



# Visions of Beirut

---

*The Urban Life of  
Media Infrastructure*

Hatim El-Hibri

# **Visions of Beirut**



# Visions of Beirut



*The Urban Life of Media Infrastructure*

Hatim El-Hibri



Duke University Press

Durham and London

2021

© 2021 Duke University Press

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by Drew Sisk

Typeset in Portrait Text by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: El-Hibri, Hatim, [date] author.

Title: Visions of Beirut : the urban life of media infrastructure / Hatim El-Hibri.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020042291 (print) | LCCN 2020042292 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478010449 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781478010777 (paperback)

ISBN 9781478013020 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Mass media—Social aspects—Lebanon—Beirut. | Mass media—Political aspects—Lebanon—Beirut. | Mass media and culture—Lebanon—Beirut. | Beirut (Lebanon)—In mass media.

Classification: LCC DS89.B4 E43 2021 (print) | LCC DS89.B4 (ebook) |

DDC 956.92/5043—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020042291>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020042292>

Cover art: Pan American Airlines map (detail), 1960s, exact date unknown. Photo courtesy of Belal Hibri (2010). Illustration by Drew Sisk.



---

## CONTENTS

---

Note on Translation and Transliteration   vii

Acknowledgments   ix

Introduction   i

1   *The Social Life of Maps of Beirut*   21

2   *Images of Before/After in the Economy of Postwar Construction*   64

3   *Concealment, Liveness, and Al Manar TV*   105

4   *The Open Secret of Concealment at the Mleeta Museum*   144

Conclusion   178

Notes   183

References   217

Index   247

*This page intentionally left blank*

---

## NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

---

Arabic terms have been translated and transliterated using a simplified version of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* conventions. For Arabic names and place-names, I have followed the most common English transliterations.





*This page intentionally left blank*

---

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

If it is true that books are never really finished, you just stop working on them, then it must also be true that you never really start writing a book: you are given countless gifts of kindness and intellectual generosity, which you eventually turn into words on a page. I have to first thank my mentors at NYU—I couldn't have asked for a better guide than Marita Sturken, a giver of incisive feedback on the most versions of this book of anyone. Helga Tawil-Souri demonstrated what it is to be a colleague and mentor, which made her insights and humor all the richer. Ella Shohat remains a deep inspiration, and an example of an interlocutor in the form of doing close readings. I am also grateful to Brett Gary, who first suggested the idea to pursue a doctorate. In my time at the department of Media, Culture, and Communication, I had innumerable conversations with Nick Mirzoeff, Arvind Rajagopal, Arjun Appadurai, and Allen Feldman, whose comments shaped the formative stages of this project. I was also fortunate to be in the company of Naomi Angel, Jamie Berthe, Song Chong, Travis Hall, Marissa Kantor-Dennis, Kari Hensley, Sarah Stonbely, Nadja Millner-Larsen, Kate Brideau, Kouross Esmaeli, Tamara Kneese, Elizabeth Patton, Carlin Wing, Robert Wosnitzer, and Jacob Gaboury. Scott Selberg and Wazhmah Osman were and are a solid rock and a safe harbor.

May Farah's comradeship has spanned the gap from graduate school to my first job at the American University of Beirut. I was fortunate enough to work closely with Nabil Dajani, Greg Burris, and

Sara Mourad in the media studies program there. My colleagues in the department were all exemplary, especially George Azar, Habib Battah, Nora Boustany, Sari Hanafi, Anaheed Al-Hardan, Rima Majed, Toni Oyry, Sylvain Perdigon, Nadya Sbaiti, Livia Wick, and Maysaa Kobrosly. I am also grateful to the patient listening and incisive feedback on this project at transformative stages from Adam Waterman, Anjali Nath, Samhita Sunya, Lisa Hajjar, Ira Allen, Omar Dewachi, Sami Khatib, and Patrick McGreevy. Kirsten Scheid's friendship, guidance, and deep understanding of Lebanon were of tremendous help; she was also kind enough to give permission for the use her photos. Additional thanks are owed to the welcoming space of the Center for Art and Humanities Mellon Faculty Fellowship, and to Reem Joudi and Rami Deeb for their work as research assistants.

Since I came to George Mason, Jessica Scarlata's mentorship, friendship, and encouragement have been tremendous. I am also grateful to Amal Amireh, Johanna Brockman, Tamara Harvey, Jessica Hurley, Yasemin Ipek, Alex Monea, and Stefan Wheelock. Libby Anker, Matthew Scherer, Bas-sam Haddad, and Noura Erakat have gone above and beyond as friends and interlocutors.

Marita Sturken, Helga Tawil-Souri, and Jessica Scarlata read a complete draft of the manuscript, which was greatly improved because of their comments. The feedback of the two anonymous reviewers was generative, and they have my thanks. I couldn't have asked for a wiser or more generous editor than Courtney Berger. She and Sandra Korn have been the best kind of colleagues, and their efforts directly improved this book.

