Civil Society and Lebanon

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*Toward a Hermeneutic Theory of the
Public Sphere in Comparative Studies*

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Brown Walker Press
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For my children, Sara, Jesus, Roque, Alex and Eric

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Acknowledgments

In many ways, this study began over a quarter of a century ago when, as an adolescent, I would join my grandfather, Fadlala Dauhajre, in a pair of rocking chairs and play solitaire on a battered mahogany table, drinking *cafe con leche* in the home of our extended family in the Dominican Republic. He was a short, stout man, balding with closely shaved gray hair, a slightly stooped posture and a broad, weathered smile. During our afternoons together, he would draw heavily on his pipe and tell me stories of our family village, Dara, in Syria and his migration to Latin America following World War One and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The stories would drift through the clouds of tobacco smoke that swirled around us — clouds of smoke that I would come to miss when he was gone. I would listen closely, fascinated by these distant places and unmet relatives. Soon, I resolved that I would travel to Syria and come to know the land and its people. I was determined to make a career of my cultural heritage, something I was very fortunate to achieve, first as a journalist, and later as an academic.

During those now distant summers and holidays in Santo Domingo, don Fadlala did not know — nor do I believe he ever discovered — that I would often wake before sunrise and listen to him and his wife Nofa converse in Arabic as they took their morning coffee before the rest of the house (three uncles, two aunts, a son- and daughter-in-law and various grandchildren) scrambled out of bed. I was fascinated by these early morning conversations spoken in a melodic language I did not know.

My grandfather died before I traveled to the Middle East for the first time as a war correspondent assigned to Beirut, Lebanon in the autumn of 1984. I was, however, fortunate enough to share my own tales of the region with my grandmother, who, those many years later, spoke a *patois* of Arabic and Spanish. I would mix my knowledge of the two languages when relating my stories to dona Nofa. She seemed to delight that I had rediscovered (or recovered?) this past that I know my grandfather believed belonged to all his progeny.

It was during this period that I came to know and love Lebanon. I admired the Lebanese and Palestinians with whom I worked

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Chapter One

Introduction:
Civil Society, the Public Sphere and *Asabiya* in the Study of Lebanon

On Sunday morning, April 13, 1975, a Peugeot sedan sped through the East Beirut suburb of Ain al-Rummaneh, toward the Maronite church where Piere Gemayel was attending mass. As the car approached the Christian Phalange leader and his entourage, the occupants opened fire. A gun battle ensued, leaving four members of Gemayel's party dead. An hour latter, Phalange militiamen — convinced that the would-be assassins were PLO commandos — attacked a bus filled with Palestinians who were traveling between the Sabra and Tel Zaatar refugee camps. For twenty minutes, the Christians laid down a barrage of small arms fire that left 27 dead and 19 wounded among the Palestinians. As far as the Christian fighters were concerned, retribution was complete (Mackey, 1989: 157).

The events of that distant morning, however, did not end in a simple exchange of hit-and-run attacks between two warring camps. Instead, they quickly escalated, propelling Lebanon into a bloody fifteen-year civil war that nearly destroyed the nation and left scarred a generation that was born to — and came of age in — war. The Lebanese Civil War — or *al-hawadeth* (the events), as the conflict is known in Lebanon — left an estimated 170,000 dead and 300,000 wounded. Almost one in five of the total population, about 800,000 Lebanese, were displaced (Andrews, 1995: 1).

Before the Civil War, Lebanon was extolled by many as the "Switzerland" of the Middle East and Beirut, the region's "Paris," a bridge between the Arab World and the West. However, the Civil War quickly revealed the deep divisions, the ethnic and confessional tensions, that have torn at Lebanon for centuries. Today, Lebanon exemplifies a condition quite antithetical to its former comparisons. Now, journalists and academics often talk about the possible "Lebanization" — that is, nearly complete destruction of state and economic infrastructure — of this or that country plagued by ethnic conflict that has escalated into open warfare (Haris, 1994). No longer a symbol of cultural integration and cosmopolitan political and eth-

nic tolerance, Lebanon has come to signify the antithesis of those social virtues.

