Affective Landscapes: Re-negotiating the Ordinary in Contemporary Lebanese Cultural Production

by

Zeina Tarraf

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Department of English and Film Studies
University of Alberta

Abstract

This dissertation examines contemporary Lebanese cultural production and its shifting relationship to the everyday/ordinary as a site that unfolds in the midst of or in proximity to violence. I argue that attention to the ordinary is an effective mode through which to approach societies, like Lebanon, that are plagued by protracted conflicts. To this end, I advance an investigation of affect across a rich corpus of Lebanese cultural production, including novels, films, memoirs, documentaries, and art, to sidestep the rhetoric of exceptionality that inflects some work in trauma studies, and to illuminate how crisis in Lebanon becomes embedded in quotidian experience. As a result, I move away from centralizing the memory of the Lebanese civil war as the focal referent in studies on Lebanese culture to foreground the *present* as a dominant framework. Primarily, I thoroughly tease out the relationship between affect and literary form to show how literary works capture the ways the civil war radically reconfigured the contours of everyday life. Next, I turn to postwar films that represent everyday life to explore how the unfinished nature of the past intersects with contemporary oppressions and violences. I then turn to popular cultural productions, which I situate within a larger discursive context, to examine nostalgia as an *ordinary affect* in the postwar era and as fundamental to structures of belonging forming in the wake of loss. Finally, I think through cultural works that emerged in the wake of former prime minister Rafic Hariri's assassination and the violent events that followed it. These works, I argue, evoke an understanding of how the violences of this period are profoundly sutured to the everyday. Such attention to the ordinary, as a continuing process of negotiation, ultimately positions me to accentuate the nexus of various temporalities, attunements, and realities that mediates representations wherein the past intersects with the flows and impulses of modernity.

Preface

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Introduction: Continuing the Story

"[There] are things that can only ever be reproduced, retold, re-imagined, but never, never laid to

rest or resolved. There is no end to the story, only the story."

–Lina Mounzer

I begin here with Lina Mounzer's quotation because it reflects the inevitability of this

project that contends with Lebanese cultural production and its shifting relationship to the

Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). Mounzer's statement emerges from her poignant reflections

about her own work translating stories about the Syrian Civil War for the Damascus Bureau, a

project for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting. The ongoing Syrian Civil War, not unlike

the Lebanese war, is a protracted conflict involving various parties, actors, and regional players.

The conflict has resulted in countless horrors and massacres, as well as a major refugee crisis.

Mounzer's observation relates specifically to the trauma of the collective, which, she argues,

ultimately reconfigures and becomes entrenched in the cultural identity of a place, not by some

dominant narrative but by gradually reshaping the frameworks through which we understand the

world. These types of catastrophes, she argues will "live on in all the stories that will be passed

down along the line of culture, *even when they are about something else"* [*my emphasis*]. While

Mounzer is writing from the midst of a conflict that has no near end in sight, and my work comes

more than two decades since the end of the Lebanese civil war, her words still resonate with the

imperatives of this project. My own project can be seen as part of the continuous story that

attempts to think through the civil war's contentious place within a social landscape of collective

memory. Here I rely on Laurence J. Kirmayer's term "landscapes of memory," which describes

the metaphoric terrains that are shaped by the specificities of personal and individual memories

but also drawn from "meta-memory—implicit models of memory which influence what can be

recalled and cited as veridical" (175). This story, however, is not *about* the civil war per se. It takes the persistence of the war as its starting point and the entrenchment of the conflict as a motivator for its curiosity, but, ultimately, it arrives somewhere else. This story arrives at scenes of the ordinary that occur on the boundaries of violence, in the midst of it, or in relative proximity to it.

The Lebanese civil war occupies significant space within Lebanese cultural works and scholarship surrounding Lebanon, so much so, that Zeina Halabi has recently noted a "fatigue of the memory discourse" in work on and about Lebanon. Halabi's observation does not necessarily imply that the civil war has been laid to rest but rather the development of new modes through which to engage the past's position within a contemporary landscape. My own project began with the curiosity about how such a contested and complex nexus of events inhabits the Lebanese public sphere through various cultural productions. Considering Lebanon's tumultuous contemporary history, I was most interested in how our relationship to the past is filtered through *present* preoccupations. In order to fully engage with this question, I argue that we need to move beyond a concern with the representational limits and quandaries of traumatic experience and be more attuned to the present as a dynamic context. As I will show, a turn to the ordinary and the affective is a crucial mode through which to account for the past's place in a present plagued by its own conflicts and anxieties.

Interestingly enough, in the past year, I have encountered two works that argue for a turn to the ordinary in their own studies about Lebanon and its complex entanglement within present precarity and an unfinished past. Sami Hermez and Ghenwa Hayek each advance an investigation of the ordinary as the means through which to approach Lebanese society and cultural production respectively. Hermez's recent ethnographic account begins with the notion of

"'in the meanwhile' as a lens through which to think about social life amid political violence and the protracted nature of conflict that has existed in Lebanon" (*War is Coming* 2). "In the meanwhile" here refers to moments of everyday life that continue to unfold as war goes on "above and around us" (2). Hermez explores the affective dynamics of anticipation to reveal the extent to which violence and the ordinary are implicated in one another as opposed to being mutually exclusive ("The War is Going to Ignite" 327). Hayek ("Making Ordinary") draws attention to post-2005 Lebanese novels that reveal a frustration with civil war tropes that have dominated Lebanese fiction for so long. The year 2005 marks the assassination of former prime minister Rafic Hariri whose death ultimately reconfigured the Lebanese political landscape and ended the post-war era in Lebanon. Hayek argues that the novels' concern with the ordinary or the mundane performs a "literary and political protest" that disengages with the past to focus on contemporary anxieties (10). She reads the assertion of the ordinary in the novels, moreover, as a form of resilience in the face of violence or trauma.

My own work, then, can be seen as part of this recent turn towards the everyday in Lebanese studies that shies away from exceptionalizing discourses that are concerned largely with the fragmentation of memory and representation in the face of traumatic experience. This turn comes from the sense, perhaps, that violence in Lebanon is no longer extraordinary and that the past does not exist necessarily as a revenant. Instead, the past is constantly and messily entangled in the affective dynamics of the present. Because the present, as Lauren Berlant argues, is perceived affectively (*Cruel Optimism* 4), the past's place within the present must be understood in affective terms. The "pastness" of the civil war, moreover, is never fully felt in Lebanon. As Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman argue, "For a story to count as memory it must have a feeling of pastness about it, yet violence distorts the sense of time so that it becomes

difficult to say when the past enters the present" (12).[1] They make this assertion in their

discussion on the effects of *prolonged* exposure to violence. The perpetuation of violence and

instability in the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war requires us to move away from a sole

concern with memory tropes to better explore violence as a continuing condition.

　　While Hayek seems invested in upholding binaries between the ordinary and the

exceptional and the past and the present, through her argument that the ordinary is an assertion

against the exceptional, my own work seeks to undermine these binaries in significant ways.

Throughout this project, I track the affective registers of various cultural productions to reveal

the extent to which the ordinary and the exceptional become inextricably entwined. The turn to

the ordinary, I argue, is not new and specific to a post-2005 context; rather, the concern with the

everyday is evident throughout civil war cultural productions and beyond. This observation

suggests that attention towards the ordinary might be an effective way to approach societies

plagued by protracted conflict and by the unstable boundaries between peace and violence.

Njabulo Ndebele makes a similar argument in relation to South African literature. He argues that

stories invested in "rediscovering the ordinary" remind us that "that the problems of the South

African social formation are complex and all embracing; that they cannot be reduced to a single,

simple formulation" (156). The ordinary, therefore, allows us to account for a more complex

network of social dynamics as opposed to reducing post-conflict societies to their violent pasts.

　　This tendency to reduce nations to their past reflects Mohammed Abed al-Jabri's claim

about the stagnancy of Arab cultural history. He argues that an emphasis on the past produces a

present that is merely "an exhibition of our past, and we live our past in our present, without

change and without history" (qtd in Sabry 10). In response to this claim, Tarek Sabry proposes a

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[1] Dominick LaCapra also makes this point in his argument that traumatization is indicated by the experience of the past as if it were still present.

renewed attention to the present in its lived materiality. He argues that we need "to claim the present tense of Arab everydayness in all its cultural manifestations, to bring it to the fore so that it is assured of its time, its being…" (10). For Sabry, the field of Arab cultural studies is best suited for this scholarly venture. My attention to the ordinary in scenes of Lebanese cultural production reflects this call to move beyond the past as the main referent in our analyses of Arab culture as I grapple with the methodological implications of such an endeavor.

