Sharing Across the Battle Lines?
Israeli and Lebanese Blogs in the 2006 Lebanon War

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This article focuses on six English-language "media blogs" authored by Israeli and Lebanese bloggers during the 2006 Lebanon war. These blogs were featured in the global Western media and represent a wide spectrum of political allegiances. The authors used their blogs to promote their interpretations of the war to their global readership communities. Their attempts at persuasion were undertaken directly by means of political discourse, and indirectly, by means of references to global popular culture. Using a rhetorical approach, I examine the extent to which these strategies—used by bloggers across both national and ideological divides—exhibit commonalities of form and content. I demonstrate that there is commonality in rhetorical forms across ideological and national divides, as well as some commonality of rhetorical content across the national divide. Finally, the comments sections of these blogs reveal the limited effects of persuasion on the *other* national blogger community.[1]

Media Coverage of Lebanese and Israeli Blogs

Over the past few decades, news media's openness to audience participation has accelerated, particularly since the advent of the Internet. As "witnesses to news," bloggers have become a significant part of this phenomenon as media organizations increasingly publish and link to their material (Lowrey & Anderson, 2005; Singer, 2005). Bloggers located in conflict and war zones have attracted particular media attention (Berenger, 2006; Ringrose, 2007; Russell, 2007).

War creates massive communication demands arising from the need to investigate the safety of family and loved ones, the extent of military action, and any implications for the future. This, in turn, produces a boost in personal communication, in addition to "heightened consumption of mass media

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sources ranging from radio and TV to news websites and blogs" (Bucher, 2002, as cited Thewall & Stuart, 2007, Introduction section, para. 1).

The stories covered by Lebanese and Israeli bloggers in the 2006 Lebanon war were featured by a variety of mainstream global news outlets including TV, radio, and online news websites. The media picked up on communication between bloggers on both sides of the national divide throughout the course of the war. Outlets included *Le Monde* (Manach, 2006), *Libération* (Blecher, 2006a, 2006b), *la Repubblica* (2006), *The Wall Street Journal* (Ellinson, 2006), *The Washington Post* (Shrank, 2006), MTV (Kaufman, 2006), BBC (Mason, 2006; Van, 2006), Global Voices (Goldman, 2006), Reuters, (Crienglish.com, 2006; Heller, 2006), and others.

Other media stories run during the war highlighted Israeli and Lebanese blogs as snapshots of personal experiences (Blecher, 2006a, 2006b; *The Independent*, 2006), as alternative sources of information on developments on the war (Buechner, 2006; Jeffery, 2006; Von, 2006) or as productions of budding citizen journalists (CNN, 2006). *USA Today* (Memmot, 2006a–f) ran a six-part series on blogs from both nations—CBC (2006) and NPR (2006) ran similar articles—while the *Guardian* (Jeffery, 2006) highlighted the way that many of these blogs promoted local aid campaigns and logged local casualty statistics. Several media sources focused on individual bloggers' particular experiences, or on bloggers' roles as citizen journalists (UPM, CNN, BBC2, Newswired). Lebanese and Israeli warblogs also hit the global headlines because of bloggers' exposure of war "fauxtographs," altered or staged photographs.

Blog Sample

This article focuses on six English-language blogs, authored by Israelis and Lebanese bloggers, which received coverage in the Western media during the war. The sample is thus not representative of the Israeli and Lebanese blogospheres, but is instead derived from the media's own selection. Media coverage favored popular Anglophone bloggers with strong voices, a good command of English, and compelling content. The blogs are aimed at Western audiences, providing background information such as biographies of key leaders and regional political histories. The authors of several of the blogs picked up by the media were engaged in dialogues with bloggers from the other national community. As such, the media's selection can also be understood in terms of its desire to sensationalize cross-national blogger dialogue.

The analysis covers posts and comments dated June 1–August 30, 2006. All of the featured bloggers received moderate to high coverage in global media, appearing with the following frequency in the media sources listed above: Lisa Goldman (15), Eugene (12), Jonathan Klinger (2), Anarchistian (11), Charles Malik (6), and Ibrahim Jouhari (3).[2] The sample was selected to represent a range of political viewpoints (on the Israeli side: strongly pro-war, moderately pro-war, and non-partisan; on the Lebanese side: strongly pro-Hezbollah, moderately anti-Hezbollah, and strongly anti-Hezbollah). Two bloggers from the sample (Malik, a Lebanese, and Goldman, an Israeli) were part of the joint Israeli-Lebanese blog community which was established before the war.

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[2] No surnames are given for Anarchistian and Eugene.

Common Rhetorical Strategies?

Figure 1. Image of Lebanese and Israeli Passports from Goldman's Blog.

Four days into the war, Goldman referred to the close ties which had developed within the fledgling Israeli-Lebanese blog community, expressing the hope that these would protect their relationships from long-term antipathy:

> Think about what it means, if the next generation of Lebanese and Israeli politicians and business leaders have intimate and personal knowledge of the others' humanity. They won't forget that, even while there was a war going on, they were able to talk to oneanother and express their feelings. It's not so easy to kill someone you know. (Goldman, July 18)

Taking my cue from this reference to bloggers' insights into their "common humanity," I examine the extent to which commonality between bloggers was present on another level, that of discourse. In particular, I examine the extent to which bloggers across national and ideological divides use common persuasive techniques, with reference to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's classic text, *The New Rhetoric* (1969). The following questions are addressed: How do Israeli and Lebanese media bloggers persuade their readership communities to adhere to their interpretation of the war? To what extent do Israeli and Lebanese nationals persuade in different or similar ways?

The New Rhetoric

The New Rhetoric, which is concerned with argumentation in everyday language, provides a description of the sorts of argumentation which may be successful in practice, and of the sorts of starting points which may be of relevance to the success of argumentation (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Kruiger, 1987, p. 209). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca intended The New Rhetoric to function as an alternative to formal logic, which, in their opinion, did not constitute an appropriate mechanism for analyzing everyday language. They equated formal logic with a geometrical conception of reasonableness, where the validity of an argument is dependent solely on its form, and where sociological aspects (such as the subject of the argumentation or the roles of the discussants) are ignored (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Henkmans, 1996, p. 123). This notion of reasonableness is associated with a well-founded belief based on a "conclusive" or "*formally-valid*" argument linked back to "an unchallenged and preferably unchallengeable starting point" (Toulmin 1976, as cited in Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1995, p. 123, emphasis in original).

