow seemingly personal communication to be mass-distributed, quickly. This interactivity means that readers are more likely to feel an affinity with writers of blogs who share their political leanings and social in-group. The sense of community is within the minds of its members, in a style that stems from the instant publishing medium itself to create a discursive, transnational, imagined community. The Internet is thus a forum for the lived locality of culture in the public sphere. This is a form of living

that is more complex than community ; more symbolic than society ; more connotative than country ; less patriotic than patrie; more rhetorical than the reason of State; more mythological than ideology; less homogeneous than hegemony; less centred than the citizen; more collective than the subject ; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism (ibid).

The question of social visibility is thus raised by unmediated self-representation in the public sphere. The spatiotemporal anonymity of the Internet allows a displacement of identity in the continual slippage of categories (gender, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or cultural difference), allowing a freedom of movement among these identities.

Bhabha writes that [T]he space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal (1990). No moral framework is shared by everyone: groups construct and affirm their own identities in the modern context, and individuals define themselves correspondingly. The quest for a moral framework is bound up with the quest for selfhood and viewpoint. As MacIntyre, Ricoeur and Falconer write, this is always expressed in narrative, or 'telling the self' (27: 2007).

Because we affiliate ourselves with a variety of overlapping social categories, this movement requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic. This has implications for post-traumatic writing: as we have seen, narrative can recast identity.

Traumatic memory: always now and always here

Trauma is chaotic. The Hebrew term for the holocaust is a telling one - the *Shoah* or *Ha Shoah*, denoting a 'catastrophic upheaval'. Falconer, following Taylor, views modern Western identity as composed of three 'moral goods' or necessary features (18: 2007): autonomy, affirmation of ordinary life, and the avoidance of suffering. When trauma occurs, ordinary life is disrupted, and the sufferer is overwhelmed, what Brison (1999) terms the 'undoing of the self'. The purpose of

existence can cease to be apparent, and the life-narrative appears to lose meaning. Thus, all three of these central 'goods' are negated, undermining the very tenets of identity. This is experienced as loss - distinguishable from the idea of absence, as LaCapra (1999) writes. While absence implies an object or concept never having existed, loss denotes its forced removal. As previously outlined, it is this loss that concerns my research, as well as the possibility of regaining agency, identity, memory and language through self-narratives.

Trauma is cognitively unexpected and emotionally unbearable: it cannot be psychologically integrated into the victim's idea of the self. Palwick (2007), following Herman (1992), observes that trauma threatens the individual with death ('not-being'). It undermines meaning, topples belief systems, and because it is so overwhelming, the individual '...carries it inside even when it appears, to outside observers, to have ended. It is always now and always here.' Herman writes that a secure sense of connection with caring people is the foundation of personality development. When this connection is shattered, the traumatised person loses their basic sense of self (52: 1992). The effects go beyond the individual and their immediate circumstances.

Certain conditions appear greatly to increase the likelihood of harm. According to Herman (34: 1992), these include

...being taken by surprise, trapped or exposed to the point of exhaustion. The likelihood of harm is also increased when the traumatic events include physical violation or injury, exposure to extreme violence, or witnessing grotesque death.

What these conditions have in common is their ability to instil terror and helplessness. The powerlessness of the survivor is doubly felt, both in the encounter with death and the escape from it, exacerbated by the fact that there appears to be no meaning or significance attached to either. Both of these sets of circumstances have occurred without the survivor's intention or understanding, and it is this deflection of agency that causes such internal chaos.

Trauma shatters identity, removing a sense of control, connection and meaning, and while these effects may begin with the individual, they do not end there. Communities are disrupted in the wake of trauma because so much of our sense of identity rests on social systems of attachment and

meaning in relation to others. This fragmentation comes as a further blow to the survivor when the very context on which they have previously relied for grounding no longer exists, or exists only to remind them of the trauma itself. Herman explains

[The events] breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis (51: 1992).

This negation of identity and agency necessarily has some effect on memory. The random nature of trauma collapses the survivor's sense of time and thus cause-and-effect relationships. As Falconer (2007) writes, most accounts register a radical shift in time-sense: ...an arrest of chronological flow, an emptying out of future possibility, a sense of being cut adrift from history (22). Erikson (in Caruth 1995) notes that, aside from the physical symptoms of this inability to integrate an experience into existing psychological structures (agitation, restlessness, numbness, hyper-vigilance, helplessness and increased isolation as the mind tries to protect itself from further onslaught), 'Our memory repeats to us what we haven't yet come to terms with, what still haunts us' (184). Van der Kolk and Van der Hart (in Caruth 1995) explain:

Traumatic memory has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody, the patient does not respond to anybody; it is a solitary activity. In contrast, ordinary memory fundamentally serves a social function (163).

Traumatic memory is marked by radical disruptions, repetition, gaps, silence: it is fragmented. Ordinary memory is accompanied by commentary and emotion: the events and their impact have been assimilated by the narrator, but traumatic events cannot be assimilated into an existing worldview, and they therefore shatter the identity of the sufferer. These events are disruptive and isolating, requiring a revision of the sufferer's existing belief system.

There are implications for every level of interaction, including the communal: familial, social and institutional ties are broken, setting the individual adrift from the familiar. Erikson (in Caruth 1995) writes that

Trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It draws one away from the center of group space while at the same time drawing one back [into a group that feels some kinship based on shared traumatic experience]...[E]strangement becomes the basis for communality, as if persons without homes or citizenship or any other niche in the larger order of things were invited to gather in a quarter set aside for the disenfranchised, a ghetto for the unattached (186).

As will be discussed, the Web is one forum where emerging from the 'ghetto' and into ordinary life is made possible, through the liberating logic of storytelling that converts information into sequence and order.

Speaking or documenting the traumatic events is one way of converting experience into an organised, often ritualised, memory of experience. Rothberg (2003) summarises the common idea that the quest for a hidden truth destabilises the experienced everyday world and '...involves coming to terms with the significant, but previously obscure, aspect of the past and its still operative influence on the present'. Falconer (34: 2007) terms this post-traumatic search for meaning a 'descent journey' or katabasis that details the story of how subjects are remade (integral, coherent, consistent) after they have been unmade (haunted, traumatised by the past, dispossessed of a future) (ibid): it is dependent on the reorganisation of memory.

To the survivor of trauma suffering bouts of intrusive 'flashbacks', time can elongate or freeze. Langer (1993) calls this durational time, and while it is the prevailing psychological mode, individuals and their communities can find it impossible to relate to events in the present, and are subject to a single, defining traumatic event. In losing the ability to see cause-and-effect relations in our narratives, we have 'lost the plot'.

Memory, as Etherington (2003) writes, is a 'gathering together' of different kinds of

information, images, metaphors and responses. It can help us to regain control of our life-story by restoring our normal capacity to organise information in ways that help us to create new stories. Connecting sensation, feeling and thinking allows the brain to relearn that such events can be remembered without the extreme fear response that has held us captive in the past (33: 2003). As we have seen in Herman (1992), this transformation – from chaos to order, and from traumatic memory to narrative memory - tends to take place when we feel physically safe, and when our voices are heard. The life-narrative then becomes a series of events that is chronologically bound rather than centred around a defining trauma, and we are allowed to mourn the losses created by it. The action of telling a story in the safety of a protected relationship can actually produce a change in the abnormal processing of the traumatic memory. With this transference of memory comes relief from many of the major symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The psychoneurosis induced by terror can be observably reversed through the use of words (Keane, Boudeyns, Hyer, Woods et al in Herman, 183: 1992).

This coming to terms with the traumatic events, or the transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory, is intrinsic to the recovery process. The story becomes a memory like other memories, and the accompanying grief also begins to fade. As Frankl (1946; 2006), Herman (1992) and Morgan (2003) write, ordinary time is restored and starts to move again. By the telling of it the story is consigned to the past, and the speaker must face the task of rebuilding their life in the present, as well as planning their future.

'The witness of the crying voice'

The mastery and integration of trauma, like the original events, are relational in nature. Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims (Herman 1992), and this is necessarily an interactional process. 'No one can recover completely from trauma on their own' (1). The responsibility of engagement lies with the teller as well as the listener, and correspondingly, the writer as well as the reader.

After the isolation of trauma, the mere presence of a sympathetic hearer may mitigate the impact of the event. Trauma invariably causes damage to relationships, but people in the survivor's

social world have the power to influence the eventual outcome of the trauma (62: 1992). Herman (1992) writes that, 'In her renewed connections with other people, the survivor re-creates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience.' These include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity and intimacy (133). Talking about the trauma, shaping it into narrative, is therefore vital, building 'a bridge of words and images between the trauma and the rest of life' (Palwick 2007). The survivor needs the support of others to recognise the trauma of their experience, to suspend judgement, and simply to bear witness to the narrative, so that '[u]ltimately, she can come to a realistic judgment of her conduct and a fair attribution of responsibility' (68: 1992).

The process of generating the truth, or bringing it forth in dialogue, is thus contingent on the presence of the listener. Feldman (2004) argues that this '...act of talking, through dialogue, through the act of interlocution' (202) requires an audience that is both equipped and prepared to listen in a witnessing process of their own. Narratives are '...a cultural tool for collectivizing truth claims, while antiphonal response is an active recording and historicization of the presence, pain, and speech of the witness...' (ibid). Caruth writes that history, like trauma, is never simply one's own: '...history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas' (24: 1996), and Sontag (226: 2007) argues for the empathic engagement of the listener with a detailed and specific narrative: 'To tell a story is to say: *this* is the important story. It is to reduce the spread and simultaneity of everything to something linear, a path.' Correspondingly, 'To be a moral human being is to pay, be obliged to pay, certain kinds of attention' (ibid).

These 'kinds of attention' are outlined by Laub (in Caruth 1995), who designates three separate and distinct levels of witnessing: 'the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience, the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others, and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself' (61).

The Internet provides a new context for these levels of witnessing because it allows others access to testimony without their having to be in the same geographic location. The Lebanese bloggers thus occupied all three levels of witnessing – as first-hand witnesses to atrocities; as mediators or voices for those individuals and groups who could not speak for themselves; and as witnesses to the process itself in the form of the comments section attached to the posts. Blogging

can alleviate the alienation of solitude once the burden of responsibility is relived by narrative.

Readers of blogs occupy the second and last levels – as second-hand witnesses receiving mediated testimonies, and as witnesses to the process itself, via the same routes. Blogging involves a new kind of listening for the reader, a double witnessing, self-appointed, that indicates a willingness to engage. Testimony can take on a universal significance for those who witness it. Felman in Caruth (1995) writes that a ‘life-testimony’ is not simply a testimony to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can, in the words of Kafka, penetrate us like an actual life (in Felman and Caruth, 14: 1995). The vicarious experience of another’s first-hand witness can provide a sense of intimacy and connection, the hope that in the reflection of the lives of others we may learn something useful about our own. Gerrig (1998) conceives of this process in temporal and spatial terms, as ‘transportation’ through the medium of the text, during which the traveller, going some distance from his or her world of origin, makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible, and returns to the world of origin somewhat changed by the journey (11: 1998). These accounts have their own fate, as Sontag points out, because they are disseminated, transcribed, misremembered, translated. The solitary activity of writing ‘...has a destination that is necessarily public, communal’ (229: 2007).

Trauma can have ‘endless impact’, in the words of Herman (6: 1992), overwhelming the sufferer because the event is ‘experienced too soon and too unexpectedly to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor’ (4: 1992). Often the story that follows traumatic events is the narrative of a belated experience, a tale of personal and historical significance that can be at odds with the narratives of others. Witnesses of trauma are often described as being in shock, rendered silent by an experience beyond the capacity of words to describe it (Sontag, 25: 2003). It is overwhelming; it resists articulation - partly because it defies language, partly because the individual fears evoking it again, and partly because there may be no available or empathic listeners. It is a struggle for meaning and representation. On the paradox of language, Gobodo-Madikizela sums up:

Language communicates. At the same time, it distances us from the traumatic event

as it was experienced, limiting our participation in the act of remembering. We cannot fully understand what victims went through, in part because the impact of the traumatic event cannot be adequately captured in words (85: 2003).

It is difficult to find words that convey fully and persuasively what we have experienced. Experiences become unspeakable – that is, outside the range of ordinary language to convey adequately the trauma and its effects – when they take place outside the realm of socially validated reality. Those who attempt to describe the atrocities that they have witnessed also risk their own credibility. To speak publicly about one's knowledge of atrocities is to invite the stigma that attaches to victims. Herman writes that survivors who are already devalued – such as women or young people, for example, who occupy a relatively powerless position in the socio-political hierarchy – may find that their testimony is rejected, and that they themselves are discredited or made invisible (8: 1992). This lack of voice increases the isolating function of trauma and further reinforces its status as not-real, thereby marginalising individuals and groups, who may in turn internalise unhelpful over-arching narratives.

To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires that the survivor be supported, and 'a common alliance' exists between survivor and witness (9: 1992). Rosenblatt (in Sumara) uses a reader-response theory that grows out of constructivist theories of cognition, suggesting that it is the relationship between reader and text that structures the production of meaning, and that this interaction is 'a site for the production of knowledge', not just its interpretation. '[R]eaders and texts and contexts of reading collaborate in the continued inventing and interpreting of knowledge' (ibid).

Here readers are not spectators; rather, they have the option of real engagement, either emotional or physical, as participants and commentators, in the dialogue that follows. This can, of course, give rise to conflict (something that is demonstrated daily in the comment threads on blogs), and is a sign of the authentic engagement that happens when, as Bayard puts it, '...we've come looking for the flesh and blood, the lived life, of other people' (2008), and found aspects of ourselves.

The role of the reader can therefore be fraught when we must interrogate the traumatic language and scene that Herman claims both defies and demands witnessing. The reader, being led

over a gap by the writer who, as Sontag argues, ‘makes something go where it was not’, is faced with a moral challenge (214: 2007). From those who bear witness, the survivor seeks not absolution but fairness, compassion, and the willingness to share the guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity. This recognition requires what Lederach calls ‘moral imagination’, the stepping into story that acknowledges past events in order to envision alternative possibilities in new and more helpful narratives. This ‘restorying’ – what White (1995), Brown and Augusta-Scott term ‘re-authoring’ - is the link between memory and the future. Lederach and Maiese (2005) argue that moral imagination does not see the past as something to be overcome, laid aside, or forgotten in order to move toward a better future. Instead,

the narratives that give meaning to people’s lives and relationships must be told and the repetitive patterns acknowledged so that healing can take place. People must attempt to discover where they’ve been, who they are, where they are going, and how they will make this journey together (148).

Trauma work thus demands the transformation of society, the mending of relationships and the changing of social conditions. Any recovery attempt, therefore, must deal with the impact of the conflict, particularly on marginalised groups (the voiceless), and create a more constructive narrative. This can be perceived as threatening by in-groups, as we see demonstrated particularly by state responses in the Arab blogosphere, as will be elaborated. Brown and Augusta-Scott (2007) write:

What we take for granted to be true, reasonable and normative are in fact social constructions that emerge within social and historical contexts and cannot be separated from human meaning-making processes (xv).

Hamber writes that ‘All the things we uncritically accepted during the conflict as “the law”, as “morally right”, as “our way of doing things”, or being “beyond negotiation”, may need to be revisited’ (2004), and recognising the presence of the voiceless is part of that process. Herman

comments that 'The traumatic event challenges an ordinary person to become a theologian, a philosopher and a jurist' (178).

The act of listening can be traumatic in itself: the 'witness of the crying voice' (Laub 2003) must step into the story and experiences its events vicariously. They must also be prepared to interrogate their own belief systems and sense of guilt and responsibility. Herman writes:

When the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides (7: 1992).

This choice has been foisted both on the bloggers and their readers: 'The victim...asks the bystander to share the burden of pain' (ibid). Of this reconstruction and assimilation of narrative, Lifton says (in Caruth 1995), [A]s one forms that imagery, one is forming a narrative about their story. And the narrative involves elements of their pain, the causation of their conflicts, and also the source of their knowledge, the nature of their experience (143). This is vital for both a coherent and integrated narrative and for the humanising effect central to empathic response. He explains

It's being a survivor by proxy, and the proxy's important. You're not doing what they did, you're not exposed to what they were exposed to, but you must take your mind through, take your feelings through what they went through, and allow that in. It's hard, it's painful, and yet you know you must do it as you come into contact with it& (145)

The reader is thus actively engaged in the meaning-making process, co-constructing an alternative narrative with the writer, enabling the rewriting of a preferred or more helpful narrative. A whole representation may be assembled from the fragmented components of the survivor's imagery and sensation, and an organised, detailed account becomes possible.

There may be gaps in representation – quite literally, the intervals between blog posts – which are in themselves indicative of trauma. That disruption, the inability to post daily updates on

a war situation amplifies the silence that can accompany the attempt to assimilate a chaotic situation. In the absence of description, or tellingly, of the blogs themselves during a particularly busy or fraught period for the blogger, gaps in understanding (Iser 1978) occur. These must be filled in by the reader. The process of making meaning is thus dialectical, reflexive and co-constructed, as the trauma is reconstructed through the recitation of the events as well as their emotional content or significance. It is this feature that is so significant for recovery: it is only on reflection that the speaker can assign meaning to the trauma story. As we have seen, trauma, in its refusal to be located in a single time and space, necessarily requires a more belated understanding, for both its first-hand and second-hand witnesses.

Finally, the narratives are not finite, inflexible or absolute: often bloggers may feel that they have not resolved the issues attendant upon the traumatic events. Celan in Felman (1995) likens this kind of 'precocious testimony' to the stammering of someone who is putting the unspeakable events of traumatic memory into words.

It is the act of reaching out and engaging with empathic listeners that is significant for post-traumatic recovery. The implication of listening to the address of another, hearing and receiving it across cultures and kinds of trauma, is an encounter with the real (Lacan in Caruth, 105: 1996), and involves the inevitability of responding. Lederach terms this the moral imagination required to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships, one that includes even our enemies, if we want alternative narratives to be heard (2005). Sontag (213: 2007) argues that writers

evoke our common humanity in narratives with which we can identify, even though their lives may be remote from our own. They stimulate our imagination. The stories they tell enlarge and complicate – and therefore, improve – our sympathies. They educate our capacity for moral judgment.

On the specific activity of diary-keeping, Patterson (1999) comments that

the soul and the humanity couched in the diary, the collapse and the recovery of a life reflected in it, can penetrate even the veils of a translation - if we do not decide

beforehand that the diaries are free-floating signs or mere bodies of evidence and the diarists nothing more than reporters. Made into mere reports, the dairies [sic] are reduced to the status of being there ; understood as human voices, they take on a capacity for calling forth, for calling me forth and announcing my responsibility.

There is thus an ethical imperative to continue to bear witness: once 'awakened' to the significance of the events, a person communicates this awakening to others. Testimonies can circulate beyond the confines of the immediate and intimate, and into realms that lie beyond individual control.

Reparation occurs both in the narration of the traumatic events, and in the generation of the capacity for building new social structures. The Internet, as will be discussed, provides a unique and appropriate platform for this regeneration.

Voice and marginalisation

Voice is empowerment. The idea of being heard and recognised or affirmed is connected on an individual level to our desire for validation, and on a broader social level to our sense of justice.

Ross (2002), following Malkki, defines 'voice' as 'the ability to establish narrative authority over one's circumstances and future, and also, the ability to claim an audience' – that is, to have agency in our own narratives, and a forum in which to share them meaningfully with others. Lederach and Maiese (2005) define voice as the ability to engage in meaningful conversation, to make a difference through what one says, and to have a say in key decisions. These inclusive conversations, grounded in mutuality, understanding and accessibility (1) are preconditions for participation in the public sphere.

This capacity to have a say may amount to having a seat at the negotiating table (or being adequately represented by someone who does), an opportunity to hold office, a chance to vote, or an opportunity to provide input into important decisions. At the local level, gaining a voice may mean serving as a representative on planning boards and committees within one's community.

Communication by marginalised groups – those who argue for an alternative version of the truth to the official narrative – necessarily involves public recognition. This relationship of the vernacular to authority, as Rothberg, Poster, Lynch and others point out, is both complex and ambivalent, particularly in the wake of conflict. Hamber (2004) writes that political violence is laden with social meaning. It tells victims how others value (or devalue) them as human beings and it communicates to them their place in society.

Political violence is unique in so far as it not only targets individuals, but...impacts on whole communities and often society at large. In addition to inflicting psychological and physical harm, political violence often aims to undermine the social relationships between individuals, as well as between individuals and society at large.

Engagement with history and memory can be both painful and destabilising. Rothberg follows O'Donnell and Davis when he writes that this kind of intertextuality is the simultaneous repression and remembering of the past (xiv: 1989). Geertz, in Brown and Augusta-Scott (2007), calls for the presence of 'thick' or detailed description in narrative. This idiosyncratic style is more conducive to alternative stories than the 'thin' descriptions that characterise potentially oppressive master narratives. 'Not only are subjugated knowledges resurrected through the articulation and thickening of alternative stories, dominant culture stories are challenged' (xii), and this causes a reassessment of beliefs held to be true prior to the traumatic events and renders the presence of the past tenuous and vulnerable. Said (1999) called this

[the] lifelong struggle and attempt to demystify the capriciousness and hypocrisy of a power whose authority depend[s] absolutely on its ideological self-image as a moral agent, acting in good faith and with unimpeachable intentions (in Parry 2003).

As we have seen, state control by an in-group elite can undermine the individual capacity for influence. In conflict situations, in-groups can marginalise out-groups to the extent that the latter are excluded from opportunities to participate in political processes. Hamber (2004) writes that

virtually any group might be made marginal: this can be externally imposed (economically or politically), or actively chosen, as we have seen. This identity creation and maintenance occurs at a state or community level, but depends for its existence on the beliefs of ordinary people. The internalisation of the values of war and violence is not surprising,

given the demands of growing up and living in a violently divided society. It is commonplace to see those in conflict creating rigid boundaries, whether physical or psychological, between themselves and those perceived as 'the other' (ibid).

Groups in conflict have a tendency to externalise, project and displace certain unwanted elements onto 'the other', while maintaining unambiguous psychological borders between themselves and other groups (Hamber, following Volkan, 2002). Those seen as 'other' are continually devalued and viewed as less human than in-groups, and their narratives can go unheard in the presence of a dominating master narrative that sustains the status quo. This inability on the part of marginalised groups to participate in significant political dialogue or have decision-making power constitutes silence, or the lack of voice. Falconer (25: 2007) writes that when a socially significant event such as death is made 'banal, anonymous and public', when individuals become 'specimens', there are implications for us all in a debilitating shift towards indifference. Abandoning the idea that the other's life has a meaningful shape is also to lose oneself (ibid).

The implications of this exclusion are dissatisfaction and public mistrust, and illegitimate power structures that could invite resistance in all its forms. Hamber (2004), Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (2007) and others argue that the denial of another's humanity is one of the most severe consequences of conflict, legitimising and entrenching violence and further marginalising out-groups. Of the tendency of Western commentators to regard Arab-Israeli conflict as inevitable, King (2006) observes that it is not the presence of diversity that results in political tensions:

Rather, it is how various communities are related to one another politically and economically, how they are encapsulated and incorporated into larger political and economic relationships, and whether those relationships are respectful of

individual and collective dignity or not, that leads to conflict. Listening to the voices, experiences, and views of people in such diverse settings is crucial for debunking currently popular theories claiming that clashes of civilizations are inevitable, and for countering those who speak cavalierly of an Arab-Islamic exceptionalism that inevitably derails democratic systems of governance.

These democratic systems of governance are supported by public participation. Lederach and Maiese write that ideally, all constituency groups (the powerful and traditionally disempowered, the politically active constituents and the bystanders) should be represented in the public sphere, through conferences, civil society assemblies and referendums (9: 2005).

The Internet, as will be discussed, is one such communication mechanism that can be used to foster dialogue in a forum that facilitates open speech and attentive listening. This manifestation of voice in the form of dialogue seeks to produce recognition of the opponents' legitimate interests, respect for their beliefs and experiences, and increase the understanding of both sides' underlying beliefs and values (14). Blogs particularly can be read as exchanges of voice. They are intertextual, shaped by other texts both in the sequence of posting by the blogger and in the responses by the readers. Aspects of the texts are borrowed or transformed as they reference one another in the 're-authoring' of life-stories. While it is difficult for an observer to see more than a few fragments of the picture at one time, to retain all the pieces, and to fit them together, the comment threads allow readers to participate actively by asking questions, clarifying the writer's ideas, or arguing for their own viewpoint. This double witnessing, through the presence of both a narrator and a reader, facilitates the translation of traumatic memory into narrative memory, and its integration back into an ordinary life-story for the writer, and allows meaningful engagement with others in the public sphere. The outcomes of this kind of transformative practice are recognition and empowerment.

Social death and structural forgetfulness

To discuss trauma leads to the consideration of mourning and commemoration practices. Trauma deals with a persistent present, the past reiterated; mourning deals with a persistent loss; and both deal with the struggle for identity and representation (Suárez-Potts, 2002).

As we have seen, the appointment to bear witness is, paradoxically, an appointment to transgress the confines of the isolated, traumatic stance, to speak for others and to others (Felman in Caruth, 15: 1995). In addition to the levels of witnessing described by Laub, we see this in the four modes of rhetorical witnessing at work in testimonial speech contexts (Hesford, 2004), where the survivor is witness to their own narrative, ‘a retrospective testimonial act’; the rhetorical viewer or listener witnesses or hears the testimony of another in ‘a rhetorical space of intersubjectivity’; the cultural, national, and transnational circulation, reception and appropriation of testimonials by individuals, groups and institutions, including governments, human rights organisations, courts, tribunals, scholars, teachers and activists occurs; and the methodological and ethical challenges posed by testimonials for all the groups mentioned above, namely the crisis of reference and the crisis of witnessing (ibid).

Responses to trauma and attitudes to conflict and commemoration are necessarily formed in relation to both personal experience and pre-existing narratives of family, nation and culture. Sadebeck writes that communities fix and conserve their collective memory through different practices, museums, contracts, cemeteries, special memorial days and history books – what Nora (in Sadebeck) terms ‘places of memory’ (*lieux de memoire*). These necessarily take place in a communal forum, and are both ‘...events found on the real-time calendar, and...mental spaces existing within the consciousness of people who remember, expressed in dialogue, dress and behavior’ (ibid). According to Morgan (2003), memory work might be defined as the deliberate setting up of a safe space in which to contain the telling of a life-story. This space might be a room, the shade under a tree, a drawing or a map, or a memory box, basket or book.

On the healing effects of this transformation, Morgan comments that, ‘...[P]ast, present and future, some would even say living and dying, life and death - are continuous. In a real tick-tock sense, the one follows and flows into the other. This is the space into which memory works’ (ibid). The externalising conversation occurs where people experiencing trauma are guided through drawing exercises and autobiographical storytelling ‘...designed to help them with mastery over specific problems or challenges in their lives’ (Morgan 2003). The Ugandan group NACWOLA (The National Association of Women Living with HIV and AIDS), refers to the commemoration practice of memory books as ‘...a communication tool, providing key messages...to assist in the

process of identity formation , allowing the writers to express anxieties in order to ...have these issues out in the open, rather than as repressed fears and/or as taboo topics (ibid). As Morgan argues,

in therapeutic contexts, the scope of memory work is not necessarily restricted to the past[;] its purpose is often to deal with difficulties in the present, and its main orientation often tends towards planning and the future.

The survivor needs help from others in mourning the losses they have experienced of material resources, of security, of trust, of community and of identity. There is a further loss added to the many losses suffered by the survivors of trauma - normal mourning practices.

Mourning can function as part of the reconstruction and restitution that must follow trauma if healing is to take place, and it can be facilitated through narrative. Delbo writes (1990) that every moment is two moments: history and memory share events because they occupy the same time and space. Ricoeur's solution to this split is in the telling: historical time becomes human time interpersonal and public through the narrative mode. By authoring our own narratives of grief and commemoration, we can restore some control over our lives. And by voicing our own identities and engaging in dialogue in the public sphere, we can provide alternatives to the grand or received narrative of the status quo (Hayes, 1998). In doing so, we close the historical gap between institutional and social memory.

The importance of memory cannot be underestimated in the process of making the self: our identities depend on memory, being reinforced by behaviours, rituals and traditions, as Kavanaugh notes (in Mack, 2003):

We literally *remember* ourselves in all our conscious acts...Every time we repeat an action or bring something to mind (however small) we are underlining, reinforcing and buttressing the subjective sense of self.

Unresolved traumatic events, by making past events too painful or disturbing to recall, can disrupt

memory and therefore the sense of self. Herman writes that 'Trauma losses rupture the ordinary sequence of generations and defy the ordinary social conventions of bereavement' (188: 1992). The telling of the trauma story thus inevitably plunges the survivor into profound grief.

Public mourning, like individual narrative, is twofold, resting on both recognition (acknowledgement) and restitution (action). Since so many of the losses are invisible or unrecognised, the customary rituals of mourning may provide little consolation (Raphael in Herman, 188: 1992). Some survivors feel unable to mourn, seeing it as humiliating rather than as an act of courage, but as long as they are frozen in their inability to feel the full range of emotions - including grief - they are not fully recovered.

This wordlessness is one response to 'unspeakable' trauma, according to Delbo (1990). The events may be imperfectly rendered to the hearer when there is the difficulty of explaining an experience to an audience who have nothing with which to compare it. Similarly, cultural outpourings of grief are often a kind of wordless keening in response to being overwhelmed. Portelli (1999) points out that, while a lament is initially wordless, it is usually shaped by rhythm and sound and continues until it is transformed into song or poetry, and thereby integrated into an individual and communal narrative, having achieved harmony or resolution. Frankl's logotherapy, as well as White's narrative therapy, move similarly from wordlessness to narrative, when healing is made possible only after what many survivors consider the double loss of a loved one - their physical presence and their constant memory - in the ambiguity of mourning and moving on.

Collectively, shared memory means coherent communities. As we have seen, broader social meaning depends on personal experience being voiced in a collective chronicle. Apfelbaum (2002) writes that

public recognition of the facts legitimises the social existence of the victims...
[providing] the historical framework within which the victims feel...entitled to
speak and to make their story heard. In other words, public accounts legitimize
private personal experiences (13).

Mack (20: 2003) goes further, writing that the manufacture of narratives is necessary for societies to

think of themselves as cohesive groups:

The...aims of modern multi-culturalism are confronted by divergent, potentially fracturing, assertions of separate memory until common cause produces common remembrance. Wars, and the commemoration of those who fell in them, are amongst the most dramatic contributors to sustained common cause.

As Khalili and other writers argue, commemoration relies on story - a meaningful sequence of narration, the collation of events regarded as 'the truth', and their organisation in the social and political present, according to the relations between the teller of the story and the audience.

Keren (2005) points out that, although trauma is often recounted in institutionalised form in order to feed the urge not to be forgotten, individual and group experiences undergo a negative transformation into social memory, ...an artificial recollection of some experiences by some groups, institutions, or individuals in society organized according to recognizable scripts and having a moral dimension. The discrepancy between the experience and its representation is clear when we consider that the impossibility of capturing in one image the ongoing narrative of trauma.

This transformation from individual sorrow to public mourning is stimulated by psychological and organisational reasons:

the obligation to fallen comrades, the need to make sense of a traumatic experience, the willingness to revive the excitements of one's youth, the usefulness of public exposure to securing pension and health benefits, the sense of owning a unique heritage that ought to be shared with the next generations...(ibid)

Memory thus identifies groups and unifies communities, but is also a contentious space between various 'agents of memory'. Commemoration is necessarily public, but raises issues of responsibility and legitimacy. Rahami (2003) comments that ritualised actions, such as rites of commemoration or funeral ceremonies, have traditionally represented death by co-ordinating

emotions, shaping public sentiment, and sustaining stable attitudes towards individual deaths.

Bhabha (1994) writes that ‘...there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative’. Portelli (1999) and Doss (1999; 2002) argue that this ‘social death’ - the public memory thereof - falls under the sway of religion, on the one hand, and the military on the other hand, ‘the institutions in charge of death’, and, while theorists agree that there needs to be a public and appropriate acknowledgement of the trauma of loss, transactional difficulties arise when there is tension between public (institutional) and private (personal) memory, or when alternative narratives are resistant to being assimilated into the prevailing master narrative or status quo. Falling outside the bounds of the master narrative, in a context where their voices are silenced, survivors can be marginalised. There can exist, even after collective trauma, difficulty in agreeing to the simple facts of trauma, as Portelli (1999) writes:

There is a space, between the historical and judicial record, and, of course, between the accurate memory of a number of first-hand witnesses, including the survivors, the families and the relatives of the victims, on the one hand, and the distorted, exaggerated, mythicised [sic], common sense memory. There lies, in this space, all the complexity, I think, of national identity... of the politics of memory, of the interplay of institutional and personal memories.

Feldman (2004) argues that memory can function as both an enabling and repressive cultural practice, critically regarding employment as biographical narrative processed through prescriptive expectations, where it is ...expected to produce healing, trauma alleviation, justice, and collective catharsis . This is often imposed externally, via an institutionalised structure for recounting and redress. This linear structure is intended to be a cathartic break with the past events, usually through state-sanctioned commemorative acts, and based on a three-step (syllogistic) structure, focused on the eventual curative aspect of narrative: firstly, the identification of a pathogenic situation, ...chronic violence, racial, gender, ethnic, or sexual inequity and oppression ; secondly, an inventory of the traumatic situation, usually in the form of critical life incidents; and lastly, a set of prescriptions to effect redress, cure and historical completion. This structure relies on the narrative

being recited in a public forum.

There is immediate conflict between the institution or monument and personal memory. Some traumatic events resist either recitation or compartmentalisation into the discrete mourning time periods allocated by the public sphere. Portelli (1999) distinguishes between ‘...putting someone under the earth and really burying them, having a ceremony where their death is recognised and somehow passes into value...acquires a meaning.’ Some members of the traumatised community – particularly surviving relatives – comprehend that there are circumstances that remain irreconcilable with the present.

The appropriation of these experiences into a single moral script, mythology or master narrative thus necessarily disempowers the original narrators by distorting the events. This control over the mediation of narrative freezes the experience in a single set of images, devoid of the social context necessary for empathic engagement, but vital to the concept of collective memory. This ‘structural forgetfulness’ (Feldman, 2004) can be read as the deliberate erasure of narratives that complicate or contradict the larger narrative of the state.

Fragmented or elided memory means that communities can struggle with functioning and social cohesion in the face of institutional memory, which facilitates cultural transmission and depends on repetition for its constancy. Mack (33: 2003) writes that the recognition of constancy is vital to the perpetuation of the status quo - whether the master narrative is illusory or accurate. As Portelli (1999) and Keren (2005) discuss, public archiving by the state can freeze a traumatic historical event as a single, monolithic experience in the memory of the community, regardless of whether it is appropriate or factually incorrect. And, as Brown and Augusta-Scott argue, groups can internalise existing narratives whether they are beneficial to them or not. Feldman (2004) worries that institutionalised narrative conditions for recounting trauma (such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example) may in fact have the opposite effect to their original purpose:

Following a redressive and curative trajectory, human rights frameworks and quasi-medicalized tropes of trauma circulate and archive the experiences of terror and abuse as episodes scheduled for eventual overcoming through

redemptive survival, recovery, and restorative justice. Does this prescriptive plotting "archaicize" terror, creating museums of suffering?

Here Feldman regards the narrators as disempowered because they are forced into the position of spectating their own trauma, something that does not allow true integration into the life-narrative. The collation and archiving of accounts of terror and pain ...is inflected with a post[-]mortem aesthetic . This may be partly due to the fact that institutional memory, as Mack writes, is encoded symbolically or ceremonially:

Remembrance days, the creation of memorials, the wearing of signs of remembrance fabricate a common narrative of the past. Without the construction of some common remembrance, past events often have no clearly recognised closure (33: 2003).

For some survivors, closure and moving on is an undesirable outcome. Feldman uses Harvey's term - the pathologisation of social space - to demarcate the state-sanctioned socio-political arena that appears to mourn the losses of a disempowered group but instead freezes and attempts to pass over the events experienced by its members. Memorials, for example, by ostensibly providing closure and fixing the events in the past, can absolve the state from ongoing historical accountability by fixing the events in the past. Traditionally, memorials precede and ultimately become monuments. The time lapse defines a period of grieving (Mack 103: 2003) essential for the creation of the institutional meaning of death (as necessary, sacrificial and heroic) in what can be a morally ambiguous situation. The monument equates the end of grieving: moving moral ambiguity on towards resolution, it implies forgetting, leaving behind

the humiliation of ultimately irrelevant and futile demise in a situation of war, or the personal anxieties of intimate remembrance in the case of individual death.

Memory in these instances is the acknowledgement of achievement, a method by which the living make an accommodation to absence, and the dead are allowed to live on (ibid).

Some soldiers (transformed into veterans), for example, experience frustration at the neglect or distortion of their message, and this can lead to a loss of trust in public institutions and the cultural production of meaning - and a corresponding transfer of representational power to another medium. Keren (2005), examining the commemoration practices of the American military during the Iraq war, writes of veterans that:

feeling that time is running out, they fight a last battle over memory by placing their heritage in the hands of popular song-writers, charismatic storytellers, professional organizers of public events, creative museum designers, loyal academics and other agents expected to disseminate it in a public sphere considered more and more hostile.

We must therefore manufacture self- or community-administered opportunities for meaningful speech: structures sans mediation by another power, particularly that of the state, which can override alternative voices in the interests of expediency. The Internet provides one such opportunity, where enunciative agency (voice) and membership of a linguistic community essential to the reconstitution of a holistic identity are possible.

This occurs in two variations. One involves the websites explicitly dedicated to the memory of a person or group in an online graveyard . These include sites such as TheMemory and the process on MyDeathBook.com that can be triggered when someone dies in real time and their profile, along with a third-person account of their death, is migrated to a memorial site, commemorating them in their own words and contextualising the death itself. In response to criticisms of tastelessness, Markland (2006) comments that the site is

a great tribute to the dead - being able to see someone's MySpace page after reading a third person's account of how they died provides a bit more humanity and compassion than a dry obituary. And perhaps more importantly, the site allows us to identify better with the deceased and reminds us of the preciousness of life.

Karachi's Online Graveyard on <http://www.wadi-a-hussain.com> calls itself 'the first experience of a virtual graveyard in Muslim world'. The graves are searchable with different criteria, and the 'call service' offers various graveyard services. Funeral movie clips are available *in situ* (via streaming) or for download. Commentary tends to centre around sentiments like the following, expressed by Feham (2004):

I think it is a good step especially for those living abroad. But the virtual graveyard visiting can never replace the essence of actually visiting the graveyard for your loved ones and performing all those rituals. Our religion asks us to visit graveyards and offer prayers [sic], and there are certainly several spiritual benefits of it.

It is, however, the blogs that were not specifically dedicated as commemorative spaces that this research is concerned with – where the blogs themselves function as artefacts, not only archiving the relevant events but commemorating the 'small stories' of the lives of those who no longer have a voice in the public sphere. This act of witnessing, as both a commemorative ritual, as well as a reminder of the processes of and connection to life, is associated with a transformative dynamic. It is particularly in the blogosphere that traumatic memory of events can become narrative memory or story, and reconnect individuals with communities. Blogs have the additional advantage that they circumvent some of the limitations of, for example, life-sized body maps or large memory boxes that are static, unwieldy and not particularly private. The blogosphere is at once an intimate and public space for memory work, and it is here that the particular features of the medium support the re-authoring or reconstructing a life-story in the externalising discourse of narrative therapy, one that emphasises resilience and survival. As first-hand, contextualised, permanent and interactive accounts, blogs encourage the alliance formed by a sympathetic community of readers and commentators that can perform a quasi-therapeutic (although relatively unstructured) function. The self-administrative nature of the blog and direct contact with 'listening others' support the emancipatory potential of blog testimony, bypassing institutional mediators that might freeze the account in a repressive narrative. Seremetakis (1991), Herman (1992), Portelli (1999) and Feldman

(2004), among others, stress the importance of feedback and acceptance by the witnesses or audience of trauma narratives. This acknowledgement can authenticate or validate the experiences of the speaker and go some way towards allowing them to reconstruct or re-author a more helpful life-narrative. The 'delivery ritual' advocated by Agger and Jensen (in Herman, 182: 1992) provides a structure for active collaboration with the reader, who plays the role of witness and ally, while the writer tells the story in as much detail as they wish, to speak the unspeakable at their own pace and in their own time. Each new post provides order and sequence, and can be viewed as access to stream-of-consciousness in action: this navigability facilitates the interactivity necessary for acknowledgement and empowerment. Feldman writes:

Antiphonal witness and biography, the alternation between self and other, sound and silence, the person and the collective, the visible and the invisible, emerges in situations where authentication of self and discourse has been withheld and refused...

Antiphony is both jural and historicising in nature. Its dyadic structure - the alternating voices of soloist and chorus - also guarantees a built-in record-keeping function (ibid). The pluralism of worldview the polyphonic nature of the Web does not allow for structural forgetfulness: in cyberspace a memorial exists in its entirety, and in its original context. Blogs are constant memorials, both because of their potential global impact, and because they are permanently available in cyberspace. Their voices have spoken, and they cannot be unspoken.

As Keren (2005) and others point out, as a research tool, this medium allows for observation and reflection before mediation by institutions:

We are thus given the opportunity to have a rare glimpse at memory's ground zero, i.e. at the very moment in which consciousness turns into memory...[B]logs allow us to identify [pre-memorial templates] before the larger frames transforming individual perceptions into social memory are applied.

In following warblogs we are exposed to events occurring in time and rooted in reality that do not

conform to the master narrative. Because of the temporal and spatial nature of the Internet, which can preserve intimacy and reinforce social relationships, the act of writing is transformed into a kind of speech.

Sadebeck argues that immediacy, accessibility and expression of emotion online may be similar to face-to-face communication, but is not exactly the same. The online disinhibition effect is one such example that distinguishes the modes of communication. As a new medium, the Internet ...facilitates the expression of emotions through on-site memorialization through participation in grief works support groups (ibid). New cultures of mourning, memorialisation and affiliation are thus made possible. As Tapuz, an Israeli site (in Sadebeck) states:

People often want to share, release feelings, let it all out, tell stories, be comforted, embrace and be embraced in return. This is the place. You already know me, I am one of you, member of the huge clan of all those who have lost someone near and dear to our hearts...I am here for you exactly as you are here for me, to listen, to respond, and often just to be silent.

Along with these sites, there are active support communities for the bereaved and those in mourning, an example of both narrative transformation and social activism in practice. Through these processes, the individual can be reintegrated into a community - although this may be a different community to their local one, as will be examined below. Individual recognition and communal validation of marginalised narratives thus become part of a necessary truth-telling process that can challenge the existing master narrative and co-construct alternative stories that acknowledge and move beyond mourning, towards reintegration into public life. As Morgan correctly identifies, the process is transformative and revolutionary. He goes on to argue that every one of us '...is both living and dying at the same time. Memory work is for everyone' (ibid).

Survivor missions and digital communities

The creation and maintenance of community has always been negotiated. As Poster (1995) argues, in earlier types of community such as the village, kinship and residence were salient factors of

determination: but identification of an individual or family with a specific group was never automatic, natural or given. Poster cites Fraser, who emphasises the multiple, dispersed and fragmentary nature of our existences, ...which nonetheless only make sense by existing in common... (x1). To a certain extent, all communities are imagined ones, which has implications for the formation of digital communities.

The Internet provides an alternative forum for civil participation and engagement. The 'public' operating here is distinct from community or even civil society in general. 'Publics connect people who are not in the same families, communities, and clubs; people who are not the same as each other' (Haugbolle, 2006, following Habermas 1991, and Ó Baoill 2000). What they share is a commitment to similar belief structures. They are self-elected and affiliative, and central to the functioning of modern societies, where digital publics particularly are created.

As many writers and critics argue, meaningful participation in an ideal public sphere (a forum) depends on communicative freedom (having a voice) and an equality of status not generally apparent in ordinary interaction (speakers and audiences may exchange roles in their responses to each other). Most importantly for post-traumatic narratives, '...the exchange is guided by an expectation shared by all parties that interlocutors interpret the arguments of speakers solely with a view to establishing the truth' (Haugbolle, 2006).

This search for individual truth can force a reassessment of identity for both writers and readers and, as a result, entire communities. Erikson (in Caruth 1995) writes that the impact of the changes wrought by trauma is threefold: in the sense of self; in the relation to others; and in worldview (194). The experience of trauma, at its worst, can mean not only a loss of confidence in the self, but a loss of belief in the social structures of family, community, government and spirituality. This is the communal dimension of trauma: it is characterised by isolation and disruption, and what Herman calls ...a drifting away from the ordinary processes of life (198).

However, this drifting away, because it is accompanied by enforced reflection and reassessment, can also become the means for the reconstruction and restoration of communality:

Persons who survive severe disasters & often come to feel estranged from the rest of humanity and gather into groups with others of like mind. They are not drawn

together by feelings of affection& but by a shared set of perspectives and rhythms and moods that derive from the sense of being set apart (ibid).

If, as Erikson writes: It is the *community* that offers a cushion for pain, the *community* that offers a context for intimacy, the *community* that serves as the repository for binding traditions [original emphasis] (188), then there are implications for digital communities, where new relationships may also be formed that are governed by affiliation, elective groups which are created from a set of shared beliefs, and where the narrator may find new allies in readers who collude with them to bear witness to their trauma.

Some of these survivors recognise a political or religious dimension in their misfortune and discover that they can transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the basis for social action: this is the recovery aspect of the katabatic journey. While there is no way to compensate for an atrocity, there is a way to transcend it, by making it a gift to others. The trauma is redeemed only when it becomes the source of a survivor mission (Herman, 207: 1992). One of the reasons survivors speak about the unspeakable in public is the conviction that their experience will be of some use to others. In providing this service, they feel connected to a power larger than themselves. Thus, psychological insight cannot be separated from political insight and action. Here Herman refers to domestic abuse, but the idea applies equally to the context of war survivors:

We do know that the women who recover most successfully are those who discover some meaning in their experience that transcends the limits of personal tragedy. Most commonly women find this meaning by joining with others in social action. And this means concrete things. It means hearing other people's stories, it means mentoring in the context of a tragedy, but also joining organizations that change the laws about what the criminal justice system says is a violation of human rights (ibid).

This kind of activism - testifying before the legislature, public education campaigns, demonstrations – can go some way towards providing the awareness and social cohesion that mean that democracy

is more likely to be upheld.

The Lebanese bloggers are survivors in the sense that they witnessed the very real destruction of the physical infrastructure of their cities and villages, including the bombing of community centres, schools and hospitals, as well as the injuries to and deaths of loved ones and acquaintances. Complete social and political disempowerment necessarily follows. As trauma writers point out, overwhelming helplessness is a common response to witnessing traumatic events. In contrast, social action offers survivors a source of power that draws upon their own initiative, energy and resourcefulness - but that also magnifies these qualities far beyond the capacities of an individual. Herman argues that

it offers her an alliance with others based on co-operation and shared purpose.

Participation in organized, demanding social efforts calls upon the survivor's most mature and adaptive coping strategies of patience, altruism, and humor. It brings out the best in her; in return, the survivor gains the sense of connection with the best in other people (208: 1992).

This sense of reciprocal connection can enable the survivor to transcend the trauma by transforming it into a more useful story.

