Of citizens and ordinary men: Political subjectivity and contestations of sectarianism in reconstruction-era Beirut

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Notes on language, including but not limited to terminology, transliteration and diacritics

For the transcription of Arabic words I’ve based myself loosely on the Library of Congress Romanization policies: the ‘dash’ over a vowel [e.g., ā] indicates the vowel is long; a [‘] indicates the guttural squeeze-your-vocal-chords sound graphically represented by the letter [‘ayin-غ], and the [‘] for the glottal stop, otherwise known as the Hamza, which I have left out at the beginning of words. To complete the diacritical madness I have included the dots under the so-called emphatic consonants [ḍ], which cost me a considerable amount of work, so the reader is kindly advised to appreciate how orientalistically professional this looks. In line with IJMES practices, however, proper names follow customary spelling, which in Lebanon means French standards (thus, I write Bachoura instead of Bashūra).

Speaking of names: I’ve chosen aliases for all interlocutors except for those who spoke from a public function. I considered the interviews with the streel level bureaucrats called mukhtars semi-public, so I changed their names as well, just in case. One exception is Abu Zalem: I’ve found a replacement for his personal name, while I retained his war moniker (it’s difficult to best ‘Father of Darkness’).

I’m taking a grammatical shortcut when it comes to designating members of the “Shia” community. “Shia” (or Shī’a) is actually a collective plural in Arabic. Individual members within this collective are designated by the adjective [Shī’i]. That is a pain to write though (especially since Word wants to autocorrect it into this: Shi’I) and it doesn’t really look pretty. Shii doesn’t fare much better. There is also an accepted anglicized variant, which is ‘Shiite’. However, that reminds of me a 1990s movie about watching trains, in which the Scottish variant of a commonly used swear
word was abundantly deployed and, well, it just doesn’t feel appropriate. So instead, I’m sticking with Shia throughout. Shia for all of them, Shia for a single individual, and Shia as an adjective. I trust you will welcome its simplicity and forgive the technical imperfection. (Sunni and Sunna sound and write just fine though, so that distinction is maintained.)

Here and there I make a few notes on the post-colony. In this regard, I make an orthographic distinction between post-colonial, which I use to refer to countries that were once colonized (or mandated), and postcolonial, which I use for a particular type of scholarly approach to, among other things, post-colonial societies. That seemed important at the time. (I am aware that others use the same orthographic difference to make other kinds of distinctions, but they seemed tied to unproductive theoretical infighting.)

A final convention I’d like to draw your attention to is that I have deployed two ways of distinguishing quotes from interlocutors. If I have the given quote on tape, I frame the quote with citation marks. If, however, I have not recorded the conversation but written (parts of) it up from memory, I use italics for ‘quoted’ text. The idea of course is that my memory is not as accurate as my tape recorder and that you might want to know when I’m drawing from either source.

(Oh, and you may be wondering about the difference between sectarian and confessional. There is none. I use them interchangeably. ‘Sectarian’ carries a rather heavy connotational charge, whereas ‘confessional’ is a perhaps bit awkward attempt to get away from that. Neither works really well, both are translations of ṭāʿīfī, and whenever I get tired of either, I switch.)