

**IRAQI WOMEN AND U.S. OCCUPATION: DECOLONIZING ONLINE
RESISTANCE**

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Master of Arts

In

Communication Studies

By

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San Francisco, California

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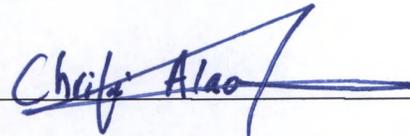
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Iraqi Women and U.S. Occupation: Decolonizing Online Resistance* by Brianna Jo Thompson, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in: Communication Studies at San Francisco State University.



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IRAQI WOMEN AND U.S. OCCUPATION: DECOLONIZING ONLINE
RESISTANCE

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In March 2003, the United States military invaded Iraq and altered the history, geography, and culture of the country forever. To justify this invasion, the Bush administration framed Iraqi women as citizens needing to be 'saved' from their government and people. During times of war, women are left to care for their nation through upholding family values, culture, and economic prosperity. However, because women take on the significant role of upholding a nation during war, they also experience the most violence. This research locates how female Iraqi citizens experienced and resisted the colonizing powers of the U.S. while upholding the culture and nation. This work decentralizes oppressive western rhetoric by honoring female Iraqi experiences. Utilizing a critique of vernacular discourse, I locate Iraqi women's ability to affirm their culture while simultaneously opposing Eurocentric power structures through online discourse.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

Fatima Z. Chirif Alaoui
Chair, Thesis Committee



05-22-2019
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Table of Contents

<i>Chapter 1: Iraqi Women and U.S. Occupation: Decolonizing Online Resistance.....</i>	1
Introduction.....	1
Research Rationale and Focus of Study.....	3
Statement of the Problem	10
Research Questions	15
Theoretical Framework.....	16
Methodology	25
Choice of Data Sample	28
<i>Chapter Two: Tactical Blogging</i>	30
Introduction.....	30
Three Female Iraqi Bloggers.....	32
Analysis.....	35
 Bloggng under constraints.....	36
 Bloggng as cultural preservation.....	40
 Bloggng as self-preservation.....	44
Discussion	49
Conclusion	53
<i>Chapter Three: Blogging for Space</i>	55
Introduction.....	55
Analysis.....	57
 Decentralize traditional media.....	57
 Draws attention towards communities and events.....	60
 Creating a sense of community.....	63
Discussion	65
Conclusion	69
<i>Chapter Four: Decolonizing Online and Academic Spaces</i>	71
Introduction.....	71
Analysis.....	72
Discussion	77
Conclusion	78
<i>References</i>	80

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1. "Two Friends" (Zaid, August 21, 2005).....	48
Figure 2. "Flowers" (Zaid, August 24, 2005).....	48
Figure 3. "The Duck Cat" (Zaid, September 10, 2004)	65

Chapter 1: Iraqi Women and U.S. Occupation: Decolonizing Online Resistance

Introduction

Three years of intense research and growth within the master's program in Communication Studies at San Francisco State University has led me to this work. I am excited to present this thesis project, as it is one more step towards devoting myself to becoming a better scholar, activist, and ally. This work represents an intersection of my interests within Communication Studies, in which gender, colonialism, and activism meet to establish the consequences of war on the female subject. The research developed within this thesis is part of a larger and longer political commitment I have made towards uncovering the darker side of modernization and its repercussions on the female subject.

Throughout my time in graduate school, my work has focused on expanding the west's limited conceptualizations of agency through illuminating the stories of the subaltern. My past research has recognized Iraqi women as the creators of their autonomy and experiences, not to be policed by the west. In my work, I have recognized female Iraqi blogging as a tactical approach towards dismantling the binary of resistance. Agency is not something a woman has or does not have, but a multiplicity of possibilities able to be dictated by the very subject that is living within that space. Throughout this thesis, I identify ways women work within their means to exemplify agency and create spaces for themselves.

My political commitment to the theorization of agency, Communication Studies, Gender Studies, and Decolonization has been ongoing. Two years ago, I began researching a blogger within this work, Riverbend. I was captivated by the citizen journalism and heartfelt words she wrote each day for her audience to read. I quickly

became devoted, politically, and emotionally, to bringing Riverbend's voice into public and academic spaces. I first presented my work at the conference level, advocating for the reconceptualization of our theorization of agency, utilizing Riverbend's different modalities of resistance through blogging. For example, her ability to be completely anonymous but still engaged, as well as her inability to move freely but speak back toward power safely. Riverbend, as well as the other two bloggers within this work, artfully dictated their agency through utilizing resources in ways that benefitted themselves and their families. Contrary to the outward displays of resistance commonly found within western feminism, the female Iraqi bloggers within this work utilize many different forms of resistance – all valid and all necessary.

My political commitment to the women and stories within this work has been brought to question because of my positionality at conferences and within academic discussions surrounding my work. When presenting my ideas, I have been told that I should never recite the words of these women but leave their stories and voices to be projected onto a screen. Also, I have been told that hearing the stories rather than reading them is too uncomfortable, too sad, and too emotional. I recognize that the most fitting person to read these stories would be the women themselves. However, in response to these comments, I push that western academics need to be uncomfortable. To be critically dedicated to the uncovering of truth and the reflexivity of our own actions and position within the west, these voices need to be heard. To place them upon a screen and hope the audience can make it through their words is not enough. As a critical scholar, who is politically committed to the expansion of our academic spaces, I do not allow us to take the easy way out; I want you to *hear* these women.

My positionality and identity has also been recognized as problematic. However, I believe to truly be an ally is to be consistent, accountable, and transparent. It is not showing up once but continuing to show up and work for the betterment of the cause you fight for and alongside. In this work, I speak with these women, not for them (Alcoff, 1991). However, I must not only be transparent about my background on the subject, but also my background as a researcher. I recognize that being a white, female, critical scholar who benefits from the westernization of the very academy I critique is problematic. It would be irresponsible for me not to recognize the juxtaposition between where my body and experiences originate in contrast to those of the women who guide my work. However, I continue to show up for these women, and this cause, as well as am open to many different critiques and questions this work may bring about.

Research Rationale and Focus of Study

A growing field within Communication Studies is the study of social media. What it means to be a social being is changing, and the divide between the public and private sphere is becoming blurred. The growth of social networking sites (SNS) that allow us to communicate across oceans and time zones have effectively established new ways for humans to share information, collaborate, and support one another. However, these new avenues require the field to continually adapt to the changing ways people can communicate online, as well as what they are communicating about. This changing environment can be identified through the differences in SNSs accessed between 2000 and 2013. For example, in the year 2000, more people accessed MSM, Yahoo!, Excite, AOL, Microsoft, Daum, eBay, and Altavista. However, in year the 2015, the most accessed websites worldwide were Google, Facebook, Youtube, Baidu, Yahoo!, Amazon,

Wikipedia, QQ, Twitter, Taobao, Live.com, Sina, LinkedIn and Weibo (Fuchs, 2017).

This shift demonstrates that people are gravitating more towards sites that enable communication between people rather than limit it. Online activism functions through the ability to access and communicate vis-à-vis SNSs and platforms. Blogging represents a major portion of the internet. Microblogs such as Twitter have continued to gain popularity and promote activism, as well as other blogging sites that allow users to produce more lengthy content. The ability to communicate through social media has forever changed how we view the world. We can communicate across borders and oceans; the internet has effectively opened up new worlds for its users, full of people and places that would not be available otherwise. Therefore, this work blends the concepts of female agency, colonialism, and blogging to highlight how women are subjected to endure war and occupation. Specifically, identifying online female activist's blogging throughout the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

In March 2003, the United States military invaded Iraq under the Bush administration. The United States government framed this invasion as the 'War on Terror,' in which Muslim women needed to be 'saved' and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) needed to be found (Abu-Lughod, 2002). The rhetoric used by the Bush administration framed the struggles of Iraqi women as a means to justify the economic and political infiltration of Iraq (Banwell, 2015). Later, in April 2003, the U.S. armed forces established occupation of the country that did not end until December 2011. This research locates the female Iraqi citizen within this complex climate of occupation and war, as well as provides examples of Iraqi women's resistance towards western U.S. forces.

This project furthers the discussion of female agency within Iraq and more specifically, female agency and resistance under occupation and war. Past research has outlined ways in which female agency within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has continually been brought to question by liberal feminists in the west (Mahmood, 2005). However, this work advances that discussion in a particular space – blogging. While blogging, especially within MENA, is not a subject that has gone unnoticed within recent scholarship, this work narrows that focus to specifically Iraqi women during the U.S. occupation of the country (Loewenstein, 2008). This focus is vital in examining the ways Iraqi women upheld their cultural values and developed spaces of resistance towards Western forces.

Women are consistently placed in between the crosshairs of national modernization and preserving culture. Therefore, their experiences during times of war differ drastically from their male counterparts. By identifying the ways women are directly and indirectly connected to the success of a nation, as well as how their bodies are subjected to violence during occupation and war, we not only gain a better conceptualization of the complexities of war but also begin to better understand how women navigate a war space. However, reducing female experiences to only highlighting what has been done to their bodies is limiting. Thus, below, I discuss the connection women hold to their nation-state in addition to laying the foundation for future theoretical conceptualizations of resistance within this work.

National identity and citizenship are closely linked to womanhood. Men represent the public sphere as the economic providers of the nation, while women are viewed as the carriers of culture and honor, isolated to the private sphere. Scholar

Valentine M. Moghadam (1999) describes that through this process, the optimal society is directly correlated to the ideal notions of female identity. Women are viewed as the bearers of culture through their ability to reproduce citizens of a nation and thus transmit ideas and signifiers of culture onto their children. The national interest and governmental pressure in maintaining the population, as Yuval-Davis (1997) describes, can be identified through three discourses; Firstly, the 'people as power' discourse, which encourages the production of families and children to enlarge the population directly aiding the power of a nation. Secondly, the "Malthusian" discourse that associates smaller populations with the prevention of people during national disasters, and lastly the "eugenicist" discourse which encourages people of a higher class to procreate and discourages others. Female reproduction has consistently been at the forefront of national debate, surrendering female bodies and sexuality to be policed, monitored, and publicly governed.

National interest in women's productivity inside and outside the household depends on the political climate. For example, in 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDA) took power of the country establishing the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA). The president of Afghanistan, after the establishment of DRA, Noor Mohammad Taraki, introduced new gender regulations to encourage female participation within the public sphere such as voting and employment. To do this, the DRA created literacy campaigns in rural areas where 96 percent of women and girls were illiterate and introduced new marriage laws. These laws forbid the exchange of marriage for money or valuables and gave men and women marriage independence from their families, as well as allowed widows more freedom after their husband's death (Moghadam, 1999).

Moghadam describes that the newly introduced marriage laws along with the literacy campaign, threatened the patriarch's power over women within the family and led the country into a civil war. In 1987, the DRA was renamed the Republic of Afghanistan and neglected women's rights in order to rebuild the national power. Stricter family laws replaced the newly implemented marriage laws, and veiling became mandatory. In the years that followed, the veiled isolated Muslim women became the symbol of national identity and Afghanistan culture, a different image of the previous government. Through this example, it is clear that in order to study the creation of culture and national identity, one must also study the discourse and experiences of women. This process becomes particularly important during times of war when a nation's security is threatened because the burden of protecting the culture is maintained through the preservation and isolation of the nation's women.

Upholding national identity rests on the shoulders of women, because of this responsibility, the female subject becomes especially vulnerable to violence, economic and social inequality and political out casting during times of war. War is becoming increasingly more personal, as the front line of battle is no longer outside of the community, but directly targeting civilians (Kaufman & Williams, 2010). Because civilians are predominantly made up of women and children, it is vital to acknowledge and examine how they experience war in the private and public spheres.

Women take on the role of head of the family while men are away. Often women are left with upholding the household, as well as the society as a whole. In order to violate this power, the enemy uses sexual violence to dominate women. Women are targeted because they are the carriers and producers of a nation's culture. Sexual violence

becomes a symbol of domination and male power used to humiliate and dishonor the *other*. Sexual violence also targets women as a way to pollute the ethnic population of a nation and publicly damage the next generation. This gendered violence is used as a weapon of war in which men are demasculinized through their inability to keep their women safe, and women are dehumanized through one nation's need to assert dominance over the other (Kaufman & Williams, 2010). This process also further links womanhood to not only the land but rather the critical component to upholding the culture and identity of a nation.

Historicizing this pattern of gender-specific violence within Iraq is pertinent to identifying resistance. In the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, Iraq experienced economic growth in response to the 1973 oil crises and the West's need for oil. This shift produced a larger middle class, leading the Ba'th regime to encourage women to take part in the growing job markets. However, Iraqi women would later be left with the more significant burden of being held accountable to uphold the Iraqi population during the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) and the 1991 Gulf War (Al-Ali et al., 2009). During the Iraq-Iran war (supported by the United States), the Ba'ath party's progressive stance on introducing women into the workforce during the oil boom in the 1970s took a back seat when women were instructed to produce a future generation of Iraqi soldiers. During prosperous times, women were allowed to work in the public sphere. However, the Ba'ath regime quickly placed the burden of upholding and regenerating the nation to the 'Iraqi mother,' which led to a fertility campaign in which women were asked to "bear at least five children" (p. 38). No longer was the regime focused on the education and the indoctrination of Iraqi women into the Ba'ath party, but their ability to procreate.