Social action is manifest in many forms, from intellectual debate to physical activism in the form of marches and demonstrations. These usually centre around educational, legal and political efforts directed towards the prevention of similar future atrocities, or on attempts to bring offenders to justice. What these efforts share and what makes the Internet a particularly useful platform for the sharing of information and resources is their reliance on raising public awareness. Public truth-telling is the common denominator of all social action (Herman, 208: 1992). This empathic engagement with others illustrates the restorative power of a shared narrative connection, and the possibility of repairing the bond broken by the traumatic events.

Logotherapy and narrative therapy

Herman (1992) writes that the fundamental stages of recovery are establishing safety, reconstructing

the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community. That community may be the literal, local community – family, friends, acquaintances – as well as the wider international digital community.

While theorists differ on the number of stages observable during the recovery process, most agree that it is the reconstruction of the trauma story that allows the transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory. Diaries or journals can often serve as a form of self-administered therapy, ...allowing one to work through the issues in one's life day by day, [playing] a significant role in identity formation (Ewins, 2005). Integration is thus observable in the gradual shift from unpredictable danger to reliable safety, from dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory, and from stigmatised isolation to restored social connection (155: 1992). While the distinctions are blurred in a therapeutic context, they are useful here to delineate aspects of the recovery process.

Healing does not imply closure or an end to all pain and suffering (Frankl, 1946; Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, 2007), 'but rather facing and working through trauma, so that the tragic loss caused by trauma is balanced by a gain in meaning' – in other words, the ability to discern *telos*, a meaningful pattern at work in the universe. True recovery, according to Brison (1999), includes control over the traumatic memories themselves, over intrusive PTSD symptoms and, to a certain extent, over one's present environment: in other words, the construction of a cohesive and coherent narrative or plot, a notion that brings us back to the work of Locke, Fisher and Ricoeur. As Herman and others note, the full range of therapeutic interventions after both structural and historical trauma include the biological (medication), cognitive and behavioural (education on traumatic syndromes, journal-keeping, and homework tasks), interpersonal (building a therapeutic alliance), and social (family support) (169: 1992).

The basic premise of the psychotherapeutic value of narrative is a belief in the restorative power of truth-telling, and the reflection on the necessarily complex concept of truth, manifest in its different kinds: personal truth, social truth, historical truth, and political truth (Hayes, 1998). It is in this telling that the trauma story becomes a testimony. Lifton (in Caruth 1995) terms this witnessing a perverse quest for meaning (138), a means of transforming pain and guilt into responsibility. This responsibility has both individual and social therapeutic value, corresponding with Lederach's idea of the moral imperative to engage with the truths of others. The transformation of isolation into

human relatedness occurs through communication. This co-construction of meaning has implications beyond the individual for peace-building and the public sphere: it enables the ultimate setting up of Ricoeur's just institutions .

By therapeutic , we mean that the recovery of the individual is possible after trauma, through the reintegration of the shattered self. Lifton says in an interview:

One has had this experience, it has been overwhelming, the self has been shattered in some degree; the only way one can feel right or justified in reconstituting oneself and going on living with some vitality is to carry through one's responsibility to the dead. And it's carrying through that responsibility via one's witness, that survivor mission, that enables one to be an integrated human being once more (ibid).

This can necessitate a search for meaning, ...and the rewriting of one's life-narrative to incorporate the catastrophe (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, viii: 2007). In other words, this is a means of re-imagining trauma, of reflection, understanding and perception, until a new narrative, with restored agency, is possible. It renders the traumatic events bearable, so that the trauma can ultimately reside as one narrative event among others in the causal chain, rather than as the central and defining event of individual or community life.

This re-orientation towards meaning is at the heart of Frankl's philosophy that life is potentially meaningful under any conditions despite pain, guilt and death, the tragic triad of the human condition (137: 1984). Frankl's logotherapy narrative-centred psychotherapy derived in response to his own internment at four Nazi camps during the Second World War, emphasises meaning-centredness. It is this approach that informs the bulk of the research presented here.

Frankl describes the effects of trauma on ordinary structures, writing that survivors may suffer ...a peculiar sort of deformed time - inner time (70: 1946). During the traumatic events themselves, the victim experiences ...a provisional existence of unknown limit (ibid), one without a goal - and therefore without a future:

A man who could not see the end of his provisional existence was not able to aim

at an ultimate goal in life. He ceased living for the future, in contrast to a man in normal life. Therefore the whole structure of his inner life changed; signs of decay set in (70: 1946).

Frankl concludes that meaning is found in the act of creation, whether it is work or love, and in the act of turning our personal tragedies into triumphs. He emphasises the example of others who have found meaning to be a stimulus, making the case for a tragic optimism :

an optimism in the face of tragedy and in view of the human potential which at its best allows for: (1) turning suffering into a human achievement and accomplishment; (2) deriving from guilt the opportunity to change oneself for the better; and (3) deriving from life's transitoriness an incentive to take responsibility (ibid).

Life events are thus significant in the importance we attach to them. Logotherapy focuses on life's transitoriness – the opposite of the deformed time of traumatic memory – to encourage activity and agency. Survivors of trauma who participate in logotherapy must confront the responsibility inherent in being human, and understand that our lives are finite and our narratives controllable.

Similarly, White's conception of narrative therapy, situated within a reflexive post-modern narrative framework, rests on the idea that meaning is both socially created and reinforced through the stories that we tell. These stories are necessarily multiple, complex and overlapping – in other words, polyphonic. They give meaning to events and make sense of experience: as Frankl, Ricoeur, Herman and Mack point out, they have an organising function. To this end, the Aristotelian notion of narrative structure is used, with its beginning, middle and end, and its focus on cohesion and coherence.

Because these stories are constructed, they can be deconstructed and examined, and more helpful narratives can be rewritten (re-authored). As Brown and Augusta-Scott write (ix: 2007),

Stories must not only be told and retold, but reconstructed. They address the importance of giving voice to experiences of trauma, respect for the unknowable aspects of others' experiences, and the recognition that both memories and hope are situated in the present.

First-voice , or first-person-narrated and experiential stories are privileged as expert or authoritative, what Hayes (1998) terms personal truth. Narrative therapy, as Brown and Augusta-Scott (after White) outline, works to

reduce guilt, shame and blaming; contextualizes the problem; achieves separation from the dominant story; fosters a working relationship to resolve the problem story; and reflects an empowerment focus shifting from inaction or being trapped by the story to active participation in re-authoring the story (xxxii).

Events may be examined, interpreted and linked and thus reconstructed. Emplotment the selection and combination of significant events in the narrative is central to recovery: as Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela conclude, we become the authors of our own lives, and our stories are autobiographies (2: 2007).

While no one is arguing that blogging can replace structured, formal, face-to-face therapy, the process does share some aspects of the steps to recovery, such as engagement, dialogue and negotiating alternative stories. The central motif is self-reflection, and a more informed look at previously held assumptions and worldviews in order to produce other possible narratives. In addition, the strong emphasis on community and commentary is compatible with the narrative therapy model.

If, as Brown and Augusta-Scott (xxii: 2007) write, people internalise dominant social discourses as their own, even when these stories contribute not to greater power and agency, but less, the re-authoring of stories has serious implications for oppressive social institutions, and for the devolution of power to previously marginalised groups. As will be discussed further, this makes the Internet an ideal platform for engagement in the public sphere.

Voice and the Holocaust diary

There is traditionally a phenomenological distinction between diaries in general and print journalism. Departing from factual reportage, the interior landscape of the diary ...reflects the variations of an exterior landscape (Girard in Patterson 1999), and provides a meaning a

detailed, specific and idiosyncratic worldview as distinct from the single, exclusionary and homogenous kind designated by the meaning itself (Barthes in Sontag, 67: 1982). If the creation not simply of a voice but of a world, Sontag argues, writing mimics the essential structures by which we experience ourselves as living in time, and inhabiting a world, and attempting to make sense of our experience (215: 2007). These processes are visibly at work in the blogosphere.

The diarist's impulse - which is also the blogger's - is an archival one, making no distinction between larger historical concerns and the minutiae of domestic life, occasionally responding to what Grundlingh (2002) calls 'the cautionary salvaging mode of memory' in the pursuit of perpetual self-correction (Sontag, 73: 1982). This impulse may arise spontaneously, but it is bound by the idea that the pages or the posts will, at some future point, be read. Edgarian and Jenks, among others, sum up the motivation to record our experiences and our reaction to them as a testament of survival:

We are headed somewhere definite, we have only so much time, and the record of our sayings and doings define us and, after we are gone, stand in our place. So we record the date, make a note, turn the page, and look ahead. Or, sometimes the view is double: forward and back.

These views are necessarily subjective: Patterson (1999), after Ricoeur, writes, experiences are refined and organised by witnesses according to their *Weltanschauungen* ('interpreting'). The 'script' of an ordinary story includes the four elements of context, fact, emotion and meaning: ordinary narratives develop, progressing in time, and reveal the storyteller's feelings and interpretation of events. Diaries, like blogs, are thus personal testimony and historical record: like photographs, they are '...both a faithful copy or transcription of an actual moment of reality and an interpretation of that reality', as Sontag (26: 2003) points out. The value of a diary is not in its originality; it is commentary and thus interrogation, reflection and the assignation of significance - which is one reason that keeping a journal or a blog is an intervention strategy used in face-to-face therapy.

Like other literary genres, the diary establishes a protagonist and a narrative point of view.

Unlike other literary genres, the significance of what the diarist or blogger records is definitively linked to its recording: diary entries are dated, and traditionally mark the end of a day in an exercise of closure. This is at odds with the recursive, repetitive, fragmented and incomplete nature of the trauma narrative, one which exists in the durational time of the eternal present tense. Diaries and posts can be seen as the attempt to recover meaning and time, if narrative can indeed organise coherence from chaos and provide some sense of control. Patterson (1999) writes:

Thus the word becomes a repository of time and experience; thus the word takes on meaning...The diary becomes a portal through which the diarist inserts himself into a life that is otherwise closed off to him by the horizon of time. It is a means of capturing a trace of presence by seeking a trace of significance in the midst of a time that is draining into the void. It is a means of returning the sand to the empty hourglass.

Herman writes that, in contrast with an ordinary life-story, the trauma story is 'pre-narrative': it is wordless and static, 'unspeakable' (175: 1992) because the experience cannot be integrated into any existing cognitive and emotional structures. The trauma is both in the encounter with death, and in the ongoing experience of having survived it. It is this incompatibility of the 'double telling' in the history of the two texts, and 'the inextricability of the story of one's life from the story of a death, an impossible and necessary double telling, that constitutes their historical witness' (8: 1996). People thus write about trauma, but also in the midst of it, exploring what Caruth, following Freud, terms the 'enigma of survival' (58: 1996). There is a sense of responsibility to document the incomprehensibility of both the past event and their continuing survival of it in the present.

The overwhelming nature of trauma requires the profound readjustment of accustomed patterns of literary communication (Foley in Patterson 1999) something the medium of the Internet has successfully negotiated, as will be shown. Blogs circumvent one issue of the transmission of traumatic narratives, about who has the authority to speak for a group, and in what context, a moral issue raised by the existence of what Patterson (1999) terms the Holocaust diary.

One of the distinctive features of the Holocaust diary that sets it apart from ordinary diary-

keeping is its consciousness of representation of, and responsibility to, a community. Patterson (1999) notes that ...the Holocaust diary harbors a consciousness of accountability that is explicit and pronounced, not merely implied, and that situates the diarist before his or her community . This consciousness is what imparts to the Holocaust diary a spirit of testimony - a movement through the word and toward another who is other than oneself (ibid).

While other diaries seek to record and preserve the experience of the world, the Holocaust diaries seeks to recover the world itself. While other diaries offer an account of life in the completed precipitate of each day , the Holocaust diary struggles to recover a life despite the day s destruction. While other diaries are projected toward a future that is yet to be realized, Holocaust diaries are written in the shadow of a doom that is certain to come - indeed, that is already at hand. While other diaries contain the individual s interrogation of himself in the pursuit of meaning, the Holocaust diary includes an interrogation of God and humanity after the loss of meaning. While other diaries are written for the diarist, the Holocaust diary is written for others, living, dead, and yet to be born.

The problem that Caruth outlines (9: 1995) is that the immediate impact of the traumatic event is incomprehensible '...in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time'. Laub in Caruth (68: 1995) argues that the trauma that attended the Holocaust precluded comprehension and assimilation: its 'radical *otherness*' to all known frames of reference

was beyond the limits of human ability (and willingness) to grasp, to transmit, or to imagine. There was therefore no concurrent 'knowing' or assimilation of the history of the occurrence. The event could thus unimpededly [sic] proceed *as though* there were no witnessing whatsoever, *no witnessing that could decisively impact on it* [original emphasis].

Thus, history was taking place with no witness. Laub writes that the debilitating issue was chronotropic: being inside the event that made unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist: 'The historical imperative to bear witness could essentially *not be met during the actual occurrence*' [original emphasis] (ibid). This struggle to recover a collapsed connection with life is one we associate with trauma texts, and one we see later at work in the rise of the warblog.

The reconstruction of the trauma story begins with some sense of context – the survivor's life before it was disrupted by the traumatic events. This can help re-create the flow of the life-narrative and restore a sense of continuity with the past, as Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela emphasise (2007), thus relegating the traumatic event to its place as one of a number of events in the survivor's life.

Syrkin (in Patterson 1999) notes that the diaries begin with *why* and end with *why* though the object of the query keeps changing. At the outset, the writer tries to find rational explanations. Syrkin concludes that the first stage in the education of the diarists is thus the recognition of the existence of motiveless evil, and the random nature of traumatic events. On the often confusing nature of human evil, Sontag (225: 2007) argues that:

because there are, incontestably, zones of experience that are not distressing, that give joy, it becomes, perennially, a *puzzle* that there is so much misery and wickedness. A great deal of narrative, and the speculation that tries to free itself from narrative and become purely abstract, inquires: Why does evil exist? Why do people betray and kill each other? Why do the innocent suffer? [original emphasis]

She concludes that the problem of this randomness can be rephrased:

Why is evil not *everywhere*? More precisely, why is it somewhere – *butnot* everywhere? And what are we to do when it doesn't befall us? When the pain that is endured is the pain of *others*? [original emphasis]

This reflective rephrasing can prompt a re-evaluation of the notions of guilt and responsibility – the

survivor may experience not only shattered assumptions about meaning, order and justice in the world, but also the renegotiation of belief systems and their reconstruction, in the presence of those who have not shared their experiences.

Herman writes that a reconstructive narrative that does not include traumatic imagery and bodily sensations is barren and incomplete (177: 1992). The use of thick personal description has a dual purpose in the symbolising process: it both enables the narrator to recall the trauma, and it provides the reader with a clear image of the event so that they can translate it into their own experience. It is this wealth of detail that enables emotional engagement. The aim is always to articulate the experience, to make the unspeakable present in the narrative course of an individual life story to the extent that it no longer occupies the status of defining event: 'The goal of recounting the trauma story is integration, not exorcism' (Herman, 181: 1992). The events do not go away because they have been successfully articulated: they do, however, undergo a transformation into narrative memory, and enable the individual to feel a sense of reconnection and common humanity with others. This transformation can be facilitated in the blogosphere.

Weblogs: 'A different space'

As Serfaty and others note, for all their apparent and sometimes actual novelty, online diaries and blogs are just the latest avatars in the long history of self-representational writing (1: 2004). Like the Puritan journals that recounted a spiritual journey towards personal salvation, and like the Holocaust diary that struggled to transform trauma into narrative, self-representational writing acts as an exercise in self-scrutiny and interpretation of everyday life events and experiences (Gusdorf in Serfaty, 5: 2004). Blogging is a similarly archival act. Like the diary, it acts as a record of the minutiae of daily life, and moves between living and writing, so that the two - action and reflection - are documented.

While the testimonial or confessional value is high for the individual writer, blogs also report real world events and allow instantaneous commentary and dialogue, which makes them an autonomous narrative genre. Warblogs utilise a distinct form of narrativity, taking full advantage of their digitality. For forming community, bloggers' use of hyperlinks - 'one-click access to the information upon which they are basing their opinion and analysis of a given issue' - has become

essential in the blogosphere (Lampa, 2004). He argues that bloggers have the ability to publicly debate issues by directly linking to one another's, posts as well as news articles that may serve as source material. Regular updating – daily or more often in a changing conflict situation - begins before the crisis is resolved, and the daily reports lack the completeness and retrospective perspective (and closure) of other types of narrative. The Internet as a medium therefore has the potential to close the 'historical gap' between the event in real time and its mediated reportage – although it should be noted that while blogs may close the historical gap in terms of instant access to first-hand accounts, they remain 'precocious testimony', part of the belated process of coming to terms with traumatic events. Until both the writer and the reader have reflected on the significance of the events they have witnessed, the trauma has not been assimilated.

Blogs share aspects of the Holocaust diary, most particularly in their attempted documentation and recovery of a lost world. As we have seen, writing can also be an act of resistance, one that maintains some semblance of the overwhelmed self. Significantly, and according to Feldman (2004), testimonies are social utterances which '...intervene in a present social context, rather than simple representations of a past event'. The social context in which the communication takes place is essential to the understanding of the significance of the utterance. The meaning that results from the interaction between individual and environment, and between witness and reader, is always co-constructed. Herman (180: 1992) outlines the personal and social dynamics of interaction:

[Survivors] need other people and they need to take action in affiliation with others...When we're isolated with this, we do give in to despair...We're dealing with very profound questions of human evil, human cruelty, human sadism. The abuse of power and authority. And the antidote to that is the solidarity of resistance.

Similarly, Snyman (42: 2002), on the letters written by the Boer women in British concentration camps during the South African War, writes that:

the letter acted, for both the writer and the reader, as an attempt at the reconstitution of their subjectivities in a different space. The letter became the antidote for the experience of displacement. On the one hand, this is the tragedy of these letters: the letter was the small residue of what remained possible for them, viz. that miniscule amount of freedom to talk about a world that was no more in a world in which they would never be at home. But on the other hand, this was also (unwittingly) the miracle of these letters: this recreation of the pre-war world in their thoughts kept this world, and therefore also their ties with this world, alive.

The blogs from Lebanon, as will be shown, performed a similar function for their writers, locating them firmly in a specific context, one in which they could continue to identify themselves and their communities. The loss of autonomy and agency associated with trauma can be remedied in part by both the control of our own narratives and the creation of digital communities that propagate them: the ability to connect with and influence others has the potential to restore the efficacy of free will and provide alternative narratives.

One aspect of interaction unique to the blogosphere is what Suler (2004) terms the online disinhibition effect - the idea that people are less reserved in cyberspace and experience a lessened sense of personal and social responsibility because of the correspondingly lowered chance of their ever having to face their intended audience in real time. Serfaty argues that the screen itself has a symbolic interactional function, "...connect[ing] writer and society while also keeping others at a distance and allowing for fantastic projections" (14: 2004), thus allowing what may be more meaningful co-construction of story with readers - an important process for the re-authoring of a post-traumatic narrative.

Suler identifies some of the psychological factors that lead to this disinhibition, including the anonymity of a Web pseudonym, which represents a controllable shift in identity unlikely in real life; the invisibility to others that can foster a sense of omnipotence and control; the time lag between sending an e-mail or posting a blog and getting feedback; the exaggerated sense of self resulting from periods of intense isolation and reflection; and the relative lack of online authority figures (although this is mitigated by the presence of webmasters and site editors).

As Goleman, following Suler, notes (2007), this kind of disinhibition can be benign, when a shy person feels free to open up online, or toxic, as in flaming - sending a message that is offensive, embarrassing or rude. For the purposes of this research, I deal with the former.

The capacity of the Internet to enable a self-administered talking cure (a term first used by Anna O., an early psychoanalysis patient) cannot be underestimated. The blogosphere is characterised by little narratives, multiple, heterogeneous and fragmented but also comprising interwoven conversations between small groups of people. There is space for every voice in this public forum: it can be read as an overlapping collection of conversations, where expert knowledge is held only by the narrators themselves. Poster (1995) argues that the Internet as a narrative context bears some resemblance to Lyotard's description of the narrative structure of tribal, pre-modern society, in that it legitimates institutions; contains many different forms of language; is transmitted by senders who are part of the narrative and have heard it before, and listeners who are possible senders; constructs a nonlinear temporality that foreshortens the past and the present, rendering each repetition of the story strangely concurrent; and most importantly, authorises everyone as a narrator.

In socio-political terms, this is a devolution of power away from a single, homogenous master narrative that privileges some groups and marginalises others. Because narratives are necessarily intertextual, individual stories can provide alternatives to dominant accounts of history, providing what Rothberg (2003) calls -autonomous forms of vernacular knowledge. These forms of knowledge can empower marginalised and voiceless groups, undermine the output of the mainstream media, and influence public opinion. As will be discussed with regard to the Arab blogosphere, this can appear threatening to existing institutions that benefit from the status quo.

Most significantly for this research, the blogosphere encourages the proliferation of voices, the little stories that place senders and addressees in symmetrical relations. Sontag writes that the memory of war, like all memory, is mostly local (35: 2003): it is through this detail and specificity that we are given access to the pain and revelations of others, making us more likely to respond empathically. As we will see, these stories, through their performance, take on a greater social significance and consolidate the social bond of the listening virtual community. As Poster and others agree, the validation afforded by the comments in the blog thread can contribute towards this sense of purpose and reconnection when a solidarity of attitude is similarly expressed; and this

affirmation can restore some sense of normality or justice for the survivor even if the perpetrator goes unpunished in a literal sense. The losses associated with trauma can thus be assimilated, and the life-narrative of the survivor adapted - restitution of both the individual and social kinds.

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PART TWO: THE BLOGOSPHERE

Online activism with offline consequences

The phenomenon of interaction in the public sphere is not new, but the mediums are. Porter (1992) writes that the online journal and e-mail list were early examples of forums in that they were concrete, local manifestation of the operation of the discourse community. As of the time of writing, to this new media we can add collaborative user-editable databases or wikis, short message services (SMS), mobile-connected cameras and moblogs, Internet radio broadcasting/podcasts, peer-to-peer (P2P) sharing, content alerts via RSS (Really Simple Syndication), vlogs (video logs) - and the weblog (we blog, contracted to blog) as forum. These manifestations all rely on participation in the public sphere, and better and faster forms of interactivity keep appearing in the rise of participatory culture. However, as we will see later, this is a change in architecture rather than content, as Gillmore (2006) and others argue.

A blog is a user-generated website or home page, updated regularly by a single author who produces new texts and links readers to other blogs and sites of interest. Entries are made in journal style and displayed in reverse chronological order. Blood (2000) distinguishes between the original filter-style weblog and blog-style weblogs, but the boundaries are frequently unclear. Because blogs are a combination of website, bulletin board and e-mail, they are used as both one-way and two-way forms of communicating, and users may be as actively engaged as they wish (Kaye in Tremayne, 2007). Topics and concerns are infinitely wide-ranging; the common feature of blogs is their autobiographical content and commentary, an affinity they have with traditional diaries or other logs of personal thoughts. Blog content tends to be a readable mixture of diaries dealing in daily minutiae, and op-ed pages - where the promotion of ideology is apparent in personal commentary on recent 'newsworthy' articles and socio-political developments, written in the present tense and closely linked with the personality of the author. Lampa (2004) argues that

because it directly represents the intent of the person who produces it, a blog empowers the writer with greater freedom to provide colorful [sic], subjective, and political commentary than would be possible within the framework of a

traditional media outlet, which has an economic interest in maintaining a sense of detached objectivity.

Blogs provide content and commentary through filtering and editing, fact-checking, grassroots reporting, annotative reporting, and open-source reporting and peer review ('We Media' Report, 2003). While their local detail and images make them site-specific, blogs are available worldwide to anyone with electronic access. They are instantaneous reportage, faster than mainstream media; they offer two-way interaction; they promote group identification and community, many to many, and few to few (Gillmor 2006). They are virtually local - that is, they are generally written by individuals, giving a particular perspective on their subjects, and they connect the members of their readership demographic, creating a virtual community that is formed around information-sharing - with optional real-world participation. They manifest the intention of Internet pioneer Tim Berners-Lee that the Web should be both readable and writeable. Barriers to entry to this public sphere of engagement will be examined further.

Format plays a large role in this engagement. The dated entries begin with the most recent and include the date, a time stamp, and a permalink - and often include a link for commentary. As Sontag notes, 'The multiple openings and closures produced by the start-and-stop method permit discourse to become as differentiated, as polyphonous, as possible...To write in fragments or sequences or "notes" entails new, serial (rather than linear) forms of arrangement' (70-1: 1982).

Serfaty (2004) writes that diaries or weblogs are rarely uploaded without a title, which either attempts to reflect the general tone of the body of text, or is the pseudonym of the writer. 'Titles are what Genette calls a threshold, both an indication as to what to expect from the text and an invitation to the reader' (23). Similarly, blog home pages include a biographical or 'About' section, similar to the preface in print autobiographies, that aim at '...ensuring the proper interpretation of what is to follow' (ibid). This identity-driven affiliation is a form of bridgeblogging, illustrated by a fairly typical excerpt:

The name 'Bedouina' is derived from a song my Arab grandmother used to sing me, about Leila the Bedouin girl. Bedouina is a Frenchified version of the Arabic term

for 'bedouin girl.' Until I was 32 years old I was indeed a wanderer; the name also denotes pride in my Arab heritage (Bedouina, 2006).

The reduction and simplification of identity is attractive to bloggers, who can select what Barthes (in Sontag) terms 'biographemes' to represent themselves in the digital public sphere (87: 1982).

There are further 'orality links' with diarists in that bloggers rarely correct their spelling, another feature of youth discourse that preserves the sense of realism, immediacy and accessibility, as do chattiness, slanginess, in-your-face-ness, and any other features of writing that are conventionally characterised as being 'like speech' (Menand 2004). This combines of the features of what Papert (in Lunsford 2007) terms 'letteracy' (the mechanical and presentational skills specific to writing) and prosodacy, oral decoding and encoding abilities (9: 2007), in a new discursive modality. The combination of links, present-tense and intimate commentary, and the frequency and brevity of updates contribute to an expectation of digital presence – in other words, relationships between writers and readers develop, and online or virtual communities (acting in an 'electronic democracy') are formed.

The popularity of a blog is judged by its 'hits' - how many times unique visitors access the site. Blogs rely largely on e-mail recommendations, and are attractive to readers for a number of reasons, which include the easily readable length of the posts, their sense of chronology-within-narrative, and the potential they offer for participation if the reader so chooses. One sign of interactivity is the hyperlinks (the URLs or addresses of other sites, or e-mail addresses) embedded in a blog's post.

Blogs are self-organising social systems that can aid interaction and collaboration in the exchange of information and ideas, and solve collective problems (Thompson). Because blogging tools are simple, available and free, users can easily communicate with others in their social networks, their geographic communities and the interested public (Thompson, and others). They are particularly influential when used by opinion leaders, facilitating what can be intimate or informal discussion and social interaction. Comments can become discussions in threads where one person makes a point, and this is either supported or disputed by other commentators in claims and counter-claims. Serfaty (61: 2004) explains that the inclusion of readers' comments - their actual

participation in building up the text of the diary in the inclusion of heterogeneous texts sent by correspondents - manifests Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, the co-presence of multiple, often contradictory discourses within the same text. The two-way communication channel of blogs, in contrast to traditional media, offers democracy in action. These comment functions, as well as blogs that are collectively authored, particularly foster a healthy public sphere. As Ginger (in Curtis 2007) remarks, 'It's hard to marginalize people who can tear apart a biased news article minutes after it's published online.' Sontag argues for this broader access, observing that, while information cannot replace illumination, something that sounds like, but is better than information, is necessary for a fully moral public stance: 'I mean the condition of being *informed*; I mean concrete, specific, detailed, historically dense, first-hand knowledge... [original emphasis] (154: 2007). As previously discussed, engaging with these narratives confronts 'the world of radical otherness'. Apfelbaum (2002) argues that this process can make us

face the existential, epistemological and moral implications of...grim and frightful reality. Hearing then becomes a major challenge to our usual categories of thinking, to the logic, rationale and values on which our sociability has been constructed. It raises the question of our responsibility as citizens (13).

Some constraints on content exist, through self- and peer-management, as well as the more formal editorial role played by the site manager(s) and the Bloggers' Code of Conduct, drawn up during 2007 by Tim O'Reilly in consultation with bloggers worldwide. Sites generally have 'fine print' that outlines their editorial practice. For example, Thoughtleader, affiliated with the South African *Mail and Guardian* newspaper, provides clear and fairly standard guidelines for posting content. Commentary should be mostly in English, fair, relevant and free of discriminatory or defamatory content, advertising material, inappropriate humour, personal attacks and excessive profanity. There is a twenty-four hour editorial period (maximum) before content goes live on the site, and readers are expected to report infractions thereafter.

Bloggers of serious events have the option of submitting thematic posts to the relevant 'blog carnival', which combines the immediate reportage of citizen journalism with the editorial

intervention associated with more traditional media. A blog carnival is simply a post which contains links to other blog posts, all on the same or similar topic – the war in Lebanon, for example. This facilitates readers' exposure to new bloggers as well as the aggregation of the Most Read or Most Popular posts. The comment function is up for as long as the post is considered relevant. Some of the Lebanese warblogs no longer have a functioning comments section two years after the ceasefire, but the original post remains available.

A blog carnival is published regularly (weekly or monthly), and bloggers and readers submit posts for consideration for the next carnival event. Editorial control exists in the moderation of carnival events – either by the same person or by different people – and may appear on the same blog or a different blog each week. Both moderators and publishers of particular events may include or reject submissions, wrap the post in a nice format, add pithy comments and categorise the links as they see fit (Berlinger 2006).

The information is organised further with the regular indexing of the carnivals themselves: Coturnix, for example, oversees a monthly digital edition of Meta-Carnival, a round-up of all known blog carnivals (2006). Blog carnivals unite bloggers who share common interests, encourage bloggers to pursue certain themes in their writing, increase traffic to the host's blog, and promote the work of other bloggers (ibid). They can create online communities by fostering collaboration and networking between individual bloggers (Curtis 2007).

Coturnix outlines successful blog carnival features: a clear purpose – to encourage regular visits; predictable publication – to prevent reader neglect; the rotation of editors – for relative objectivity and shared administration, as well as relevant content; a homepage and archives – for easy navigation. Coturnix refers to carnivals as the glue of the blogging community:

Sending an entry to a specialized carnival exposes you to bloggers who are inherently interested in your writing. Hosting one makes you even more visible (like giving a plenary lecture at a meeting) and after the temporary avalanche of hits subsides, you will realize you have acquired a number of new regular readers, bloggers who put you on their blogrolls and on their RSS feeds, who keep coming back and linking to your posts. This is how a community is built (ibid).

This fostering of community serves two functions - to introduce to each other people from all over the world who are interested in the same topic, and to organise meeting at the local level: This is particularly relevant for political organizing, and to some extent for doing business locally & [They] serve as virtual MeetUps, and often lead to real-life meetups as well as community action (ibid). As Curtis argues, activism can take place online, and that activism is facilitated by the community networks that form around blogs and blog carnivals (2007). Signatures, for example, can be collected in online petitions

from a broader range of people in much less time than it would take to accumulate signatures in the offline world. Or, attendance for a protest offline could be organized quickly online because of the efficiency the [I]nternet offers in terms of spreading information (ibid).

It is this dissemination of information rapidly and with little effort that is the single most effective way that feminist blogs and blog carnivals assisted and participated in cyberactivism (ibid).

As is to be expected, the mainstream media (MSM) is critical of blogging as a medium. Kakutani (2007) remarks that new-generation participatory sites such as MySpace and YouTube (and, by extension, the blogosphere) emphasise user-generated content, social networking and interactive sharing: 'more information, more perspectives, more opinions, more everything, and most of it without filters or fees. This prosumer-based media model has received criticism for its amateurism. Keen (in Kakutani), in a fairly representative summary of this viewpoint, argues that it makes for 'superficial observations of the world around us rather than deep analysis, shrill opinion rather than considered judgment'. Disgraced blogger-turned-author Siegel (2008) outlines three concerns: the Internet's blogofascism; its erosion of standards and expertise; and its commodification of private life. This, as noted by Bayard (2008), is essentially a conservative argument: in favor of gatekeepers and cultural elites, against the cacophony of untrammelled opinion.

Furthermore, critics point out that the Internet is not inherently reliable: misinformation and rumours proliferate in cyberspace, raising issues of identity and reliability. Search engines can be manipulated so that they answer search queries not with what is true, but what is most popular, such as the practice of Google bombing, which links a large number of sites to a certain page to raise the ranking of any given site in Google's search results. In addition, social networking structures are often shaped by a small number of users. Digg.com, for example, has 900 000 registered users, but 30 people were responsible for one-third of the home page postings; at Netscape.com, a single user generated 217 stories over a two-week period (ibid). One contributor, using the name Essjay, who had edited thousands of Wikipedia articles and was once one of the few people given the authority to arbitrate disputes online between writers, turned out to be a 24-year-old named Ryan Jordan, not the tenured professor he claimed to be. Shear (of *The Washington Post*) argues that blogs are:

clearinghouses for rumors, innuendo, political attacks, misunderstandings, half-truths and gossip...a completely open forum for anyone in the world to publish, in most cases instantly and usually anonymously, whatever they want to. The discussions are, from what I can tell, almost completely free of any editorial control (2006).

While this last point is debatable (there is often editorial control, as we have seen self- and peer-editing, adherence to the Bloggers' Code of Conduct and site managerial editing), responsibility for fact-checking and content lie a great deal more with the individual blogger. Shear also disregards the vagaries and misinformation rife in the MSM: for example, the claim by Robert Fisk, an *Independent* journalist, that Israel used uranium-based weapons in southern Lebanon during the 2006 conflict - later corrected by a United Nations panel, the IAEA and other international agencies. Bloggers, in fact, actually played a role in correcting misrepresentations during 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict. For instance, sources claimed that Israeli forces had killed 60 Lebanese civilians in Qana. Investigators eventually concluded that 28 people had died. Similarly, in Houla, it was falsely reported that Israeli bombing had killed 40 Lebanese people, when the actual tally was one. The blogosphere here served as extension of existing media structures; as Rosen (2008) comments,

the ballyhoo about citizen journalists storming the Bastille of established journalistic institutions has not materialized. In fact, most Web logs are an extended commentary and conversation about the news produced by those institutions, not a qualitative challenge to them.

Francoli (2007) came to a similar conclusion that citizen journalism, because it relies on discussion of core content, bolsters mainstream media structures by linking to the relevant news articles. If anything, the idea that bloggers might be performing a watch-dog function means that MSM journalists are more likely to check their facts, resulting in better reporting practices, as well as more participation in news coverage and analysis a win-win situation.

The popularity of the blogosphere has had other repercussions for MSM sources and private institutions both for-profit and civil society organisations (CSOs) - which have incorporated them into existing models or produced hybridised models. Bolter conceives of this process, when a medium responds to, competes with, and reforms other media, as remediation. Print publications such as the United Kingdom's *The Guardian* started a news blog in 2000. Other publications, groups and campaigns (*The Christian Science Monitor*, *The New York Times*, Amnesty International, the Clinton-Obama campaigns of 2008) followed suit (Curtis 2007). Businesses have similarly adapted their marketing strategies. Google, for example, mixes the two strategies of marketing and business organisation by using in-house blogs to help its employees interact more efficiently when they are working together on projects, and also encouraging them to develop personal blogs that foreground Google-owned software.

The three major constituencies of the media world are blurring: journalists, newsmakers and the former audience all now make the news. Shear argues for a clarity of responsibility and purpose in media models. He, and other writers, consider that blogs are useful as a system of checks and balances for the MSM, and that they are particularly valuable in three chief areas:

First, in focusing attention on happenings to which the MSM pay too little attention;
second, in offering analysis - almost always filtered through a particular political

philosophy - that often goes far deeper than any mainstream media outlet has the time or resources to do; and third, in being effective political advocates for a cause or a candidate (2006).

Shear's compromise, which seems reasonable and clear-cut, is honesty about the bloggers' role as pundits, aggregators of other people's work, analysts, political activists, gossips and agitators - but not journalists (ibid). Blogs, because they manifest what Atlas (in Miller and Shepherd, 2004) viewed as the general culture of confession and the innate human desire for shared experience, can facilitate a reflexive elaboration of identity as well as the hope for connection, for community, and at the same time a more traditional voyeuristic enjoyment of stealth and the possibility of a glimpse of unguarded authenticity (Sella in Miller and Shepherd, 2004).

The social psychology of self-disclosure at work here serves four purposes, according to Calvert (in Miller and Shepherd, 2004): self-clarification, social validation, relationship development and social control. In blogs,

the two former purposes function intrinsically, providing heightened understanding of self through communicating with others and confirmation that personal beliefs fit with social norms. The latter two function extrinsically, turning personal information into a commodity and manipulating the opinions of others through calculated revelations.

What blogs share is the desire to create our identities through the narration of our own life-stories, and to share this narrative process with empathic others in a constitutive effort: blogs thus provide the opportunity to tell our stories in a mediated forum to a potentially large, though distant and invisible, audience (ibid). In real terms, most bloggers reach nano-audiences, although respected bloggers such as Instapundit and Andrew Sullivan reach more than a million readers a month, and make a profit through subscription fees and merchandising links.

As we have seen, most bloggers are social diarists, utilising their sites in very localised ways, 'to exchange gossip, music and films with close friends' (Haugbolle, 2006). However, the focus of this research, as discussed, is on the serious political weblog - the warblog - authored by self-elected

first-hand witnesses of the 33-Day War between Israel and Lebanon in 2006. While it does not pretend to be objective, at its most effective, serious political blogging can change the way in which people – particularly young people – react to various forms of oppression, corruption, nepotism and political ineptitude. Blogs can serve a dual function, both as a memorial to injustice, and as a remedial template. They are both confession and testimony, the product of their writers' report and reflection, their worldview. They allow us insight into the workings of individuals, and they allow us to understand how commonalities lead to communities being formed. Above all, they are interactive.

The blogosphere as a discourse community

Whether they are chewing on existing content, or providing original investigative content, blogs are group magnets and information inciters : they draw people of similar interests; and they can contribute towards political mobilisation (Perlmutter 54: 2008). Blogs allow full discussion of a topic (although regularly or daily updated blogs do require the time taken to read them), the kind of discussion that is not encouraged or feasible in other media forms. Perlmutter (17: 2008) points out that mass media are chopping themselves up into smaller and smaller bits of clutter and hyperkinetic activity , while blogs provide a platform that allows the reader (and writer) to stop, think, read, talk, ponder and rethink at will. In other words, blogs are an online discourse environment within the greater platform of the Internet, a space where people ...interact on asynchronous discussion boards, synchronous chat, multi-user online games, or any other computer-mediated communication tool . Bloggers and readers, as prosumers , therefore represent an online discourse community.

A discourse community, after Swales in Porter (1992), has common public goals; has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members; relies on participation to provide information and feedback; is located within a specific and uses a specific lexis; relies on relevant content and discursal expertise. It is, by definition, an in-group.

However, blogs are also heterogeneous, enabling the co-existence of distinct varieties within a single linguistic code - what Bakhtin regards as heteroglossia, differentiated speech distinct from the monoglossia of the dominant linguistic form, and desirable for its status as alternative narrative. It is worth reprinting here some advice posted by VanFossen (2008), citing Amber (on Lamb and

Frog):

[T]here are some truths bloggers need to know:

It's your blog. Blog what you want.

Want traffic, blog for traffic, but don't expect to turn them into readers.

Want readers, blog for the readers. Readers return.

Writing well pays off better than not.

Blog consciously.

Don't surprise readers. Blog consistently.

If you open the door to comments, be prepared for comments.

Blog comments are content. You control them.

Blog comments are content. Comments are mini-resumes that speak for their author.

Expect insults.

Expect nasty commenters.

Expect spam and splogs.

Expect inconsiderate and thoughtless commenters.

Expect nasty, inconsiderate, and thoughtless fellow bloggers.

Expect unexpected, random acts of kindness.

Expect fans to feel like they are your friends.

Expect a support group and network to form in and around your blog.

As a blog reader, you are not judge and jury. You are the audience.

As a blog writer and publisher, you are the entertainment. It's your stage. Use it wisely and well.

Blogs can be influential as a genre as well as in content specificity. The actual weight of individual, private utterances may be minute, operating at the micro-linguistic level. However, in connection with a given social practice, these may lead to the development of a speech genre, which stabilises this genre against the monoglossia of the macro-linguistic level. The consideration of context, as we

have seen in the social constructivist and reader-response theories, is vital. The variety, situation and historical moment must be evaluated in order to understand the linguistic and social act.

Public sphere theory

Civil society incorporates all the organisations within a state that are not government-directed, or -affiliated. The power of public and collective reasoning is a concept that goes back to the Arab world, originating with the books of the *Muqaddimah* of the medieval scholar and historian, Ibn Khaldūn. He terms this kind of collective power *asabiya* (or *asabiyyah*). The capacity of a social group for concerted collective action can be translated variously as *esprit de corps*, solidarity, blood ties, tribalism or social cohesion – in other words, the potential power of the community. Dawood (1967) paraphrases Ibn Khaldūn on the dynamics of *asabiya*:

This social cohesion arises spontaneously in tribes and other small kinship groups; and it can be intensified and enlarged by a religious ideology & [T]his cohesion carries groups to power but contains within itself the seeds - psychological, sociological, economic, political of the group's downfall, to be replaced by a new group, dynasty or empire bound by a stronger (or at least younger and more vigorous) cohesion.

Asabiya forms the backbone of what is currently termed public sphere theory, which falls under the umbrella concept of civil society. Public sphere theory refers most simply to political participation through the sharing of opinion in a public forum, & a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment (Hauser, 83: 1998).

According to Negt and Kluge (1993), the meanings of Habermas's original German term *Öffentlichkeit* (public sphere) include the spatial concept - the social sites or arenas where meanings are articulated, distributed and negotiated - as well as the collective body constituted by and in this process - the public. Bohman (2004) argues that dialogue is only public when it transforms and expands the conditions of communicative interaction, which implies that electronic democracy is a

real possibility. In cases such as the 33-Day War, this engagement and collaboration is visible in action. Thompson points out that the blogosphere, because it utilises the features of news portals, personal journals and selective indexes to the web, can both modify and influence mainstream news coverage, and therefore public opinion. In other words, it has become a public sphere in the sense of the term first used by Habermas: a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed (398: 1991):

Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. They are then acting neither as business or professional people conducting their private affairs, nor as legal consociates subject to the legal regulations of a state bureaucracy and obligated to obedience (ibid).

These spaces were originally physically located in places easily accessible to interested members of the community: traditionally the salons of Europe and the coffee houses and cafés of the Middle East traditionally provided the venues for interlocution.

Habermas saw four governing elements of the public sphere:

- (1) a disregard for status
- (2) the problematisation and discussion of areas not previously questioned
- (3) conclusions through rational discussion
- (4) natural inclusivity.

Ultimately, this means that (theoretically) everyone has a voice, and that voice is of equal relevance to that of any other speaker: the public sphere is thus a forum for self-expression and a platform for public discussion which also implies a devolution and dispersal of power away from centralised ownership of information.

Fraser (2005) regards the public sphere as one of the vital (though unrealisable) functions of a democracy:

a space for the communicative generation of public opinion, in ways that are supposed to assure (at least some degree of) moral-political validity. Thus, it matters who participates and on what terms. In addition, a public sphere is supposed to be a vehicle for mobilizing public opinion as a political force. It should empower the citizenry vis-à-vis private powers and permit it to exercise influence over the state.

Habermas wrote that the public sphere is cultivated in the modern sense through the media (newspapers and letters) and, by extension, the Internet. Blogs are thus the natural branching out of this public sphere, and, being permanently available, also the most visible manifestation of it. What Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (2007) term the *table of dialogue* has taken on a less literal aspect in the form of cyberspace. The Internet has provided a virtual forum for the same purpose as the old public forums: the raising and discussion of issues in which concerned parties feel that they have a stake, and the creation and maintenance of community.

This is a contested idea. Haugbolle (2006) argues against the medium itself, going so far as to see the Internet as an extension of an existing model of public sphere theory. It is, rather, a space where identity-aligned user groups interact, and these identities are fluid. Like Fraser (1990), and Lynch (2006 and 2007), Haugbolle agrees that Internet boundaries are permeable and because of this there is little focus. In this sense, the Internet is *...unsuch as any previous medium* (ibid):

by viewing it as a variation of existing print media and national public spheres, one misses the point that it has opened up a *space of spaces* or *public of publics* that may interact with each other and with existing public spheres but that is essentially decentred and largely unregulated.

Poster (2005), using Habermas's theory, is critical of online users:

In Western civilization, the public sphere was a place people could

talk as equals. Status differences did not exclude frank discussion.

Rational argument prevailed, and the goal was consensus. It was a place anyone could argue with anyone else, and the collected assembly acted as judge of the wisest direction for society to take.

As those who read Usenet can tell you, this definition doesn't come close to describing the online world. True, the Net allows people to talk as equals. But rational argument rarely prevails, and achieving consensus is widely seen as impossible.

But consensus is not the point; dialogue is. Whatever the worldview, if enough people subscribe to it, the public (through its access to resources) may have some influence on politics and society. Habermas called this the bourgeois public sphere, the space in which it was possible for a political class to exist and act through a network of institutions of publishing enterprises, newspapers and discussion forums. It is thus another feature of the bourgeois public sphere that it may equally become a tool of political will rather than the voice of the people. This kind of media influence, according to Habermas, is an ongoing struggle for power in which topic selection is highly desirable, while the strategic intentions of the media are hidden.

Other critics of Habermas's theory argue that inclusivity does not exist, and that when some people form a group, other people (women and the poor, for example) are pushed out of social settings on the basis of their belonging to a specific group - and are therefore unable to participate in the public sphere discussion. Their concerns thus go unspoken. This flouts all Habermas's features of public sphere theory.

Fraser (1990) recognises that these marginalised groups form their own public spheres, or subaltern counterpublics, parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs (67). Some years later, Fraser went on to insist that her criticism hadn't gone far enough, and outlined the existence of discursive arenas that overflow the bounds of both nations and states (2005) and to which Habermas's model could not apply.

Further criticisms of Habermas's conditions for a functioning public sphere by Fraser, Poster

and Ó Baoill included the fact that it is not possible for speakers in a public sphere to deliberate as if they were social equals, when they are not. As Fraser writes, societal equality is a necessary condition for political democracy (ibid). (In addition, these critics write that a single monolithic public sphere is not preferable to multiple publics, and the latter may in fact strengthen a democratic institution. Furthermore, private issues may have some relevance in the public arena (particularly in the case of domestic concerns). Lastly, a distinct separation between civil society and the state is not always possible.)

In technological terms, Fraser (2005) mentioned the subversive function of the Internet (and blogs) as empowering but also fragmenting,

instantaneous electronic, broadband, and satellite information technologies, which permit direct transnational communication and bypassing Westphalian-state controls. Together, all these developments signal the denationalization of communicative infrastructure. The effects include some new opportunities for critical-public opinion formation, to be sure.

But these are accompanied by the disaggregation and complexification of communicative flows. The overall effect is to undermine both the generation of critical public opinion on a large-scale and also its mobilization as effective communicative power.

Fraser offers instead the concept of multiple publics, in a multi-level structure of sovereignty, and puts her hope in transnational social movements. We will see later how these multiple publics have functioned in the Lebanese blogosphere.