Much has been written about modern Lebanon and the Civil War (see, most notably, Khalidi, 1979; Deeb, 1980; Khalaf, 1987; Salibi, 1990; Collings, 1994; Phares, 1995; Abul-Husn, 1998). Almost all of this literature offers an explanation of the conflict involving three core explanatory factors, with the important exception of Abul-Husn. First, these scholars argue that the 1943 National Pact, an unwritten compromise between Sunni and Maronite leaders which laid the foundation for Lebanon's formal independence from French colonial rule, allotted power along confessional lines, resulting in an acutely vertical and unequally distributed political and economic system that only served to promote inter-confessional conflict. Second, they posit that the expulsion of the Palestinians from Jordan in 1970 resulted in the introduction of an armed PLO presence in Lebanon that gave rise to new sources of internal political and civil tension and conflict. Finally, in an argument similar to the social movement theory of Sidney Tarrow (1994), these scholars contend that by 1975, Lebanon's democratic system had given rise to an open political culture in which debate spiraled out of control, especially on university campuses and in a free press, as the "cycle of protest" escalated into armed insurrection. Again, as already noted, almost every significant study on Lebanon's civil war involves all three of these explanations, though each emphasizes a different explanatory variable.

None of the English-language literature on the civil war in particular, or Lebanon in general, emphasizes civil society and public sphere theory in analyzing the historical and social forces which informed the emergence of modern Lebanon, and gave rise to and sustained the civil war, and have informed the constitution of the Tai'f peace and Lebanon's much-vaunted Second Republic with the important exception of a recent article by Antoine Messara (1995). This study attempts to fill this void in the literature while, at the same time, making a contribution to the increasingly important and growing scholarship on civil society in the Middle East in particular (most notably in English: Norton, 1996; Schwedler, 1995; al-Sayyid, 1995; Mowlana, 1994) and democratic public sphere theory in general.

A single, broad research question drives this essay: can a democratic public sphere be constituted in a multiconfessional state

where *asabiya* is a principal source of the self and is constitutive, in part, of such confessional sects, giving rise to multiple public spheres within the polity? In the context of modern Lebanon, this issue is especially important, since the sectarian divisions many believe led to civil war remain a source of social, cultural and political tensions. Four more core questions emerge from this general inquiry. First, what discourses and narratives informed the historical constitution and subsequent crisis of the Lebanese public sphere, a crisis that ultimately escalated into civil war? This question gives rise, in turn, to a second, more nuanced and perhaps important query: given the confessional and ethnic divisions of Lebanon informed in part by *asabiya*, can we talk about a truly "Lebanese" identity? This question has profound implications for any discussion of a national public sphere and civil society in general, and about Lebanon in particular. Another question which evolves from the above is whether or not some remnant of civil society and a democratic public sphere survived the civil war and contributed to the (re)constitution of civil society in Lebanon following Tai'f. This prompts a final general question which concerns recent events in Lebanon and that state's future. That is, has the Ta'if Accord, and the relative peace it has ushered in, allowed for a new, more tolerant and viable national identity and national public sphere to come into being?

To be sure, other important questions will emerge and be engaged in the course of this essay. How could a people destroy their own nation? Will the *Pax Syriana* work? For that matter, is there really peace in Lebanon? Will Israel keep its ground forces out of South Lebanon? Does Lebanon have a future as a sovereign state whose confessionally diverse polity is capable of restraint and mutual recognition? This study aspires to answer, at least in part, these and many other questions about Lebanon and its future.

In defending the position Lebanon merits close examination today, this essay will work against a powerful countercurrent in news media coverage and even within academia. The war is over. The Western media are no longer fascinated with the tiny Mediterranean nation now that the carnage has come to an end. However, anyone knowledgeable of Middle East affairs — especially the Arab-Israeli peace process — knows that Lebanon's future is now, perhaps more than ever, a crucial issue central to the current round of Syrian-Israeli

talks as the Jewish state attempts to bring to an end guerrilla and terrorist attacks by radical Palestinians and militant Islamic groups from camps within Lebanon (Hoff, 1996; Mualem, 1997).