In this dissertation, I make the case for studying the ordinary in terms of the affective. Because ordinary life theorists like Henri Lefebvere advocate for an interrogation of *lived experience,* and because, as Kathleen Stewart argues, "everyday life is a life lived on the level of surging affects" (*Ordinary Affects* 9), an investigation of the ordinary is inevitably bound up with an exploration of affect. Christine Berberich et. al argue, moreover, that affect values the "small-scale, the ordinary, and the everyday" (316). They rely on the notion of an affective landscape, which is similar to Raymond Williams' famous term, *structure of feeling*. A structure of feeling evokes a particular historical sense distinct from other periods. It can be most obviously traced by tracking the shifting aesthetics of cultural forms. My use of affective landscapes throughout this project seeks to nuance the connotations of this term because landscapes evoke a multiplicity, a layering, and a multivocalness that "structure" often does not. Landscapes, in these terms, are not only spatial but also temporal. As Barbra Bender argues, because landscapes are constantly being shaped and reconfigured, "they are always temporal" (103). A landscape in her terms is "*time materializing*" (103). In Kathleen Stewart's terms, moreover, the ordinary is "composed out of heterogeneous and noncoherent singularities" (*Ordinary Affects* 4), and so my use of landscapes works to capture some of that messiness as we begin to map the various and shifting valences of everyday life in Lebanon.

In studies on the aftermath of traumatic and violent events, there have been attempts to think through the binaries between the everyday and the extreme. Most notably Michael Rothberg's concept of traumatic realism, which he argues is "marked by the survival of extremity into the everyday world" ("Between the Extreme and the Everyday" 103), does precisely this. Rothberg formulates the idea of traumatic realism in relation to post-Holocaust representations that grapple with an effective way to approach the lingering aftermath of the Holocaust without fully owning the event and thus reducing its impact. Traumatic realism, rather than mimetically reflecting the traumatic event, "*produce*[s] it as an object of knowledge" (103) that is marked simultaneously by an evasiveness and a persistence—something that always slips away *and* something that "inexplicably persists as a remainder/reminder" (102). Through traumatic realism, the everyday and the extreme are "at once held together and kept forever apart" (93). Rothberg's formulation here depends on upholding the distinction between the everyday and the extreme. He argues that just because the extreme is implicated in the everyday "as a non-integrated presence" (99), does not imply the reverse: that the everyday is always implicated in the extreme. Similarly, Dominick La Capra warns against the conflation of culture with trauma in his distinction between "structural" and "historical" or "empirical" trauma. He argues that a conflation of the two divests the traumatic event of its specificity and erases important historical distinctions that are, in fact, crucial to the ethical remembering of trauma.

My own work re-navigates this opposition between trauma and the everyday. For trauma theorists like LaCapra and Rothberg, while it important to recognize the interplay between the extreme and the everyday, a distinction between the two should remain intact. This argument is a valuable and an arguably necessary contribution to the ethical imperatives of trauma theory that originated with Holocaust studies. In the Lebanese context, however, I argue that this firm

distinction is not always maintainable or productive. The ordinary is a site that emerges from unfinished traumas not only in a virtual sense but in a physical sense as well. When we are discussing violence and the impact of violence on the ordinary, therefore, we need to understand that everydayness in Lebanon is implicated in a messy entanglement of unresolved past collective traumas, the establishment of new violences, and a violent neoliberal order that magnifies the experiences of precarity. This is not to suggest that the everyday is constantly traumatic, rather that the frameworks for understanding the everyday's relationship to trauma need to be reconfigured. My work is not invested in upholding binaries; instead I am interested in revealing the affective qualities that emerge when the extreme becomes re-inscribed in the ordinary, working upon it, reconfiguring it, de-familiarizing it. The extreme here does not exist as a lingering remainder, but as a tangible/visceral (sometimes absent) presence that the ordinary works through and around.

In order to adequately theorize the past's relationship to a dynamic present, I will first briefly outline the historical context in which Lebanese civil war emerged as well as its aftermath. Next, I will discuss some of the ways in which Lebanese cultural production has been studied in relation to the war, and finally I will evoke the theoretical trajectories and paradigms that frame this project.

The Lebanese Civil War

The Lebanese Civil War was a period of protracted violence from 1975 until 1990. The war was a multifaceted conflict fuelled by the sectarian schisms of the country's religiously diverse society. After Lebanon's liberation from the French Mandate in 1943, a National Pact, which would determine the structure of Lebanese government to properly represent Lebanese

society, was orally agreed upon. The agreement stated that Lebanon's president would be a Christian-Maronite (Christian sect making up the majority of Christians in Lebanon), its prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and its leader of parliament a Shiite Muslim. This arrangement, while meant to reflect the idea of national unity in a multi-sectarian nation, also reinforced sectarian identity as a prime marker of subjectivity. As Ussama Makdissi points out, "From the outset, the nationalist project has been intertwined with…the unutterable contradiction that has haunted Lebanon: the paradox of a national unity in a multi-religious society wherein religion is inscribed as the citizen's most important public attribute—stamped prominently on his or her identification and voter registration card" (24).

The religious divisions that fracture Lebanese society make it susceptible to conflicting ideological movements that characterize regional and international politics. This susceptibility to foreign influence should not be understood causally as an explanation for the violence of the civil war (and other political conflicts that have occurred since), although there have been some thinkers who have re-narrativized the civil war as "A war of others" (la guerre des autres) in an attempt to shed Lebanese of responsibility for their crimes and blame the violence on the meddling of foreign powers.[2] Instead, the participation of foreign entities in the perpetuation of civil war violence and the Lebanese susceptibility to regional political upheaval are factors that highlight Lebanon's fragile geopolitical position and supplement the deeply complicated events that characterize the civil war period.

The war had various phases, and political alliances often shifted throughout the duration of the conflict. In popular representations of the civil war, however, particularly in Western

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[2] Prominent Lebanese journalist and politician Gibran Twaini originally coined this phrase, although he did not use it to absolve the Lebanese of responsibility, merely to highlight their susceptibility to regional conflicts. The concept of "a war of others," however, has proven to be a "popular shorthand for the idea that the Lebanese were not solely (if at all) to blame" for the war (Haugbolle, *War and Memory* 13).

articulations of the event, the war is seen as a sectarian conflict mainly between Christians and Muslims. While partially accurate, this representation does not do justice to the complexity of the conflict since it reflects neither the war's early stages and the background leading up to the first-stage, nor the inter-religious conflicts that eventually erupted. In the early stages of the war, the country was divided between pro-Western Christians who were threatened by the Palestinian refugees who had been migrating into the country[3] and a coalition of leftists (largely Muslim but not exclusively) on the other side who were pro-Palestinian. It should be noted here that, at this time, there were internal divisions growing that had nothing to do with the Palestinian issue. These issues were largely class issues, as 4% of citizens dominated the economic realm in terms of national income. The class issues are also reflected across sectarian lines as Christians generally dominated the upper class. The 1960s, moreover, are characterized by the sweeping student movement that took place across the country, as students were demanding better resources for the public Lebanese University. These movements are often associated with a growing support for the liberation of Palestine. Protests, for instance, would start off about education and end up with slogans and chants about Palestine. It can be argued, therefore, that the Palestinian issue was contributory to the war but not basic. Nonetheless, the influx of Palestinians and Palestinian militant groups was changing Lebanon's fragile sectarian balance and threatening the Christian parties who resented the presence of foreign-armed groups.

After the historical defeat for Arabs in 1967 when Palestinians lost what was left of their country to Israel, the Arab League made the historical decision to arm Palestinian groups. Yasser Arafat's armed Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) ultimately gained a stronghold in Western Beirut and the South of Lebanon as they carried out military operations against Israel

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[3] This mass migration happened since the establishment of Israel and also after Black September in 1970 in Jordan in which Palestinian militant groups were violently expelled.

from Lebanon. The result of the Palestinian's growing military ability, however, was a mounting

tension between the army and the armed Palestinian groups, in addition to the growing

dissatisfaction of Lebanon's Christian right and their Israeli allies.

The country soon was divided between those who supported the Palestinians and those

who opposed them and blamed them for the country's problems. Two main coalitions eventually

formed: the Lebanese Front (LF) and the Lebanese National Movement (LNM). The Lebanese

Front was made up of Maronites who opposed Palestinian militancy in Lebanon, namely Kamil

Chamoun's National Liberal Party and Pierre Gemayel's Phalangist Party.[4] The Lebanese

National Movement was comprised of a number of different groups who identified themselves as

leftists and seculars, but also included many religious groups, and it was headed by the Druze

leader Kamal Jumblatt, who was also the leader of the Progressive Socialist Party. By the end of

the war, after a series of assassinations, conflicts, and interventions, this order was radically

reconfigured. The final stages of the war saw inter-religious battles between the Lebanese forces

and the Lebanese army, as well as between Shiite groups Hezbollah and Amal. Syria had also

ascended as a hegemonic power in Lebanon, with the PLO being forced out of Beirut by a 1982

violent Israeli siege.