In the fall of 2019 I had the privilege of being a visiting faculty fellow at the Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, where I finished revising this manuscript. I am very grateful to Marwan Kraidy, Marina Krikorian, and Clovis Bergère for all of their companionship and support. I also owe special thanks to Padma Chirumamilla, Giang Nguyen-Thu, Ergin Bulut, Fernanda Rosa, and Stanislav Budnitsky for all the inspirational conversation.

There are many people to whom I spoke about this project who have requested anonymity but to whom I am grateful, and I owe thanks to more friends and fellow travelers than the names that appear here. Bassile Khoury's good humor and careful management of the cartothèque at IFPO were a tremendous help, as were the staff of Assafir's archival collection. Mona Fawaz shared her deep knowledge and insight at crucial junctures. I am grateful for numerous conversations with Omar Al Ghazzi, Michael Allan, Narges Bajoghli, Hiba Bou Akar, Paula Chakravartty, Sabine El Chamaa, Rayya El Zein,

Ghenwa Hayek, Yasmine Khayat, Kristine Khouri, Niko Kosmatopoulos, Peter Limbrick, Munira Lokhandwala, Laura Marks, Fouad Marei, Heather O'Brien, Lisa Parks, Tarik Sabry, Deen Sharp, and Nadia Yaqub. Leena Akhtar, Karron Karr, Jerry Salame, and Andy Tank have each been the most incredible friends. The Arab Image Foundation came through with a last-minute digitization request. I owe special thanks to Tarek El-Ariss for his unflagging support, camaraderie, and guidance over many years. Belal Hibri shared in the trials of this project in all its different stages, and took many of the photos that appear in the pages that follow.

My deepest debts are to three people. My parents, whose exceptional support and encouragement are an entire lifetime of thanks. Most of all Tania, whose fierce intellect, patience, and love had maybe the deepest impact of all.

Any errors and flaws remain my own.

*This page intentionally left blank*

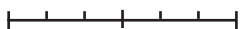
---

## INTRODUCTION

---

Media start us in the middle of things. In this way, they are not unlike events—large and small, personal and political—that assert themselves through the everyday. By the time we are aware that something is an event, it tends to already be in motion, to have accumulated a momentum whose directionality has only just become perceptible. When I visited Beirut late in December 2006, I was already aware of the sit-in demonstration organized by Hizbullah, the Lebanese political party and militia. The group had emerged in the 1980s during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90), at the nexus of Shi’ite social movements that predated the start of the conflict, and with backing from post-revolutionary Iran. Hizbullah had fought a war with Israel in the summer of that year, which the party termed a “Divine Victory.” They denounced the standing government, organized by an opposing political bloc affiliated with Western and Saudi interests, as not representing the true interests of all Lebanese. The call for protests came soon after. When I visited the sit-in demonstration that resulted, it had been ongoing for the better part of three weeks, and had effectively shut down large portions of the historic city center, and also the site of Parliament. The area had been badly damaged during the Civil War, and in the early 1990s was placed into the hands of a private company for development.

The atmosphere that prevailed that night was a stark contrast with what the heavily policed space was typically like—oriented



exclusively to high-end shopping, luxury apartments, banks, and government offices, and empty when compared to other parts of the city. Major thoroughfares were closed, people smoked hookahs in parking lots converted to gathering spaces, and informational booths set up by the party and its allies had been established in Martyrs' Square, a large open space that was an important historical site of protests seeking a national stage (as it had been just a year earlier). Street vendors—ordinarily not allowed in the neighborhood—sold street food, party-branded memorabilia, coffee, and cotton candy from carts and impromptu stalls. While taking in the disruption to the typical order of things, I soon noticed another modification to the space. The demonstration's organizers had set up large screens near the Parliament building and at Martyrs' Square (where there was also a stage for nightly performances), onto which was projected Al Manar, the television channel affiliated with Hizbullah. What was striking about these screens was that on more than one occasion, what appeared both on screen and in the space was live coverage of the demonstration *at* the demonstration. I was eventually able to figure out where the on-scene and on-screen reporter was by walking around and glancing at the screen while keeping a lookout for the lights of the camera crew.

The circularity of such an image was part of what initially stood out, because of the novelty of seeing the *mise-en-abyme* created on location, particularly as it was a spectacle of public disruption harnessed to the agenda of a major political party. The demonstration, operating in this key in its initial weeks, capitalized on perhaps the most made-for-spectacle part of the city. It occupied a square that had been both city center and protest center since the late Ottoman era, albeit in the incarnation taken by postwar neoliberal construction with all its nostalgia for the French colonial style. This experience left me with questions that have led to this book. What history of images in and of the city might contextualize this event? What role have images played in attempts to manage, shape, and contest the spaces of Beirut? If the visual vectors of that night drew attention to the act of looking itself, how might these specificities offer a perspective on how media condition urban space and everyday life? What is the context in which these images, and media infrastructural conditions, make sense? This book grapples with these questions so as to investigate contemporary visual culture, and the role of infrastructure in shaping how that public and that space were brought into being. It gives an account of shifting topologies of power, and of contingent techniques and infrastructural alignments as they congeal in Beirut's radius.