Finally, mainstream social scientists' general criticism of case studies and the inability to make inferences back to a population from them notwithstanding, this study offers important, new perspectives on civil society, civil war and post-war reconstruction that should prove germane to the study of the former Yugoslavia and the various former Soviet republics plagued by confessional and/or ethnic tensions and violence. No case study examines a sufficient number of cases to allow us to make highly efficient inferences back to a population. A case study can allow us to posit new hypotheses, make some inferences to a population (inefficient though they may be) and build new theory. Further, such insights can be valuable from several methodological perspectives. While this study is clearly a piece of social theory, the findings presented below should prove useful to rational choice and game theorists, as well as behavioralists. In the end, I hope to demonstrate a brand of methodological pluralism that may privilege social theory, but does not preclude the usefulness of the findings should they be incorporated into other types of studies. Ultimately, this is what any good theoretical work should strive to achieve.

The Idea of Civil Society

One of the most important research programs in contemporary Middle East studies involves the application of the notion of civil society to the emerging democracies and other forms of government in the Arab world. Four significant bodies of scholarship have been produced in this area: the various publications of the Civil Society in The Middle East Project at New York University (directed by Augustus Richard Norton); the symposium on civil society at the Center of Arab Unity Studies in Beirut (al-Sayyid, 1995, pp.133-34); the Marxian approaches of those scholars associated with the Arab Research Center in Cairo; and the *Civil Society Newsbulletin* published by the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies in Cairo (al-Sayyid, 1995: 134). Norton, et al. employ a minimal notion of civil society: a democratic public sphere relatively free of

state tutelage in which individuals conceive of themselves as citizens of the state (with all the rights and obligations this entails) and engage in free associative and civil interaction (Norton, 1993: 211-212). Researchers at the Ibn Khaldoun Center employ a rather Lockean approach to civil society (al-Sayyid, 1995: 135). Studies produced at the Arab Research Center draw heavily upon Marx and Gramsci (al-Sayyid, 1995: 135).

Significantly, the notion of civility is contested by Islamic scholars who argue that the "term *mujtama' madani*, the usual translation of 'civil society,' smacks in their view of its Western origins, which stress membership in a particular community qualified as civil, as distinct from any other community, particularly one based on religion. These intellectuals prefer, therefore, another term that could reflect particular features of Arab culture. An alternative term offered is *al-mujtama' al-ahli* or the 'unofficial society,' while another has favored *mu'assasat al-'umma* or the 'nation's institutions,' guided by *maqasid islamiyya* or 'Islamic goals'" (al-Sayyid, 1995: 134). Liberal Arab Nationalists, meanwhile, "have called for maintaining the concept of civil society while adapting it to reflect specific conditions of Arab culture" (al-Sayyid, 1995: 134). Despite these East-West and secular-Islamic tensions, at the core of all major work in the research program is the notion that emerging civil societies in the Middle East constitute significant movement toward democracy in the region.

Like the idea of civil society, any notion of democracy and a democratic public sphere as they are applied to the Arab world also bring with them Western influences. It is impossible to escape Western philosophical traditions in the study of democratization in the Middle East (or elsewhere, for that matter). On the other hand, it would be a cultural conceit to impose exclusively Western constructs of civil society and democracy on the study of Middle East or other non-industrialized and/or non-Western nations and states without also considering the influence of these diverse cultures on such Western ideas. Indeed, as Edward Said so forcefully argues in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), such Western constructs are appropriated by the people of the former colonies and transformed by the infusion of indigenous ideas and structures. The imperialists' political thought and institutions were imposed upon those who were colonized and

yet were also appropriated by the indigenous populations and interpreted within the context of local knowledge and social structures. This study focuses on the relationship between civil society and public sphere theory and Ibn Khaldoun's notion of *asabiya*, or group cohesion.