Two years after the Iraq-Iran war, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait beginning the 1991 Gulf war and economic sanctions. During this time, families were dependent on rations distributed by the government. The war increased the number of widows and female-headed households. Often, with nowhere left to turn, women looked to prostitution to provide for their families. The Ba'ath party and Saddam Hussein condemned this as dishonorable through violent campaigns. Al-Ali et al., (2009) describe that "Iraqi women became the bearers of the honor of the whole country: they had to be protected because they were vulnerable to temptation, gossip, a tarnished reputation, and potentially prostitution" (p. 48). This series of events between the 1970s and 1990s demonstrates the continued burden placed upon Iraqi women to uphold a nation's culture and identity. This burden is not only evident during times of war, but also during times of growth. However, women are at a heightened risk of experiencing violence by their nation-state and invader during times of conflict.

Post-September 11th, 2001, the U.S. rhetorically linked democratizing Iraq to the 'empowerment' of Iraqi women and justification for the military invasion of the country. The U.S. administration framed Iraqi women as the key to accomplishing a democratic government within Iraq. Scholar Brenda Mehta (2010), describes that Iraqi women's bodies were used to demonstrate the colonizing powers of the U.S. and further the democratic agenda. Al-Ali et al., (2009) links the importance of women within implementing democracy and the modernization of Iraq through George Bush's personal statements about the occupation, such as: "There's no doubt in my mind, empowering women in new democracies will make those democracies better countries and help lay the foundation of peace for generations to come" (p. 8). However, even with the vast

impact gendered policy had on Bush's push for democracy, the U.S. only used an estimated \$500 million to support the development of women out of \$21 billion documented as reconstruction funds for Iraq (Banwell, 2015). Through this massive discrepancy in allocated funds, it is clear to see that 'Iraqi women's liberation' was a rhetorical strategy to justify the occupation of a country. This occupation had precise effects on women's health and safety. Mehta (2010) describes that because of the war, gender-specific violence was evident under occupation by the increased "cases of rape, domestic abuse, prostitution, 'honor' killings, divorce and incarceration" (p. 80). This economic structure of violence also left between one and five million widows in Iraq (Banwell, 2015). Through this, it is evident to see that the U.S. occupation of Iraq had detrimental effects on Iraqi women. Therefore, Iraqi women are pertinent to studying the resistance strategies of a nation towards colonial powers because of the excessive violence they experience during times of conflict.

Statement of the Problem

The focus of this work is on Iraqi women's use of online spaces to resist the colonial powers of the U.S. I intend to identify ways female Iraqi bloggers used their online voice to speak out against the U.S. occupation. In doing so, women establish a sense of self vis-à-vis the preservation of culture and personal identity. However, while researching the multiple ways women have produced artifacts of resistance, I encountered revolutionary acts, on and offline. Below I contextualize Iraqi women's history of resistance, to counteract the popular U.S. trope of the silenced and oppressed Muslim woman.

To better conceptualize resistance tactics within Iraq, it is essential to acknowledge Iraqi women's history of resistance, reform, and challenging oppressive regimes. These histories can often be overlooked when only acknowledging Iraqi women's experience during the U.S. occupation. Al-Ali and Pratt (2009) take us back to the 1923 founding of the first women's organization in Iraq, the Women's Awakening Club. This organization mostly consisted of the middle and upper-middle class, secular Muslim women. The Women's Awakening Club aimed to "awaken" women within the country through literacy, healthcare, and education. While male reformists at the time, argued with traditionalists over the veiling of Muslim women and modernization, the Iraqi female activists focused on women's entry into the labor force and their education and overall rights (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009). Organizations continued to materialize during the British occupation before Iraq received its independence in 1932 and fully regained the country from Britain's meddling after the 1958 revolution. Women participated alone and alongside men within these organizations. Political revolutions and organizations became popular around this time, such as The Women's League against Nazism and Fascism in the 1940s. This group was focused on the progression of women's education and defeating Nazi Germany within WWII. In 1945, the Iraqi Women's Union was founded. Al-Ali and Pratt (2009) acknowledge this group as the "most important feminist organization at the time" (p. 24). The Iraqi Women's Union focused on significantly more taboo issues than past organizations, such as "prostitution, divorce, child custody, women's working conditions, and property rights" (p. 24). It is vital to acknowledge the resistance movements of Iraqi women within the past to better understand that their resistance is not just central to current times but evolving, continuing, and a part of their

culture. This continuing display of resistance towards dominant, and in particular western forces, has now entered a new online space.

Antony Loewenstein's (2008) argues in his book *The Blogging Revolution* that the internet is the most valuable tool to enact social change since the printing press. However, Lowenstein (2008) also articulates that "far too often, western commentators arrogantly presume that people living in repressive regimes want our help and crave a lifestyle and outlook comparable to our own" (p. 2). This mindset often leads women's resistance work to be viewed in comparison to westernized feminist modalities of agency and acts of othering. Lowenstein also reminds us that during the occupation, mainstream western media outlets typically focused on voices and opinions of white, western individuals, not within Iraq. He also argues that blogging within Iraq became essential in order to highlight the actual voices of people living within the occupation.

The lack of representation within media pushed for people inside and outside of Iraq to distrust mainstream news outlets and move towards online spaces. Two popular bloggers taking advantage of this space were Salam Pax with his blog, "Where is Raed" and Riverbend's blog, "Baghdad Burning." These two bloggers share the same location; however, their gender differentiates their way of knowing, experiencing, and re-telling the war. For example, Salam Pax was a very visible blogger and known to the public, but Riverbend intentionally stayed anonymous. I explore the concept of visibility within Chapter Two and Three, more specifically.

While blogging has been praised as being the new weapon in conflict zones, there are still critics questioning who this online space is helping. For example, Wesely Attewell (2012) argues that the popular anonymous blog, "Baghdad Burning" does not

actually function as a subalternized voice of Iraqi women but reinstates middle-class initiatives. Attewell argues that Riverbend's positionality as a middle-class Iraqi woman and her adoption of the 'we' voice is problematic, in what he calls, "tactical subalternity" (p. 634). However, Attewell does provide a significant critique about limiting Riverbend and other Iraqi women's resistant tactics to act of 'speaking out.' He states, "by distilling Riverbend's 'resistance' to the simple act of 'speaking,' we run the risk of silencing *her* struggle by reproducing the trope of the Arab woman as muted, silent, and immobile" (p. 631). These criticisms of Riverbend's blogs are essential for two reasons. First, criticizing Riverbend's background before the war does little to acknowledge the current environment that she lived through. However, Attewell's work also locates a very problematic way of simplifying resistance and agency to that only of 'speaking.'

Expanding upon the simplistic notion of speaking, Perri Campbell (2012) introduces Foucault's concept of self and the reflexive spaces that blogging provided and continues to provide for Iraqi women. Campbell (2012) states:

Digital spaces offer particular opportunities for bloggers to say and do things that are not always productive or safe in other fields of possibility. As Anita Harris (2005: 42) argues, digital spaces can both operate as 'marginal spaces for the expression of missing discourses.... women are able to engage in unregulated dialogue and debate with one another, to generate their own meanings and terminologies', and occupy a space which they can 'speak back.' (p. 330)

To support these claims, Campbell analyzes the blog, "Neurotic Iraqi Wife" (also identifies as Neurotica). The anonymous author of this blog identifies as an Iraqi expat

working within the Green Zone of Iraq. Neurotica consistently uses her digital self to describe her inability to come to terms with her identity or purpose within Iraq. As an expat of the country, Neurotica finds herself labeled as a traitor of the country and an “ungrateful Iraqi” (p. 335).

Similarly, citizen journalists¹ in Iraq like Dahr Jamail transcribe content and stories not available to the public and post them within online spaces. Other artifacts of resistance include Dunya Mikail’s poetry book *The War Works Hard*, in which she discusses the toxic masculinity between the warmonger west and the Iraqi government (Mehta, 2010), as well as Nuha Al-Radi’s “Embargo Art” following the Gulf war and her discussions of healthy food and living spaces as resistance within occupied Iraq (Mehta, 2006). This diversity in productions of resistance exemplifies Iraqi women’s multiplicities of agency within a country under siege.

As discussed earlier within this section, women’s resistance towards colonialism and western forces is not a new phenomenon within MENA. However, the different modalities of resistance available to women are changing. Through these changes, women can enact agency in a multiplicity of ways. Online spaces are opening up the possibilities for women to interrogate governments, wars, ways of life, and experiences in an accelerated and public way. Blogging continues to open up avenues for women to enact agency however they feel necessary. More importantly, blogging within occupied Iraq enabled Iraqi women to express their distrust for the U.S.

¹ Citizen journalism, which will be discussed more in Chapter Three, is the process of citizens broadcasting first-hand accounts of information within their area. This is commonly through social media sites (SMS) and blogging and works to disrupt the hierarchical structure and gate-keeping strategies of traditional media outlets. (Thorsen & Allan, 2009)

This work brings two current topics within the discipline to the forefront of the discussion – female resistance and mediated spaces. What is missing from the current literature is a critical analysis, specifically to identify ways in which female Iraqi bloggers utilized online spaces to resist dominant forces by upholding their cultural values. However, the discussion of resistance becomes problematic without the addition of agency and the critique of western thought. This work adds to ongoing literature re-centering women's voices within times of conflict through past histories and struggles. What current literature lacks is a critical approach to women's online voices within occupied Iraq, which is precisely what this work pushes to focus on. The discussion has begun surrounding blogging and mediated spaces, however, women's voices still have to fight to be heard. The fight proves even harder for Iraqi women to be acknowledged outside of western academia's limited feminist epistemologies. This analysis furthers the de-linking of Iraqi women's bodies and voices from western ideals.

Introducing female positionalities and experiences about war, vis-à-vis online mediated spaces create a hyper-focused look into how women resist and enact agency within the gender-specific violence of war. This lens also provides a critical look into how U.S. forces enact and enforce dominant discourses during times of conflict, as well as how women respond and resist these spaces. Lastly, this thesis adds to the ongoing literature that is pressing to remove white, liberal feminist positionalities from that of women outside of the western world (Hill Collins, 2000; Mahmood, 2005; Spivak, 1983).

Research Questions

Therefore, the two questions this thesis seeks to answer are:

1. How was female Iraqi blogging used as a tactic against dominant western strategies during the U.S. occupation of Iraq from 2003 to 2011?
2. How does blogging re-center the female subalterns' voice within U.S. occupation of Iraq from 2003 to 2011?

The investigation of these two questions will push to identify moments of resistance and cultural survival employed by Iraqi women, as well as the burden women take on during times of war. In addition, investigating Iraqi women's online vernacular discourse enables a "de-linking" from western ways of knowing.

Theoretical Framework

In contemporary literature surrounding the discussion of resistance, many scholars fail to decolonize their theoretical approach to resistance from their epistemological and geopolitical location in the west. Three significant theorists guide this work and help locate Iraqi women's agency through blogging. First, the overarching theme of this thesis is to de-link ways of knowing and experiencing the world from hierarchical structures associated with western thought. In doing so, we are better able to remove oppressive and narrow-minded notions of female agency. Second, and as discussed earlier in this work, I employ de Certeau's (1984) concepts of tactics and strategies and space versus place to better identify resistance. Lastly, I utilize Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) postcolonial theory of the subaltern subject to identify how colonialism has silenced Muslim women.

The overarching theme of this work, and what will be discussed extensively within Chapter Four is the process of illuminating the subaltern voice past academic and western constraints. In order to do this and move away from essentializing resistance, we must

follow Walter D. Mignolo's (2007) process of "de-linking." Mignolo argues that in order to decolonize our ways of knowing, a shift must be made from theo- and ego-politics to body-and geo-politics. Theo- and ego- politics represent Eurocentric ways of knowing, theo-politics being Christian theology and ego-politics representing a secular philosophy, both become the hegemonic marker of the rhetoric of modernity (Mignolo, 2007). This shift in knowing is salient in theorizing women's resistance within occupied Iraq, in addition to identifying that resistance and agency cannot be viewed only in response to the west.

Mignolo (2007, 2011) gains his insight into decolonialism and "de-linking" from Anibal Quijano, a Peruvian scholar who is best known for developing the concept of the "coloniality of power." Quijano's theories were inherently rooted in his geopolitical location within Latin America and worked to uncover the interrelated legacies of colonialism within contemporary society. Mignolo's discussions of decoloniality and the theoretical underpinnings of his work are not situated within MENA or Iraq. However, the principles behind Mignolo and Quijano's work need to be utilized when interrogating the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the tactical response Iraqi female bloggers had towards this war. Mignolo (2007) describes that decoloniality is the process of "de-linking from the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality" (p. 463). To "de-link" is to highlight ways power structures police and exclude subaltern identities from their stories, home, and culture. This thesis adds to the theory of decoloniality by expanding its principles towards Iraqi women's blogging tactics and online spaces. By establishes new ways to utilize the process of "de-linking," this work extends the theoretical principles established by Quijano and Mignolo towards new locations – on and offline.