## Infrastructure, Incompleteness, and Mediation

Our ability to grapple with the political stakes of infrastructure depends on a precise understanding of its spatial and temporal qualities. This is in turn a question of the entanglement of urban space with the images that animate it. The opening paragraph of Edward Said's *Orientalism* discusses commentary by a French journalist about the damage done to downtown Beirut in the first years of the Civil War. Said shows how this expression of regret reflected an outsized fascination for the East, which in turn produced a very particular kind of disappointment in the place itself.<sup>1</sup> Such imaginaries clearly continue into the contemporary moment. Yet alongside this cultural register, there is a less examined media history of techniques of visualization in support of endeavors such as urban planning, real-estate investment, and military surveillance. The history of the space of the city—fundamentally bound up in the politics of the creation of its geographic outside and periphery—is also historically intertwined with the media infrastructures that circulate such images. Considering the uneven and contested nature of visual culture from Beirut allows a productive perspective on the politics of the circulation of images. It may often be that infrastructure is defined by its overlooked place in everyday life—not noticed within our daily rhythms and media habits because of its continuous, smooth functioning. The aesthetic experience of infrastructure may encourage a common-sense view of it as a finished and distinct thing, or even a sublime totality. But in places like Lebanon—as it is in many parts of the Global South<sup>2</sup>—the everyday is itself defined not by whether water and electrical cuts may hypothetically happen, but by how predictable those cuts become.

There is an incompleteness intrinsic to infrastructure, a spatiotemporality that requires maintenance sometimes beginning before construction is even completed, and which perhaps by definition is always ongoing. Embarking on infrastructural projects can have a certain evidentiary utility for elites who wish to perform development—wherein the completion of public works is secondary to the exchanging of money and favors.<sup>3</sup> Yet infrastructure would seem to be defined by its essential incompleteness—not simply in the sense that roads also crumble in wealthy neighborhoods or the metropole, or that life persists unevenly in imperial and neoliberal ruination. The study of infrastructure from the perspective of maintenance and repair has allowed for a sense of the politics of its temporal duration, and of modifications that take place within its path dependencies.<sup>4</sup> This incompleteness can be mobilized toward ends that are sometimes less obvious and more politically ambiguous.

A similar perspective emerges if we trace the spatiotemporal relations of mediation itself—or, as I explore in chapter 3, the relationship of multiple, conflicting visual vectors allows an eventful understanding of visual culture. If infrastructure is the relation between things—which is itself something like a definition of mediation—then many kinds of mediation are also incomplete. To investigate mediation means to consider the verb form of media, or, those processes that media do. Considering mediation in Beirut brings the incompleteness of infrastructure to the foreground. The contradictions of incompleteness appear there in ways that can be dramatic, mundane, or mundane in their drama.

Mediation is not simply circulation in the way that walking or driving are—although mobility and technology have been intertwined since long before GPS. The study of media infrastructure gains a great deal from the insight that the term *communication* used to include transportation in its ambit, attending to the particular forms that mobilities take.<sup>5</sup> Not all kinds of mediation are about movement in space, even if it is defined by a differential relation between mobility and circulation. If infrastructure is a system, it is one that is greater than the sum of its machines, in that it implies a set of relations that are an ongoing process of dispossession, accumulation, and contestation. Attending to incompleteness does not mean all is free-flowing contingency and contestability, just as Stuart Hall once argued that the political has no guarantees.<sup>6</sup>

Infrastructure is an elastic concept, gathering numerous and sometimes quite disparate things together. Some approaches to infrastructure emphasize the forging and remaking of the terms of citizenship, as people only partially served by the state negotiate rights that are not automatically granted. Other approaches stress the sensory formations and aesthetic experience of infrastructure—or at least, those parts that people experience either directly or indirectly. The study of infrastructure, of which the study of media infrastructure is one kind, has grown rapidly in the past decade. Parks and Starosielski (2015) highlight what the study of media gains by attending to infrastructure, or even more interestingly, by adopting an *infrastructural disposition*.<sup>7</sup> They argue for a critical approach premised on a relational understanding of the political economic and social formation of media industries and technologies.<sup>8</sup> Larkin's (2013) examination of the relationship of anthropological study and infrastructure draws attention to its world-making politics (or techno-politics, if one wishes). He offers a useful working definition:

Infrastructures are matter that enable the movement of other matter. Their peculiar ontology lies in the facts that they are things and also the relation between things . . . what distinguishes infrastructures from technologies is that they create grounds on which other objects operate, and when they do so they operate as systems. (B. Larkin 2013, 239)