Building upon Said's thesis and the important work of Roberto Alejandro (1993), this study pursues a hermeneutic and dialogic conception of the public sphere, a phenomenology of the public sphere. In the process it rejects liberal conceptions of civil society grounded in a principally conservative narrative informed by liberal capitalist ideology and traditional Western notions of democracy. These have little utility in examining/interpreting the political cultures of societies where the hypothetical social contract rings less than authentic. Further, through a critical assessment of the development of the closely related ideas of civil society and a democratic public sphere, this study will attempt to show that theorists must move beyond any traditional notion of civil society when conceptualizing the public sphere in comparative studies. Instead, the comparative theorist must pursue a cultural hermeneutic that makes room for the recognition of: 1) the incorporation of such ideas as civil society or democracy by other polities and their appropriation and transformation by those peoples; and 2) the unique social structures, political action and modes of rationality and discourse such as *asabiya* that emerge from specific historical, cultural and spatial locations.

Specifically, this study will examine Ibn Khaldoun's notion of *Asabiya* and its impact on the constitution of civil society and the public sphere in Lebanon, paying particular attention to the notions of power and authority within the context of this indigenous concept in particular and Lebanese (and Arab) culture in general. Like Alejandro, this essay proposes "a hermeneutic construction of the public sphere as a dimension of dialogue, not of an agonical longing for immortality (Arendt); a space of understanding, interpretation and application, not a space where distorted patterns of communication are uncovered and deciphered (Habermas); a realm where individuals can exercise distance, not a permanent face-to-face community (Dewey); a domain where citizens can risk the search for consensus without renouncing their deepest commitments, not a locus where divided selves erase the commitments defining their private

subjectivity" (Alejandro, 1993: 206). Extending Alejandro's argument that the public sphere "should be conceived as a field of competing traditions and competing languages" (1993: 206), this study contends that a hermeneutic and discursive conception of the public sphere allows for culturally and historically informed interpretation, critique and praxis when employed in comparative studies and indigenous political discourse.

Sources of Confessional Groups: Ibn Khaldoun and *Asabiya*

At the center of the argument made below is the notion that there are multiple public spheres within a single national public sphere. I will argue that this is particularly the case in the Arab world, and that it is perhaps most pronounced in Lebanon due to the presence of seventeen officially recognized sects. Drawing upon the recent work of Abul-Husn and the medieval *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldoun, I will posit that *asabiya* is an indigenous construct that has informed the emergence of Lebanon's sects at least since the introduction of Christianity to the Levant. Indeed, *asabiya* may be the most privileged source of the self for individual subjects situated in the Arab world for reasons discussed further in chapter four.

Asabiya has no specific English translation, although it loosely means "group cohesion" (Abul-Husn, 1998: 9). It is a pre-Islamic discourse that Islam has denounced because it centers on a group bond that would "commit its adherents to support one another without question, without regard to the justice of the cause" (Abul-Husn, 1998: 9). Abul-Husn's recent work on conflict resolution and Lebanon brings to bear *asabiya* in an important and meaningful way, but stops short of engaging two critical aspects of the construct: power and authority. Abul-Husn (1998), Issawi (1950), and Rosenthaul (1958) all treat power and authority within the context of *asabiya* as almost inseparable, a single form of coercion very similar to Gramsci's *dominio*, or rule (Williams, 1977: 108). I will argue below that a more nuanced understanding of these two related concepts of power and authority is required if we are meaningfully to understand *asabiya* and all that it implies in the constitution of the Lebanese self, sect and civil society.

Methodology

This study is primarily theoretical in nature. My goal is to contribute to the growing body of critical comparative literature on civil society and public sphere theory. Inasmuch as I pursue a critical cultural heremeneutic in this essay and posit a hermeneutic conception of the public sphere, my approach is interpretative. While in-depth and elite interviews with subjects from each of Lebanon's four main sects, Maronite, Sunni, Shia, and Druze, were conducted, the general methodology of the study is grounded in the notion of the analogue text (Taylor, 1985: 15). (The methodological approach taken in the interviews is detailed in chapter six). Consequently, a hermeneutic exploration of the historical narratives that have informed the constitution of modern Lebanon will be pursued.