The Lebanese Civil War officially came to an end with the Taif Agreement of 1990 that

gave Syria considerable control in Lebanon. Any opposition to the agreement resulted in violent

suppression or exile. This agreement could not take place until Syria had reached an agreement

with the United States— that in exchange for support against the Iraqi regime of Saddam

Hussein in the Gulf War, it would convince Israel not to attack Syrian aircraft approaching

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[4] The Lebanese Front was officially formed in 1976. Each of the groups in the coalition also had their own militias which together formed the military wing of the Lebanese Front called the Lebanese Forces. Between 1977-80, Pierre's son, Bashir Gemayel, leader of the Lebanese Forces, consolidated control and strengthened the militia by absorbing and destroying smaller militias.

Beirut. In 1991, under Syrian hegemony, the Lebanese parliament passed an Amnesty Law that pardoned all war crimes that occurred prior to its enactment.

The postwar period, therefore, was marked by a commitment to leave behind the wounds of the past. This official amnesia not only reflected the fact that, after the war, former war criminals walked the corridors of the Lebanese parliament, but also the assumption that remembering the war would reignite internal schisms and animosities. As Sune Haugbolle puts it, "What good will it do to look the beast in the eye if it is going to bite your head off?" (*War and Memory* 197). Despite this general culture of silence, activists, artists, writers, and members of civil society have been engaging with the war across the cultural spectrum. In most scholarship on contemporary Lebanese cultural production—and particularly the efforts of the creative class and civil society to produce books, films, testimonies—these works are viewed as "counter-hegemonic" in their negation of the Lebanese state's official approach to remembering (or forgetting) the war (Haugbolle, Seignure, Nikro, Hout, Rogers). This characterization of postwar cultural production can be understood partly in light of the circumstances that these cultural works were emerging from, namely the era of reconstruction that was carried out by former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri's company, Solidere.

Cultural Production in the Wake of the War

Solidere— French acronym for "Society for the Development and Reconstruction of Downtown Beirut"—is a Lebanese joint-stock company founded by Hariri that was responsible for planning and redeveloping Central Beirut District. While self-defined under the pretence of reconstruction and national progress, Solidere not only eradicated significant cultural markers and commercialized the heart of Beirut, but also stripped local landowners of their property and

thus intensified class schisms. The Solidere project highlights the extent to which reconstruction was favoured over remembrance in the postwar period; remembrance was seen as a regressive step into the incivilities and cruelties of the civil war whereas reconstruction was considered a progressive step towards recovery. For this reason, cultural production, which was insistent on reinserting the Lebanese civil war back into public consciousness, is often viewed as a significant mnemonic counterpoint that replaced the public void exacerbated by official amnesia and reconstruction. In this sense, cultural production is articulated as a kind of "memory culture," to borrow Sune Haugbolle's term.

Cultural Production as Counter-Hegemonic

Haugbolle employs the term "'memory cultures' to describe the production of historical memory, because it denotes a plurality that fits the Lebanese context" and invokes the "variety of overlapping agendas, issues and interpretations in any national culture" (*War and Memory* 9). Cultural production, as a body of work that resists the logic of violence, is often contrasted to other forms of memory cultures that are associated with various political groups.[5] It is often theorized as a conscious kind of resistance to the logics of violence and neoliberal forgetfulness, embodied for instance in the Solidère project. Ken Seignure, for example, distinguishes between two types of aesthetics that were informed by the war: what he calls "mythic utopianisms," which he associates with political parties that vied for a "fallen world in need of redemption" (*Standing by the Ruins* 11), and a more humanistic "elegiac aesthetic" that characterizes cultural output, namely novels and films. Haugbolle makes a similar distinction, contrasting the memory

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[5] Distinctions within cultural production have been made as well. Miriam Cooke, for instance, makes a distinction along gendered lines, writing about the Beirut Decentrists, a group of women writers in the early phases of the war who challenged male perspectives of the war. Cooke links the rise of female writers to the outbreak of war and to an emerging feminist consciousness that aimed to "undermine and restructure society around the image of a new center" (3). For more on this, see Cooke's *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (1996).

work of cultural production with that of political groups. He argues that the memory cultures of

political groups are "based on hagiographic frameworks for understanding the past that were

used to underpin and legitimize their political identity" (9). This form of memory culture, while

mobilized by political actors, is tied to the intimate ways that particular groups remember the

past, and the sectarian boundaries that still mark memory, identity, and space in Lebanon. As

Haugbolle notes, neighbourhoods in Beirut, for example, "still retain rather distinctly sectarian

boundaries, some of which even existed prior the war" ("Public and Private Memory" 199).

These neighbourhoods are frequently marked by posters, graffiti, flags, and other political

symbols that serve as "reminders for the people who inhabit the space and the people who pass

through it alike, of the cultural, religious, political, ideological worldview that holds sway over

this particular part of the city" (200).[6]

Cultural Production as Disillusionment

Many novels written during the war and in the postwar period express disillusionment

with the causes that instigated the war in the first place. Norman Saadi Nikro, for instance,

focuses on earlier forms of cultural production, mostly Leftist accounts associated with

Palestinian and socialist parties, "that situate and work through personal experiences of the war"

(5). Nikro argues that each author and filmmaker "strive to resituate a sense of self from an agent

of history to a casualty of history" (9). Nikro here is referring to the disillusionment with

ideological attachments to a Left that succumbed to the logic of violence, and a consequent

reestablishment of self through narrative. The question that he poses to these works is how each

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[6] For a thorough and insightful account of how political posters in Lebanon act as symbolic sites of struggle, see Zeina Maasri's *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War* (2009). For studies on the relationship between memory and space (architecture, urban planning), see C. Nagel's "Reconstructing Space, re-creating memory: sectarian politics and urban development in post-war Beirut" (2002) and Assel Sawalha's *Reconstructing Beirut: Memory and Space in a Postwar Arab City* (2010).

employs memory to "destructure or unravel both an historical understanding of self and related modalities of being" (17). Similarly, in Seignure's discussion of earlier forms of cultural production in Lebanon, particularly novels, he argues that Lebanese novelists sought to regulate memory beyond the cycles of revenge that characterized wartime martyrdom (*Standing by the Ruins* 36). Seignure here refers to the opportunistic and rapidly shifting ideological commitments of the war: "Activists who had been prepared to lay down their lives for secular convictions were suddenly told that this was all wrong and that it was really better to die for religious-sectarian reasons" (36). Those who resisted this logic of what Seignure calls "Promethean forgetfulness" were relegated to the margins. Lebanese novelists were among those marginalized as they borrowed from Arabic memory literature to contribute to a distinctive aesthetic that not only adopted Western forms but rather "implicitly reappropriated classical Arabic literary techniques along with their associated values in order to formulate an aesthetic response to a traumatic present" (37). What is common in both Seignure's and Nikro's accounts, ultimately, is their emphasis on the role of ideological disillusionment in the development of civil war and post civil war cultural production.

The War as Tabula Rasa for Cultural Production

Accounts on Lebanese cultural production often posit the war as creating a tabula rasa for creative output in Lebanon. Syrine Hout, for instance, notes how Lebanese diasporic fiction is characterized largely by "the war and its consequences" (*Post-War Anglophone* 201). She asks rhetorically, will these works "eventually move on to other themes?" (201). The civil war, moreover, is often seen as a gateway to gaining legitimacy in the literary world (Lang) while postwar cultural works like Ziad Doueiry's film *West Beyrouth* and Ziad Abillama's 1992 beach installation, are credited with (re)starting cinematic and artistic activity respectively (Khatib,

Rogers). The fact that the war produced a prolific amount of cultural work that was experimental

in form, moreover, adds sway to the notion that the war produced a clean slate for artists. Across

the creative spectrum, for instance, visual artists, documentarians, and novelists blur the

boundaries between fact and fiction as well as challenge the conventional function of the

mediums they employ. The Lebanese postwar art scene is mostly known for "creating

representations where the evidentiary mode of photography or video becomes indissociable from

imaginary scenarios" (Demos 102)[7] to reveal the unstable nature of representation in the

aftermath of war. These techniques, which are also evident in the literary world through the

unclear boundaries between autobiography and fiction, can be read as an evocation of modernist

or postmodern forms. Some scholars, however, argue that this formal experimentation largely

reflects the "belated force of traumatic encounter" (Nikro 7) and the instability of everyday life

in Lebanon (see Demos interview). My own sense here is that these forms are a reflection of both

modernist types of representation *and* the particularities of the Lebanese context. As Christine

Tohme notes, "it's not either-or, but both. They live off each other and they merge together"

(Demos 116).