Electronic democracy - with a small d

Journalism, like government, is an institution that relies on the fundamental but unspoken relationship of trust between the reader and what is read. That relationship is undermined by what Delmar (2008), following Davies, refers to as churnalism, the increased pressure to produce copy that results in overwork and unpaid overtime. Facts can go unchecked, and [u]npalatable truths that

take time to dig out, and then to defend, are glossed over (ibid). This places journalistic responsibility at risk and increases media bias. This is characterised by a lack of factual verification; editorialising; omission and selective reporting; decontextualisation; emotive language or euphemistic terminology; double speak; the passive voice; placement of article; coercion and censorship; forgery and falsification. Balance is often equated falsely with neutrality; and sources are not inherently of equal credibility and reliability. Cited as a criticism of citizen or confluence journalism in general and blogging in particular, bias is as often at work in the mainstream media.

In social terms, political process is based on the negotiation of interests between different groups: differences are constructed and articulated through reflection in the mass media. Correspondingly, with new media may come a shift in public ideas about citizenship, responsibility, rights and ethics, and the rise of new technology thus has social implications.

Shirky (2003) argues that inequality is a natural component of media: The tradeoffs are clear: Diverse. Free. Equal. Pick two. For unequal but unconstrained media such as weblogs, Levitt and Dubner (2005) write that power differentials are changing: [I]nformation asymmetries everywhere have in fact been gravely wounded by the Internet [whose currency is information].

The currency changes hands by the shift of information from those who have it to those who previously did not. This information existed previously 'but in a woefully scattered way': using, for example, the search and research functions of the Internet remedies this scattering by making collection and comparison relatively easy. Levitt and Dubner conclude that '[t]he Internet has accomplished what even the most fervent consumer advocates usually cannot: it has vastly shrunk the gap between the experts and the public'. They concede that the Internet has not, of course, eliminated information asymmetry. But it has made possible public access to information - and the corresponding participation in forums.

The second media age, that of 'new' media (an already archaic term), is so called because of its interactive nature. No longer based on 'the mass mediation of a centrally formulated cultural product' (Haugbolle, 2006), new media forms allow public input (Bakhtin's polyphony) in the multiplicity of independent voices situated in a communal forum. Tuomi documents the assumptions of old media as being that the producer and consumer are separate; only the end product is visible; production is an industry; and content reflects reality.

In contrast, in the new media context (blogs, in particular), the user is the producer; 'backstage' is the front of stage; production is expression; content reflects interpretation; and narrative is implicit. This 'explosion of narrativity' depends on technology that is unlike print and unlike the electronic media of the first age. It is relatively inexpensive, user-friendly, readily available and almost instantaneous, combining the most efficient aspects of previous models, such as the decentralised model of the telephone and other numerous producers of messages, with the broadcast model's advantage of numerous receivers (1995). As Shirky (2003) writes, using Godwin's famous phrase, weblogs are the best attempt we have seen to date of 'making freedom of speech and freedom of the press the same freedom.'

People with access to technology are terms 'prosumers' in the industry – hybrid creators and readers of texts, both actively consuming and producing them instead of passively receiving them according to the constructivist view of meaning-making. While creation does not include the capacity to think critically about the process, the Internet does allow ordinary people to bypass institutions that previously performed gate-keeping functions; the many are talking to the many, as Poster argues (1995).

Every day, those who can afford the computer equipment and the telephone bills can be their own producers, agents, editors and audiences. Their stories are becoming more and more idiosyncratic, interactive and individualistic, told in different forums to diverse audiences in different ways (ibid).

Rosen (2003) cites the distinction between the not-for-profit gift economy of the blogosphere and the market economy of the top-down traditional press as the number one indication that weblog-based journalism represents a substantial shift from the status quo (Lampa, 2004). The free dissemination of texts produced by unpaid amateurs provides & a decentralized realm of individual publishers who not only consume texts but also produce texts that are circulated, reproduced, and consumed by others . This is manifest in the sense of communal identity - the we -ness rather than the they -ness of MSM, manifest in one pronunciation of the term weblog , and indicative of

participation in the public sphere.

There are clear social and political implications for facilitating dialogue in online discussions regarding national and international events, issues and ideas. Democratic practice and the feeling of shared experience necessarily interact: as we have seen, the Internet relies on a decentralised information model. Perlmutter argues, 'Blogs are not dangerous populism, whatever that is, nor are they hereditary autocracies; they are, simply, democratic (small *d*). You peruse, you pick, you choose' (28: 2008). While there are constraints - for example, posts are checked by webmasters before they go 'live' and Internet access does require the physical proximity to appropriate hardware - ordinary people have a voice in the public sphere that did not exist twenty years ago.

In their socio-political effect, the Lebanese blogs did serve as a counter to media convergence and consolidation, allowing under[-]represented and marginalized positions to be represented (Thompson). Mass participation in the vernacular created a local environment conducive to communal activism, as well as a transnational environment conducive to larger engagement. Habermas's utopian public sphere is therefore possible, though in slightly modified form. It is still an 'electronic democracy', although its influence is restricted unless this is accompanied by real activism on the ground, as will be discussed further.

Human rights in the Arab mediasphere

As Gadamer (in Sumara) has argued, in order for work to be considered hermeneutic, it needs to be historically informed. A brief overview of recent developments in the Arab blogosphere is therefore required.

The Internet ...has a large number of users in the Arab Gulf region in particular due to the high living standards which allow citizens to purchase computers and Internet access tools (<http://casaarabe-ieam.es/index.htm>). Between four and ten per cent of the Middle Eastern population uses the Internet for news feeds and information, or uses the Internet daily (www.Internetworldstats.com). This activity tends to be concentrated in urban areas, where hardware and connections are relatively easy to come by, and are also affordable to ordinary members of the population. Lynch (2007) writes that 2006 Nielsen data suggests there are about 19 million Arab Internet users, making up about ten per cent of the population. Other surveys show

closer to 26 million (<http://www.ameinfo.com/96643.html>). These figures need to be contextualised (<http://www.Internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>):

This represents almost a 500 per cent increase over six years ago, however, and Internet access seems nearly universal among politically mobilized youth in some Arab countries.

It is this last fact, and its implications for narrative and free expression, that my research is concerned with.

The media migration to the Internet cited in Ward (2006) indicates a fundamental change in publishing hardware. It is apparent that people are more dependent on online media outlets. In statistics provided by *The Economist* on 24 August 2006, Britons between 15 and 24, for example, reported spending 30 per cent less time reading newspapers once they started using the web. In a parallel migration, ...the payrolls of the American newspaper industry fell by 18% between 1990 and 2004 . These figures support the pattern of traditional media migration onto the Internet globally, and can be extrapolated for the Arab blogosphere, where mainstream news outlets are routinely accompanied by Internet websites and feeds, as is discussed below.

As far as writers go, the most reasonable estimate of the number of Arab political blogs circa 2006 would be several thousand, out of the commonly cited figure of 25 000 in total (Lynch, 2007). Various hosts and aggregators claim between 4 000 (Maktoob estimates there are 4 360) and 7 000 (Issam Bayazidi, founder of the Jordan Planet aggregator) political blogs throughout the region:

National aggregators in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia each include about 300 active blogs, while Egypt may now boast over a thousand (Lynch, 2007).

The communication medium serves the ideology of its users. As with the mercuries , the critical (and histrionic) pamphlets of the 1600s which used an image of Hermes or Mercury as messenger on their covers, blogs can function both as supporters of orthodoxy or its underminers. Blogs may often be opposition in a new voice , as they were terms in Ahmed Zayn *Al Jazeera* documentary (26 May 2006), but a variety of political movements can access the same tools. (The Noman study - 338 online Arabic-language forums between July and September 2005 - found

conservative Islamic-themed forums to be the most common, at just over a quarter of all forums. Only five per cent of forums were devoted to politics and current affairs.) New media technologies, from satellite television to online forums, were adopted early on by Islamist groups such as the Egyptian Muslim Brothers who began an online campaign in February 2007 to pressure the government into freeing Brotherhood leaders and students. The campaign included custom-made banners, link-exchanges, online petitions, personal testimonies, high resolution photos of protests and embedded videos (Lynch, 2007).

As has been discussed, increased Internet usage does not necessarily mean an increased social conscience or concern with human rights for readers and it does not mean that writers routinely take advantage of their potential digitality, either. As Hayden (2006) and others argue, how a story is told ...provides a means to comprehend and a conceptual resource for argument. Media stories, or narratives, function as equipment for the public conversation. As a plethora of writers point out, the Internet is a medium more than anything else. As such, it is subject to the ideologies and concerns of those who use it.

While activism and digitality might seem obviously to co-occur, the Internet has only fairly recently been exploited by Arab human rights organisations, for example. These initially found a home with the now-defunct Center for Human Rights Legal Aid (www.chrla.org) in Egypt. Created in 1995, the website posted Arabic materials for download in 1997 and was the first to publish Arabic human rights texts online for public perusal and archiving purposes. Human Rights Watch (HRW) also facilitated Arabic language web pages in 1999, an example later followed by Amnesty International.

Other organisations have been less technologically involved, partly because of repressive state practices. These include the Tunisian League for Human Rights (LTDH), Arab Institute for Human Rights in Tunisia, Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR), and New Woman Research Center (NWRC) in Cairo; while these organisations exist, they have not fully investigated the advantages of digitality. Lynch (2007) describes Arab blogospheres as developing nationally rather than transnationally, despite the spatiotemporal nature of Internet: 'Blogs have been harnessed to concrete political movements in some Arab countries...but remain politically marginal and disconnected in others.'

There is a reason: the very real risk attached to political blogging in the Middle East. In a 2006 report ('Implacable Adversaries: Arab Governments and the Internet'), HRINFO examines the activities of eighteen Arab governments in the twenty-first century, explicitly linking Internet activity with the larger concern for freedom of expression. It found that the Arab countries leading repressive reactions are Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and Libya. These restrictions have had serious implications, including the much-publicised but ultimately unpreventable torture of the Egyptian blogger Mohamed Al-Sharkawy, and the detention of Kareem Amer. The Libyan journalist Dhaif Al-Ghazaly was the first online writer to be killed. His typing fingers were severed: the message to the online resistance was clear but failed to repress digital resistance. By January 2007, eighteen websites had been launched by Egyptian opposition groups, Harakamasria.org, Saveegyptfront.org, March9online.net and e-socialists.org among them (Eid, 2007). Bloggers have been tortured and arrested, mainly for sentiments regarded as anti-Islamist or critical of the regime: Abd al-Kareem Nabil Suleiman and Alaa Abd El Fattah are the most public faces of this kind of state reaction to online speech.

The relatively small number of Arab bloggers is mitigated by their extended influence, apparent both in the sites that link through to these blogs, and in the social networking that results in activism. Beckerman (2007) writes that it is this very paucity of bloggers that encourages dialogue:

[T]he small size of the Arab blogosphere forces people with contrary opinions, or even more mildly divergent viewpoints, to engage each other.

As one Arab blogger said, We re not big enough to preach to the choir yet.

There is no choir.

In all cases activist bloggers took advantage of a political opening by turning it into something more than the state had intended: Kefaya [in Egypt] turned what could have been ritual, sham elections into a tense drama; the Bahraini bloggers turned a routinely repressive shutdown of a human rights organisation into a political cause; and Kuwaiti bloggers helped push for an early election in which they could then engage.

As we have seen, the new wave of Arab blogging has been the result of both long-term and

short-term factors. These independent voices have reacted to the general 'despotic impulse' of government, visible across the Arab landscape. More politically engaged bloggers have emerged, some writing in Arabic and all deeply connected to local political campaigns that eventually become global.

Some institutional support for bloggers does exist. The Initiative For an Open Arab Internet, run by The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (HRINFO), advocates free use of the Internet without censorship, blocking or spying...The initiative also defends Internet users, web designers and writers by organising legal and media campaigns and highlighting practices restricting Internet freedom. Its first report, Internet in the Arab World: New Space of Repression was issued in mid-2004 (<http://www.openarab.net/en/info/>).

Similar findings regarding repression occurred in the 2006 report, which selected eight of the biggest and most influential mainstream Arabic media outlets - aljazeera.net, alarabiya.net, islamonline.net, elaph.com, copts-united.com, moheet.com, middle-east-online.com, naseej.com - and used quantitative and qualitative analyses of the discourse and content of these sites over one year (2006). It was the first study in Arabic to discuss the status of human rights issues in the discourse of electronic Arabic media outlets, and focused on four essential rights - those of women, minorities, and refugees (tolerance of the Other) and the individual right to privacy. The findings centre on the tendency by Arab electronic media to cover stories on human rights violations - but not to use human rights frameworks for analysing newsworthy events in general.

While it has gone some way towards promoting awareness and dialogue, the Internet in the Arab world has not yet become ...an effective tool in serving human rights causes (<http://www.openarab.net/en/news/2007/news1002.shtml>) partly because most media do not utilise the full capabilities the Internet provides in terms of its digitality. As a result, there is scope for far more development in this area. With a wider reach and more freedom of expression, rights groups would possibly have a more direct and public impact on documenting or preventing human rights violations. Journalists and political and human rights activists are particularly dependent on this kind of information-sharing in a critical and free domestic mediasphere.

On the distinction between blogger and activist, Lynch (2007) comments:

Other countries which have many bloggers but few activists may simply lack the necessary political openings: Jordan lacks any significant political parties other than the Islamic Action Front and has been steadily de-liberalizing over recent years; Tunisian bloggers have not been able to escape the intensely repressive state policing of the media; Saudi bloggers face the same extreme censorship and personal fear which dominates offline Saudi public life.

It is on individual blogs that activism seems to flourish. As Beckerman (2007) documents, there are several instances where Arab bloggers have mobilised the Arab boycott of products from Denmark subsequent to the Danish cartoon riots; the Egyptian bloggers who circulated video footage of men sexually assaulting Cairo women, and achieved global outrage; the Jordanian bloggers who campaigned to reinstate Skype, a free Internet phone service and the donations organised for the displaced people of Lebanon during the 33-Day War.

The evolution of the Arab blogosphere

The interpersonal aspects of the mediasphere are significant in any study of the social context surrounding political events. The Arab blogosphere therefore deserves some explanatory remarks.

Aside from their confessional loyalties, a more secular political activism is visible in the views of a younger generation of bloggers. While the first political blogs featured 'mostly westernized, relatively liberal voices writing in English - often brilliantly individual voices who made little claim to represent the broader political spectrum' (Lynch, 2007), the Arab blogosphere has changed, adapting to the perceived need for alternative discourse communities.

Hayden (2006) after Ball-Rokeach, explains the concept of a media infrastructure to analyse how blogs inform and are influenced by the hierarchy of media forms that connect the interpersonal to the mass level of communication: blogs are the meso-linkages between mass reporting by media outlets and the local level of opinion. In the United States, for example, they are increasingly informing public debate by feeding back into the MSM.

While the Middle Eastern blogosphere has not achieved the same broad politically

sanctioned influence, bloggers have clearly had some impact in Arab countries - even if that impact has not been directly on policy-making structures. As examples of successful social pressure campaigns, Lynch (2007) lists the Kefaya movement in Egypt; political protests in Bahrain; anti-corruption campaigns in Libya; the 2006 Kuwaiti elections; and the post-Al Hariri period in Lebanon - which is the focus of this research.

The increase in popularity of blogging in Arab countries is partly due to an appeal to youth culture and subculture - and young people are by far the most intensive online users (Eid, 2007; Perlmutter, 2008, and others). Lynch regards the other group of early adopters of technology as relatively Westernised youth, going on to say that the political outlook of these bloggers is shaped by the demographics of Internet users in the Arab world: the majority of the first wave of Arab bloggers have tended to be young, technologically oriented and politically unengaged (2007) - but the hope is that engagement of any kind with the politically conscious and influential minority of bloggers will lead to further socio-political involvement.

This serious minority of Arab bloggers is dealing with clearly demarcated socio-political issues. Unlike their Western counterparts, there is perhaps more at stake for these bloggers who write in heavily weighted political and historical contexts. Forced to confront existential questions that have a very real bearing on their daily functioning, it appears that the writers are more inclined to understand the significance of outspoken political blogging. Beckerman (2007) confirms this:

For the twentysomething growing up in Riyadh, writing resentfully about the power of the religious authorities, the questions are fundamental ones about the state of her society. For the Egyptian blogger, the brutal suppression of a demonstration can make the difference in whether he chooses to stay in the country or leave.

In addition, many blogs in Arabic originally appeared in colloquial form, which added to their appeal among the youth demographic. Eid (2007) distinguishes between this form and the more formal Arabic used in the mainstream media, which is different to everyday spoken Arabic. Usage of the idiom of the streets also encouraged identification among young people and those belonging

to minority groups subject to a dominant culture. Authority can be challenged on the Internet, and blogging can help to secure a more generalised identity for young people in the Middle East. Haugbolle (2006) notes that blogs are true dialogues, ...allowing not just for a response, but a quick sequence of responses and ensuing dialogues that extend to other user groups and media. They are snappy, filled with codes, abbreviations and cultural references. The people who can comprehend and respond to these language codes are more likely to think of themselves as belonging to a cyber-community, a concept that has been discussed elsewhere in this research.

Other aspects of texts produced by a youthful demographic that regards itself as a technological subculture include a disregard for the language rules used in more formal writing contexts (the use of slang, spelling mistakes, a lack of punctuation and capital letters) in favour of contentious content. Code-mixing and code-swapping into different languages also occurs on some blogs. This informality extends to the subject matter: Tidbits of political analysis, rumours, chatter, headlines from local television news and quotes from here and there are mixed with personal observations and indignations (Haugbolle, 2006, and others). This conflation of high and low cultural forms can be seen as a deliberate challenge to the status quo supported by, for example, an older, less politically active generation, or the state itself.

Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia goes some way towards explaining the theoretical shifts in power made possible by the Internet (Haugbolle, 2006, and others). The ordinarily strict Arab hierarchy can thus be subverted when the usual social speech genres - determined by age, region, economic position, kinship and so on - are absent, and writers and readers can engage in conversations that are directed only by the representation of their digital identities.

With this increased number of users - and the rise of subcultures - comes negotiation around access to information and freedom of expression. Technological advances in the Middle East and the accompanying access to global mass media have been accompanied by what is an unreasonable but strong belief in their ...potential to create open debate, break with old taboos and threaten undemocratic regimes (Alterman in Haugbolle, 2006). Lynch (2006) is nevertheless doubtful of the transformative nature of online personal weblogs:

Blogs reach only a fraction of the audience of *Al Jazeera* or even of tedious

state-dominated newspapers. Where bloggers have been politically influential, such as Egypt and Bahrain, repressive regimes have been able to crack down on them. From this perspective, it is highly unlikely that blogging will induce wide political change in the Middle East.

The absence of state-sanctioned political change is something that Haugbolle (2006), after Hudson, blames on a lack of trust among the media, regime and individuals. To this it must be added that there are enormous difficulties inherent in trying to conflate the differing rule systems of the physical world (centralised, based on social, economic and religious demarcations) with those of the cyber-world (decentralised, identity-fluid, flat rather than hierarchical, with unmediated access to information).

However unregulated the Internet is, it does have boundaries and these are defined by its user groups. This idea is supported by Lynch's idea (2006) that there are multiple Arab identities online which, while encouraging diversity of representation, also fragment social response.

[There is] not so much an Arab blogosphere as...a collection of localized, regional blog communities. These communities, such as the bloggers associated with the independent political parties in Egypt, reflect less of a nationalist or pan-Arab tone, but more immediate political concerns (ibid).

These communities – whether individual dissidents or cause-aligned groups – make their concerns visible and audible in providing alternative narrative to that of the state. The 33-Day War in Lebanon, as a bloggable series of events, demarcated such a community.

Alternative media forms: warblogs

Initially, Arab dissident voices considered the introduction of Internet access an opportunity for expression. Following general trends of Internet use, this participation was often a reaction to repressive Arab governments, which tend generally towards digital censorship, blocking websites and arresting online activists (see, among others, <http://www.openarab.net/en/info/>). This trend is

supported in the regular reporting by the Arab meta-blog, <http://arabblogandpoliticalcommunication.blogspot.com/>, which has documented the increase in political persecution in which Arab bloggers have been censored, jailed or prosecuted in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Bahrain, Egypt and Tunisia.

There was a wave of young Arab blogs in 2004, mostly in response to national events. They included bloggers such as Hawliat Saheb Al-Ashgar, on <http://gharbeia.net>; Serdal, on <http://www.serdal.com>; Tay El-Motasel, on <http://zamakan.gharbeia.org>; Tak Hanak, on <http://digressing.blogspot.com>; and Lenta ada El-Tabi ey, on <http://beyondnormal.blogspot.com> (Eid 2007):

Such groups were previously deprived of the medium where they could present their ideas and concerns for political, religious, and/or legal reasons. The political restrictions include banning...of leftist and Islamist parties, and human rights groups. Religious prohibitions include the harassment of Shiites and Christians...[S]ometimes, the... three reasons are regarded collectively...[in the example of] homosexuality.

Many bloggers write in support of their peers in local contexts, which, as a result of their blogging, can become global campaigns. One such example is the case of Kareem, an anti-Islamist writer in Egypt, who was sentenced to four years in jail for blogging; another is the story of Alaa Abd al-Fattah, an activist who spent forty days in jail. The possibilities for future contributions to generational and political solidarity across ideological lines are enormous, as are the implications for democracy. Eid (2007) claims that the approaches of these participants ...are completely contradicting those of officials in charge (i.e. Arab governments) . His view is echoed by many Arab bloggers themselves, one such being Mohammed on Iraq the Model (Hayden, 2006):

I feel I must talk about the Arab media and its deception campaign and that s because wars in both Lebanon and Iraq are largely the same. In both cases the media functions not only as a means to deliver news but had

long turned into an effective weapon that is not the least interested in objectivity or factuality.

Eid summarises the typical frustration with Arab governments' domination of traditional media outlets: [W]e have nowhere to go but the electronic media .

Critics point out that MSM reporting is rarely objective in either content or approach. Commercial or ideological bias can account for the skewed representation of public figures and events. Historically, MSM have avoided overt political statements in their reportage, although there may be a supportive or subversive undertone to the reporting, and a clear station agenda. The American outlet, Fox News, for example, is distinctly right-leaning in its reportage.

Blogs, on the other hand, seldom pretend to be objective. The most serious and well-researched reports (from bloggers such as Sullivan and Instapundit, as well as online journals such as Slate and Salon) are comfortable commenting on controversial issues and public affairs. This overtly critical reporting has had repercussions for mainstream coverage and public affairs, and raised issues about bias and responsible reporting.

The relationship of media outlets to international conflict is necessarily complex. The first Gulf War in 1991 was covered most extensively by CNN, and Al Jazeera shot to prominence with the 1998 invasion of Afghanistan – but the shift to the Internet came with the 2003 war in Iraq, as Zeyad, of the Healing Iraq blog, discovered when he blogged a massive pro-democracy demonstration in Baghdad, an event whose significance had been missed by the MSM. His credibility as an Iraqi civilian meant that some readers preferred his first-hand accounts of daily life: those accounts became 'a key source of news for others, including professional journalists' (Gillmor 137: 2006). There is clearly a demand - both domestic and transnational - for alternative news sources that are varied, independent and accountable. The implication of these developments is that, as Rosen (in Barlow 2007), and others argue, politics and public life, journalism and its professional identity, can be ...renewed along civic lines, meaning the ties that held [people] together as a community of the whole – a public (131: 2007).

Meanwhile, the Arab political blogosphere is evolving to meet the needs of its users. As we have seen, and Lynch (2007) explains, bloggers with overt agendas have emerged, ...often writing

in Arabic and deeply connected to local political campaigns (ibid). But the influence of international events on digital expression cannot be underestimated.

Individual blogging in the Middle East, as Haugbolle and others acknowledge, has been tremendously stimulated by conflict. The artist-blogger Mazen Kerbaj's first posts summarise many bloggers' motivation and frustration:

2 years of laziness before starting this blog. I'll begin then by thanking Israel who burned in one night two years of efforts to avoid getting myself trapped in this adventure. Good job guys! Especially the airport party and the bridges. No way to leave the country. Nothing else to do than this blog.

The first mainstream blogging conflict event was the Second Gulf War in Iraq. Borger and Thompson, among others, write that discussions about war against Iraq began almost as early as the 9/11 attacks and were certainly in the news as early as March. Weblogs proved significant as venues for organization (mostly anti-war) and for war support and the satisfaction of venting (both pro- and anti-war). MSM organisations found themselves turning to the Internet for aspects of their coverage that were lacking, as discussed previously in this research. Howard Kurtz, the media critic for the Washington Post, writes (2003):

Just as television replaced the week-old movie newsreels of World War II, the Internet made its mark on this war. There were dozens of war blogs, or one-person online journals - the authors ranging from L.T. Smash, the pseudonym for a military officer in the field, to Iraqi dissident Kanan Makiya.

Initially, weblogs had a relatively small readership. The Pew Internet and American Life project reported that only four per cent of U.S. internet users relied on weblogs as their main source of war coverage. The Internet was used rather to supplement television and other reports and for the purposes of activism, a trend which was replicated in the Arab blogosphere during the 33-Day War:

77% of online Americans have used the Internet in connection with the war - for information, to read and voice opinions, to send e-mails in relation to the war, etc. A smaller proportion use e-mail to mobilize others and gain support for their views (ibid).

Thompson goes on to categorise warblogs as follows: participant or observer blogs; pro-war commentary/filter blogs; anti-war commentary/filter blogs; weblogs on other aspects, such as military strategy or media observation. (Some of these functions may overlap.)

Observer weblogs include those written in the field, whether by those in the (US) armed forces, embedded reporters, Iraqis or others, and include those by L.T. Smash, Christopher Allbritton, Kevin Sites and Salam Pax. (An index of warblogs, compiled by Christopher Allbritton, George Paine, Sean-Paul Kelley and Mike Hudack, is available at <http://www.aboutus.org/WarBlogs.cc>.) There was a range of voices and tones, allowing more vantage points than any mainstream publication could offer.

Of the 2003 bloggers, Salam Pax's *Where is Raed?* is probably the most well-known. Pax's site is representative of a more informal but nonetheless serious - blog:

Let me tell you one thing first. War sucks big time. Don't let yourself ever be talked into having one waged in the name of your freedom. Somehow when the bombs start dropping or you hear the sound of machine guns at the end of your street you don't think about your imminent liberation anymore.

By the time of the invasion, 20 000 people were reading Pax regularly. His posts, as Beckerman (2007) explains, ...captured an emotional, lived experience of the war, one that evaded most journalists covering the conflict. His Baghdad diary found its way into more traditional news media, being reprinted in *The Guardian* newspaper and later published as a book. It is interesting to note the change of mode here from full digitality to static print. This aspect of modality will be explored later.

Anti-war sites from 2003 were used primarily to exchange news about demonstrations leading up to and into hostilities. As with opposition to the war in the West generally, these tended to be more nuanced than the pro-war sites (i.e., some oppose war generally, some oppose American imperialism, some object to the use of war for political gains, some concede justification for certain interventions but argue that inspections should be given time to work, and so on).

The Lebanese warblogs from 2006 continued the trends observable in the Second Gulf War. They were written by a variety of bloggers, all with reasonably overt agendas - writers (Michael Holloway's Warblogs), non-profit and educational organisations (Reason Online), ex-soldiers, embedded journalists (Kim Ghattas for the BBC), disgruntled party members (young conservatives such as NewsBusters) and civilians (Global Voices Online).

It is this last group that is the focus of my research. The civilian contribution on the ground in Lebanon during the conflict seems to me to provide some of the most authentic and meaningful texts. Their personal and communal attitudes as survivors of trauma are vital, and their blogs provided the impetus for both local civic action and international petitions and pressure on the governments of Israel and Lebanon.

The effects of new media on the Arab blogosphere

In order for blogs to escape their reputation as marginal, Habermas speculates that a link to the mass media is inevitable. This process has already been instigated by many mainstream media outlets, as we have seen. International companies are also investing in Arabic-language software, effectively increasing the number of blogs available both in Arabic and in translation. Eid cites the attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 as having had a particular influence ...on motivating the people around the world to be more interested in the Arabic language and the Arab region in particular (2007).

After the Second Gulf War, mainstream publications began to include blogging and forums in their report structure. Newspapers and journals (like *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Salon* and so on) published themselves in print and online simultaneously. Their sites often incorporated a column dedicated to the conflict in progress: podcasts and video blogs were also available for more instantaneous footage. Citizens were encouraged (and occasionally paid) to

release private footage from their cellphones or home cameras for on-the-spot reportage, but with the incorporation of digital technology into the traditional media, bloggers found themselves moved to the centre rather than the periphery of journalism - with all the attendant issues of reliability and accuracy.

These developments naturally throw up their own controversies, such the ethics attached to broadcasting or publishing footage or photographs of torture victims, dead bodies and live executions. The plight of prisoners at Abu Ghraib were a particular hot spot, the leaked footage of abuses garnering disapproving international attention and corresponding pressure.

As far as coverage of the 33-Day War went, the American cable channel, Fox News, known for its right-leaning editorial slant, sensationalistic [sic] coverage and high ratings... (Ward 2006) recruited Spencer Witte, an American in Beirut, to blog the conflict for a US audience. His detailed posts featured prominently on the channel's website and generated increased traffic but they did not, in the truest sense, constitute a blog, restricted as they were to the tastes of the broadcaster. Ward concludes, somewhat dismally, that [t]he ability of bloggers adopted by large outlets to write freely will always be limited by those outlets' need to appeal to a much wider audience and by their desire for editorial or ideological control (ibid):

While bloggers are increasingly able to harness traditional media to get out their message, traditional media formats tend to be mimicking blogs in style but not content. As shown by the strict editorial constraints Fox News placed on Witte's blog, the things that make a blog great to its comparatively small and self-selecting audience - unpublishable rumor, polemic rants, the delicate balance between insight and incitement - will not fly in the profit-driven Western press or the largely state-dominated Arab media.

A blog-based public sphere is more of a threat to existing frames of reference, because there is less containment of public discourse through editorial means. Lynch (2006) writes of the Arab punditocracy that public-sphere bloggers represent a potentially challenging body of ...politically

savvy, engaged citizens determined to argue in public about the things which matter to them . Lynch uses the example of Al Jazeera to explain the difference in freedom of expression between state- and corporate-sanctioned media outlets and the blogosphere:

Blogs tap into the same deep appeal captured by Al Jazeera, which thrived by embracing more participatory forms such as unscreened call-in shows, live talk shows, online polls. But even Al Jazeera could only expand the range of existing voices rather than enable a new generation of political voices.

In terms of fusing mainstream media and the blogosphere, the Arab media is following the trend set by its Western counterpart by incorporating user-participatory online formats (Ward, 2006). The Lebanese paper *An-Nahar* ran a short profile piece during the war on Blogging Beirut, and *Al Arabiya* launched a Video Club feature on their website that allowed users to upload short movies. The footage, however, is subject to the usual editorial restrictions imposed by Saudi-controlled media: The clips dealing with the Lebanon war are mostly montages of injured faces set to patriotic music (ibid).

It must be remembered that although this conflation of old and new media formats generally has a negligible impact on policy-making structures (Hudson 2005), there is clearly increased diversity of opinion in the Arab public sphere. There appears to be a trend towards more political commentary among tech-friendly youth, in particular. It is hoped that the Lebanese blogosphere, which already exhibits similar characteristics, will follow suit:

In Jordan, for instance, the first wave...has already been supplemented by blogs maintained by Batir Wardum (a liberal columnist for the newspaper *Al Dustour*), Yasir Abu Hilala (*Al Jazeera*'s Amman correspondent and columnist for *Al Ghad*), Ziyad Abu Ghuneima (an Islamist former MP), and Hilmi Asmar (a columnist and former editor of the Muslim Brotherhood weekly newspaper *Al Sabil*).

Political blogging is in flux, and its relevance is increasing. The relatively small number of political

bloggers has already had a disproportionate impact on a much larger support base, being routinely used for information by MSM outlets and commentators. These include political activists, journalists, and other politically influential elites (as well as foreign scholars and governments trying to gauge Arab public opinion), ...a high quality audience even if a relatively small one (Lynch, 2007):

Newspapers such as *Al Masry Al Youm* and *Al Dustour* in Egypt now routinely cite blogs as sources for their stories, offering another indirect route for political impact. In such a political environment, even a handful of creative, engaged, and effective political bloggers can make a dramatic difference (ibid).

As Parry (2003) and others summarise, online news publishing is

a cost-effective, high growth industry; a proven way of reaching out to key groups (including those who contribute content to traditional media) and the younger generation who will shape the future; and an excellent venue for publishing political viewpoints that are excluded, marginalized, or minimized in the mainstream and traditional media.

The power of the medium will be apparent when those bloggers find a way to cross the bridge between the elite and the grass roots - a process that Lynch (2006 and 2007) and Beckerman (2007) point out is already beginning, ...through a few organized demonstrations co-ordinated by bloggers, online campaigns, and the posting of information... (Beckerman, 2007). Increased interest translates into increased traffic on sites, and increased commentary and dialogue, further encouraging bloggers to post as they are made aware that they are writing to audiences both domestic and international. There is scope for further technological development as well as civilian democratic commentary and intervention. It is hoped that the medium itself - the range and access inherent in digitality - will aid the development of free expression in the Arab blogosphere.

The Lebanese blogosphere

The public sphere is a space of heteroglossia, as we have seen. Lebanon, like all societies, has always functioned across multiple public spheres that are created by the development and interaction of ...tribes, sects, integrated principles, [and] civil society... (Dawahare, 59: 2000). As a multi-confessional state, it is traditionally one of the most culturally diverse and tolerant countries in the world.

In the twentieth century, however, Lebanon became a byword for destruction. Journalists and academics predict the *Lebanization* that is, the near-complete destruction of state and economic infrastructure of any country plagued by ethnic conflict that has escalated into open warfare (Haris in Dawahare, 9: 2000). It has become a kind of shorthand to indicate a long-term series of conflicts and civil devastation. What this means is that an entire generation was born into or came of age during the period of the civil war from 1975 to 1990 - a conflict that had arisen out of the complexities of the confessional system of nineteen sects with no majority. Of the difficulties of identity and political engagement in this sectarian system, King writes, 'If a minority is a group that lacks power, it is only a short leap to the conclusion that a minority group is always a potential victim group' (2006). The pre-war population, 'a mosaic of contending minorities' (ibid), was therefore primed for conflict.

Known simply as *al-hawadeth* (the events), the war was a fifteen-year cycle of violence and retribution in a number of dimensions, including the local, regional and international, and manifest in an Israeli invasion and subsequent occupation in 1982. As King observes:

Territory became identity, and identity was ineluctable in the war. In the absence of a state structure and a centralized government, familial and religious networks, and the patron-client relationships linking neighborhoods, cities, regions, and transnational settings and actors, assumed pronounced importance, power, and utility. These networks probably enabled many Lebanese to survive the war, and certainly played a role in keeping the Lebanese economy surprisingly vibrant and resilient from the start of the war until 1983, but these networks also fragmented Lebanon as a nation, and

were especially evident in the fracturing of Beirut (ibid).

The post-war era witnessed remarkable rebuilding and sustainable reconciliation, but institutional and legal reform has been generally absent, or insufficient: Lebanon began its recovery after the controversial Declaration of Ta'if in 1990, which emphasised sectarian identity over Lebanese nationality, further dividing the population and increasing the sense of powerlessness and the lack of voice in the public sphere. (While it is beyond the reach of this research to present a detailed discussion of conflict in Lebanon, King's 2006 post on Electronic Lebanon - 'Lebanon for Beginners' - provides a succinct history of the relevant conditions and events, and Traboulsi's *A History of Modern Lebanon* provides a more extensive historiographic analysis.) What concerns this research is the fact that it is this generation, familiar with the dynamics of voice and representation, that is currently active in the blogosphere, providing alternative accounts to socio-political narratives. As discussed, the youth demographic is defined by particular digital attributes that have implications for media forms and the dissemination of information. As Rasha Salti writes (2006), the Lebanese polity will not be manipulated into '...barbaric sectarian horror. We've tried that before and it does not work, and we are tired of fighting each other.' She goes on to point out that the contentious status of Hezbollah is:

a mature political organization (that has matured organically within the evolution of Lebanese politics) with an Islamist ideology, that has learned (very quickly) to co-exist with other political agents in this country, as well as other sects. If Lebanese politics was a representation of short-sighted petty sectarian calculations, the lived social experience of postwar Lebanon was different. Sectarian segregation was extremely difficult to implement in the conduct of everyday social transactions, in the conduct of business, employment and all other avenues of commonplace life. And that is a capital we all carry within ourselves, there are exceptional moments when the country came together willingly and spontaneously (as with the Israeli attacks in 1993 and 1996), but there are other smaller, less spectacular moments that punctuate the lived experience of the postwar that every single Lebanese can

recall where sectarian prejudice was utterly meaningless, experienced as meaningless.

Most of the bloggers based in Lebanon during the 33-Day War knew no context other than conflict on a more or less continual scale, in both urban and rural areas and affecting all confessional groups to a greater or lesser extent. Various governments had proved themselves to be unreliable and opaque at best (and corrupt and nepotistic at worst, illustrated by the family-run Lebanese construction industry). Civil society organisations, while more efficient in providing public services, tended to be funded and run by parties with overt political affiliations, the most public and wide-ranging being Hezbollah (Lebanon Higher Relief Council: 2007). The public sphere in which Lebanese bloggers met was therefore one of violence. Nevertheless, what these culturally and ethnically diverse groups had in common was their status as civilians during wartime. As a result, Lebanon, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, was perfectly situated for continued civil resistance to the imposition of military involvement.

Before 2005, Lebanon itself had seen little activity in the blogosphere. The first serious Lebanese blogs came in February 2005, when Lebanese blogging with an overt political bent rose dramatically after the murder of Rafiq Al Hariri. The demonstrations that followed - the Intifada Al Istiqlal or Independence Intifada – were known in the West as the Cedar Revolution. Haugbolle (2006) estimates that in the period between February 2005 and June 2005 several hundred blogs were created, ‘the majority of them as a direct result of the boom in civil activism that characterised the uprisings in the spring of 2005’. Lebanese expatriates felt a similar need to discuss the events in what most still considered their homeland: international readership ensured that the Lebanese blogosphere thrived. It shares certain features of developmental history with its counterparts in the rest of the Arab world. However, the Lebanese blogosphere has the advantage of both a sound technological infrastructure and the legal protection of freedom of expression – two aspects that cannot be overestimated in terms of democratic practice.

In comparison to other Arab countries, Lebanon is relatively free in its Internet usage, ranked first among Arab countries, according to The Economist International Union (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4450582.stm). Lebanese bloggers are aided by a fairly reliable and far-reaching infrastructure. The national telecommunications network was largely

reconfigured in the 1990s, after the destruction of the civil war. According to *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* newspaper (14 December 2004), the percentage of Lebanese citizens with terrestrial phone lines at the time was 15.7%. The Digital Economy Study Centre, MADAR, ranked Lebanon eighteenth among Arab countries regarding Internet access and use, although this has increased dramatically since the 33-Day War.

According to the figures released by the International Telecommunication Union in Lebanon, by 2005 the country had 630 000 land phone lines, 813 000 mobile phone lines provided by LibanCell and France Telecom Lebanon, and some 550 000 Internet users. Recently, the Ministry of Telecommunications allowed Internet companies and users to use Internet satellite receivers after licensing from the cabinet of ministers (Internet Service in Lebanon, Ministry of Telecommunication, <http://www.mpt.gov.lb/Internet.htm>).

These structures were aided by prominent figures like the late Rafiq Hariri, who launched government projects such as the 'Computer for Every Student and Teacher' initiative, which aimed to provide each Lebanese student and teacher with a computer and Internet access (<http://www.almustaqbal.com/stories.aspx?StoryID=153563>).

According to the Arab Regional Office of The International Telecommunication Union in Lebanon, there are 7 000 registered Lebanese websites. This is high in comparison to other Arab countries, particularly considering Lebanon's small population (3.5 million in the official 2005 census). Haugbolle writes (2006) that of the three hundred or so specifically Lebanese blogs, 232 were written by university students or young professionals based in Lebanon, Europe, America and Canada (listed by the search-engine Technorati and the blog Lebanon Heart Blogs in September 2006). This spread and bias is in keeping with Western blogging patterns.

The Lebanese government does not censor Internet use. Article Thirteen of the Lebanese Constitution explicitly stipulates that freedom of expression verbally or in writing, freedom of press, freedom of assembly, and freedom to form associations are guaranteed by law. Limited materials for censorship extend to pornography, politics and religion, as well as any Israeli materials when they are a threat to national security (<http://www.ifla.org/faife/report/lebanon.htm>). While Beirut's Internal Security Department in Beirut initially gave itself the mandate to investigate electronic violations, no websites have yet been blocked. Security forces have intervened in a single case,

where the manager of the service provider for www.gaylebanon.com, Ziad Maghraby, was pressured to reveal the names of the owners of the website and subscribers. The website was shutdown but the identities of the players were protected. The incident escalated when it was published by Kamal Al-Batal in MIRSAD, the Lebanese human rights organisation publication. Both men were accused of defaming the moral police, but the appeals court found Al-Batal innocent (<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2000/09/23/leban0680.htm>).

If anything, censorship concerns come from within the ranks of the Lebanese population, where more conservative parents are concerned that their children's exposure to Westernising influences – mainly pornographic and anti-Islamic - may influence them at the expense of their own religious and cultural belief systems (<http://openarab.net/en/articles/2007/art0121.shtml>). In other words, Lebanese parents find themselves dealing with the same issues that their Western counterparts face.

Lebanon's influence in the blogosphere was internationally highlighted by the outbreak of conflict with Israel during July 2006. Haugbolle (2006) follows Lynch (2006) in summarising the enervating effect of conflict on alternative reportage in general:

If the first Gulf War in 1991 was CNN's baptism of fire and the Afghan Invasion in 1998 Al Jazeera's, the Lebanon War in 2006 has propelled Internet-based journalism, which first appeared during and after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, from obscurity to the heart of the new Arab public sphere of transnational media (ibid).

The conditions provided by the 33-Day War produced both the political actors and opportunities necessary for alternative media and organisation. Politically motivated blogging activity was entrenched by Israel's attack on Lebanon (in retaliation for the kidnapping by Hezbollah of two soldiers, setting back much of the reconstruction work that had been done over the last fifteen years). After more than a month of bombardment, about 1300 Lebanese civilian had been killed and a quarter of the population displaced. Infrastructure was destroyed, rendering schools, hospitals and community centres unusable, and trapping Lebanese civilians when bridges were exploded and

roadblocks set up.

Many bloggers, both local and diasporic, believed that Western mainstream media was not reporting accurately on the war. Blogging was a way to express this frustration, as well as provide alternative viewpoints to the subjective accounts of the dominant narrative. Blogging offered a new way of speaking and listening, a unique way to share and discuss their war experience. Lynch comments that the war ‘...sent the international blogosphere into frantic action and filled chat rooms and postings with heated debate’ (2007).

Social networks were already functioning in Lebanon at a basic level before the 33-Day War. What the conflict did was entrench existing networks and create new ones, both on the ground (like the Lebanon: An Open Country for Civil Resistance drive in Lebanon) and in cyberspace (like the site E-Petitions.net, which organised international petitions in response to events such as the oil spill at Jiyeh station in the East Mediterranean occasioned by the Israeli attacks on the 13th and 15th July 2006, and other various causes).

The blogs performed an archival function, as well as a more personal one: the narration of the war provided a record of events for posterity, and preserved identity for the writers by maintaining some sense of community, for Lebanese people both at home and abroad. As Rasha Salti writes of the purpose of her archiving of experience (Siege Note 5: 17 July 2006):

These siege notes are becoming something else, and I realize now that I am no longer writing to the intimate society of people I love and cherish, but to an opaque blogosphere of people who want alternative news. I am more than ever conscious of a sense of responsibility in drafting them. They have a public life, an echo that I was not aware of, and that I experience now as some sort of burden.

Another blogger, Mazen Kerbaj, comments on the responsibility that many bloggers report - to tell a truth that often differs from the dominant narrative of the state: ‘We are writing our future’s collective memory.’

While there was a small core of bloggers, they were highly influential, both locally and

internationally, in focusing attention on the true conditions experienced by civilians. The bloggers used this influence to call for an end to the conflict, as well as for more immediate aid for the civilian population. Lynch (2006) outlines the structural evolution of individual accounts that become social action: blogs allow for ‘a widely dispersed set of interlinked arguments about politics that responds with extraordinary rapidity to new events’. This means that on the collective level blogospheres can create a space in which ‘...citizens are able to engage in sustained, focused political argument, and perhaps even hold national leaders to account in ways not managed by existing media [that may promote] political accountability and transparency’ (ibid). This online interaction may contribute to the rebuilding of transnational Arab identity by re-creating relationships between people and their communities.

Lebanon in the public sphere

There is much debate around whether the Internet can be considered a true Habermasian public sphere. Ó Baoill (2000) contends that there are a number of structural impediments in the current implementation of weblogs (in both production and reception) that damage any claims by the blogosphere to be a strong public sphere. But he refers here to permanent weblogs pre-existing personal networks. While these may not attain the status of true forums for public debate, warblogs in general do. The Lebanese warblogs in particular functioned as event-specific texts that were constrained by the time parameters of the conflict; they did create sites for public debate. This was supported by the physical response of the Lebanese civilians in rescue and rehabilitation programmes, as well as in international pressure on both the Israeli and Lebanese governments.

Some civic engagement as the result of the blogging conversations and calls to act is thus clearly taking place. It is my contention that the Internet does exhibit the features of a public sphere as mentioned by Habermas. This is not least because blogosphere keeps expanding faster than any other new media sphere (Haugbolle, citing the 2006 Kluth survey), particularly in parts of the world with limited access to the latest technology – a fact which seems at odds with the criticism so often directed at the political blogosphere as envisioned by Habermas as a space characterised by universal access, rational debate, and disregard of rank: that it is elitist, excluding those who do not have access to the hardware and software required to participate in a true public sphere; and that

consensus is impossible.

Firstly, there is no question that participation by both writers and readers can be limited. Davis, in Ó Baoill, identifies three impediments that Internet democracy places in the way of civic participation: technological access and literacy (the physical requirements for Internet access include hardware, for example, a personal computer with modem; software, for example, Web browser, mail client software; and access to an Internet node, like an ISP dial-up port. Users also need to be able to be literate, and understand how to operate their computer and navigate their way around the web); time commitment; and additional financial resources. Overall economic and social conditions, including population density, in an area or region can strongly influence the affordability of telephone and Internet access. The problem for Lebanese users is mainly financial, particularly in the poorer south, where a monthly subscription can amount to fifty U.S. dollars (the anecdotal figure supplied by Abdel Aziz in response to a research question on The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information site). This encourages black market activity: 'Some small Internet service providers illegally supply houses with the Internet connections to skip the problem of high costs', according to an article in *Al-Mostaqbal* newspaper (<http://www.almustaqbal.com/stories.aspx>).

Ward (2006) writes that the new realm of online interaction brought with it further inequalities of access in a society already divided along confessional lines rather than a true representation of the Arab voice of the street much-touted by journalists.

In Lebanon, blogging tends to be a hobby of the wealthy, socially conscious, and usually urban elite. In the sectarian terms pervasive in Lebanese politics, this translates to a heavier online representation of Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims (ibid).

Lynch agrees, criticising the Arab blogosphere as the province of ...a tiny elite...only a small minority of the already microscopic fraction of Arabs who regularly use the Internet actually write or read blogs (2006). In the Lebanese blogosphere it is still the educated, relatively liberal, middle-class commentators who hold sway.