This study offers a hermeneutic effort that strives to go beyond the liberal/behaviorist conception of the subject cast adrift in a probabilistic world and studied in aggregate. Rather, discursivity and a critical phenomenology ground the theory of the public sphere offered below. This essay is concerned with the subject's being (Heidegger's ontological mode), not the subject as a statistic or thing (Heidegger's ontic mode) (Macadam, 1977: 47). It is not enough merely to count the number of associative bodies that have emerged in a given polity and calculate their membership and relative autonomy in an attempt to demonstrate the existence of a public sphere. Such empirical methods of operationalization and descriptive inference treat the subject in aggregate and ignore the individual actor and his or her position in historical time and a given place. Further, they ignore the ontology of the self, culture and the public sphere. "What the ontology of mainstream social science lacks," writes Charles Taylor (1971: 32) "is the notion of meaning not simply for an individual subject; [but] of a subject who can be a 'we' as well as an 'I'." This is the dialectic of consciousness that must rest at the core of any viable theory of the public sphere.

As Arendt, Dewey and other theorists of the self and public space have argued, the subject constitutes meaning only when engaging others. "Action...," Arendt (1958: 188) reasons "is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act." For Dewey, man/woman "becomes a social animal in the

make up of his ideas....What he believes, hopes for and aims at is the outcome of association and intercourse" (Dewey, 1927: 25). This "sense of connection and combination," he continues "is a 'law' of everything known to exist. Singular things act, but they act together. Nothing has been discovered which acts in entire isolation" (1927: 22).

Put simply, single social and political actors are simultaneously an individual and a member of society. As Adam Seligman writes, "It is precisely this dialectic and tension between public and private, as constitutive of civil society" that defines the public sphere as "that arena where — in Hegelian terms — free, self determining individuality sets forth its claims for satisfaction of its wants and personal autonomy" (Seligman, 1992: 5). Like Dewey and Arendt, most all who work with the concept of the public sphere and/or civil society view men and women as "social animals," driven to pursue individual needs and desires while necessarily functioning in the webs of a society and community - in short, a culture - woven both by the individual subject and others.

For Dewey, like Habermas and Arendt, communication is both constituted by and constitutive of culture, community and the public sphere. But, as James Carey notes, a fundamental tension exists in Dewey's conception of communication. "I think...," writes Carey (1989: 14), " [he] understood better than most of us that communication has two contrasting definitions in the history of Western thought, and he used the conflict between these definitions as a source of creative tension." On the one hand, Dewey conceived of communication as a mode of "transmission", that is, communication as "a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people" (Carey, 1989: 15). On the other hand, Dewey employs a ritual definition in which " communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space and time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs" (Carey, 1989: 18).

Carey argues that the ritual view of communication dominates Dewey's work, being present in notions such as "'sharing,' 'participation,' 'association,' 'fellowship,' and 'the possession of common faith.' This [ritual] definition exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the terms 'commonness,' 'communion,' 'commu-

nity,' and 'communication'" (Carey, 1989: 18). He concludes by asserting that Dewey places "the final emphasis" in his work on a ritual conception of communication (Carey, 1989: 22). In the reading of Dewey offered below, I will contend that there is a pathos in Dewey's work which, at the very least, implies that both transmission and ritual are present in all communication. [Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Clifford Geertz make a similar argument in their respective theories of author function (Geertz, 1988:7-10).] Further, I will argue ritualized communication is always politicized, something Habermas attempts to overcome in his rather Kantian and formalistic notion of the Ideal Speech Situation, an epistemological effort, I will argue below, that is problematic in his theory of the public sphere.

Thus, Dewey's "social animal," humanity, engages in action and communication in the constitution of the social and public realms (two realms which Dewey pointedly distinguishes). Cultural theorist Raymond Williams makes a similar argument, though he grounds his theory of culture not only on the dialogic quality of man's being-in-the-world, but also on a Marxist thesis of materialism. For Williams, culture is "a constitutive social process, creating specific and different 'ways of life'" (Williams, 1977: 19). However, this process does not exist only in the realm of "mere ideas" (superstructure) (Williams, 1977: 18). Instead, Williams takes Marx's theory of base and superstructure and, drawing heavily upon Gramsci, recasts the formerly static model in a more dynamic fashion. Thus, for Williams, economic base generates superstructure, which in turn affects base (1977: 75-82). Thus, "'man [is always] making himself [anew]' through producing his own means of life" (1977: 19).