Moving Beyond the Centrality of the War

In recent years scholars have challenged the line of thought that presents the war as the

origin to all creative activity in Lebanon. These works instead reveal the extent to which cultural

production is a product of particular circumstances. In reference to a postwar generation of visual

artists, for instance, Sarah Rogers argues that we need "to account for the circumstances that

allowed for the emergence of the postwar generation and a set of practices that emerge *not out of*

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[7] Most notable here is artist Walid Raad's fictional archive the Atlas Group. In this archive he purposefully manipulates and invents material that he presents as archival evidence from the war. His work has often been read as an interrogation of the boundaries between art and reality in the context of trauma.

a void, but rather out of history" (*my emphasis* 20). Similarly, in her monograph tracking

Lebanese literature's shifting relationship to place and its impact on national identity, Hayek

challenges the assumption that novelists only began engaging with ideas of place and identity in

the wake of the civil war. These works build upon the lexicons of memory and crises of

representation to explore other themes that place war-related cultural production within a larger

historical context. While the war moves further into the chronological past, political instability

continues to plague Lebanon, thus necessitating a different framework for approaching Lebanese

cultural production.

As I will discuss throughout my dissertation, the end of the civil war did not bring about a

condition of peace and stability. The Syrian occupation of Lebanon had repressive consequences

in the aftermath of the war and only came to an end in 2005 after the assassination of former

Prime Minister Hariri. Hariri's assassination was followed by a period of violent instability,

including a war with Israel in 2006, a string of assassinations and explosions, border trouble in

the North of Lebanon, a mini civil strife in 2008, presidential vacuums, political stalemates, and

a major refugee crisis that continues to have divisive consequences on the country. In light of

these continuing developments, it is necessary to re-evaluate the way we engage with Lebanese

cultural production and its relationship to Lebanon's contemporary history. While my own

commitment to studying Lebanese cultural production follows and responds to the established

and emerging body of work that addresses the manner in which the Lebanese civil war has

shaped and influenced cultural production, my project simultaneously reflects the fatigue with

memory discourse that I discuss earlier in this introduction.[8]

I am interested, instead, in exploring how certain cultural productions "stay within the

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[8] Halabi discusses this fatigue specifically in terms of literary works and film, but I argue that it is reflected in
secondary scholarly work as well.

realm of the minor and the detail, and…resist the spectacular in all its forms" (Cotter 31). I not only trace the investment with the everyday across different phases in Lebanon's contemporary history, but I also engage with popular cultural productions that emerge from the everyday to investigate their affective resonance within the ordinary. My work differs from other scholarship on Lebanese cultural production because I am not solely invested in the representational consequences of living amid political instability; rather, I am interested in exploring the dynamic range of Lebanese cultural productions to track how they evoke shifting notions of the ordinary. I show the extent to which filmmakers and writers are attuned to ordinary lives as they produce an account of the ordinary that seeks to capture the noise of the present. Rather than purely articulating these works as counter-hegemonic, moreover, I situate them within an affective landscape to reveal how crisis in Lebanon becomes embedded in quotidian experience and to expose the ordinary as a site of constant negotiation.

In the next few sections, I will outline the theoretical investments that frame this project and, more particularly, the theoretical trajectory that produces my interest in the everyday as a productive site of investigation. While my work sidesteps the rhetoric of exceptionality that characterizes much work on trauma and violence, I argue that we should not abandon the heuristics of trauma theory completely. In the next sections, I salvage the elements of psychoanalytic trauma theory that are productive for conceptualizing the role of cultural production in the contemporary Lebanese landscape, while also making the case for building upon these frameworks to account for the effects of traumatizing violence in global contexts.

Trauma Theory and Beyond: Theorizing Lebanese Cultural Production

As I have suggested, the Lebanese civil war occupies significant space in Lebanese cultural production and the scholarship surrounding it. My critical interest in engaging Lebanese

cultural production began after all with the encroaching realization that the majority of Lebanese films, novels, memoirs, and art were centered on issues relating to the civil war. This observation led me to the oft-cited and perhaps now obvious conclusion that the civil war was not yet over for Lebanese people. I theorized this "obsession" with the civil war as an anxiety-saturated repetition that manifests an urge to master the fractured referent of the civil war. I understood the constant return of the civil war, then, as indication of its status as a *cultural trauma*. I viewed these cultural productions as embodiments of cultural memory whereby the past was constantly emerging out of a need to bridge a certain gap between the present day and the unfinished nature of the civil war.[9] Reading the civil war as a cultural *trauma* was conceptually useful in the early stages of this project considering the unfinished nature of trauma as a continual process of revision.

The notion of trauma, which signifies a wound that has not been and indeed cannot be properly attended to, is productive for thinking through the unattended wounds of the civil war that seem to continuously plague Lebanese society. In Freud's early articulations of the term, trauma operates according to a temporal logic of delay or "deferred action" (*Nachträglichkeit*) in which trauma is made up of the dialectical relationship between two events or experiences that are not in themselves traumatic: the first event, sexual in nature, that came too early in a child's life for it to be understood and the second event that triggered a memory of the first event that only then was given traumatic meaning. The first childhood experience establishes the "libidinal 'substructure'" (Ball, *Disciplining* 153) upon which future "neurotic" experiences are based. While some like Dominick LaCapra have accused applications of this formulation of undermining the specificity of historical traumas, the logic of *Nachträglichkeit* does not

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[9] My understanding of cultural memory here is influenced by Jan Assman's definition of the term that assumes the centrality of rupture or trauma to the formation of cultural memory.

necessarily diminish the particularities of historical traumas. As Karyn Ball has pointed out,

Nachträglichkeit suggests that the anxious aftereffects of particular traumas are "difficult to

distinguish from neurotic symptoms [that] express a prior *and* supplemental susceptibility…of

future cathexes" (*Disciplining* 153). What is particularly significant about this Freudian

articulation of trauma is the argument that it is not the "event" itself that is traumatic, but rather

its "delayed revival as a *memory*" (Leys, *Trauma* 20). The traumatic event's belated impact

always already deracinates its historical specificity "since its experience only emerges in its

displaced, symptomatic afterlife within the fractured or collective psyche" (Senyal 305).

It is this aspect of latency or belatedness and deferred memory of the event that I

originally found valuable for my own articulation about cultural production in Lebanon. In

particular, the notion of deferral provided a useful framework to consider the delayed emergence

of cultural products dealing with the civil war. The civil war's prominent presence within these

cultural products, moreover, seemed to resonate with the patterns and structures of traumatic

experience. In Freud's understanding, the term *traumatic* applies to "an experience which, within

a short period of time, presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt

with or worked off in a normal way, and this may result in permanent disturbances of the manner

in which energy operates" (275). The shape that this disturbance often takes is repetitive

behaviour in which the traumatized subject repeats the painful experience in the form of a

traumatic dream. This articulation allowed me to interpret cultural production's "obsession" with

the war as a form of repetition-compulsion that reveals an urge to master the fractured referent of

the civil war. In this formulation, I am not merely transposing psychoanalytic frameworks onto a

collective context; rather, I regard psychoanalysis as a productive heuristic to begin theorizing the civil war's contested position within a collective psyche. [10]

The most valuable aspect of psychoanalysis, for the purposes of thinking through historical traumas, is its emphasis on the inextricability of the past from the present. In psychoanalytic terms, the past is never fully sanctioned off from the present. As Jackie Stacey notes, "One might say all psychoanalytic concepts of time challenge the notion that childhood belongs to something neatly called the past" (45). In his article "On Screen Memories," for instance, Freud defines a screen memory "as one which owes its value as a memory not to its own content but to the relation existing between that content and some other, that has been suppressed" (320). A screen memory, then, conceals subsequent wishes or desires. To be more exact, Freud notes that,

> Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge*; they were *formed* at that time. And a number of motives with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves (322).

Freud's understanding of screen memories implies that memory does not mimetically convey a transpired experiential content, insofar as present motives and desires shape images of experiences that we locate in the past. This premise offers a productive heuristic because it

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[10] In recent studies, the distinction between individual and collective memory has become increasingly irrelevant. As José van Dijck argues, the distinction between individual and collective is not useful because it ignores the significant and creative interplay between individuality and collectivity through which memory is ultimately produced (268). His argument is rooted in the assumption that all memory is always already a representation. Drawing upon the work of Andreas Huyssen, who claims that "the past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory"(2), van Dijck argues that "by assuming its representational nature, Huyssen firmly locates the act as well as the products of memory in the realm of culture, rather than in the realm of cognition or sociality," rendering the distinction between individual and collective irrelevant (268).

highlights not only how memory serves unconscious interests; but also how it is formed in relation to a present context. For my own purposes, these psychoanalytic concepts offered a discourse that helped me approach my primary objects not simply as mimetic conveyers of a stable past, but as products of present-day circumstance. I was interested ultimately in the interplay between present day contexts and the past that emerges from these contexts in the form of memory acts and cultural products. Understanding the civil war as cultural trauma, then, was an important theoretical move to help me convey the extent to which the civil war does not remain neatly in the past and whose memory is triggered, shaped, and influenced by contemporary preoccupations. The question for me became not only what can representation tell us about the nature of a traumatic past and its effects, but also: what can it tell us about the *present* in which this past is being represented or remembered?

