

**Crossing the East-West Divide:
Lebanese Returnee Youth Confront “Eastern”
Sectarianism and “Western” Vice**

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**Stereotypes in the Age of Transnationalism and
Globalization**

After the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 and the cold war between the Soviet Union and the United States ended, Samuel Huntington, a Harvard University-based political scientist, redrew the global conflict map using a “clash of civilizations” framework.¹ According to Huntington, conflicts between nations would be replaced by conflicts between ethnic groups (defined by religion and culture). Huntington’s theory found many followers who reinforced his ideas through potent metaphors such as Thomas Friedman’s *Lexus and the Olive Tree* or Benjamin Barber’s *Jihad vs. McWorlds*.² Both books present the world in terms of a fundamental opposition: the U.S.-based forces of leisure and consumption (represented by the icons of luxury cars or fast food) are pitted against Arab and Muslim forces of unyielding rootedness and close-minded fanaticism. In other words, these theorists of globalization created an understanding of the world using stereotypical metaphors of a luxurious and efficient “West” (the United States) and a narrow-minded and sectarian “East” (the Arab world).

Against this conflict paradigm that emerged in the fields of international relations and international politics, scholars in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology have argued that the current global order is best understood through theories that dissolve civilizations borders or boundaries. The central icon in this field of study is the transnational individual who travels back and forth between a country of origin and a host country. Keeping close ties with communities at home, transnationals make money in the West, send it to their immediate or extended families back home, and use their increased (financial) status to engage in politics in their villages and towns of origin.³ As a result, transnational

individuals create a new kind of community that is “deterritorialized,” undermining the conventional map of bounded nation-states.⁴ The new order has variously been called “ethnoscape,”⁵ “global assemblage,”⁶ or “third space.”⁷

Homi Bhabha famously coined the latter term when he spoke of a postcolonial reality that brought migrants and refugees into the national spaces of previous colonizers (Indians to Great Britain, North Africans to France, Caribbean islanders to the United States, and so on). This kind of transnationalism, according to Bhabha, questioned the definition of a bounded identity of the West against the identity of formerly colonized peoples. Instead, he suggested an “*international culture, based . . . on the inscription and articulation of a culture’s hybridity.*”⁸ The “inter” or “in-between” space, opened up to a large degree by transnational flows, now “carries the burden of the meaning of culture.” Unmoored from their origins and not quite rooted in their temporary places of work and residence, transnationals live with and among elements of multiple cultural fields, a reality that promises the end of the East and West (or North and South) divide.

A similar argument in support of the dissolution of boundaries between East and West can be found in the literature that describes global flows that originate in the West and travel to other parts of the globe—for instance, the spread of Western pop music or consumer culture. In response to those who view the spread of Western consumer goods to the non-Western world as a zero-sum game in which one culture eradicates the another, anthropologists have argued that local traditions and practices survive by processes of creative adaptation: Serbs eat pork burgers with paprika garnish at their local McDonald’s, and Muslim mullahs in northern India use the latest computer technologies to pursue their own Islamic goals.⁹ Other peoples do not necessarily feel resentment against the foreign intrusions: we are told that there are “more Filipinos singing perfect renditions of some American songs . . . than there are Americans doing so.”¹⁰

I call these reported instances of cultural mixing examples of “happy hybridity,” a theoretical construct that proves that local and global cultures can all get along—except when they don’t. When global ideas reach certain localities that are described as fundamentalist or otherwise irrational, they can create backlash and violence. Appadurai, who is otherwise the champion of happily hybrid media- and ethnoscares, warned his Western academic audiences of a “religious rage” that would be unleashed when “the transnational worlds of liberal aesthetics and radical Islam met head-on” in the Salman Rushdie af-

fair.¹¹ In the late 1980s, Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* created an outcry in much of the Muslim world for its purported insensitive portrayal of Prophet Muhammad and his family. A religious edict was issued by Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini, who called the book "blasphemous," and it was subsequently banned in many Muslim countries. Rushdie received multiple threats on his life. Appadurai's use of the adjectives "liberal" to describe the "West" and "radical" when describing the Muslim world are telling. In this vision of a deterritorialized world, the flow of ideas (such as the distribution of *The Satanic Verses*) is brutally disrupted, and there are no "in-betweens," only "us" versus "them." In today's world, the question of a clash between East and West has gone beyond the limits of academic theorizing. Western democratization themes in many parts of the Muslim world have pitted U.S. Marines against "Muslim insurgents," providing daily news evidence that civilization boundaries are hardening rather than dissolving.

This study contributes to the ongoing debate among social scientists about the nature of the relationships between nations and citizens of nations in the twenty-first century in general and between the West and the Arab Muslim East in particular. Rather than investigating the issue from the perspective of transnationals in the West or Western influences in non-Western locales, I look at the complexities of transnational and global cultures through a study of individuals who have come from there (the East) to here (the West) and gone back again. Return migrants are a special category of transnationals who grow up and live in the geographic West or in Westernized expatriate zones in other parts of the world and, for a variety of reasons, go back to their country of origin in the Arab and Muslim world. After their arrival, they become part of a minority group of "foreign nationals" who may look like and share last names with the locals but whose life trajectory abroad means that they lack cultural and linguistic competencies.¹² Employing ethnographic description and analysis, I focus on a group of thirty returnee youths who are actively engaged in creating their young-adult identities by navigating contradictory stereotypes about the East and the West in their daily lives.

Stereotypes organize and simplify complex social realities. They do so by inventing and assigning specific values to groups of peoples who are defined by their religion, ethnicity, or nationality. When speaking about the East or the West, people are not simply engaging in a geography lesson; they also are making value judgments. They assign each civilization sphere values such as liberal or radical, moral or immoral,

pure or impure. Westernized return migrants to Arab countries (where they are often called *muta'amrikeen* or "Americanized") find themselves embodying both Western and Eastern stereotypes. They passively suffer as targets of stereotypes and also actively create and use them. Although stereotyping reifies boundaries of identity, leading to social and cultural maps that position "us" against "them," the shared practices of stereotyping can also become a means to critique the very boundaries that they establish. If stereotyping occurs in the context of humor and play, the practice of rendering communities fundamentally "other" can become a practice of social self-critique, as well as an acknowledgment that we keep living in a world of boundaries but can actively work on crossing them.

A Brief History of Lebanese Migration and Post-Civil War Return

The history of the Lebanese diaspora has been thoroughly documented.¹³ It is estimated that currently between 16 and 20 million people of Lebanese descent live outside of Lebanon and about 3 to 4 million Lebanese reside inside the country.¹⁴ Accurate numbers for the different waves of immigrants are difficult to come by since migrants did not necessarily register their departure from Lebanon, and the government was incapable of tracking population movements during times of civil war or unrest.¹⁵ Even more difficult to ascertain are precise figures for Lebanese return migrants. Although historians of Lebanese migration have found evidence for a consistent flow of return migration back to Lebanon (one author estimated that 45 percent of the emigrants who left Lebanon for the United States between 1870 and 1920 eventually returned, and another surmised that in the year 1908, a time of economic recession in the United States, 8,725 of 9,199 Lebanese migrants returned to their homeland),¹⁶ numbers of contemporary migration flows are difficult to come by.