But this allegation of elitism is hardly as problematic as critics suggest. Beckerman (2007)

quotes Ammar Abdulhamid, a Syrian blogger in exile for his pro-democracy activism, who writes:

There is nothing wrong with admitting that we represent a certain elite. It is not exclusively an economic elite, though economics surely plays a large factor. These are people who are comfortable, who have more time to blog. But in itself this is not the problem. The importance of this technology at this stage is to connect the elites better, to network the elites, to make them able to share more ideas and organize.

In urban areas, particularly Beirut, Internet cafés are ubiquitous, both as independent venues and as services offered by larger concerns (Starbucks coffee shops, for example). The figures supplied by Eid, of The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, estimate the price of Internet access as ranging between one thousand and four thousand liras per hour (0.7 to 2.7 U.S. dollars, or between 5 and 20 rand at the 2008 exchange rate).

During the conflict, Internet cafés served another very public purpose as well: they provided a space for like-minded bloggers to meet, and in this sense, there was participation in an alternative public sphere. Salti (2006) writes: 'I am better off here than at home, following the news, live, on-the-spot documentation of our plight in sound bites.' This desire to represent the self in the writer's own terms is one of the premises of narrative therapy – that the reconstruction of a fragmented life-story in 'sound bites' according to the narrator's will is a healing process (among others, Ricoeur 1991, Laub 1991, Hayes 1998, Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 2007). The narrator moves from the disrupted story that marks powerlessness to a series of causal events under their psychological control, as we have seen.

Furthermore, some community venues (such as libraries) offer free access, and literacy is high. Blogging was, as we have seen, stimulated by the conflict. Bloggers were able to post as usual, and the public sphere generally saw an increase in traffic as individuals posted more texts, and international readers began to view the blogs as serious news sources, even if there was a degree of skewed representation.

Representivity is not cause for concern here, because the diversity of opinion provides a

range of viewpoints. Bloggers may not *be* the people but they are *of* the people, voicing their concerns. They are voluntary civilian voices, heard in a public platform. With the networking of elites comes enlarged influence, and, as we have seen, it is these vocal minorities that tend historically to make changes in the status quo. The more individual voices are heard the more polyphonous the Internet becomes - the more likely bloggers are to engage their readers emotionally and politically and this, ideally, results in political participation. Parry remarks in summary that the reach of online media & has penetrated key areas of society, including crucial target audiences for re-dissemination such as the media and young people, audiences frequently described as having a "multiplier effect" (2003).

This two-step flow of persuasive communication does not convince people directly; it influences local opinion leaders what Perlmutter calls influentials who then persuade those who respect their opinion or follow their leadership (31: 2008). These Online Political Citizens (OPCs) tend to serve as opinion leaders in their actual communities as well (Schwartz in Perlmutter, 2008). As discussed, young people are regarded as a particularly influential demographic among their peers (Miller and Shepherd, 2004; Haugbolle, 2006; Perlmutter, 2008), and have certainly had an impact on political campaigning in Arab countries - as, for example, in the case of the imprisonment of the Egyptian blogger Alaa, which opened up heated public debate. Poster (2005) cites Lyotard when he advocates a turn to the little story of individual narrative, one which & validates difference, extols the "unpresentable" and escapes the overbearing logic of instrumentality that derives from the metanarrative of progress. In the serious political posts of the Arab blogosphere, at least, the little narratives do indeed seem to proliferate against their authoritarian contexts.

As Lynch and others argue, these forums involve the kinds of participation which articulate well with the process of accountable politics and democracy in action - criticism, negotiation and argument. Haugbolle (2006) reminds us that:

[Blogs] can be seen as playful realms of negotiation for national, social and gender stratifications. This freedom of expression can seem threatening to traditional social institutions, from Islamic authorities to traditional media and cultural elites.

The second criticism of the Habermasian public sphere deals with equality of status, which is not a given. Arguing against the flattening of status on the Internet, Ó Baoill (2000) writes that the use of pseudonyms and multiple identities means that the content of the post or comment must be judged on its internal logic, rather than any physical markers of the speaker, while Poster (2005) argues that shifting identity is not consonant with forming a stable political community; Dissent on the Net does not lead to consensus: it creates the profusion of different views. Without embodied copresence, the charisma and status of individuals have no force.

However, it is just this narrative disinhibition, as Suler (2004) argues, that allows people to transmit information they would not be inclined to share in a face-to-face situation, an aspect of narrative utilised in journaling during narrative therapy. In the Lebanese comments, affiliation was apparent in shared perspective rather than specific physical identity, a transcendence of individual identity that marks cyberspace as a new location for engagement.

Ó Baoill writes that there is skewed representation online, and that status remains hierarchical, representing what Habermas terms 'mere opinion' rather than 'public opinion'. Ó Baoill and others argue that there is clearly an 'A-list' of bloggers with more traffic on their sites, as well as more influence in the mainstream media. '[L]inks to weblogs, just like on the Web in general, follow a power law distribution' (Kottke in Ó Baoill): the top-ranked weblogs have far more links than those further down the chain. Shirky's (2003) sample of 433 weblogs found that 'the top dozen (less than 3% of the total) accounted for 20% of the inbound links, and the top 50 blogs (not quite 12%) accounted for 50% of such links' (Ó Baoill). High activity on the part of the bloggers, established reputations, pre-existing networks, topical subjects, media interest and blog indexes all go some way towards accounting for the trend of over-representation.

Polarisation and 'flaming', particularly on contentious issues, feature on both linked weblogs (blog carnivals) and within forums on 'hard' news websites. Thompson writes that, while Internet texts (chat rooms and forums) are theoretically more open to audience response than traditional media, they can in fact be filtered

& intentionally by webmasters and ideologically by association with

the typical content of the website. Weblogs offer satisfaction to their audiences by reinforcing ideological perspectives & if audiences gravitate to web sites which offer only coherent reinforcement of existing ideological positions, theirs seem natural and right.

While there is no lack of diversity of viewpoint among bloggers, the implications of the socially constructed patterns of access discussed above are that readers should bear in mind that they are not necessarily receiving the most representative viewpoints of the Lebanese population at large. It is, however, useful to be able to follow the development of influential youth pressure – however privileged a background it may stem from – in the political arena. Weblogs offer an illustration of ‘...how new technological capabilities interact with social conditions and institutions’ to enable new types of media and responsibility (ibid).

While some Lebanese writers (Rasha Salti; The Angry Arab) were lionised in the mainstream media, others were available with a shallow search through aggregators and blog carnivals (such as <http://electronicintifada.net/>, <http://electroniclebanon.net/>, and <http://lebanonheartblogs.blogspot.com/>). These sites facilitated access to many blogs that would otherwise have gone unnoticed, listing them in a blogroll on either the left or right hand side of the screen. The skewed online representation for Lebanon online is the same as it is for any country, leaning towards the young, educated, middle-class commentator – those people most likely to embrace change. Meaningful participation in the public sphere was thus relatively unhindered.

The last criticism of the Habermasian public sphere presents the most challenging issue – that debate is rarely rational, and that achieving consensus is unlikely, considering the range of opinions and conversational approaches of the participants. The very lack of boundaries demarcating community may be a disadvantage: the diversity and reach of the ‘virtual village green’ means that every viewpoint on the topic gets equal consideration in the blog posts themselves.

For the comments section, a mediating function exists in the form of editorialisation: while anyone may submit a comment on a post, webmasters decide what to publish. Alternatively, comments may be filtered by consent: when other readers complain that a comment is offensive or amounts to hate speech, it may be removed from the site and its originator banned. This gate-

keeping function is practical and necessary, but also means that a kind of censorship is practiced, removing the control of information from the collective authors. (O'Reilly's Blogger's Code of Conduct seeks to avoid exactly this censorship by obviating the necessity for it in the first place.)

Another aspect of editorial practice that differs from the MSM model is that it occurs after publishing. The blogosphere filters content collaboratively and ...without the same profit motive of print-capitalism, making it more open to outside voices and dissenting views (Lampa, 2004). Shirky (2004) and Lampa (2004) note that blog filters guarantee that bloggers' work is always available for reading even if it is not actually widely read. This filtering occurs on the micro level through the work of individual bloggers who suggest posts of interest. Small-scale filtering further encourages a dialectical relationship between bloggers and their perceived community through engagement. On the macro level, there are aggregate blog indices (Blogdex, Technorati, Daypop, Popdex and others). Lampa writes:

The aggregated filtering that occurs in the blogging community is based both on the perceived value of each discrete bit of information (an individual blog post) and the authority and exposure of the author (quantified by accumulated inbound links) within the community (Sifry, 2003b; MIT, 2003).

Reader consensus is indeed more difficult to achieve online. The usual physical markers of face-to-face interaction that we use to build up trust relationships in communities are absent. Discussions may also be limited in freshness, linked as they are to specific news items or posts, and the people who post comments are the ones who belong to a particular group—one with the time and inclination to do so. In addition, the structure of the comments section – as separate threads on each post – can cut debate short or be interrupted by news updates. Reaction is therefore not representative of a population as a whole. Ó Baoill recommends the wiki as a more participatory tool where consensus is expected, because multiple users can create, modify and organise content in a more clearly collaborative fashion.

Serfaty (83: 2004) sums up by writing that the Internet '...opens up the closed space of interiority onto a space that is far larger than itself, without being totally public, however'. Most of

the Lebanese bloggers wrote coherent and well-argued posts. The majority of the comments by readers were sensitive or querying in nature, and represented rational engagement and debate; a minority of the comments were aggressive or irrelevant and could not be regarded as rational although there is scope for further research on these reactions as themselves potentially traumatised. Readers who found Hassan Nasrallah laughable, for example, joined in the mockery instigated by Jamal's Propaganda Language considerations and cultural affiliations obviously play some role in who reads which blogs, and readers were drawn to sites where they were more likely to reach a consensus with the blogger.

Serfaty (60: 2004) also argues, Networking with other diarists can therefore be said to loom large in the expectations of diarists, and may actually end up in a process of co-enunciation. Blogs repeatedly provide illustrations of their socialising functions, as hypertextual links with other people's diaries turn into real life interconnections (ibid). The multiple sites that published the Civil Resistance Campaign posts, for example, occupy a very clear demographic one that resisted both the Israeli attack and the Lebanese response. The civic discussion and mobilisation that occurred as a result of these posts indicates that the Lebanese warblogs did indeed provide a site for public engagement, debate and action.

The groups that blogged or responded to blogs tended to exhibit the features of Fraser's counterpublics and multiple publics above, as well as Hauser's recommendations (1999) for rhetorical public spheres which make for a more useful analytical framework.

Hauser advanced the idea of a public sphere that was concerned primarily with dialogue and issues (the 33-Day War, for example), instead of the identity of the contributing speakers, pointing out that it is the active, interested members of society who will engage in discourse (they may be the actors for institutions or simply engaging in street rhetoric). The discussion in these issue-based spheres is conveyed to all interested publics:

& even though we lack personal acquaintance with all but a few of its participants and are seldom in contexts where we and they directly interact, we join these exchanges because they are discussing the same matters (64: 1999).

Hauser designated further characteristics of a rhetorical public sphere: permeable boundaries; activity and engagement; contextualized language; believability; and tolerance (79-80). This definition of the rhetorical public sphere can be viewed as a response to Poster's ideas about the fragmenting effects of Internet identities. The rhetorical public sphere is created around shared interests and common meanings and provides:

[a] discursive space in which strangers discuss issues they perceive to be of consequence for them and their group. Its rhetorical exchanges are the bases for shared awareness of common issues, shared interests, tendencies of extent and strength of difference and agreement, and self-constitution as a public whose opinions bear on the organization of society. (64: 1999)

In this context, the shared public sphere is wartime, when all citizens are affected (to differing extents) by the conflict. Warblogs tend to display the characteristics of Hauser's rhetorical public sphere fairly distinctively: the posts are discourse-based (rather than identity-based); they are derived from actual discursive practices; and are composed of many and divergent dialogues and experiences.

In addition, my classification here of the Internet as public sphere acknowledges that discourse does not have to be rational, and that the discourse of trauma is often the opposite: disrupted, non-sequential and fragmented – the 'precocious witnessing' of seeing without understanding in the belated rendering of the trauma story. It is the very engagement through dialogue that is important, and the mudslinging, ridicule and outrage so decried by critics of public sphere theory are all legitimate (although not always helpful) strategies employed by witnesses – both first- and second-hand - of the testimonial context as they are confronted with the belief systems of others and challenge their own.

When considered in the context of constructing post-traumatic communities, the Internet is an appropriate site for polyphonic engagement and healing; there is evidence of universal access, rational debate, and disregard of rank. As Perlmutter (2008), and others summarise, blogs have changed the way we communicate by turning the traditional dynamics of the media producer-

media consumer relationship upside down. And an increased media platform is a more powerful voice – one which can both narrate the individual healing process and facilitate communication through survivor missions, thereby reforming lives shattered by the chaotic forces of trauma.

Warblogs in Lebanon

July 2006 saw the Lebanese blogosphere establish itself as a transnational public sphere. Despite the bombing of urban infrastructure, electricity and phone lines were for the most part left intact, enabling many Lebanese people to present their ...political analyses, experiences and practical wartime information for the wired world to see (Haugbolle, 2006). A small but influential group of core writers found that they had a large international audience, and used this influence to procure aid for the civilian population. According to Ward (2006), the 33-Day War ...may have been the most intensely blogged-about war in history :

The Israel-Hizbullah conflict was the first war where large numbers of bloggers on all sides were able to swap both practical information and political rants in real-time. More than ever before, bloggers were able to influence the agenda for traditional media coverage (ibid).

Haugbolle (2006) outlines the various forms international interest took, emphasising the accessibility of digital reportage:

The war sent the international blogosphere into frantic action and filled chat rooms and postings with heated debate. According to the international blog search engine Technorati, key words during the conflicts, such as Hizbullah and Qana[,] were among the very most requested on the Internet. The blogosphere became not just a space for debate but also for information and alternative views and accounts from the ground, which during previous conflicts in the Middle East has [sic] been the privilege of satellite channels.

Blogging reflected a general change in the way news is created and consumed in the twenty-first century. Ward (2006) writes that the conflict was:

part of a second phase of traditional media's embrace of the Internet, marked by a flurry of experimentation with ways to cash-in [sic] on the success of individual bloggers and popular aspects of the blog format such as serial narrative and user participation. During the war, mainstream media outlets piggybacked off stories researched and broken by bloggers, ran pieces profiling prominent blogs, and in one case, recruited a student living in Beirut to keep a blog-style journal featured on a major U.S. network's website.

The devolution of power wielded by traditional news outlets became obvious as blogs became more influential during the conflict: civilian activism was on the rise, as earlier discussed. Beckerman (2007) writes that

They were more than just a handful of aberrant voices. They reflected a new culture of openness, dialogue, and questioning...[T]he push for change here is coming from within...[E]ach of these unprecedented acts is one small move toward opening up these societies.

Many personal sites included war coverage as a matter of course because the lives of the bloggers were so disrupted by the events. Rasha Salti's Siege Notes became particularly popular. Blogs such as July 2006 War on Lebanon, Lebanese Bloggers and Electronic Lebanon found the most readers during the conflict (blogs rely on e-mail recommendations, and a blog's popularity is judged by the frequency of its being accessed from another site via links). Haugbolle (2006) distinguishes among the blogs according to their readers:

Journalists, activists and academics in the ex-pat circles around Beirut's English-language paper, privileged blogs such as Siege of Lebanon, where *Daily Star* staff writers Sonja Knox, Jim Quilty and Ramsay Short produced some fine pieces of war journalism (www.siegeoflebanon.blogspot.com, beirutlive.blogspot.com).

Other readers relied on word of mouth for recommendations and referrals to particular websites. These ranged from highly personal descriptions of siege life to relief organisation networks such as www.lebanonupdates.blogspot.com and www.samidoun.blogspot.com, which provided statistical evidence of damage incurred, town by town, and therefore had implications for state and international relief efforts. Blogging Beirut, along with the standard reports, contained a sidebar that indicated which public sites (particularly the tactically significant bridges) had been hit, and which foodstuffs were currently in short supply.

One editor at the Lebanese newspaper *As-Safir* knew that Western media outlets were unlikely to flight realistically gruesome depictions of injured or dead Lebanese civilians. Hanady Salman therefore began dispatching regular e-mail updates to friends and colleagues, providing photographs as well as her own narratives and analyses. Salman was intent on getting the message posted on multiple blogs (like www.beirutjournal.blogspot.com. 16 July, 2006), requesting that readers circulate the images widely,

especially to Western viewers who would almost certainly not encounter them in their mainstream press or on television. Many bloggers inside and outside Lebanon prominently featured Salman's messages, and would make hers one of the most powerful voices emanating from Beirut during the war (ibid).

Civilian journalism during a finite period of crisis functions slightly differently, as writers such as Rasha Salti (2006 and 2008) explain. Pressed into providing personal accounts of the bombing for friends and family, these bloggers realised that their posts had a larger audience in the forums,

essentially creating social networks both locally in Lebanon, and transnationally in cyberspace. These networks had the potential to organise themselves socially. While some writers make a distinction between public-sphere blogs, which are concerned with local or domestic politics, and those which advocate and organise activism, it seems apparent that it is more likely that the latter grows out of the former but not exclusively, and not ubiquitously. As Salti's *Notes From the Siege* (135-6) illustrate, frustration and grief could find their outlets in activism:

I was not aware of being animated by guilt, but gradually I became obsessed with having the deaths of everyday folks acknowledged as a first step to redressing injustice...In a desperate attempt to fight ineptitude and helplessness, I became involved with a group of people to organize what became known as the Civilian Resistance Campaign.

Salti's post demonstrates aspects of all three of the discursive modes proposed by Lynch (2007): activism, bridgeblogging (a term coined by a blogger, Xiao Qiang), and public sphere engagement:

Activists are directly involved in political movements, using blogs to coordinate political action, spread information, and magnify the impact of contentious politics. Bridgebloggers primarily address Western audiences, usually writing in English with the intention of explaining their societies. Finally, public-sphere bloggers tend to not be directly involved in a political movement, but are deeply engaged with public arguments about domestic (and often Arab or Islamic) politics.

While these categories make useful intellectual distinctions among bloggers, in reality many individuals move freely across these boundaries, as will be discussed in a more detailed analysis of selected Lebanese blogs that follows. Activism was clearly manifest in some campaigns and organisations, as shown in the scrutiny of the Lebanon is An Open Country for Civil Resistance campaign and the other activities posted and discussed on sites such as www.lebanonsolidarity.org.

While all the bloggers talked about the Israeli bombing and its repercussions, activist bloggers advocated direct political involvement – boycotts, demonstrations and other resistance activities such as volunteer work. While some are transnational, most of the Lebanese bloggers focused on the immediate domestic situation because of the crisis it had precipitated.

Even when this was perhaps not the primary intention of the bloggers, a certain amount of bridgeblogging was inevitable. Mahmood Al Yousif, a Bahraini blogger, explains that he writes about Islam in order to ...create a better understanding that we're not all nuts hell-bent on world destruction (http://mahmood.tv/?page_id=2). Bridgebloggers, whether they are conscious of this function or not, are important in preventing social fragmentation and promoting communication across a broad range of readers. Sabbah (in Lynch, 2007) suggests that their role in challenging Western media biases and gaining international support is vital.

Bridgebloggers often wrote in English, using Western discourse to address a foreign audience. Lynch (2007) comments that while this ensures massive international access, it can also function as a distancing mechanism from the bloggers' own national politics. In addition, these blogs are often linked to hubs or blog carnivals, which can have a restrictive, gate-keeping function.

One option to circumvent this kind of bias is offered by the approach favoured by Global Voices Online: fluent regional editors sift national blogospheres in order to provide a fairly representative sample of the available writing, providing a media frame for the blogs (<http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/>). While this cannot ensure impartiality, it does provide a broader range of access to content – more seats at the table of dialogue .

Because blogging can reach new audiences, particularly ones disillusioned with the MSM coverage of controversial events, there is a certain sense of responsibility among the more serious political bloggers. Some consider themselves news watchdogs , on the lookout for bias in reporting, a lack of analytical content or simple obfuscation. (Correspondingly, some representatives of traditional media are suspicious of bloggers for similar reasons.)

Blogging provides young Lebanese people with a voice. It is a chance to contradict, to undermine, and to assert , as Beckerman (2007) points out, quoting Abu Kais:

Every leader thinks they represent everyone in these countries. And I

think that's something we challenge every day in our blogs. We challenge what they say, and we always show the politicians as hypocrites, really. We have documented what has happened over the past two years and are able to contrast statements that show the level of the hypocrisy. That's something you don't always find in Lebanese media.

One much-publicised example is that of the Little Green Footballs site, (<http://littlegreenfootballs.com>. 5 Aug 2006), which broke the story that photos of the bombed-out Beirut city centre had been digitally altered by a photographer, Adnan Hajj. Specifically, plumes of smoke above the buildings had been increased in size, and buildings duplicated. Reuters, the international news agency, initially ran the photographs. The subsequent fallout caused by the revelations of the LGF webmaster, Charles Johnson, illustrated the relative powerlessness of traditional media in the face of the Internet. Ward (2006) comments:

No moment during the war better summed up the dynamic of the blogger-mainstream media crossover than when CNN asked for Johnson's take on his role as a blogger, to which he replied, 'It's a sort of a taking-back the reins of information, I guess you might say, from the mainstream media and just double-checking.'

Ward adds that 'Both parties were winners that day; CNN got a ready-made story, and Johnson's blog got a plug on national television' (Hooper in Farhi, 2006). It had become apparent that both online and traditional-media coverage stood to benefit from a more symbiotic relationship than had been previously accepted. What is clear is that the digital crossover trend (already followed by some media outlets) needs to be acknowledged, consolidated and accorded the same status particularly financially as mainstream and print journalism. This has begun in some small part through traditional print models becoming available online with permanent blog columnists; program collaboration or sharing-pairing that uses local bloggers but edits with an eye for the whole publication, such as the South Korean OhmyNews site; hyper-local independent community blogs

that provide neighbourhood information bypassed by other outlets, as we will see in the case of Lebanon; and totally collaborative wikis (wikinews, wikitorials, reader wikis) (Kolodzy, 2006).

Transnational media forms have thus become part of political culture in Arab countries without any demonstrable revolutionary consequences on state policy; there has been very little democratisation in the institutional sense (Lynch in Haugbolle, 2006). While satellite TV and increased press freedom have created increased diversity of Arab public debate and new venues for critical intellectuals, they ...have failed to generate enough trust between intellectuals, the media and the regimes to make them influential in policy making (Hudson in Haugbolle, 2006). The profit motive inherent in the functioning of large news corporations will probably ensure that while the layout, appearance and user patterns of blogs may be borrowed, content is unlikely to be truly alternative to the mainstream ideology.

Whatever the political implications, Haugbolle (2006) concedes that blogs have broadened the base of political commentary and social critique ...by drawing in younger people with less established opinions than those normally seen in the Lebanese media :

It may even have broken a monopoly of middle[-]aged journalists on shaping public opinion. Certainly, the Lebanese blogosphere has created new and vital linkages between diaspora groups and Lebanon, and between academia and the press (ibid).

A note on bloggers outside Lebanon

Blogs have also created a medium through which expatriate Arabs living in the West can establish direct links with their home countries, ...generating a new realm for Arab transnationalism (Haugbolle, 2006).

[T]hey have given an outlet to the generation between fifteen and thirty[-]five who have traditionally had limited access to the public sphere; and they have introduced a whole new speech genre, which challenges cultural, social and political norms.

As has been established, bloggers are a skewed representation of the Lebanese population, leaning towards the academic and educated observers, but these bloggers - of Lebanese extraction, although situated in other countries - were uniquely positioned to analyse and comment on the conflict, often criticising traditional Western news outlets for their biased coverage, which they could compare with the few independent Arabic news sources and personal reports from intimate contacts still in Lebanon (Ward, 2006):

The strong participation of the Lebanese diaspora in blogging the war demonstrates the potential of the medium in bringing together shifting and disparate commentaries, and in juxtaposing multiple overlapping identities. The ability of the Lebanese diaspora and others outside the Middle East to follow Lebanese sources, and of Lebanese bloggers to influence new worldwide audiences demonstrates the globalizing potential of the medium (ibid).

While it is beyond the scope of this research to investigate bloggers living outside Lebanon during the 2006 conflict, it should be mentioned that there were some highly influential voices. Again, Asad AbuKhalil's Angry Arab News Service provided sarcastic quips and longer analyses during and after the Independence Intifada. AbuKhalil, who is an Lebanese-American professor of Political Science, found that his site went from an average of ten posts daily to over thirty at the height of the conflict. The combination of factual content, insider angle and heavy sarcasm made The Angry Arab a more entertaining and readable option for many Internet users who valued honest outrage over the state- and media conglomerate-sanctioned spin of the mainstream news networks. The Angry Arab himself commented on the cross-over interest generated by his and others' posts:

Finally, an American news source pays attention to the victims of the Israeli war of aggression on Lebanon (15 August 2006).

Critics of The Angry Arab include Across the Bay and From Beirut to Beltway, both written by Lebanese expatriates in America. Lebanese Bloggers, Beirut Spring and The Lebanese Political

Journal all discussed extensively what it meant to be Lebanese, although many of the posts are written by people living outside the country. Popular topics frequently included ...Lebanon's sectarian system, the ailing Lebanese economy, the Hariri family and Hizbullah (Haugbolle, 2006; Lynch, 2006). These sites continue to be updated.

Bloggers with a less academic approach also abound. For example, this excerpt from a report from the Iraqi blogosphere, Salam Alil's Asterism, is typical. Hala, on her return from Beirut, muses:

I've never ever felt so humiliated in my life as I did seeing Israeli jets flying freely in the skies of Beirut & I loathed our weakness, I loathed being born as an Arab, I loathed living in London I hated myself so much I couldn't even look in the mirror or watch my shadow as I walk. I felt so small and envied a tiny ant struggling to find its way through the sand.

This kind of frustration and the national self-loathing inherent in trauma situations are simply two of the observable reactions from international bloggers on the 33-Day War. There is clearly scope for further research that distinguishes between bloggers inside and outside Lebanon, as well as research that examines more minutely internal sectarian differences in the blogosphere.

What is clear is that there is a need for Lebanese bloggers to continue to produce independent content, both for the Arab blogosphere and beyond. If change is to be implemented on a national scale in the future, dialogue between individuals and social groups must necessarily continue to come from within (Beckerman, 2007). Whether the Internet is a fully developed public sphere is largely irrelevant. The point is that Arab citizens are engaging politically, and that this new voice - however small it may be initially - is being heard both at home and abroad. The Internet may function as a threshold, crossing into what Falconer (230: 2007) terms a richer, more complex engagement with historical, material reality.

PART THREE: THE LEBANESE WARBLOGS

We media: each night from my bed i hear beirut being erased

This research examines three basic aspects of the digitality and content of the blogs from Lebanon during the 33-Day War: their function as detailed, intimate and first-hand corollaries to the accounts in the mainstream media; their status as reflective and katabatic (descent-and-recovery) narratives; and their ability to create affiliative activist communities, both online and in real time, which is an illustration of the blogosphere as a public space for dialogic engagement.

Most of the Lebanese blogs of July and August 2006 did not begin as modes of convergence journalism, being self-selected, autobiographical and unpaid. However, they did begin to function as a mode of citizen journalism in that they served as a corollary to the more traditional modes of the mainstream media (MSM). It is worth examining how this evolution occurs.

One theory of online journalism (Deuze in Tremayne) deploys four types along an axis mainstream news sites (originated for the Web, or aggregated from the parent medium, also known as shovelware); index and category sites (no original content; portal sites such as Yahoo! or The Drudge Report); meta and comment sites (dealing with meta-reportage issues about news production); and sites for sharing and discussion (the exchange of ideas in an open forum) (240: 2007). The horizontal axis ranges from left to right and goes from emphasising editorial content towards more public interaction. The vertical axis, from top to bottom, goes from an emphasis on moderated to unmoderated participatory communication (ibid). The Lebanese blogs, as informal affiliative sites for sharing and discussion, are situated largely in the last area. As Paul Illek comments on Kerblog, on 2 August 2006, the insomniac artist-musician-Kerbaj has produced:

a brilliant drawing, exact and essential counterpoint to the news photos which have to be outside. your drawing is the inside as your country/people is torn up.more coffee.

P

9:57 PM

Warblogs are historical as well as personal acts. In their explanation of content they provide context

and commentary for events: they are heteroglossic frames. Blogs are raw data, primary sources, ‘the lived histories’ of their writers – what Lederach regards as ‘the lived experiences that create and reinforce the stories of their collective lives and shared memories’ (143: 2005). The history of the formation of the group’s identity, the construction of the group’s future, and its very survival are all about finding place, and story. Kerbaj’s work, for example, is in response to his sense that, as he writes in a post from 8 August 2006 titled ‘my beirut :

each night
from my bed
i hear beirut
being erased

This literal erasure is compensated for in some sense by his illustrations, poems and music: Kerbaj is engaged in an act of preservation, the same efforts we saw in the Holocaust diary’s attempt to re-establish a collapsed connection with the world by re-creating it. Kerbaj’s often crude line drawings are intended to be satirical. His cartoons appear on the cover of a self-styled online ‘magazine’ titled *The Real News from Lebanon*. They initially appear in colour; as the war progresses there is only black and white. With the announcement of the ceasefire in August, the colour gradually reappears, much to the delighted commentary of his readers. Annotated in Arabic, the illustrations have an English version appearing alongside, thus retaining the original context, while facilitating international access.

Blogs follow a written ‘script’, in that they include the four elements of context, fact, emotion and meaning. In their presentation, they share features of both prison letters and political trials, structured in a ‘delivery ritual’ (Agger and Jensen in Herman, 182: 1992). Active collaboration is required with the reader, who plays the role of witness and ally, allowing the speaker to tell the story in as much detail as they wish, to speak the unspeakable at their own pace and in their own time – often in multiple posts, or a single post after a number of days of silence. The relationship between writer and reader is what Lifton calls an encounter and a dialogue, and what Caruth terms ‘a double survivor situation...a survivor and a proxy survivor, and it’s the

meeting of the two that constitutes the witness' (145).

The screen, as Serfaty has suggested (2004), provides a liminal border between the traumatic events and the reconstruction and narration thereof. Blogs can function as threshold chronotopes: by reading we cross over into the stories of others. The Lebanese bridgebloggers, as first-hand survivors of trauma, and the archivers thereof, feel keenly the responsibility of witnessing the irreducible impact of the war on their own lives, as well as 'the history of others that is also our history'. They pay Laub's 'moral attention', manifest in the three levels of witnessing (within our own experience; witnessing the testimonies of others; and witnessing to the process itself). This does not go unnoticed. A comment on Kerblog sums up the debt readers feel to the warbloggers:

freespeechlover said...

thanks for witnessing for those of us who aren't there. you have been our eyes and our vision.

5:11 AM

Blogs have the advantages of independence, digitality and interactivity over mainstream media, which are dependent on format, ownership and sponsorship constraints. Because they are not pressured by space concerns, blogs are able to investigate and detail narratives in ways that MSM aren't. As discussed, the search for meaning manifests in stories, which have what Parry and Doan (2: 1994) term a quality of sufficiency .

[Stories] give an answer to one of the big why questions in a way that most fully accounts for the implications of the question through images that make life meaningful within that culture. In other words, it is the *meaningfulness* of the answers given, rather than their factual *truthfulness*, that gives them their credibility. The hearers of the story believed that it was true because it was meaningful, rather than that it was meaningful because it was true.

This idea is related to the kinds of truth elaborated by Hayes (1998), as we have seen: personal truth, social truth, historical truth and political truth - necessarily multiple and elusive in what Arendt terms a plural world, where we experience meaningfulness only because we can talk with and make sense to one another and ourselves (4: 1958). Narrative elucidates these truths, and the blogosphere is an ideal platform for this kind of polyvocality.

Narratives are a mode of transmission whereby messages are extended in space and time to impart information, but are also concurrently the representation of shared beliefs (Dewey in Dawahare, 2000). Because they are autobiographical and generally located in the 'eternal' present tense, blogs are mediated by individual and communal structures or modes of communication that have been agreed upon rather than enforced in a strict social hierarchy. They are 'we media' in the truest sense, as evinced by the consistent use of the first-person plural pronoun in both the posts and the comment threads and the continual question of moral responsibility and culpability.

English-language blogs were aimed both at Lebanese citizens during the war, and also at diasporic communities. Blogging was vital to narrating the war, forming a record for both internal and international audiences. The bloggers' own reasons for recording their impressions seem to differ superficially, but are at heart the same: blogs manifest the search for meaning and truth – both the factual kind, and the emotive kind – in difficult circumstances. As Kerbaj comments: 'we are writing our future's collective memory' (2006). Salti, on Day 5 of her Siege Notes, explains her entry into the blogosphere as an antidote to the paucity of accurate representation in the MSM, the personal responsibility she feels, and the conflicting emotions it brings as her thoughts move from personal to public status. Salti explicitly compares her Siege Notes to the online diaries of other resistance writers in the Arab blogosphere, as we saw earlier:

I started writing these diary notes to friends outside Lebanon to remain sane and give them my news. I was candid and transparent with all my emotions. The ones I had and the ones I did not have. They were more intended to fight dementia at home, in my home and in my mind, to bridge the isolation in this siege, than to fight the media black-out, racism, prejudice and break the seal of silence. Friends began to circulate them (with my approval). By the third diary note, I was getting replies, applause and rebuke from

people I did not know who had read them. It's great to converse with the world at large, but I realize now that candor and transparency come with a price. A price I am more than happy to pay. However, these diary notes are becoming something else, and I realize now that I am no longer writing to the intimate society of people I love and cherish, but to an opaque blogosphere of people who want "alternative" news. I am more than ever conscious of a sense of responsibility in drafting them, they have a public life, an echo that I was not aware of that I experience now as some sort of a burden. I have been tortured about the implications of that public echo. Should I remain candid, critical, spiteful, cowardly, or should I transform into an activist and write in a wholly different idiom? There is of course a happy medium between both positions, but I don't have the mental wherewithals to find it now. And I don't want to sacrifice candor, transparency and skepticism at the risk of having my notes distorted to serve some ill-intentioned purpose, or in the vocabulary of official rhetoric, "give aid and comfort to the enemy". &

I am reminded of the many, many, many e-diaries that Palestinians send when the Israelis want to secure peace and give them a virile dose of justice with sieges, shelling, checkpoints, sniping, maiming, beating... What Israel is now administering to Lebanon is a small dose of what it delivers to Palestinians. Intense, condensed, but a small dose. However the complications of Lebanon's internal politics and the very, very complicated imbrications of Lebanon with regional politics renders enduring, witnessing, documenting this war more confusing. So bear with me. It's lonely being an anti-hero.

These trends are replicated in most of the other blogs. Individual bloggers provide detailed descriptions of their own experiences during the bombing. This is followed by the more reflexive mode of editorialising and commentary. Collective engagement follows. What Beckerman (2007) terms 'real-time testimony' is accompanied by discussion and arguments in the comment threads following posts,

in which Lebanese and Israelis engaged each other at the deepest levels

about the politics of the conflict, their fears, and sometime even their hopes for the days after. Those provided an important outlet for many people, even when the rhetoric was belligerent. At least we're talking, bloggers frequently pointed out.

Some of the sites use a blend of factual information to cross-check safety concerns, for example, with sarcastic commentary. The corroboration by readers is a significant marker of interactivity and thus voice. Barthes distinguished between readerly and writerly texts. This research regards blogs as writerly (*scriptible*) they invite the active participation of the reader and an involvement in the construction of reality. The comment below also mentions the characteristic confusion and shock that disruption and trauma bring with them. Malik, on The Lebanese Political Journal, cites a post from 13 July 2006, defiantly titled 'Normal life continuing in Beirut', and explains:

This site is intended to provide in-depth analysis in English on the political situation in Lebanon.

This is what Lebanon.profile saw in Beirut today:

The Lebanese political establishment is in complete disarray. Political party leaders have no idea how to respond to this situation. Prime Minister Saniora is in triage mode. He is in constant communication with foreign leaders.

Life is going on as normal in Beirut, although a bit quieter than usual. I had a few meetings this morning, and am busy working, as usual. I plan on going to the gym later in the day, and then attending a party.

the perpetual refugee said...

LP,

Yes, it is pretty much a normal day. Electricity still sucks. Phone lines work (barely), but that is normal. Calls are coming in. Calls are going out. People are checking up on each other and I am going to have a great fish lunch on the Mediterranean, probably not that far from where you are.

But we're all tense. I'm pissed actually. I have no patience today. When my mind is clear, I'll try and figure out what the hell it is we're supposed to be doing, if anything at all. I don't even have it in me to vent right now. Maybe later. When the electricity is out.

The comment thread is further used to disseminate information too new or unreliable to appear in the MSM:

fabio said...

Does anybody have clues about the best way to leave Beirut right now? I have relatives there vacationing that would stay another week they are deciding to leave earlier due to fears of an Israeli airstrike.

Thu Jul 13, 08:38:00 AM PDT

fabio said...

Also, could anyone confirm what is the neighborhood that Israel's air force dropped leaflets warning citizens of an airstrike? could not find this in the media, AP, etc...

Thu Jul 13, 08:41:00 AM PDT

Charles Malik said...

Fabio,

The best way to leave Beirut right now is to go to the Charles Helou bus station and get on a bus or in a taxi headed to Tartus, Latakia, or Aleppo (all cities in Syria).

The Syrians are offering Westerners visas at the border.

The Syrian and Lebanese authorities advise against going from Beirut directly to Damascus. The border crossing is jammed with people. It takes a few hours to get through, and the Israelis are bombing in the Bekaa Valley.

The area near Beirut that Israel has threatened to bomb is Dahieh (alternative spelling: Dahiyya), which is south of Beirut near the airport. Most likely, your relatives are not in this area.

Thu Jul 13, 09:13:00 AM PDT

Of the Syrian role in the conflict, AK, on From Beirut to the Beltway comments sarcastically:

26 civilians have died so far in Lebanon, according to al-Jazeera. LBC is reporting that ten belonged to one family. My family told me over the telephone that they are completely cut off from Beirut. They live south of Beirut, and they could see the Israeli jets bomb the airport runway. More than 10 bridges have been reportedly destroyed. There are unconfirmed reports the tunnels that go through the airport were destroyed as well.

The Rafik Hariri International Airport is closed. Lebanon's only link to the world is now through... Syria.

Well done.

One of the above commentators, the perpetual refugee, has their own blog, and in another post titled 'From the killing fields. Silence', comments on the frustration and voicelessness experienced in the face of the inadequacy of MSM in reporting actual events, and the burden and horror of witnessing death:

I try and imagine the 371 stories of each fatality of this current genocide. I try and remember how beautiful a summer it was in Lebanon & And now, as I watch high rated news telecasts projecting images of destruction. Images of genocide. I don't hear anything. Just silence. Mixed in with ads for McDonald's and Ford automobiles interspersed between the funerals.

I just watched the death of #372. And I hear nothing. Silence.

Kerbaj also recognises the primacy and power of voice. In a post from 17 July 2006 titled 'message in a bottle', he writes:

dear friends and family from lebanon and abroad,

i am receiving tons of supportive emails everyday. thank you all. we really need your eyes and ears.

i am trying as much as possible to answer everybody.

however, some questions are common to all, and i think it is relevant to answer to the most asked one here.

to the question: "how can we help?"

the answer is: speak.

speak about the shit happening here. speak with your family. with your friends. with people you don't know. in a bar, a restaurant, at work. with the people in the streets. talk to everybody. talk to buildings.

silence

here

is more frightening

than the most

frightening bomb

This kind of witnessing includes an accurate record of events in addition to emotional commentary, as we have seen. In a post provocatively titled "Is Santa Claus dead???", one of the most-read bloggers, Amin Younes, began blogging at the beginning of the war, explaining

I own a small gourmet cafe in Hamra, a busy and commercial part in Beirut, Lebanon. Lebanon is in the middle of a bloody war with Israel... And we're sick of it, again. But Lebanon is a unique country with unique citizens, so strong from the inside that they can stand in front of tanks, missiles and American-Israeli weapons of mass destruction. A friend of mine went to talk to war refugees in a public garden in Beirut. She saw a little girl writing on a piece of paper. "I am writing to Santa Claus", she said... Then after a pause, she asked: "Is Santa Claus dead?"

I decided to portray a daily picture of Lebanon that is not a picture of war scenes, refugees or political analysis. It is a picture of those who are still in Lebanon (Lebanese and non-Lebanese) trying to have an unsuccessful break from the daily terror seen on TV. I hope that some of you, by reading this, could answer the little girl's question. I can't.

The fate of the Lebanese children seems to have affected the bloggers and their readers profoundly. Here, in a post from the site From Gaza, on 9 August 2006, Elfarra observes a nameless little girl refugee, her ordinary identity disrupted by trauma and erased. Her situation is one of thousands, all terrible in their own way but impossible to assimilate by readers, who correspondingly feel overwhelmed by both the numbers of displaced people and the severity of their conditions. Elfarra, although she provides no descriptive commentary, is clearly affected by her witnessing of the child's plight and her own responsibility to report it.

At Al-Awda hospital in Jabalia camp I met the medical staff, who were exhausted after continuous emergency work during the incursion. Many injured arrived at the hospital and the staff worked round the clock. There were massive casualties. The three operating rooms were also working round the clock. Those hurt had serious injuries in the abdomen and chest. There were a good number of children in that attack, who I visited while they were recovering.

A small girl held my hand and said: look there, we were in the sun for a long period, next to the donkey place. It was hot, I was thirsty, my baby brother was crying, and I was terrified, I wet my pants.

Bloggers telling the stories of children during warfare – a group, rightly or wrongly, regarded as particularly undeserving of attack – also highlight the coping strategies adults used in a bid to continue life as normal. The following post also illustrates the potential of the blogosphere to move from the digital to the actual in organising meet-ups between like-minded people. The War on Lebanon and its comments are from 6 and 7 August 2006, and titled 'When in doubt, lie':

Today I decided to adopt a new strategy and that is to lie to kids about the explosions they keep hearing. The previous strategy of explaining to them that the bombs are far away from their school and will never reach them failed miserably after Qana. What they learned from Qana was bombs can reach them and that they're not really safe. So the new strategy is to say that the explosions they hear are in fact fireworks that people fire in weddings. So every time we hear one, the kids begin crying until I remind them that this is a wedding so they all stop and say: "MABROUK!" ("Congratulations!").

...

But today there were five weddings.

posted by zeina h. at 6:52 PM

Diana said...

Dear zeina, i just wanna tell u that i wait every day to read your daily chapter of your journey with the kids..i just love it.

i work with kids too..i'm a volunteer in an NGO that is currently focusing on entertaining the displaced children through educational games..i invite you to visit our website: www.sdclebanon.org and to contact us..i would love to meet you and the kids you always talk about.

you have a great website..keep the excellent work.

August 07, 2006 6:48 PM

zeina h. said...

Hi Diana, so nice to know that you're also active with kids. Let's meet up soon. I work in a school in Ashrafieh and would love to exchange some ideas with you. You can write to me on nahhul@hotmail.com

August 08, 2006 9:49 AM

The overturning of expectations associated with trauma is not always negative. Salti's take on the strangely peaceful impact of the refugees' presence in the cities is volunteered here. Her post also

serves a humanising purpose, as she imagines what each one of these people has lost or had to leave behind. Their dependence on the medium of the radio's ceaseless newscast to know their fate arouses our sympathy.

Day 8

The displaced have been dispersed in the country. They have been placed in schools, universities, government owned buildings. Aid is arriving, but still in chaotic manner. Volunteers are beginning to get tired. However nothing compares to the distress of the displaced. They are in a state of complete emotional upheaval. Their presence has already changed the habits and rituals of the neighborhoods where they have been placed. As the sun begins to set and the harshness of its rays begins to dim, you find families strolling on Hamra street (a main commercial thoroughfare in West Beirut). Shops are closed, sandwich shops are closed, cafes are intermittantly open, but the sidewalk provides an opportunity to escape the confinement from the shelter where they been relocated. You can see it in their walk, their body language. Their pace searches for peace of mind, not for a destination, their lungs expand drawing in oxygen to inspire quietude and calm, not for cardiovascular pressure. They have a deep, mournful, sorrowful gaze. They left behind their entire lives, maybe even their beloved. In Ras Beirut, small backstreets have come to life. To escape the heat of indoor confinement, displaced families relocated to old homes or government-owned buildings, have grown in the habit of placing plastic chairs and their narguiles on small front porches or entrance hallways of buildings. I had to walk home after a long day of working with journalists, two nights ago, and as I zigzagged through these back streets, I was comforted by their gentle presence. They chatted, softly, quietly, huddled in groups, watching the night unfold, fearful of the sound of Israeli warplanes. The ceaseless newscast from a radio kept everyone informed. It too sounded softly. It was a gentle summer night, and the families dispersed and uprooted surrendered to the gentleness of the night.

Younes, perhaps more so than anyone else, humanises the tragedy for international readers, describing some of the patrons of his café, and following their progress and garnering global interest and empathy. The sense of continuity and emotional investment in the fate of these 'characters' is created in a way that is difficult to achieve with a mass of faceless victims.

Here, in a post from 27 July 2006, he narrates the small, sad story of one of his customers that sums up the capacity of war to destroy a lifetime's achievement. The implication is that the pathos readers feel at the tale of this individual is replicated thousands of times all over Lebanon during the war, in all the stories of all the people. By personalising the victims of the bombings, Younes brings home their plight, providing a window onto the impact of the conflict on the helpless. Feldman (2004) examines the dual status of testimony as both medium and artifact - first-hand evidence of harmful acts, and a product of institutional cultures of witnessing, arguing that testimony has a doubled density and gravitas due to its historiographic vocation and artifactual status: it is a window of historical visualization and also a historical object, midwifed from materialities of pain and suffering. Younes explicitly uses orality links to storytelling in the first line, addressing the reader directly.

I have to tell you the story of Oum Ibrahim. Oum Ibrahim is the nicest person you could ever meet. A martyr's widow, whose husband was killed by the Israeli army a few years ago, Oum Ibrahim lives in an apartment in Beirut Southern Suburbs with her two young boys, surviving on Hezbollah's monthly help and some relative's assistance. I met this middle-aged woman a few years ago when she insisted on buying one of the most expensive coffee beans in the shop. She then was hooked buying several kilograms per month. "A good cup of coffee is all what is left", she used to say. I decided to make her an important discount and since she never came empty-handed, carrying bags of home-made sweets and jars of her Southern village's thyme for my employees and me. A month ago, Oum Ibrahim ordered three times as much coffee than her usual and when I asked her about the reason, she replied that she is inviting everyone in the building to celebrate the last payment of her apartment's 15 years loan. "It is finally mine", she said... Oum Ibrahim's brother came today and ordered the usual

coffee beans. He told me that Oum Ibrahim and her children are safe and living with her cousin but the building is a small hill of dust and cement...

In a post on the same day, Younes reports a much shorter, though equally chilling conversation, outlining the fears of a modest civilian that she would not have under ordinary circumstances:

Tanya, 20 years old, decided to wait before taking her bath yesterday night. She was terrified from the sound of the Israeli war planes flying at a really low altitude over Beirut. "I don't want to die naked", she muttered shyly.

Salti, in Day 3 of her Siege Notes, lists the damaged areas, noting that, in contrast to official Israeli statements, non-combatants and suburban areas seem to be particularly at risk. She intersperses hard information with rhetorical and existential questions about the point of writing and her responsibility to perform the task, which she then answers herself:

Nearly all Lebanese ports were shelled today, Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, Amshit and Jounieh. Christian areas are not being spared. The alternative road to Syria (via Tripoli and Homs) was shelled. Bridges in the north of the country and the south of the country were shelled and rendered unusable.