Mignolo (2007) describes the rhetoric associated with modernity aids in the justification of violence. For example, the Bush administration used the justification of Iraqi women's rights to infiltrate and bomb the country. As discussed earlier within this work, when providing reasons for the invasion of Iraq, the U.S. rhetorically situated Iraqi women as individuals subjected to old and undiplomatic restraints. Falsely using veiling as a reason that the Iraqi women needed to be 'saved.' Mignolo (2007) advances further to describe that the logic of coloniality is dependent on modernity; you cannot have one without the other. Quijano's (2000) "coloniality of power" represents the power structures, repercussions, and the changing environment inflicted on communities through colonization. Coloniality is the consequence (for the subaltern) of modernity, and modernity is the root of coloniality. Mignolo (2007) describes that we must decolonize our minds through alternatives to modernity, such as an expansion of knowledge and utilizing the experiences of the subaltern vis-à-vis geo- and body-politics. This expansion is not grounded within Latin and Greek philosophy but expands to incorporate "border thinking." Mignolo (2007) describes critical "border thinking" as the connection between subaltern histories. Through this connection, knowledge does not begin with western thought but involves many ways of knowing, opening up new avenues to re-thinking the world around us. Iraqi women's online community and presence represent substantial and crucial addition towards "de-linking" western thought from the experiences of women, and particularly Iraqi women, during times of conflict and war. Next, I identify examples of scholars "de-linking" western thought from their approach towards gender studies.

A recent and tangible perspective to this process of "de-linking" western (white) thought from epistemological ways of knowing is Patricia Hill Collins (2000) book,

Black Feminist Thought. Within her work, Hill Collins argues that ways of knowing and experiencing the world for Black women do not fit into white lived experiences. The everyday ways of knowing that Black women embody are often taken-for-granted knowledge. However, Hill Collins argues that lived experiences of Black women are not only essential to their family units but also an act of surviving in which “Black women cannot afford to be fools of any type, for [their] objectification as the Other denies [them] the protections that white skin, maleness, and wealth confer. Hill Collins’ ideas outline the discrepancies within feminist scholarship and resistance. For example, during third wave feminism in the 1970s, a common goal surrounding white middle-class feminists was for women to pull away from the nuclear family unit and become more autonomous and freethinking individuals, devoid of male governance inside and outside the home. However, Black and intersectional feminists argue that this shift did not account for the women of color, especially Black and Native women within the U.S., whose families had been enslaved and destroyed for centuries (Mahmood, 2005). Instead, resistance to them was upholding and cherishing the family unit. These differences in thought outline how white western ideas of resistance do not account for intersections of race, class, and gender and therefore, continually need to be interrogated and questioned.

However, it is crucial to recognize that the process of “de-linking” originates from a Latin-American context that differs from the positionality of those living within MENA. Therefore, I bring scholar Saba Mahmood (2005) and Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) to the discussion. Mahmood (2005) expands the western assumption of resistance and agency through her ethnographic study of the Egyptian women’s mosque movement within her book *Politics of Piety*. Through this process, she actively works to “de-link”

the Egyptian piety away from western criticism and misrepresentation. Mahmood demonstrates Egyptian women's ability to work within patriarchal and religious spaces to enact agency, instead of against it. Within this explanation, she argues that western feminists fail to acknowledge the diverse modalities of agency and resistance. This shift in examining resistance strives to place the subject *before* the preconceived notions of desire and resistance to power. To better explain this shift, Mahmood critiques Judith Butler's (1993) examination of resistance that is always situated against heteronormativity and patriarchy. Within this critique, she describes that Butler's theoretical approach to studying resistance is predominately situated within an agent's ability to acknowledge and resist power structures, particularly those associated with patriarchal systems of oppression. This western equation of resistance is problematic because it not only fixates on one desire to resist (against the male-dominated spaces) but also places these spaces of resistance before the subject. Therefore, Butler's argument strips agency from the subject if they do not desire to subvert social norms. This critique is vital because it relocates and dismantles western notions of resistance by acknowledging that agency is not a set of proposed actions that are enacted by a subject. Instead, Mahmood's description of agency provides a more nuanced and complex view of women's resistance, in which the subject does not only go against power structures but bargains and works within these structures. This view of resistance and agency is diverse, complicated, and not fixed.

To further identify ways in which western conceptions of agency and resistance fail to account for women within MENA's experiences, Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) discusses the dangers of placing cultural icons such as veiling at the center of the

discussion of agency without acknowledging historical and political dynamics. Abu-Lughod (2002) argues that during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the burqa became associated with Afghan women's lack of agency. This association outlines ways in which the west inaccurately ascribes or removes agency from bodies and reinforces Gayatri Spivak's (1988) famous quote, "white men saving brown women from brown men" (p. 92). Both Abu-Lughod (2002) and Mahmood (2005) argue that pushing away from these simplistic views of women's experiences, not only enhances the safety and lives of women within the MENA but also expands our perception of resistance and culture. Separating agency from notions of resistance will expand our perceptions of survival and a subject's ability to behave or perform in a certain way (Mahmood, 2005). For example, in the previous reference to Abu-Lughod's (2002) work, the burqa is viewed as a lack of agency and resistance towards hierarchal, often gendered structures of government and religion. However, depending on the subject, the burqa can be worn to enact agency or subscribe to social norms consciously. Also, it can be worn as resistance towards the west. However, these are very different decisions related to the subject in which commonalities may cross, such as resisting the west through upholding one's culture, just as they may differ or not relate to each other at all. This example furthers Mahmood's (2005) argument that resistance and agency are not synonymous, as well as pushes further to disassociate resistance from solely the west.

To provide a theoretical framework that encompasses the decolonial aspects of the previous scholars and trajectory of this work, I look to Michel de Certeau's (1984) concepts of tactics versus strategies and space and place. Hill Collins (2000), Mahmood (2005), and Abu-Lughod (2002) all describe small everyday acts performed, coordinated

and experienced by women that enable their survival and existence in a patriarchal system. These tactics and space building practices are what de Certeau (1984) argues are common everyday operations of people within suppressed communities. de Certeau (1984) labels the subaltern individuals creating tactics and building space, users or consumers of popular culture because they are taking the information, media and hegemonic culture of the people in power and utilizing it to their benefit.

Much work has been dedicated to analyzing a societies ability to represent cultural norms vis-à-vis media; not much energy has been dedicated to examining how and what individuals do with that media. While many more media outlets and ways of communicating have transpired since the foundational work of de Certeau (1984), the question still remains, how do individuals consume and produce (*poiēsis*) new ways of using oppressive systems and representations to better themselves and their communities? To understand this more fully, de Certeau (1984) introduced two transformative ideas to the academic forefront of critical intercultural communication. Firstly, the concept of tactics versus strategies and secondly, the acknowledgment of transformative space versus place. Both of these approaches become critical when examining the cultural salvation of Iraqi women's blogging during the U.S. occupation of Iraq and moving towards the geo and body-politics discussed earlier.

Michel de Certeau (1984) describes oppressive hierarchical structures assertion of dominance over a subject as 'strategies,' and the opposing oppressed group's way of navigating spaces as 'tactics.' Tactics are not a byproduct of strategies, but a direct response to power. Strategies are any institutional body that has direct or indirect governance over others. For example, government officials create roadways and paths

through cities using strategies that may make more prosperous areas of the town available, while other, more deprived areas of town have limited access. However, a local cab driver uses tactics to navigate and create shortcuts along these roadways.

Using this framework above, the U.S. occupation of Iraq would be considered a strategy, and Iraqi women's blogging a tactic. de Certeau (1984) describes that strategies function through control; however, control is not stagnant and always changing to better govern others. This uncertainty fuels the subaltern's use of tactics to take advantage of the unpredictability of the environment. Connecting this idea back to the theory of 'de-linking' from western ways of knowing; Mignolo's (2007) argument of prioritizing geo- and body-politics over the aggressive, dogmatic knowledge produced by western elites and academics would prove to coincide with de Certeau's (1984) tactical approach to resistance. The relationship between these two theories is further strengthened when looking at blogging as a space building practice that works to decolonize ways of knowing.

de Certeau (1984) is known for his conceptualization of 'place' versus 'space.' He argues that 'place' is a fixed, static, and often-distinguishable location or thing. For example, when looking at San Francisco State University from the street, an onlooker will see stable buildings that house classrooms and offices, as well as small coffee kiosks that serve pastries and drinks. However, upon closer look, an observer will see moving elements composed of students and faculty transforming the 'place' into a 'space.' No longer is the University static and unchanging, but now students are seen placing posters on walls and laughing with classmates. Professors are rushing to meetings and grabbing a coffee before attending lectures. This transformation happens through "space as practiced

place,” through the moving elements of human life (de Certeau, 1984, p. 117). Following the examples above, Iraqi female blogging represents a ‘space’ built by women and producing tactical responses to western colonialism and violence. Within this space, blogging becomes inherently tactical, as well as decolonial.

In order to further identify the need to illuminate voices not generally heard within the academic space and discussions surrounding the topic of war, I utilize Spivak’s (1988) groundbreaking postcolonial work, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Within her book, she identifies that literature referencing other cultures have been told from the experiences of the colonizers, not the colonized. This Eurocentric strategy has historically stripped groups of people their identities and culture to better situate western thought and practice as the dominant hegemonic discourse. The subaltern subject is one deprived of hierarchical class signifiers without agency or status. In order to navigate up the social class ladder, the subaltern must bargain with the strategies of elite thought and use tactical ways of knowing. In doing so, Spivak argues that the subaltern must utilize the colonizers thought and western ways of interpreting the world, leaving behind their own embodied knowledge and culture. This process becomes increasingly more difficult when the subaltern identifies as a woman. Spivak states that “the protection of women (today the ‘third-world-women’) becomes a signifier for the establishment of a *good society*...” (p. 94). As I have discussed above, when the burden of carrying a nation’s culture is placed on the female population, the subaltern does not experience more protection, but multiple levels of violence, physically and emotionally. Spivak’s interpretation and theoretical approach to studying and speaking with the subaltern is pertinent to this thesis,

as it not only provides a vital portion to the framework of my writing but also continues to interrogate my ethical approach in observing Iraqi women's blogs.

In the next section, I introduce the methodology of this work. However, it is crucial to recognize that the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis are not separate from the methodological framework of my analysis of Iraqi female blogging. Both theory and method speak to each other and work with one another.

Methodology

I intend to investigate the different ways Iraqi women resisted the dominant hegemonic western structures during the U.S. occupation of Iraq. I am specifically looking at women's ability to reclaim power through the humanization of Iraqi people vis-à-vis blogging. In other words, in what ways did Iraqi women utilize blogging as a form of resistance to push back against western conceptualizations of power? In order to better identify acts of resistance, I employ a critique of vernacular discourse. This rhetorical analysis strategy focuses on the vernacular of the oppressed and their uses of everyday speech in public and private spheres (Ono and Sloop, 1995). This methodology is pertinent to studying women's resistance and the honoring of marginalized voices. A critique of vernacular discourse serves as a step in de-linking western ideological ways of knowing from the lived experiences of Iraqi women. Through the process of prioritizing everyday language, the subaltern voice does not have to bargain within the broader institutional structure of Eurocentric knowledge.

Vernacular discourse is everyday speech, unique to specific communities and groups of people, as well as the cultural artifacts produced by these communities. These artifacts can include such things as music, art, architecture, dance, media, and much

more. Vernacular discourse works to prioritize the rhetoric of the oppressed, as opposed to critical rhetorician's study of complete works produced by elites, such as speeches in which the empowered dictate public spaces (Ono and Sloop, 1995). If scholars do not highlight the voices of the oppressed in times of struggle, we run the risk of reproducing ideological hierarchies, as discussed by Kent Ono and John Sloop below:

Unless critical attention is given to vernacular discourse, no new concepts of how community relations are interwoven and how communities are contingent is possible. Without a critical framework, description occurs without self-reflection; hence, ideological presuppositions unconsciously may be reproduced. (Ono and Sloop, 1995, p. 21)

For example, Ono and Sloop (1995) argue that past scholars like Burke (1941) studied the rhetoric and public speeches of oppressors and dictators, such as Adolf Hitler to analyze and critique power. Critical rhetoric works to "unmask or demystify the discourse of power" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91); however, we must look closely at who and what rhetoric is being showcased. By only analyzing the elite and their public displayed discourse, we focus on the stagnant language produced by one person or population. Even speeches produced by historically progressive individuals like Dr. Martin Luther King's (1963), "I Have a Dream" speech, only focuses on one individual. A critique and exploration of oppressive structures should not stop after one speech or person. The everyday vernacular of people negatively affected by powerful elites and oppressive systems is more telling of the climate, social structure, and realities being explored. Blogging represents a type of vernacular discourse in a community unable to safely go

outside their homes and converse with neighbors and friends during the occupation.

Blogging grows, evolves, and continues past a single moment in time.

Critiquing vernacular discourse links back to my theoretical framework in two fundamental ways; firstly, Mignolo's (2007) critique of vernacular discourse works as an alternative to modernity in which many knowledges and methods of establishing those knowledges are explored. This acknowledgment becomes vital in de-linking western ways of knowing and establishing new ways of interpreting the world. Secondly, the authors push towards Spivak's (1988) argument of not co-opting the subaltern's voice but highlighting it and honoring the voices of the marginalized. Identifying the vernacular of the oppressed removes other voices that historically have clouded the stories told by subaltern individuals.

In order to identify the vernacular of the oppressed, two characteristics are used to establish a critical framework and highlight the voice of the subaltern to create political change: *cultural syncretism* and *pastiche*. Cultural syncretism is the reproduction of discourse and actions that protest how dominant forces view vulnerable communities. This affirmation of culture upholds oppressed communities by providing cohesive opposition towards elite ideologies. An example of this is rap culture, in which the music and lyrics produce a counter-hegemonic discourse. Pastiche is the process in which oppressed communities borrow fragments of popular culture to reclaim space. This is not a process of reproduction of dominant narratives, but the creation of vernacular discourse that explicitly and implicitly challenges mainstream discourse (Ono and Sloop, 1995). Examples of this can be found in street art, such as graffiti. Through this process, artists reclaim public spaces by reproducing cultural artifacts in visible locations. This

reproduction pushes back against hegemonic culture. Both cultural syncretism and pastiche can be viewed through de Certeau's (1984) concept of tactics, in which the oppressed group utilizes pieces of their environment to push back against institutions of power in ways that promote their community and wellbeing.