It is estimated that 800,000 Lebanese left Lebanon during the 1975 to 1990 civil war, a time of protracted conflict that killed 144,000, wounded 184,000, displaced 100,000, and saddled the Lebanese economy with \$18 billion in infrastructure and revenue damage.¹⁷ It is unclear how many of those who fled the country returned in the early 1990s, but some of those who returned became prominently involved in the country's reconstruction process. At times, the entire family reset-

bled in Lebanon; at other times, mothers returned with their children while the fathers kept working abroad; and in a few instances, children returned alone to live with extended family while both parents remained abroad to work. The decision to split up the family was never an easy one but was driven by economic realities (available job opportunities) and personal concerns (parents wanted to ensure that their children “became Lebanese”). After many years spent in international schools as members of the expatriate communities in the Gulf countries, West Africa, Latin America, Europe, or the United States, these children spoke English fluently and had befriended other international students. Even if the families had visited Lebanon for short periods of time during summer vacations, the young people had only limited knowledge of the country. Their parents’ decision to return came as a surprise to most, and none had been consulted in the matter.

Despite the visible damage caused by the civil war in most parts of the country, public discussions of “the events” (as locals call the war) were assiduously avoided.¹⁸ According to Lebanese sociologist Samir Khalaf, Lebanese society displayed throughout the 1990s signs of collective amnesia.¹⁹ The public silence regarding “the events” prevented any public accountability for perpetrators of war crimes, a price that Lebanon’s political elites were willing to pay to move beyond the civil war.²⁰ Taboo topics included the sectarian characteristics of the war and the distrust and hatred that it had generated among members of certain religious communities toward others.²¹ When they returned to Lebanon to reconnect with their roots, the members of the Lebanese diaspora entered a complicated moral space that contained both celebrated traditions of their communities and also the legacy and specter of sectarian violence. While politicians passed amnesty legislation for militia leaders and Lebanese adults told stories of Lebanon’s happier prewar past or postwar future, young people circumvented the prescribed silences in the space of teenage culture.²² In unsupervised spaces in their school, they commented freely on topics related to the civil war, international politics, global pop culture, and the latest fashions.

Returnees Transcend the East-West Divide

Most of the thirty-five teenagers that I was able to interview during my fieldwork in Beirut in 1997 and 1998 remember a time of anger and tears when they were asked to leave their friends and familiar surroundings to go “home” to a place that they barely knew. But it was a place

where people knew them because of the social geography that places each family in Lebanon in a region or even village of origin. By telling people a last name, returnee Lebanese had an immediate place. The question “*Beit meen?*” (Whose house/family to you belong to?) is part of the Lebanese getting-to-know-you ritual. In a conversation with a person whom returnee teenagers had never met before, they might be told that this stranger knew their cousin, had gone to university with their paternal aunt, or had recently visited the returnee student’s village of origin. Also, “*Beit meen?*” often answered the question “Are you Christian or Muslim?” The students told me that they found this social placing via naming disconcerting because other people seemed to infer a lot of information about them after learning their name. But at the same time, they found it comforting because people knew them, which made them feel that they belonged.

This moment of simultaneous discomfort and comfort begs further analysis. The discomfort stemmed from the judgments that people seemed to make after they found out someone’s family and sect, and the comfort came from being recognized as a member of a community in the place that they called “home.” In this way, the cultural zone of the East contained values that generated feelings of both belonging and misrecognition. As the returnees settled into their new routines and enrolled in schools that offered foreign curricula (since most of them did not have the linguistic skills that would be necessary to complete national student exams in Arabic), they found that Lebanese configured the West (and their local American school) by a set of opposing values—lack of morals and open-mindedness. Rather than dividing up the world into two cultural zones, the students faced values that could be expressed in a four-field matrix:

Fields of Representation	East	West
Positive values	Pure, moral, profamily	Open-minded, tolerant
Negative values	Sectarian (<i>mu‘a‘ad</i>)	Impure, immoral, antifamily

Each of the four fields of representation is a space of stereotype. The values do not describe actual individuals of Western or Eastern origin, but they create a powerful moral map through which behaviors of individuals are defined and judged.²³

The young people I met in post-civil war Lebanon did not live on one side or the other of the East and West divide but lived in both spaces

at once. They articulated the East as metaphor for purity and traditional family values, while the West stood for moral corruption and family disintegration. But at the same time, the West was equated with open-mindedness, and the East was equated with sectarian parochialism or being *mu'a'ad* (complicated, complex, troubled). As “foreign Lebanese,” they inhabited all four quadrants of this imaginary East and West geography, balancing their sense of self among accusations of corruption, praise for open-mindedness, a desire to protect family name and family values, and a feeling of *mu'a'ad* because of the demands their families placed on them. In this way, this group of Lebanese returnees exhibited a particular kind of double consciousness. The term *double consciousness* describes an attribute of minority or diasporic individuals who look at themselves “through the eyes of others,” measuring their sense of identity and self-worth “by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”²⁴ Lebanese returnee youth saw themselves through the eyes of others (relatives, friends, foreigners), but they also looked right back at those who looked at them, using the same kinds of stereotypes and values that supposedly defined them.

Mapping Lebanon’s Educational System

Throughout Lebanon’s history, most students have attended private schools.²⁵ In 1993, Lebanon’s French-language newspaper *L’Orient le jour* reported that of the country’s 750,000 school children, 495,000 (66 percent) went to private schools and that 380,000 of those went to private schools that required the payment of tuition fees.²⁶ The private schools were either foreign-language schools or religiously affiliated. The latter resulted in a de facto segregated student body where children of Christian families went to Christian schools and Muslims went to Muslim schools, although individual parents could and certainly did send their children to any private school of their choice and within their financial means. Even before the civil war, Lebanon had a higher proportion of private-school students than public-school students, but the trend grew after the civil war. When I became a teacher at a Lebanese private school in 1997, I was not at the educational margins of Lebanon’s educational system. My school was different because it charged high fees, which made it unaffordable for most Lebanese. Moreover, it catered to members of the Lebanese diaspora regardless of their reli-

gious affiliation, and therefore it was a space of encounter of “the other.”