Tonight the shelling is again focused on the southern suburbs, Haret Hreyk and Bir el-Abed. The first neighborhood is where the headquarters of Hezbollah are located. They have been targetted several times and there is extensive damage. The leadership has not been harmed. A great number of the inhabitants have been evacuated, but the afternoon shelling targetted residential areas. I am up, anxious, writing. As if it served a purpose of sorts.

Foreign diplomatic missions are making plans to evacuate their nationals. They had planned to evacuate people by sea, but after today's shelling of the ports, they may have to rethink their strategy. Should I evacuate? Does one turn their back on a "historic" station in the Arab-Israeli conflict? If there is no cause that animates me, how do I

endure this? (I could not give two rats a damn about the Iranian nuclear bomb or Hezbollah's negotiating power). I was shamed this morning for having these thoughts... And now, at 1:30 am, as the Israeli airplanes fill up my sky, I am writing them again.

Writing does have a purpose, and Salti believes this, otherwise she would not be recording and disseminating these posts. Later, she writes that it is only this activity that is keeping her sane.

Some blogs, by saying little, express the disruption and chaos of conflict in the ever-present threat of non-being. In post number 47 from 20 July 2006, ambiguously titled 'my life in a bag', Kerbaj merely lists the following:

each time i leave my flat, i take with me:

my passport and even's one

a mini-disc recorder + microphone

2 t-shirts

2 underwear

2 pairs of socks

a notebook and pens

my trumpet

binoculars

a book

tobacco

a small camera

a lighter

a usb key

a toothbrush

4 batteries

It is left to the reader to realise that to be in a combat zone, as the *nom de plume* of another blogger also emphasises, is to be a perpetual refugee. The possibility of having your home destroyed while

you are out is always a distinct possibility. It is the unpredictability of the conflict that contributes significantly to the 'craziness' and dislocation of trauma.

Bloggers differ in their coverage of the same event. The bombing of Tyre motivates Salti, in a post from Day 6 of her Siege Notes, to comment on the shocked aftermath of bombing, the logistical difficulties of disrupted services and facilities, the fright and unease in the absence of a fixed death toll, and the nightmarish mixture of factual recounting and heightened sense of unreality (characteristic of trauma narratives). Her record itself has been delayed because of power failures:

(The generator shut down before I could end this entry. It's noon the next day now...)

I am drafting this entry in this unusual diary at 11:30 pm, I have about half an hour before the generator shuts down. Most of Beirut is in the dark. I dare not imagine what the country is like. Today was a relatively calm day, but like most calm days that come immediately after tumultuous days, it was a sinister day of taking stock of damage, pulling bodies from under destroyed buildings, shuttling injured to hospitals that have the capacity to tend to their wounds more adequately.

The relative calm allowed journalists to visit the sites of shelling and violence. The images from Tyre, and villages in the south are shocking. Images from Haret Hreyk (the neighborhood in the southern suburb that received the most "focused" shelling) are also astounding.

The number of deaths is yet uncertain, it increases by the hour as bodies are pulled from the landscape of destruction. In the southern suburbs, some people may be trapped in underground shelters under the vestiges of their homes and apartment buildings. And yes, there is a problem of space in morgues in the south and the Beqaa, because none of the towns and villages are equipped to handle these numbers of deaths.

Ramzi's Blah Blah details a more personal response to the bombing of Tyre, asking existential questions regarding the self, responsibility, state institutions and the role of the individual in polity, interrogating the master narrative that makes heroes and martyrs of ordinary people but eventually concluding that he'll support this version. The confusion of present and past tense (bitterly self-

corrected) in the first line is typical of trauma narratives. Some people only use the present tense throughout their stories, apparently unaware that they are using a traumatic marker.

My second cousin is in the army. Or was.

He was stationed in Tyre, to man a prehistoric anti-aircraft gun that could only intimidate migrating birds.

He heard Israeli choppers flying in to drop commandos in a civilian area.

We don't know if he actually managed to get a round fired off or not.

Moments later he became a charred body in a destroyed vehicle.

In my heart, I know his death served no purpose.

He is fodder to the raging inferno of death and hate sweeping Lebanon, leaving ash and dust in its wake.

But when his toddler kids grow up, and ask me what happened in 2006, I will say he died a hero.

Would they understand the truth? Would they forgive us if they did?

A post from 4 August 2006, posted by Glass Garden, further outlines the moral dilemma of warfare and the loss of identity and breakdown of trust it engenders:

Beirut is now cut off from the north. Our lives are now valueless, our safety of no concern to anyone at all and there seem to be no rules as to how this game is played. We want no part of this, yet we are held hostage in our villages, in our cities, in our homes, in our country because we are the sacrificial lamb of this "noble" war on terror. I don't know how much longer the world will stand by and watch. I don't know how many more human and environmental catastrophes it will take until someone says, "enough". If I live to see this end, I am leaving Lebanon I never again want to expose myself to this kind of terror. I love Lebanon with all my heart. I do not want to lose my home and I am not a coward. But this is no way to live. I can't raise a family here, I can't invest in a future, I can't trust that things will ever be okay.

The katabatic journey: We are still here

The katabatic journey in the warblog is an intimate one, even when shared with the rest of the blogosphere ('at once everyone and no one' in the theory of online disinhibition). As a public platform, the Internet allows writers to be free of physical and temporal constraints, providing an almost unlimited space for narration. Ewins (2005) comments that, in place of the stream of consciousness within posts, ...the weblog itself becomes the stream - a stream of individual posts, each of them representing a particular moment in time and moment of consciousness, detailed and personal. This can be revelatory for the writer, as well as the reader. Ewins writes that a blog develops over time:

into a representation of one's self...revealing yourself - your selves - to you. And it is a representative of yourself, representing you to the world. Others interact with you through this representative - via email, comments, and trackbacks, a type of automated comment - and represents your interests in ways you might not have expected or planned (ibid).

This is particularly important after traumatic events: blogging foregrounds the process of identity formation and construction and helps us to create boundaries for the fragmented self. Blogging can go some way towards assuaging the need to assimilate horror, by transforming traumatic memory into narrative memory on a personal level. The focus of such narrative enquiry, according to Clandinin and Connelly in Etherington (2003), is subjective:

inward and outward, backward and forward [original emphasis]. By inward, we mean towards the internal conditions such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality – past, present and future (19).

Blogging features are particularly useful here, because they allow references to past posts, as well as provide the most recent posts first: this locates the reader in space and time, but also allows them the freedom to move chronologically or to re-read segments as often as they like without disregarding the present status of the writer. Readers come to feel an attachment to the writers because of their disclosure, and a dependence and reliance on their posts for information and insight. Many bloggers post during the night or early in the morning, so that their readers will have something to look forward to, a continuation of the narrative thread. Comments like these on Beirut Update and Kerblog assume an intimacy with the blogger, manifest in the casual use of their first name, as well as personal enquiries. These features both indicate the formation of an affiliative discourse community:

Elizabeth said...

Zena, Where are you? It is now October 1. I hope and pray that you are ok and some semblance of peace has entered your life.

4:07 PM

Descriptions of life experiences are necessarily partial or fragmented. We foreground some events and leave others out – but these can be as significant to the narrative. Foucault (in Brown and Augusta-Scott, 2007) observes that silence can be as telling as description, ‘...an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them’ (xxv). The opposite is also possible. We see in Kerbaj’s blog the chronological progression of his night during the bombing, the posts beginning just after midnight. (The posts are illustrated; when there are no captions or words, the line drawing still conveys the blogger’s message):

night of 13th to 14th of july 2006

4 am

the israeli air force flies over beirut

far away we hear bombs falling down

posted by mazen at 00:08

The next two posts are silent, in the hiatus before the resumption of attack and before civilians can make a reckoning of the full extent of the damage. They indicate the fear of civilians who cannot know where and whom will be hit next. This aspect of psychological warfare affects Beirut's entire population.

[illustration]

posted by mazen at 01:34

[onomatopoeic renderings of approaching planes and bombing]

posted by mazen at 01:38

we

begin

to

hear

shots

far

away

posted by mazen at 01:40

4:51 am

closer explosions

little by little, people wake up and

get out on their terraces to hear where the sounds are coming from

posted by mazen at 01:43

from here, we can only hear the planes

VVVVVSSSHSHSHSHSSSS

and

the

rest

we

picture

it

posted by mazen at 17:56

The MSM reports the bombings. Kerbaj compares it with his own direct experience, his personal truth. His various renderings of the word 'silence' emphasise the shocked reaction of viewers, who ironically have to watch television to see the full city-wide impact of their own destruction. It is this silence that so frustrates Kerbaj and keeps him resisting. On the night of 15 August, Kerbaj's sarcastic exhortation to 'get your tickets ladies and gentlemen' announces the transformation from television spectacle to a record of human endeavour. He resorts to recording the sounds of the bombers overhead and playing his trumpet in silence against this sonic background – the sounds of his own inhalations are clearly heard. The piece, 'Starry Night', is broadcast over the Internet and has enormous international impact, because of its defiance, as well as its pathos:

Saturday, July 15, 2006

5:02 am

waiting in front of the tv

silence

beirut burns in the tv

(silence)

SILENCE

posted by mazen at 01:54

7.46am

closer and closer each time.

4 huge bombs. very close. most probably inside beirut, not the suburbs.

the ports of beirut, tripoli, jounieh and amchit are bombed.

it s becoming serious. real action. from extreme south to extreme north the party is going on. get your tickets ladies and gentlemen.

posted by mazen at 19:36

night of 15th to 16th

recording session

mazen kerbaj / trumpet

vs

the israeli goverment / bombs

posted by mazen at 03:02

[Recording of Starry Night in mp3 format]

Kerbaj maintains the performance metaphor, sarcastically likening the Israeli pilots to real musicians. Beneath the mockery, however, the strain is evident.

Sunday, July 16, 2006

3:15 am

it seems that tonight the bombing won t stop.

every 15 minutes, a new attack. one or two bombs only each time. just enough to keep you up the whole night. these guys are real artists.

a fucking huge bomb just arrived while i am writing. how to describe this fucking feeling with words?

so yeah, the israeli pilots are real artists. they know how to keep their audience attentive. they never give you time to fall asleep; each time you feel the action is slow, they bring in some new emotional material to get you in again. i suspect that they calculate exactly how long it takes to a normal human being to fall asleep, and act upon. well done guys,

it's working.

The reaction from readers is overwhelmingly empathic. In an early post on Global Voices Online, Johnnie sums up the anxiety and shame that citizens of a war-mongering state can feel when their government acts without their consent. Here he dispenses the stereotype that all Israelis are automatically enemies of the Lebanese; he understands the psychological aspect of both victims and perpetrators, and the irony inherent in the situation. His bemused tone is fairly typical of people still in shock:

I'm sitting here listening to the helicopters flying northward overhead, listening to the TV commentators explaining that the rocketing of Haifa this afternoon almost certainly means that Beirut will be attacked tonight, listening to my inner voice asking who needs this?

I'm not going to comment on the politics- that's starting from the wrong end. I only want to say to those of you over the border in Lebanon that there are Israelis who worry about you tonight even as hizbullah target us.

Our airforce is destroying bridges: we wish to build person-to-person bridges that they cannot knock down.

I don't want to refer to the politics, not because it's not important, but because tonight, when you and us are being attacked on both sides of this border, it is also important to give a thought to the common humanity which should connect us.

I pray that those helicopters will leave you in peace tonight.

Another commentator, dood, writes on Kerblog:

this comment is for your blog as a whole.

we are thrilled and astounded and amazed every evening we see it.

we put the children to sleep and sit down to it, it's beautiful.

we feel bad for the situation there and what it seems to become.

we are with you even our country is the one whose bringing your people and you all
the sorrow
3:10 PM

While there is a good deal of racist invective and hate speech in the comment threads (not all are removed by site administrators), a later post, from 22 July 2006, illustrates the opposite the empathic support of many readers. Sam S writes:

It is very easy to see this war from only one point of view - whichever it is you are standing on. It is so important to try and put yourself in the other people's shoes and imagine how you would feel / want to do. I hope peace finds its way to a better place and time.

One post from Lebanon Heart Blogs contains the following story of pain experienced by two people on opposite sides and their ability to overcome ideological differences, illustrating the affiliative nature of reconstructed identity narratives. Although she concludes that they have no answers, she has in fact provided an argument for peace-building, which begins with the willingness of ordinary people to engage with other people based on the recognition of a shared humanity. This healing approach is at odds with the war-mongering attitude of the state, the people in power [who] exploit the grief and victimization of the masses in order to fuel more hate and to sponsor more wars instead of focusing on the righteous and the goodness in the world.

15.8.06

To L.,

When the war on Lebanon started, I ran into L. in the hallway. The minute she saw me she started crying. My friend was in fact sobbing to the point where I had to comfort her, and then I started crying myself. We ceased to be two persons with opinions and resentments...We were two hurt women, suffering for all the pain in the world and revolting against our weakness and helplessness against the world.

What can I do? What can I do? she screams to me in the most humane almost apologetic way trying to make me understand that she is as heartbroken about the dead children and mothers and fathers. She tells me how she stopped talking to half of her family who can't see what she sees. She tells me how she attacked a rabbi telling him that a state that loots, tortures, confiscates land, undergoes ethnic cleansing and mass killing and war crimes is not a state that should represent her or her children or the religion she believes in. She told him a state built on racism and greed and religious fanaticism is not better than the enemy we try to demonize and to finish off. She tells him we adopted the techniques of the Nazis and what kind of hope will that leave our children with even if you don't care about their children? She then tells me the rabbi looked her dead in the eye and told her, Every dead Palestinian child is a step forward. She says she is not surprised, I say I'm not either for these are the hopes of those leaders who are exploiting the religion to their political interests and who exemplify the civilization of hate and the culture of death.

We agree that we both now understand how all the genocides in the world took place and the world watched as it does today, how the people in power exploit the grief and victimization of the masses in order to fuel more hate and to sponsor more wars instead of focusing on the righteous and the goodness in the world. As always we decide that there will be no hope for peace in the Middle-East, we give examples of a lot of people we know that are just like me and her, to keep some hope for the future. We agree, though, that these people who are the majority are neither greedy nor aggressive enough to step up and try to rule. And we leave with no answers.

But the bloggers, whether they are conscious of the process or not, are providing themselves and others with answers. This search for truth and healing is what leads bloggers to record their thoughts and experiences, and to interact with their readers in ways that deconstruct existing narratives and pose alternative ones. Kerbaj, for example, in this post titled message to the people of Israel who are reading this blog, writes

&

for the israeli musicians, painters, writers, thinkers, intellectuals and for all the israeli in israel and around the world who sent us supportive emails and comments,

we know you are here.

we know you are hearing us.

we know you are hearing the bombs getting down on civilians and kids.

kids from lebanon.

kids from israel.

kids from al over the world.

we know that like us, you feel ashamed.

we know you are not a lot.

but we shall meet one day.

when our people will wake up.

in 10.000 years.

please continue sending us your emails and comments, here and wherever you can.

we need to know you are here. and that you are more than what we expected.

WE NEED YOU TO RESIST.

&

Bloggers experienced highs and lows as the conflict progressed, coming up against logistical and technical issues as well as the anticipated moral ones. In another post titled *still alive and well and living in beirut*, Kerbaj comments on the difficulty of maintaining contact, the hypocrisy he feels as a mere witness, as well as its burden of responsibility, and the chaos (in the repetition of *crazy*) of war:

one bad trick with this blog is that i receive tons of messages when i do not update it for a while. people must think i died or something. nothing like that can happen.

we re still.

we re still here.

we re still alive.

we re still waiting.

we still have nerves.

&

having these kind of considerations for such trivial shit while people are killed drives me crazy. i tried to talk to this with a friend from germany in an email 2 days ago:

"anyways, music and drawing are the only things keeping me going these days.

i recorded two hours of bombs + trumpet from my balcony yesterday night.

some bombs were really close (what kind of mouthpiece do the israeli pilots use to have this sound?). &

i always said that i regret not being adult during the war to see if you can

do something in these situations. now i feel bad to draw or play music while

people are burning. i convince myself by saying it is my only way to resist. that i have to witness. that it is very important.

but i am not really convinced. i try to be a fucking witness. to show a

little bit what s happening here. in my own way. but having regards for what

is a good drawing or a good music track drives me crazy. i cannot stop

saying after a bomb: "yeah, this one was huge. i ll leave a long silence

then make a small sound to balance the track." this is totally crazy!"

The conditions and privileges of an ordinary life are disrupted by the trauma of conflict. Totally crazy is one fairly perceptive method of describing the losses suffered by the Lebanese people, and this sense of unreality and chaos is reflected steadily in the tone and content of the blog posts, even as the writers try to bring some sense of order and causality to the inexplicable events of conflict. This is an attempt to create meaning. Suffering, as Frankl (1946; 2006) maintains, is not inherently meaningful. We imbue it with meaning through our response to it. We choose how to interpret the

events – the raw data – of our lives, and decide what is significant, and what is not. Our future actions are based on these decisions.

Speaking and writing during the 33-Day War are therefore acts of resistance and identity reconstruction. Blogging is social action: as Gergen (in Brown and Augusta-Scott, 2007) writes, the terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people, and, correspondingly, descriptions and explanations of the world themselves constitute forms of social action (178). We language our experience into being, creating the symbolic universe which organises meaning in daily life and interaction. It is this language that makes shared meaning possible, both in the acknowledgement of past events and in the negotiation of meaning in the present. Of this power of articulation (voice), Bedouina, on Dove's Eye View, writes:

More than once I've had the experience of seeing the power of words on the internet to mirror or possibly shape reality. I now watch what I type very carefully & I also think that my words published on the internet affect me. Sometimes I want to bitch and kvetch, or criticize and condemn, but this always causes me problems online and offline. I do permit myself to vent in private & but I no longer permit myself to vent for posterity.

If you want to know the bad news, or get the negative interpretation of whatever event, there are plenty of sources on the internet. Dove's Eye View focuses on solutions, whether for justice and peace or environmental harmony, and celebrates those who celebrate life (ibid).

As White, along with Brown and Augusta-Scott (2007), write, our stories are active. They constitute us: the stories we tell are the stories we live. Bloggers often turn to reflecting on how much they took for granted before the conflict, as well as whether they are suited to the task of witnessing the stories of others. The posts begin fairly fluently, however, as in this example from From Beirut to the Beltway, dated 13 July 2006, in a post titled 'Balance of delusion':

I'll have updates throughout the day. These are difficult times for me and millions of other Lebanese in and outside of Lebanon. This blog is how I will be expressing my frustration, and hopefully keep everybody up to date. I urge my readers to keep it civil and understand where I come from.

1:40 AM

Throughout the conflict, bloggers provide personal, detailed and intimate portraits of those affected by the war. They use the digitality of their medium to its fullest advantage, in both the subjective and lengthy descriptions impossible in MSM, particularly print formats, and in the interaction with readers. The humanisation of Lebanese civilians facilitated by the dissemination of the little stories made immediate connections with readers, bringing home the impact of the damage to both infrastructure (the loss of homes, schools, bridges) and social fabric (the complete disruption of routine, the loss of material and emotional connections, and the attendant powerlessness). Along with the pathos, the stories of these characters in the Lebanese-Israeli narrative also highlight the resilience and spirit of those under siege, not least that of the bloggers themselves.

They are conscious of the moral responsibility to bear witness, even though they are conflicted about their roles. Kerbaj, in a post sarcastically titled *another word of wisdom*, from 5 August 2006, comments

& all of us
and each one of us
is guilty

Similarly, Salti, on Day 8, writes of her inner conflict:

I had the opportunity to leave tomorrow by car to Syria, then to Jordan and from there by plane to wherever I am supposed to be right now. For days I have been itching to leave because I want to pursue my professional commitments, meet deadlines and continue with my life. For days I have been battling ambivalence towards this war,

estranged from the passions it has roused around me and from engagement in a cause. And yet when the phone call came informing me that I had to be ready at 7:00 am the next morning, I asked for a pause to think. I was torn. The landscape of the human and physical ravages of Israel's genial strategy at implementing UN Resolution 1559, the depth of destruction, the toll of nearly 250 deaths, more than 800 injured and 400,000 displaced, had bound me to a sense of duty. It was not even patriotism, it was actually the will to defy Israel. They cannot do this and drive me away. They will not drive me away.

Salti stayed throughout the siege, eventually organising a civil resistance campaign, as will be discussed – but not without ambivalence and self-doubt. The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (fourth edition) recognises that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder can develop in response to events directed at both the individual involved, or in response to the witnessing thereof - 'incidents that are, or perceived as, life-threatening to oneself or others; witnessing acts of violence to others; and hearing about violence towards or unexpected death of others' (in Etherington, 2003). As a result, feelings of guilt and inferiority in the warblogs are universal, contributing to the arc of descent in reportage. Herman writes that these feelings are particularly severe when the survivor has been witness to the suffering of other people:

To be spared oneself, in the knowledge that others have met a worse fate, creates a severe burden of conscience...They feel guilty for not risking their lives to save others, or for failing to fulfill the request of a dying person...[W]itnessing the death of a family member is one of the events most likely to leave the survivor with an intractable, long-lasting traumatic syndrome (54: 1992).

'Survivor guilt' is pervasive in the blogs from Lebanon. As many writers comment, perhaps it is more palatable to imagine that we have a choice than to acknowledge our complete powerlessness in the face of events. So begins the katabatic journey, a transforming descent into facing the horrors of non-being, which bloggers such as Kerbaj represent with a combination of reportage, poetry,

illustration and music in the attempt to overcome wordlessness and express traumatic experience more completely.

In a post from 23 July 2006, Kerbaj presents an elongated vertical layout, a visual representation indicating the drawn-out durational time of traumatic memory, as if the letters themselves have no meaning in this context because they are powerless to affect the course of the conflict. The final ellipsis is commensurate with the erasure of identity and the wordlessness that accompanies such a realisation that cannot be assimilated into any existing worldview:

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University of Cape Town

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Kerbaj wonders repeatedly if his voice – the voice of ordinariness, which is also the voice of reason – will be heard, in this existential post two days later, from 25 July 2006, also titled *black* (a common title for his posts as he explores the various ambiguities of the word, as well as the seemingly endless and repetitive nature of the conflict):

how can i show what i feel?

how can i know what i feel?

By the next day he has come to some decision – but it is a negative one. The times of the posts, titled *change*, indicate his insomnia:

i am beginning to get tired

posted by mazen at 00:59

i am beginning to change...

posted by mazen at 01:05

Eventually he writes, in an outburst of indignation titled *i am sorry to decline your proposition*, that the MSM has a fairly unfeeling attitude in its reportage. By the end of the post, still laughing bitterly, he seems to acknowledge the power of his own voice, finishing off with a sarcastic comment about being able to sleep (during the bombing):

stop!

that s it!

i can t anymore!

nein!

please do not contact me for any interview anymore.

i am beginning to freak out repeating 5 times a day the same things. if your interested in what i am doing, please write yourself a story about it (it s easy, you ll see).

anyways, everything i am asked is already on the blog. or worst, on tv.

i should by the way keep record of these interviews, some are incredible. i was asked

twice so far: "don t you think that your piece of music and bombs is of a bad taste?"

i answered twice: "do you think that it is of a good taste to throw a bomb on a bus with civilians escaping their village?"

it is incredible that some people, listening to this piece in their living room in london or in paris, ask themselves if they like it or not.

...

finally, a kind message to all the people posting comments on this blog:

thank you for your support and for spreading the message. keep doing so please. with a little bit of luck it will end up on condoleeza rice s desktop. i know it won t stop the war, but i am sure at least that she ll ask me to do her portrait.

i am sorry not answering the comments (and a big part of the emails) i am receiving. it s being tougher and tougher to keep all this going on. on the mental level it s staying cool, but on the physical one i look more and more like nosferatu.

i should get some rest.

when all this shit is over.

(hahahaha).

it s 3 am. i ll try not to stay late tonight.

posted by mazen at 02:50

He goes on to pose a half-serious rhetorical question prompted by technological obstacles that end in voicelessness and possible censorship; we hear later that some countries have blocked his site

from their blogospheres. Perversely, the idea cheers him and goads him to make further posts:

am i dead?

i am becoming very paranoiac. maybe it is a side effect of the war.

i can not access kerblog anymore. there is only a blank page.

i received two emails so far reporting the same problem.

am i being stopped?

if this problem remains, it would mean that my blog has been stopped by "somebody".

could "somebody" be afraid of what i am doing? it would be great!

anyways, if you can read this post it means i still can post. so i ll continue it "blind".

posted by mazen at 20:48

It is through the comments that Kerbaj's roles as observer and survivor are acknowledged and emphasised. The processes of reflection, interaction and co-construction are relational in nature.

Brown and Augusta-Scott cite Anderson (2007):

Through conversations we form and reform our life experiences and events;
we create and recreate our meanings and understandings; and we construct and
reconstruct our realities and ourselves (178).

Comments are from a myriad of countries, in a number of languages, in a tremendous outpouring from listeners and readers in response to Kerbaj's illustrations and their accompanying poems. The time stamps indice that somewhere, someone was always reading his blog. This resonates particularly for Kerbaj, who could not sleep during the bombing and would upload up to eight illustrations every night, their time stamps testifying to his increasing frustration and panic. The comments perform affirmative and affiliative functions, pointing out that Kerbaj's voice is heard through the medium of the Internet; that his work has value for thousands of people, both in Lebanon and beyond; that one way to assimilate horror is through acts of creativity and hope; that the human spirit is indomitable. The conversations that follow allow the bloggers to continue their

survivor mission:

Mary-Laure said...

Hi Mazen, I have been checking out your blog often since I first heard about it a few days ago, and have recommended it to friends. I have lived in the Middle East and have many emotional ties to Lebanon so this new war makes me very very very upset and angry; like many people around the world, I feel awfully helpless. I wish there were more I could do or say, my words sound very inadequate. Thanks for your amazing drawings and please keep on posting - we re watching.

Take care.

7:51 PM

heretiger said...

i am a musician. i just heard your music on public radio here in the u.s. i have no words. my heart is broken and you make a lot of sense to me. where can i hear your balcony recordings. i want my world to hear them.

2:18 AM

billfish said...

I m no longer sure what "normal" means. There are far too many who will accept the propaganda, because when it all becomes too painful to deal with, one simply pushes a button on the remote control and we see happy things, which steer us away from the truth, because the truth is very often painful. I wish I had a button on my remote control that could make the bombs stop, as well as the hate that brought them. Keep your head down, and keep telling the world the truth, however painful or inconvenient. I hope peace will find you again.

6:01 AM

Blue said...

Heard you on U.S. public radio today. Nice to have a voice to go with the incredible art.

We're listening; we're reading.

-Blue

8:40 AM

joladies said...

We hear you loud and clear Mazen. Can you feel the energy we are sending you through cyberspace ...

Keep safe, keep blogging - the music and the art is getting louder by the day.

You will be heard!

9:56 AM

Characteristically of traumatic situations, the bloggers' sense of time is located in the insular endless present of durational time, the feeling that the damage and chaos is permanent, and that the trauma is the only thing that counts. This lack of control over events is particularly relevant in the Middle Eastern context, where conflict with Israel is repeatedly experienced. In this post, Salti comments on the intense personal effect on her morale of the psychological warfare of continual and random bombardment, as well as the lack of coverage from the MSM:

Day 5

Dementia is slowly creeping in... Slowly, surreptitiously. At the rate of news flashes.

This is how we live now, from "breaking news" to "breaking news". A sampling: I have been in the cafe for one hour now. (The cafe is an escape from home, but in itself another island of insanity... will get to that later at some point).

...

Does the world make sense to anyone? It's not supposed to, I know, but these "surgical" military tactics are supposed to make sense to at least 15 people. And out of these 15 people, at least 14 disseminate the news, and since the world is about 6 degrees of separation removed, at some point, somebody has to know something...

Day 5 of the Siege part 2.

It's 3:30 am. Perhaps past that time, I don't know. I could not sleep from the shelling. It's not the intense quantity of shells falling, no, it's 10 to 12 shells every hour or hour and the half. They augment the nerve-wrecking aspect: they don't focus shelling one zone, with one objective. It's wounds inflicted over time and time, the length of a week...It's been a really, really rough night. Where do I begin with what you will not hear? With what you will not know and what will be hidden from your ears?

Salti goes so far as to rename the days to correspond with the beginning of the bombardment, as if the ordinary notation (date-month-year) was inadequate, meaningless, during trauma, as if the events themselves were an epoch deserving their own nomenclature, in the way that leaders of new regimes often term their rule as beginning from Year Zero. She cannot conceive of her life before the conflict (the world outside), as if it no longer exists. The two posts below illustrate this fragmentation. Salti moves from the more general 'you' pronoun to the explicit and personal 'I' in the second post, illustrating the inability to distance herself from the events as the conflict progresses. The change in identity is a reductive one: it is so disturbing that she again references insanity, but eventually resorts to humour as a coping mechanism, as will be further discussed. The arbitrary mechanics of survival are made clear to Salti as she concludes that the Lebanese live each day with the very real possibility that it may be their last – another characteristic of traumatic memory being the inability to plan for the future.

Day 5

By Day 5 of the Siege, a new routine has set in. "Breaking news" becomes the clock that marks the passage of time. You find yourself engaging in the strangest of activities: you catch a piece of breaking news, you leap to another room to announce it to family although they heard it too, and then you txt-message it to others. At some point in the line-up, you become yourself the messenger of "breaking news". Along the way you collect other pieces of "breaking news" which you deliver back. Between two sets of

breaking news, you gather up facts and try to add them up to fit a scenario. Then you recall previously mapped scenarios. Then you realize none works. Then you exhale. And zap. Until the next piece of breaking news comes. It just gets uglier. You fear night-time. For some reason, you believe the shelling will get worse at night. When vision is impaired, when darkness envelops everything. But it's not true. Shelling is as intense during the day as it is during the night.

Day 11

Every day, I have to ask at least twice or three times what day it is, where we are now in July (Please tell me this war will be a July affair only). The calendar of the Siege barely sticks in my head. It's Day 16 or 17 when I am writing now. I don't know.

I have also tried to the best of my abilities to keep up to date with professional commitments from my former life. It's almost impossible, but if I stop I know I will fall apart entirely. It is surreal to write emails following up with work. The world outside is decidedly distant. The mental image of my apartment in New York is practically impossible to summon. Avenue A, the deli at the corner and the Yemenis who own it, all lapsed. This is what happens when you are under siege. Or these are the first effects of the siege, maybe when time will pass, my perception of the world will change and my imagination will be back at work, I will have this imagined geography of where I once was and people I once knew. I know I am not alone in this. My friend Christine said to me yesterday that she forces herself to go to the office to keep from going insane, but she cannot remember anything about her work before the siege started. The renowned Lebanese novelist, Elias Khoury, said this morning on al-Jazeera that he is so reminded of past experience with Israel's wars that he feels he is living between a time of memory and the present time. This war is not exactly a replay of 1982, but we cannot help recalling 1982. I keep joking that the "veterans" of 1982, those of us who endured that Israeli murderous folly, should get some sort of a break, a package of mundane privileges, free internet, free coffee, parking spots.

Beirut has been spared and life has resumed an almost normal pace. The sound of Israeli

air raids comes every so often just low enough to spread chills of horror and fright. But the droves of displaced who arrive here every day have transformed the space of the city. Their wretchedness is the poignant marker of the war. We live from day to day.

Meanwhile, Kerbaj's posts get shorter and simpler, often one-liners describing his state of mind. The lack of sleep because of the bombing is taking its toll. By the end of July he is writing in (rhetorical) question-and-answer format. This post, from 27 July 2006, is titled

until when?

posted by mazen at 20:59

He adds:

re-charging needed soon

By August Kerbaj is reduced to numbers rather than words, and posts the following, titled calendar, a series of numerals rendered meaningless because they do not represent any progression in the conflict. His wordlessness is almost complete:

day after day...

12/13/14/15

16/17/18/19

20/21/22/23

24/25/26/27

28/29/30/31

... i am using more and more the expression "day after day"...

One post from the 5 August 2006 is a single line interrogating his complicity, as well as that of

anyone who knows about the bombing. His identity has been completely subsumed:

who are we?

The above posts illustrate how painful the narration of trauma is. We make sense of our lives through stories, ascribing meaning to experience through telling. The process is not without conflict. As Salti writes in Day 2 of her Siege Notes,

But still, I felt "smaller" than the historical moment demanded. I wanted to write this, I needed to come clean to you all. I need to let you know that if you were intrigued/discomforted by the pettiness of my spirit. The cause of this is partly my refusal to acknowledge the gravity of the moment. I don't feel I am strong or courageous enough to face it, to take it all in.

This fear of betraying their duty is one that many bloggers describe. Survivors of trauma have nothing against which to measure their experience of trauma; it is beyond their ability to assimilate the experience into an existing worldview.

The descent of many of the bloggers into desperation and existential crisis is dramatically affected by the events at Qana, just after two weeks into the 33-Day War. In a series of posts from 29 July 2006, ironically titled 'a normal day' and pre-dating the news of the massacre at Qana, Kerbaj merely lists some of his (living) friends' names, a list which bears some resemblance in retrospect to the lists of the dead used in public mourning. Normality is a condition for which the bloggers yearn: Even the reiteration of the ordinary is an act of resistance and a reaching out to some collective notion of stability and familiarity in the face of chaos and upheaval.

The craziness, trauma and grief peak in an outpouring of public mourning with the news of the indiscriminate bombing and the large-scale displacement that occurs in its wake. Note that the bloggers have all relied on the MSM for footage of the bodies; many of them comment on the compulsiveness and horror of the images. Younes, for example, on 31 July 2006, writes of his survivor guilt:

Cafe Younes always closes on Sundays. That Sunday morning, I took the liberty to sleep a few hours more to wake up to the horrifying news that all the world witnessed: The Qana holocaust. After one hour of TV watching, I felt that my head is exploding. Is it because I cried like a child while the "rescue" scenes were pictured in the media? At least I have the luxury of a headache... I am sure that the Qana victims would have given anything for a headache but all we might give them are those tears...

What was supposed to be a busy Monday morning is a sad mourning day. Cafe Younes is closed for a second day in a row. I will take the time to read (mainly Robert Fisk's articles on The Independent) and talk with some friends about what I have seen on TV.

Kerbaj experiences a similar shock, briefly outlining the moral quandary of voice, and of trying to turn war into art:

2000 years ago, in qana, jesus transformed water into wine.

today, in qana, the israeli air force transformed kids into ashes.

today, in beirut, i am not able to transform this page into a drawing.

An Iraqi commentator, on Neurotic Iraqi Wife, in a post titled *doomed world* from the same day, writes of her shock, disbelief and sense of unreality at the repetitive nature of the traumatic events:

Im tired, Im angry and frustrated...Been watching the news the whole day...Watching the images of these kids being pulled out of the rubble...gruesome footage...I cant take it anymore...Maybe I should go back to my unphased state...Cuz this is driving me insane... I switch channels, all I see are bodies...Dead bodies...Dead bodies everywhere...be it Iraq...Be it Lebanon...Be it Palestine...Its like watching a horror movie...But this aint a movie...This is real.

The horror of the deaths is evident in Salti's wordlessness, the literal *unspeakability* of trauma.

Her

Note from the Siege 12 (Qana) reads:

This siege note took a couple of days to write. I could not find my words or sense of self after news of the massacre on Sunday.

In another post, Salti writes that she has lost her faith in writing as an act of resistance:

I have to confess that writing is becoming increasingly difficult. Writing, putting words together to make sentences to convey meaning, like the small gestures and rituals that make-up the commonplace acts of everyday life, has begun to lose its meaning and its cathartic power. I am consumed with grief, there is another me trapped inside me that cries all the time. And crying over the death of someone is a very particular cry. It has a different sound, a different music and feels different. I dare not cry out in the open, tears have flowed, time and time again, but I have repressed the release of pain and grief. My body feels like a container of tears and grief. I am sure it shows in the way I walk. Writing is not pointless per se, but it is not longer an activity that gives me relief.

This motif appears repetitively. While the bloggers feel that they do not have the vocabulary to describe the depth of feelings, or that the articulation of these feelings is pointless, their readers do have some notion of their suffering, and respond to it. Kerbaj writes:

no

we refuse

but who is listening to us?

The comments are both simple and reassuring:

Hevea Brasiliensis said...

I am.

6:20 AM

Marvin the Martian said...

I am too

7:36 AM

kerfroggy said...

I am too

j écoute, avec mes oreilles, mes yeux et mon coeur

8:03 AM

NOBODY said...

"We don't have a choice, but we still have a voice". Lebanon will always have. And you too : we are listening to you.

And we know what to think about the "leaders" of the so-called "free world", the so-called "United Nations", all the arabic and occidental "leaders" who let all this happen. We listen to you, and together, we will remember.

Nous vous écoutons.

2:18 PM

pabs said...

a few more ears listening from Madrid. We listen, time an again, tuning in to your distress however pointless it might seem to others, talking about your sorrow, gathering around you hardship, contributing in the only way we can think of and trying to find others. Again and again.

2:53 PM

jo said...

Juste pour dire, ces temps je check tous les jours ce blog, pour tout ce qui se passe au Liban mais surtout pour les dessins. Ils m'impressionnent, j'aime surtout ceux avec les mots fondus dans le reste. voila.

6:40 PM

Arnaud_V said...

J'écoute tes dessins et je regarde tes mots comme tous tes lecteurs et lectrices humanistes rassemblés ici fraternellement pour te soutenir.

Hélas ceux qui n'écoutent pas sont nos gouvernements composés de fous furieux, de cyniques, de machiavéliques, ou de caniches. Un jour ils devront rendre des comptes.

3:32 AM

al spetrino said...

I am listening to you and all the others who are suffering. Just know that in my university classes, altho I am an old professor, I am enlisting as many as I can. Yes, I sit here in comfort and economic security, but not in morality for that which is happening in the world.

11:44 PM

hard_to_see said...

everybody is.

but the question is who is going to actually DO something about it?

1:22 PM

This last question is answered by activism, as will be shown. This witnessing and antiphonic response by the listening other are vital for the transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory, and for the arc of descent in the katabatic journey to turn into the upswing of recovery. The comment thread on Kerbaj's posts after Qana illustrates this comfort and solidarity in action.

Particularly moving are the tributes by Israeli and Jewish people, who write of shame and helplessness in the knowledge of the attacks. The traumatic experience of witnessing harm done to others crosses geographical and ideological borders.

Bluesfreak said...

I am so sorry Mazen for the atrocities committed by the Israelis...I feel somehow responsible for my taxes helped pay for the rockets&

5.06PM

Keir said...

Mazen: it is uplifting that amidst the murder and destruction you depict there is an artist who stubbornly refuses to be anything less. Please continue your meaningful work. I hope it inspires (shames?) others who haven't yet been able to engage creatively with the violent time in which we live.

6:41 PM

Paul Illek said...

the recent drawings are right on the edge of what it must be like to be in a war - sad angry and then right up against it. I honestly don't know how you deal with it.

In solidarity

P

6:47 PM

S.C. said...

I can't say anything, I have no words. Even if I am very far from your country in kilometres not in my feelings. Please, keep on, as far as you can with your blog.

Here, we are reading and posting your blog, and writing and signing against genocide,&

From Argentina

8:18 PM

The Minstrel Boy said...

no words.

no tears.

only sorrow

empty

aching

sorrow.

i. . .

oh

what s

the

use?

9:40 PM

Gaagaamiczec said...

RESIST

5:32 AM

The Turtle s Back said...

I heard today of this terrible, terrible massacre. I extend my sympathies, as a stranger, in Australia, to you all. What else can I say?

6:19 AM

Dick said...

& I am no great friend of Israel, but I am sad that there is no more outrage against the instigators of this present violence. I sympathise with your sorrow and feelings of powerlessness. It must be terrible to witness. Please continue to keep the rest of the world informed.

7:26 AM

Maske said...

& There is nothing one can say, nothing one can do, but mourn the brutality of humanity. I sit here in shame, filled with anger, and anguish. There is no excuse, no justification for these acts.

&

Worse of all are those like me, who are unable to do anything because we are unwilling/unable to stand up to our government and stand on the side of the human beings we for some reason identify as separate from us. You are our brother, yet we spit in your face&

We are guilty, but we are not punished.

We need to know shame, for we have none.

We need to find hope but there is none.

&

I can only mourn with you, and know even though I mourn with you as a brother; I feel deep shame for where I am, who I am, and what my country helped do to your people. What new horrors will my country support? What new nightmare will we both wake up to tomorrow?

&

If we meet Mazen& may we be friends and remember that we are brothers in the heart.

8:21 AM

Paul Illek said...

At some point in the future we will experience something new and liberating - a huge silence where there was the sound of people shouting "IT WAS HIS/HERS/THEIR FAULT". And then the sound of people accepting responsibility for what they do and what they fail to do.

Like a good trumpeter, I won't hold my breath.

P

1:39 PM

Μαύρος Γάτος said...

Hello my friend. You are not alone.

MiltiadisS from Greece

1:43 PM

mountainear said...

Much, much admiration for your ability to express yourself so eloquently given the hateful circumstances. I, for one, have ben profoundly moved by your words, drawings and music.

Take care.

7:16 PM

residency said...

My heart i with you I cry tears for you all words are useless, we must feel collective shame for standing by, as a Jew I deplore this violence

7:38 PM

CirCe said...

Hi Mazen

I don't have a computer at home so I'm only connected when I'm at work. I never care about having a computer at home. But this weekend I miss you so much that I went to cyber to see what you have post. I was wondering about you & your family both saturday & sunday. I don't watch TV so you are the one who is telling what's happening.

Here in Argentina we went to Israel's Embassy to show our disagreement although is useless we need to feel that we are not so far away, that war it's a bad thing everywere and everywere it's our place.

I love what you are doing.

kiss, hug & love

10:54 PM

cinecantina said...

my grief, like that of many others throughout the world is with you.

so is my admiration for you, my frustration, and anger at what zionists are doing to humanity.

but if you can still manage to draw, to write, and to express yourself, it means that they have not won.

you have a friend in new york.

11:17 PM

Queen-Dido said...

we are all together really: only the sad world leaders stand alone with their dusty indifference.

peace and love from London

3:59 AM

Despite this support, conditions after the Qana massacre do not improve. The sense of dislocated time and the feeling that they are trapped in an endless loop of events over which they have no control is clear in some of the bloggers' posts: Ramzi's Blah Blah titles one cathartic post 'Godot' and comments on the emotional strain of disruption:

It's been a while since I'd enjoyed a Black Label, long glass, full ice over a crowded bar top while unfamiliar jazzy music accompanied the hubbub of beautiful people.

17 days of bombing and death.

I hate counting the days.

Partly because it somehow brings acceptance, as if I expect more days to come.

&

I'm not sure if it was that poem, everything I mentioned above, or the 17 days of violence that finally made my tears run.

I cried. But then quickly checked myself. I still had a home, loved ones and a future.

Many Lebanese sleep tonight without any of these.

Kerbaj has a similar breaking point. In a post titled 'day 19', he writes:

after 19

days

i started

to cry

He experiences alternating bouts of uncertainty and hopelessness that culminate into almost incoherent rhetorical questions:

and my life tomorrow?

and after tomorrow?

and after after tomorrow?

and after after after tomorrow?

and etc?

and after etc?

and after?

In a post from 6 August 2006, titled 'gloomy sunday', he states baldly:

today, i wish to die.

The response is immediate and gentle, and, for the most part, fairly humorous. The comments centre

on reminding Kerbaj of his responsibility as archivist. These conversations in fact enable him to survive the war itself and organise citizen activist events, as will be discussed. The knowledge that others are dependent on his posts becomes redeeming:

angryanddevastated said...

of course you do... but please don't

3:13 PM

pierre said...

We too want to die Mazen, we too.

But your blog is good, and it helps us going.

Die later, for the moment, we need this blog.

11:50 PM

Rachel said...

The world needs to hear your voice.

You are stronger than the bombs, Mazen.

8:28 PM

Fred lonberg-Holm said...

Mazen!

I hate leaving comments on blogs but... I just want you to know that not a day goes by that I don't talk with someone about you. You and your friends are so much like many of us here in Chicago except that you are being bombed. I always knew there were people who, just like me, want to play music and make art and have sex and eat food in every city that was ever attacked but... this time I know them in person.

I won't tell you what to do or not to do, except maybe to remember you are being thought of non-stop by me and many others here and around the world.

After this shit is over, I hope you will still want to play.

I had an idea to play your solo record at high volume in front of the state department (psy-op stylee!) but, these are the tactics of the war mongers. I hope to never become the flip side of their miseraeable coin.

Love, its our only weapon.

PAX!

Yours,

Fred

11:25 PM

Tim Blue said...

Mazen,

In Berlin we follow this blog.

it won t go away.

this work means so much, sorry is not enough to say that the people of Lebanon have to endure this horror.

Thank you,

Tim Blue

12:14 AM

The Minstrel Boy said...

i ve been through shellings myself so i won t say bullshit like "you ll pull through" because i have no way of knowing that. i will say, do what ever you need to do, for yourself. i hated the long nights in khe sanh. helpless, terrified, fucked up nights, other nights when we could get our hands on a bottle or bag of anything to just not feel like that. you are absolutely allowed to feel any way you feel. don t hide anything. there is where the truth lies. try mixing the whiskey with canned milk. it throws up easier that way.

3:49 AM

Kirsten said...

Mazen - we are thinking all time in the people of Lebanon, send you all love, power and energy to withstand this. You must go on being strong - don't give up. With love -

Kirsten from Mexico

6:56 AM

the rambler said...

...

yes, people do need to help on the ground. But above and beyond the band-aid quick-fixes, there are those whose calling is to open the eyes of those who can stop this murderous madness.

And that's what Mazen's doing.

His honesty, his suffering, his fuck-ups are our way in to the real impact this is having on our people. The beauty of Mazen's work is not the war, but the humanity it strips bare.

9:58 AM

The sense of the hopelessness and inevitability of war is clear in many posts. Bloggers feel trapped in the conflict chronotope. On 24 August 2006, in a post titled *one more year on the initial counter / one less year on the final counter*, Kerbaj remarks:

at the end of the civil war in 1990, i calculated that when i'll be 31, i would have lived more in time of peace than in time of war.

It is a bizarre sum to work out: the incongruity of this calculation does not escape him. Zena on Beirut Update, like Salti, uses the date only as a marker of the conflict. In a post from 10 August 2006 titled *1 month anniversary*, she explains her sense of durational time, the increasing feeling of futility, and her waning belief in writing as an act of record and resistance:

it has been one month now.

for one month, lebanon has had bombs drop on her.

in one month, i have aged 50 years.

for one month, i have cried everyday.

as the days unfold, the news is only getting worse. i find myself sinking... it has become so hard to write.

It is the remark by a commentator that acknowledges her significance in the blogosphere and encourages Zena to keep writing. These expressions of solidarity form the alternative public mourning spaces that are indicative of engagement:

5036.com said...

so GOOD to hear your voice, even if it is choked by tears and worry! i can't know how hard it is on you, having never had my peaceful life destroyed by bombs, but i cry with you...for the lost time, lost lives, lost country. even the lost glitter. but you will survive it.

you will. you give us hope, and inspire so many with your courage.

stay safe, stay strong.

borders are just lines drawn in dirt.