Methodologically speaking, when we approach cultural products from the perspective of trauma theory, we are often confined to reading these objects symptomatically, looking for traces of trauma in the formal structures of the texts. Generally speaking, then, trauma is viewed as a problem of representation. The latency inherent to trauma, or the fact that trauma cannot be *known* in its primary instances, has often been used as a means to characterize the general incomprehensibility of the traumatic event, as something that ultimately surpasses understanding and therefore representation.[11] Trauma, in this sense, poses a crisis for memory because the presumed severity of the traumatic occurrences suggests that memory ultimately "refuses the knowledge of what happened" (Hodgkin and Radstone 6). The theoretical impetus of this

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[11] This idea was further solidified by Cathy Caruth's famous articulation of trauma as a "missed encounter." The tendency, moreover, to frame trauma in terms of the inadequacy of representation is related to the trend of linking trauma to notions of the sublime. See LaCapra's *Writing History* and Hayden White's "Figural Realism" and "The Modernist Event." Also, Geoffrey Hartman has intensified claims about unrepresentability by suggesting that traumatic knowledge is almost oxymoronic in the sense that the traumatic event "bypasse[s] perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche" (537).

unknowability is that trauma "complicates referentiality by interposing the disruptions of

memory between the event and its representation" (6). While disruptions between the referent

and its representations are arguably inherent to memory itself, as Hodgkin and Radstone suggest,

trauma theory maintains that it is the event itself that disrupts memory.[12] This particular idea has

been employed most generally within Holocaust studies, a field that is intimately tied to the

emergence of trauma theory. Ball notes how this idea of unrepresentability, also evident in

Adorno's comments on the "impossibility" of poetry after Auschwitz, "contributed to a

sacralizing discourse about the Final Solution that seemed to place it beyond the possibility of

comparison" ("Trauma and its institutional destinies" 10).[13] My own sense here is that an

emphasis on the limits of representation is counterproductive in that it restricts focus to that of

the sacralized object or event, rather than to *how* this event/object comes to be memorialized and

the way this memory eventually circulates. This restriction runs counter to the possibilities

offered by memory studies, which presents an understanding of history that does not rely on

"idealist notions of coherent identity and 'authentic' experience" (Ball, "Trauma and its

institutional destinies" 7), but rather sees memory, and traumatic memory in particular, as

provisional signifiers of experience.

The emphasis on representation in trauma theory often directs our focus to the event itself

or at least the effects of the event on the formation of a memory act. In this sense, trauma theory

frequently encourages us to consider the past's effect on the present. While this paradigm is

productive for thinking through the visceral impacts of an unfinished past, I eventually found

that there were limits to relying solely on trauma theory to understand the extent to which the

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[12] Pierre Janet, for instance makes the distinction between narrative memory and traumatic memory. Unlike narrative memory, traumatic memory is characterized by its unassimilated nature into the psyche (see Van der Kolk).
[13] For a sustained critique of this trope of unrepresentability, see Naomi Mandel's *Against the Unspeakable.*

civil war operates in contemporary Lebanon. More specifically, applications of trauma theory that are concerned with either the limits of representation (through sacralization of the traumatic event), or with the aesthetics of trauma as an event that ruptures conventional modes of representation, often limit our perspective to the nature of the past itself rather than its dynamic interplay with the present. The continuation of violence in the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war implies that the unfinished nature of the war goes beyond the persistence of traumatic memory to take on a more literal or physical dimension. Taking this point into consideration, it becomes increasingly difficult to focus on the memory of the civil war while ignoring the manifestations of violence in the present that are inseparable from the logics that perpetuated the war itself. The civil war is not only relived through painful memories, as some trauma theory would have us conclude; instead, constant renewals of violence and the violent experience of living under neoliberal austerity complicate the patterns of traumatic memory and may render past affects more visceral. As my engagement with Lebanese cultural production developed, then, I found myself gradually moving away from the paradigms of trauma theory that had me privileging the past. I became more interested, instead, in the lens of the *present*, or the textured dimensions of living in a world in which the past is but *one* force coming up against the oppressions of the contemporary moment.

My own sense that trauma theory is not fully able to account for the experiences and memories of violence in Lebanon resonates with efforts to "decolonize" trauma theory. These efforts recognize the limits of trauma theory to discuss the effects of violence in postcolonial contexts. Most noticeably, these accounts are critical of the psychoanalytic emphasis in trauma theory that privileges the individual as opposed to the collective. Of course as Rothberg has indicated in his response to *Studies in the Novel'*s special journal edition, *Postcolonial Trauma*

Novels, accounts that challenge conventional trauma theory's emphasis on the individual as opposed to the collective often fall short of these intentions in their character-based textual readings (230). I see this issue as further evidence for the unstable boundaries between the individual and the collective. For my own purposes, I maintain that psychoanalytic models of trauma can still provide productive heuristics for considering trauma as a process of revision. As Ananya Jahanara Kabir argues, the "broadening out of trauma studies cannot…do away with its foundational dependence on the structures and articulations of the Freudian unconscious" (72).

In the Lebanese context, psychoanalysis provides us with the language to conceive of cultural production as a shifting form of memory culture that is constantly being shaped to meet the demands of the present. Here I am working with Ball's assumption "that theoretical languages are endemically figurative" ("Losing Steam" 69). I do, however, agree with the diagnosis that trauma theory alone is potentially inept at providing an account of traumas that are less event-based and more pervasive and persistent. More specifically, we need to find frameworks that allow us to consider the experience of violence not merely as an exceptional event that disrupts present and future processes, but as something that is ongoing and that is sutured to everyday experience. A shift in emphasis from conversations about the past to conversations about the *present* enables us to account for these experiences more aptly. In this regard, we need to move beyond conceptualizations of the present that view it merely as a temporal space in which the past lives on. A focus on affect encourages us to think about the present in a more dynamic sense because the present, to echo Berlant again, is perceived first affectively. In the following section, therefore, I outline what an investigation of affect might look like when we confront cultural production that emerges from places marked by collective trauma.

The Turn to Affect Theory: Privileging the Ordinary

Ananya Kabir argues that "Analysis of cultural production arising out of spaces of collective trauma should be attentive to the presence of affect-worlds deployed by the cultural producers concerned" (72). Affect-worlds here refer to the "epidermal and haptic" (72), or ontological, circumstances of historical experience. Kabir's claim stems from her sense, like my own, that trauma theory alone cannot fully account for particular collective traumas—in her case, the Indian Partition and conflicts of the global South more generally. More particularly, Kabir argues that the narratively driven aspects of trauma theory, which emphasize the healing nature of "telling the story," do not allow space for conceptualizing more pervasive structures of feeling that exist outside the trauma narrative. For this reason, Kabir explores forms of cultural production, like lyric poetry and song, which offer alternative expressive registers to explore the legacy of traumatic histories. While she does not completely abandon the heuristics offered by psychoanalysis, Kabir explores "non-narrative" cultural productions that resituate the body at the forefront of analysis. Her move here is reminiscent of the "affective turn" in cultural theory (Clough) that was spurred by "the view that the body in its lived materiality has been neglected in the humanities and social sciences" (Leys, "The Turn to Affect" 440). While my own retreat away from trauma theory towards an investigation of affect is endemic to recent theoretical trends in the humanities, it does not lead me towards a literal attention to the material body in the same sense that it does for Kabir. My turn towards affect, instead, is motivated by the belief that an "orientation toward the affective or emotional…[directs] us to focus more intensely on what matters to the communities we study…and thus what makes the emergent material and social worlds in which we are immersed" (Lutz 189). The methodological implication of this belief is a renewed focus on the varying tones of everyday life and how it is captured in textual and visual

environments (Wiegman 13). Unlike affect theorists, therefore, who reject an emphasis on language and representation, I see value in studying cultural texts as affectively rich creative acts that "cultivate a response to the conditions of the political present" (Wiegman 16).