The American Community School (ACS) of Beirut was founded in 1905 to educate the sons and daughters of Americans in Lebanon, but the school’s mission changed during and after the civil war. There were no Americans at the school when I worked there as part-time history teacher in academic year 1997–98. The principal was Mrs. Catherine Bashshur. She was an American married to a Lebanese and was clear about her desire to educate Lebanese students. She told me that although the name of the school was American Community School, the emphasis was on *Community* rather than *American*. She had instituted public-service hours as a graduation requirement, something unheard of in other Lebanese public or private schools. Moreover, Mrs. Bashshur explained that the school was American insofar as it was not French. The French colonial legacy manifests itself in Lebanon’s current parliamentary system and its centralized educational system. Staunchly opposed to the French pedagogy that emphasizes memorization, Mrs. Bashshur emphasized that her teachers used creative teaching methods.²⁷ In other words, ACS considered itself very much a Lebanese school, serving its diverse returnee population.

Are You Really Lebanese?

One day during my first teaching cycle in my world history class at the American Community School, I brought to class Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden” (Great Britain, 1899) and excerpts from Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart* (Nigeria, 1958). The class objective that day was for students to formulate a definition of *imperialism*. We made a list of the objectionable motives of a colonizer’s mission, such as religious conversion, economic exploitation, and divide-and-conquer power plays.

Then Mona noted that Europeans also brought education to their colonies, which was a good thing. Raising her voice a bit, she said, “Look at us. What are we doing here? We are sitting in an American school.”

Fuad jumped half out of his seat and turned toward Mona across the aisle: “We are here to get a *good education*. That is way different than being colonized. We are *not* influenced that way.”

Rashad fired at Fuad, “Look at yourself. Look at your clothes and

how you talk. And you tell me that you are not a little American. We don't fit in."

Dress code didn't mean a thing, Fuad contended: "What do you mean, we don't fit it? We all have cell phones, and we wear the same clothes that everybody else is wearing." He was emphatic that he was not partly American and that everyone knew that he hated American politics.

But Rashad was vehement that foreign education made students accept the foreign culture unquestionably: "Just look at all these fast-food chains that opened up in the past years." Rashad had written an article in the school newspaper about the closing of a traditional Lebanese restaurant and the opening of a TGIF franchise restaurant in its place. In the article, he accused his fellow students of being prime agents in the demise of the traditional, something that earned him much criticism from his friends, who claimed that they did not eat there.

Mira said, "You mean, if you go eat *falafel*, you are Lebanese, but if you go to Hardee's, you are not?"

Dina added, "And what about my mom? She *loves* sushi. Does that make her Japanese?" Everyone started laughing.

Hala threw in, with her usual hint at sarcasm, "But if you want to be *truly* Lebanese, you have to speak French, and we don't speak French!"

This spirited exchange continued, and although I had a hard time moving the students back to the subject of British colonialism, they had unwittingly articulated the conflicts that are central to their returnee identities. This type of class discussion replayed itself several times during the school year, and it indicated that (1) the "real Lebanese" was an elusive concept that was difficult to define and (2) despite its elusiveness, returnee youth defined themselves and longed to be seen as Lebanese.

The status of returnee Lebanese was something that the students were self-conscious about. They defended their "foreign Lebanese" status by pointing out all the ways in which they looked and behaved just like the more "authentic" Lebanese. Fuad made his claim to belong by pointing out that he wore the same clothes and used the same cell phone as his local peers and that, like them, he hated American politics. Speaking English was not a disqualifying point because those who claimed to be "authentic" spoke French, which was also a European language. To be Lebanese meant to be bilingual. As for food, it was clear that students did not derive a sense of identity from eating differ-

ent national foods. As another student told me in a subsequent food discussion, having access to all the different kinds of foods from all over the world was precisely Lebanese: they were open to all options and did not limit themselves to one kind of cuisine. His mother made sure to serve lasagna, sushi, Caesar salad, as well as traditional lentil and rice dishes for Ramadan dinners. This is how you knew you were at a Lebanese *iftar*. Their animated participation in this class discussion signaled that these students were ready to defend their own claims to Lebanese-ness. These returnees wanted to fit in. They knew about their privileged economic status, but they minimized their differences compared with other Lebanese by stating that they might buy a nicer brand of cell phone or shoes but that everyone else bought nice cell phones and shoes and all Lebanese knew how to find a good bargain.

As became clear as the year went on, the students' defensiveness was partly caused by the widespread stereotype that ACS's high-school students were spoiled, unruly, and given to assorted "American vices" (such as drugs, alcohol, and sex). One ACS student took up this theme in a satirical essay that was published in the quarterly school newspaper, *Aléf Bé*.²⁸

For decades, we the people of ACS have endured the most derogatory, most painfully degrading descriptions from all four corners of this superficial gossip-propelled city. We have been called drug dealers, alcoholics, Satanists, whores, ballet dancers. . . . We like to think of ourselves as open-minded in our fine institution and that we accept and support any student regardless of their personal hobbies and beliefs. So applying our firm philosophy, the school has established an after-school Satanist cult, whose members are recognized by wearing little horns and paper tails. As you can see, we can take a joke. When we are constantly harassed with questions about our school like "Are there really homosexuals?" or "Do you really smoke in class?," you learn to deal with it.

The article was accompanied by two photographs—one that showed students smoking and holding empty liquor bottles and the other that showed students in passionate embrace in front of the ACS logo at the school's entrance. Using hyperboles of deviance, the author glossed ACS students as morally impure compared to the purportedly more pure Lebanese students (who "did not smoke" or "were not homosexual")

and by doing so implied that for both sets of students these categories were exaggerations. The author of the article described himself as impure but prided himself and ACS on being open-minded. These two sets of dichotomies—the pure and impure set and the close-minded and open-minded set—mapped moral spaces within which the students continuously positioned themselves in many of our discussions during the year. Being considered “foreign Lebanese,” they were automatically implicated as being corrupt and impure, regardless of their actual behavior.

Although it is standard cultural practice to draw arbitrary boundaries to distinguish inside from outside, clean from impure, or sacred from profane and to organize rituals and practices that define a community, it is usually considered a binary practice.²⁹ But what made the pure versus impure an intriguing pair is that to be pure also meant being close-minded and to be impure meant being open-minded. The immoral West was embodied in metaphors (like whore, Satanist, or alcoholic) that violated local rules of sexual and religious propriety. But by juxtaposing the local (morally dubious) practice of gossip and exaggeration with the imputed Western vices, ACS students showed themselves to be tolerant and open-minded toward other Lebanese who were biased and intolerant. The student drew attention to the outrageousness of the stereotyping and thereby successfully critiqued its practice.