A critique of vernacular discourse provides the needed framework to study the marginalized and silenced voices of Iraqi women and their resistance. Through cultural syncretism and pastiche, these women reproduce and prioritize their voices, as well as others experiencing similar horrors under occupation. This work outlines ways in which the narratives of the elite are not and should not be the only way to evaluate and critique power. Next, I provide the specific female bloggers that this work looks towards as knowers and producers of culture and resistance.

Choice of Data Sample

I have chosen to study the online vernacular of Iraqi female bloggers during the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq from March 2003 to December 2011. There are three blogs I have chosen to examine in this thesis: H.N.K.'s "a diary of IraqiGirl," Raghda Zaid's "Baghdad Girl," and Riverbend's "Baghdad Burning." There are two main reasons why I have chosen these blogs; firstly, each of the three women mentioned above represents a diversity of positions, experiences, and thoughts about the war and occupation. These factors are influenced by age, socioeconomic status, and approaches to blogging and communicating through mediated spaces that diversify opinions and blogging tactics. Secondly, I believe that I am connected to these blogs through the immense amount of time I have spent reading them. However, I would like to caution that this is not a declaration of similarity between myself and these women, but

recognition of time spent and devotion to reading each blog by H.N.K., Raghda, and Riverbend entirely and respectfully. Through this respect, I move away from speaking *for* these women towards speaking *with* each blogger (Alcoff, 1991). Also, each blog post showcased within this work was not edited but taken directly from each woman's online blog; because English was a second language for these women, there are occasional misspellings. A more detailed description of each female blogger is provided within Chapter Two. In that chapter, I describe the personal characteristics and pieces of their identities that each woman felt comfortable enough to share within their blogs.

This chapter has provided an overview of the research goals, methodology, theoretical approach, and justification and importance for this work. In Chapter Two, I outline moments of tactical approaches to power through cultural and self-preservation within female Iraqi blogging. In Chapter Three, I recognize moments of space building practices within the process of blogging that allowed women to uphold their personhood and nation, as well as center Iraqi women's voices through citizen journalism. Chapter Four concludes this work and offers insight into how highlighting the vernacular of the subaltern within occupied Iraq works to decolonize academic spaces and change the rhetoric and discussion of war.

Chapter Two: Tactical Blogging

Introduction

Bloggging naturally bridges time, space, and place. A blog, as long as a site is intact, can be retrieved, read, and re-read as many times as an audience would like. The language placed upon a page can reenact moments completely lost to the natural progression of everydayness, of moving on – of life. In addition, a continuous watchful blog, like the spaces discussed in this work, can unearth the truths and even the monsters that live below the surface.

While internet access is still an unattainable commodity to most, the world wide web has undoubtedly reworked how wars are broadcasted, retold, and understood. In addition, female voices are consistently pushed aside when discussing nationalism and violence (Farah, 2003). However, women have increasingly more access to voice opinions and experiences surrounding the subject of war within online spaces; this is demonstrated through Iraqi women's tactical blogging practices in which they described their everyday lives during the U.S. occupation of Iraq, as well as their feelings, opinions and cultural values surrounding the subject of Iraqi culture, nationalism, war, and Eurocentric strategies.

The next two chapters of this work, act as a space to honor the voices commonly lost within war rhetoric and occupation. Many scholars have analyzed how women are silenced and violently targeted as casualties of war through changing family structures and sexual violence (Kaufman & Williams, 2010; Al-Ali et al., 2009; and Yuval-Davis, 1997). Performance scholars such as Laila Farah (2003) and Cherrie Moraga & Gloria Anzaldúa (2015), have brought marginalized female voices to the forefront of their research. Scholar Chandra Mohanty (1991) describes that marginalized ways of thinking

position the third world women as always in *resistance to* the west. The inherent linkage of the experiences of women within MENA as subaltern subjects to their colonizers enables a silenced and skewed understanding of how women within these places experience violence and live their lives. In this chapter, I move to disable that linkage by investigating the vernacular discourse of female Iraqi bloggers. After analyzing the blogging tactics of these women, I provide a theoretical extension to de Certeau's (1984) concepts of tactics and strategies. In addition to this theoretical approach, Spivak's (1983) guiding principles of acknowledging, listening, and honoring the subaltern voice will continue to humble this work.

Throughout this chapter, I use vernacular discourse to better explore blogging as a tactic and mechanism of war resistance and survival. In order to critique vernacular discourse, one must identify the everyday speech of the community being observed. The women within this work utilized blogging as a way to document the everydayness of their lives. Through blogging, Iraqi women connected their cultural values and experiences to online and visible spaces. These connections were made public to not only express the real horrors of war but also to celebrate a vibrant culture of historically strong and connected communities within Iraq. Both of these tactics are viable and necessary for Iraqi women's survival. Identifying and analyzing vernacular discourse allows the power relations between the U.S. and the Iraqi government, and most importantly, Iraqi women, to be visible (Ono & Sloop, 1995). Women used this space to uplift their communities and remove the self-serving U.S. ideology of *Operation Iraqi Freedom* and modernization. These women went against narrow conceptualizations of the 'silenced Muslim woman' and projected their thoughts, opinions, and desires onto a space for all to

see. This work begins in resistance towards the west but reconceptualizes this understanding as spaces governed *by* Iraqi women, *for* Iraqi women.

This chapter is broken up into four sections in order to expand upon Iraqi women's tactical approaches to power through blogging. First, I introduce the three bloggers whose words and experiences will guide this work. Secondly, I identify moments in which Iraqi female bloggers used vernacular discourse to preserve themselves and their culture from inside their home. Next, I locate how blogging operates as a vehicle for the tactical subversion towards colonizing powers. Lastly, I conclude this work with a discussion connecting Iraqi women's online vernacular discourse to de Certeau's (1984) use of tactics and strategies.

Three Female Iraqi Bloggers

Many blogs were created in response to the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Bloggers backgrounds differed; some were created by the U.S. and Iraqi soldiers fighting within the country, others were expats of Iraq, and most were Iraqi citizens living within the country. However, the process of female Iraqi citizens choosing to blog about their lives becomes vital when exploring how the female subaltern experiences colonialism and war. The preservation of these experiences through online vernacular discourse is a clear example of how gender, colonialism, and nationalism intersect.

After reading many blogs produced during the time the U.S. occupied Iraq, three bloggers stood out: H.N.K.'s "a diary of IraqiGirl," Raghda Zaid's "Baghdad Girl," and Riverbend's "Baghdad Burning." These bloggers documented their experiences extensively within Iraq, giving a wide breadth of vernacular discourse to examine. However, it is useful to recognize that not every woman introduced herself extensively.

Therefore, this introduction of voices describes the information each blogger decided to share. Also, it is essential to mention that each of these blogs was written predominantly in English with the occasional post in Arabic. Within my research, none of the three bloggers spoke explicitly about the audience they hope to reach through their language choice, but this tactic did allow for more U.S. citizens and English-speaking individuals to witness these blogs and experiences unfold.

H.N.K. began blogging in 2004 at the age of fifteen years old. She tells her audience that she has two sisters, a father who is a doctor, and a mother who is an engineer. She describes herself as “special” and states, “I look to the life in a different view than you do, I love life, I love people, and I wish the best for my family and my friends” (H.N.K., July 29, 2004). H.N.K. used her voice and blog to describe what occupation felt like for a young woman going to school. She often transitions between the stressful environment of war and her struggles as a student. When documenting wars from afar, onlookers do not recognize or think about the everydayness of struggling civilians, H.N.K. uses her position to highlight the uneasy dichotomy of life within a war zone. It requires a young woman to find discomfort in her school exams while simultaneously describing the bombing around her home. Four years after the creation of her blog and many tragedies later, H.N.K. reintroduces herself and why she is anonymous; “H.N.K. is my nickname that is known by blogger and which I used in this blog from the beginning, and Hadia is a name I used in my book ‘Iraqigirl.’” Later, within the same post, she critiques the use of names and her reasoning for being anonymous: “I began this blog to do something to my country and to be someone. And since I am still in the beginning of this road I want to be sure to end it safely. I used

nicknames for not be known (not be assassinated)” (H.N.K., May 23, 2008). H.N.K. and the following bloggers demonstrate that blogging served as an outlet and tribute to their country and culture. However, the act of documenting their experiences was dangerous and not to be taken lightly.

Next, H.N.K.’s cousin, Raghda Zaid, began blogging at the age of thirteen. Zaid’s blog became an interesting and memorable blog between news outlets² because of her stylistic choices and content. Often Zaid would post pictures of kittens to brighten her audience’s day. At times, kitten pictures would take up most of her daily postings and recounts of war experiences. Daily blogging would appear sparsely between images labeled things like, “kittens playing” and “cute cat.” However, as the war continued, it is clear to see that the once frequent images of kittens begin to dwindle. With age and time, Zaid transitions into blogging about war crimes rather than images of kittens. As a reader of her blog, the process in which she grows up through occupation is transparent vis-a-vis her changing vernacular.

The last blog I am utilizing within this work is *Baghdad Burning* by the anonymous blogger, Riverbend. Riverbend identifies herself in her first blog post, August 17, 2003, as a twenty-four-year-old female Iraqi computer programmer who has survived the war. She tells us, “that’s all [we] need to know. It’s all that matter’s these days anyways” (Riverbend, August 17, 2003). She goes on to explain in this introduction that this weblog will be more of a “rantlog,” in which she warns her readers but denies it getting read by many. The last blog post by Riverbend appears on April 9, 2013, almost ten years after the creation of her site. However, this post comes after a six-year hiatus

² <https://www.dailydot.com/layer8/baghdad-girl-kitten-blogger-iraq-war/>

from the blog in which her second to last post appeared on October 22, 2007. Riverbend does not give us much personal information throughout her years of posting, her siblings and cousins are only given letters for names, and she identifies her parents as “mother” and “father.” She tells us that she fled to Syria to escape the Iraq war. However, because of her anonymity and a final post in 2013, we do not know if she survived.

While all of these women have similarities in experiences that ground their writing in the same geopolitical location, it is important to recognize them individually. No two experiences can be the same, and each voice should not essentialize an entire country filled with diverse female experiences. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to locate multiple and different positionalities and voices to broaden the focus of this work.

Analysis

This analysis of female Iraqi blogging within the timeframe of the U.S. invasion of Iraq outlines how Iraqi women counteracted Eurocentric power. Iraqi women’s online vernacular simultaneously opposed Eurocentric rhetoric and power while affirming the culture and women within Iraq. The blending of culture and protest act as cultural syncretism, a vital component of the framework used when critiquing vernacular discourse. Studying the blogs of women within this time highlights how culture is upheld, created, and preserved through the female subaltern vernacular. In addition to the preservation of the country, women also used blogs to re-create culture in which they pieced together popular histories of Iraq and their own subjectivities. This process, known as pastiche, completes the framework of critiquing vernacular discourse. Utilizing this framework, three themes emerged from the blogs of H.N.K., Raghda Zaid, and Riverbend: (1) Blogging Under Constraints, (2) Blogging as Cultural Preservation and (3)

Blogging as Self-Preservation. I begin each section with a blog post representing the emerging theme followed by a critique of vernacular discourse. Each blog post locates the female Iraqi blogger as in control of how she and her country is represented.

Focusing on how Iraqi women projected their voice through blogging and retelling stories of survival and community, showcases how the female body experiences war. Highlighting this practice demonstrates the connection between women and the creation and preservation culture, as well as how colonialism historically and ideologically targets women differently than men. Bridging these gaps highlights the critical approach this work takes towards uncovering the experiences of women during war and occupation. Locating the vernacular of these women introduces new voices, opinions, and subjectivities into an academic space, otherwise denied to them.

Blogging under constraints.

Females can no longer leave their homes alone. Each time I go out, E. and either father, uncle or cousin has to accompany me. I feel like we've gone back 50 years ever since the beginning of the occupation. A woman, or girl, out alone, risks anything from insults to abduction... (Riverbend, August 23, 2003)

...growing up in war is very hard, all the things you used to do is impossible to do now including going out that's because it is very dangerous to go anywhere so you have to stay home all the time and even home isn't safe, for me the most thing I missed was going out and visit my relatives and friends...(Zaid, September 24, 2006)

I begin this section with the first theme that emerged from these women's blogs – blogging under constraint. Riverbend and Zaid both describe how Iraqi people, and particularly Iraqi women, were unable to leave their homes for fear of being assaulted or killed. Riverbend goes on to describe her need to leave the house, to see the 'light of day:'

An outing has to be arranged at least an hour before hand. I state that I need to buy something or have to visit someone. Two males have to be procured (preferable large) and 'safety arrangements' must be made in this total state of lawlessness. And always the question: "But do you have to go out and buy it? Can't we get it for you?" No, you can't, because the kilo of eggplant I absolutely have to select with my own hands is just an excuse to see the light of day and walk down the street. (Riverbend, August 23, 2003)

Female Iraqi bloggers documented the everydayness of their existence, the struggles of power conflicts within their homeland, troubles within their communities, and at times joy between family members and friends, as well as memories before and after occupation. Blogging was used as a space to celebrate the richness of the Iraqi people and culture vis-a-vis the very women that create and uphold these values, traditions, and country. Vernacular discourse is specific to communities and people experiencing similar realities. The most pertinent communities to be critically explored are the subaltern individuals that have been historically overlooked. Iraqi women during the U.S. occupation represent a community of people often overlooked during times of war, through gender-specific violence and silencing. Iraqi women also serve as a population of people continuously misrepresented and stripped of agency by U.S. rhetoric.