11:33 PM

Ceasefire was scheduled for 14 August 2006. However, in the disbelieving reaction fairly typical of trauma survivors, few bloggers experience the expected elation. This post on Ramzi's Blah Blah, also points out the permanently damaging aspect of conflict – the removal of trust in public institutions:

Could it be over?

Is this it?

No more rushing to the TV live feed to see the smoke plumes?

Or seeing the reporter try to figure out if it was a fighter or warship that fired?

No more breaking-news ribbons on the bottom of the screen?

Or that cute Saliba reporter on LBCI?

I've come to expect the casualty report every morning.

I get anxious when the power cuts out, as if the massacres can't happen if I'm watching the news.

And I've come to recognize the Haifa skyline like I've actually been there.

I never expected this war and it took me by surprise.

It angry, I cried out for peace, I had countless debates and arguments.

And now it's over just as abruptly as it started.

How can I ever trust in peace again?

Anecdotes from a Banana Republic – a site run by a German girl in Beirut, her tongue often firmly in her cheek (This blog offers satire, news, commentary, media analysis and anecdotes from that borderline-retarded little country, Lebanon Addendum: which is now in a state of war) documents the tension and a similar lack of faith (justified by the continued bombing after the ceasefire was declared), in a post from 13 August 2006. The absurdity of this violation spurs her to an exasperated humour in the last few lines.

They leveled residential buildings in Dahieyeh today. 20 bombs dropped in a matter of minutes, and a few more in the evening. And again, a few minutes ago. My roommate Mohamed, who ordinarily lives in Dahieyeh with his family, called his home phone yesterday to see if the house was still standing. He hasn't been back there since the beginning of the war when they fled with only their personal documents, a few sheets, and a satellite dish. And he hadn't called earlier, because there was no end to the destruction in sight. The phone rang; he was ecstatic. We made plans to go pick up his bike and a few other essential items tomorrow. Today they bombed his neighborhood anew, and it seems they will continue through the night, until the last minute. Tomorrow the phone might no longer ring; the remains of his home might be indistinguishable from the surrounding rubble.

What to do between now and eight AM? What if nothing happens at 8 am –kind of

like the Y2K hype? Perhaps four months from now I'll be sitting in a bomb shelter and trying to lighten up my neighbors with jokes about that that ceasefire deal, way back when, in August --or was it September? And what if it all suddenly ends, if quiet descends upon the land, and people crawl out of their besieged homes and villages to survey the damage, and infighting is once again the order of the day?

How did this all start again?

...

Negotiations. Funny how that was on the table as an option 100,000 bombs ago. It feels like forever.

In a later post, Emily adds:

Ceasefire jitters

They broke the siege! A commercial flight is arriving from Amman this afternoon, and yesterday, some fuel. Soon we'll have avocados and electricity and imported everything again.

This from Monday night. Couldn't post it earlier:

Sitting in the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel late last night to take advantage of their hi-speed wireless Internet and generator, I grabbed Mohamed's hand every time I heard a loud noise outside. It was just a car. The car door of a big GMC being slammed, Mohamed said, or it was just a car accident, or probably a window was blown shut by the wind. He laughed exasperatedly; I threw him a dirty look. The fourth or fifth time, I stopped believing him. What? What? he asked.

It will take a few days, maybe even weeks, for my body to recuperate from this state of high alert. But maybe unexpected loud noises will torment me for the rest of my life.

...

I'm a nervous wreck. I must stop drinking so much coffee and caffeinated soft drinks.

I don't need to be sharp; dull and subdued would suit me much better. I no longer trust

this city; did I ever?

She is intrigued by the resilience of people, who return to the sites of their former homes in an effort to rebuild them. Again, the bloggers' posts on this topic share aspects of more traditional reportage in their factual accuracy, but also supply detailed, first-hand accounts of events as they occurred. Here, for instance, Emily moves from general description of the carnage to a very specific and personal narrative of her friend's escape, illustrating the random nature of the bombardment and giving a face to the statistics in the MSM. The post is from 14 August 2006 and is titled "Rubble, rocking horses & the 'divine victory'":

This afternoon I accompanied my friend J. to his home in Haret Hreikh-- a neighborhood of Dahieyeh that sustained the most intense bombing in the southern suburbs. Taxis were already back on the roads, circumventing the rubble, and honking their horns to attract potential passengers. Despite the uncertain durability of the ceasefire, many people were returning to stay. Others came and discovered that there was nothing left of their homes; they were digging through the debris with their bare hands in search of salvageable items. Amongst the smoking mounds of concrete, the odd bookshelf, half a bed, or a rocking horse miraculously survived the impact of the bombs. I imagine the previously unretrievable bodies of the missing will soon be found amidst the tangle of iron rods, the wreckage of stone, crushed appliances and furniture. All around Dahieyeh, the rubble was cordoned off with what looked like ordinary yellow police tape. Instead it read, "RESTRICTED AREA- NO TRESSPASSING. The Divine Victory." A fashion dummy, which had toppled out through the broken glass of a department store display dangled from the electricity wires by its synthetic hair. Another precariously rested on top of the cables. Entire street blocks have been demolished, leaving clearings amidst the highrise tenements that resemble - in size and magnitude-- the crater left by the World Trade center attacks. Some buildings were hit from the top and had collapsed in the conventional manner, as if sinking to their knees and doubling over. Other houses

were destroyed from the bottom up, sustaining damage only to the lower half; 5-stories were intact on top of the wreckage of the lower 3-stories, surrounded by a massive deep gorge as if the explosion had taken place underground. Much of the paved roads were smashed, exposing the soil beneath. People were wearing protective masks; the stench of garbage, sulfur, burnt rubber, smoke, and what might have been undetected corpses or dead cats was unbearable.

J. s house incurred damage only on the first day of the Israeli bombing, before the family had evacuated. The Israelis bombed a road approximately 150 meters from his house, and a sizeable chunk of concrete from the site catapulted in through the open balcony door into his bedroom. Luckily, J. was sleeping in his brother s room downstairs; the concrete slab landed right smack at the head of his bed, causing the whole thing to collapse. It would have crushed his face had he been sleeping there.

Kerbaj also writes that he does not trust the machinations between states, but is cautiously positive:

they are saying that today, at 8 am, the war ended.

and i said that when the war will end i ll stop drawing for a while. i ll rest.

and there is a girl with very beautiful eyes in the torino.

and there is a smell of life in beirut. only a smell.

very beautiful. more than what i can draw.

i don t know why i feel that i ll have to still draw for a long long time before i rest.

posted by mazen at 06:22

His caution is rewarded, leaving a bitter taste in the mouth :

today s joke

20 bombs

in less than one minute

on the southern suburbs

while i am writing
that the war is over
posted by mazen at 23:15

night of 14th to 15th of august.

5am

silence.

silence.

silence.

and a bitter taste in the mouth.

On the 15 August 2006, he experiences another bout of mistrust, hopelessness and lack of direction. His desire to sleep is overwhelming but unsatisfied; even though the trauma is technically past, Kerbaj is waiting for the next bombardment. He keeps posting updates.

i don t
know
what i should
do
posted by mazen at 02:28

zzz

zzz

posted by mazen at 02:25

time remains
and we pass.
time passes
and beirut remains.

posted by mazen at 05:49

the eternal return

despite the warnings from israel against the circulation beyond the litani river,
thousands of cars overloaded with people and luggages took the road toward their
villages ruins today, starting 8 am.

the stubbornness of the lebanese people will remain for ever a rejoicing mystery to me.

posted by mazen at 06:32

On 17 August, Kerbaj writes:

after the days of anger
came the days of despair

The next day is no better, even though the conflict is over: Kerbaj is haunted by the voices of the dead. In a post titled still resisting? he writes:

it s 3:30 am.

there is no electricity.

i cannot upload yesterday s and today s drawings.

the war is "over" since monday.

they are still finding corpses under the fallen buildings.

we still freak out each time we hear a scooter or a truck. we think of the planes.

tomorrow we re recording a "war quartet" with sharif, charbel and marc on electric
guitars.

i am still drawing.

i am waiting for the day when i can sleep.

posted by mazen at 02:37

from under the lebanese earth
more than 1500 persons are asking themselves
why?
posted by mazen at 05:50

Nearly ten days later he accepts that the bombing is truly over, writing on 27 August 2006 that:

i feel that tonight, i am going to sleep.
for real.

His final post for August details his next moves, outside Lebanon, which involve travel, music, and art. He has moved on but not without realising the impact of his actions during the conflict. He writes on 29 August 2006 that he feels that he is leaving a community in the blogosphere:

&
i am posting this as if i was sending an email to a friend to tell him i ll be absent for
a while.
it s funny.

The bloggers find other work to pursue. Some sites are still live, while others, feeling that they have performed their duty, have been relegated to archival status they are still available for perusal, but not commentary.

In a post-war post from 23 August 2006, Zena writes that she has felt part of a recognisable online community, but also that she must engage in concrete reconstruction activities now that they war is over.

to all who have been posting comments.
i am sorry i have not been able to respond to you all ... i guess i m not much of a
"blogger", but rather see this as a sort of online diary. it is difficult for me to respond

to most of your questions. i am not a politician. i don't understand how their minds work. for those leaving beautiful messages, i thank you from the bottom of my heart. you have become part of my everyday being. i have come to recognize so many of you now... and often look forward to your comments. they give me strength. thank you.

i may not be posting as often as i was before because really, there is so much work to be done now. being online these days is a sort of luxury. i am sorry if any of you were worried by my absence. thank you so much for thinking of me.

with love, always,

.z

The end of the katabatic journey for these warblogs is thus recovery so much work to be done now, as will be shown. Trauma works its way into the fabric of community life, but the reverse relationship is therefore also possible: the very events that caused such disruption and fragmentation of ordinary social processes can, in their shared experience, also be the catalyst for affiliation and engagement. As this comment thread indicates, much of the blogging from and about Lebanon during the conflict tried consciously to promote positivity, activism and independence in order to deconstruct negative stereotypes and facilitate alternative narratives to those received from the MSM and state institutions. Reading blogs was one way the bloggers themselves found some peace of mind. Zena, on Global Voices Online, writes of this online community:

It was actually reading the blogs of fellow bloggers that helped me the most. I don't know anyone of them by face, but I felt connected, as if I knew them for a long time. Reading blogs has become a daily ritual and I have come to really enjoy it. On these blogs, I saw many talents. I laughed, teared, read poetry and listened to forgotten tunes that lived in me for a long time.

Another World is Possible Now simply quotes Arundhati Roy as its mission statement, in an extract that emphasises the will to make meaning from trauma:

To love. To be loved. To never forget your own insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never, to forget.

The site Ur-Shalim is administrated by Moussa Bashir, who is also one of the regional editors for Global Voices Online. He writes that the expression of collective will is potentially powerful, explaining his choice of title:

"Ur" is an Aramaic word for city. "Shalim" means peace. Salam in Arabic. "Ur-Shalim" or "Uri-Shalim" is then the "City of Peace" (Madinat al Salam). It is the ancient name of Jerusalem or Al-Quds.

It is a belief that to attain a lasting peace in the region, it must materialize first in UrShalim.

Similarly, Bedouina writes:

I knew (and still know) that places like Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine are much more than just war zones. I knew that humans have big hearts everywhere, that even in the midst of war people pray and meditate, people do good works for each other, people reach out. People always take actions to construct positive good, no matter how bad the behavior of others around them. I wanted to blog visions of the world we want to have, not the problems that plague us.

The vividness and immediacy of the bloggers' posts for their readers is summed up simply and beautifully by one response to a post on Kerblog from 4 August 2006:

backenas said...

Ahh, I can hear the music all the way here if I listen very closely!

12:47 PM

These visions of the world we want to have are manifest in the comments and support of the thousands of readers of the Lebanese warblogs, as well as in the civil society events and programmes that arose from the interactions in the Lebanese blogosphere. As one commentator on Kerblog, Paul Illek, observes:

...

Rebuilding is always the hardest part.

Stay with it.

best

P

7:36 PM

Citizen activism: Rebuilding is always the hardest part

The particular features of warblogs provided acknowledgement and affirmation of past events for the writers; engagement and affiliation in the present (between writer-reader, reader-writer, and reader-reader); and planned future participation. This went some way towards reconstituting a sense of individual time that was ordered and causal.

There were two other major outcomes of the rise in Lebanese blogging activity. The first was an increased public profile for the alternative narrative, which often resulted in convergence journalism and hybridised media platforms.

As we have seen, blogs are alternative narratives to the master narrative presented by institutional memory. All societies, as Van der Merwe writes (2008), have their shadow texts discomforting takes on historical events that may make their hearers reconsider what they know of the power and responsibility they have invested in these public institutions. Blogs are, in this sense, a threat to the grand narrative of government, military and capitalist concerns. They undermine the status quo by telling another kind of truth. As Perlmutter argues, blogging empowers. The new

narratives bypass big media; they can show and tell us at length, without being subject to outside editing or commentary by an interlocutor (181: 2008).

MSM outlets began paying attention to blogs almost as soon as the war broke out. In a post from 7 August 2006, alex comments:

Mazen-

I learned of your blog from a local newspaper in Florida, U.S.A. and I am sure the same article was carried by other US newspapers. The importance of your drawings/writings is immeasurable as more people will soon come to see the "real" effects this war is having and not just the numbers game that is played on CNN night after night. Keep posting. Courage. Stay strong for you will get through this.

2:08 AM

On 18 August 2006, Buitre Desahuciado said:

Wow!!! Terrible and precious.

My sincerely congratulations for giving us this different point of view.

(I m from the US backyard: Central America, especifically, Costa Rica and we can t have this info through the regular mass media, but at least there is the Internet).

6:25 PM

From 24 August 2006, PORTÁTIL tellingly commented:

i feell like your work is the only information i can believe, you are the one who tells me what is real today in your country,

when i read the news i don't understand words like "hostility" to name bombs over hundreds of people

...

i don't understand that kind of words

and i still hear your question in my head

5:28 PM

On 29 August 2006, some commentators belatedly point out that the blog has crossed over into print, in a kind of convergence journalism that extends the bloggers' influence:

Paul Illek said...

Hi Mazen

Just to let you know that there is a full page article about Beirut and you in the September issue of The Wire, with drawings. I can send a jpeg if you want. I guess Wire distribution to Beirut might be a little slow at the moment...

P.

3:01 PM

karen said...

I read about your blog in an Australian newspaper over the summer. I don't know quite what it is that so grabs me about your site. Perhaps it's the simplicity and the human-ness of the cartoons. Now I'm fearful because you have not clocked in since Tuesday. Hope to see you back on line in sooner rather than later.....and, thanks

1:04 AM

From a post dated 29 July 2006, Younes writes

At 10:00 AM, Cafe Younes witnessed a large and happy crowd. At one time, you could actually hear seven spoken languages: Arabic, French (Swiss and French), English (American, English and Scottish), Spanish (Colombian and Venezuelan), German, Armenian and a Greek on a mobile phone with her family. A New York Times reporter, sipping his espresso, was eaves dropping. Then he decided to interview me

about my personal view regarding the war. I answered his questions and as he was looking for more candidates, I selfishly offered him to talk to Jamal since we both share the same opinions. Hopefully, a non edited version of these interviews will appear tomorrow in the New York Times.

The café itself is remembered fondly in the comments; it provided a literal manifestation of the Habermasian space, in which journalists and civilians mingled, and argued. Salti writes that it was better to be at the Internet café she frequented, surrounded by friends, instead of at home, where the news delivered by the mainstream media in sound-bites served to dislocate and disorient people, adding to their anxiety. In a comment from 12 August 2006, Hind said:

hi...i am a friend of a friend of a friend...i regret to this day not stopping by the cafe and hanging out with your wonderful clients..i was out of beirut when this war started and as miserable as i have been, i have been forced to stay outside till now...i read so many blogs every day and i wanted to say, thank you...thank you so much for your words everyday and the pictures...it makes me feel connected and back in my beloved hamra and hope you continue to write...

1:52 AM

Another anonymous commentator, in a comment that assumes a relatively intact future for Beirut, said:

Hi,

I ve been reading your posts during the war. You really succeeded in reflecting the daily lives of the resilient lebanese people and the foreign reporters covering the war, through their brief conversations.

I lived in Lebanon for six years but never had the chance to pass by your cafe. Next time I visit Beirut, make sure to have enough coffee beans for my mochacino!

Melhem

7:02 PM

Similarly, in the digital space of the blogosphere, the Lebanese warblogs share some aspects of blog carnivals, in that they centre on one theme or event, have multiple original authors, and have been collected and archived since the war. Most of the blogs tend to be linkfests, where blogs - particularly international ones - may link to more immediate reports in Beirut, for example, where bloggers posted more up-to-date photographs and information than MSM outlets could provide.

This public space becomes particularly important in the context of state censorship and the scarcity of technological resources. In a post from 5 August 2006 titled 'testament', Kerbaj writes:

it seems that this blog is censored in the united arab emirats. i received more than 10 emails assuring this. if this is true, it means that it is possible to do it on a larger scale.

two things should be done to address these issues.

first, if every person who read this and know people in dubai or abu dabi can download ALL of the drawings and send them by emails there it would be great. you should also ask to the people to make them available for as much people as possible there.

second, regarding the possible shut down of this blog one day (the more it grows the more i am afraid of such a censorship), here's what should be done in my opinion: every person who have enough place on her hard disk should download and keep ALL the drawings and texts posted on the blog. this will be useful in two ways:

1- the blog can be recreated at different addresses in different countries to avoid the censorship. i will for sure recreate it also and continue it somewhere else. but i might not have the possibility to do so with the electricity problems that are becoming worst and worst.

2- the scans you find on the blog are the only other versions of the real drawings that are made on my notebooks. if this notebook or myself or both of us disappear some day. there'll still be a trace of it. even in low-res.

it is 2:40am in beirut and there is still eectricity.

the vultures are revolving above us.

i am going to try to sleep.

good night

more drawings, and words and bombs tomorrow.

posted by mazen at 02:27

As we have seen, contemporary conflict situations highlight the devolution of trust in public power structures: the trust once placed in the state is replaced by the investment in new media for social reform and action. These are the same groups that encourage resistance in the form of alternative narratives. The 33-Day War thus provided both the agents and the impetus for engagement in the public sphere, visible in the creation of digital communities in the Lebanese blogosphere. The second major outcome of this activity in the blogosphere was increased actor-centred social activity: the 'survivor-mission' visible in the recovery arc of the katabatic narrative. As the above post illustrates, the threat of censorship inspired bloggers such as Kerbaj to find alternative routes to ensure that their material stayed in the public sphere. His archiving suggestions take full advantage of the multimodality of the Internet. (His blog stayed live.)

Calls to activism by bloggers during the bombing manifested in both local and global campaigns. Instantaneous international media attention focused on the conditions in the country during the bombing, often relying on the alternative narratives of the bloggers in preference to more mainstream accounts. Sandmonkey (2006) sums up the motivation of young bloggers wanting to engage critically in the public sphere over these issues of truth, identity and existence: There are the arguments in which you hope to find the truth and the arguments in which you want to defend an established truth. Lebanese Bloggers, among many others (see the Web Directory after the References), became such a site for engagement. Its reach was sufficient to challenge most MSM outlets: it received a quarter of a million page views during the conflict (Beckerman, 2007).

Blogs engendered worldwide concern over infrastructural damage and the risks of escalation

of the crisis, as well as mixed support and criticism of both Hezbollah and Israel, visible in the engagement among bloggers in the comment threads and forums. They were responding in part to the governments of the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and Canada, which asserted Israel's right to self-defence. The United States government authorised Israel's request for expedited shipments of precision-guided bombs, but did not announce the decision publicly (Cloud, 2006). Bush declared the conflict part of 'The War on Terror' (ABC News, 30 July 2006; CNN, 14 August 2006).

Neighbouring Middle Eastern nations (Iran, Syria and Yemen) publicly supported Hezbollah, while the Arab League, Egypt, and Jordan issued statements both condemning Israel's response (Haaretz, 16 July 2006) and criticizing Hezbollah's action. (*International Herald Tribune*, 17 July 2006). Saudi Arabia found Hezbollah entirely responsible (Al-Jazeera, 15 July 2006).

The Lebanese blogs linked to other blogs, activist projects and communities. Sites such as The Electronic Intifada, Lebanon Under Siege, and Samidoun provided information, tracked reconstruction and linked to relevant sites, becoming portals for access to the various groups at work on the ground and in cyberspace. The Electronic Intifada (EI) calls itself '...the leading Palestinian portal for information about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its depiction in the media', providing the following links: Opinion/Editorial; Diaries; Human Rights; Development; Israel Lobby Watch; Internet & Tech; Business & Economy; Role of the Media; Coverage Trends; Journalists in Danger; EI in the Press; Activism News; Action Items; Letters to the Media.

Lebanon Under Siege, fairly typically, lists the following links: Hotlines; Donations; Cash Donations; In-kind donations; Volunteering; Donations received; Relief Efforts; Higher Relief Council; NGOs; International Organizations; HRC Payments; Facts & Figures; Aid Distribution; Movement of the displaced; Damages; Stockholm Pledges; Updates; Official Statements; Relief Updates; Situation Reports; Recovery Updates; Latest International Press; Reports & Surveys; Human Rights; Maps; Humanitarian Assistance; Damages & Locations Bombed; IDP Distribution; Clashes; Videos; Testimonials (ibid).

Civilian protests and demonstrations took place worldwide, largely organised through social networking sites and blogs. These appealed for an immediate ceasefire on both sides, and denounced the heavy loss of civilian life. Blogs such as Anecdotes from a Banana Republic

recommended local relief organisations:

Grand Street said...

Juan Cole suggests sending money for relief and humanitarian aid to AUB. What is your suggestion?

9:35 PM

EDB said...

My suggestion is to send money to the Sanayeh Relief Center-- a multi-confessional, progressive coalition of individuals and NGOs who have been operating from day one to provide relief to the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons in and around Beirut.

Their website is www.samidoun.org

10:48 PM

Other demonstrations were held exclusively in favour of Lebanon or Israel. Numerous newspaper advertising campaigns, SMS and e-mail appeals, and online petitions were also instigated (APA, 28 July 2006; Save the Lebanese Civilians Petition. E-petitions.net, 15 July 2006).

Within Lebanon itself, *asabiya* was visible in a number of civil society organisation. While volunteers belonged to existing groups based on their confessional identities, they also formed one of Fraser's (1990) counterpublics by creating a digital identity aligned with criticism of the existing socio-political circumstances. Many activist projects began as alternatives to existing MSM coverage and outlets. Younes, in a post from 29 July 2006, documents the relief efforts of people he knows, as did many bloggers; these sites served as portals to other sites that organised activities. While Younes is supportive of these relief efforts, he is under no illusions that the recipients are particularly selfless or grateful, and documents honestly their behaviour towards the volunteers. His gentle mockery is obvious by the end of the post:

I have to admit that most of my stories are biased and subjective, but a small part of my objective persona is emerging throughout the next lines. One of the main actors in

this theater of Lebanese drama is a group of young men and women who spend their time contributing and volunteering to help war displaced people. Just to show the other dark side of the Lebanese society, I will forward what Rima and Nadim, two young students full of life and hope for a better Lebanon, told me today: In the middle of the crisis and what is happening in the country, displaced children were entertained by some local help groups. The cheapest and easiest entertainment is drawing. The children, unaware of the catastrophe they are witnessing, were more than happy drawing lively colored houses, big suns, vast green gardens and even shiny red Coca Cola cans. Nadim was shocked to see the parents ordering their children to draw tanks, guns, war scenes and the famous Hezbollah's missile Raad 1. Rima couldn't believe her ears when she heard a woman include in her list of basic needs, between the words of bread, water and soap, deodorant and perfume for her 18 years old son who wants "to go out at night"... And we shouldn't forget the newly wed couple who insisted on a private room while the whole refugee's school they are in is hardly able to contain hundreds of families. Of course, these are minorities that should not be accountable for!!!

Kerbaj repeatedly describes his sense of fraudulence and frustration in the face of the unsought mainstream attention garnered by his site. In a post from 21 July 2006, titled 'fuck interviews', he writes:

i am receiving a lot of propositions for other interviews.

i hate to do that. especially in these times.

i feel that the attention my work is given is somehow unjustified. in normal times, i would have sent my blog address to my mailing list (around 400 people), and would have got some 1000 people visiting after 2 or 3 years. today, it went pretty fast out of control. in 4 days there was already more than 1000 readers. god knows how much there is now. i hope a lot. and i hope that others are coming.

the thing is that today i feel a sort of responsibility, and it is like i have to make my voice heard to continue the job i am already doing on the blog. i am doing it and will

still do it. but it put me in the position of a sort of hero defending the lebanese citizens with my art, while the sad reality is that i can do nothing to even protect myself. people are dying under the bombs and i am giving interviews!!!

anyways, i ll continue drawing, fraking out, playing music and blogging (i hate this word) until i find something more intelligent/helpful to do.

The frustration motivates Kerbaj to begin organising independently. He urges other bloggers to join a simple mailing list, and recommends that as many people as possible start blogging in order for their experiences to be documented and archived. Post 57, on 21 July 2006 is titled to all the lebanese bloggers :

& i am creating this post for you to add all your links on it in the comments section. maybe you can add a quick description if you like. i know it is not much but it is the only way for me to spread the word about all the lebanese blogs going around these days. i hope you ll see this post and send all the other lebanese bloggers.

keep it going. and encourage everybody you know to start a blog. your mom, dad, any friends, family. everybody. we are writing our future s collective memory.

His blog becomes a point of organisation and activism, stimulating his own curiosity about the readership demographic. The response to the two posts below in particular is instantaneous, global and overwhelming:

Thursday, August 03, 2006

i won t stop

i have now a program to check the daily visits. it is around 11000 per day. the real number of visitors is bigger if knowing that a lot of the "regulars" connect once or twice in a week. the real number must be around 15000 maybe.

there is 15000 persons seeing this blog! it s incredible no?

no.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH!

guys if each one of these 15000 can drag 10 more people asking them to drag 10 more, we'll be a fucking million and a half. and if this million can drag some more...

i am not totally naive and more likely a little bit sceptical, but it seems for me that a webtifada is possible. ghandi's concept but on the net. one fucking billion of people saying NO. it looks cheesy i know, but is there something else to do?

anyways, i thank you all (especially the israelis, germans, english and american people who have the balls to refuse what they are told they should do by their government).

i'd like to be able to thank personally, "live", each one of you. it'll take a lifetime, but i'll try. after.

after.

&

we fucking resist. we fucking resist. we fucking resist.

Again, two days later, Kerbaj titles a post "webtifada let it be", an open letter to his readers, suggesting digital resistance:

dear all,

this concept of webtifada (the word is not from me. i insist) seems to have some appeal. as you might all know, my brain is not functioning to its full capacity these days. i have no idea of what to do. but despite my legendary skepticism, i feel we can do something with all these people around the world connected to the net. i do not know if petitions work. i usually do not sign them and believe in them. maybe there is a better idea. i do not know. it is really YOU who have to make this webtifada work. i'll continue posting about this issue to give place in the comments section for some ideas to come out. i want this site to be used as a catalyst because it is dragging a lot of people. a lot of people that seems to begin to understand that lebanon is not a desert with people on camels worrying all day long where to find water to drink.

i ll continue doing my job. please try to start yours.

WE FUCKING RESIST.

as we can.

illusion of progress said...

A WEBTIFADA IT IS!!!

I ll find 10 more people -- each day until the shit ends.

&

from chicago,

michael

1:42 PM

Nefertari said...

Thanks for allowing the rest of the world a glimpse into your world. Your pictures are an inspiration.

I ve added a link to your blogsite on mine. I know of a few other South Africans that have done the same.

Wish there was something more tangible I could do, though. If I had my way, I d be on a plane to Lebanon to come and assist with the growing refugee crisis.

Good luck, and keep posting.

2:27 PM

billfish said...

I ve been telling everyone I know about your blog, and will continue to do so. Your Webtifada idea is great, and the common man does, indeed, have a voice. Let the voices ring

Bill

2:55 PM

Samir said...

Mazen,

your site is inspiring to the millions of people in the Lebanese diaspora and the countless other friends of Lebanon.

Don't erase the comments, it further enhances your credibility and exposes the hateful and racist bent of Israeli proponents and policies.

Cheers,

Samir

3:36 PM

kerfroggy said...

Don't you erase any of what you create : it's reality and i have to say i'm fed up with the "politically correct" thing. Freedom of speech and freedom of creation is what you have : GO FOR IT!!!!

As for Webtifada, i'll try to pass the word around

Keep resisting!

5:32 PM

Deborah said...

Mazen,

Yes, a webtifada!

As I was deleting yet another advertisement (for motor scooters this time) from my website's guestbook I was inspired by your last post to add your blog to my guestbook, not just the links page. I have sent your blog, via email, to many people...but hey, maybe the next spam advertiser who tries to post in my guestbook will check out your blog!

You never know!

As always, you and your family/friends are in my prayers.

Spreading the work and the word,

deborah

5:46 PM

For ever free said...

Hi Mazen,

I know it hurts to see the racist supremacists trying to speak out through your site. But the more they speak out, the more we can see the hypocrisy behind their reason, we see how much they are truly enemies of the human cause. So please, do not quiet them. Let their ugliness contrast with the beauty of your soul. All the love from Buenos Aires...

I will keep telling everyone about your site and the gorgeous art in it.

Let's go on with the WebTifada!

5:55 PM

b99 said...

how can we start the Webtifada? let's start the website and-or the BLOG. i don't have any experience...

come on guys... I know you, tech-guys, can...

mazen, keep strong and safe. we'll help soon. :-)

6:07 PM

Nana said...

From Mexico, all I can say is:

OUR HEARTS ARE WITH YOU!

Blessed be my friends.

8:44 PM

mopti95 said...

dear mazen,

not much of a comfort, but your drawings are being distributed in anti-war

demonstrations in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, Israel, and we have such demos almost

every day. Don't give up.

Peace,

Eyal

Jerusalem

9:58 PM

birgit said...

Brilliant drawings!

Great idea the webtifada!

I'll put a link to your blog on my website.

Hope we can listen to your recording soon.

birgit

10:03 PM

In Silence said...

Dear Mazen,

I am asking for your permission to post your latest post in my blog -both in English and in Greek- with a link back here.

May I?

10:10 PM

JC2005 said...

I'll link yours to my blog too. thank you, mazen.

10:22 PM

kim said...

i am an american & a texan at that & i think our administration is insane. i am so ashamed of what is happening in lebanon. it makes it look like all americans follow what our president is doing. let me tell you that bush has only an approval rating in

usa of 30%. that means that 70% of american do not agree with his policies. i want to personally say i am so sorry to the people of the middle east. it seems that the usa has fucked everything up. i cringe every night when i watch the news & see nothing is being done to help end this by my country. please tell the people of the middle east that many, many, many americans do not go along with this killing by israel, it is disgusting & wrong, wrong, wrong. i am a middle aged woman who lives in the state that bush is from & that s an embarassment in itself to me & my whole family, including my 81 year old mother. please know some of us DO CARE & WANT THIS TO STOP. NO ONE WILL LISTEN TO US!

KIM

11:11 PM

samah-the-nut said...

webtifada then... at least I ll be doing something... I already added your link on my blog and will market it amongst friends... stay safe, draw all day peace... where?

12:30 AM

wayne&wax said...

keep it up, mazen! the drawings and commentary provide an all too rare glimpse at lebanese humanity -- something that the american media would like to pretend doesn't exist, making it all the easier to ignore (or worse, support) israel's shameful slaughter of civilians.

and post some of that music here, too, if possible. the more media, the better. i appreciated your "jam" with the bombs that dj /rupture pointed me to. powerful stuff. in strength and solidarity,

w&w

boston, MA

1:46 AM

Kerbaj, clearly awed by the response, adds his own comment to the thread:

well, it seems that idea of webtifada found some supporters. i have to admit that the word is cool but was not invented by me at all. actually i already saw it in 5 to 6 emails. so i let you imagine how to do it. for me it seems that bringing one billion people together on a website in the same moment should be enough. it will blow out the internet worldwide for sure.

let s webtifada then.

3:10 AM

boris said...

Mazen!

I recommend you setup e.g. draw up a painted artistic petition - in form of a strong KERBLOG drawing.

Then you put it online for any individual to print out on a b/w printer and glue on any lamppost, wall, music theaters cashier desk, church, brothel entry - you name it - all over the world

then one online petition to:

- 1.) sign with name and email address
- 2.) then forward to a politician living the petitioners area I could search for some Austrian addressees - e.g. in the EU providing a eu commissariy email adress, in the USA soemone has to find the proper adress there.
- 3.) some chaps here on the internet are surely clever enough to find a valid email address of reps. like Condi, Bush, Koffie Annan, Olmert Assad, Van Heugen, Bruce Willis e.g. to whom that signed petitions may be forwarded.
- 4.) One guy in or around Brussels would be needed to assemble all signatures to the petition, print it out and send it by snail mail (photos to be taken) to the EU commissary.
- 5.) to organise all this I would set up a seperate KERBLOG blog to assemble all ideas -

the main and most important, superior and overshadowing aim is:

Every idea supplied must be a self runner as we all know Mazen is not able to handle any additional task.

A separate site / internet representation / blog for WEBTIFADA would be good for security reasons as one never knows when one of the ever-present agents decides "Mazen is not good for us" and decides to hack your only site - then your offline with everything.

Just my two cents

4:36 PM

Elisabetta said...

Dear Mazen,

I've copied your post in my blog with a link back here.

We're listening you.

Love and mercy for you and your friends, from Spain.

1:56 AM

Yannick said...

please post mazenkerblog url on forums, non-english wikipedia pages about lebanon and israel, wiki stuff, blog comments, online newspaper comments, etc.

8:00 PM

hannuna said...

...

Mazen, could you paint something - with english words- so that if those drawings are copied and posted on the side of the roads bypassers here in germany can understand that's about the present situation in Beirut??? And might realize something...

Hug

1:18 PM

The comments were supportive, generating positive responses from individuals and groups, who spontaneously organised events and reported back to Kerbaj, stating explicitly how influential his blog had become:

paixauliban said...

Dear Mazen,

We are a group of individuals who are organising a big gathering in Paris tomorrow on Thursday 10th at 6 pm on the lawn just outside the Eiffel Tower.

This gathering answers the calls of Marcel Khalife, Nidal Al Alchkar and a group of Lebanese film directors. We will rise a 65 meter square Lebanese flag with a broken cedar and the words La Paix! (Peace!) on it. We can send you a picture of it if you are interested.

I know you are in Lebanon and will not be able to join us but could you please send the word through your blog, which touches a large audience.

If you agree, we would also like to add your name to the list of artists and intellectuals who support us. If you do, please send us an email to paixauliban@yahoo.fr

Best regards,

Lama

3:50 PM

By 15 August 2006 Kerbaj has used some of the simple suggestions both print and digital, and all interactive - by other bloggers. In a post titled a colorful poster for the streets of your city , he writes another open letter:

dear all,

a lot of people are asking if they can print the poster with the war games (let s play).

please do. it is available in large format to download (click on it then enlarge it on flicker).

by the way, i repeat here for those who didn t look at all the archives:

you can use the drawings/music on my blog for any non-commercial printing (posters,

flyers, emails, etc.) or airing (for the music) to help promoting the blog and thus to help the lebanese cause.

please do use the screen resolution for printing.

please do use them with NO editing/cropping/mixing or anything else.

please do put my name AND the address of the blog next to it.

for those interested also, you can find ready to print and stick on your neighborhood walls A4 drawings on the link of my friend paul keller from amsterdam.

Kerbaj also links to other events, ensuring that his wide readership spreads the news. From the same day, a truly internal and truly multimodal venture develops: a webjam, complete with mission statement and contact details. Many of the people listed below are well-known in the blogosphere.

Mrabba Electroni[c]que: Global Lebanon Web Jam. Stop the war!

!!!!please note time change!!!!!!

Saturday, August 12 2006, 15:00 - 19:00 PM CEST [--> 16:00 - 20:00 EEST]

<http://beirut.streamtime.org>

<http://streamtime.org>

Live audio/video streaming transmission from Waag Society in Amsterdam, in direct connection with Beirut and surrounding localities. The event was initiated by Streamtime, a web support campaign for Iraqi bloggers.

After one month of violence and carnage, this Global Web Jam brings together live interviews and conversations, video clips, cartoons and blog blurbs, soundscapes, DJs and VJs, a lively mix of information, art, protest, party and reflection. We feature the voices, images, stories, reports and initiatives from Lebanon and beyond, with participation of activists, artists, bloggers, journalists, musicians and many others.

This is a call for an immediate end to the violence and destruction, in defiance of war, and in search for solidarity.

With contributions and participation of: Wahid el-Solh, Mounira el-Solh, Sonya Knox,

Naeem Mohaiemen, Kanj Hamadi, Jim Quilty, Randa Mirza, Mazen Kerbaj, Raed Yassin, Charbel Haber, Nathalie Fallaha, Henri Gemayel, Fadi Tufayli, Tariq Shadid, Peter Speetjens, Chalaan Charif, Martin Siepermann, Arjan El Fassed, Ruud Huurman, Kadir van Lohuizen, Thomas Burkhalter and Anna Trechsel, Beirut DC, Tarek Atoui and many others.

This Global Web Jam is an initiative of Jo van der Spek, Geert Lovink and Cecile Landman (from Streamtime), Nat Muller, Paul Keller and Denis Jaromil Rojo in Amsterdam; and Tarek Atoui and Rawya el-Chab in Beirut.

info: <http://beirut.streamtime.org> | mail: beirut@dischosting.nl

This project is supported by Waag Society, Novib (Dutch Oxfam) and X-Y Solidarity Fund

Dominic Lash said...

Hello Mazen, I am an improvising bassist who lives in Oxford, England. I heard you play at the LMC festival last year, which was wonderful. I just wanted to let you know how your blog and your artwork is the most dignified response to a hideous situation that I have seen. So many people in Britain are wholly behind you - we will have a demonstration in Oxford tomorrow as some small expression of that. Keep up the struggle.

12:46 AM

nickorname said...

mazen, we wanted to contribute to this cause. you can see the photos of your drawings in the halls of Lisbon at or blog <http://unsilencedpt.blogspot.com/>

peace.pt

11:22 PM

Similarly, local actor-centred activism was apparent in the extra-cultural, multi-confessional blogging community that formed around the Civil Resistance Campaign, involved in rehabilitation and medical training, and housing and feeding schemes for the hundreds of displaced Lebanese

civilians who had lost their family members, health, homes and jobs. The campaign relied on contributions from existing social networks and the goodwill of people who had been made aware of the plight of the population – largely through the blogosphere. Rasha Salti, one of many other bloggers who documented civilian volunteer work, writes in a post dated 5 August 2006, of a temporary refugee hospital run by civilians:

In the next room four elderly women were lodged. One was from Zreiriyeh, a diabetic whose legs were amputated, and was on dialysis. She had piercing green eyes. Ziad (Killer smile) got the old ladies to talk. He walked in and asked each one where they were from. To the old lady from Zreiriyeh he asked if she knew the Kojok family. She said she was born a Kojok, "I recognized the green eyes", he replied knowingly. Her neighbor was from Adloun, she needed cataract surgery and had been there for 20 days. One of the women nudged me to ask her, and I asked her, and she said that she was from Srifa. "You will hear about the massacre of Srifa, you will hear," she said to me. She had driven with her family to Tyre, then to Saida, but her mother, who shared the room with the other elderly ladies, had walked a week later from Srifa, "walked for three days, without respite," she kept repeating. "An old lady like me, walking for three days. We saw death and we could do nothing but walk."

Descriptions such as these, with their combination of factual content and commentary on characters that inspired pathos in readers, both raised money and galvanised local volunteers. There arose a clear and organised civil resistance movement in Lebanon, mediated by ordinary bloggers turned social organisers. The Lebanon: An Open Country for Civil Resistance call to action/manifesto, for example, was posted independently by the International Civil Mission in Lebanon, and was consequently endorsed by activist groups and individual citizens until its momentum gave it the status of a mass movement.

Salti writes in the Introduction to *Notes from the Siege* that the Civil Resistance Campaign's first action, planned on August 12, was a citizens' convoy to south Lebanon, intended to defy the Israeli siege on the south ...and to express nationwide support for the populations stranded in

shelters all over the country, and for those who remained in the war zone (2006). They ultimately mobilised 200 people and 55 cars in seven days of campaigning; their presence on the Internet contributed massively to the dissemination of information.

The manifesto appeared first on www.lebanonsolidarity.org, and then on multiple websites simultaneously on 7 August 2006. It was endorsed by more than two hundred organisations, including the following civil action groups:

The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)

International Solidarity Movement (ISM)

Cultural Centre for Southern Lebanon

Norwegian People's Aid

Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies

Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections

Frontiers

Kafa

Nahwa al-Muwatiniya

Spring Hints

Hayya Bina

Lebanese Transparency Association

Amam05

Lebanese Center for Civic Education

Let's Build Trust

CRTD-A

Solida

National Association for Vocational Training and Social Services

Lebanese Development Pioneers

Nadi Li Koul Alnas

Lecorvaw [and more.]

Posted on 7 August 2006, the manifesto is worth reprinting here in its entirety:

Lebanon: An Open Country for Civil Resistance

Called for by the International Civil Mission in Lebanon

Call For Action & Solidarity For Lebanon

We, the people of Lebanon, call upon the local and international community to join a campaign of civil resistance to Israel's war against our country and our people.

We declare Lebanon an open country for civil resistance.

In the face of Israel's systematic killing of our people, the indiscriminate bombing of our towns, the scorching of our villages, and the attempted destruction of our civil infrastructure, we say NO!

In the face of the forced expulsion of a quarter of our population from their homes throughout Lebanon, and the complicity of governments and international bodies, we re-affirm the acts of civil resistance that began from the first day of the Israeli assault, and we stress and add the urgent need TO ACT!

We urge you to join us in defying Israel's aggression against our country and in defending the rights of the inhabitants throughout Lebanon, and particularly in the South, to live on their land. When the United Nations, created to preserve peace and security in the world, is paralyzed; when governments become complicit in war crimes, then people must show their strength and rise up. When justice and human rights are scorned, those who care must unite in their defense.

Building on our belief in our country, the efforts of the civil resistance, and on the arrival of the internationals coming to Lebanon for solidarity, we declare that Lebanon is an open country for civil resistance, starting from August 12.

On August 12 at 7 am, we will gather in Martyrs' Square to form a civilian convoy to the south of Lebanon. Hundreds of Lebanese and international civilians will carry relief as an expression of solidarity for the inhabitants of the heavily destroyed south who have been bravely withstanding the assault of the Israeli military.

After August 12th, the campaign will continue with a series of civil actions for which your presence and participation is needed. Working together in solidarity we will overcome the complacency, inaction, and complicity of the international community and we will deny Israel its goal of removing Lebanese from their land and destroying the fabric of our country.

To sign up to join the convoy, send an email through the contact page or contact one of the following:

Rasha Salti

email: rasalti@aol.com

phone: 03 970855

Rania Masri

email: rania.masri@balamand.edu.lb

phone: 03 135279

phone: 06 930250 x 5683 or x 3933

Please check the website of this campaign after midnight tonight:

www.lebanonsolidarity.org

Two days later the cease-fire was implemented. The campaign had illustrated the willingness of volunteers to be involved in acts of resistance and solidarity at a degree of risk to themselves.

The importance of the role of websites and blogs in this instance cannot be overestimated. The Internet contributed significantly to the quick dissemination of the information to a global audience, both in terms of general information-sharing for an international audience (a brief history of the groups involved, the most up-to-date statistics, the civilian fallout) and the logistics of rescue and rehabilitation operations for local operations. This 'crowd-sourcing', as we have seen in the numerous cases of actor-generated and consensus-based activism during the 33-Day War in Lebanon, involves the devolution of professional and institutional responsibility to individuals and groups, emphasising community development and autonomy. This process is becoming more

common, with digital social networking driving the search for information on the Internet.

The social implications are wide-ranging. Bloggers impact on others when their posts are made available through more than a single public forum. One of the ways they do this is through being linked to larger sites that aggregate themes in Round Ups. Sites such as Global Voices, for example, use media framing to provide context and comparison for blogs as primary sources. Global Voices, a not-for-profit global citizens media project, focuses on the Internet's impact on society, and aggregates, curates, and amplifies the global conversation online, working to develop tools, institutions and relationships that will help all voices, everywhere, to be heard. The mission statement is worth reprinting here in some detail:

At a time when the international English-language media ignores many things that are important to large numbers of the world's citizens, Global Voices aims to redress some of the inequities in media attention by leveraging the power of citizens media. We're using a wide variety of technologies - weblogs, podcasts, photos, video, wikis, tags, aggregators and online chats - to call attention to conversations and points of view that we hope will help shed new light on the nature of our interconnected world.

We aim to do the following:

- 1) Call attention to the most interesting conversations and perspectives emerging from citizens media around the world by linking to text, photos, podcasts, video and other forms of grassroots citizens media being produced by people around the world
- 2) Facilitate the emergence of new citizens voices through training, online tutorials, and publicizing the ways in which open-source and free tools can be used safely by people around the world to express themselves
- 3) Advocate for freedom of expression around the world and to protect the rights of citizen journalists to report on events and opinions without fear of censorship or persecution.

For maximum representation and access, the site is curated by local and regional blogger-editors and translated every day by Lingua volunteers into, among other languages, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Malagasy, Portuguese, Albanian, Macedonian, Arabic, Farsi, Bangla, Hindi, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional), and Japanese. These translators and editors have been hired

because they understand the context and relevance of information, views, and analysis being posted every day from their countries and regions on blogs, podcasts, photo sharing sites, videoblogs and other kinds of online citizen media. They are helping us to make sense of it all, and to highlight things that bloggers are saying which mainstream media may not be reporting (ibid).

Significantly, the site regards voices from North America and Western Europe as & already over-represented in the global media .

In addition to this website, Global Voices has an advocacy program ‘...to help people speak out in places where their voices are censored online’; and an outreach program called Rising Voices ‘...to enable help marginalized communities use citizen media to be heard’.

It must be remembered that while the blogosphere is a vital space for engagement, dialogue is just that: talk. And talk without corresponding socio-political action may be of therapeutic benefit without necessarily contributing to any behavioural change or shift in the status quo – the most desirable outcome of dialogue. As has been illustrated in the case studies above, social mobilisation through *asabiya* is both possible and desirable. These forms of civic responsibility and rehabilitation are vital for communities that have been fragmented by conflict, both in Lebanon and further afield:

illusion of progress said...

It s so wonderful to see so many people visiting this blog from all around the peace loving world. I have a small suggestion for all of you that would like to do something for Lebanon, and maybe help end Mazen s nightmares...

VISIT BEAUTIFUL BEIRUT!

Within the next year, plan your vacation, come for the music festivals, art galleries, theater performances -- help kick start the night life -- anything for any reason -- COME TO BEIRUT -- let's flood the place with love (and a little bit of our money).

If you are very lucky, you may even meet MAZEN KERBAJ and his strange band of friends. I certainly will be coming from Chicago, and I know many others will come from Germany, Sweden, France, Brazil, Argentina, India, England, Syria, Egypt, Korea, Japan, etc, etc...

I would love to meet all of you there (except the ones that have had their messages deleted!)

Until then, peace!

Michael

Chicago

9:41 AM

In conclusion, what we have seen here is the capacity of the blogosphere to provide a public forum for the healing and activism of individuals and societies. Blogs are transformative narrative spaces, negotiating between traumatic memory and narrative memory by creating meaning, and are an expressive medium for this negotiation to take place. Blogs provide opportunities to witness on the behalf of others, and they have the potential to create digital communities with real-time ramifications for activism. Above all, blogs can provide the sense of identity and continuity necessary for social cohesion and participation in governance so often eroded by historical trauma.