After reading this article out loud in class one day, I asked my students about opinions that they held about the West, and they immediately fired back with answers such as “They think they are better than everyone else,” “Nobody takes care of their family,” “Young people do whatever they want,” or “Everyone at age thirteen does you know what.” When I started smiling at this volley of responses, the students paused and then started laughing. They realized that they held the same stereotypes that they felt so defensive about when others applied them to ACS students. When they were the target of other people’s gossip, they deconstructed stereotypes, but otherwise they were happy to help construct them because that allowed them to formulate their own claims to Lebaneseness: they were close to their families, they did not do whatever they wanted, and they did not do you know what (although they might spend a good deal of their time talking about it). The constructions of moral superiority dissolved when coupled with humor, caricature, or joking.

Western morals were suspect, but Lebanese had their own dubious values that regulated the relations between the sexes. In a different

school paper article entitled “Babe and Hunk of the Month”(itself a parody of a column in the student newspaper at the neighboring American University of Beirut), the high-school students made fun of stereotypical Lebanese mate preferences: girls looked for a Lebanese *jagal* (an Arabic word derived from the Italian *gigolo*) who drove a Mercedes 500SL, had enough cash to buy presents, was manly but neither smart nor interesting, and was at least the age of their fathers, and boys looked for a girl who could handle all the options of her cellular phone, liked fast cars, and was at least twenty years younger than they were.³⁰ In this article and subsequent joking conversations, the students created a commentary on what they considered to be superficial, image-driven local dating practices. Through the use of hyperbole and exaggeration, the returnee students claimed that the relationship norms of the supposedly morally pure East lacked values and depth.³¹

The student writers used stereotypical images of the United States (satanists and drug addicts) and Lebanon (*jagals* and superficial young women) and then dissolved these images through humor, placing themselves at both sides of the divide. They joked about Lebanese dating practices by photographing themselves as the proverbial hunk or babe in the same way that they represented themselves as drinking and kissing in public. By resorting to hyperbole and turning imputed behaviors into jokes, the students embodied and performed the West and the East and the value judgments that accompanied them. They displayed their knowledge of local norms, *and* they claimed that they were open-minded. The students joked about the popular representation of themselves as dissolute Westerners at the same time that they depicted the Lebanese as shallow gossip-mongers. The joking permitted these foreign Lebanese to draw stereotypical images of Western culture and Lebanese culture and to position themselves within and against them. They thereby showed that they had mastered different cultural registers and that they embraced humor as a means for dealing with their discomfort with the stereotypes they faced.

Acting Out Local Divides of Sectarianism

Although the East and West divide featured prominently in the lives of these young returnees, another set of boundaries was equally, if not more, significant—the sectarian differences between Lebanon’s many

religious communities. Sectarianism has been with the Lebanese since the Ottoman empire, and it is supported by a political system that allocates seats in parliament according to quotas for members of different religious communities.³² It needs to be understood as relating to religious and cultural differences as well as experiences and practices. According to one student who had lived through the last years of the civil war, his parents never taught him what religion he belonged to, but he found out at a checkpoint when soldiers demanded to know his identity before they would let him pass. Checkpoints were known areas for kidnappings and also for killings.³³ Against this backdrop of danger, threats, and possible violations, postwar sentiments about sectarian identity became a sensitive issue.

During my stay in Beirut in the late 1990s, adults avoided talking about sectarian differences, answering my inquiries with “*Khalasna min al-harb*” (We are done with the war) before they changed the topic. Despite or possibly because of the sensitive nature of sectarianism, young people wanted to break the silence and talk about it. One Muslim student explained—in great detail and with much emotion in his voice—how as a child he had learned about being different from his Christian neighbor:

I remember me and my neighbors—we were doing fireworks one day. You know, fireworks. In the U.S. they are *so* illegal, you were not allowed to use them if you were not of a certain age. And here I was barely ten years old, and my neighbor—he was a couple of years younger than me—he used to take me downstairs, and we would fire fireworks and firecrackers any time of year but particularly during the holidays.

So while we lived in our temporary house when we got here first, we were downstairs playing, and there was this one kid named Raymond. I liked him a lot because me and him, we would have all these great ideas—like taking an empty tube and going to a construction site to do our fireworks. We used to have so much fun.

One day me and my neighbor are going back up the elevator at eight o’clock, which was our curfew, and I said, “That was fun, and Raymond is such a nice guy.”

And my neighbor said, “But he is Christian [*Bas hue mesihi*].”

And in my head, I was like, “What???” And I asked, “What is that supposed to mean? [*Shu biassir?*]”

And he just replied, “Oh, no, there is no difference, no difference. *Bas*, he is Christian.”

And I replied, “But I like him [*Ana bhibbu*].”

And he said, “I like him, too [*Ana kamaan, bhibbu kteer*].

And I remember how I walked back home, and my parents were watching TV. And I wasn’t watching. I was thinking, “What did he mean by that?”

This marking of a person as a sectarian “other,” which this student had experienced eight years prior to the interview at the tender age of ten, had left a deep impression on him. The casualness with which his young friend and neighbor had uttered the “*Bas hue mesihi*” made it particularly unsettling to this returnee student, who was new to the country. The quickly added assertions “But I like him” and “I like him, too” signaled the need to brush away the momentary discomfort that arose when the religious difference between the two friends and Raymond was established.

This labeling practice—with students and adults mentioning the sectarian affiliation of a person, followed right away by “But now that doesn’t matter anymore” or “But we are really good friends”—was one that I witnessed repeatedly. The Lebanese created sectarian difference and then erased it emphatically, making claims to a common sociality. The returnee students at school learned the practice from their local peers as well as their elders. This form of naming difference was an extension of Lebanese greeting practices, discussed earlier, whereby Lebanese can assign a person’s religion with a high degree of certainty after they learn a person’s first and last names. Sometimes, last names elicited stories about marital scandals or the financial mismanagement of a member of such-and-such family, and other times they led to exclamations of approval that such-and-such family had an excellent reputation. This aspect of passing judgment on a family based on the actions of individual members was what students described to me as backward or troubling. It created a ranked social world that was maintained by the local practice of gossiping (*kalām al-nās*), which assigned value to Lebanese individuals as part of their family or religious group.³⁴

At ACS, where students from all backgrounds mingled, the declaration of otherness came up in discussions of dating or marriage. Many young people befriended each other in the classrooms, agreed that they should not marry each other if they belonged to different religious

groups, and said that they disliked this backward and close-minded thinking. When I asked them why they supported something that they disapproved of, different students at different times told me stories that they had heard from their parents or local peers. The story line followed this template:

There was this woman (of my religion) who married this guy (of another religion), and they were happy at the beginning because both agreed that religion shouldn't matter much if two people just love each other. But twenty years later, he changed and decided that religion did matter to him, so he forced her to wear a veil/stay at home/not go visit her family/not practice her faith.