In *The New Rhetoric*, the notion of soundness shifts from the form of the argument to its audience—from the structural to the sociological. Rhetorically speaking, the argument is sound if it is successful with the audience to which it is addressed. By equating the soundness of the argument with its effectiveness on those audiences "who act in particular cases as judges," they opt for "a sociological perspective and adopt an anthropological norm of reasonableness" (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 129).

For Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, one of the limitations of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's approach is that it allows for only intersubjective validity to be tested *relative to* specific audiences. This is considered problematic insomuch as a different audience may come to a different conclusion about which different argumentation schemes can be discerned in the same argument (Van Eemeren Grootendorst, & Henkmans, 1996, p. 123).

These authors also criticize *The New Rhetoric's* anthropo-relativistic notion of reasonableness on the grounds that it proceeds from the basis of a *"justificationism"* which assumes that reasonableness is concerned with legitimatizing standpoints *definitively.* Given the difficulties of such an aim,[3] they claim that what "justificationists" end up doing is cutting off the (justificatory) process at an arbitrary point: "The assertion where the justification is broken off is then declared to be axiomatic or is in some way or

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[3] The authors explain as follows:

> Justificationism of any kind, however, can never escape the so-called Munchhausen trilemma, because in the last resort the justification has to choose from the following three alternatives: (1) ending up in an infinite regress of new justifications (*regressus in infinitum*); (2) going round in a circle of mutually supporting arguments; (3) breaking off the justificatory process at an arbitrary point. (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 131)

As such, they declare the alternatives to be unsatisfactory.

other elevated beyond further discussion. . . . In this way, a premise is created that is immune to criticism" (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 131).

Pragma-dialectics

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's own critical-rationalist approach *proceeds from the basis of the fallibility of all human thoughts*. Their approach to reasonableness is, philosophically speaking, based on the assumption that humans cannot be certain of anything: "We should therefore be skeptical with regard to any claim to acceptability, whoever makes it and to whatever it refers" (2004, p. 16). Their approach assumes a *consensualistic* view of the function of argumentation—that the aim of argumentation is conceived as unqualified consensus or the elimination or resolution of a difference of opinion (Lumer, 2010, p. 41).[4]

To the critical rationalist, then, the idea of a systematic critical scrutiny of all fields of human thought and activity is the principle that serves as the starting point for *the resolution of problems* (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 131). Since conducting a *critical discussion* is the point of departure for their conception of reasonableness, they adopt a dialectical approach. This concept of reasonableness derives from "the possibility it creates to resolve differences of opinion (its *problem validity*), in combination with its acceptability to its discussants (its *conventional validity*)" (ibid., p. 132). In other words, this approach measures the soundness of argumentation in relation to the degree to which it contributes to the resolution of the dispute, as well as against the degree to which it is acceptable to the discussants (ibid.).

The pragma-dialectical approach integrates descriptive and normative approaches by exploring the "connections between a *normative model* for disagreement resolution and *empirical reality* of argumentative practice by developing analytical tools for reconstructive argumentative discourse in the light of the *critical ideal*" (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Henkmans, 1996, p. 275, emphasis added). The pragma-dialectical model is *dialectical* "because it is premised on *two parties* who try to resolve a difference of opinion by means of a methodical exchange of discussion moves" and *pragmatic* "because these discussion moves are described as speech acts that are performed in a specific situation and context" (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 22, emphasis added).

More recently, Van Eemeren and Houtlosser have integrated rhetorical insights into their dialectical (pragma-dialectical) framework of analysis, with reference to "strategic manoeuvring,"

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[4] Lumer also refers to the epistemological approach:

> . . . which sees generating the addressee's justified belief in the argumentation's thesis as the standard function of argumentation (e.g., Biro & Siegel, 1992; Feldman, 1994; Goldman, 1999, ch. 5; Johnson, 2000; Lumer 1990, 1991, 2005/2006; Siegel & Biro 1997). (Lumer, 2010, p. 44).

As for approaches adopting the rhetorical approach, which sees convincing an addressee (i.e., creating or raising an addressee's belief in a thesis) as the aim of argumentation, Hamblin (1970) and Tindale (2004) are cited alongside Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (Lumer, 2010).

understood as "the efforts arguers make in argumentative discourse to reconcile aiming for rhetorical effectiveness with maintaining dialectical standards of reasonableness" (Van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2006, p. 383).[5]

Argumentation and Multi-agent Discussions

As Daniel Bonevac puts it, "pragma-dialectics is dynamic, context-sensitive and multi-agent; it promises theories of fallacy and argumentative structure" (2003, p. 451).[6] However, while conceding that pragma-dialectics has a number of advantages over other approaches to argumentation, he also argues that it is less suited to multi-party contexts, since its definitions privilege an understanding of argumentation as involving two agents: "Pragma-dialectics does well at analyzing arguments advanced by one party, directed at another party; it does much less well at analyzing argument *directed at several opponents at once or at convincing an audience*" (ibid., emphasis added).

The form of blogging straddles these last two directions. On one hand, blogs can be understood as a cultural genre which has "retooled" the practice of diary writing (Van Dijck, 2004, Weblogs as signifiers of cultural transformation section, para. 6). In this sense, the blog is more aligned to forms of *broadcast* media. The individual "speaker" (blogger) addresses an audience (his readership community) which she attempts to persuade. On the other hand, the blog's comments' function enables blogs to be *interactive*, giving rise to multi-party interactions. In such online contexts, as with various other computer-mediated communication models (CMC), certain patterns of interaction emerge:

> [T]here is not a one-to-one correspondence between an initiation and its response. Multiple responses are often directed at a single initiating message, and single messages may respond to more than one initiating message, especially in asynchronous CMC, where longer messages tend to contain multiple conversational moves. Moreover, many initiations receive no response. (Herring, 1999, The Evidence section, para. 11)

When considering the multi-participant interactions generated by blogs' comments sections, argumentative discourse needs to be thought of "not as a dialogue between a protagonist and an antagonist, but as a discourse with a set of participants (the disputants) and a set of observers (the audience)" (Bonevac, 2003, p. 456). In blogs, observer-commentators generally use the comments function to indicate approval or disapproval of the standpoints advanced by the blogger or participant-commentators. Participant-commentators, on the other hand, may advance or defend standpoints in response to the arguments deployed either by the blog's author, or by other participant-commentators, or both.

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[5] In argumentative discourse, "strategic maneuvering" is manifest "in the choices that are made from the 'topical potential' available at a certain stage in the discourse, in 'audience-directed framing' of the argumentative moves, and in the purposive use of 'presentational devices'" (Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2006, p. 383).