Iraqi women created an online culture through cultural syncretism by outlining the danger of placing their bodies on the line in resistance towards U.S. forces and rhetoric. They highlight that it was only after occupation that their bodies began to be policed, counteracting the U.S. rhetoric of Iraqi women needing to be 'saved.' Recognizing this, Iraqi women utilized blogging as a space in which they could oppose the physical constraints placed upon them by war through the tactic of affirming and speaking about their own culture and everydayness. Riverbend, an anonymous blogger, describes that during the occupation, Iraqi citizen's days had "been reduced to identifying corpses, avoiding car bombs and attempting to keep track of which family members have been detained, which ones have been exiled and which ones have been abducted" (Riverbend, December 29, 2006). Riverbend's location is unknown to her audience, and she often tells us that she obeys orders to stay inside. However, even while obeying those orders, she uses her position as a blogger to push back against the war that is waging outside her door:

The question now is, but why? I really have been asking myself that these last few days. What does America possibly gain by damaging Iraq to this extent...nearly every Iraqi has lost so much. *So much*. There's no way to describe the loss we've experienced with this war and occupation. There are no words to relay the feelings that come with the knowledge that daily almost 40 corpses are found in different states of decay and mutilation. There is no compensation for the dense, black cloud that hangs over the head of every Iraqi. (Riverbend, December 29, 2006)

In contrast, Riverbend also recognizes her feelings at the beginning of the war, stating: “nearly four years ago, I cringed every time I heard about the death of an American soldier.... they were occupiers, but they were humans also and the knowledge that they were being killed in my country gave me sleepless nights” (Riverbend, December 29, 2006). Emphasis is placed on the words “my country,” Riverbend fights with the idea that someone could be killed within her country no matter where they come from. Within this post, she actively opposes the idea that Iraq was a dangerous place before the war while affirming the idea that the war and death of American soldiers were not welcomed by Iraqi citizens.

H.N.K. also uses her position as an anonymous blogger to identify ways in which the war affects her daily life and studies. She speaks of a “normal day” in which she had an exam but did not believe she understood the exam material well because of outside noises. H.N.K. states, “I know that is not good but what can I do, I heard the sound of bombings and bullets so that I couldn’t understand.” H.N.K. goes on to explain to readers that a normal day is not what they assume, “when I say today was a quiet day that does not mean there is not bullets or something like that, when I say today was a normal day that does not mean there were no explosions, because if there were no bombings, it’s not a normal day” (H.N.K., November 03, 2004).

Riverbend and H.N.K. do not steer away from describing the horrors and complexities of war. They use their position to call attention to atrocities within their countries and the terrible circumstances they are in because of their gender, age, and location. However, as Riverbend notes, the discrimination they face is not because of their religion or culture, but restraints placed upon their bodies by the occupying U.S.

forces. Both bloggers create, through cultural syncretism, a space to voice counter-hegemonic discourses protected by the anonymity of blogging. This protection becomes vital in their survival and their ability to continue voicing opinions. Without leaving their home, blogging represents a space where these women were able to oppose the rhetoric that silences them and voice opinions through affirming their culture and autonomy. Through this process, both Iraqi women were able to avoid disrupting the regulations of military infiltration, such as having to stay inside, curfews, and areas of the country that Iraqis, and particularly Iraqi women were unable to occupy or visit. The ability to be visible and expressive online provided an outlet for Iraqi women to occupy and create spaces for themselves safely. Through this process, Riverbend and H.N.K. express grief and trauma in a public space, as well as empathy and frustration. This recognition of emotions counteracts the U.S. administration's rhetoric surrounding the saving of Iraqi people, and particularly Iraqi women, discussed in Chapter One.

Blogging as cultural preservation.

We've been cleaning again these last few days. The 'Big Eid' or "Eid Al Kabeer" or "Al Eid Al Adha'ha" is on Sunday and everyone has been hectically taking down curtains for washing, polishing furniture and rearranging sock drawers. The 'Big Eid' is known as the big one because it lasts a day longer than the other Eid, "Eid Al Futtur." During the Big Eid, Muslims from all over the world go to Mecca in Saudi Arabia and visit 'Bayt Allah' or 'God's House' which was built by the Prophet Abraham. Visiting Mecca is one of the five pillars of Islam which include fasting, 'shahada' or bearing witness to God and the Prophet, prayer,

visiting Mecca (at least once during the lifetime), and 'Zekat' or charity.

(Riverbend, January 31, 2004)

Above, Riverbend describes the 'Big Eid' for her audience. Blogging creates a space for what I am categorizing as two tactics, cultural and self-preservation. In this section, I discuss blogging as cultural preservation through a critique of vernacular discourse. Blogging allowed women to demonstrate cultural values and traditions that are specific to Iraqi beliefs and family customs. Through the process of pastiche, blogging provided a space for Iraqi women to post pictures of traditional dishes, discuss holidays, and any other practice specific to Iraqi culture. Pastiche is created through borrowing pieces of popular culture "to reconstitute discourses within specific racial, cultural, gendered, and ethnic communities...that often implicitly and explicitly challenges mainstream discourse while at the same time affirming and creating the community and culture that produce vernacular discourse" (Ono & Sloop, 1995, p.23-24). The blogs within this analysis use pieces of U.S. and Iraqi popular culture, religious and traditional values and personal experiences to continue to uphold the culture of Iraq.

In contrast to the happier post that began this section, Riverbend also describes abuse she and other Iraqis face because of their culture. For example, within her blog, she describes a moment of injustice a woman faced while being searched outside her job by a U.S. soldier. Riverbend describes that U.S. troops had been conducting daily searches of all employees of the Ministry of Oil, a large petroleum plant located in Iraq. Explaining, "the checks are worse on females rather than they are on the males because we have to watch our handbags rummaged through and sometimes personal items pulled out and examined while dozens of people stand by, watching" (Riverbend, October 21, 2003).

She also goes on to explain that often, because of the war, Muslims had been carrying around small Qurans for protection. In order to explain what happened to the women next, Riverbend had to go through a process of pastiche, blending cultural and religious knowledge within her story. She describes that in order to handle a Quran, “a Muslim has to be ‘clean’ or under ‘widhu.’ ‘Widhu’ is the process of cleansing oneself for prayer or to read the Quran. We simply wash the face, neck, arms up to the elbows and feet with clean water and say a few brief ‘prayers’” (Riverbend, October 21, 2003). Once done explaining the importance of religious preparation before reading the Quran, Riverbend describes that during the search, a soldier pulled a small Quran out of a women’s bag and proceeded to check it and eventually throw it on the ground. Onlookers waiting to go to work were horrified.

Within the example above, it is evident that female Iraqi bloggers, speaking in English, know that they have a western audience. Because of this, Riverbend contextualizes her experiences using pastiche, borrowing from many different outlets, such as the religious knowledge explained above. The vernacular discourse that is derived from this produces a community of pastiche. Iraqi women must blend cultural and religious facts to describe the extent and importance of events clearly. However, with this, I would like to caution this is not their sole reason for blogging, but aids in the creation of vernacular discourse and the process and content in which they write. Because women are the bearers of a nation’s culture, the burden of explaining, refuting, and justifying cultural injustices increases during times of war and struggle. Women are not only the first to be harmed by modernization and colonialism but also the first to push back against those processes. Through these blog posts, Iraqi women utilized their space

not only to sustain, protect, and continue to produce cultural values in their own country but humanize Iraqi people. For example, in another blog post, Riverbend blends Iraqi culture, history, and western academics to speak back to power through the process of pastiche.

Riverbend defends an Iraqi woman's right to choose her style of dress and autonomy by responding to Dr. Stanley Kurtz's, an anthropologist at the Hoover Institution, examination of the purpose of Muslim women's veiling practices. Kurtz states that a veil is "to prevent outsiders from competing with a woman's cousins for marriage." Kurtz also describes that attacking veiling is to "attack the core of the Middle Eastern social system." Riverbend, after describing the article, argues, "He took hundreds of years of wearing the veil for religious reasons and relegated it all to the oppression of females by their male cousins. Wow – human nature is that simple" (Riverbend, October 01, 2003). Riverbend goes on to state:

I have a question: why is Dr. Kurtz using the word 'veil' in relation to Iraq? Very, very few females wore veils or burqas prior to occupation. Note that I say 'veil' or 'burqa.' If Dr. Kurtz meant the general 'hijab' or headscarf worn on the hair by millions of Muslim females instead of an actual 'veil' then he should have been more specific. While 'veil' in Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan is quite common, in Iraq it speaks of extremism. It is uncommon because the majority of moderate Muslim clerics believe it unnecessary.

...Muslim females do not wear a hijab or veil because their male cousins make them wear it. They wear it for religious reasons. I personally don't wear a hijab or headscarf, but I know many females who do – in Baghdad, in Mosul, in Najaf, in

Kerbela, in Falloojeh...in Jordan, in Syria, in Lebanon, in Saudi Arabia...and none of these females wear a headscarf because their cousins make them wear it. They wear the headscarf out of a conviction that it is the correct thing to do and out of the comfort and security it gives them. Cousins have nothing to do with it and Dr. Kurtz's very simplistic explanation is an insult. (Riverbend, October 01, 2003)

I quote Riverbend at length here because the idea she is responding to is a common and dangerous misconception perpetuated by the west. Equating all Muslim women to the same dress, religious values, and culture degrades and removes their autonomy as free thinking and valued members of society. When the west assumes all Muslim women wear veils, they dehumanize Muslim women as faceless and voiceless beings that must be saved. While a veil is common in parts of the MENA, like Riverbend discusses above, it is not a uniform attire that can be attributed to all women within MENA.

Blogging as self-preservation.

My mother told me not to write about politics. She told me to write about my normal life, but I don't have a normal life so how could I follow her advice?
(H.N.K., August 03, 2005)

What should I feel towards:

Towards the people who killed the doctors?

Towards the soldiers who killed my relatives and my people every day by their
arms?

Towards Saddam who break my heart?

What should I feel? What should I say? What should I do?

I don't know.

I am a blind in the dark. (H.N.K., June 15, 2005)

In addition to cultural preservation, women also utilized blogging as a tool to discuss their sense of self during destruction such as H.N.K.'s posts above. This space provided room for each blogger to discuss their hopes, dreams, aspirations, and personal lives with their audiences. This process not only continued to humanize a nation crippled by war but granted a space for women to discuss themselves as not only war survivors, autonomous beings.

Vernacular discourse is the everyday vernacular of marginalized communities, in addition to this it is also the culture: "the music, art, criticism, dance, and architecture of local communities" (Ono & Sloop, 1995, p. 20). H.N.K. and Raghda were both bloggers using pastiche to blend art and stories of survival. H.N.K. frequently posted poems and stories onto her blog. Early in her years of blogging, H.N.K. posted this poem:

I read this poem and want you to read it,

When I Say...I am a Muslim

When I say...I am a Muslim,

I'm not shouting, "down with Christians and Jews."

I am whispering "I seek peace,"

And Islam is the path that I choose.

When I say...I am Muslim,
I speak of this with pride.
And confess that sometimes I stumble,
And need Allah to be my guide.

When I say...I am a Muslim,
I know this makes me strong.
And in those times, I am weak
I pray to Allah for strength to carry on.

When I say...I am a Muslim,
I'm not boasting of success.
I'm acknowledging that Allah has rescued me,
And I cannot ever repay the debt.

When I say...I am a Muslim,
I'm not claiming to be perfect.
My flaws are indeed visible,
But Allah forgives because his followers are worth it.

When I say...I am a Muslim,
It does not mean I will never feel pain.
I still have my share of heartaches,

Which is why I invoke Allah's name.

(H.N.K., December 22, 2004)

The language H.N.K. reposts within this poem represents the affirmation of her culture and herself. This discourse challenges the dominant western discourse that continually places the Muslim faith at the center of terrorism and war. H.N.K. speaks back to power by defining her culture as peaceful and protests against the dominant ideals of the 'angry Muslim.' Four years later, H.N.K. posts a poem she has written, in which she continues to protest the conditions that she and other Iraqis are living through. She writes:

But who am I?
 A human who love peace,
 Who love freedom,
 Who want to be someone,
 Who want to have electricity 24 Hr per day,
 Who want to get out of the house after 9 PM
 Who want to live a life with no fears,
 Who want to see it country unhurt and not destroyed,
 I am the one who is a Muslim, and who love Allah the most.
 I am the one who dream of a better tomorrow,
 And who live for a better one.