I call these stories *injured-ancestor stories*, and they create fear of members of other religions because of the *potential future abuse* that might occur in a marital relationship.³⁵ The stories are told very matter-of-factly. Students spoke of the ugly monster of sectarian intolerance that supposedly lurked inside any cross-sectarian love marriage. The threat of turning backward or close-minded in the future should make the most open-minded couple today think twice about their marital choices.³⁶ Injured-ancestor stories of this kind form part of Lebanese common sense, and they are not questioned. Lebanese couples undoubtedly have had unhappy cross-sectarian marriages as well as unhappy same-sectarian marriages, but everyone talks about the cross-sectarian case because it fulfills “the truth” that everyone knew all along, while same-sectarian marriage troubles are usually kept quiet and negotiated among close family members. Via stories of this kind, young people learn that the sectarian community that they belong to does matter in their important life decisions as adults.

The discomfort created by the “commonsense” notion of irreconcilable sectarian differences in marriage was translated into another high-school newspaper commentary. A group of juniors created a photoromance story between a girl named Phatty-ma and a boy named Jean the Jagal. In the photographs, one ACS student played Jean wearing in designer clothes and standing in front of a fancy car. He is ditched by Phatty-ma because he is an “Ericsson man” and she is a “Nokia girl.” A third person appears in the story, a boy named Chip, who lives in the Phatty-ma’s village and whose mother is Phatty-ma’s paternal aunt. Chip uses the right kind of cell phone. In the end, Nokia boy marries

Nokia girl.³⁷ The three classmates who posed for the photos came from three different sectarian backgrounds, which enhanced the critique of sectarian sameness as guarantor of marital happiness. By making fun of young people's dress code and cell-phone obsessions while simultaneously critiquing the logic of same-sectarian marriages, the students again commented on local practices yet put themselves, literally and figuratively, at the center of the joke.³⁸

The message that people should marry someone from their own cultural group was accompanied by a vague understanding of what made each group distinct and different. The Lebanese parents that I spoke to shied away from the topic of sectarianism and emphasized that the religious differences did not and should not matter. As a result of the adult silences, I had an unusually attentive audience in my Middle East history class when we began the sequence about the emergence of distinct branches of Islam. Most of the students had never heard of the controversies around the succession of the Prophet and the reasons that the Islamic community split up into Sunni or Shi'ite Islam, nor had they heard of the rivalries between the Roman Catholic papacy in Rome and the Greek Orthodox patriarchate in Constantinople.

The students were thoroughly engaged in the class discussion and were reluctant to leave the classroom after the bell, which was a rare occurrence. They shared in class how little they knew about their religions. Some had received some private tutoring at home to learn the standard prayers or basic tenets of their faith, some attended church on the holidays, but the majority of ACS students did not consider themselves practicing Muslims or Christians. Most of them arrived in Lebanon knowing very little about sectarianism. They were mostly puzzled by the communal differences that they encountered. For them, it did not make sense to split religion into many branches when there was only one God, nor did it make sense that Maronites made the sign of the cross one way, Orthodox Christians made it in another way, and Shi'ites performed their prayers differently than Sunnis did. It was clear that this was not simply a question of difference. The students asked why Maronites were so "paranoid" about the Muslims and why Sunnis thought that they were "better Muslims" than the Shi'ites. Why was everybody suspicious of the Druze? The students knew that local cultural differences resulted in social ranking order, that members of each community ranked other religions differently, and that each one believed that they were worshipping God in the correct way.

The West Side Druze Connection Meets *Mesihi* Power

The differences in religious practices created a series of jokes that students kept far away from adult supervision in the student-only senior room because they knew that the jokes would get them in trouble. Teachers were not allowed into this common room on the first floor of the high-school building, so I did not witness the students' actions firsthand. But because I was a foreign teacher, I was taken into confidence at the end of the school year, and I was able to collect taped narratives of the events that had transpired in the senior room.³⁹

The students who participated in a particularly insightful and potentially inciting parody of religious communities in Lebanon included Maher, Sawsan, and Firas. Maher was the class joker in my history class who, like Sawsan, had attended an international school in Saudi Arabia for several years. Sawsan was one of my best students and earned good grades without having to try very hard. Despite her obvious academic talents, she told me early on that she had no specific ambitions or goals in life, since there was nothing in Lebanon that she wanted to do as a career and, besides, she was expected to get married. Firas was a struggling student, a returnee from Colombia who, unlike most of his classmates, lived with extended family while his immediate family was still in Latin America. They shared their stories willingly, alternating between laughing out loud and stifling laughs of embarrassment.

I began the conversation with an explanation about my research project into how young Lebanese grow up after a civil war. I wanted to know how young people from different communities related to each other and how they got along. I asked them to share any story from their high-school experiences at ACS. The three students looked at each other for a moment. Then Maher laughed and said,

Maher: Miss, *please* put this in, it will be so amazing, it will be great!

Sawsan (interrupting, chuckling): No way, it is so lame!

M: It'll be so cool!

S: Let me tell you . . .

M (interrupting): No, *I* am the originator . . .

Firas (to Sawsan): No, let Maher talk . . .

Maher started the narrative, as if he was dictating it to me:

M: First of all, it's called the WSDC—[repeating very slowly] W . . . S
. . . D . . . C.

Maher and Sawsan started laughing, and after a few seconds, Maher continued:

M: At the beginning of twelfth grade, I got into all this rap. I really was into it. . . . So I was with the West Side. You know: Tupac and those rappers—the West Side, you know. And then at the middle or end of the year, it all became something religious. . . . You know, *jokingly*, of course. [At this point, he looked at me very seriously.]

Maher went on to explain that the WSDC stood for West Side Druze Connection, a group name that the Druze students chose for themselves because of its reference to a conflict between two rappers. California-based rap artist Tupac Shakur was killed in 1996. He had been in competition with East Coast rap artist Notorious B.I.G., who was killed six months later in 1997. The two singers and their record studios, Death Row Records and Bad Boy Records, fought for years over who was playing the most authentic rap—who was more “down,” more grassroots, more black.⁴⁰ “It’s all about the West Side” or “It’s all about the East Side” became part of the rap lyrics and the vocabulary of their respective fans. When both artists were killed by still unknown assailants, the newspapers declared them victims of the West Side, East Side “war,” and other rap artists began to call for a “truce.”⁴¹

In 1998 Beirut, Maher and a group of his friends thought that “they had a connection with the West Side,” as a fourth student, Samer, explained to me at a subsequent interview, where I tried to verify the story that I had heard from Maher, Sawsan, and Firas. Samer noted that not all students participated in this parody of sectarian difference but that there was much laughing and a sense of complicity in the events that unfolded, underscored by the fact that everything was kept from the teachers. Samer confirmed Maher’s version of the jokes’ beginnings (here recorded in Maher’s words):

M: So I was like sitting down [in the senior room] one day, and I’m like, “The West Side,” whatever. I was thinking like, groups, so we made up groups. . . . I made up the WSDC, the West Side

Druze Connection. So we went, and for every Druze guy, we wrote on their locker WSDC . . .