The stakes for the study of infrastructure, here, are in the modes of relation they create—a useful starting point from which to consider mediation. As Peters (2015) would have it, an infrastructural understanding of media directs one less to the history of specific devices than to the sociotechnical relations that constitute the conditions of possibility of human community. Peters proposes a daring conception of media—not so much as environments but as elemental processes, opening our understanding of human communication to a wilder set of potentialities. Debates in anthropology and geography link the politics of infrastructure to the transformation of everyday life in urban contexts, and to the conditioning of the senses and movement.<sup>9</sup> Rather than distinct disciplinary boundaries, these approaches are better understood as having a shared scholarly inheritance, traceable to the modernist (or Marxist) concern to understand a world set in motion. Critical study of infrastructure can not simply ask what is materially below the surface of culture and everyday life, but should offer insight into the spatial processes of power.

The politics of the contestability of infrastructure—the sovereignties, relations, and modes of circulation that it enables—are better understood when we center incompleteness. Rather than infrastructure as a thing or thing-like assemblage, the politics of mediation require attending to the specific nature of the systems infrastructure is made to embody. The state of continuous breakdown of power, water, road, internet, waste, and even broadcast infrastructure in Lebanon lend themselves to understanding the rhythms of incompleteness. The frustrating and debilitating experience of infrastructural incompleteness and failure can make completeness seem like the sweetest of dreams, or a sign of investment in the conditions of possibility for collective life.<sup>10</sup> In Lebanon, access to even the most basic necessities (much less those social services ordinarily the province of the liberal welfare state) is for many a function of their proximity to political parties and leaders, divided by sectarian affiliation in its neoliberal incarnation. Even harsher precarities come into view if one considers the differentials of citizenship in Lebanon from the perspective of how they affect foreign domestic workers and Syrian refugees, whose labor has been a cornerstone of the Lebanese postwar economy.<sup>11</sup>

## An Infrastructural Approach to Visual Culture

Rather than trace a single line of determination—as when culture is thought to be the emanation of institutions or sociotechnical systems—I take an infrastructural approach to visual culture, which also brings into question those modalities that purposefully go unseen. To develop a critical approach adequate to Beirut requires attending to the particularities on the ground, but also contending with the narrative frameworks that position visibility in modernity. W. J. T. Mitchell (2002) once called for an analytical move from the “social construction of the visual” to the “visual construction of the social,” a move he later clarified requires a departure from the essentialism and ocular-centrism of the notion of “visual media.”<sup>12</sup> This insight explicates that looking is a kind of social and cultural practice, and is as informed by ideas and debates about what it means to see or present the self (as in portraiture) as any other.<sup>13</sup> To draw out the co-implication of visual culture and media infrastructure requires an analytical shift—from close readings of images, texts, and devices refigured by disciplinary inquiry to also considering visual relations themselves. As Mirzoeff (2011) has demonstrated, for as long as systems of domination structure ways of seeing the world, there will be a need to invent new and reactivate old ways of seeing each other that affirm other possible communities, equalities, and intimacies.

Mirzoeff draws on Rancière’s conception of the political, which juxtaposes the consensus view of the social imagined by the powerful with a radical break from an existing order, created when those who have no part begin to enact equality within conditions of inequality. Rancière (1999) contends that a true rupture from a political order is not simply the aggrieved or disenfranchised articulating demands for inclusion and visibility, but a fundamental contestation of the terms under which community is constituted—what he calls the distribution of the sensible.<sup>14</sup> The understanding of dissensus implied here is not simply an antagonism of competing worldviews, or a simple bid for recognition, but a rejection of the inequality implied by the public ordering of who may speak and how they should do so in order to be sensible.<sup>15</sup> To dominant historical configurations, dissensus appears as disordered movement, unruly bodies, or just rebellious noise.<sup>16</sup> Against the oversight of the slave overseer, the imperial cartographer, and the counterinsurgent, there is the actuality and possibility of countervisuality, which is to say, the claiming of “a right to look” against the political order and for equality. Against liberalism’s promise of inclusion and recognition, or notions of politics as a settling of accounts, this conception opens up the possibility

of a decolonial rejection of the foundational violence that inequality presumes and visually reenacts.<sup>17</sup>

Thinking of visual culture in this vein makes attention to infrastructure and incompleteness much more valuable. It makes it possible to reconsider ways of being overlooked by overseers. Most critical vocabularies of visibility and invisibility are attuned to the politics of not being seen or being made seeable, or the ethics of witnessing. Much of the media of everyday life oscillate between spectacle, mundane and ambient sensory experience, and corporate and state surveillance. These familiar forms can lead one to misrecognize what I refer to as modalities of concealment. A state of concealment can be said to exist when a tactic (or more commonly, a combination of tactics) deliberately keeps a person or place from appearing to an opposing force. It isn't the camouflage but the visual modality of the camouflaged vis-à-vis the verticality of the drone.<sup>18</sup> To conceal is to attempt to remain unseen or undetected, or to keep secrets selective. Concealment is both an infrastructural modality and a relatively noncommunicative relation that can be said to exist when these tactics function according to plan. In some conditions, concealment of its material form can even enable the functioning of infrastructure itself. It is not (primarily) a feature of a text amenable to hermeneutical approaches, but the mode of mediation of an undisclosed underground communications bunker. It isn't the visual mode that results from the collective occupation of Tahrir Square and the training of cameraphones and global news agencies on it in the Arab Uprising, but rather, when protestors would on occasion run and hide from the police down side streets so as to gain spatial advantage. It is also just as easily utilized by the powerful and the state as by the freedom fighter and dissident.