[6] "Multi-agent" is used here in the sense that it takes the roles of both arguer and audience into consideration.

M. A. Van Rees, addressing Bonevac's skepticism toward pragma-dialectics' capacity to adequately address multi-party discussions, claims that multi-party discussions *can* be "fruitfully viewed as a number of dualistic exchanges" (2003, p. 461). She points out that the terms protagonist and antagonist refer to the roles of participants, and that the dualistic framework is "an abstraction that serves merely as an instrument for analysis," and not as "a model for behavior" (ibid.). Moreover, Bonevac also distinguishes between pragma-dialectical theory—framed dualistically—and what pragma-dialectitians "actually do," which is to adapt the framework to multi-participant discussions (Bonevac, 2003, p. 452).

Rhetorical Techniques, Popular Culture, and National Identity

In practice, then, a pragma-dialectical approach could have provided a complementary approach to *The New Rhetoric* approach by focusing either on the blog posts as monologues with implied antagonists, or on exchanges between bloggers and participant-commentator or between participant-commentators. However, given that the main goal of this article is not to focus on the *dynamics* of argumentation in terms of anticipated or actual criticism, within a resolution-orientated framework, but to concentrate on the semantics of argumentation, within a purely rhetorical framework, *The New Rhetoric* is considered a more suitable theoretical vehicle. As Gross and Dearin put it:

> Perelman still reigns supreme when it comes to the elucidation of actual texts. His is a
> micro-analysis of arguments, one that is endlessly suggestive of ways of analyzing texts
> at the level of the word and phrase, the arrangements of parts, and the structure of
> arguments. (2003, back cover)

The selection of *The New Rhetoric* has been made in the consciousness of the criticisms leveled against its philosophical, theoretical, and empirical estate. Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Kruiger, for instance, criticize not only its conception of audience and the concomitant notion of reasonableness, but also its claim to systematic comprehensiveness. They point to shortcomings in terms of the definitions and the demarcations of its categorizations, and of the divergent ordering principles employed in the drawing up the typology (1987, p. 256). These criticisms have been addressed in part by Warnick and Kline's empirical investigation of the validity of *The New Rhetoric's* argumentation scheme (albeit not entirely satisfactorily, according to Van Eemeren and Grootendorst). Their study concluded that *The New Rhetoric's* scheme system was "generally complete," and that the schemes could be identified by "three individuals" with an acceptable level of consistency" (Warnick & Kline, 1992, p. 13).

The present article draws on the descriptivist strengths of Perelman's extensive classifications. With reference to *The New Rhetoric*, I compare the ways in which Israeli and Lebanese media bloggers deploy rhetorical techniques for the purposes of winning their readership communities' adherence to their interpretation of the war. *To what extent did these Israeli and Lebanese bloggers have recourse to similar or different rhetorical techniques*?

These techniques are deployed using both political discourse and references to popular culture. In *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, an analysis conducted in the context of modern Austrian

society, Wodak et al. argue that discursive constructions of national identity draw heavily on *culture-based national elements*:

> In the discourses of national identity . . . irrespective of the degree of formality of a particular situation, respondents drew on *culture-based national elements* in all the contexts analyzed. However, this was particularly obvious in semi-public and quasi-private discourse, where culture-based self perception was determined not only by "*high culture*" but also by *an imagined homogeneous everyday culture*. (1999, p. 189, emphasis added)

This analysis illustrates the blending of "linguistic and cultural national elements with purely political elements of nationhood" (ibid., p. 117). In the context of this present study, bloggers also blend cultural elements with purely political elements of nationhood. However, here, as I will show, in contrast to Wodak's findings, bloggers do not draw on culture-based *national* elements but on *de-territorialized* cultural forms—on culture-based *global* elements—in order to construct their national identity.

Finally, I examine the blogs' comments sections, focusing on interactions between Lebanese and Israeli commentators and bloggers: To what extent did cross-national exchanges foster positive or hostile dialogues across national frontiers?

Background to War

Dialogues between bloggers were negotiated within a political context where extreme differences of ideology within national communities (especially within Lebanon) went hand in hand with ideological convergences across the national divide (between certain Lebanese and Israeli political communities).

On July 12, 2006, two Israeli soldiers were captured by Hezbollah, provoking a month-long Israeli retaliation, concentrated on areas of Shia support (southern Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut). Hezbollah executed rocket and missile attacks against Northern Israel, and Israeli warplanes launched some 7,000 bomb and missile attacks in Lebanon. Large parts of the Lebanese civilian infrastructure were damaged or destroyed (Crienglish.com, 2006, July 13 and 14 sections), as were tens of thousands of homes (Human Rights Watch, 2007a, Executive Summary section). According to Human Rights Watch, the conflict resulted in an estimated 1,109 Lebanese deaths, along with 4,399 injured and an estimated 1 million displaced Lebanese (ibid.). On the Israeli side, the estimated death toll was 43 with hundreds of civilians wounded and around 350,000 evacuated (Human Rights Watch, 2007b, p. 4). Hezbollah claimed to have fired as many as 8,000 rockets at Israel, double the number cited by Israel (Human Rights Watch, 2007b, p. 95). More than 10 Israeli cities and towns were hit (*The New York Times*, 2006). On August 14, 2006, hostilities came to an end with a UN-brokered ceasefire.

From the Lebanese perspective, interpretations of the war were determined by political communities' perception of who constituted the greater enemy: Israel or Syria. The pro-Syrian Lebanese camp regarded Israeli military action as a provocative and disproportionate show of force deliberately perpetuated by an enemy resented for its interventions both in Lebanon and in the Palestinian territories. To Hezbollah supporters, the war provided the opportunity for this "resistance movement" to test its

mettle against Israel despite being the weaker party in this asymmetrical conflict. On the other hand, anti-Syrian and pro-Western Lebanese (whether Sunni, Druze, or Christian), who already resented Hezbollah's expanding support base among the Lebanese Shia, its links to Iran and its Islamist agenda, were not unduly provoked by the initial military strikes (limited to pro-Hezbollah areas). However, the increasing toll of civilian casualties and expanded range of military strikes soon had the effect of increasing anti-Israeli sentiment within these communities, with the exception of a small minority of extreme anti-Hezbollah Lebanese. From the Israeli side, the war was generally interpreted as an extension of Israel's proxy war against Iran, conducted on Lebanese soil against a "terrorist" organization responsible for regular armed incursions into Israeli territories. According to a survey undertaken in February and March 2007, over two thirds of Israelis supported the decision of the government to go to war against Hezbollah (Ben Meir & Shaked, 2007, p. 9).