S: . . . and then they wrote all this stuff on the doors and walls, and everyone, “What the hell is this WSDC?”

M: It was so cool. People really caught on! And then the Christians, they were like, “We need a group,” so they made up MP, *Mesihi* Power [*Mesihi* is Arabic for “Christian”]. There was one for Muslims. Ali tried something Shi‘a. It lasted for two seconds. . . . But it didn’t really work, so it was just WSDC and MP.

During the civil war, a “line of confrontation” divided the capital Beirut into two zones that were controlled by different militias. Journalists referred to the two zones as Christian East Beirut and Muslim West Beirut. Throughout the years of fighting, a population transfer occurred in which Christians moved from their Western neighborhoods to the East and Muslims to the West to avoid road blocks of opposing militias stationed all along the front line. *East* became the umbrella term for various Christian militias, many of whom fought for what they considered Muslim encroachment on their power, and *West* became a metaphor for the Muslim opposition to the Christian status quo.⁴²

In creating the West Side Druze Connection and *Mesihi* Power, the students superimposed American rap singers’ conflict over authenticity (West Side rap and East Side rap) onto the map of the Lebanese civil war. Using the vocabulary of popular culture, the students commented on their own country’s sectarian conflicts over who was most authentically Lebanese or whose vision of and for Lebanon was the most authentic. Just as Tupac and Notorious B.I.G. showed disrespect for each other in their songs, the students made fun of each other’s religious practices. In our conversation, the students distanced themselves from the disrespectful practices that they were about to tell me, underlining the sensitivity of the topic:

M: First of all, *I* never said any of this.

S: No, *H* would make the jokes, *A* would . . .

Lucia: I am not interested in specific names.

M: Well, first of all, they would make fun of the Druze.⁴³ . . . Like, all they know is the Druze star, the *khamse alwaan* [Arabic for “five colors” in reference to the Druze symbol, a five-colored, five-

pronged star].⁴⁴ And they would call us the “United Colors of Benneton.” . . . Then they made fun of the Muslims—you know, how they walk around the Kaba⁴⁵—so they (A and them) would put this box down on the ground in the senior room and do this dance around it . . .

[Sawsan and Firas laughed with embarrassment.]

M: . . . and you know how at *Ashura*⁴⁶ the Shi‘ites, they started hitting themselves, so they started hitting each other. . . . And for the Christians—oh, this is bad, and I didn’t *do* this—

[Sawsan and Firas laugh, revealing that they disagree with Maher’s claim.]

M (looking at Sawsan and Firas): I would never have *thought* of this, ok? [He looks at me.] You know how in church, they put this bread in your mouth? [He is reluctant to go on.]

F: And so they’d take chips, like those Lebanese Fantasia [a brand name] chips, they’d go and give them to each person, you know . . .

S [interrupting]: Those guys had nothing to do . . .

M: So we made all these jokes about—There’d be offensive jokes about—

S: *Everything!*”

During this conversation, the students repeatedly reassured me that they were only joking. Looking at Lebanese sectarian differences through the lens of the conflict between two American rappers distanced the offenders from the target of their jokes. Using the global language of rap to create sectarian Lebanese factions, these teenagers showed their cultural knowledge of both worlds. The principal promoter of the West Side, East Side scenario was a class joker who often disrupted class in creative ways that made even the teachers laugh. Maher’s personality guaranteed that the offensiveness of the joking never escalated to confrontation because nobody took his jokes too seriously. But the students’ embarrassed laughter and reluctance to continue with the story made it clear that “dissing” religious practices walked a fine line between joking and offending. To distance themselves from the acts of transgression, they shifted blame to other students who had danced around a makeshift Kaba or handed out fake Eucharist wafers. They ad-

mitted that they knew the jokes were offensive, and they made sure to keep them away from adult eyes and ears. Although not every student participated in making fun of religious rituals, I found out in subsequent interviews with other students that most of them had found the parodies humorous.

By taking on sacred symbols and questioning their meanings—handing out chips as pseudo-Communion wafers, dancing around a box in the senior room, mimicking *Ashura* rituals, and casting the Druze star as an icon of the fashion industry—the students thereby questioned the religions themselves. At the same time, the students proudly pointed out that they maintained their respect for each other and their cross-sectarian friendships. Although the sectarian joking was offensive, Maher kept insisting that it was all in good fun. He said that students would “diss” each other one minute, hug each other the next, and walk off to class together and that the parodies never led to real fights. His interpretation was confirmed by Sawsan, who said that “the groups were only *there* when they were joking! It wasn’t like we’d meet after school to fight.” The most important proof for their open-mindedness about sectarian difference was Maher’s comparison of their own school with other Lebanese private schools:

M: Anyway, . . . it was cool ’cause our group—It wasn’t all Druze. It had Muslims, Christians, everything, you know. . . . Some people were calling us narrow-minded, but it was quite the opposite. We were joking about this stuff because we are so *open-minded* [Maher’s emphasis]. . . . Like in other schools, they would take this stuff seriously! There are some people who only have Muslim friends, and if you said anything about Muslims, they would—honestly, they would have a fight. . . . And we were just like joking around.

I cannot confirm Maher’s claim that students at other schools would fight over negative comments about their sectarian affiliation, but it is another example of opposing moral spaces—the purported open-mindedness and tolerance of the people at ACS (even in situations that cross the line of mutual respect) versus the intolerance of “other Lebanese” who fight to defend their religious symbols from any offense. Maher’s claim that the WSDC contained students of different religious affiliations also indicates that the students performed their disrespect of the other religions. They mimicked and critiqued the practice of forming

sectarian gangs during the civil war, and in contrast to that history, they proudly showed that they were able to transcend sectarian hatred and distrust.

Conclusions

By looking at the behavior and attitudes of Lebanese returnee teenagers, it is possible to show that stereotypes of a liberal, impure West and a narrow-minded, moral East exist and that those stereotypes create cultural fields through which young people who are “from here and from there” define themselves. The Lebanese students who participated in my study employed stereotypes in practices of everyday (school) lives, engendering cultural practices that both reinforced and undermined those same stereotypes. The resulting joking practices were not hybrid; they relied on hyperboles that exaggerated existing differences rather than melting them into a harmonious new form. At the same time, the genres of the joke, satire, or parody and the accompanying (embarrassed) laughter ensured that the “dissing” of sacred symbols and religious rituals did not lead to “rage.” Rather than calling my Lebanese students travelers across a humorscape or residents of a Fourth Space, I invite readers to observe the ways in which scholars and other pundits create East and West divides in the literature and to learn from Lebanese teenagers a lesson about subversion.