To push the concept of dissensus a step further, one might say that its supposedly sudden appearance (to a police order) is a sign that somewhere else, unseen or ignored, there are ways of communicating and moving that remain undetected or unregistered. To understand these modalities, consider two different historical examinations of the systematization of light in modernity. Browne (2015) interrogates how lantern laws in colonial-era New York City enabled the surveillance of black, indigenous, and mixed-race bodies by requiring any such people over fourteen years of age to carry a light if outside after sunset. This enforced visibility at night, which as Browne shows was of a piece with the codification and documentation of the right to travel, was part of the racial surveillance of urban mobility.<sup>19</sup> In the city that became the heart of twentieth-century empire and an important northern node in the making of racial capitalism, there appears an attempt to make people shine a light on themselves so as to aid in their subjugation. Browne explains how this in turn

led to the development of social worlds that crossed boundaries of class, gender, and race, and between both the free and enslaved, forging community under the surveillant gaze and in the daytime: an adaptation to the legal provision for harsh corporal punishments for those caught without a light at night.

A related development was the systematization of street lighting. As Schivelbusch (1995) shows, the installation of street lighting in European cities was an inextricable part of the creation of modern urban policing. The pre-industrial urban night was darker not simply in degree but in kind, and Schivelbusch shows how the creation of street lighting—like the electrical grids that came after—was part of a reconfiguration of the relationship of modern states and citizens. Rather than self-identification in the form of a handheld light (a requirement in many European cities in the early modern period), the illumination of the street displaced the act of self-identification and surveilling others to the state. Before streetlights became systematically implemented and bright enough to fill the urban landscape, one person could extinguish their lantern so as to gain the tactical advantage of comparative darkness.<sup>20</sup> Schivelbusch suggests a rather direct relation between the installation of the infrastructure of public lighting and the monopolization of coercion and policing by the state. The initial outcome was that when the streets got brighter, it became both very symbolic and practical to smash lanterns.<sup>21</sup>

These two examples each open modern systems of light to differential relations to power. If, in the first example (Browne), the visual culture of a racialized urban space is regulated by individual self-identification, in the second example (Schivelbusch) the urban space as a whole is transformed to be more readily watchable. These examples each resound with the incompleteness of infrastructure and the (im)mobility it fosters. These examples can also be taken as evidence of the importance of remaining hidden to the politics of urban space. Electricity and electrification in Lebanon and Arab countries of course have their own uneven history.<sup>22</sup> Yet while lanterns can be said to cast light, they are also different from phenomena like live television and its promise to see at a distance. They are also unlike the broadcast of the Hizbullah protest at the protest in that, rather than a contestation of and regulation by light, Al Manar (which can be translated as “the beacon” or “the flame”) exemplifies the degree of influence that the party has in Lebanon, even as its broadcasts are in no small way part of a contestation of a global visual culture that it frequently describes itself as contesting. Rather than an interruption of or defection from the capitalist order, or a subversion of televised spectacle—what Wark (2013) describes as the “disintegrated spectacle”<sup>23</sup>—the Hizbullah sit-in demonstration constituted a much more mundane demand for a bigger

part of a system of rule it is basically compatible with. If we consider the visual relations of the event—the patterning of modes of attention, the assertion of collective experience, the performance of making political claims to space—it is also the forging of spatial linkage at multiple scales (in the city, during the national and regional nightly news hour, for a variety of transnational audiences). However, when Hizbullah's Secretary General Hasan Nasrallah gives speeches of this type in the era after the 2006 war, he only rarely appears at the location of the event in person and never with advance warning, out of reasonable concerns for security. The infrastructure of live satellite broadcasting can enable and depend on a kind of hiddenness while on air.