(H.N.K., May 23, 2008)

Both poems demonstrate the blending of art and vernacular in one platform. Within this work, H.N.K. affirms her own culture and self while simultaneously protesting the hegemonic and Eurocentric values that are destroying Iraq, her home. Next, Raghda Zaid

also uses a form of art to create a blogging culture specific to her. In the first few years of her blog, Zaid would post almost exclusively pictures of kittens. She'd name the image a title that was something recognizable to go with the picture and often only write a lengthy blog post every two or three weeks. Below is some example the images she'd share:



Figure 1. "Two Friends" (Zaid, August 21, 2005)



Figure 2. "Flowers" (Zaid, August 24, 2005)

To expand upon the juxtaposition Zaid, utilized within her blog, it is important to recognize the blog post following these two images is titled "We are Living in Hell." Within this post, Zaid states, "it has been a long time since I posted my last subject... four days ago a big explosion happened near my house, it was done by a bombcar, this

bombcar cost people's lives, broke windows, and brought fear" (Zaid, August 26, 2005). She goes on to explain that two ten-year-old children were killed by the bomb and urges people to stay safe. Ono and Sloop (1995) describe pastiche as "the process of appropriating through imaginative reconstructive surgery" (Ono & Sloop, 1995, p. 23). It is the active process of grabbing pieces of culture and molding them into something new. Zaid surgically alters her vernacular to fit her personality and needs at that particular time in her life. She uses pictures of cats and kittens to ease her fears and bring joy to her online space. She creates a community through images purposely placed to release some of the burden and pain felt by herself and her community.

Discussion

Uncovering vernacular discourse alone is not a liberating practice. The next step to identifying the importance of subaltern vernacular is to provide a critical framework to view the everyday speech of the community being studied. Using de Certeau's (1984) framework of tactics and strategies, I identify ways in which Iraqi women used blogging as a tactic against the colonizing strategies of the west, particularly the United States.

de Certeau (1984) describes tactics as responses to power strategies produced by elites. Traditionally, de Certeau (1984) described these tactical approaches to power as small, everyday movements and changes choreographed by suppressed communities. In Chapter One, I introduced the taxi driver example. To expand upon this, a taxi driver may utilize shortcuts through a city to get their passengers to their destinations faster, as well as increase the number of riders they pick up in one day. Within this scenario, the larger elite structure is the strategy of the government and city planner's construction of roads and dictation of how to experience the city. However, the native informant, the taxi

driver, can tactically subvert the power structure and benefit from their personal and intricate knowledge of the city. This knowledge is only held by people who understand the city's structure in ways that benefit themselves. While small everyday movements created by subaltern communities, like discussed above, can continue to enable better survival for individuals, I argue that resistance and therefore agency sits upon a spectrum unable to be categorized as "large" or "small." As a result, what could be considered a "larger" approach to power, such as blogging can also be considered a tactical approach towards elites.

Blogging is a diverse tactic that allows the users to be as transparent and visible as they would like. For example, not all female bloggers identified their actual name within their blog, while others identified members of their families and places they have traveled. Some posted pictures of themselves; others never posted anything that could identify them or their family. Surveillance factors attributed to women making these decisions. Some women were concerned that they or their families would feel the backlash from the U.S. or Iraqi governments and possibly citizens within either country. Riverbend and H.N.K. both use pseudonyms and careful language not to identify themselves or family. This is a purposeful tactic to avoid dangerous repercussions that could come with criticizing both the U.S. and the Iraqi government. Both women found ways to speak back to power anonymously but forcefully. H.N.K. responds to hurtful and threatening comments on her blog early on within her writing, stating "I read all the comments that you wrote, some of them hurt me, some of them made me nervous, some of them let me cry" (H.N.K., November 17, 2004). It becomes clear that women made conscious decisions about who and what they would speak about within their postings. In

addition to this diversity, some female bloggers were consistent with their daily posting, while others often went a few weeks or months without posting. Many factors could have contributed towards blogging constancy, such as personal choices of the women, internet access, and availability to power sources. Blogging occupies a space of diverse choices for the women that created these accounts and re-told their lives online. For this reason, blogging intersects a liminal space, between large and small-scale resistance practices and agency from within the home.

A key component of de Certeau's (1984) framework is the ability of the subaltern subject to utilize the everydayness of their environment in a way that is specific and beneficial to their own experiences and community. Through this use, tactical approaches to power become ingrained in the practice of living and surviving within an oppressive system, and agency becomes specific to the culture and geopolitical location of the subaltern. However, because tactics – small and large – become rooted in the normalcy of living, they often can be overlooked, downplayed, or not even understood by outsiders. In contrast, this allows subaltern subjects to avoid the harm that may come from outward displays of resistance, such as protesting publicly. The practice of studying vernacular discourse and Iraqi women's tactics, tell us that studying this *everydayness* is the center of a transformative and critical acknowledgement of systems of power and how communities thrive within oppressive structures.

Tactics in the face of strategies are not always outwardly resistant. In fact, at times they may be compliant with power, not opposing it. A subaltern subject may use small everyday measures to subvert power structures and survive. For example, this may be an Iraqi family obeying an American soldier's commands to stay inside their home.

However, within this entrapment, a young Iraqi blogger uses her time to project her feelings onto a screen to be seen by many. By effectively using a position deprived of power, she alters her experience and expands her voice beyond occupation.

Riverbend, H.N.K., and Zaid all describe their lives within Iraq under pressure to obey the outside control of U.S. forces and power. Through blogging, these women's voices live past their constraints within their country and can travel across borders and computers into the households of people millions of miles away. To be able to produce a tactical response towards power, de Certeau (1984) claims that tactics rely on timing and one must "always [be] on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.'" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix) Blogging and Iraqi women's tactical approach to U.S. strategies represents a process contingent on time.

Dr. Kurtz's examination of the Muslim women and their attire demonstrates how western academia essentializes and neglects the subaltern's voice, as well as pushes to further the west's obsession with the topic of "veiling." This obsession is closely linked to what would be considered the success of a nation. As Spivak (1988) notes, a country is judged based on how well they can protect the woman of the nation. Women are inherently linked to land and culture within a country. Therefore, when western rhetoric and infatuation is focused on the 'unveiling' of Muslim women, women are centered as the target for misrepresentation and slander. However, Riverbend utilizes this moment to decolonize the western assumption of a woman's lack of agency and autonomy, as well as the inaccurate language and cultural knowledge of a university anthropologist. Through her tactical response, she affirms her own culture, while opposing Eurocentric rhetoric and assumptions.

Zaid's post pictures of kittens as a tactic against the destruction surrounding her. She uses her youthful disposition as a counter-hegemonic discourse. This tactic is specific to Zaid and made her stand out around the world. Subaltern communities use tactics as survival methods, as well as strategic maneuvers to subvert power systems. Unlike any other blogger, Zaid's youthful and innocent expression online provides an outlet for herself and others.

Conclusion

Interrogating the center of the creation of culture, functions only through highlighting the individuals placed on the margins of society, the people left out of the discussion. This process crosses state and country lines. Bodies on the borders, physically and metaphorically become the consumers and producers of knowledge and economic prosperity. Female Iraqi citizens during the occupation were systematically placed on the borders of society through the violence of war and the insistence of the west to rhetorically position them as unconscious bystanders of their own culture, stripping Iraqi women of their agency. However, through this work, I demonstrate that blogging counteracts this silencing.

Blogging works to bridge the public and private spheres, through illuminating the everyday vernacular discourse used between women and communities during the occupation of Iraq. This becomes increasingly important when exploring the lived experiences of Iraqi women during the occupation. Moving away from studying the colonizers rhetoric and language, this work places the subaltern subject at the center of the research. Value begins to shift away from Eurocentric notions of knowing and

gaining knowledge through one singular truth and proceeds to honor the voices of the oppressed and highlight their tactical responses to power.

To do this, three moments are located; tactical responses to power from within the home, preserving culture as a tactic and preserving self as a tactic. All three of these moments become inherently important to the women within this work. de Certeau's (1984) framework establishes a way to recognize a subaltern's ability to subvert power situations strategically and safely. Iraqi women utilized their tactical approaches to power as a means for preserving Iraqi culture and nationalism, as well as Iraqi womanhood in the face of colonialism and occupation. In addition to providing a space for subaltern voices, blogging served as a bridge between connecting the world to the modern colonizing strategies of the western world. Female bloggers upheld their culture and nation through their online presence.

In the following chapter, I discuss the space building practices of blogging and the importance of Iraqi women's ability to create space. To study the three bloggers creation of space through vernacular discourse, I provide a critical framework utilizing de Certeau's (1984) concept of transformative "space" versus static "place."

Chapter Three: Blogging for Space

Introduction

In this chapter, my investigation into the vernacular discourse of blogging identifies ways that Iraqi women created online spaces for their voices, experiences, and culture. These spaces are unique to each of the three bloggers identified in this work, as well as work together to create a common goal of self and cultural longevity, through war and colonization. Zaid, H.N.K., and Riverbend all constitute their own online space through their online vernacular and citizen journalism. Choosing to focus on citizen journalism as an approach women used within their blogs, is a strategic move in demonstrating how vernacular discourse serves as a space constructing and emancipatory practice from Eurocentric and colonizing powers of the U.S.

Within this chapter, I first introduce the concept of citizen journalism and its effects through blogging that alters and disrupt traditional news outlets and their limited broadcasted information. Secondly, I build upon the tactic of cultural preservation and upholding senses of self vis-a-vis blogging that was previously discussed in Chapter Two. Through these two tactics, the three bloggers brought attention to their experiences as Iraqi women and advocated for the preservation of their culture and people. Lastly, I discuss how female Iraqi bloggers created a space that pushes back against narrow representations of Iraqi people and specifically, Iraqi women. I look to space as the online community and platform each woman worked to create, uphold, and intertwine with other bloggers through shared experiences.

Citizen journalism works to re-center subaltern voices through first-person accounts and documentation of current events. Forms of this documentation can transpire

through videos or photos taken with a mobile device, verbal and written recounts of events, or a combination of images and text. Citizen journalism can be found on multiple different platforms and is not limited to the blogs discussed in this work. For instance, microblogging such as Twitter has become immensely popular in recent years, as well as other SNSs like Facebook and YouTube. Three universal goals are found when critically analyzing Iraqi woman's vernacular discourse and space building practices while using citizen journalism as the lens; (1) citizen journalism works to decentralize traditional media, (2) citizen journalism draws attention towards communities and events, and (3) citizen journalism creates a sense of community through shared experiences. These three themes emerged from reading each women's blog. Often, Riverbend and H.N.K. would outline ways that media sources were misrepresenting their lived experiences within a warzone, as well as not reporting on crucial things happening within Iraq. This misrepresentation resulted in their blogs directly speaking back towards power through their first-person accounts of current events and atrocities happening within their country. In addition to this, each woman aided in building interconnected spaces that served as a broader platform for all Iraqi female bloggers to be part of.

Similar to Chapter two, each theme will begin with an excerpt from one of the three women's blogs. I do this to demonstrate how each theme emerged while analyzing and honoring the experiences reported by H.N.K, Zaid, and Riverbend. Following the excerpt, I link the concept of citizen journalism to each theme. Lastly, I identify more examples of how each theme resonates within all three women's blogs and reporting practices.

Analysis

Decentralize traditional media.

In her blog, Riverbend continually disrupted the media by calling out false statements and responding to political arguments. Below is Riverbend's response to witnessing a speech by George W. Bush, President of the United States at the time:

Bush said:

'Iraq is the latest battlefield in this war ...the commander in charge of the coalition operations in Iraq, who is also senior commander at this base; General John Vines, put it well the other day. He said. 'We either deal with terrorism and this extremism abroad, or we deal with it when it comes to us.'

He speaks of 'abroad' as if it is a vague desert-land filled with heavily-bearded men and possibly camels. 'Abroad' in his speech seems to indicate a land of inferior people – less deserving of peace, prosperity and even life.

Don't Americans know that this vast wasteland of terror and terrorists otherwise known as 'Abroad' was home to the first civilization and is home now to some of the most sophisticated, educated people in the region?

Don't Americans realize that 'abroad' is a country full of people – men, women and children who are dying hourly? 'Abroad' is home for millions of us. It's the place we were raised and the place we hope to raise our children – your field of war and terror. (Riverbend, July 01, 2005)

Citizen journalism has the power to decentralize traditional news media from reporting stories to the public. For example, citizens now can report current events before news broadcasters and news sites have the ability to broadcast a story. More widespread internet access, smartphones, and SNSs are changing who breaks the news and when this happens. Einar Thorsen and Stuart Allan (2014) discuss recent events in which citizens reported on a crisis before the media in their book *Citizen Journalism*. On July 6, 2013, a plane crash-landed at San Francisco International Airport (SFO). Using their phones and platforms like Twitter and Facebook, passengers on the plane and individuals watching from within the terminal became the first people to broadcast the event to outside sources. Through this practice, the story created an international buzz in real time before media sites could get to the scene or report on the tragedy that resulted in 180 injuries and three deaths. David Eun (@Eunner) posted on the SNS Path moments after the crash, “I just crash landed at SFO...tail ripped off. Most everyone seems fine. I’m okay. Surreal.” In addition to this, another witness, Krista Seiden, tweeted, “Omg a plane just crashed at SFO on landing as I’m boarding my plane” (Thorsen and Stuart, 2014, p. 2). Seiden also used her phone to post a picture of the smoke and chaos. One person, Cory S., commented on Seiden’s tweet, “you broke the news before the News broke the news!” (Thorsen and Stuart, 2014, p. 3). The tragic crash at SFO is not the only area we have seen this type of first-person reporting; it has been evident within the Arab Spring, Hurricane Katrina and Sandy, tsunamis, earthquakes and other tragic events, in addition to the occupation of Iraq discussed within this work.