The Rhetorics of War

In *The New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca demonstrate that, in order for the foundations of an argument to be laid, a speaker must start from premises which his or her audience accepts, such as shared values (1969, pp. 65–67). I will begin by examining the rhetorical strategies of the two bloggers in the sample who represent the most polarized views on both sides of the national divide. Both of these bloggers start by appealing to their readership communities' adherence to a shared value—in this case, the value of justice as attached to the institution of international law:

> The thing is Nasrallah made a mistake starting all of this, he's in for way more then he bargained for. At first the French prime minister said that it's a disproportional use of force on our part, now even he says that Hezbollah should be disarmed. Most of the world wants us to do it.
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> Nasrallah counted on the Israeli civilians to be intimidated and rally against the actions of our government, but exactly the opposite is happening. And even the some of the Arab nations are condemning Nasrallah. He is mostly unsupported by the Lebanese themselves, as Lebanon was amidst a tourist and economy boom and was supposed to regain its status as "Paris of the middle east". Now the billions of dollars he cost them in tourism and damages, and deaths . . . he isn't very popular there.
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> Hezbollah is on the run, and now Israel has a great opportunity to finish that organization. The Lebanese prime minister promised to deploy troops along its south border to guard it. So in effect after all of this is done Israel will be out of reach of Hezbollah's rockets and have a safe north border for the first time in a long time.[7] (Eugene, June 16)

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[7] Misspellings on all the blogs and comments sections are preserved as in the originals.

The *Live from an Israeli Bunker* blog, authored by the 17-year-old Israeli Eugene, starts from the premise of a nation's right to self-defense, implicitly appealing to the authority of article 51 of the UN Charter. For Eugene, this right is based on the presumption that Hezbollah provoked the hostilities: "The thing is Nasrallah made a mistake starting all of this" (June 16). The validity of this statement is then shored up by what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca dub "the argument of authority" which appeals to "the acts or opinions of a person or group of persons as a means of proof in support of a thesis" (1969, p. 305). Eugene appeals here to the opinions of others foreign powers, whose support for Israeli action is given as "proof" that Israel was justified in its actions: "now even he [The French prime minister] says that Hezbollah should be disarmed. Most of the world wants us to do it" (June 16).

Eugene then considers the war from a long-term perspective, using a pragmatic argument by which an action is judged in terms of its "favorable or unfavorable consequences" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 266). Eugene believes that the war is in the interest of Israel's long-term security: "So in effect after all of this is done, Israel will be out of reach of Hezbollah's rockets and have a safe north border for the first time in a long time" (June 16). His next rhetorical move, based on the rationale of "reciprocity" (Perelman & Obrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 221), draws on the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 425 (1978), which called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from South Lebanon and the restoration of the Lebanese Government's authority after the 1978 Israeli invasion of South Lebanon. He argues that, since the Lebanese Government did not exert effective authority over the southern strip of Lebanon, by implication contravening that resolution, then Israel should no longer feel duty-bound by its terms and is therefore justified in re-entering Lebanon: "Israel maintains its right to act forcefully if terrorist attacks on northern Israel continue after the withdrawal" (July 17).

To underline the case for Israel, Eugene establishes two relations, one of association and the other of disassociation, which he believes add weight to Israel's casus belli. These relations, which Israeli audiences would expect pro-war Israelis to internalize, have to be spelled out for his Western readers: 1) "Iran & Hezbollah, Iran is Hezbollah," and 2) "Hezbollah is a terrorist organization within Lebanon; it is not and does not represent the Lebanese. The bombings there is to get rid of Hezbollah, I'm sure that if we are successful the Lebanese will in fact thank us" (July 17).

To give the first claim weight, he provides his readership community with a three-page history lesson: "The geographical area known as present day Iran has a fascinating history behind it. It was once home to one of the earliest civilizations and empires the world has ever known" (July 24). Eugene then takes his reader through a whistle-stop tour of history, passing through Alexander the Great, the foundation of Islam, the schism between "The Shi'as & The Sunnis,(which out of context could have been a great name for a Bebop ensemble, but I digress)," the Turks, Genghis Khan, and the Safavid dynasty. He then performs a leap to the 20th century, zipping through monarchy and revolution to the foundation of Hezbollah as a proxy army in Lebanon, followed by a list of "terrorist acts" perpetrated by Hezbollah. He ends with a warning about the threatened advent of a "second" Persian Empire if Iran is allowed to win this war by proxy:

> Remember that I started out talking about the Persian Empire? Persia's (by any other
> name) influence has not reached so far into the west for over 1300 years. The Lebanese
> don't want it (if they know what's good for them), we don't want it, and the Arab world
> doesn't want it. (July 24)

While the conclusion of the first (associative) relation—Hezbollah is Iran—is that military action is necessary to combat the threat of a "second Persian Empire" established with the assistance of Hezbollah, the conclusion of the second (disassociative) relation—Hezbollah is not Lebanon—is thus that military action not only serves the long-term interests of Israeli security, but also serves the long-term interests of the Lebanese people.

On the other side of the political divide, Anarchistian,[8] author of *Blogging the Middle East* and a strong advocate of Hezbollah, attacks the disassociative relations advanced by Eugene, using "the argument of incompatibility" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 195). This argument consists of exposing contradictions within a system (here, the Israeli government's ideological system) by showing that it upholds both a "proposition and its negation" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 195). Anarchistian's starting point is his (own) translation of the text of a leaflet dropped over sections of Lebanon by Israeli jets, offering rewards for information relating to Hezbollah:

> Let us not be content with words! Whoever is able and willing to help Lebanon eradicate
> HezbAllah's evil and get back its independence, freedom and prosperity, whoever has
> information that could promote this purpose, is hereby invited to contact us at one of
> the addresses listed below . . . After 9 days of massacres and destruction of the
> infrastructure of the country, does anyone in the world—let alone the Lebanese—believe
> that Israel has or can ever have good intentions towards Lebanon? If so, then they are
> *forcing* themselves to believe it, or otherwise they are just as crazy as Olmert or Peretz
> or whoever the hell came up with this ingenious idea (still doesn't beat my favourite: the
> name of this operation). But wait, since 1) the Lebanese are allegedly held hostages
> against their will by HezbAllah; and 2) HezbAllah is allegedly operating throughout the
> country; 3) claims are being made that sectarian tension is a pressure cooker waiting to
> explode; this only means that Israel should be receiving many, many "tips." In which
> case, we should expect that Israel be able to "uproot" HezbAllah in a matter of days.
> Condie is of course worried that if we rush into a ceasefire we might be building "fake
> hopes." (Anarchistian, July 22)