PART FOUR: THE USES OF HUMOUR IN LEBANESE WAR BLOGS

The functions of humour

Jokes are what Davies (1993) calls mock versions of real fears, a way of coping with a difficult or traumatic situation by an overt, controlled, and temporary fantasy that combines imagination with reality (see Ziv, 1986) to produce a laughter of endurance for those within the group (1993: 42). Newmark (in Caruth 1995, and following Baudelaire) comments that the dissonance produced by the experience itself and the disinterested observation of it is what results in laughter. It is this capacity for self-reflexiveness even under severely disruptive circumstances that allows the conscious subject to move away from the experience of shock by integrating it into a stable understanding thereof (248).

Martin (2007) and others classify the psychological functions of humour into three categories: (1) cognitive and social benefits of the positive emotion of mirth, (2) social communication and influence; and (3) tension relief and coping. The uses of humour in traumatic situations involves a combination of all three categories, as will be discussed further.

Humour performs a vital adaptive function (Gross and Munoz, 1995; in Martin, 2007). The ability to regulate or manage emotions contributes to mental and physical health by reducing the physiological arousal caused by negative emotions. Freud first posited humour as cognitive mastery, proposing that for the suffering individual, humour is a way to defuse tension and avoid pain. Levine (1977, in Martin, 2007) extends the idea to suggest that humour and laughter are a way of asserting mastery in emotional and interpersonal domains as well, contributing to an individual's mental well-being. O'Connell (1976, in Martin, 2007) describes humorous people as skilled in rapid perceptual-cognitive switches in frames of reference, which enables them to reappraise an incongruous situation, distance themselves from its threat, and reduce their anxiety. Isen (2003, in Martin, 2007, and supported by Lyubomirsky, King and Diener, 2005) summarises experimental research all of which concluded that when subjects laughed, they were also able to demonstrate greater cognitive flexibility, more efficient organisation and integration of memory, more effective thinking, planning and judgement, and higher levels of affiliation and social responsibility. As a result, these individuals are better adapted to communal life. Johnson (2007) explains that humour

builds social cohesion: Our bodies aren't responding to punch lines; they're responding to social connection. It is a vital skill for individuals to be able to participate in healthy social institutions in the aftermath of a traumatic episode such as a bombing, which disrupts every lifestyle aspect.

Humour can function across context by challenging the reader and posing existential questions. As one commentator, Susan, on For Laughs, writes:

Khaled,

Thank you for the jokes !

A sense of humor has helped me to overcome a deadly disease. If I had lost my sense of humor, I would not be writing to you today.

We are sad about your situation and hope for the best while planning for the worst. We think about you every day.

Fredrickson (1998, 2001, in Martin, 2007) proposed a 'broaden-and-build' model of the physiological functions of shared humour, arguing that an individual's focus of attention was broadened by mirth, so that more creative problem-solving strategies were possible, and that more physical, intellectual and social resources were made available. Haugbolle (2006) writes of blog posts that they can be ...snappy, filled with codes, abbreviations and cultural references. And unlike the heavily edited realm of newspapers, blogs facilitate informal and incorrect speech as well as formal speech genres. In other words, the language, as well as the content of the humour, can perform an exclusionary function but, in this instance, very rarely does. Shiota et al (2004, in Martin, 2007) came to the conclusion that:

...the mirth associated with mutual laughter can be a way of identifying members of an in-group, selecting and attracting partners, rewarding cooperative efforts, and enhancing interpersonal bonding and group cohesion.

It is the last two areas that are important for this research. In the most extreme form of Althusserian social power differences war we are able to see vividly illustrated what Davies calls the

assymetry (see Middleton and Moland, 1959; Zenner, 1970) between the humour of culturally dominant majorities and the humour of culturally subordinate minority groups. Members of an ethnic minority differ from the dominant majority in that they ...have to live in two cultures which may well differ in language, religion, values and way of life (see Glazer and Moynihan, 1975; in Davies, 1993). An alien set of values is imposed on the less powerful group. This incongruity means that, [i]n consequence they are able to laugh both at their own mores and at those of the dominant group, since each can be seen relative to the other (ibid). In a traumatic situation such as a bombing or military invasion, the differences in power between these two social groups which consequently become in-group and out-group are painfully manifest.

It is in precisely these contexts that the transcendent function of humour is apparent. It preserves the idea of the norm some kind of fixed and ineradicable cultural repository - in a chaotic situation. It is thus a function of Lederach's concept of the moral imagination (2005), the capacity to imagine and generate constructive processes that emerge from violence contexts, yet transcend them. Members of a national-cultural group such as the Lebanese, physically and psychologically threatened during the Israeli bombing of their country, might well focus on identity-enhancing activities such as the dissemination of in-group humour in order to imagine a future free of trauma. And as a result, these individuals are more likely to survive as cognitively healthy, socially connected, and able to cope in an unfamiliar or traumatic situation.

Styles of humour

The psychosocial functions of humour are manifest in the teller's approach to their audience, or their humour style. Martin et al (2003) assessed four dimensions relating to individual differences. They identified relatively benign uses of humour to enhance the self (self-enhancing); to enhance one's relationships with others (affiliative); to enhance the self at the expense of others (aggressive), and to enhance relationships at the expense of self (self-defeating).

The same jokes can be used for affiliative or aggressive purposes. Humour can communicate both positive and negative judgements - with corresponding social consequences - including, on the one hand, the release of group tension, or liberation from negative interpretations of one's own experience, and on the other hand, aggression, perceived superiority, and ridicule (Veatch, 1998).

Jokes cannot be divorced from context and intention. For example, psychological studies of extreme-trauma groups often use former concentration camp interns or prisoners of war who survived Vietnam. While the same jokes told by their captors would be derogatory and support stereotypes of prisoners as a disempowered group, when told by the prisoners themselves, the jokes performed an affirmatory and affiliative function. Frankl, a personal survivor of the concentration camps, says (in McGhee, 2001) that prisoners indulged in both kinds of humour – jokes about the brutality of their conditions and their hopes for a free future (that is, self-effacing humour), and the shortcomings of their oppressors (self-enhancing and aggressive humour):

I would never have made it if I could not have laughed. Laughing lifted me momentarily & out of this horrible situation, just enough to make it liveable & survivable... Humour, more than anything else in the human makeup, affords an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds.

Humour can be a moral tool because it is judgemental: ...[it] enables people to see a fault and avoid it, or to note virtue and reinforce it (Buckley in Morrow, 2003); as such, it maintains group cohesion. That maintenance of group identity under threat, or we-feeling (Goldsmith, 2003; in Ziv, 2003), comes about as a result of affirming mirth for the in-group - the laughter of acceptance, friendship, sympathy and contentment, so essential to human dignity and sanity. Laughter is

...often an important means of engendering positive emotions; maintaining group cohesion and morale; preserving a sense of mastery, hope and self-respect; and thereby enabling individuals to survive in seemingly hopeless circumstances (Ford and Spaulding, 1973; Frankl, 1984; Henman, 2001; in Martin, 2007).

The importance of a sense of community is paramount, both during the traumatic events and in their aftermath. Of a cabaret set up by Auschwitz prisoners, Frankl writes that humour was ‘...one of the soul’s weapons in the fight for self-preservation’ (43: 1946):

[The prisoners] came to have a few laughs, or perhaps to cry a little; anyway, to forget. There were songs, poems, jokes, some with underlying satire regarding the camp. All were meant to make us forget, and they did help. The gatherings were so effective that a few ordinary prisoners went to see the cabaret in spite of their fatigue[,] even though they missed their daily portion of food by going (41).

Humour is thus a tactic for survival. The ability of groups to understand and comment on the incongruity of a traumatic situation and the ability to communicate that observation in a non-threatening and amusing fashion promotes cultural adherence. A preserved cohesive identity means that the group has a far likelier chance of surviving a traumatic situation.

The constraints of shared humour

Internet voices are polyphonic; so are their joke scripts. The posts on the bombing of Lebanon can also have multiple interpretations by their readers because of their relatively affectless text-to-text format. This, while it implies that there is more than one possible master text or grand narrative, can make for confusion. Readers have to rely on other informational cues, emoticons and their own knowledge of the back-story. Shared humour can thus impose constraints on communication. It requires a sharing of affective evaluations and attitudes - otherwise it would risk offending the listeners. This audience design (Bell, 1984, in Veatch, 1998) details how speakers tailor their speaking style to their listeners. If a speaker wants to have an audience laugh along with them, they must present an incongruous situation in a joke that overturns audience expectations by violating their norms, while at the same time seeming acceptable or providing an insight. Veatch (1998) writes

To relieve group tension by introducing a humorous, perhaps deadpan, or idiotic, interpretation of the situation which otherwise constitutes a violation to those present, it must be possible to convince the other people that the situation can in fact be seen as normal.

The way a joke functions cannot be derived from its text alone; whether something is deemed amusing or not depends on the context. Lewis (1993) writes that, depending on situational variables, what may be an ethnic joke in one context may be gallows humour in another. Depending on who tells a joke and why it is told, it may be liberating or oppressive, psychologically threatening or relaxing, self-effacing or hostile. The affiliative style of humour - one that promotes social cohesion assumes a shared content and an in-group audience for the teller of the joke. Davies (1993: 41) writes:

Jokes are *ambiguous* comic utterances without a single clear meaning, and their relation to aggression or fear is variable and problematic. Jokes are playful aggression and play with aggression and are not necessarily a mask for real but temporarily hidden or unrecognised hostility. Tendentiousness [intention] is not a quality of a joke as such but is a quality of the teller.

The same joke can either inflame fears or domesticate and master them (Davies, 1993). Readers who set out to search the humorous Lebanese blogs assumed that they would find material of a particular ideological persuasion: pro-Lebanese (though not always pro-Hezbollah), anti-Israeli in-group sentiment, presented as satirical comment.

When jokes are invented by the butts of the jokes themselves and told within the community or by one of its members, then they are likely to be perceived as *safely* funny (ibid). The Israeli pilot in the joke discussed later, for example, when reading the wry comment made by a blogger about his flying technique might find the observation insulting and aggressive, while Lebanese civilians sheltering in school halls would probably find the same comment affiliative and self-enhancing. Some of these references are high-context, the opposite of canned humour, extending occasionally into anti-joke, serious territory.

Gallows humour: the laughter of endurance

During the bombing of Lebanon by Israeli forces in 2006, Lebanese bloggers took to posting jokes

on the Web. Because of their virtual nature, and unlike other physical resources, Internet uplinks were one of the few commodities to survive Lebanon's four weeks of war relatively unscathed. The jokes spread quickly and virally, and promoted the message of Lebanese outrage and resistance to a global readership in a way that traditional media could not have done in the same timespan. The comment function at the end of each post meant that anyone who read the post could respond meaningfully and instantly, and this dialogue maintained Lebanon's unbroken contact with the outside world.

Fickling (2006) comments that most of the Lebanese wartime blog wit was bitter: 'Maybe it's gallows humour', the kind that arises from stressful, traumatic or life-threatening situations - accidents, wartime events, natural disasters, often where death is perceived as impending and unavoidable.

Gallows or trench humour arises because the reality is almost as bad as, if not worse than, the parody. Incongruous situations abound when individual and group worldviews are challenged; what has been held to be true is patently no longer so, and the response of the ordinary citizen is confusion. This kind of humour is created by those most affected by the trauma. The jokes are so outrageously offensive that only someone with nothing left to fear - who had suffered the multiple losses of traumatic experience - could find humour in them. If the world is incongruous - if it stops making sense - then non-sense is an appropriate, creative and useful reaction to that dislocation. Mirth can function to restore individual identity, as well as membership of an in-group or community, and to release tension.

This sense of licence can occur at points of disjuncture and incongruity. If trauma creates chaos and disrupts the narrative thread of a life story, as Ricoeur (1991) and Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (2007) claim, then an individual's idea of their existence as being structured and meaningful is removed. Part of being overwhelmed is to be unable to use narrative in a linear, progressive, sense-able fashion, and joking can be an extreme coping strategy for an in-group under real physical and psychosocial threat. This type of humour - one that that may seem inappropriate to observers or outgroups - is considered appropriate by members of an in-group in a traumatic context. As Pierre Tristram, of *Candide's Notebooks*, writes in a post dated 5 August 2006, ... [T]hat's all Lebanon's left with for now: fighting back with humor, since the tears have probably run

out along with the food, the gas, the medicines...

Lebanese civilians saw their houses, schools, shops and workplaces - and as a consequence, their culture, way of life and identity - bombed without discrimination by the Israeli military. It resulted in death for just over a thousand civilians, severely damaged Lebanese infrastructure, and displaced 974 184 Lebanese and 300 000 - 500 000 Israelis - although most, if not all, were able to return to their homes. After the ceasefire, some parts of southern Lebanon remained uninhabitable because of the presence of unexploded cluster bombs (BBC News Online, 2006; Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006; Lebanon Higher Relief Council, 2007).

Because humour exposes incongruity and is open to multiple interpretations, individuals who employ its techniques are able to shift their perspectives on stressful situations so that these appear less threatening and more manageable (Kuiper, Martin and Olinger, 1993; Martin et al, 1993; in Martin, 2007). It is, quite simply, a survival technique. For Lebanese civilians, after both long-term and short-term historical trauma, humour must seem like one of their only constants - a much-needed laugh at the enemy, the exposure of a highly incongruous situation, and a vital release of tension. The most desirable outcome is the retention of identity, social cohesion and cultural adherence. Although it may proclaim superiority and include malice, ...laughter always contains the hope of redemption (Buckley in Morrow, 2003). This bitter humour dovetails with Lederach's ideas about the gift of pessimism (Lederach in Maiese, 2005), and it may just be the very attitude that is concerned with & how to rebuild a public sphere that has been destroyed by violence, how to restore trust in public institutions, and how to move from cycles of violence to respectful engagement .

Humorous devices in Lebanese blogs

Martin (2007) divides everyday humour into three broad categories: (1) jokes - portable, prepackaged humorous anecdotes that people memorise and pass on to one another; (2) spontaneous conversational humour - created intentionally by individuals during the course of a social interaction, which can be either verbal or non-verbal, and relies on context for meaning; and (3) accidental or unintentional humour. This study is concerned mainly with the first category - canned or self-contained jokes, with a set-up and payoff that do not vary in structure, but rely on

the tweaking of historical context to provide fresh comment and amusement.

Easily and universally understood, such jokes are the ideal vehicle for satirical socio-political comment. The cross-cultural rules of joke-telling mean that readers readily understand the format of the joke, although the content itself might be new to them; it is the familiarity of the joke's structure that enables readers to assimilate new information.

In general, humour relies on the surprise element, the audience's subverted expectation at a surprise ending (the punchline). Effective humour relies on three other basic premises for comprehension. The first is precision - audiences and readers are more likely to remember a vivid image, and to feel that they can identify with (and therefore invest emotionally in) its content: 'I've never thought of it like that, but you're right!'

The second is brevity - the point of most mainstream jokes is the maximum level of humour with the minimal number of words (although it must be said that this premise is flouted by the 'shaggy dog' story, in which nothing funny happens and the telling of the story itself is the amusing shared experience between speaker and hearer; the audience's expectation of a punchline is subverted once more).

The third and final premise is rhythm or timing - where the content of the joke is secondary to its mechanism and pace, and the punchline is vital. Often humorous narratives involve a set-up and pay-off where the humour arises from the protagonist being seemingly unaware of the irony of his situation. Structurally, there may be the classic ternary (three-beat) rhythm of introduction, premise and resolving antithesis.

The blogs tended to focus on common humorous devices that would be familiar to a wide-ranging readership, in-group or out-group: the dialogue, the diatribe, the soliloquy, the confession and so on, all characterised by the dark humour and macabre atmosphere of the carnivalesque as outlined by Bakhtin (also in Wellek, 1980). Maybe it's just the natural idiom of the blogosphere, writes Fickling (2006): he was referring to the extensive use of irony and self-deprecation, and the heightened awareness of the Lebanese bloggers of being perceived as arrogant.

The use of irony and sarcasm employed in the blogs involves an understanding of a complex set of linguistic and social inferences - at its most extreme, irony is understood mostly by its creator (Fowler's idea of the 'double audience', a semantic situation in which only the ironist herself fully

understands the gap between the truth and the literal meaning of her statement). Hearers need to recognise that the intended meaning of the ironic statement is not the surface meaning, and they must learn to substitute the true meaning for the literal one. Dews et al (1995, in Martin, 2007) write:

In addition, they need to recognise the pragmatic (i.e. social and communicative) functions of irony in speech...First, irony is used to tinge or mute the implied criticism or praise, making the criticism less negative and the compliment less positive than they would be using literal language. Second, irony is used to convey humour, based on the incongruity between the literal and the implied meanings, and is therefore meant to be funny.

Not all the humour appears in the structure of a joke. Kerbaj, for instance, specialises in throw-away remarks, such as these from a post on Kerblog, a Lebanese warblog, on 7 August 2006.

yesterday i slept early... at 2 am

and

today i woke up early... at 6 am with the melody of the israeli alarm clock

Early is only early in the morning of the following day: what he means is that he was kept awake very late the night before by the bombardment by the planes (the alarm clock). Kerbaj's insomnia was, in reality, seriously debilitating. His humour here is courageous.

More focused content-driven critique is evident in this post on Jamal's Propaganda, from 13 August 2006, titled *Angry and Soon to be Unemployed Olmert Days 32 & 33*. The writer uses irony to point out the failure of Israeli to achieve its stated aims, and the futility of war in general:

13 hours to go until the promised ceasefire.

Just over a month ago, a man by the name of Ehutzpanim Olmert declared war on

Lebanon to send it back 20 years, to free 2 Israeli soldiers, and to destroy Hezbollah.

Instead he earned himself war criminal credentials, strengthened Hezbollah considerably, and caused damage to the Israeli army image that not even 20 years would fix. Not a very successful war, is it?

Ahmad, on 23 July 2006, in a post on Jamal's Propaganda titled "Angry Olmert Day 12", goes further, suggesting fictional Israeli propaganda headlines. They are intended to be ridiculous, illustrating, as does the previous example, the pointlessness of the conflict and its inability to have any real impact on the morale of the Lebanese.

Day 12 of Olmert's killing campaign is in the books and still no military accomplishments to speak of. This is the point where you start making them up. These make believe scenarios have to be creative, captivating, and convincing.

...

So in an effort to help Olmert sell a "victory" to his people and so that he stops killing civilians left and right, I propose we compile a list of war trophy headlines that he can showcase in lieu of real accomplishments.

I'll get it started:

Mossad Agents trim Nasrallah's Beard, Render him Powerless.

Overdose of Eighties War Songs Drive Lebanese Society Nuts.

....

Israeli Destructive Forces captures 2 Kalashnikov Rifles in Maroun El-Rass, a coffee thermos and a clay mug.

The use of caustic fictional constructs is a staple in the Lebanese warblogs. Consider the following post by Pierre Tristam of Candide's Notebooks, on 2 August 2006, titled "Letter from Hizbullah to Israel":

Recently received intelligence via my Hamas contact, Mel Gibson*, in which it was learned that Hizbullah has sent a "thank you" letter to Israel. Text follows.

* Expelled for intoxication.

Dear Isr--- Hated Zionist Enemy:

Please accept our earnest thanks for making us the most powerful force in Lebanon, and rallying even many of the kuff--- Christians to our cause. We would also like to thank you for getting al-Qaeda to almost care about suffering Shiites. Although we do not like our children being killed and maimed by your stones-break-scissors airstrikes, who d have thought that you could make an exercise in deadly mischief, like a soldier kidnapping, into an outpouring of pity for our constituents, even as we lob rockets willy-nilly into cities full of people and make intermittent anti-Jewish bigotted comments? And please accept our great thanks for being made to sound downright rational while your statements sound like Nasserist spiel in 1967 or the Arab states in 1948, or Russians in Chechnya.

And thank you for blustering and not winning, at least right away. We re the big heroes now.

Loved also the way the Iraqi leaders had to up-end the official line of their American sponsors too.

And it is really a pleasure too to watch you push along the live-action drama: the Passion of the Rice.

May God destroy you,

Appreciatively,

His Party

The Perpetual Refugee outlines the fictional rules of interaction during conflict, as they would be laid down by the Israeli Defence Force, in a post from 11 August 2006, titled After all, lightning

doesn't strike the same place twice. Unless the IAF controls the heavens. Hyper-conscious of the power differentials between the two countries, the post is intended to illustrate the hypocritical behaviour and oppressive practices by Israel during the war, and ends with the false promise that the Arabs who follow them will be fine which is patently untrue.

IDF Rules For Arab Civilians

The Guttersnipe reports:

Here are the IDF rules for Lebanese and Palestinians under attack:

- 1) Do not cry
- 2) Do not laugh
- 3) Telling jokes at Israeli expense, especially while under bombardment, constitutes hate speech and will be punished with more bombardment
- 4) Do not blog, email or otherwise try to tell your story to the rest of the world. It makes us look bad, and that constitutes hate speech. See #3 for how we deal with hate speech.
- 5) Resistance is futile.
- 6) Effective resistance is terrorism, and thus a war crime.
- 7) Arabs committing war crimes must be exterminated.
- 8) Israel never commits war crimes
- 9) Mourners who weep too loudly at funerals will be exterminated.
- 10) Stop taking so many pictures. Photography is forbidden. Your photos of dead babies and weeping women are anti-Semitic. UPDATE And anyway, all your photos are doctored. Your videos too. There aren't really any dead bodies, or if there are, not as many as you say, and what's a few dead Arabs? We kill Arabs all the time, why are you complaining? So quit posting your pictures, and if you don't quit, well they're all lies!
- 11) The kill ratio of Israelis to Arabs must always remain at 1:10. Arab measures that bring the ratio down to 1:5, 1:3 or even God forbid, 1 Israeli to 2.7 Arabs dead, any and all such measures are war crimes. See #3 for how we deal with Arab war crimes.
- 12) Geneva conventions? We don't need no stinking Geneva conventions.
- 13) More cluster bombs now!

14) Israel never uses illegal bombs, except when we do, which is never. Cluster bombs may be illegal, but we don't use them. We just need more of them. If we did use them, which we wouldn't because we agreed they are illegal, it would be in self-defense against known terrorists. All persons remaining in Lebanon are terrorists.

15) The IAF and IDF have taken all necessary precautions to protect civilians and avoid loss of life. Any deaths occurring during the course of Israel's natural right to self-defense are completely regrettable and should be accepted as such. See rules 1-14 for appropriate Arab behavior under the circumstances.

The above rules have been brought to you by the Guttersnipe. My Arab brothers and sisters, just follow them and you'll be fine!

Israeli readers are not likely to find these rules amusing, not least because they are intended as bitter criticism. Similarly, this reported (real) conversation in a popular Beirut café that compares the Jewish leader to Hitler would not be appreciated, however accurate it might have been. Younes, in a post from 12 August 2006, writes:

I was talking with a client about the fact that Olmert is being compared to Hitler. A British reporter overheard us and said: "You can't compare Hitler with Olmert. Hitler used to drive the prisoners to concentration camps and gas chambers while Olmert is better in client service; with the help of Tony, George and Condie, he brings death directly to his "clients" homes and beds at anytime of the day, even at dawn. A 24-hour service". I remember this guy, we had a little discussion four weeks ago and I recalled him arguing about Israel's right to defend itself.

The humour lies in both the inflammatory comparison and the last line – Younes's wry observation of the reporter's change of heart.

The failure of shared humour may offend or confuse a listener because they are made aware that they do not share the same moral code or set of behavioural expectations as the in-group: in

other words, laughing at , not laughing with . This illustrates Martin s (2007) maxim that, in the use of superior or aggressive joking, teasing, ridicule, or sarcasm,

...humour can be used to exclude individuals from a group, reinforce power and status differences, suppress behaviour that does not conform to group norms, and have a coercive effect on others.

For example, a site named Jamal s Propaganda deconstructs Hassan Nasrallah by posting

First of all, he s Lebanese, thus the arrogance; from the South, thus his healthy appetite; and born and raised in East Beirut, thus the lisp.

This unflattering portrait makes use of in-group high-context, implicit and exclusionary humour. Readers need to know what sarcasm is and how it functions as a particular subset of an aggressively humorous style; that one (undesirable) Lebanese national stereotype is arrogance; that the South is regarded by some Lebanese as poorer, greedier and less sophisticated than other geographical areas of the country; that the dominant Arabic accent in Eastern Beirut can sound like a speech impediment to its detractors; and that Nasrallah, as the radical leader of Lebanon s organised resistance group Hezbollah, is a powerful political figure - as well as the reasons even among the Lebanese themselves (who might rightfully be inclined to support any resistance movement in a war situation with Israel), he might not enjoy the confidence of all citizens. This is a large amount of information (back-story) required for a fairly brief humorous comment - what Lewis calls the anti-joke, an image or narrative that uses the original joke s incongruity-resolution material to expose the value assumptions of the original joke (1993: 53).

Further examples of jokes requiring in-group information come from Ur-Shalim, in a post titled our war: the lighter side , detailing the conflict situation in terms of a lack of economic foresight, politicians unattractiveness or stupidity, children s programming and so on. The jokes are all intended to insult their subjects:

Let me break the piercing silence here with a couple of jokes circulating around.

Making up jokes in the face of adversity is a phenomenon for social scientists to analyze.

I will not even venture there. Some of the humor is lost to the translation so I will try to translate those that are least affected. As with all local jokes, you may have to be familiar with the local politics to really appreciate the humor. Anyway here goes:

Minister Nayla Mouawad has threatened the opposition forces that she would go on national TV without makeup if they do not withdraw their militia from the streets.

The opposition demonstrators protested against the government, calling for its resignation, because it allowed the import of bad quality tires that do not produce very thick dark smoke when burnt.

Carlos Edde forces have taken over the amusement park in Beirut.

The opposition took over the ministry of education and forged a brevet certificate (grade 9) for minister Suleiman Franjeh.

The Super Star singers (program on Future TV) have surrendered their places to Firqat el Wilaya (Hezbollah related choral group)

Michel Mouawad is giving a press conference on Tiji channel (for children).

Bitter sarcasm requiring less interpretation comes from Kerbaj, who, in a post from 30 July 2006, titled with the punning black. always. , comments:

the black mediterranean sea

15.000 tons of oil on the lebanese shores.

the biggest ecological disaster in the mediterranean sea

a new world record for lebanon

hurray

The humour here is twofold, both at the expense of the bombing techniques of the Israeli Defence Force, and the lack of competitiveness in global record-setting exhibited by Lebanon. It depends for its impact on the single last word, alone on a line. A lighter story, but still conveying the double incongruity of both the disaster and dwindling petrol stocks, comes from Cold Desert:

A Lebanese saw that his friend got very tan, so he asked him, "Which beach are you going to during this war???" (the beaches are all contaminated with a massive oil slick caused by Israeli bombs) His friend replied, "I just waited for 4 hours in the line at the gas station."

Sites such as Global Voices Online and Lebanon Under Siege are still updating Lebanese efforts to deal with the environmental impact of the war, two years on.

While it is beyond the scope of this research to investigate bloggers living outside Lebanon during the 2006 conflict, it should be mentioned that there were some highly influential and highly sarcastic - voices. Perhaps the most popular was The Angry Arab News Service, run by As ad AbuKhalil. While he was equally outraged by the Saudi-controlled and America-aligned media corporations that own most Arabic newspapers and the Al Arabiya satellite channel, The Angry Arab is particularly critical of mainstream American media, which he regards as profit-driven and ideologically unsound in its support of Israel. Here, in a post dated 25 July 2006, he bitterly mocks a human interest story run by *The New York Times*:

Ohad [an Israeli soldier] said he called his wife to say goodnight before going into battle, and called her when he came out to say he was O.K.

The Angry Arab then comments:

Don't you feel bad for this occupier? Are you not getting goose bumps reading about the emotional strain of killing women and children in Lebanon? Do think it is easy to kill for hours on end, especially in a land of inferior people? Do you now know how difficult it is for Israel to maintain its racist occupation of Arab lands?

The questions here are rhetorical. The Angry Arab does not expect answers from his audience; he expects a similar outrage to his own at the incongruity of Ohad's actions. As a soldier, it is his duty to kill and injure as many Lebanese families as he can, in the name of state-sanctioned conflict; it does not occur to him that these doomed families are as meaningful as his own might be to him. The notion of a soldier as a compassionate individual concerned with his own family's well-being and state of mind is ironic considering that in another context he is a killer. The joke is an extremely bitter one.

Some Lebanese jokes are instantly translatable across cultures and require little explanation of context. For example, on the Cold Desert blog, Ahmad describes a morning spent watching an Israeli leaflet drop, and comments:

Obviously the pilot has a serious vision problem or he is totally inept - all his three attempts ended up with the pamphlets in the sea.

The only joke here is at the expense of the pilot and his apparent failure to perform his manoeuvre: he could just as likely be an inept French pilot, or an Irish one, in another wartime situation.

Ahmad provides only two explanatory options for the reader: the former is sarcastic and therefore unlikely and untrue (no pilots with vision problems would be accepted into any airforce); and the latter, more likely, explanation is intended to undermine the Israeli military force and comfort the Lebanese targeted by the propaganda exercise (although the Israeli army is far superior in terms of matériel, its human agents cannot utilise these resources properly; thus it appears ridiculous).

The pamphlet drops engendered mirth among civilians. In a post titled 'Countdown' just before the ceasefire of 14 August 2006, Emily, on Anecdotes from A Banana Republic, writes about

the absurdity of the attempts at psychological warfare (people kept the pamphlets as souvenirs - apparently their spelling was also amusingly incorrect), comparing them to a quality survey.

There's talk of a ceasefire that will take effect in 10 hours and 12 minutes. In the meantime, I hear a drone creeping up on us, as all other sounds of generators and the odd nocturnal motorcyclist grow dim, and you have ears only for him - the unmanned aviator. You are being stalked by an airborne, robotic peeping Tom. What if he develops feelings for a pretty girl and no longer wants to level homes? I'm waiting for Spielberg to produce that heart-wrenching film.

They drop lots of pamphlets and flyers from the sky, but never customer satisfaction forms. On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate the value/futility/sleep deprivation/cunningness/brutality of our latest bombing raid? What is your opinion of the price to quality ratio, in human and financial terms? When dining on shrapnel and cluster bombs, how can we improve the experience for you? Thanks for your time.

Please leave us your name and address so we can memorize the coordinates and serve you better in the future. We are an equal opportunity bomber. Signed: The State of Israel. The signing off as 'The State of Israel' is very telling - it's the you-don't-recognize-us fixation, as if non-recognition entails not believing rather than not accepting. Here's the empiric proof that we exist, motherfuckers. Bang, bang, boom.

Readers participated joyfully, stripping the leaflets of their threat:

Randah said...

That cedar looks like one of those car air-freshness trees you hang from the rear-view mirror.

5:37 PM

Oberon Brown said...

The correct translation would be "the destroyer" (singular): and it's not very ambiguous, especially if you pay attention to the little Hassan caricature hiding behind the cedar tree :)

Well, Jews may be smart people, but, as you've mentioned in a previous post, their propaganda is sometimes ridiculous and absolutely useless...

8:49 PM

EDB said...

Yes, Randah. They should drop pamphlets with scratch-and-sniff cedar trees.

10:51 PM

Tom Scudder said...

Beirut Live says they ARE dropping cedar-tree air-fresheners with a little Hassan Nasrallah on them.

I want one.

1:34 AM

Veatch (1998) says that shared laughter by an in-group in a tense situation is at the heart of ridicule, and Lebanese laughter at the expense of their leaders or the Israeli army may be interpreted as viewing those groups as responsible for a moral violation. That violation is present in the participants' minds when the audience suddenly sees the incongruity of the situation and signals its relief in laughter; it is amused rather than threatened, even though the threat is real.

The four main humorous styles designated by Martin et al (2003) – affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating and aggressive – overlap as their functions evolve in response to changing socio-political contexts. The real physical threat posed by Israeli bombs during the conflict in Lebanon meant that self-enhancing and affiliative humorous styles were paramount. Bloggers used the humour of the powerless – of ethnic and national stereotypes – to manipulate public opinion and the status quo for positive effect.

All the following jokes rely to a certain extent on situational humour and irony – but not to

the extent that they are high-context in-jokes that only Lebanese civilians would understand and find amusing. They needed to translate into other languages (English, from Arabic or French) and be sufficiently similar in structure to the traditional set-up and pay-off of the funny story or stand-up comedy routine. They tend to be both affiliative and aggressive in style, laughing at the devil or disempowering the enemy by refusing to acknowledge their power. One example, as Boustany writes, targets the Syrians for causing the crisis by allowing arms to flow to Hezbollah and pressuring the Lebanese government to let the group keep its arms (2006). According to the joke, the Israelis cannot aim at the Syrian inhabitants of Homs. Why? Because the Israelis only have smart bombs.

Visual humour relies on slapstick, gags, jokes, clowning, exaggeration and parody. For example, to comment on Israel's systematic destruction of bridges in the offensive launched after 12 July, advertisers put up a gigantic black poster on a five-storey building. It showed the gold Johnnie Walker character with his top hat and waistcoat, blithely striding on after leaping over a gap on a destroyed bridge.

The power cuts were debilitating, bringing normal business to a halt and limiting access to cooked food and ablution facilities. Extreme situational irony (although not much intrinsic humour) is apparent in Rasha Salti's Day 6 of her Siege Notes, where she complains that

Life as it were, or as previously understood, in my city has stopped. No gym classes, and I am accumulating cellulite, hence chances of finding second husband are lessened (can I make the IDF pay for that?). Air-conditioning is dependent on electricity or generator working. Power cuts are the rule now and the generator works only on a schedule. I like it when Israelis report their weather, it ought to have some cathartic virtue, because it's like a reality check one of the few reminders they are in this region and not in Europe. So yes, without air-conditioning and with power cuts, my "semitic" curls produce unruly coiffe and I have to admit, I am enduring siege with bad hair.

The ridiculing of typical Lebanese stubbornness is apparent on the Siege of Lebanon blog, where Sonya Knox describes how one of the refugees packed into her neighbour's flat was woken up at

4.30am because it was finally [his] turn to use the shower . The joke rests on the incongruity of what would otherwise be appropriate ablutory behaviour; it is the timeframe that has changed the determination has not.

On Anecdotes from a Banana Republic, Emily appears to praise Bomb-induced Bulimia . What begins as outright satire ends soberly, as if she has lost the heart for mockery when other people are dying:

Forget Dr. Atkins, diet pills, and Weight Watchers; bombing is the appetite suppressant par excellence. When they bomb in close proximity, like they did today for the first time in weeks, you can't eat; the general sensation of weakness brought on by an empty stomach is indistinguishable from the near paralysis of fear and helplessness. Food would bog me down, hamper my reflexes; instead of jumping out of my skin, I might reflexively vomit. The latter does nobody any good, and scares little children. On an empty stomach, you wretch without losing your food and nobody notices.

Eating also requires patience that I don't have when the glass panes shake, when cars are tearing through the streets, people running aimlessly for shelter, having no sense of where the next one will hit. If they keep it up for a few days, everyone gets that hot gaunt look to them. No blush needed to emphasise your cheekbones.

Now there's a solution for those lamenting the harm inflicted by this war on the tourist industry: come to Lebanon for your terror diet. If you're severely obese, we can roll you down south where fear combined with shortages will forcibly slim you down. Guaranteed, or your money back.

For the persons who fled the bombardment in the south now forced to take shelter for weeks in Sanayeh park, the bombing in Beirut is unbearable. My friend K. who visits the park every day, says some of the women from villages in the south vomited when the missiles hit Ras Beirut this morning, and were crying unconsolably. So I was right about the vomit reflex. I assume that's why the Israelis aren't letting the relief convoys bring food to the south, right? It's a waste to feed people under bombardment if they just vomit it right up.

I am ashamed that I feel like vomiting over a missile that hit the tip of an abandoned lighthouse in my everyday vicinity, when I hear stories of a lone survivor from nearby Chiyah courageously burying 19 family members, less than 48 hours after their demise. Some people survived because they stepped outside to buy bread or a pack of cigarettes, and returned to find their entire family buried under the rubble of their homes.

Younes, on 12 August 2006, provides an apparently mild but piercing comment on civilian resources and services under siege, comparing their lack to a similar lack of Israeli strategy:

Eighteen hours of electrical darkness left me as ignorant as Olmert's strategic military advisor .

Satire and irony are often used against governments and the military because humour functions as an unmasking tactic (Kane et al, 1977; in Martin, 2007). Mockery of a more powerful figure or group in the social hierarchy indicates a refusal to take on the identity that has been projected onto the less powerful group, and exposes or belittles the motives behind that projection.

This kind of verbal humour relies on wordplay to ridicule or satirise a socio-political situation. It is intentional miscommunication on the part of the teller. The humour occurs on all levels of speech: phonemes or sounds, words (puns in particular), phrases and sentences; occasionally, the intention of the speaker seems to clash with the intention of the interlocutors in the joke, and this incongruity is what provides the humour. One website is titled *War Jokes (re-runs)* and is in itself a pun: the war is a re-run in the sense that Lebanon has been occupied previously by Israel, and the jokes on it are re-runs because they have also been heard before. Bitter humour, indeed.

The following jokes rely on some contextual knowledge of the Israeli bombing of Lebanon, as well as human nature. The first mocks the vanity of women - stereotypically desirous of youthful comeliness - in addition to the Israeli-Lebanese conflict, a war which is a repeat of an earlier incident between the two countries.

Q: Why are aging Lebanese ladies happy to be at war?

A: It takes them back thirty years.

In the following joke, the pun is on the term *occupation* : it means, simultaneously, a job (the

customs official's communicative intention) and Israel's invasion (the teller's communicative intention):

An Israeli recently arrives at London's Heathrow airport. As he fills out a form, the customs officer asks him: "Occupation?"

The Israeli promptly replies: "No, just visiting."

The next joke centres on a bridge, the double meaning referring to both the oral plate of the dentist's client, and the infrastructure deliberately damaged during the bombing. It pokes fun both at the speaker and the context:

Early one day, a man rushes desperately to the dentist. "Please take out my bridge, or the Israelis will bomb it!"

Boustany (2006) writes that this kind of joke has become so contagious that:

in one refugee center, Marwa Saad, 15, whose family was driven out by fierce fighting near the southern market town of Nabatiyeh, did not dare utter a word without covering her mouthful of braces. "Everyone keeps teasing me; they bully me to keep my mouth shut so we don't get hit by Israeli jets," she said about her friends, giggling with her hand to her mouth.

Another normalising joke that deals with the trauma of having familiar surroundings destroyed is this one, a cynical comment on the wastefulness of war:

Three Hezbollah fighters run out of Beirut's southern suburbs after Israeli raids, flashing the victory sign.

Actually, no. They were really pointing out that there were only two buildings left standing.

In the following context, the geographical fact of civilians having to shelter in educational buildings has been conflated with a pun about social services (education). These people are not at school because they are learning; they are in fear of their lives and have nowhere else to go. It is intended as a criticism of what some Lebanese saw as the Hezbollah leader's ill-advised kidnapping of Israel soldiers (which initiated the bombing):

Q: Why will Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah win the Nobel Prize for Education?

A: He sent a million people to school in just two days.

Because the message is funny, and because the jokes can be interpreted in a number of ways, it is difficult for the subject to retaliate or to hold the source accountable (Dews, Kaplan and Winner, 1995 in Martin, 2007). Humour can thus be used to reject or subvert an existing hierarchy without the overt hostility that might provoke physical retribution: for the Lebanese bloggers, mockery was one way to show their readers – and, implicitly, the Israeli government – that they refused to accept the bombing and invasion as legitimate, and that their sense of identity and community was intact.

Abul Abed, the Lebanese schlimazl

Miller (2005) describes the problematic concept of culture in terms of its functions. It is at once a performance schema or script (in-group behavioural guidelines that ensure social cohesion and the status quo); a way of organising and interpreting experience to make sense of incongruity; and a means through which individuals can participate in the world of the community, integrating cultural members separated by time and space. Humour, because it is a shared communicative experience, is culturally bound (although not exclusively so). In terms of Miller's theory, humour serves to provide social mores and promote the preservation of the status quo by punishing deviance; it can make sense of two seemingly contradictory states in a wartime situation; and humour – as disseminated on the Internet, in the case of the Lebanese bloggers – can ensure social cohesion by allowing its members to communicate with one another even though they are not bound by laws of time and space.

Those who belong to more powerless groups tell jokes both about the more powerful group

and about their own group (see Glazer and Moynihan, 1975; in Davies, 1993), but these jokes can be self-mocking without being self-derogatory. Davies (1993) writes [T]he relationship between jokes and stereotypes is problematic, for many of those who invent and enjoy the jokes do not believe in the stereotypes...it would be quite wrong to assume that their liking for the corresponding jokes implies acceptance of [the stereotype] (32). It is, rather, a wry comment on the familiar. One story, as Boustany (2006) details, refers indirectly to the initiating incident of the conflict, when two Israeli soldiers were captured by Hezbollah, by having Haifa Wehbe, the curvaceous bombshell of Lebanese music videos, dispatched by the Hezbollah leadership to Israel to conduct negotiations. She returns pregnant. When confronted about her condition, the anecdote goes, Wehbe insisted she was only trying to help: I thought I would get you another small hostage (ibid).

Similarly, a Lebanese person telling the joke below about Abul Abed would be using an affectionate and familiar (affiliative) style of humour while an Israeli telling the same joke would be using aggression.

Because the ambiguity of decontextualised joke scripts means that it depends on who is doing the telling, jokes can perform a subversive function by neutralising serious or hostile statements. Negative stereotypes can be subverted by being reinterpreted positively, particularly if the stereotypers (a more powerful group) and the stereotyped (less powerful) have opposed values or moral frameworks (see Apte, 1985; in Davies, 1993). The humorous script may be used as a way of repudiating or transmogrifying the stereotype, and ethnic jokes originally intended to be mocking or aggressive can become self-enhancing and affiliative instead - what Davies calls assertions of autonomy and vitality both for individuals and, as a result, whole communities.

The ambiguity of humour permits and requires the creation of comic images that are at once self-praising and self-deprecating (see Mulkay, 1987; Raskin, 1985; in Davies, 1993). This paradox means that the humorous situation is one of neither strength nor weakness, confidence or despair, but of a situation in which both are present. It is not the humour of unbalanced people but of people seeking and temporarily creating balance in an unbalanced world (Davies, 1993: 43). In other words, in a time of trauma, role models are particularly important for individual identity and social cohesion.

It is important that Abul Abed (variously called Abu Abed El Beyrouty, Abul Abed and Abu

El-Abed), a character who embodies national neuroses, is a folkloric figure who appears consistently in Lebanese jokes over the last thirty years – precisely during the period when Israeli has increased its military and political hostilities. Similar in function to the Eastern European *schlimazl*, Abul Abed takes on the role of the hapless Everyman – with the potential for better –, living in a problematised [read: traumatic] universe. He is non-threatening; as Fickling (2006) points out, he is a fumbling caricature of all the failings of the Lebanese, but his function is vital: as a cultural repository, he illustrates that the underdog may still be defiant, and that a failure of humour and optimism would render the Lebanese completely powerless indeed.

Abul Abed has his corollaries in nearly every culture; South Africa has, for example, both the figures of Van der Merwe and Evita Bezuidenhout, who fulfil the same function of affectionate parody and sharp social comment from within the community. Miller (2005) points out that social learning can take place using models in the media, and this aspect of social cognitive theory – identification – is at work in the character of Abul Abed. He learns all the rules, obeys all the laws, lives by all the orders...and yet somehow, for some reason, he never quite prospers (Boyer, 1993: 6):

He embraces his culture, accommodates it, makes its rules and regulations his own, compromises his wishes and dreams, bends to accommodate his culture until he finds himself in the shape of a paper clip – and for what? Everything he touches turns to dung. Nothing his culture has taught helps him get what he wants.

His deliberate misunderstanding of serious situations, his role as the rube, the *faux-naïf*, the babe-in-the-woods, allows him a measure of freedom to comment without fear of retribution. He provides a voice for the oppressed, an identity beyond the present trauma and despair of Israeli attack.

These idiosyncratic figures are high-context, culturally specific figures that are nevertheless translatable across cultures, providing windows of a sort onto the existential suffering and relative powerlessness of the group at the bottom of the political hierarchy. The characters tend to be ordinary men caught between accommodation at one extreme and rebellion at the other...[and] what sense is there in making a choice when neither alternative can satisfy? (Boyer, 1993). Boyer goes on to explain that black or gallows humour holds that neither choice is viable any longer, and it is

often from the protagonist's failure to recognise this that the comedy originates. He refers to these figures half-jokingly as *Homo incapacitus*, in place of the fool and his goodness only the sense of man's loss (ibid). Nevertheless, they provide temporary distraction and amusement; humour, after all, conveys information, provides entertainment, and offers relief from stress while highlighting areas of anxiety or concern (Lewis, 1993; in Gawlik, 2006), and specific strains can be used deliberately & to do more than amuse: to cure, terrify, educate, motivate, persuade, inform and misinform (ibid).

The joke below is fairly context-specific, but even without knowing that Ehud Olmert is the Israeli Prime Minister, and Abul Abed a relentlessly optimistic folkloric figure, the casual reader can see the humour in the ludicrous situation. Its humour rests on the fact that Israel is known for its heavy armaments and military prowess, and that Lebanon is inferior in resources. There is the use of a narrator (Abul Abed), and extreme focalisation (the discrepancy in power between the two national representatives) and timeframe (the war in 2006). Situational irony is present in the idea that there is no possible military victory for Abul Abed and the Lebanese in real time, but his aspiration is nonetheless admirable. The subversion of power rests in the punchline, because Abul Abed appears not to understand how he could possibly lose, and as a result seems heroic rather than stupid.

The joke begins with the three-phase set-up (three is the necessary and sufficient number for fairytales, myths and oral culture), and makes use of the classic ternary rhythm (introduction, premise, antithesis). There are increasingly ludicrous claims by Abul Abed, and the joke ends in a climax that is spectacularly improbable but highly sympathetic to the Lebanese.

Ehud Olmert was sitting in his office, wondering when to invade Lebanon, when his telephone rang.

"This is Abull Abed and I am calling to tell you that we are officially declaring war on you."

"How big is your army?" replies Olmert.

"Right now," said Abull Abed, "there is myself, my cousin Mustafa, my next-door neighbour Abul Khaled, and the whole team from the teahouse. That makes eight!"

Olmert paused. "I must tell you, Abull Abed, that I have one million men in my army,

waiting to move on my command."

Abull Abed paused, then said: "Mr. Olmert, the war is still on! We have managed to acquire some infantry equipment!"

"And what equipment would that be, Abull Abed?" Olmert asked.

"Well, sir, we have two Mercedes 180s, and a truck."

"I must tell you, Abull Abed, that I have 10,000 bombers and 20,000 fighter planes. My military complex is surrounded by laser-guided, surface-to-air missile sites. And since we last spoke, I've increased my army to two million!"

Silence.

Then, "Mr. Olmert, we have to call off this war."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Abull Abed," said Olmert. "Why the sudden change of heart?"

"Well," said Abull Abed, "how will we feed two million prisoners?"

Humour as a defective coping mechanism

Not everyone agrees on the healthy aspects of humour in traumatic situations. On an individual level, Martin (2007: 305) explains:

Individuals who use humour to cope in ways that are sensitive to their own and other people's broader psychological needs are likely to experience enhanced feelings of self-esteem and emotional well-being and more satisfying relationships with others in the long term.