Citizen journalism also works to critically decentralize the media through the use of first-person eye witness accounts of tragedies commonly overlooked or sanitized by

traditional news sources. This was a common practice of Riverbend within her blog “Baghdad Burning.” For example, when criticizing the traditional and western news and television stations available to her, Riverbend describes, “As I write this, Oprah is on Channel 4 (one of the MBC channels we get in Nilesat), showing Americans how to get out of debt. Her guest speaker is telling a studio full of American women who seem to have over-shopped that they could probably do with fewer designer products” (Tuesday, February 20, 2007). In contrast to this, she explains that while this television show is broadcasted in Iraqi, so is the Al Jazeera show. Within this show, a young Iraqi woman, Sabrine Al-Janabi, is explaining “how Iraqi security forces abducted her from her home and raped her.” Riverbend goes on to state that “she might be the bravest Iraqi woman ever” (Riverbend, February 20, 2007). She says this because within Iraqi it is very uncommon for women to speak about sexual assault, especially on television, publicly. By speaking out against this violence, Sabrine risks her safety. Using cultural syncretism, Riverbend provides a national news outlet for how Iraqi women are being treated and viewing events within Iraq (Ono & Sloop, 1995). She pushes back against western gatekeeping that sanitizes and limits the scope of current events being discussed and explored through the news and television.

It is clear to see that the media plays an active role in agenda setting and hiding unforgivable and tragic events. Because of this, if a person is not active in seeking out correct and often unsettling news coverage, western media can gloss over events happening around the world. Above, Riverbend actively speaks back to power as she highlights the news available to her and the contrasting coverage and topics. Through this process, citizen journalism acts as a vehicle to recognize important news and events

happening around the world. Riverbend actively and explicitly challenges the mainstream discourse available to her and other Iraqis by utilizing her online vernacular.

Draws attention towards communities and events.

We heard today that American soldiers imprisoned six Iraqi women. And I heard from my sister who work in the hospital that American soldiers took a 3-year-old kid to the hospital after they shot him. Not good news to hear. If I will not talk about the bad things that are happening in Iraq, I will not find anything to talk about and at that time I should probably shit up, close the blog, and begin counting the days... (H.N.K., June 17, 2005)

H.N.K. leads me into the second function of citizen journalism; blogging acts as a way for individuals to highlight specific events happening around them. In 2008, when the terrorist attack on Mumbai occurred, SNSs such as Twitter, Facebook, and Flickr were instrumental in getting the word out about the devastation as well providing helpful information to those affected and their families. Once the attack happened, citizens and witnesses began reporting events in real time at an estimated 70 tweets or posts tagged under the name Mumbai every five seconds (Ibrahim, 2014). Within hours of the attack, people began posting helpline numbers and contact information for foreign offices. In addition to this, google documents were created listing the names of people wounded and killed in the horrific terrorist attack, as well as maps of the city that identified dangerous and safe areas. The information posted not only informed the outside world about what was happening but gave vital information to people trapped within hotels and areas central to the attack. Citizen journalism provided an interconnected web of a community

looking to help one another and establish a sense of safety in response to the terrible and tragic events that took place that day.

Riverbend also consistently draws attention towards life as an Iraqi during the occupation to re-center the Iraqi experience vis-à-vis her blog. Using a form of pastiche, Riverbend works to borrow from events around the world to discuss what terrorism means to her and other Iraqis. She states, “terror isn’t just worrying about a plane hitting a skyscraper...terrorism is being caught in traffic and hearing the crack of an AK-47 a few meters away because the National Guard want to let an American Humvee or Iraqi official through.” In the same post, she draws attention to what it is like to experience terrorism daily:

Terror is that first moment after a series of machine-gun shots, when you lift your head frantically to make sure your loved ones are still in one piece. Terror is trying to pick shards of glass resulting from a nearby explosion out of the living-room couch and trying not to imagine what would have happened if a person had been sitting there. (Riverbend, January 15, 2005)

Riverbend works to make her audience understand what it is like to be a citizen and woman in Iraq. Her vernacular is pieced together in ways that draw attention towards her culture and experiences.

As seen earlier within this chapter, she speaks directly to Americans about the Bush administration’s false speculation of finding weapons of mass destruction within Iraq. She states, “the weapons never existed... two years of grieving for the lost people, and mourning the lost sovereignty, we’re told we were innocent of harboring those weapons. We were never a threat to America...” (Riverbend, January 15, 2005).

Riverbend uses her blog as a journalistic tactic to report on current events within her country. H.N.K. also speaks directly to the US and Bush administration through cultural syncretism. Like Riverbend, she reports on political events happening around her and expresses the sorrow she feels for her country; “Here I am, write to you again, in spite of the bad situation around me...yesterday when I heard that boush [Bush] won and the American soldiers will begin to attack Fallujah, I began to cry and I couldn’t stop, and my head ache me” (H.N.K., November 06, 2004). H.N.K. describes further how the devastation around her and current events within Iraq follow her into bed at night, “these days I have big grief, every night I have a nightmare, my nightmare today was: our taxi driver who take us every day to school kidnapped me and najma, and too us to somewhere dark.....” (H.N.K., November 03, 2004). H.N.K. uses her voice and blog to describe what occupation feels like for a young woman going to school. She often transitions between the stressful commute to school and her struggles as a student. Using their blogs, both Riverbend and H.N.K. highlight the uneasy dichotomy of life within a war zone. Analyzing citizen reporting and vernacular discourse is necessary when continuing to humanize citizens within Iraq.

While each moment above discusses terrorism, it is clear to see that the spaces created by each blogging community are drastically different. The factors that contribute to this difference are the geopolitical climate surrounding each country and event, as well as the women reporting and writing about each event. The attack on Mumbai represents a safety net of blogging and helpful responses to terrorism. Riverbend and H.N.K.’s responses to terror are drastically different and nuanced; terror is an everyday occurrence for both of these women. Not to say one is more horrific than the other, but to

demonstrate that even when bloggers are reporting on similar events, the spaces created by each community metaphorically and verbally transform into individual sites of shared resistance.

Creating a sense of community.

The blog was supposed to be the true voice of Iraqis to the outside world, it was supposed to tell the truth that was never revealed by the media, and I hope the blog has done all that, I hope you all understand now that the war was unfair and its consequences were inhumane. (Zaid, October 23, 2014)

Above Zaid describes the purpose and voice she gave her blog. Vernacular discourse and blogging demonstrate an interconnectedness between the blogger and her audience, and the connection between bloggers in the same, or similar situation. These connections create communities that are consistently in a fluid state of transition. When bloggers can identify and connect with others who are also reporting on shared experiences they may have, the community grows. For example, a study conducted by Kristina Riegert (2014) tracked the online relationships between 21 Lebanese and Egyptian bloggers from April 2009 to April 2010. Within this study, Riegert discovers that the aim of these bloggers was similar, “to freely express their opinions about politics, society and culture” (Riegert, 2014, p. 69) in which most opinions were not the focus or correctly represented in mainstream media at the time. Within this study, each blogger was aware of how many readers they had, as well as the countries in which their online presence was flourishing. They interacted with not only their audience through comments within their blog but also fellow bloggers within their country. This interaction displays an interconnectedness of bloggers and ideas within an online community. This shared

space is created through the use of commonalities between each blogger and actively disrupts traditional media by providing a platform for individuals to express themselves and report on events.

Raghda Zaid, the creator of the blog *Baghdad Girl*, displays a vivid web of networking and family ties throughout her blog. She often references her cousin, H.N.K., as well as their trips to Syria to visit each other and their extended families. In addition to this, Zaid positions every family member's blog on her homepage. Through this, Zaid offers a physical connection between blogs, family, and activism for her audience to see. The right navigation column on the homepage of Zaid's blog reads, "An Average Iraqi *My cousin,*" "Life in Baghdad *My Uncle,*" "A star from mosul *My Cousin,*" "Coloured bubbles *My Cousin,*" Hnk's blog *My Cousin,*" and "Days of my Life *My Cousin.*" Riverbend also references a fellow Iraqi blogger, Salam Pax, within her work. Pax, a 29-year-old middle-class architect, who also gained notoriety by blogging about his experiences within Iraq and criticizing both the US and Iraqi governments. Through vernacular discourse, both of these bloggers demonstrate the use of pastiche. Within the online space, each blog is an extension of their culture and experiences of individuals like themselves. By referencing and or linking other blogs to their page, they creatively create a patchwork of blogs literally and physically within the online space.

In addition to the connection between bloggers, there are also strong connections between bloggers and their audience that reinforce the re-centering of female Iraqi vernacular. An excellent example of this is Zaid's continuous posting of kittens on her page, such as the image below:



Figure 3. “The Duck Cat” (Zaid, September 10, 2004)

Images like the one above are frequently intertwined between devastating recounts of war activity near Zaid and her family. Cat pictures were so crucial to Zaid and her audience that one post titled, “See you soon,” stated, “Hi again, well, the school will begin again, and I’ll stop posting for 1 or 2 weeks until things settle down, I’ll post new cats for you then.” (Zaid, February 03, 2005). Zaid’s use of pastiche blends the innocence of “cute cat pictures” with the tragedy of war in a way that is specific to only her and strengthens the broader community of female Iraqi bloggers. While reading her blog from the beginning of occupation towards the year 2018, it is clear to see that the light-hearted-cat-loving mentality somewhat dissipated with age and the length of the war. While cats still grace the pages of her blogs, more severe topics tend to take over the pages. This demonstrated the changing space and vernacular of Zaid as a blogger.

Discussion

As discussed within Chapter One, space is created verbally, ideologically, and physically through the individuals who occupy a location. de Certeau (1984) describes that this process is accomplished through everyday movements and literary descriptions of metaphorical spaces. Narrated adventures are those that guide people through streets

and create spaces where friends meet and transport metaphors into physical realities through categorized experiences. de Certeau (1984) explains his concept using the example of transportation:

In Modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transpiration are called *metaphorai*. To go to work or come home, one takes a “metaphor” – a bus or a train. Stories also take this noble name: every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together, they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories. (de Certeau, 1984, p. 91)

Another way to understand this is through the concept of a grocery store. The grocery store, a physical place, can be defined as a space through unexpectedly meeting a friend in an aisle. In the same place, a person might experience and construct space vis-a-vis their purposeful navigation through aisles and sections. This example can be taken even further when recognizing where these learned practices come from; do we navigate the store aisles the same way our mothers or fathers did? Do we choose sections based on traditional family dishes and the ingredients included within these meals? History, family lineage, and geography can all be found at the grocery store or market, each experience different, each reconstructing static place into *space*.

This chapter adds to de Certeau's (1984) concepts of metaphorically constructing places into spaces using vernacular discourse as the vehicle and blogging as the changing space. Iraqi women utilized past histories and knowledge to develop online spaces that not only allowed them to vocalize their feelings but humanized and resisted western stereotypes during a time of war and hostility. Riverbend, H.N.K., and Raghda Zaid

became citizen journalists and effectively created space through the tactical practice of blogging.

Many scholars have added to the ongoing discussion of spatial theory, including Michel Foucault, Marc Augé, Henry Lefebvre, Jean Baudrillard, Félix Guattari, and Michel de Certeau. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1984) positions his body on the 110th floor of the World Trade center looking down at Manhattan. As he peers down at the busy city below, he wonders if it is possible to understand the city from such a vantage point. This metaphor explores the subjectivity of anthropology and intercultural studies, as well as, the complex realms of knowing. To remove oneself from the environment that is being studied is an injustice to the discipline and community being analyzed; ultimately, an impossible and immoral task. Impossible because with removal, one can genuinely never see or honor the individuals. Immoral because once removed, the ideology of the researcher is centered, and the epistemology of the community is *othered*. In order to understand the complexity of the city or a group of people, one must fully submerge oneself within that community and resist totalizing an entirety of people. For instance, a map of Manhattan demonstrates how to navigate the streets, but only upon knowing the spaces more intimately, can a pedestrian walk through the city with a sense of self and acknowledgment of the different environments that can be encountered – all made by diverse populations of people. For de Certeau (1984), ‘space’ is a learned and fluid environment, created through people “making do.”

Within de Certeau’s (1984) anecdote, he describes pedestrians walking as the story makers and the creators of spaces. This is an overarching metaphor for the production of self and community-serving spaces. However, when our world is

increasingly becoming more digital, it is not too much to exchange the language of walking with typing and the idea of a city landscape with online navigation. Therefore, the spatial practices of blogging become relevant to modern communication. In addition, Iraqi women's lack of access to the outside world, post-occupation only furthered the need for virtual spaces created by Iraqi women.

The idea of "making do" coincides with the practice of *pastiche* and cultural syncretism. Within the methodology and theory of critiquing vernacular discourse, pastiche surfaces as a subaltern communities' ability to piece together parts of popular culture through a creative and restorative process. This process works with the subaltern to repurpose popular culture in a way useful and specific to their community, creating ownership and re-growth from within. Pastiche works within the creation of online spaces by Iraqi women through the merging of images and popular Iraqi culture into one space. This is found within Riverbend and H.N.K.'s discussions of current political events, as well as Zaid's use of imagery within her blog. Other forms of this could be images of popular celebrities and discussions of Iraqi culture, as well as the recounting of everyday events. Through this process, all three bloggers created a new space for blogging.

Within H.N.K.'s blog, place is a simplified onlooker's idea of war. However, within her blog, H.N.K. articulates that war does not look like one may think. She transforms our conceptualization of war into a *space* of 'both and...' Into not just bombs and death but living experiences of children and families attempting to cope and survive during times of destruction. In addition, Zaid physically alters her blog to define her sense of space. By linking the blogs of her friends and family to her own blog, she allows

her readers to jump between positionalities and ideas. This is a unique approach, specific to the blog construction of Zaid. All three bloggers use their platform to create metaphorical online spaces in different ways. However, no matter the approach each woman contributes to the overall larger space of female Iraqi blogging, representing different backgrounds and positionalities, all valid, influential, and lifesaving.