Anarchistian juxtaposes the proposition advanced in the leaflet, that Israeli action will bring increased democracy and economic growth to Lebanon, with its "negation," reports of the destruction of life and infrastructure which "caused that action." He then undermines the assumption of disassociation between Hezbollah and Lebanon by the use of ridicule. Argumentation by ridicule is usually achieved by "temporally accepting" a statement contradictory to the proposition one wants to defend, "deducing its

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[8] The sex of this blogger is not clear. For the purposes of this article, I am assuming a male gender.

consequences," demonstrating its incompatibility with "what is accepted on other grounds," and consequently, "inferring the truth of the proposition being defended" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 207). In order to undermine the basis of Israeli claims that they are acting in the interests of the Lebanese, Anarchistian not only temporarily "accepts" the disassociation of the Hezbollah and the Lebanese, but exaggerates it, by comparing it to the malignant relationship between kidnapper and hostage. His deliberately provocative conclusion, that the leafleting campaign will "obviously" be successful, then, implies the very opposite.

Like Eugene, Anarchistian appeals to his audience's adherence to the value of justice as institutionalized in international law. In Anarchistian's case, the case against Israel is brought with reference to international humanitarian law which distinguishes between civilian population and combatants and between civilian and military objectives (Geneva Conventions, 1977). He attacks Israel's contention that it is acting (against Hezbollah) in Lebanon's interests by alluding to Israel's targeting of Lebanese (non-Hezbollah) facilities. He also resorts to ridicule to undermine the supposed "necessity" of these attacks and the attendant extension of the principle of self-defense to new targets. This is achieved by means of a tongue-in-cheek reference to the most innocent of possible targets—a sheep:

> It appears that terrorist cancerous growths have taken over all Lebanese TV stations, cellular networks, and ISPs that offer wireless internet, which has left the Israelis with no choice but to bomb them. Israel also believes that Lebanese sheep have grown human brains, and thus jeopordize the safety and security of Israeli civilians. Israel deeply regrets this transformation, and argues that the bombing of the sheep was merely an act of self-defense, adding that it sincerely hopes that other sheep would not develop terrorist tendencies. (July 23)

Converging, Diverging Arguments

As the war progressed, Anarchistian repeatedly stated that one of its inevitable outcomes would be increased support for Hezbollah among those who had previously not been Hezbollah supporters:

> So who is Israel really striking? Regular people, surely HezbAllah supporters and electorate mostly, but will they be voting for HezbAllah in the next elections? You bet they will. Those who were planning on not voting for HezbAllah will do so too. (August 4)

According to a survey undertaken by the Beirut Center for Research and Information at the height of the war (July 24–26, 2006), 70% of Lebanese supported Hezbbollah's "*initial*" July 12 operation to abduct Israeli soldiers, and 87% expressed support for Hezbollah's subsequent "confrontations" (MidEast Monitor, 2006, BCRI section). The shift in public opinion toward a (more) unified anti-Israeli position is chronicled in the *Lebanese Political Journal* blog, where its trajectory can be tracked in small increments during the second half of July. At the beginning of the war, Charles Malik, an anti-Hezbollah Lebanese, believed that the war would negatively impact Hezbollah support. On July 13, he wrote, "The tide is turning against Hezbollah . . . Experts content that Hezbollah made a massive mistake." The first significant shift in Malik's opinion occurs on as a result of Israel's extension of the bombing campaign to residential areas:

> I thought Israel was going to help prove that they would not abide with Hezbollah's weapons and wouldn't let Hezbollah continue spreading the stupid myth that they can protect Lebanon. I thought this even after they bombed the airport. Okay, it's a major symbol. I don't like it getting bombed, but I get it. At first, they hit military targets and the airport. But the devastation they have wreaked on us is truly horrendous. The US did not do this to the Iraqis. The US didn't do this to al Qaeda in Afghanistan, for crying out loud. (July 15)

He "congratulates" Israel on achieving the very "association" which it hoped to definitively destroy—that of the Lebanese people and Hezbollah:

> On the bright side, it might have accomplished two very difficult things. Disarming Hezbollah, you say? Nope. 1. Truly uniting Lebanese. We were close before. Now, it seems we are even closer. (July 15)

For Malik, the last straw comes on July 30, when Israeli bombs hit a building in Qana, killing 28 civilians (Human Rights Watch, 2006, International Inquiry section):

> Qana II did not pass without significant political implications: Israel['s] image is becoming darker and darker. After an emergency meeting between the Lebanese Prime minister Fouad Siniora and Speaker Nabih Berri in the Beirut Grand Serail, it was clear that the whole Lebanese family became now united, not just from a human point of view, but also politically. (July 30)

Not all Lebanese blogs in the sample demonstrated the shift of opinion in favor of Hezbollah evident in Anarchistian and Malik's blogs. Jouhari, author of *Bob's blog*, is a resolutely anti-Hezbollah Lebanese blogger.[9] Throughout the war, his arguments demonstrated some convergence with both the form and the content of the arguments used by *Live from an Israeli Bunker* blogger Eugene. Like Eugene, Jouhari blames Hezbollah for starting the conflict, as well as for the suffering caused by the war: "Hezbollah is making the whole country suffer" (July 18). Although he calls for peace rather than war, like Eugene, he uses a pragmatic argument, justifying his antipathy for Hezbollah on the basis of the future consequences of a Hezbollah victory. In this case, though, it is the consequences for Lebanon, rather than Israel which come into play:

> Unity? What unity? I have been calling for peace and for putting internal pressure on Hezbollah to stop its violence, and now it seems that Hezbollah is the one pressuring the rest of us. People criticized me for offering a dissenting opinions and supposedly shattering our unity, while the pro Hezbollah forces in Lebanon and outside have been waging a fierce campaign against all the different factions. Nassrallah to Najah Wakim and all the rest of these guys, they have been attacking all those who stand against them, or have not supported Hezbollah, totally vilifying them, calling them traitors and maybe soon burning them at the stake.

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[9] Ibrahim Jouhari is profiled in his blog as a 30-year-old man working in telecommunications.