Although concealment is not the same thing as Rancière's conception of dissensus, the two do have some similarities at a certain level of abstraction: both imply a potentially open-ended, noncommunicative antagonism, and both emphasize that the police order of the social is already a way of overlooking those kept in place.<sup>24</sup> They also both have an ambiguous tactical relation to recognition as a goal unto itself. The refusal of the politics of recognition is one whose utility has been discussed in indigenous critique.<sup>25</sup> In some situations, being overlooked employs a queer aesthetic opacity that defers or refuses recognizability on normative terms.<sup>26</sup> Concealment should not be equated with any one technique, as this would mistake the action for the visual tension or broader field that it is in tension with—sort of like mistaking the technology for the outcome. Concealment is better understood as a mode of mediation—one defined by historically and materially specific confluences of agentive action and infrastructural formation. Concealment is also something other than “opacity” and its relationship to the ethics of “transparency”—which has not always been a self-evidently desirable political relation (transparency of the self to itself, to the state, to society, or of the state to society).<sup>27</sup> In the contemporary moment, concealment and attitudes toward those who seek to remain concealed are in tension with a historically specific configuration of individual privacy, state secrecy, and techniques of targeting. Public demands for state transparency dovetail with communication infrastructures that are both leaky and (almost) always on.<sup>28</sup>

While the forms of concealment investigated here are primarily those of infrastructure and not of subjectivity per se, the two are linked. This book's primary focus on the visual field is not a suggestion that concealment is essentially visual, and study of its sonic history would surely deepen our understanding of it. Concealment is a phenomenon that requires critical attention not because of an inherently emancipatory potential, although it does undermine an easy faith in the power of posting truth to power. As I explore in



chapters 3 and 4, concealment structures the visual formations of Hizbullah's guerrilla tactics in both war and protest, and has an ambiguous politics in itself. Hizbullah's mobilizations usefully demonstrate the overlooked presence of concealment's relation to media infrastructure.

The concept of the distribution of the sensible suggests that the part who have no part have always spoken out even if they remain policed, and specifies enacting equality in the here and now, not in the yet to come. Yet the state of affairs in post-Civil War Lebanon is not only one of political polyphony (multiple actors who vie with, over, and against the government) but one fully articulated within geopolitical competition between regional and global powers. This is true at various levels—from the multiplicity of broadcast institutions associated with rival political parties and geopolitical blocs, to the “resistance” idiom that comes to characterize the manufactured bipolarity of the contemporary period.<sup>29</sup> Lebanon demands a refined conception of dissensus, so that the duality of intelligibility/unintelligibility, and the capitalist system that it is a part of, can grapple with situations in which multiple groups (and the political right in particular) adopt the language of opposition. All too often, it becomes possible to conflate partisan geopolitical disagreement with dissensus, and to mean “resistance,” with a positive normative connotation attached. Doing so potentially obscures the dynamics by which political actors may contest the distribution of the sensible on one level, but leave it untouched on another. As many people around the world long ago figured out, the enemy of my oppressor who is the enemy of equality is not inherently my friend.<sup>30</sup> Any political party that seeks to increase their share of a system that by definition generates inequality, and reduces politics to a game of elite or ethno-religious mutuality and competition, should be understood to already be a part of the problem. The political binaries expressed in the Hizbullah and Future-led blocs are preeminent examples of status quo politics papered over by the veneer of partisan bickering.

### **Lebanon, TV, Arab Media**

This book's chapters each interrogate the historical interrelation of a range of cultural forms with the politics of managing and shaping the spaces and people of Beirut. Much like its neighborhoods, charities, and legal systems, the political economic structure of Lebanese television is inseparable from the contradictions of sectarianism. Sectarianism is a political order in which parliamentary seats, key government posts, and personal status law are divided along ethno-religious lines. It is a crucial factor shaping the nature of

political contestation over the state, and a defining feature of the media landscape. Like other misfortunes of racial capitalism, sectarianism should always be that which needs explanation and never the explanatory framework, lest one mistake the transactions of power for inevitability. The distinctly modern messiness of forging sectarianism into a political framework is a process whose fundamental nonsense is continuously and periodically retooled and refinanced, covered over with blood and legal precedent, and discursively rearticulated to suit geopolitical reconfigurations of state and non-state actors. Sectarianism in Lebanon—particularly the organization of violence along ethno-religious lines—was a response to the awarding of rights and protections on the basis of group affiliation as part of the Ottoman *tanzimat*, or modernization plan.<sup>31</sup> Rather than an age-old story, it is one no older than the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Rather than a pre-modern phenomenon originating in theological dispute, it is specific to the form that secular political structures took, in this case, under pressure from European powers to protect the rights of Christians. The outcome was that battles for dominance and position proceeded at pace, and the consolidation of political power meant cutting new lines through communities on the basis of ethno-religious group belonging, culminating in a series of massacres of Maronites and Druze between 1858 and 1860.<sup>33</sup> Local elites, Ottoman reformers, and European notables initially struggled to make sense of the scale of violence inflicted on previously mixed neighborhoods and villages, resulting in the deployment of some 6,000 French troops in 1860 (one of the maps that resulted from this expedition is discussed in chapter 1). Beirut's rise to prominence can also be dated to this period, impacted by the arrival of those fleeing violence in the mountainside and the transformation of the region by its integration into new economic flows.<sup>34</sup>