For the returnee teenagers at the American Community School in Beirut, the dichotomy of East versus West was both a reality and a metaphor. They had lived in expatriate communities and had attended international schools. Most of them spoke English better than Lebanese Arabic. But East versus West was also a metaphor for the geography of Lebanon’s civil war, as well as a metaphor for opposing value judgments. In the four-box matrix above, the label “Fields of Representation” describes two sets of values—(1) Eastern purity, morality, and profamily traditions versus Western impurity, immorality, and antifamily customs and (2) Eastern sectarianism versus Western open-mindedness and tolerance. These are discursive fields that young people traverse rather than human essentials or absolutes. The Lebanese teenagers who I interacted with used humor as a way of coping with contradictory moral mandates and societal pressures. They traded in stereotypes and yet also managed to cross their boundaries.

The Lebanese experience may have relevance for other families

who are living in diaspora and parents who are considering taking their children “back home,” especially if there are moving from the West to the East. Migrants of Arab descent have experienced increasing harassment and discrimination living in diaspora after September 11, 2001.⁴⁷ In the current climate of fear, members of many other diasporas who reside in North America or Europe face difficult decisions about where they want to raise their children. If they decide to return, they bring with them their professional skills and education, but they also bring Westernized ideas, often embodied in their children, who might encounter disapproval at “home.” In Lebanon, I also heard residents express resentment that their relatives had abandoned the country during its civil war and that they had selfishly focused on their education and career in the safety of a foreign country while those who remained had suffered hardships and losses. Lebanese returnees resented their local family members for their expectations of financial assistance while stereotyping and disdaining them. Lebanese returnee youth are placed in this complicated “home” environment where they are faced with multiple, contradictory stereotypes. Some, as I show, are able to engage them creatively and self-consciously amid feelings of discomfort or amusement, while others might not be able or willing to turn stereotypes into jokes.

Additional studies that address these pervasive practices of stereotyping are needed. There are challenges to studying practices of stereotyping because public admissions of stereotyping others do not reflect well on the research participants or their communities. Anthropological research methods, which allow an outsider to build relationships of trust with members of a community over time, are well suited for such a project, but they make it difficult to generate large samples for comparative analysis. To start an informed dialogue about how, when, and why individuals resort to stereotyping to make sense of the social realities around them, it is necessary to analyze issues such as the fear and resentment that people experience when confronted with members of other communities. In the context of a postwar society, these feelings might raise difficult issues for individuals. But given that stereotypes will be with us for a while, how do we explain that some can turn into jokes, while others lead to deadly fights? What kinds of social, economic, and political factors enable people to grow up with an openness to getting to know the “other” *despite* existing stereotypes?

Hidden humor can be an important tool for addressing issues of stereotyping, yet more needs to be done to find ways that topics that lead to discomfort can be spoken out loud. Addressing differences that are ethnoreligious is particularly difficult since these differences arise from

beliefs that certain truths are divine. At this time of this study, most Lebanese adults avoided the topic of sectarian differences. Their teenage children broke the adult silences of postwar Lebanon through semipublic (school newspaper articles) and private (senior room) joking. Students knew that their behavior might be viewed by some as offensive, but they felt proud that they could talk and laugh about sectarian sensitivities. They showed that, at least in their secondary school environment, it was possible to maintain sectarian difference and still get along.

Notes

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1. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

2. Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1999); Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001).

3. See Nina Glick-Schiller et al., eds., *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered* (New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1992), or Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

4. See Michael Kearney, “The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 547–65; Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,” in *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, ed. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 33–51.

5. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), chapters 2 and 3.

6. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier, eds., *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005).

7. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 38.

8. *Ibid.* (italics in original).

9. Robert Block, “How Big Mac Was Able to Refrain from Becoming a Serb Arch-enemy,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 3, 1999. For additional examples, see James L. Watson, ed., *Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). How the Internet can be compatible with Islam is shown in Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

10. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 29.

11. *Ibid.*, 8–9, 37–38. The worldwide public protests over the recent publication of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper can be considered a sequel to

the Salman Rushdie affair. An example of Hindu “rage” against McDonald’s violation of religious dietary rules can be found in Nirmala George, “Hindu Group Vandalizes McDonald’s,” Associated Press, April 5, 2001, http://www.mcspotlight.org/media/press/mcdfs/associated_press040501.html (accessed September 24, 2007).

12. In the most comprehensive anthropological returnee study that I know of, Japanese Brazilians who return to Japan encounter such anti-immigrant hostility from the local population that they develop a strong Brazilian nationalist identity as a result. Takeyuki Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Jeffrey Lesser, ed., *Searching for Home Abroad: Japanese Brazilians and Transnationalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

13. See Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi, eds., *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (London: Tauris, 1992). According to this study, the Lebanese emigrated in four main waves. The first lasted from the seventeenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century and involved a “limited numbers of Syrians and Lebanese who went to Egypt and the main centers of trade between Europe and the Near East—Livorno, Marseille, Manchester.” The second phase lasted from the mid-nineteenth century until the early twentieth century, and it saw the “more or less unlimited emigration to the countries of North and South America.” The third phase began after World War I when the United States began to limit its immigrant quotas in 1924. In response, Lebanese began to settle in West African colonies under British and French colonial rule. The fourth wave (the one that concerns us here) began in the 1960s, when the oil economies of the Gulf began to draw skilled labor from neighboring Arab countries. The outbreak of Lebanon’s civil war in 1975 increased this exodus significantly.

14. David Munir Nabti, “Family Remittances Vital in Lebanese Economy,” *Daily Star*, July 20, 2004, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=24&article_id=6437 (accessed February 6, 2006).

15. Kohei Hashimoto, “Lebanese Population Movement 1920–1939: Towards a Study,” in *The Lebanese in the World*, ed. Hourani and Shehadi, 71.

16. Akram F. Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 110; Hashimoto, “Lebanese Population Movement,” 66, respectively. Before 1920, there was no national entity called “Lebanon,” and the migrants were listed as “Syrian.” Yet their names and places of birth appeared on their migration papers, which permitted scholars to place the migrants in what would become Lebanon.

17. Augustus Richard Norton and Jillian Schwedler, “Swiss Soldiers, Ta’if Clocks, and Early Elections: Toward a Happy Ending?,” in *Peace for Lebanon? From War to Reconstruction*, ed. Deirdre Collings (Boulder: Rienner, 1994), 64; Nicholas Blanford, *Killing Mr. Lebanon: The Assassination of Rafik Hariri and Its Impact on the Middle East* (London: Tauris, 2006), 41.

18. Sune Haugbolle, “Public and Private Memory of the Lebanese Civil War,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 25-1 (2005): 191–203. While pointing out the official silences, Haugbolle argues that the private sphere generated a diverse array of memories through art, graffiti, films, and so on.

19. Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 305.