In other words, humour may be a useful mechanism for regulating emotions and coping with stress in the short term - but Martin goes on to add that longer-term mental health depends on the existing ways people use coping methods in their daily lives.

Davies (1993: 42) considers humour descriptive rather than prescriptive: Jokes are thermometers that help us to understand social reality; they are not thermostats controlling that reality. Lewis (1993) cautions particularly against the so-called liberating effect of gallows humour on the individual. First proposed by Freud, this theory of humour dealt with joking as a means to

avoid pain, and signalled a temporary escape for the teller and the listener from the brutal reality of trauma. Lewis (1993: 49) criticises this idea, writing that:

[w]e are dealing here with two very different notions of liberation, one purely internal, the other both internal and political...[a prisoner who] spends his last moments joking rather than looking for some way to escape, or resist, or protest may help to seal his doom...[A]lthough any joking done in such a situation may help the joker relax, a clear case of gallows humour will focus, by way of its subject matter, on the danger, playfully dismissing it through the resolution of the joke's incongruity...[w]hen your laugh withers to a smile and the smile fades from your face, the gallows still looms...

These very different ideas of liberation are interdependent. Personal, psychological restitution and redemption may be possible, but there are also larger social processes at work, as we have seen in the dialectic between individual and community.

As Lewis claims, the primary social and political functions of humour are conservative:

[H]umour works in a given society, within and between subgroups, to reinforce accepted values, goals and ideals (1993: 51). Wilson (1979, in Lewis, 1993) demonstrates that, by virtue of its structural elements, humour can be a cryptic conservative. In other words, by presenting situations as solvable and therefore funny, humour urges us to laugh - rather than think or act. Edward Said (in Peterson, 2007), calls these kind of jokes inappropriate because they are well-intentioned shock-absorbers: that, whatever their merits, they stop short of deeper analysis and the call for fundamental change. The temporary relief they provide encourages apathy and the maintenance of the status quo, as people are more likely to accept the incongruity of their situations.

Greiner, (1973, in Boyer, 1993) goes further, saying: [t]he black humourist dismisses reformational and ethical certainties. In other words, commentary is no substitute for political power, and as such it has little capacity to change the existing imbalance of power between social groups. While Lebanese civilians may have been outraged and expressed that outrage in a global forum that they themselves controlled their political situation remained unchanged until real international pressure in the form of military and economic threat was brought to bear on the Israeli

government: in other words, they had a voice but no say. These theorists all point out that humour is a temporary response to a longer-term trauma, and as such is inappropriate. Lebanese civilians may have emerged culturally intact, but they were politically disempowered. It is the status quo that must be questioned if meaningful change is to benefit marginalised groups.

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Blogs are here, and they are in increasing use because they present a particularly effective potential means of healing individual trauma, stimulating healthy debate between groups, and encouraging participation in the public sphere. They have the capacity to build personal relationships, both through digital interactivity and mass communication, and through mobilisation.

This psycho-social context of political trauma is important. I have argued, in agreement with Frankl (1946 and 2006), Caruth (1995 and 1996), Brison (1999), Laub (1991), Mack (2003), Hamber (2004), Falconer (2005), Brown and Augusta-Scott (2007) and Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (2007), that the traumatic loss of confidence in self, community and state can be restored through the creation of and engagement with alternative narratives in the public sphere. Lederach (2005) especially points to a wide range of activities increasingly practiced in the field of peace-building that explore the past: truth commissions, war crime tribunals, restorative justice practices and trauma healing. I have gone further to discuss the claim that the Internet in general, and the blogs from Lebanon specifically, provide such a space for this activity. Acknowledging this dialectic foregrounds the public space of the blogosphere for memory work as necessary for individual healing and communal reintegration through the relegation of traumatic events to ordinary status and the co-construction of new narratives.

As we have seen in the work of the theorists above, the fundamental stages of recovery are establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and communities. Social constructivists hold that it is through stories that the real world is internalised, reflected and sustained in the imagination of the individual, group or community. We are simultaneously members of many such imagined communities, operating in multiple public spheres. By engaging in dialogue in the public space of the blogosphere, we can recast our identities in more helpful life-stories, transforming traumatic memory into narrative memory. Restoring these causal relationships between events goes some way towards understanding our lives as cohesive and coherent, and re-authoring narratives can resurrect the suppressed voice by recognising and emphasising personal agency. To have a voice – to be heard – implies that personal experiences are commensurate with the larger processes of history, as Caruth (1995 and 1996), Falconer (2005), and

Brown and Augusta-White (2007) particularly argue. It follows that, in providing an authentic witnessing and listening context for this polyphonic chorus of 'little stories', the Lebanese blogs enabled survivors to ask the existential questions that led to some greater understanding of personal, historical, political and social truth, and allowed them to pick up the narrative thread of their lives, as Frankl (1946), Ricoeur (1991), and Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (2007) predict. Witnessing the truths of others, at both first- and second-hand levels, is a courageous act of co-construction as well as a social duty. For individual bloggers, this was played out in relationships with readers of blogs, who, in the words of Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (2007), by sitting at the table of dialogue of the public sphere, witnessed these alternative narratives and thereby provided acknowledgement, support and affiliation. As we have seen, and as critics of Habermasian theory of the public sphere point out (particularly Fraser 1990 and 2005; Ó Baoill 2000; Lynch 2007), not everyone has equal access to this table of dialogue, and, while it is beyond the scope of this research to explore a more complex analysis of social demographics within the on-line blogging community in Lebanon, a more developed focus on gender, age, identity and class would prove beneficial in future research.

Be that as it may, for those who do consciously engage with them, narratives are a potential site for social resistance through the challenging of internalised discourse: they can provide the opportunity for the reflection on and challenge to social mores, as Iswolsky (1984), Vice (1997) and Curtis (2007), among others, argue in their examination of Bakhtin's idea of the subversive carnivalesque. This disruption of accepted dominant narratives may be perceived as threatening to in-groups when alternative narratives are at odds with the official version of events. For society at large, this was manifest in political acts that upheld the rights of the disempowered by giving them a voice and forming civil action groups, thereby acknowledging the moral imperative to create what Lederach and Maise (2003) and Hamber (2004) term 'just institutions' through 'moral scripts'. Conscious individuals make conscious communities, and shared memory constitutes social narratives. As Portelli (1999), Mack (2003) and Falconer (2005) argue, when appropriate public mourning structure are in place, closure - or at least the possibility of making the traumatic events bearable as part of a life-narrative - is within reach. I have argued that the Internet provides a forum for the intrusion of these memories into public awareness, and that this is a means of avoiding the

social denial, repression and dissociation that can operate on a larger, collective level. Both the rehabilitation of identity and the larger goal of peace-building depend on the recognition of interdependent narratives and constructive engagement with those people and things we least understand and most fear. Blogging provides an alternative forum for the silent and unequal dialogue between victim and perpetrator in the creation of new commemorative practices and survivor missions. The increasing acknowledgement and use of blogging as a serious political tool therefore has implications for democratic practice, as does any forum that challenges cultural, social and political norms and the propaganda model of the media that support the status quo.

This is achieved through the integration or hybridisation of personal and mass media, as Ó Baoill (2000), Shirky (2002), Sullivan (2002), Serfaty (2004), Curtis (2007), and Perlmutter (2008) describe. Through remediation, bloggers are assuming the responsibility to redeploy existing information and recontextualise it, providing alternative viewpoints and thereby encouraging debate and participation. Blogs can challenge negative stereotypes, facilitate dialogue rather than top-down monologues, and are an important medium for the creation and criticism of information rather than the mere passive consumption of it. They may not represent entire groups (what institutions can?), but they do allow some insight into the processes of youth and mass market communication. Political bloggers are passionate, a small core of influentials who have the capacity to stimulate dialogue and participation in the public sphere. Their blogs offer instantaneous communication, group accretion of knowledge, independence from existing media conglomerates and big business concerns; they also evolve to incorporate new information.

As Poster (2005) and Lynch (2007) argue, the evolution of Arab blogging came about as the result of both long-term and short-term factors: perceived oppressive state practices in general and the outbreak of the 33-Day War in particular, produced bloggers who felt that Western and mainstream media coverage was both inaccurate and inadequate, and dedicated themselves to organising and publicising local campaigns. The war, as Pintak (2006), Salti (2006), and Ward (2006) point out, while not the first conflict during which bloggers swapped practical information and political rants in real-time, was marked by a steep rise in activity in the Lebanese blogosphere. Stories reported by bloggers appeared in mainstream media (MSM) coverage, and the profiles of and interviews with bloggers such as Mazen Kerbaj were considered newsworthy in themselves.

Many of the blogs described a katabatic or descent-and-recovery narrative arc, reaching a low with the massacre of civilians at Qana. Bloggers' dependence on the support of and engagement with readers and other bloggers was particularly pertinent to the decisions they made following Qana, as was evident in the rising arc that resulted in actor-centred activism. Humour, both explicitly in the passing on of in-jokes and the more general use of sarcasm and satire enabled the cohesion of communities and functioned as a coping mechanism without resorting to flippancy.

Although there was a small core of a few individuals advocating active political engagement, their influence was exponential, both at home and abroad, particularly for expatriate Lebanese. Blogs became catalysts for social mobilisation and change, and, while they did not represent wider public opinion, they did offer insights into belief systems and decision-making processes, particularly into those of the young, educated and well-off, whose opinions are being assimilated slowly into public structures, as Ward (2006) argues. These new forms of reporting and debate have created alternative discourse communities, and as such have implications for political accountability and transparency in the Arab context and beyond.

User-participatory online formats are increasingly popular in both Arab and Western media, as we see in the work of Ward (2006) and Curtis (2007), performing an archival function as compilers of information or informants, wisebots or information scouts, used by media elites and reporters for newsworthy items that have not yet been absorbed. Bloggers can also function as collectors, collators, revisers and extenders of MSM, political and media watchdogs (as we saw in the case of the Little Green Footballs exposé of the digitally altered Hajj photographs), investigative reporters, political analysts and critics. Interactive media intersects with MSM, performing a watchdog function, as well as vertical analysis and commentary – all of which encourage more rigorous and responsible journalism.

Blogs are increasingly used for more formal reporting, informational and analytical purposes, often as a result of the voluntary, unstructured individual testimonies that emerge. Aside from their status as corollaries to the mainstream media, sites such as TLXCALA (The Translators Network for Linguistic Diversity) below publish reports in series – in this case, the survivors' testimonies made in the hearing of the 250 members of international civil society that comprised The People's Tribunal for Lebanon (Bruxelles, February 2008). Content tends towards

subjective reportage, structured in report or precis format:

All [the testimonies] brought something important that we need to share with those who were not present. I will present the various testimonies and participants interventions one by one. Today, I begin with a testimony by Dr. Mustafa Badr al-Din, Mayor of Nabatiya, a city in the south of Lebanon, 25 km from the Blue Line & Dr. Badr al-Din presented an important testimony, and the following day, in round table discussion, allowed us to understand more in depth the meaning behind what had happened to his people, his city and his land.

(<http://www.tlaxcala.es/pp.asp?lg=en&reference=4791>)

Blogs are playing more of a public role in political campaigns, particularly in the United States; the youth-vote demographic is crucial, and mass communication has always played a fundamental role in elections and governance, as Sullivan (2002), Ó Baoill (2002), Keren (2005), Perlmutter (2008) and others point out. This trend is certain to be replicated in other countries where the necessary hardware is available and an online presence is considered significant.

As southern Africa becomes more digitally literate and has more access to the Internet, similar patterns will become apparent. The leap-frogging by cellphone technology has already had a major impact across all sectors of the population, and other technologies that require self-owned and self-administered media platforms will follow. The current plan by Neotel to provide competition to Telkom, the only fixed-line operator in the South Africa before 2008, should encourage this kind of access.

The relatively youthful demographic of the country, as we have seen in the context of the Arab blogosphere, is conducive to digital participation. These influentials may still be in the minority, but their opinions are exponentially powerful in garnering the attention of their peers. Political parties like the African National Congress's Youth League arm focuses particularly on their digital and mobile influence, organising meetings and publicity by this means.

Engagement in the public sphere is increasingly apparent on the South African Internet in general, even though some of the same criticisms of the Arab blogosphere (largely the problems of

equality and access) apply. Serious political sites like the *Mail & Guardian*-affiliated Thought Leader are fairly popular among the reading public, according to the site statistics, and will become more so as state control of MSM increases. The blogosphere also hosts awards for Blogger of the Year, among other titles, and marketing and publishing concerns are undergoing some changes as they adapt to multi-platform models. Tertia Albertyn's blog *So Close*, for example, found enough mainstream and international interest to be published in print (a book), in a reverse of the usual publishing process.

It is to be hoped that the kind of digital education advanced and supported by bodies like the Shuttleworth Foundation, with its emphasis on both hardware and digital access, will be continued and increased, making the Internet available to more people. While it is being used extensively for not-for-profit and academic or scholarly archival purposes in, for example, the work of the Bleek and Lloyd Archives and the Centre for Popular Memory attached to the University of Cape Town, and the joint venture of the University of the Witwatersrand and the South African History Archive to store the digital and electronic media sources associated with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission processes, the digitality of the medium is still not being utilised to its full potential for testimonial purposes. As the professional and institutional responsibilities associated with democracy devolve to individuals and groups, emphasising community development and autonomy, so the Internet plays a larger role in interaction among agents. We have seen the rapid development of convergence journalism and other digital media in response to the repressive regime in Zimbabwe, for example, where legal, political and news blogs, as well as social networking sites, are certain to play an ever-increasing role in unmonitored communication and interaction. Networking, which provides the impetus for information searches on the Internet, will have a greater impact as multiple public forums become available. This will be commensurate with media projects developing in order to investigate the Internet's impact on society, and to aggregate, curate and amplify online global conversations. However, until ordinary people in many parts of southern Africa - still feeling the effects of decades of both historical and structural trauma - have access to alternative support mechanisms for trauma and memory work and social grieving spaces, the full potential of the medium will remain under-utilised.

More universally, blogs are relatively unmediated by institutions at this point, but Internet

filtering will become increasingly common as more people have access to it through national wealth and technological advancement, thus sidestepping hegemonic media control. As we have seen in the Arab blogosphere, state security can include censorship and the blocking of websites. Increased political sway will be followed by increasingly repressive measures. Countries such as Bahrain have already attempted to enforce blogger registration under real names. We can assume that there will always be a need for sites for alternative socio-political opinion and debate, and the blogosphere will remain an important space for public engagement. Some of the Internet groups, like those Lebanese blogs that began as ordinary reportage of daily minutiae, could theoretically revert to being the ordinary accounts they were initially intended to be. Sites such as Lebanon Under Siege continue to track reparation and reconstruction efforts, and to provide political commentary. The blogosphere constitutes a new space for negotiating issues of Arab identity, both for citizens at home and expatriates, through the polyvocality of narrative and the interaction of argument.

Future areas for increased interest in narrative frameworks include social science and academia, where stories can function as structuring mechanisms for personal and social development, and as media for practical social experiments and collaborative learning (see Curtis 2007, and Dettori et al in Van Haaster 2007). Digital storytelling, role playing games (RPGs) and simulations stimulate social interaction and empathy by allowing us to access other perspectives, while crowd-sourcing, as we saw in the numerous cases of civil activism during the 33-Day War in Lebanon, emphasises the kind of community development and autonomy made possible by the blogosphere, rectifying to some extent the asymmetry of information inherent in the status quo.

In academic and research contexts (or any area where discussion is important), the same tools can enable team members to share knowledge simply and quickly, facilitating the efficient management and navigation of collective knowledge. In a small group that posts news items, upcoming events and essays, for example, the comment system allows for structured discussion, the quick updating vital to recent developments in the field, and critical readership, enabling academics to be both author and audience in a peer-mediated community. The hyperlink feature is particularly useful in this context (for footnotes and references, primarily), and blog archives allow accretive knowledge to be stored and accessed easily. Elizabeth Curtis's 2007 on-line doctorate, *A Blog Without a Bicycle*, is one such example of harnessing the features of the Bakhtinesque notion of the

carnavalesque to feminist theory within the structure of the multi-media blog carnival, allowing expert and ordinary commentary to feed back into the content itself.

Legal, political and news blogs all promote the greater dissemination of information. They contextualise information, which can empower individuals and groups through awareness and discussion. This substantive interchange of facts, ideas and debate in the public sphere can contribute to the recasting of identity by recreating relationships between people and their communities, and by creating entirely new affiliative groups. This creation and commentary, in addition to consumption and witness, is what makes informed and engaged citizens, and blogs have therefore gone some way towards rejuvenating political processes. Future political decision-makers are growing up in present political circumstances, mediated by blogs. Diversity of opinion in public debate strengthens accountability, and democratic institutions can only benefit from this participation.

But it must be remembered that the Internet is a medium. Like any free media, blogs have the capacity to transform critical discourse into political action, but they still depend on production, consumption and organised civil society processes. That said, their potential as multimodal spaces for the transformation of individual and social narratives of identity after trauma is doubtlessly both unprecedented and unlimited.

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A note on electronic referencing practice

For a more detailed list of Lebanese blogs, see the Web directory that follows after the References. When I have quoted direct content from the blogs, they appear in the main list of References here.

When bloggers have used *nom de plumes*, I have supplied only these first names or chosen names as they appear in the blog profiles. These are ordered alphabetically in both the References list and the directory.

Please note that websites necessarily do not use the page number convention associated with print references. As per accepted reference notation, I am thus not able to provide page numbers for websites. While I have provided the exact URLs below, for specific information location on the site itself, use the Find key function and the relevant keyword.

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Appendix A: LEBANESE WEBLOG DIRECTORY

Lebanon Blogger Forum

News articles, views and analysis reports about Lebanon

<http://www.lebanonheartblogs.blogspot.com/>

ToBeirut.org

Blog site for Lebanon awareness campaigns

<http://www.tobeirut.org>

Technorati (Lebanon)

Provides listing of blogs, photos, videos and music related to Lebanon

<http://www.technorati.com/>

WordPress (Lebanon)

Listing of blogs related to Lebanon

<http://www.wordpress.com/>

Leblogger.com

Lebanese blogging community, allows users to create their own blog and share their thoughts with other members

<http://www.leblogger.com/>

A Lebanese Abroad

Opinions from a Lebanese abroad

<http://www.lebaneseabroad.blogspot.com/>

Across the Bay

Views and articles covering Lebanon

<http://www.beirut2bayside.blogspot.com/>

Bliss Street Journal The Blog

Sub-expert commentary on Middle East history in the making

<http://www.blissstreetjournal.blogspot.com/>

Bassem Mroue

Blog of journalist Bassem Mroue

<http://www.bassemroue.com/>

Lebanese Female Diary

Blog by a Lebanese woman

<http://www.afifa80.blogspot.com/>

Open Lebanon

Aggregation of news and blogs, articles library, directory of associations abroad and an online discussion forum on Lebanon-related developments

<http://www.openlebanon.org>

Bob's Blog

Blog by Ibrahim Jouhari on the latest political events in Lebanon with his independent views, in addition to book and movie reviews.

<http://www.ibosblog.blogspot.com/>

The Lebanese Inner Circle

Blog with posts and thoughts concerning Lebanese politics and other Lebanon

<http://www.theinnercircle.wordpress.com/>

Ramzi's Blah Blah

Blog covering Lebanon

<http://www.ramziblahblah.blogspot.com/>

The Lebanese Bloggers

Blog created to honor the memory of heroes of all the Lebanese sects who were assassinated for their patriotic stands

<http://www.lebanesebloggers.blogspot.com/>

The Ouwet Front: A Lebanese Forces

Blog features personal views and opinions of Lebanese Forces members

<http://www.ouwet.com/>

For a Better Lebanon

Blog with posts concerning political conditions in Lebanon, stressing on change through awareness, tolerance, education and the willingness to admit that hereditary leadership does not work anymore

<http://www.forabetterlebanon.blogspot.com/>

Mysterious Eve

Blog posting general views

<http://www.mysteriouseve.blogspot.com/>

Lebanon Update

Blog site about recent political and social events in Lebanon

<http://www.lebanon-update.blogspot.com/>

Voices on the Wind

Blog site by a Lebanese living in Canada covering various topics

<http://www.voicesonthewind.blogspot.com/>

Libanismes

Blog with posts and pictures covering social and political Lebanon in Lebanon

<http://www.libanismes.blogspot.com/>

Maldoror's Eyes

Blog with a selection of articles and posts covering general Lebanon

<http://www.maldoror37.blogspot.com/>

Beirut Spring

Personal website featuring news, articles, opinions and views regarding politics in Lebanon

<http://www.beirutspring.com/>

Hamra Blues

Blog featuring analysis of events related to the Middle East and the Arab World

<http://www.hamrablues.com/>

WebLB.com/ - The Lebanese Code

Blog spot, created by Ziad Zacca to reflect opinions

<http://www.weblb.com/>

Lebanon Blogs

Provides news articles and views in several languages including Arabic, English, French and German

<http://www.lebanonblogs.com/>

The Thinking Lebanese

Blog site covering reflections on policy and the Lebanese experience

<http://www.thethinkingleb.blogspot.com/>

Thermo Police

Scrap book of a Lebanese expatriate

<http://www.blog.thermo-police.net>

From Beirut to the Beltway

Blog by a journalist, featuring news from Lebanon, USA and the Middle East

<http://www.beirutbeltway.com/>

About Lebanon

Blog provides news, reflections and pictures about Lebanon

<http://www.spaces.msn.com/>

Blogging the Middle East

Analyzing the Middle East and working towards a world without borders

<http://www.meastpolitics.wordpress.com/>

Beirut Diary

News blog website provides articles and opinions about Lebanon-related Lebanon

<http://www.beirut-diary.com/>

Beirut Lemons

Features photos, news and articles, focusing on Beirut

<http://www.beirutlemons.com/>

Lebanese Political Journal

Blog intended to provide in-depth analysis in English on the political situation in Lebanon

<http://www.lebop.blogspot.com/>

Cold Desert

Blog by Ahmad, offering humorous articles and photos

<http://www.colddesert.blogspot.com/>

Angry Arab News Service

Blog about politics, war, the Middle East, Arabic poetry and art

<http://www.angryarab.blogspot.com/>

Lisa in Lebanon

Blog features profile, personal interests, views

<http://www.lisainlebanon.blogspot.com/>

The Levantese

Blog of Ashraf Al-Mansur.

<http://www.levantese.blogspot.com/>

Rampurple.com/ - Lebanon

Posts and links to Lebanese and Lebanon related blogs.

<http://www.lebanon.rampurple.com/>

Hamoudi s Blog

Diaries of webmaster Hamoudi Assaf. Shares experience, music, videos, articles, news

<http://www.7amudi.com/>

Kerblog

mazen kerbaj s blog. beirut + free improvised music + comics + bombs + drawings

<http://www.mazenkerblog.blogspot.com/>

Charbel Baini

Blog by the Lebanese writer Charbel Baini.

<http://www.charbelbaini.blogspot.com/>

La La Land

Blog by a Lebanese student

<http://www.landlala.blogspot.com/>

Independent Lebanese

Blog covering Lebanon

<http://www.foraunitedlebanon.blogspot.com/>

A View from a Bar Stool in Beirut

Personal blog

<http://www.dollysgirlsboy.blogspot.com/>

Lebanese Delirium - Life, or Something Like It

Blog with general posts, articles, personal profile

<http://www.com/puteraidedelirium.blogspot.com/>

Lebanese Political Humor

Blog examining humour in Lebanon during the war

<http://www.forlaughs.blogspot.com/>

Abu Takla's Blog

Personal views, articles, personal interests

<http://www.abutakla.blogspot.com/>

Beirut Notes

Blog for thoughts and facts about Beirut and Lebanon

<http://www.beirutnotes.blogspot.com/>

Leb Blog

Blog provides news articles and views, discussion forum and other information about Lebanon

<http://www.lebblog.com/>

New Leb Blog

Personal account of events taking place in Lebanon and its region.

<http://www.newleb.blogspot.com/>

Anecdotes from a Banana Republic

Blog offers satire, news, commentary, media analysis and anecdotes from Lebanon

<http://www.anecdotesfromabanarepublic.blogspot.com/>

A Window in Lebanon

Articles, pictures and news about Lebanon

<http://www.windowinlebanon2.blogspot.com/>

Badran Blog

Blog of a Lebanese in Ukraine

<http://www.badran-blog.blogspot.com/>

The Suffragettes

Blog by two Lebanese girls

<http://www.thesuffragettes.blogspot.com/>

Lebanese Nights

Blog by Layal covering articles and news related to Lebanon

<http://www.lebnights.blogspot.com/>

Dark Side of the Moon

Blog by Khaled Itani (Khookh): A tribute to wasted thought

<http://www.khookh.blogspot.com/>

Publius Pundit

Blog provides news and commentary about democracy

<http://www.publiuspundit.com/>

Letters Apart

Blog featuring a selection of articles and posts of general and Lebanon-related subjects

<http://www.lettersapart.blogspot.com/>

Lebanonesque

Blog by Josey Wales

<http://www.lebanonesque.blogspot.com/>

Anima Errare

Blog by Nour, offering photos and articles about Lebanon

<http://www.animaerrare.blogspot.com/>

BloggingBeirut.com/

Blog community website features photos and articles about Lebanon

<http://www.bloggingbeirut.com/>

Lebanese W Bass

Blog dedicated to Lebanon Personal views about Lebanon-related Lebanon

<http://www.lebanesewbass.blogspot.com/>

Jamal s Propaganda Site

Blog with posts on several subjects related to Lebanon

<http://www.jamalghosn.blogspot.com/>

Ana Min Beirut

Thoughts and feelings about life in Beirut, Lebanon

<http://www.anaminbeirut.blogspot.com/>

Ya Latif Oltof

Blog expressing the feelings about the situation in Lebanon during the July war

<http://www.yalatifoltof.blogspot.com/>

All the Hydrogen in the World

Blog by Rasha, offering personal thoughts, ideas and comment

<http://www.allthehydrogenintheworld.blogspot.com/>

Cedars Awakening

Blog calls for a new political system

<http://www.cedarsawakening.blogspot.com/>

Ur-Shalim

Blog of Moussa Bashir. Personal views, general articles

<http://www.urshalim.blogspot.com/>

Habibe Lebnen

Personal views, thoughts, poems, lyrics, interests

<http://www.ing4leb.blogspot.com/>

Loubnan Ya Loubnan

Blog by Nidal covering articles about Lebanon

<http://www.tokborni.blogspot.com/>

Beirut Update

War diaries of a 30-year-old woman living in Beirut

<http://www.beirutupdate.blogspot.com/>

Alaa Bashir

Blog by Alaa Bashir, presenting thoughts and pictures

<http://www.bashir-alaa.blogspot.com/>

Lebanon View

Blog by Majida covering articles about Lebanon

<http://www.lebanonview.blogspot.com/>

Nad's Blog

Blog featuring personal interests and posts about the war on Lebanon

<http://www.nadche.blogspot.com/>

Beirut Journalist

Daily updates from Samer Zouehid, a journalist living in Beirut

<http://www.beirutjournalist.blogspot.com/>

Bloggers for Lebanon

Group of Arab bloggers working to help and support Lebanon

<http://www.bloggersforlebanon.org>

Out Here in Beirut and Beyond

Views, articles and pictures by Anna, a freelance German journalist in Beirut

<http://www.outhereinbeirut.blogspot.com/>

Streets of Beirut

Blog site providing information, news and reports

<http://www.streetsofbeirut.wordpress.com/>

Yalla

Blog site by Rima covering news and articles about Lebanon

<http://www.yalla.blogspot.com/>

Bob's Blog - Tabaris

Articles and comment about democracy in Lebanon and the Arab world

<http://www.tabaris.blogspot.com/>

Lebanese Cafe During the War

Blog by Amin Younes covering events during the war on Lebanon

<http://www.yawmiyat-yawmiyat.blogspot.com/>

Yasmina a Harissa

Blog by Yasmina. Articles, opinions, pictures

<http://www.yasmina-a-harissa.blogspot.com/>

Capisho

Critical blog by Shoubasi

<http://www.capisho.blogspot.com/>

From Lebanon - Annie's Diary

Blog site covering the life in Lebanon

<http://www.vosje.wordpress.com/>

Tatarazi

Posts, views, pictures and articles about Lebanon

<http://www.tatarazi.blogspot.com/>

Coffee Break

Blog by a Lebanese doctor; comments, pictures, personal views

<http://www.xyloblog.blogspot.com/>

All Seeing Eye

Blog with personal thoughts, views and analysis

<http://www.all-seeing-eye.blogspot.com/>

Ibn Bint Jbeil

Poems, paintings, drawings and somber memories of war

<http://www.ibnbintjbeil.blogspot.com/>

Blacksmiths of Lebanon

Blog site by a group of young Lebanese, providing articles, comment and views about Lebanon

<http://www.blacksmithsoflebanon.blogspot.com/>

Inside Lebanon

Blog by Anmar El-Khalil covering personal experiences and insights on the war in Lebanon

<http://www.insidelebanon.blogspot.com/>

Hopeful Beirut

Beirut as seen by a young woman

<http://www.hopefulbeirut.blogspot.com/>

Stroobia

Blog by Camille Ammoun covering Lebanon-related Lebanon

<http://www.stroobia.blogspot.com/>

IceRocket - Lebanon

Listing of blogs related to Lebanon

<http://www.blogs.icerocket.com/>

Lebanese Alternatives

Blog aiming at promoting, discussing and criticizing objectively any alternative solutions to

Lebanese Lebanon

<http://www.lebanesealternativesolutions.blogspot.com/>

Lebanon Untold

Blog site covering articles and comment about the current situation in Lebanon

<http://www.lebanon-untold.blogspot.com/>

Victor Sawma

Blog by Victor Sawma

<http://www.victorsawma.com/>

Distorted Reality - The Dancing Fairy

Blog with comment and posts about Beirut

<http://www.thedancingfairy.blogspot.com/>

Jeha s Nail

Blogsite with posts and articles about Lebanon

<http://www.jehasnail.blogspot.com/>

Lebanese Americangers

Created by a group of Lebanese living in America to help support Lebanon in the crisis with Israel and to build bridges for peace.

<http://www.lebaneseamericanbloggers.blogspot.com/>

My Journey

Blogging thoughts on Lebanon politics, history and religion

<http://www.nicholasm9.blogspot.com/>

Beirut - Heard from the TV

Personal page showing pictures and drawings related to the crisis in Lebanon

<http://www.littlepaperboat.livejournal.com/>

Shirin from Lebanon

Drawings and opinion about the situation in Lebanon

<http://www.shirin-from-lebanon.blogspot.com/>

Witnessing Again - Laure Ghorayeb

Blog of poet and painter Laure Ghorayeb. Features a selection of drawings connected to the Lebanese war

<http://www.laureghorayeb.blogspot.com/>

From Beirut with Love

Personal posts expressing feelings about the war conditions in Lebanon

<http://www.frombeirutwithlove.blogspot.com/>

Dialogus - The World is my Idea

Blog by Walid el Houry, personal thoughts, emotions and fears

<http://www.theworldismyidea.blogspot.com/>

Free Cedar

Blog about Lebanon, with analysis

<http://www.cedarfree.blogspot.com/>

Lebanon 2006

Political blog by Nayla Chacra, a Lebanese living in London

<http://www.lebanon-2006.blogspot.com/>

Peaceblogger

Blog by Wael Hmaidan covering articles and pictures about the biggest environmental catastrophe caused by the war on Lebanon

<http://www.ecocampaigner.blogspot.com/>

Perpetual Refugee

Blog by a Lebanese refugee talking about his own experiences and problems

<http://www.perpetualrefugee.blogspot.com/>

Between Two Worlds

Personal blog site covering news, articles and comment

<http://www.betweenworlds.blogspot.com/>

Lebanon Rising

Blog site by Elza Maalouf covering the Lebanese crisis

<http://www.risinglebanon.blogspot.com/>

Bachiriste 10452 Km

Blog site covering news and articles about politics in Lebanon

<http://www.bachiriste-kataeb.blogspot.com/>

Inside la Guitarra

Site by a Lebanese female offering songs, poems and comment

<http://www.laguitarra04.blogspot.com/>

Ya Ardee

Blog site covering news related to the situation in Lebanon

<http://www.22-8-1943.blogspot.com/>

No Words

Blog site covering articles, news and photos about Lebanon

<http://www.ciphercubed.blogspot.com/>

Shi Feshil

Lebanese blog site covering humorous facts

<http://www.shifeshil.com/>

Tales of Ordinary Madness

Blog site by Nasri Atallah covering various subjects. Music, videos, stories

<http://www.nasriatallah.blogspot.com/>

For Ever Free Lebanon

Blog site covering Lebanese political news, articles and opinions

<http://www.freelebanonnow.spaces.live.com/>

Worried Lebanese

Blog site covering information and news about the Lebanese and Middle Eastern politics

<http://www.worriedlebanese.wordpress.com/>

JnoubiyehLebanon

Covers articles, information and news about activities in South Lebanon

<http://www.jnoubiyeh.blogspot.com/>

Roaming Nat

Blog site by Nathalie Fallaha, graphic designer in Lebanon

<http://www.roamingnat.blogspot.com/>

Beirut Blues

Blog site covering the latest news about Lebanon

<http://www.beirutiblues.blogspot.com/>

Farid Abboud

Blog commenting on the current political situation in Lebanon, as well as speeches, interviews

<http://www.ambassadorabboud.blogspot.com/>

Live Lebanon

Blog site covering information about Lebanon; pictures, news, posters, greeting cards

<http://www.livelebanon.page.tl/>

ElieDH's Blog

Blog site covering the latest news and articles on Lebanon

<http://www.eliedh.com/>

Les Politiques (Lebanon)

Blog of personal political views and opinions; with a focus on the Middle East

<http://www.lespolitiques.blogspot.com/>

Apocalypz - A Voice from Lebanon

Blog site covering comment on events and situation in Lebanon and worldwide

<http://www.apocalypz.blogspot.com/>

Rabid Smurf

Blog site covering views and reviews on local and regional politics

<http://www.rabid-smurf.blogspot.com/>

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Appendix B: A BRIEF HISTORY OF MODERN LEBANESE-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Source:

Associated Press. A brief history of the Lebanese-Israeli conflict , on

http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20060716/mideast_israel_lebanon_060717/20060717/. Posted on 17 July 2006. Site visited 25 November 2008.

Because Israel and Lebanon have never signed a peace accord, the countries remain officially in a state of war that has existed since 1948 when Lebanon joined other Arab countries against the newly formed Jewish state.

The two countries have been bound by an armistice signed in 1949, which regulates the presence of military forces in southern Lebanon.

With a large Christian minority in an overwhelmingly Muslim region, mercantile and westernized, Lebanon was considered the least hostile Arab neighbour to Israel, and the weakest. The rare skirmishes that occurred were mostly symbolic.

That began to change as Palestinian guerrillas became active. In 1968, Israeli commandos landed at Beirut airport and blew up 13 Lebanese airliners in retaliation for Arab militants firing on an Israeli airliner in Athens, Greece.

Under pressure from staunch anti-Israeli Arab regimes in 1969, Lebanon signed an agreement that effectively gave away a southern region for Palestinian guerrillas to use as a springboard to infiltrate Israel or launch cross-border attacks.

Notable among these were an April 1974 raid on the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona, when Palestinian gunmen killed 16 civilians, mostly women and children, and an attack the following month on a school in Maalot in which a militant group killed 20 teenagers.

Israel retaliated regularly as Palestinian guerrillas fired on northern Israel, and Israeli forces invaded southern Lebanon in 1978. A UN peacekeeping force deployed and the Israelis pulled out after installing a local Lebanese militia in a border buffer zone, but the attacks continued.

Israel invaded again on a wider scale in 1982 to destroy Yasser Arafat's Palestinian guerrilla movement, which had established itself as a force within Lebanon during the country's civil war that

began in 1975. The bulk of Palestinian guerrillas were evacuated from Lebanon, but a new Lebanese guerrilla force, Hezbollah, emerged with the aid of Iran and drawn from the Shiite Muslim community that inhabits southern and eastern Lebanon.

U.S.-sponsored negotiations produced a Lebanon-Israel agreement but that deal died as Lebanon collapsed in another round of civil war.

After a destructive and costly military campaign that lasted for three years, Israeli forces withdrew from most of Lebanon but retained a self-proclaimed "security zone" just north of its own border.

Fighting inside Lebanon would escalate periodically, including a 1993 Israeli bombing offensive and the 17-day "Grapes of Wrath" military campaign in 1996 that left about 150 Lebanese civilians dead. At that time, Israel was reacting against guerrilla attacks by Hezbollah against Israeli soldiers inside the occupied zone and against Katyusha rockets being fired by Hezbollah into Israel proper.

Israel left that zone in 2000, but warned that it would return if its security to the north was compromised.

Hezbollah trumpeted Israel's withdrawal as a great victory but claimed that Israel continued to occupy illegally a small, empty parcel near Syria called the Chebaa Farms.

Diplomats mostly see that claim as a convenient excuse to justify attacks against Israel. Nevertheless, the Israeli-Lebanese frontier had remained largely quiet for the past six years with occasional outbursts, until a cross-border raid by Hezbollah July 12 resulted in the capture of two Israeli soldiers and the killing of eight others, sparking the current [33-DayWar of 2006] warfare.

Appendix C: A TIMELINE OF THE 33-DAY WAR

Source:

Key events in Middle East crisis , from ABC Online and AFP. Print version of story at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/indepth/featureitems/s1694729.htm>. Posted 25 August 2006. Site visited 25 November 2008.

All dates refer to June, July and August 2006.

Sunday, June 25: Palestinians attack army post on Israel-Gaza border, killing two soldiers, capturing a third. Israel starts to mass forces around Gaza, from which it withdrew in September 2005.

Monday, June 26: Three Palestinian groups - the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), the armed wing of the ruling Hamas movement and the Army of Islam - say they captured 19-year-old Corporal Gilad Shalit. They demand Israel free detained women and minors.

Tuesday, June 27: Hamas, which dominates the Palestinian government, signs agreement to end bitter internal conflict and which implicitly recognises Israel's existence.

Wednesday, June 28: Israeli ground forces enter southern Gaza. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert says Israel will use "extreme measures" to rescue Cpl Shalit. Washington says Israel has the right to defend itself.

Thursday, June 29: Israel detains scores of Hamas members, including one third of the Palestinian cabinet. International community steps up calls for restraint. Mr Olmert suspends a ground offensive expected in northern Gaza as Cairo tries to mediate.

Friday, June 30: Israeli jets blitz Gaza, set interior ministry ablaze. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh insists government working to free Cpl Shalit.

Saturday, July 1: Israel rejects Palestinian demand to free 1,000 prisoners.

Sunday, July 2: Israel hits Mr Haniyeh's Gaza office.

Monday, July 3: Israel sends troops and armour into northern Gaza. Palestinian militant is killed. Cpl Shalit's captors give a 24-hour deadline for Israel to free Palestinian prisoners. Israel rejects ultimatum.

Saturday, July 8: Israeli forces advance toward Gaza City, killing four Palestinians. Other units pull back from northern Gaza. Mr Haniyeh calls for mutual cease-fire.

Monday, July 10: Exiled Hamas political leader Khaled Meshaal says Cpl Shalit will not be freed without prisoner swap, pledges he will be protected. Israel says some Palestinian prisoners could be released, but only after safe return of Cpl Shalit.

Wednesday, July 12: Hezbollah captures two Israeli soldiers and kills eight, prompting first Israeli ground operation into Lebanon since its 2000 pull-out. In Gaza, 23 Palestinians are killed by Israeli air strikes.

Thursday, July 13: Israeli planes bomb Beirut airport, kill at least 44 civilians in air strikes across Lebanon. Two Israelis are killed, more than 35 wounded by Hezbollah rockets. Russia, France, Britain and Italy criticise "disproportionate" use of force by Israel. US blames "terrorists who want to stop the advance of peace". US vetoes UN resolution calling Israel to halt military operations in Gaza.

Friday, July 14: Israel bombs Beirut home of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah. He declares "open war" on Israel. Israel sets conditions to end offensive: halt rocket attacks, release its soldiers, and Lebanon to implement UN resolution calling for Hezbollah's disarmament. Two Israelis killed by

rocket fire from Lebanon.

Saturday, July 15: Hezbollah attacks Israeli warship. Israel recovers body of one of four missing sailors, bringing Israeli servicemen toll since Wednesday to nine dead.

Monday, July 17: Israeli strikes kill 43 Lebanese. Hezbollah rejects Israeli terms for a cease-fire. UN secretary-general Kofi Annan calls for end to hostilities, suggests UN "stabilisation force" along Lebanon-Israel border.

Tuesday, July 18: Fifteen people, most of them soldiers, killed in Lebanon as Israel pushes on with attacks. Helicopters, ferries and cruise liners commandeered to retrieve trapped foreign nationals.

Wednesday, July 19: At least 70 civilians killed by Israeli bombing on deadliest day of its Lebanon offensive, pushing overall toll to 325. Two Arab-Israeli children killed by Katyusha rocket fired from Lebanon on northern Israeli town of Nazareth. Two Israeli soldiers killed, nine wounded in border clashes.

Thursday, July 20: Israeli troops battle Lebanese guerrillas and planes bomb suspected Hezbollah bunker as Lebanon pleads for international help. Thousands of foreigners pour out of Lebanon by land, sea and air, leaving homes and possessions to head for the safety of Cyprus, Syria and Turkey. Israel warns civilians in the Gaza Strip that every home storing weaponry is now a target.

Friday, July 21: Israel calls up thousands more troops, warns of possible invasion of Lebanon. Israeli raids hit Baalbeck and Tyre, killing at least five Lebanese. Lebanese civilians flee from south; foreign nationals' exodus gathers pace. Rockets hit north Israel town of Haifa, wounding 19. Hezbollah rejects UN plan for immediate halt to hostilities and release of two Israeli soldiers.

Saturday, July 22: Israel masses thousands more reservists on Lebanese border; warns it would not rule out full-scale invasion despite increasing calls for cease-fire. Foreign governments step up

efforts to evacuate remaining nationals.

Tuesday, July 25: An Israeli air strike kills four United Nations (UN) military observers at their base in southern Lebanon. UN secretary-general Kofi Annan condemns what he calls the "apparently deliberate targeting" of the base in Khiam. Israel expresses sorrow for the deaths, which it calls a mistake, and promises an investigation.

Saturday, July 29: An Israeli air strike in the south of Lebanon kills at least 51 Lebanese civilians, including 22 children, in the village of Qana. Hamas vows to carry out attacks on Israel in response to the air strike on Qana.

Wednesday, August 2: Fierce fighting between Israeli troops and Hezbollah fighters intensifies as tens of thousands of Israeli forces pour across the border on four new battlefronts.

Thursday, August 3: Eight Israeli civilians and four soldiers are killed on bloodiest day for Israel so far. Hezbollah's chief threatens to rocket Tel Aviv.

Human Rights Watch puts the death toll from the attack on Qana at 28 dead and 13 injured - well below Lebanon's estimate. Israel says the bombing was a mistake and it thought terrorists were hiding in the building.

Friday, August 4: Israeli jets bomb bridges on a coastal highway north of Beirut, killing five. At least 23 people, mostly Syrian, are killed in an Israeli raid at Qaa on the Lebanese-Syrian border. Israel hits the Sohmor power station, cutting electricity to Bekaa Valley and south Lebanon. Hezbollah fires 220 rockets at Israel, including one at Hadera, 40 kilometres north of Tel Aviv.

Saturday, August 5: Israel pounds Lebanon in its heaviest bombardment yet. One Israeli is killed near Taibe and eight commandos are wounded in a raid Israel says killed four senior Hezbollah members in Tyre. The UN, US and France at odds over the first UN resolution on the conflict.

Sunday, August 6: Ten Israelis are killed in rocket attack on Kfar Giladi near the border. Israeli jets kill at least eight civilians in attacks on south Lebanon villages. The UN Security Council debates the Franco-US draft resolution demanding "full cessation of hostilities" - but Lebanon, Iran and Syria reject it.

Monday, August 7: An Israeli air raid kills more than 40 people in the Lebanese village of Houla. Seven people in the Palestinian Prime Minister's office in the West Bank fall ill after opening a letter containing an unknown substance, government and hospital officials say.

Tuesday, August 8: Australia's Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, says about 100 Australians are still trapped in southern Lebanon and it will be highly risky to get them out. Lebanon says it is ready to deploy 15,000 troops near the southern border when Israel pulls out all soldiers from the area.

Wednesday, August 9: Israel's Navy shells Lebanon's largest Palestinian refugee camp, killing one person and wounding several others. Palestinian officials say Israel has also attacked a Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank, killing two members of Islamic Jihad in a helicopter strike.

Thursday, August 10: Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah vows to turn southern Lebanon into a "graveyard" for invading Israeli troops. The Israeli army pushes up to 10 kilometres into southern Lebanon just hours after Cabinet approves an extension of ground operations.

Friday, August 11: Hezbollah fires up to 70 rockets into Israel, killing a woman and a toddler in an Israeli Arab village. France announces a breakthrough could come soon in diplomatic efforts to end the war, and Israel says plans for a deeper ground assault into southern Lebanon are on hold to give diplomacy a chance.

Saturday, August 12: The United Nations Security Council votes unanimously for a resolution

calling for a "full cessation of hostilities". The resolution calls on Hezbollah to stop all attacks immediately and Israel to end "all offensive operations". It also authorises the deployment of a 15,000-strong peacekeeping force.

Tuesday, August 15: Almost a day after a cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah, the deal is largely holding - but Israel's Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, says his country will keep pursuing the leaders of Hezbollah everywhere and anytime. Two male journalists from the US Fox News television channel, one American and the other from New Zealand, are kidnapped by armed men in Gaza.

Thursday, August 17: The Israeli military says it has transferred half the zones it had been occupying in southern Lebanon to UN peacekeepers in line with a cease-fire deal. About 2,000 Lebanese soldiers cross the Litani River to begin their mission in southern Lebanon. The Hamas-led Palestinian Government makes contact with all Palestinian factions to try to find and secure the release of two kidnapped journalists working for US television network Fox News.

Friday, August 18: Lebanese troops widen their historic deployment to Hezbollah's long-time bastion in the south, taking up positions in the heavily bombed border town of Khiam and other villages. Countries planning to contribute to the United Nations peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon call for clearer guidance on the exact nature of the mission.

Saturday, August 19: Three Hezbollah guerillas and one Israeli soldier are killed in an Israeli raid on one of Hezbollah's bastions in eastern Lebanon. The Lebanese Prime Minister says it is a "naked violation" of the cease-fire. Israel seizes Palestinian Deputy Prime Minister Naser al-Shaer, a top official of the Hamas militant group, at his home in the occupied West Bank.

Sunday, August 20: Lebanon warns it could suspend the deployment of government troops to the south of the country in the wake of an Israeli commando raid in the east, and UN secretary-general Kofi Annan says the raid violates the cease-fire. Israel says the raid aimed at halting the flow of weapons to Hezbollah and says it will continue to carry out raids in Lebanon.

Monday, August 21: The Lebanese Government vows to crush any attempt on the Lebanese side to breach the cease-fire in the conflict with Israel. The Israeli Cabinet authorises a commission of inquiry into the mistakes Israel has made during the war with Hezbollah, and one of Israel's top generals says the country's armed forces have at times been guilty of arrogance in the conduct of the war in Lebanon.

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