My understanding of affect in terms of the everyday echoes a larger theoretical trend, which rejects the "virtual turn" of affect theory (Ball, "Losing Steam" 60) without abandoning affect as a useful concept for cultural theory. This categorization is influenced by Robyn Wiegman's classification of affect theory into two schools of thought: She differentiates between the everyday affect school, which "reads both embodiment and everyday life in affective terms" (14), and the "recent reorientation toward the body in the context of what is called 'the new materialism'" (13). This latter form of affect theory, or the virtual turn, is mostly associated with affect theorists who build upon the work of Deleuze and Spinoza (most notably Brian Massumi and Nigel Thrift) and, to some degree, Silvan Tomkins.[14] In their terms, affect is an autonomous, pre-cognitive and pre-ideological force or intensity and is thus independent of meaning or signification. Deleuzian inspired theorists are often invested in distinguishing affect from emotion to emphasize affect as a state of becoming as opposed to a state of actuality. Generally speaking, these theorists "disdain vocabularies that presuppose an individuated subject" (Ball, "Losing Steam" 60) and are instead interested in the corporeality of existence or affect as purely bodily and non-cognitive. Ruth Leys' incisive critique of this body of work proves useful here. Leys argues that these theories share the belief that "affect is independent of signification and meaning" ("The Turn to Affect" 443) and thus "independent of…ideology" (437). For Leys, the

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[14] Tomkins' main arguments borrow heavily from neuroscience and evoke the relationship between affect and physiology. In this sense, Tomkins and some of his followers, like Paul Ekman, construct affect as "a hard-wired and therefore involuntary response disconnected from belief and desire" (Ball, "Losing Steam" 73). My own work does not subscribe to this articulation of affect, although I do engage with Eve Sedgwick, who takes up Tomkins, in the third chapter of this dissertation. Sedgwick is less interested in describing affect as innate and is instead invested in using affect theory to advocate for a reparative turn in critical theory.

depoliticizing implications of these articulations are grave. The separation of ideology from affect produces, in her terms, a "relative indifference to the role of ideas and beliefs in politics, culture, and art in favour of an "ontological" concern with different people's corporeal affective reactions" (450). Even more gravely, understandings of affect that are pre-subjective seem to overlook issues of power and agency that are crucial for understanding systems of oppression (Ali 32). A de-subjectifying framework of affect theory thus risks universalizing the affective impact of oppression (Lutz 187) (Ball, "Losing Steam" 69) without taking seriously the "messiness of the marginality, identity, materiality, and politics of lives and liveliness" (Ali 33).

These convincing critiques of affect theory do not necessarily vacate the concept of its productivity or political potential. While the origins of affect theory seem to insist on the separation between ontology and epistemology, many scholars have recently pushed back against this binary to reject the separation of affect from social meaning. Most notably, Clare Hemmings cites standpoint feminist theory and postcolonial theory as examples of epistemological work that "attend to emotional investments" without reducing "experience to a place on a grid of immutable power relations" (558). In other words, Hemmings challenges affect theorists' claim that privileging the epistemological obscures an understanding of lived experience. Similarly, in her discussion on the affective experience of labour under capitalism, Ball rejects the separation of affect from social meaning. Citing Eva Illouz's book *Cold Intimacies*, Ball argues that far from being pre-cognitive or pre-social, emotions are relational as they are what connect the self to others. This idea is supported by Sarah Ahmed's argument that emotions create the very boundaries that "allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place" (10). If emotions, therefore, seem pre-conscious, it is "because their sociocultural infrastructure has been so 'deeply internalized' that we no longer discern how it motivates action" (Ball, "Losing

Steam" 65).

While Massumi's claim about the autonomy of affect has "asserted a seemingly irreconcilable gap between what happens in the world and what we can know of it as that happening" (D. White, Daniel 177), scholars who are interested in salvaging affect as a productive heuristic without abandoning epistemological investments, have maintained that it is still possible to discuss affect and affective attachments within "the context of social narratives and power relations" (Hemmings 562). My understanding and evocation of affect is influenced by these theorists who often "speak of affect in its everyday idiom, as feeling, emotion, and sentiment" (Wiegman 13). This conceptualization of affect has been especially significant for feminist theory that seeks to critique systems of power and understand their effects through an affective register. In my own work, I am similarly invested in tracking the everyday across a multitude of cultural productions to understand the extent to which it absorbs and is entangled within a network of traumas, violence, and unjust power relations. This investigation coincides with the imperatives of feminist affect theory that highlights the "place of emotion in the public sphere" (Gorton 334) and that is mobilized by the belief that work on affect and emotion allows us to reconsider the importance of feeling in the making of political worlds (Gorton 345). Because affect, as Hemmings argues, "place[s] the individual in a circuit of feeling and response" (552), an attention to affective registers allows us to account for ordinary lives that are constantly negotiating the shifting temporal and spatial realities of a politically volatile nation. Affect, in this sense, is "viscerally political, permeating every layer of everyday life" (Berberich et al. 314). An attention to the "sensed and lived details" of everyday life (Berberich et a. 315), ultimately provides a way to think about how unfinished traumatic pasts exist as part of a dynamic present that is plagued by its own violences and injustices.

Theories of the Everyday

An attention to affect ultimately guides me towards my framing interest in the ordinary. Throughout this work, I maintain that the ordinary or the everyday is a significant mode through which to study and understand the effects of enduring violence. I define the everyday here as "the unmarked background condition against which specific events are framed" (Lewis 539). Cultural production, as emergent from and attuned to the everyday, is one medium through which to track the valences of everyday life in Lebanon.[15] My interest in the potential of the ordinary must be viewed as part of an older trajectory of French theorists who championed the everyday or the quotidian as "a critical concept and as an imaginative fiction for approaching social life" (Highmore 32). For many of these theorists, the everyday is a site that nuances our understanding of broader social structures, either as a supplement to them (de Certeau) or through its dialectical positioning towards them (Lefebvre).

My own project is not solely interested in a theory of everydayness that upholds the idea of the everyday "as a normative force of *life* itself" (Colebrook 696). I am, after all, discussing cultural production that registers the affective impact of violence and disturbances that *reconfigure* the way in which everyday life plays out. What I take from everyday theory is its insistence on drawing out the ordinary to the foreground of our analysis in an attempt to understand social structures. Everyday practices here "no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity" (de Certeau xi). Instead, the mundane rhythms of everyday life become the primary material that we are concerned with. This move echoes the belief that

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[15] My analysis of cultural production as a lens into everyday life resonates with Raymond Williams' approach that takes "lived experience as the ground for a conscious and reflective analysis of culture" (Sabry 15). I take up Williams more explicitly in the first chapter of this dissertation.

"There [is] a power concealed in everyday life's apparent banality, a depth beneath its triviality, *something extraordinary in its very ordinariness* (Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* 37). I find Lefebvre's claim, moreover, that "the history of a single day includes the history of the world and of civilization" (*Everyday Life in the Modern World* 4), encouraging in its affirmation of my own investment in the quotidian as a significant site through which to understand the civil war's contentious place within a tumultuous political present.

When confronting the everyday as a scholarly concept, especially through the realm of cultural production, we find ourselves inhabiting contradictory grounds. The everyday is often configured as an "impossibly evasive terrain" (Highmore 21) that escapes representation. This view is mostly advanced by Maurice Blanchot who argues that one of the everyday's essential traits is that "it allows no hold. It escapes. It belongs to insignificance…" (14). In these terms, to approach the everyday from the perspective of literature and film seems problematic at best and impossible at worst. Despite this seemingly obstructive claim, many scholars have found ways of reconciling the everyday with the realm of representation. In his account on various everyday life theorists, Ben Highmore argues that to insist on the incommensurability of everyday life with representation "is to miss the fact that sensation and the everyday are already part of a world of representation" (21). Highmore's argument does not imply that the everyday has been "fully colonized by discourse and representation" (21); rather, Highmore contends that theories of the everyday must concern themselves with generating suitable forms that can register the ordinary in all of its valences.

Lefebvre's development of the concept of the everyday indicates a frustration with a philosophical tradition that he claimed was inadequate for capturing the lived actuality of the present moment. He argues, for instance, that socialism can only be defined "*concretely* on the

level of everyday life, as a system of changes in what can be called lived experience" (Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* 49). The potential of Lefebvre's notion of the everyday comes from his insistence that the everyday is not necessarily something that can be seceded as an object of analysis itself. Instead, Lefebvre argues that

> everyday life is profoundly related to *all* activities, and encompasses them with all their
> differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground.
> And it is in everyday life that the sum of total relations which make the human…a whole
> takes its shape and its form (*Critique of Everyday Life* 97).

Lefebvre's theorization of the everyday, then, invites us to view it as a "totality of relationships" (Highmore 143). The everyday is the site through which to understand the *intersection* of phenomena and activities that make up human life. For Lefebvre, historians and other scholars who do not seriously engage with the everyday are missing something crucial in their accounts about human experience. Once these academics "begin consciously linking history and the knowledge of mankind with…everyday life…" he argues, "they will have left their naivety behind" (*Critique of Everyday Life* 136).