This gives rise in Williams' theory to three distinct types of cultural elements or structures: dominant, emergent and residual (1977: 121-127). "The residual," writes Williams has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process," though it may often have an "oppositional relationship to the dominant culture" (1977: 122). The British monarchy of today might be an example. Emergent structures are new meanings, values and practices introduced into dominant culture, but not yet fully incorporated into or rejected by it (1977: 123). Emergent elements are oppositional or alternative to the dominant elements of culture (1977: 124).

They are, in short, either counter-hegemonic (in complete opposition to dominant culture) or alternative hegemonic discourses (adaptations potentially subsumed by dominant culture). Dominant elements of culture are the prevailing institutions and practices of the day and are the product of cultural hegemony.

Williams borrows Gramsci's cultural hegemony thesis and argues that hegemony and rule cannot be escaped in any culture (Williams, 1977: 115-120). "'Rule' is expressed directly in political forms and in times of crisis by direct or effective coercion," writes Williams (1977: 108). "But the more normal situation is a complex interlocking of political, social, and cultural forces, and 'hegemony', according to different interpretations, is either this or the active social forces which are its necessary elements." This thesis is an important one for it gives rise to notions of power, authority and the political and their roles in the constitution of the self and the structures of society and culture. Put simply, culture and communication cannot be depoliticized in Williams' theory. Instead, the political is always present, either overtly or as pathos in all human endeavor. And so, man/woman is not only discursive and social, but political. Similarly, culture is both constitutive of and constituted by the political.

Another concept offered by Williams, and germane to this study, is his notion of the "structures of feeling." "Williams argues that the process he calls structures of feeling (a deliberate paradox) both shape and reflect the quality of social relations. Structures of feeling differ from such concepts as 'world-view' and 'ideology' because they are just emerging, still implicit, and not yet fully articulate. Instead they so tightly interweave feeling and thought as to make them indistinguishable" (Rosaldo, 1993: 106). As Williams writes: "We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating community" (Williams, 1977: 132). Gramsci's notion of the various "common senses," I think, is related to Williams' notion of the structures of feeling. In short, Gramsci argues that we employ "common sense" (as opposed to critical) approaches to problems because they make "sense" within the hegemony that informs and bounds the culture within which we live. "Common sense," writes

Gramsci from his prison cell, "is a collective noun, like religion: there is not just one common sense, for that too is a product of history and a part of the historical process. Philosophy is criticism and the superseding of religion and 'common sense'. In this sense it coincides with 'good' as opposed to 'common' sense" (Gramsci, 1974: 325-326).

The implications of this for any theory of the public sphere are far reaching. That is to say, if Williams is right, affect must always be present in meaning and thus interpretation. Drawing upon the work of French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, Renato Rosaldo writes: "Objectivism describes completed human events, which therefore can be depicted as totalities, complete with synoptic diagrams and governing rules. What already did happen (and no longer cannot happen) becomes conflated with what necessarily had to happen. Operating in a timeless realm, objectivist social analysis binds itself to the ways cultural practices are fundamentally defined by their tempo" (Rosaldo, 1993: 107). But human interaction is never completed. Indeed, most people move about the world acting on structured feelings and "common sense." Reason is often employed in daily life, but elaborate abstractions like those offered in the social sciences are not. Human beings "orient to their lives as if from midstream because precisely what will happen next, and when it will happen, cannot be predicted. The future, by its very nature, is uncertain" (Rosaldo, 1993: 107). This is the time men and women occupy, an historical time that gives rise to the public sphere and also must account for the future.

More to the point, the subjects of study in the social sciences rarely employ the purely analytic reason with which we attempt to explain their action, and which Habermas calls for in his theory of communicative action. Instead structured feelings and common sense guide their daily lives. And at the core of these lies an interwoven and inseparable cognitive and affective dimension. Having said this, we must also acknowledge that similar structures are at play when the researcher engages in his or her pursuit of meaning. They cannot be escaped, nor should they be. Instead, they should be brought to the surface and exposed so that our analysis is truthful and complete. This is the hermeneutic effort that must be present in the normative construction of any theory of the public sphere.