20. One significant exception from the rule of silence that was enabled by Lebanon’s amnesty law was the February 2000 public confession and apology of one of the commanders of the Lebanese forces militia, Asad Shaftari. See Charles M. Sennott, “Apology of Lebanese Figure Breaks Silence of Civil War,” *Boston Globe*, February 27, 2000, A1, A6.

21. I count as sectarian violence both the violence between members of different religious communities and also the violence among members of the same religious community over leadership of that particular community. Some of the most destructive civil

war violence occurred after the signing of the Ta'if Accords in 1989 between the forces of two Christian leaders—General Michael Aoun and Samir Geagea.

22. Lucia Volk, "Missing the Nation: Lebanon's Post-War Generation in the Midst of Reconstruction," PhD Thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 2001.

23. I borrow the notion of value orientation as a basis for self-making from Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989). Taylor's argument is that to have an identity, a person needs an orientation to—and I would add, away from—the good. He treats the orientation in moral space similar to orientation in physical space. By extrapolation, I define the East versus West discourses that I encountered in Lebanon as moral fields that structure the teenage experience of growing up.

24. W. E. B. Du Bois, as quoted in Samir Dayal, "Diaspora and Double Consciousness," *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 29-1 (1996): 46–62. The article sums up and analyzes the main arguments in Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

25. Volk, "Missing the Nation," 12–16.

26. "Les écoles privées absorbent 66% de l'ensemble des élèves," *L'Orient le jour*, September 13, 1993.

27. A comparison of the perceptions of Francophile Lebanese and Americanized Lebanese and the cultural spaces they inhabit (French Lebanon and American Lebanon) still needs to be written. In Lebanon, the West comes in two permutations due to French colonial history and current American hegemony. This article focuses on the latter.

28. See "ACS Students: The Last Laugh Is Ours," *Aléf Bé* 7-4 (1997): 4.

29. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

30. See "Da Wack," *Aléf Bé* 8-3 (1998): 5.

31. This self-critique of Lebanese practices is not limited to returnee Lebanese. I have heard many resident Lebanese make fun of the supposed Lebanese "ideal match."

32. Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

33. One of the results of the civil war was to remove the religious affiliation from Lebanese identity papers. This did not entirely solve the problem since first names such as Omar, Hassan, or Charbal still indicate a person's religious affiliation—Sunni, Shi'a, and Maronite, respectively. Another result of the war has been that some families give their children names that do not indicate a clear sectarian affiliation, such as Fouad, Samer, or Saeed.

34. For an extended ethnographic description and discussion of the workings of *kalām al-nās* in other parts of the Arab world, see Unni Wikan, *Tomorrow, God Willing: Self-Made Destinies in Cairo* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), or Anne Meneley, *Tournaments of Value: Sociability and Hierarchy in a Yemeni Town* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

35. I coined the term *injured ancestor* based on the figure of the "defiant ancestor" in Martha Balshem, *Cancer in the Community: Class and Medical Authority* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1993), 80–82. In her case, the paradigmatic "defiant ancestor"—an older person in the neighborhood who smoked all his or her life, ate fatty foods, did not exercise, and lived to be over a hundred—is used to explain why members in a community with a high cancer rate do not follow doctor's orders. It is not important to know this "ancestor" personally, but the image of a community member who defies medical authorities becomes the explanation for people's personal (medical) choices.

36. In the majority of stories that I was told, the husband turned religious, which supposedly trapped the woman in a veil, at home, or away from her family. One time, the

story was reversed, and a woman turned religious. She donned a veil and prayed continuously, which was said to have ruined the marital relationship.

37. See “Da Wack,” *Aléf Bé* 8-4 (1998): 8.

38. Cross-sectarian marriages are increasingly common in Lebanon, but because of the absence of civil marriage in Lebanon, couples need to travel abroad, most often to Cyprus, to get married and then file for recognition of their marital status back in Lebanon. The institution of civil marriage is publicly debated with regularity, but same-sectarian marriage has remained the “ideal” because it shows that you know your roots and traditions.

39. My most comprehensive interview transcript dates from a discussion with three students in the living room of my apartment. I subsequently corroborated this interview by talking with five more students.

40. Tim Brennan, “Off the Gangsta Tip: A Rap Appreciation, of Forgetting about Los Angeles,” *Critical Inquiry* 20-4 (1994): 663–93.

41. Michel Marriott, “At a Ceremony for Shakur, Appeals for Peace,” *New York Times*, September 23, 1996, B3; Esther Iverem, “East vs. West: ‘Gangsta’ Rap’s War of Words,” *Washington Post*, March 10, 1997.

42. East and West had their designated armed forces during the civil war, but the south of Lebanon has come to signify Shi‘ite Muslim resistance against Israel. For its part, Lebanon’s north emerged as a conflict zone in 2007, when a radical Islamist group in a Palestinian refugee camp was pitted against the Lebanese army. Lebanon is therefore a country that can boast of a sectarian mapping of violence onto all four cardinal points of its national geography.

43. The Druze constitute about seven percent of Lebanon’s population. Their version of Islam is not recognized by the majority of Muslims, and they have faced much discrimination throughout their thousand-year history. The Druze identification with African American rap culture can therefore be read within the frame of response to the oppression of mainstream culture. For more in-depth information on the Druze, consult Robert Benton Betts, *The Druze* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).

44. The Druze students told me that they did not know what the colors stood for exactly. Some had heard that they stood for five prophets but were not exactly sure which ones. Others said it stood for “five intelligences” but could only name three—wisdom, strength, and loyalty. The confusion among these young people is at least in part due to the fact that only a small group of initiated members of the faith know the full belief system of the Druze. See Betts, *The Druze*.

45. The Kaba is a rectangular structure in the center of Mecca’s main mosque that is the destination of millions of annual Muslim pilgrims who walk around it seven times as part of their pilgrimage ritual.

46. *Ashura* literally means “ten days,” a period during which Shi‘ite Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Hussayn, the son of the fourth Caliph, Imam Ali, in 680 CE in Karbala, Iraq. On the tenth day of this religious holiday, some predominantly Shi‘ite towns (like the southern town of Nabatiye) organize an all-male procession through the streets during which men hit their chests and heads with chains and use razor blades to cut their foreheads. Most Sunnis and many Shi‘ites consider the practice of self-flagellation un-Islamic. For a recent discussion of the controversies surrounding the Ashura ritual, see Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi‘i Lebanon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), chapter 4.

47. See Wayne Baker, Sally Howell, Amaney Jamal, Ann Chih Lin, Andrew Shryock, Ron Stockton, and Mark Tessler, *Preliminary Findings from the Detroit Arab American Study (DAAS)* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004); Louise Cainkar, “The Impact of the September 11 Attacks on Arab and Muslim Communities in the United States,” in *The Maze of Fear: Security and Migration after 9/11*, ed. John Tirman (New York: New Press, 2004), 215–39.