De Certeau's articulation of the everyday is mostly noted for his distinction between strategies and tactics. On the one hand, strategies are associated with established institutions and structures of power that have clear and visible ends or intentions. Strategies, in this sense, "assume a place that can be circumscribed as *proper (propre)* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it" (de Certeau xix). Tactics, on the other hand, belong to the realm of the "weak" and consist of the wandering, purposeless practices that unfold within the dominant order that is laid out by strategies. It is through tactics that de Certeau identifies the potential of everyday life because tactics contain within them elements of creative

resistance. Tactics, according to de Certeau, are not undertaken with the intention of disrupting the dominant order; rather "it is in this very purposelessness or refusal of engagement that a tactic exposes the limit of a strategy" (Colebrook 698). De Certeau's account of the everyday offers a means through which to think about social life "beyond the closure of constituted powers" (Colebrook 699). This claim becomes especially useful when thinking about the consumption of popular culture as something other than evidence for the pervasiveness of repressive power structures. De Certeau instead invites us to think about consumption as "*ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order" (de Certeau xiii *original emphasis*). In this sense, de Certeau "register[s] a cultural density around objects and practices that evoke what might be thought of as a…cultural imaginary" (Highmore 152).

Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter of this dissertation analyzes everyday life as documented by two novels/memoirs written during the time of the war: Ghada Samman's *Beirut Nightmares* and Jean Said Makdisi's *Beirut Fragments*. Most accounts about wartime literature read the war as producing "an epistemic break with a number of previously dominated traditions" (Hayek, *Imagining the City* 22). This observation is accurate considering the extent of experimental fiction that emerged during the war and that differed from the realist modes of narrative that were previously dominate. In this chapter, I situate the two memoirs under study within a larger Arab literary landscape to insist on the historical circumstances of literary production, and to reveal how the texts emerged from the circumstances of war, not in terms of a break but as an affective adjustment that necessitated a reconsideration of form. I evoke literary form, therefore, as a mode through which to track the affective resonances of an ordinary being radically

defamiliarized and reconfigured by the war. I offer a reading of affect that is heavily inscribed in form as I present the formal structures of these texts as processes of negotiation that simultaneously produce and adjust to new contours of everyday life in the wake of war. This production of the everyday is inflected with traumatic traces as it is heavily anchored within a violent present that redefines the modes and boundaries of ordinary life. The formal structures of these texts do "not only archive what is being lost but track what happens in the time that we inhabit before new forms make it possible to relocate within conventions the fantasy of sovereign life unfolding from actions" (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 7).

Chapter two analyses two post-civil war films: Ghassan Salhab's *Terra Incognita* and Khalil Joreige and Joana Hadjithomas' *A Perfect Day*, to examine how the conditions and valences of the postwar period register affectively. Each film foregoes the centrality of plot and narrative to produce an account of postwar everyday life that is riddled with competing intensities in a context heavily weighed down by its unfinished past and contemporary violences. I study these works, therefore, as embodiments of an emerging structure of feeling specific to post–civil war Beirut, in which the haunting remnants of an unresolved violent past intersect with the neoliberal imperatives to propel Lebanon into a global market. In this sense, I build upon an exclusive concern with 'pastness,' which often dominates discussions about post-conflict and post-colonial societies, in order to consider how an unfinished traumatic past intersects with more contemporary oppressions and the affective dimension of these intersections. Through a series of visual motifs and audio techniques, *Terra Incognita* and *A Perfect Day* track the ways that forces from the past encounter a wholesale embrace of neoliberalism, commercialism, and present violence to create a kind of affective impasse that plays out either in depressed apathy or in excessive indulgence.

In the third chapter, I explore nostalgia as a dominant affective register in the Lebanese

postwar landscape. Nostalgia, I argue, while fundamental to the way power operates as a top

down structure, is also embedded within a more diffuse network of narratives and discourses that

operate in the public sphere. In this sense, I invoke nostalgia as an *ordinary affect* that emerges

in "disparate scenes and incommensurate forms and registers…[as a] tangle of potential

connections" (Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* 6). I track nostalgia across popular cultural productions

as well as literary texts to explore how it becomes essential to articulations of national belonging

in the postwar context. By reading nostalgic texts reparatively, we emerge from the binary mode

of conceptualizing texts either as "trangressive or ideologically complicit" (Ronda 5). Instead,

my reading of nostalgia as an affective register deeply embedded in the postwar ordinary reveals

the extent to which nostalgic narratives provide a powerful emotional experience for consumers,

while not forsaking how nostalgia functions as part of the state's neoliberal imperatives.

Finally, in chapter four, I look at works that investigate and uncover the modes through

which extreme events of violence in the wake of Hariri's assassination become folded into the

ordinary. Each of the cultural products that I study reveals how Hariri's assassination, as a

violent rupture, became folded into ordinary existence in profound and inextricable ways. The

historical present being drawn out in each of these works is constituted as an adjustment to a

particular political and affective shift that plays out in the wake of the assassination. The three

works under study here diffuse the extreme event into the patterns of everyday life and connect

the violences of the present with those of the past. While the post-assassination period is depicted

as shaping new ordinaries; therefore, the past is constantly refolded into and reinterpreted in the

present moment. Importantly, each of these works engages in a particular kind of mapping or a

tracing of the various intensities, layers, dimensions, and contours of the country that are shifting

and adjusting to the historical present being produced in the aftermath of the assassination.

Chapter One: Structures of Feeling in *Beirut Nightmares* and *Beirut Fragments*: Reconfiguring the Ordinary

In Lamia Joreige's video compilation *Objects of War,* she presents a series of testimonials by individuals who lived through the Lebanese civil war. Each of these testimonials revolves around a particular object that serves as a departure point for the video subject's story about the conflict. These objects range in variety and function, from old photographs to playing cards, to a teddy bear, a candle and even an old piggy bank. The purpose of this project, according to Joreige, is to reveal the "impossibility of telling a single history of this war" (23). In this sense, the objects in these videos function as affective fragments of collective memory that reveal the unstable and contentious boundaries of history and truth. What Joreige's work also reveals, however, is the extent to which stories about the Lebanese civil war are inextricable from stories about everyday life. The mnemonic weight that these mostly mundane objects are given through the testimonies reveal how everyday objects, and by extension the everyday, become reconfigured in the wake of the war.

Joreige's work often gets read within the context of memory making, as producing an "aesthetic archive" (Georgis, "The Aesthetic Archive") that reveals the precarious ways the past lives on in the present (Marks 22). I would add that the ordinary objects within her video series also invite us to reconsider how violence erodes the boundaries of everyday life and the frameworks through which we understand the world. The centrality of everyday life to Lebanese cultural productions and the subsequent juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extreme are features that speak to the ways in which violence and memories of violence are embedded within the ordinary fabric of Lebanese life. My own work in this chapter explores this dynamic as I look at two memoirs/novels, Ghada Samman's *Beirut Nightmares* and Jean Said Makdisi's *Beirut Fragments*, which produce accounts of everyday life as it unfolds in the midst of war. These

works represent the reconfiguration of the everyday as a shared affective adjustment that, while

traumatic and extreme, shapes new contours of the ordinary. Because these texts mark an

aesthetic shift in Lebanese literary production, I evoke literary form here as the central mode

through which to track the affective adjustments unfolding in response to the war.

Dina Georgis argues that "if political events psychically wound, then the affect that they

unleash unconsciously organizes meaning" (*The Better Story* 76). Here Georgis is concerned

with how art and aesthetic representation and production more generally serve as a sites on

which unprocessed affect finds expression in the processes of symbolization that constitute

aesthetic accounts. Georgis understands affect as the "persistent remains of the past" and as the

"past's legacy on the present" (12). In Georgis's articulation, then, affect is fundamental to the

expression of a traumatic past. In this chapter, I seek to explore and elaborate on Georgis's

claim, particularly in relation to how affect organizes meaning and how aesthetic texts in

themselves become expressive of affect in the wake of a shifting quotidian. I am interested,

ultimately, in dwelling on the question of *how* in order to understand the ways in which certain

affective realities become expressed formally. If "ghosts speak through affect" (11), then how

do they press up against and influence aesthetic forms?[16]

My methodology is one that attempts to connect the realm of formal literary production

to that of affect. My own attention to form in this chapter is one way for me to consider how

affect "registers the conditions of life that move across persons and worlds" (Berlant, *Cruel*

Optimism 16). I take my cue again from Berlant here who considers "affect's saturation of

form," and argues that "the aesthetic or formal rendition of affective experience provides

evidence of historical processes" (*Cruel Optimism* 16). For Berlant, then, affect is fundamental to

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[16] Many in the field of aesthetics have traditionally been concerned with emotions and particularly how art objects stir our emotions or evoke particular responses in us. I will elaborate more on these theorists and my relationship to them later on in this chapter.

the mediation of any historical moment and form is the mode through which this affective

mediation becomes expressed. By paying attention to the formal features of these two texts, I

reveal the extent to which each work emerges from a thickly inhabited *present* that reconfigured

the boundaries of everyday life.