> It is shame, and it gives you a snap shot of what will happen if Hezbollah wins . . . the
> end of Democracy, the end of freedom of press and the end of Lebanon. (Jouhari, July
> 22)

A week into the war, Jouhari refers to hostile comment traffic on his blog: "It seems I am being criticized by many Bloggers, Lebanese and others because I am calling for peace. I was even asked by some to go and live in Israel" (July 18). While Jouhari's blog attests to increased social and political pressure to support the anti-Israeli "resistance," on the other side of the national divide, Jonathan Klinger, an Israeli blogger and former peace campaigner feels the pressure to confirm to mainstream (pro-war) sentiment among Israelis. Klinger, a reluctant convert to military action, argues in favor of the war as a "necessary evil."

> Recipe for Peace: The main reason that the Israeli public, imho, still supports this war is
> basically defaultance. We know war is the worst form of living in a state; however, we
> know that violence will not cease if we stop our violence. We do not wish to prolong our
> endeavours in Lebanon and we do not wish to occupy civilians or territory. The only
> problem, basically, is that we don't know any other option to end the conflict. (Klinger,
> July 20)

Like Eugene and Bob, Klinger uses a pragmatic argument, based on this belief that Israeli action will bring long-term peace to the whole region.

Global Culture, Local Meanings

During the war, bloggers of both nationalities not only engaged in political discourse, they also drew on a global store of cultural references. Although many of these references had a ludic dimension, it is their instrumental (political) function which ultimately dominates. The combination of political functions with cultural elements can be understood with reference to the discussion of the relation between the concepts of *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation* in the context of the discursive construction of national identity (Wodak et al., 1999, pp. 18–21).

In the political *Staatsnation* model, the unity of a nation is understood as residing in "a common state and in the rights and obligations of its citizens" (ibid., p. 19). The concept of *Kulturnation*, on the other hand, "refers back to so-called 'objective criteria' such as language, culture and territory" (ibid.). The implied dichotomy between the two concepts cannot, according to Wodak's study, be maintained in the context of the construction of national identity: "Discourses of nation identity constructed by residents of any given state will always contain or imply *both cultural and political elements*" (ibid., p. 5, emphasis added).

The discourses of national identity constructed by residents of the given states relating to this paper, Israel and Lebanon, also contain both cultural and political elements. But as I will show, counter to the cases analysed in the Austrian-based study, the cultural elements are not drawn from national culture, but from global Anglophone culture. Here, bloggers draw on global Western popular music, Hollywood films, computer games, and televised sitcoms to discursively construct their national identity. In the examples below, bloggers deploy "the strategy of demontage (or dismantling) and destruction," using

analogical arguments which transfer meaning from the field of global popular culture to that of politics (ibid., p. 42).

Network, a satirical New Hollywood film released in 1976, is Israeli blogger Eugene's favorite film. It tells the story of the fictional television network, Union Broadcasting System (UBS) and its struggle with falling ratings. The story opens with veteran UBS Evening News anchor Howard Beale being fired because of his show's poor performance. The following night, Beale threatens to commit on-air suicide, but he ends up touting the idea of a new TV reality series *Terrorist of the Week* (see Fig. 2).
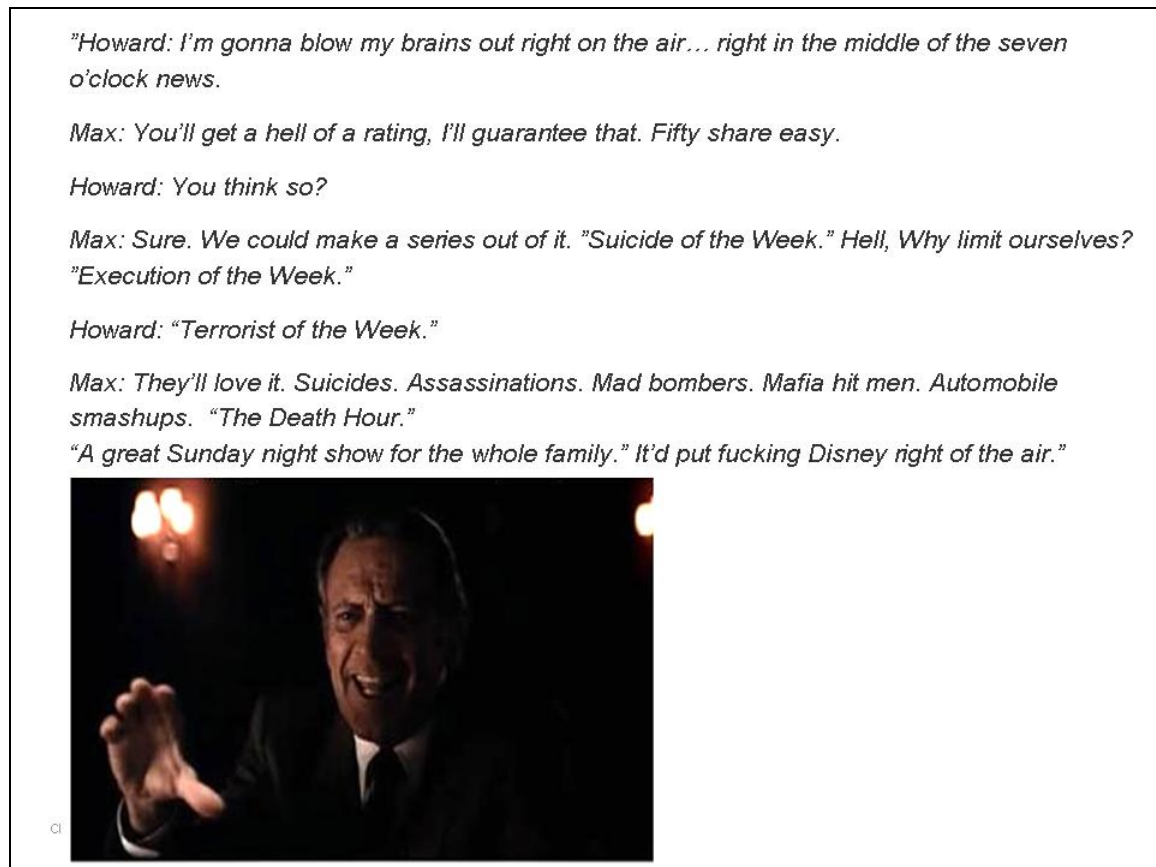
Figure 2. **Network** *Image from Eugene's Blog, August 31.*

One of the UBS producers, Diana, soon acquires footage of terrorists robbing banks for the new series.