Conclusion

Vernacular discourse is always changing, adapting, and serving the communities that it belongs to. Critically interpreting and honoring the vernacular of the oppressed works to de-centralize hegemonic discourses and Eurocentric strategies. In this chapter, I bridged citizen journalism and the concept of space to uncover how Iraqi women used vernacular discourse to affirm their culture and selves while protesting the injustices and tragedies happening around them. Citizen journalism through blogging, created the needed space for documenting the horrific and challenging experiences each blogger faced, as well as connected Iraqi citizens together. Using citizen journalism as the vehicle, female Iraqi bloggers created spaces for subaltern voices to be re-centered within war dialogue.

This tactical approach to blogging pushes back against Eurocentric silencing and news coverage. Iraqi women utilized their oppressed status within the home to document and counteract false news statements. They reported on previously ignored political information that was pertinent to their communities and actively grew their space to encompass many different voices, all working to support one another. In the following chapter, I identify how the work done by these three bloggers pushes to decolonize online

spaces. In addition, presenting the language and stories found upon this blog forcefully pushes against the traditional dialogue found in western academics.

Chapter Four: Decolonizing Online and Academic Spaces

Introduction

Chapter four concludes this work though describing the benefits of bringing marginalized voices to the forefront of research. Historically, rhetorical criticism has focused on the language and experiences of people in power to analyze and critique systems of struggle. However, focusing solely on the most powerful individuals in society is not the only way to critically analyze how power functions. If we limit our investigation into dominant discourses of power by restricting our scope of research to only the elite or the evil, such as Burke's (1941) rhetorical criticism of Hitler's "Battle," we only see half the picture. Within this framework, we fail to recognize the lived experiences and voices of the oppressed. Throughout this work, I have utilized the method of critical vernacular discourse to illuminate the voices and people often overlooked by traditional rhetorical criticism.

Women experience excessive violence and suffering during times of war, perpetrated by invaders within a country as well as their country of origin. This happens through gender-specific violence and the obligation of maintaining family and cultural structures. Also, women also represent a population of people ignored by academic spaces when investigating the traumas of war. Thus, to counteract this silencing, Iraqi women produced their online blogs to be projected all around the world.

The overarching theme this work is to bring attention to the everyday vernacular of women within times of war. Through the use of tactics and strategies, the female bloggers discussed within this thesis utilized their subordinate positionality to fight back against Eurocentric narratives and counteract hegemonic discourses. In addition, these

women created spaces of profound protest to acknowledge and resist colonialism within their country and towards their culture and people. The discourse described within the previous chapters pushes against the western assumption of Iraqi women's lack of agency and free-thinking autonomy. Thus, I argue that the final moment of the emancipation process from western assumptions is recognizing the decolonial powers of Iraqi women's blogging.

Throughout this chapter, I discuss the process of 'de-linking' from Eurocentric narratives through decolonialism and utilizing the body-and geo-politics of knowledge, rather than the theo-and ego-politics of knowledge. To do this, I locate how Iraqi women's blogging is an active extension of their body-and geo-political knowledge towards western colonialism and silencing. The bloggers discussed within this work utilized their cultural knowledge through their use of body politics. In addition, each woman used her political location within MENA, and particularly within Iraq, to locate ontology specific to themselves. Analyzing subaltern narratives through the use of common everyday vernacular encapsulates the most precise and most significant experiences of war. I also look at each blogger from a holistic perspective in order to circle back to my initial research questions stated in Chapter One.

Analysis

Decolonization is a political project, it is not religious, ethnic, or national but an intentional move to 'de-link' from the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2000) through epistemological disobedience. Mignolo (2007) tells us that this process is relentless and always in motion. The persistent effort to think decolonially is a never-ending process in which the researcher must consistently be critiquing the logic of coloniality underneath

the pressure of modernity (Mignolo, 2007). Anibal Quijano's (2000) "patron de poder" (colonial matrix of power) is described as four intersecting and interrelated areas: "control of the economy, of authority, of gender and sexuality, and of knowledge and subjectivity (Mignolo, 2007, p. 5). All four areas are upheld and protected through the ego-politics of knowledge and the theo-politics of knowledge. As discussed earlier within this work, these ways of thinking are grounded in the word of god (Christian) and the word of reason and truth (scientific). Both knowledges are predominantly controlled by white, European, heterosexual men and actively work to silence and ignore knowledge that does not support their western ideologies. However, to dismantle the colonial matrix of power and decolonize our ways of knowing and experiencing the world, a push must be made towards the body-politics of knowledge and the geo-politics of knowledge.

Thus, for my final chapter, I showcase how the tactical and space building practices of Iraqi women threatened and disrupted the colonial matrix of power through body- and geo-politics of knowledge. To do so, I first outline what these knowledges represent within this line of thinking and how they disrupt the colonial matrix of power. Subsequently, after this description, I look at the blogs utilizing the theories brought forth in Chapters Two and Three to critique the vernacular discourse of these women further.

The U.S. government and armed forces utilized the four areas within the colonial matrix of power over the Iraqi people and particularly the Iraqi women. If we look at each pillar individually, we will see how the justification of 'saving' Iraqi women functioned as a rhetorical strategy to modernize the country in the interest of the west. For example, the first area of the colonial matrix of power is control of the economy. We know that war alters daily life within countries drastically. Therefore, a countries

production of goods slows down tremendously. Also, during war, males are encouraged to fight and uphold their countries integrity and security also damaging the economic prosperity of the country. Riverbend, in particular, discussed the rising cost of goods, lack of food rations, and limited electricity within her blog. The second aspect of this power structure is authority. It is clear from all the blogs discussed that authority was showcased through the use of weapons, forced entry, and killing throughout Iraq. Next, the colonial matrix of power governs individuals through the use of gender and sexuality. As discussed throughout this work, gender plays an instrumental role in determining the level of violence individuals experience during the war, leaving Iraqi women extremely vulnerable during the occupation. Lastly, to continue to uphold this power structure, the production of knowledge must be held and created through the Eurocentric narrative of power. Therefore, western academia monitors and filters what stories are told and through what point of view. Since decoloniality is inherently from the perspective of the subaltern, the first step in re-centering the female voice is to change the epistemology of knowledge production and ways of knowing.

Body- and geo-politics of knowledge are found at the inception of the decolonial process. In essence, knowing, sensing, and believing is ingrained within the flesh and geo-historical location the subaltern. Both foundations of knowing are particularly crucial to the decolonial process and the Third World subject because decoloniality was birthed within these spaces. Mignolo (2011) states that the Third World was not invented by its inhabitants but was rhetorically developed by western elites to passively describe the inability of Third World countries from developing and modernizing under imperial conditions (Mignolo, 2011 p. 276). However, the colonial matrix of power that upholds

these false assumptions of modernization can be dismantled through the subaltern's ability to utilize alternative ways of knowing that are ingrained within themselves. Mignolo (2007) explains, "you are where you think" as a metaphorical and literal representation of body- and ego-politics of knowledge (Mignolo, 2007, p. 203). Metaphorical because the body that a subject resides in, informs her and guides her knowledge. Everything is incorporated within this body; gender, race, class, and sexuality. Through a multiplicity of identities, different ways of knowing are born and reside within the flesh of the individual. Mignolo (2007) is also literal within his phrase, "you are where you think," meaning that the historical and geopolitical location of a subject influences her knowledge. Therefore, in order to perform decoloniality, the knowledge must come from the Third World woman. The individual who resides within the very environment that has been forced into modernization and impacted by colonialism. She embodies the thinking/sensing/doing that is strictly interconnected with the process of decoloniality (Mignolo, 2011).

A critique of vernacular discourse works within the process of decoloniality through the methodological framework of prioritizing the rhetoric of the oppressed. When we look towards Riverbend, Zaid, and H.N.K., we see and hear individuals expressing their thoughts and ways of knowing and navigating the world that is inherently ingraining within their body and geopolitical location. However, these experiences are seldom the ones that make it into the media or academic spaces. This is precisely why blogging became and continues to be such a decolonial tactic towards western power.

Female Iraqi blogging works within the system that oppresses it. The three female bloggers create spaces for themselves to openly speak about the war, describing what they are sensing, feeling, and knowing in ways not attainable or understandable by outsiders of the country. When Zaid states,

The value of homeland is much more than having a residence paper and a permanent place to stay, home is about being raised on certain values and having a chance to grow up while experiencing them and then have another chance to make them better... (Sunday, December 22, 2013)

She is expressing the direct association the body has to the geographical and metaphorical location of a 'homeland,' one that altered the way she looked at the world and influenced her ways of knowing. She links her culture and values to the very land that she grew up on, advocating that she would not be the same without this background and past.

When Riverbend describes the simple moment of drinking tea with her family, she also points to the ways that Iraqi customs and culture are embodied within her knowledge: "...in the evening, most Iraqi families gather together for 'evening tea.' It's hardly as formal as it sounds...No matter how busy the day, everyone sits around in the living room, waiting for tea (Saturday, October 18, 2003). Riverbend goes on to describe the complex three-stage process of the tea correctly for her family. Small descriptions like this showcase that culture is in everything and aligned with the knowledges of the body told through the vernacular.

Discussion

When circling back to my initial research questions, this work looked at how Iraqi female blogging functioned as a tactical approach towards dominant western colonial strategies during the U.S. occupation of Iraq. In addition, this thesis also acted as the needed space to re-center Iraqi female voices during the U.S. infiltration of the country. In order to re-center the voices of Riverbend, Zaid, and H.N.K., their vernacular was utilized as the substantial text and analysis for this work. When critiquing western structures of power, like political warfare, violence, capitalism, and academia we must look towards the oppressed, towards the subaltern identities within the countries that feel the repercussions of coloniality long after it has gone. If we negate the very individuals that are affected by western elites, we fail to critique the systems in place thoroughly.

This process is not something commonly found within academia. Therefore, this work performed bargaining within the academic space; borrowing from complex theorists like de Certeau (1984), Spivak (1988), and Mignolo (2007, 2011) to work within the structure of Eurocentric published knowledge while simultaneously critiquing and altering the power that upholds the academy. This work utilized the functions and process of traditional, western academic writing by prioritizing the vernacular of Iraqi women instead of that of the colonizer. Therefore, this work actively 'de-linked' from the colonial powers of western academia and war to establish a space for Iraqi women. To do this, a critical approach towards vernacular discourse worked within and alongside the theoretical epistemologies of this thesis. For example, Michel de Certeau's (1984) critical approaches to power work to decolonize spaces of intercultural research. Pushing for the researcher to not look from afar at the subject but ingrain themselves within the culture.

In addition to this, Gayatri Spivak's (1988) interrogation of western academia's inability to accurately investigate or report on the subaltern's experiences continued to inform this work. Lastly, Mignolo's (2007, 2011) interpretation of the rhetoric of coloniality and the logic of modernity continued to ground this critique.

Conclusion

Recognizing that western academia and spaces of resistance need to be reorganized to re-center the female subaltern is only the first step within the decolonial process. It is not merely enough to bring attention to these women and spaces. While this work begins to break down and challenge the power structures of Eurocentric knowledge, it is only a small crack within the system. I say this because the work cannot end here. The process of decoloniality is always in motion. Therefore, I hope this work starts a conversation among academics and challenges assumptions of the west. However, it is essential to recognize that this is still not enough. Conversations do not end the violence that comes with coloniality and modernization, and they certainly do not liberate the subaltern from the grasp of the colonizer. As academics, we must strive to incorporate the voices and experiences of the oppressed into our work, classrooms and research.

In the future, I plan to bring this work to the conference level, particularly the ideas found in Chapters Two and Three. To do this, I will modify these chapters to be free-standing papers, able to be presented. Continuing to attend conferences with this work expands the reach of Riverbend, H.N.K., and Zaid, as well as the discussion of agency and the female subject. In addition, this work can be modified into a performance to bridge and intertwine the ideas and styles of each woman's blog. Performance has the power to physically project the diverse identities of individuals within Iraq and warzones

into academic spaces. Through performance, this work can disrupt these spaces in ways a traditional conference presentation cannot. Lastly, I will continue to edit and revise this thesis with the aspiration of publishing this work.

In a broader sense, I'd like to discuss the future and global implications of this work. At the time I am concluding this thesis, May 2019, Iran and the U.S. are inching closer and closer towards conflict. The U.S. has placed sanctions Iran's oil exports, throwing the country into economic hardship. In response, Iran has threatened to back out of the nuclear deal established by the U.S., France, China, Russia, and Germany (Gladstone, 2017). The rising uncertainty that comes with the hostile history between Iran and the U.S., as well as Iran and Saudi Arabia, a U.S. ally, threatens the already unstable political climate within MENA. This instability and the possibility of war, if it takes place, will have detrimental effects on women and children within the area. Therefore, the work within this thesis must be utilized as a framework to advocate and highlight the voices and experiences of women within the surrounding area of Iraq, like Iran.

With this said, I look at this work and the spaces created within this thesis to encourage the incorporation of vernacular discourse into more academic spaces, as well as a firm and needed move towards expanding our perception of agency and global conflict. This work reestablishes different modalities of agency and provides a clear understanding of the tactical power Iraqi women utilized in the face of colonialism and violence. With this direction, I encourage every critical scholar to incorporate the voices and experiences of the oppressed and earnestly question who their work advocates for.

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