The origins and contemporary formations of sectarianism bear a biopolitical logic, and it has always been a gendered and sexed form of subjectification and rule. As explored in the chapters that follow, this requires a feminist critique of the patriarchal order it depends on.<sup>35</sup> Infrastructure, examined here in terms of the processes of mediation and the normativity of shaping space, is one whose biopolitical horizon is akin to the erection of scaffolding—enabling, debilitating, and abandoning particular forms of life and interrelation.<sup>36</sup> Making sense of the biopolitical requires that one turn to a historically contingent understanding of governmental techniques, provocatively developed in Foucault's later work. As Collier argues, Foucault in the late 1970s stepped back from epochal and totalizing claims, a move away from a concern “with a single line of biopolitics that links diverse elements as if through a kind of inner functional coherence. Instead [Foucault] draws

a much clearer system of correlation, and provides a vocabulary for describing how . . . they are brought into a relationship, but remain heterogeneous” (2009, 90).<sup>37</sup> Rather than utilizing the same approaches as his earlier work, applied to an “age,” it becomes possible to engage in an analysis of what Collier dubs a “topology of power.” This reading allows for an empirical investigation of specific governmental forms, without a totalizing claim that reflects a very partial understanding of the colonial metropole. This reading also requires a step back from those conceptions of technology that imagine sovereign power as a quasi-theological, ultimately thanatological force—the Heideggerian technological inheritance that informs many conceptualizations of biopolitics.<sup>38</sup> Instead, one might consider how infrastructure is an incomplete process with biopolitical implications, which has always already been premised on the racial (or ethno-religious) structures of colonial modernity.<sup>39</sup> What this book gives is an historical account of the governmental logics of making space visible, and the intertwining of this process with the biopolitics of population management.

Sectarianism is a framework that is adaptable to regional and geopolitical adventurism, and divides such as the Muslim/Christian split that defined the Civil War can fall away when others gain momentum, such as the Sunni/Shi’ite split fanned by the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the ongoing conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Sectarianism is best understood as a mode of organizing social and political life, and one that is spatially and infrastructurally constituted. As Nucho (2016) argues:

Infrastructures are the channels through which the activity or process of sectarianism is produced in specific instances as opposed to other modes of differentiation. . . . Just as channels and infrastructures serve to create spaces of connection and conjoined action, they also serve to differentiate, subtract, or reroute people and things. (206, 5)

Rather than an immutable outcome, sectarianism is a process as incomplete as the temporality of infrastructure and the nature of urban life—and one reproduced through and by contingent formations of resource provision, the arrangement of neighborhoods, political access and protection, and the production and distribution of media.<sup>40</sup>

In most Arab and many postcolonial states, the history of television can often be told as a story that begins with strong state control of broadcasting institutions, which then face either a wave of privatization or challenge to their monopoly beginning somewhere in the 1980s. The emergence of distinctly transnational and neoliberal political economies in more recent decades has

led to new configurations of local and regional production and distribution, with national frameworks challenged or projected outward in new counter-flows.<sup>41</sup> Much like the state, broadcasting in Lebanon began in the colonial period and was run as a semi-private commercial endeavor prior to the Civil War, was coopted by militias during that conflict, and was then remade in the shape of a regional market with the emergence of satellite broadcasting in the 1990s. Unlike Egypt, for example, there is no strong Lebanese tradition of a developmental state producing programming in service of forging a national consciousness and educating a modern citizenry.<sup>42</sup> Radio began in the 1930s as an effort by French Mandate officials to counter the presence of Radio Berlin on the airwaves in Lebanon and Syria.<sup>43</sup> By comparison, British Mandate authorities granted radio a more central role in the administration of Palestine, where it created separate Hebrew- and Arabic-language services within listening distance.<sup>44</sup> Radio in Lebanon continued to be a field of contestation, between states in regional competition and among internal actors during periods of crisis—particularly in 1958, when militant factions started their own stations.<sup>45</sup> Given the proximity of nearby countries such as Syria and Egypt, it was possible for listeners in Lebanon to tune in to signals originating in nearby countries.<sup>46</sup>

Domestic television broadcasting began as a private endeavor with the granting of a non-monopoly license to two businessmen, with *La Compagnie Libanaise de Télévision* (CLT) beginning service in 1959. A second private station, *Télé-Orient*, was granted a license and began service in 1962, with additional backing by the US ABC network. In this regard, Lebanon was unique among Arab states in terms of its broadcast history prior to the Civil War, a condition that combined with a relative degree of press freedom—the 1962 press law granted official freedom of the press, but with ambiguous language around “endangering national security,” “insulting heads of state,” or “inciting sectarian unrest.”<sup>47</sup> These two stations would continue to broadcast after the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975, but would be combined to form *Télé-Liban* in 1977, under government control but with joint public-private ownership.<sup>48</sup>

The Lebanese state was only intermittently able to exert any degree of control over the airwaves during the fifteen years of the Civil War. The political fragmentation of the period meant that broadcasting primarily became the province of militias, and any with the means and desire to put out a signal did so. The availability of inexpensive, low-power solid-state radio transmitters (with relatively limited range) made it so the airwaves were populated by as many as 150 stations, oftentimes broadcasting on the same frequency.<sup>49</sup>