Traditional conceptions of civil society theory are informed by a capitalist ideology which does not make room for this kind of critical discourse. Nor does Habermas pursue this sort of hermeneutic in his conception of the public sphere. As a result, his theoretical offering becomes almost formalist, concerned more with the ideal than the actually existing public spaces of the various world polities. As we shall see below, both Arendt and Habermas idealize action and speech respectively and thus render their conceptions of the public sphere almost devoid of historical authenticity. Dewey, on the other hand, comes closer to achieving this end, despite his idealized conception of the face-to-face community.

In any event, regardless of the analyst, all agree that the public sphere emerges from the general culture and, in turn, constitutes that culture. Following Clifford Geertz, this study adopts a "concept of culture [that]...is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of a law, but an interpretative one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after" (Geertz, 1973: 5). But, the social scientist, like the individual, "as a positioned subject, grasps certain human phenomena better than others. He or she occupies a position or structural location and observes with a particular angle of vision" (Rosaldo, 1993: 19) . And, as Rosaldo notes, this notion of position refers not only to the place from which observation is conducted , but "how life experiences both enable and inhibit particular kinds of insight" (Rosaldo, 1993: 19). Precisely because social scientists are situated in historical time and specific spaces, their "interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects prepared to know certain things and not others" (Rosaldo, 1993: 8). This dialectic lies at the heart of interpretation. The boundary of interpretation (what we may not be prepared to know) also constitutes what we are prepared to understand. Thus, the core of the hermeneutic effort, interpretation, is the interpretation of the situated analyst observing situated subjects.

These issues are central to comparative studies because they reveal one of the great dangers of the field: the introduction of ideas to an analysis of other people and their cultures which are not culturally authentic. I raise this point now, as we prepare to examine the

work of several Western thinkers, in order to point out that while much of what I am about to discuss may or may not have overt historical grounding in the Middle East, distilled variants of these ideas have made their way into the culture and politics of the region (see Mowlana, 1994).

Plan and Scope of Study

In probing these issues, this essay will attempt to offer new insights in civil society and public sphere theory in general. As Robert Cox (1996) has noted: "Ontology, lies at the beginning of any inquiry. We cannot define a problem ... without presupposing a certain basic structure consisting of the significant kinds of entities involved and the form of significant relationships among them....From such ontological beginnings, complex theories have been built and specific cases... can be examined" (144). The 'ontology', as it were, of this study is grounded in the related notions of *asabiya*, civil society and a democratic public sphere.

Theory not only "follows reality....[it] also precedes and shapes" it (Cox, 1996: 145). "That is to say," Cox continues, "there is a real historical world in which things happen; and theory is made through reflection upon what has happened. The separation of theory from historical happenings is, however, only a way of thinking, because theory feeds back into the making of history..." (145). The history which informs, in part, the theoretical questions which will be engaged is that of Lebanon. Thus, following this introduction to the ideas of civil society and *asabiya*, the literature review offered in chapters two and three examines the related concepts of civil society and a democratic public sphere. This survey will then open into chapter four, which concerns *asabiya* and the historical narratives and discourses that have informed the constitution of modern Lebanon. Special attention will be paid to the discourses between the numerous confessional groups of the region and the ways in which these "public spheres" interacted and gave rise to the Lebanese nation and state. Indeed, it will be argued below that the Lebanese public sphere(s) is constituted, by and large, by the social practices pursued within and between the public spheres of each major confessional group. Chapter five centers on an interpretation of the

various discourses that have informed the emergence of modern Lebanon within the context of civil society theory and theories of myth. Issues of myth are important in the study of Lebanon (and other polities) because many of the discourses informing the constitution of the country's confessional groups are, in fact, grounded in a unique blend of history and popular mythology. Chapter six focuses on a hermeneutic exploration of the in-depth and elite interviews conducted during the course of my research. Again, this interpretive effort will be pursued within the context of civil society and public sphere theory. Chapter seven probes issues of difference and the notion that Lebanon is a 'fault-line' state within the context of Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis. Chapter eight, closes the essay with a summary discussion of the various interpretations offered in the study.