> Diana: We've got a bunch of hobgoblin radicals, the Ecumenical Liberation Army . . . who go around taking home movies of themselves robbing banks. Maybe they'll take movies of themselves kidnapping heiresses, hijacking 747s, bombing bridges, assassinating ambassadors. We'd open each week's segment with their authentic

footage . . . hire writers to write a story behind that footage, and we've got a series. (August 31)
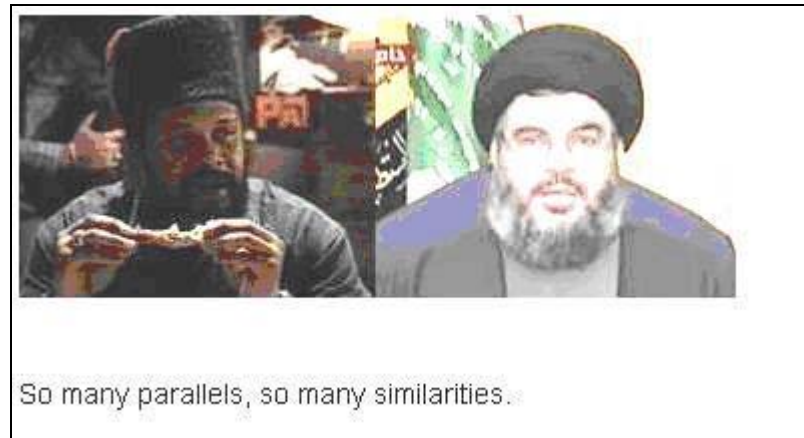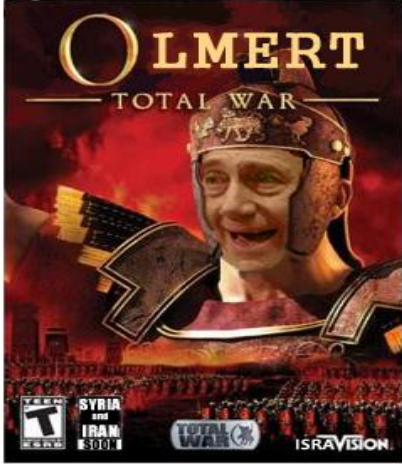

*Figure 3. Nasrallah/*Network *Image from Eugene's Blog, August 31.*

Eugene posits a relation of equality between the criminal acts of violence perpetrated by the hobgoblins, the fictional super villain-terrorists, and the actions of Hezbollah. "These words hung in the air for me. Are the hobgoblins not Hezbollah?" (August 31). He photoshops an image of Hassan Nasrallah next to one of the film's terrorist figure ("So many parallels, so many similarities" —see Figure 3).

Figure 4. **Total War** *Image from Anarchistian's Blog, August 9.*

In his August 9 post, Anarchistian posits a similarly loose equivalence, albeit within the more explicitly ludic context of Activision's *Rome: Total War* computer game. Referring to this game, in which players fight historical and fictitious battles within the Roman era, Anarchistian makes a wry allusion to Israeli "territorial fantasies": "[A]wesome game; did I tell you I occupied Jerusalem AND Damascus just a few months ago?" (August 9). This statement accompanies an altered image of the cover of *Rome: Total War*, onto which Anarchistian has "photoshopped" Ehud Olmert's face over the Roman soldier's with the comment: "Olmert has sure earned his place next to the lunatic imperialists of the good old Roman

empire." Anarchistian thus equates Israel's presence in Lebanon with the coercive political structures of empire, while implying that Olmert's actions are both demented and irrational.

Anarchistian's play on the *Total War* game also recalls the specifics of the fauxtojournalism charges leveled against "pro-Hezbollah" journalists. Referring to his "personalized" version of the *Total War* game, Anarchistian ironically suggests that, in order to create the product, he made use of the services of "biased pro-Hezbollah journalists," and that, like them, he "manipulated" his readers by the use of "sensationalist" images. He does this with reference to mock product details attributed to his version of *Total War*: "Necessary additions: A couple of cameramen on the HezbAllah payroll (to do photo-ops), frozen bodies of babies (to be used in each photo-op), etc. Price: 1000+ dead civilians" (August 9).

Defense through Presence

Bloggers used their posts not only to comment on the fauxtograph controversies, but also to contest the interpretations assigned to images posted by the "other" blogger community. One such image, which aroused outrage in the Arab blogosphere, was that of young Israeli children writing the message "To Nasrallah with love" on Israeli missiles (see Figure 5). Israeli-Canadian blogger and journalist Goldman used her blog to counter the wave of Arab protest over the image:

> On the day that photo was taken, the girls had emerged from the underground bomb shelters for the first time in five days. A new army unit had just arrived in the town and was preparing to shell the area across the border. The unit attracted the attention of twelve photojournalists—Israeli and foreign. The girls and their families gathered around to check out the big attraction in the small town—foreigners. They were relieved and probably a little giddy at being outside in the fresh air for the first time in days. They were probably happy to talk to people. And they enjoyed the attention of the photographers.

> Apparently one or some of the parents wrote messages in Hebrew and English on the tank shells to Nasrallah. "To Nasrallah with love," they wrote to the man whose name was for them a devilish image on television - the man who mockingly told Israelis [...] that Hezbollah was preparing to launch even more missiles at them. That he was happy they were suffering.