Television broadcasters proliferated, some of them operating on a commercial basis. As television required comparably more expensive equipment and a greater degree of technical sophistication, it primarily became the province of the better-funded militias. One of the best examples of these is the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC, affiliated with the Christian Lebanese Forces militia and formed with support from American televangelist Pat Robertson's CBN),<sup>50</sup> which began operation in 1985 and continues to define the Lebanese media landscape. The proliferation of illegal and militia broadcasters created an unusual ratio of channels per person, and a cadre of people with some degree of experience in the media and advertising industries. It also transformed the nature of the television-viewing public—one in which the nature of programming and the language spoken was premised on a more intimate appeal to audiences. LBC's mode of televisual address was premised on seeming closer and more relevant to contemporary audiences—less formal Arabic, and more appeals to the overlapping and gendered categories of consumer and citizen.<sup>51</sup>

The Taif Agreement, named for the Saudi town in which they were brokered in 1989, brought an official cessation to the armed hostilities of the Civil War, but reinforced the logic of sectarian politics. The agreement ordered all militias to disarm save for Hizbullah, which was granted official recognition as a resistance force aimed at ending the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. Taif also set the regulation of the broadcast spectrum as a key priority, as the crowded broadcast spectrum featured many overlapping signals.<sup>52</sup> This resulted in the 1994 Audio-Visual Media Law, which created the National Council of Audio-Visual Media and set out to reduce the number of terrestrial broadcasters by several orders of magnitude. This in turn led to a licensing war, the winners of which resulted in a pattern of ownership that reflected the clout of private interests, and perpetuated the logic of sectarian "balance." Future TV (owned by Hariri), NBN (then a prospective station owned by Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri), LBC, Murr TV (owned by the deputy prime minister), and Télé-Liban were the initial crop granted licenses. As Al Manar (which began transmission in 1991) was granted an exception, Télé Lumière (which mainly broadcasted Catholic religious programming), was also granted a license to avoid an imbalance of domestic "Muslim" channels. The scarcity of funds and underlying political irresolution led to a media system perpetually prone to crisis and in need of patronage.<sup>53</sup>

The end of the Lebanese Civil War roughly coincided with the end of the Cold War, and the advent of popular viewing of satellite television in the region—inaugurated by CNN's coverage of the first US war on Iraq.<sup>54</sup> The Arab

League had formed a consortium in 1976 with the aim of launching communication satellites, the first of which became operational in 1985. MBC (based in London, a key urban hub for Arab media) began free-to-air broadcasting in 1991.<sup>55</sup> As a consequence of signing a peace deal with Israel in the 1970s, Egypt was a late signatory to Arabsat, which allowed Saudi Arabia to become a dominant shareholder.<sup>56</sup> The coincidence of Saudi funds, a Lebanese television industry in flux, and a burgeoning Arab-speaking viewership accidentally created the conditions for an outsized role for Lebanese broadcasters in the new terrain of satellite television.<sup>57</sup> Despite the historic centrality of Egyptian film and music in Arab popular culture—which also constituted an important feature of Lebanese television content during the Civil War—Egyptian networks would never attain the same kind of prominence. An explosive growth of channels would follow, and with the satellite footprints of Eutelsat and Hotbird falling across the region, any overly simple description of the television landscape as “Arab” requires qualification.<sup>58</sup> Al Manar would branch out into satellite coverage in 1997, although as I examine in chapter 3, it would only ever have a tenuous grip on satellite bandwidth.<sup>59</sup> For example, it was booted off of Arabsat in 2016 for Hizbullah’s continued military support of the Assad regime. Although nominally independent from Hizbullah, the station has always been operated by senior party members, like the many other media organizations affiliated with and financed by the party. If the social experience of television reflects its uneven adoption across public and private spaces, then like other Lebanese channels, Al Manar’s programming tends to reflect an awareness of its audience that focuses on quite local concerns, but staged with a sense of a transnational or global audience in mind.<sup>60</sup>

Examining Al Manar’s tenuous place in Arab media and global visual culture allows for a unique perspective on the visual constitution of political order, and how the city and its infrastructure are themselves also shaped by imaginaries populated by a belief in the power of images to do things. Similarly, the maps and aerial photographs of twentieth-century urban planning allow a critical understanding of how the visualization of Beirut has been an important part of the production of its spaces. The sit-in that began in December 2006 was the first Hizbullah event that I had attended, but not the first time I had seen Al Manar. When my family began making regular visits to Lebanon in the late eighties, everyday media life for me entailed a fairly typical middle-class Sunni Beirut relationship to television (inextricably related to power cuts and videocassette rentals, but not much “political programming” allowed when I was younger). Centering this inquiry in Beirut allows for a situated understanding of global visual culture, as cities congeal spatial processes