> The photographers gathered around. Twelve of them. Do you know how many that is? It's a lot. And they were all simultaneously leaning in with their long camera lenses, clicking the shutter over and over. The parents handed the markers to the kids and they drew little Israeli flags on the shells. Photographers look for striking images, and what is more striking than pretty, innocent little girls contrasted with the ugliness of war? The camera shutters clicked away, and I guess those kids must have felt like stars, especially since the diversion came after they'd been alternately bored and terrified as they waited out the shelling in their bomb shelters. (Goldman, July 20)
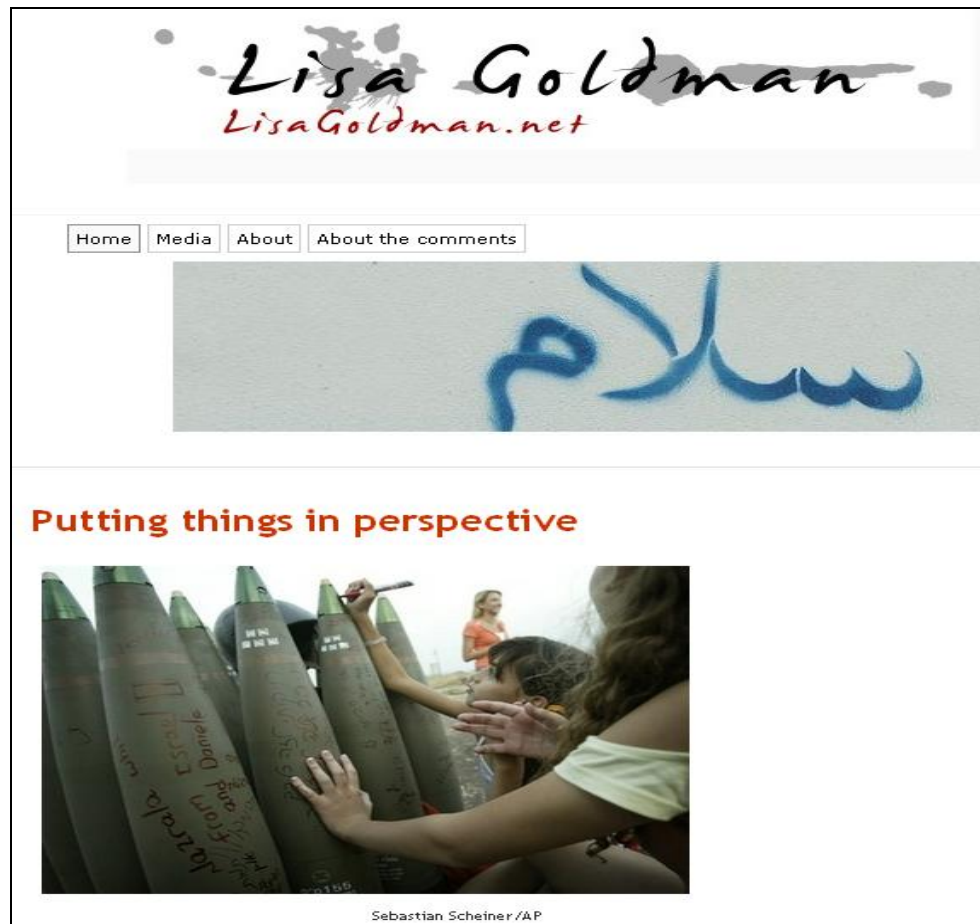
Figure 5. Children Image from Goldman's Blog, July 20; "Peace" in Arabic Script.

Goldman reinterprets the story behind the image by focusing on the situatedness of the children in question. According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, the art of interpretation is not only a matter of a choice between apparently incompatible interpretations, but also of a choice involving the "level in which the interpretative effort will be conducted" (1969, p. 121). Goldman's interpretation is not proffered on the level of the political education of Israeli children "taught to hate," but on that of the daily reality of the lives of the particular children involved. She invites the reader to identify with their experience by creating a sense of *presence*. Goldman's apologia brings to the readers' consciousness the sensory perceptions and

heightened emotions of the children who had been cooped up under difficult conditions for days. Rather than a deliberate act of provocation, she suggests that the image was taken as the result of an unfortunate and unforeseen combination of circumstances—the coincidence between the timing of the children's eventual release into the outside world and the arrival of a new army unit with a media gaggle in   tow.

Finally, Goldman presents the girls' actions as an understandable response to a combination of post-traumatic stress and media pressure. She refutes the accusation circulating in the Arab blogosphere that the children equated the missiles with "dead Arabs," with reference to the fact that images of Arab civilian casualties are not aired on Israeli Television:

> How many small children would be able to make the connection between tank shells and dead people on their own? How many human beings are able to detach from their own suffering and emotional stress and think about that of the other side? Not many, I suspect. (Goldman, July 20)

Thinking About the Other Side?

During this war, the technology of blogging allowed Lebanese and Israeli bloggers to "talk to the 'other side.'" Exchanges between Israelis and Lebanese with very divergent starting positions predictably consisted of virtual shouting matches. Anarchistian's blog attracted almost exclusively vitriolic exchanges from Israeli commentators, who received equally acerbic backhands in return:

> Aviv: Hey Dude, I was called today to join my brothers at the northern border of Israel.One Hizbala Down is more freedom for you, right? If you don't agree with that statement join Hizbala and I'll see you from the other side of the border. Peace. (July 22, 2006, 8:06 pm)

> Anarchistian: War seems to be a wet dream for you and your "brothers" . . . stop being cowards and stop massacring babies. Had you done so from day one your cities would never have come under fire like this. (July 22, 2006, 8:13 pm)

The anti-Hezbollah Lebanese blogger Jouhari, by contrast, received many supportive comments from Israeli bloggers who referred to their common anti-Hezbollah sentiments.

The only blog in this sample to produce a significant number of meaningful interactions throughout the duration of the war (alongside hostile incoming comments) was Malik's. As such, Malik's blog represents the exception, rather than the rule. At the onset of hostilities, Malik received many messages from Israelis expressing political solidarity. When his neighborhood came under attack and he started to criticize Israeli action, many of his Israeli correspondents continued to respond empathetically, apologizing for civilian casualties: "we do all we can to avoid hurting people that has nothing to do with terrorism, and when still there are such victims we all are sorry" (Anonymous, July 14).

In the early days of the war, Goldman had expressed optimism for the fledgling Israeli-Lebanese blogging community, assuming that their "friendships" would survive the war. Ten days into the war, her optimism had become dampened. She refers to her (already) damaged friendship with a Lebanese blogger, called Perpetual Refugee, who had visited her in Tel Aviv a few months earlier: "'Welcome to my Lebanese Holocaust,' was the title of his post shortly after Israel started bombing Lebanon. He's made a 180-degree turn since the beginning of the war and has become an Israeli hater" (Goldman in Ellinson, 2006). The fact that Perpetual Refugee's visit is itself also revisited in Malik's blog (July 15) as the symbolic narrative of a human bond facilitated by the Internet and threatened by Israeli action points to both the fragility of this cross-national community and its erosion by war.

Conclusion

An examination of the rhetorical strategies of six Lebanese and Israeli bloggers featured in mainstream Western media during the 2006 Lebanon war revealed convergences and divergences within and across the national/sectarian divides. These arguments attested to the bloggers' needs to defend their local political identity. Their other, global identity as cybernauts, was subsumed by the immediacy of military conflict, as references to global culture were assimilated to the blogs' persuasive function and used to reinforce political standpoints. In the context of this sample of online public discourses conducted in a "global" language and aimed at global readership communities, we find that national identity is constructed with reference to elements of global culture. This stands in contrast to findings that relate to European discourses of national identity conducted in a national's own language and not primarily directed at non-national international audiences, which draw on elements of national culture (Wodak et al., 1999). Finally, despite media sensationalism surrounding blog exchanges during the war, persuasion across national/ideological divides was generally ineffective, with overwhelmingly negative dialogues dominating the exchanges.

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