In this chapter the historical moment that I am concerned with is the period of the civil

war. *Beirut Nightmares* by Ghada Samman and *Beirut Fragments* by Jean Said Makdisi are each

written from a different spatial and temporal vantage point. *Nightmares* was written and

published at the beginning of the civil war (1977) and is told from the perspective of an unnamed

narrator who is trapped in her apartment during the fierce and relentless Battle of the Hotels. The

novel is organized as a series of nightmares that are often fantastical in nature. *Fragments* was

written during and published at the end of the civil war in 1990. This memoir is organized as a

series of chapters or fragments that generally cover a different temporal period and that are

formally diverse. To some extent, this chapter serves a descriptive function because it attempts to

capture the nature of the civil war as a conflict that eroded private lives and homes and that

rendered familiar spaces strange and threatening. The temporality of war and its gradual erosion

of everyday life are central to the formal experimentation that each author engages in.

While my focus in this chapter is on these two texts, for reasons I will elaborate on later,

both these novels belong to a wider context of literary production in the Arab world that is

marked and influenced by significant socio-political changes. In order to return to the question

about the relationship between form and affect, then, it is worth considering these socio-political

developments in terms of a larger Arab literary landscape, so that we can ultimately situate the

two texts under study in this chapter and thus insist on the historical circumstances of literary

production. In dwelling on the historical moment in which these texts are produced, I aim to

evoke Raymond Williams' term, "structures of feeling," which I alluded to briefly in the

introduction. In William's famous formulation, a structure of feeling describes a "particular

quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities,

which gives the sense of a generation or of a period" (131 *my emphasis*). According to Williams,

literature and art not only capture the *sense* of common historical experience, they also provide

"the very first indications that…a new structure [of feeling] is forming" (133). Cultural

representation, in this sense, exemplifies "political and subjective formations local to a particular

time and space" (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 66). By evoking literary form, I show how these texts

emerged from the circumstances of everyday life during the war, not in terms of a break but as

an affective adjustment that *necessitated* a reconsideration of form. In that spirit, I will briefly

turn my attention to a reflection on the literary context in which the two texts under consideration

here are situated.

Literary Context before the Lebanese Civil War

Although the period under study in this chapter is the phase of the civil war, it is worth

briefly commenting on the nature of literary production prior to this stage in order to exemplify

how the war, along with other developments in the Arab world, embodied a "new temporal

architecture" (Harootunian 471) that became inscribed in the performances of literary

production. Here I am influenced by Sabry Hafez's categorizations which divide Arab cultural

production, and the Arab novel more specifically, into two distinct categories, primarily those

written and produced in the early 1900s up until the late 1950s and those that circulated in the

early 1960s up until the early 1990s—the time in which he was writing. The first group belongs

to a period characterized by the struggle for independence from colonial powers while the second

one belongs to a time in which old ideals were shed as new political developments unfolded.

The novel is one example of a literary mode that bore significant aesthetic changes.

While other forms did circulate at this time, the novel gained ascendency as a primary literary

form and this can be seen in the proliferation of new novelists as well as the subsequent scholarly

interest in this particular genre.[17] The rise of the novel in the Arab world can be traced to the

early twentieth century when the region was dominated largely by the struggle for liberation

from the colonial West (Hafez 96). This struggle for liberation and the attempt to establish a pan-

Arab identity went hand in hand with the adoption of Western expressive modes like the novel,

the short story, and drama (Hafez 96). Paradoxically, then, this adoption of Western narrative

techniques and genres that resulted from colonial exchange was used to articulate an investment

in a committed Arab identity. The type of literature that was produced in the latter part of this

period was founded upon the idea that literature and art more generally are not "isolated

activit[ies]" but instead could only be understood in relation to Arab society" (Klemm 52). This

type of literature is often categorized as "commitment literature," or *adab el iltizam*, and can be

understood as "a commitment in accordance with the social and political concern of an Arab

world which was finally going to renew itself and grow together" (Klemm 57).[18]

As Verena Klemm points out, the basis of commitment literature, which was advanced

mostly by socialist critics, was tied to a certain political climate, particularly the loss of Palestine

in 1948 and a broad idea of pan-Arabism associated specifically with Gamal Abdel Nasser.

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[17] In this project I make a distinction between genre and form, with *genre* referring to a category of literature and *form* referring to the organization of elements within a particular text.

[18] The origins of commitment literature in the Arab world were based on Jean Paul Sartre's idea of *littérature engagée,* which "fell on fertile ground in the progressive circles of Arab writers and poets" (Klemm 52). In Sartre's seminal book, *What is Literature?*, he discusses how writing, and prose more specifically, is not meant for mere aesthetic purposes; instead, prose is socially committed as it acts as a vehicle for political ideas.

According to these critics, artists and writers had a political and social responsibility to produce

"conscious and responsible artistic creation" (52). This demand stemmed from the belief that not

only is "literature socially and politically dependent, but at the same time socially and politically

effective and significant" (52). Rooted in the struggle against colonialism and the desire to

establish a pan-Arab identity, commitment literature "became a moral orientation" (55). In this

sense, "the freedom and responsibility of the writer were understood to be his artistic

commitment in the service of Arab society and Arab nationalism" (55).[19] Although commitment

literature did not require or adhere to a uniform set of formal principles, the ethos of *adab-el-iltizam* can still be observed on an aesthetic level. For instance, realism was a dominant

technique employed by novelists who are associated with commitment literature and can be

explained in terms of commitment artists' belief that "artistic creation is not an isolated activity

but has to be understood in terms of reference to society" (Klemm 53). As Hafez reveals, there

was an "interest in social and political issues and in the portrayal of external reality" that

contributed to a very linear and realistic aesthetic (108). These older novels were very much

concerned with representing a system of character dynamics that was focused heavily on the

"characters' social and political roles" as opposed to their inner psychological states (108). The

protagonists of these early novels were often "actively engaged in political or social activities

aimed at changing their societies" (105). Hafez describes this commitment to realistic portrayal

as the "belief in the infallibility of mimesis" or the insistence on verisimilitude as the most

effective representation of life (102). Narrative space tended to incorporate all the uniform and

harmonious elements of social reality as authors downplayed any divergences or contradictions

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[19] Of course, as Klemm acknowledges, this belief contains an inherent contradiction that although the artist is regarded as free and autonomous, she is "still expected to contribute to the creation of a supranational Arab community" (55).

(105). We can understand this kind of representation in terms of the commitment to pan-Arabism that sought to unify the Arab world and establish a singular Arab identity.

Ultimately, then, it is evident that certain aesthetic and narrative choices in the period prior to the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war were rooted in a particular political climate and a conviction about the role of literature and art in the advancement of ideological goals. This political climate started to shift, however, as the conviction in certain ideologies began to wane. The Arabs' historical defeat against Israel in 1967 "opened the floodgates of doubt and self questioning," (Hafez 95) and Egypt's later sole agreement with Israel in 1979 ostracized it from other Arab countries as it was expelled from the Arab League—a significant shift considering Egypt's former status as "the old center" of the Arab world and the "leading Arab country of previous decades" (95). Meanwhile, with the destruction of Beirut, another Arab cultural hub, the belief in commitment literature gradually faded as political convictions gave way to disillusionment with previous political affiliations, particularly the idea of a unified Arab world. As Klemm puts its, "due to…political and ideological fragmentation, many of the proponents of commitment lost their belief in the political role of the writer" (58). These political developments contributed to a change in mood and a "deep feeling of frustration [that] triggered an era of suspicion…not only of…traditional society, but also of the present society and its self-expression in language" (Kassem-Draz 34). Early civil war narratives in Lebanon, for instance, emerge from what Norman Saadi Nikro calls, "the smoldering remains of ideological attachment to grand narratives of liberation" (9). In this sense, cultural production strove to resituate a sense of self from "an agent of history to a casualty of history" (9), a phenomenon that had significant aesthetic consequences. As I will reveal shortly, the novels under consideration in this chapter belong to a wider group of Arab cultural production that departed from the aesthetic conventions

of the earlier period because new political realities called into question previous commitments as well as forms. As we will see, the fragmentation of political values and priorities can also be observed in the fragmentation of literary form. Literary form here is the mode through which to track the affective resonances of an ordinary being radically defamiliarized and reconfigured by the Lebanese civil war.

New Forms and Political Disillusionment

I will reflect briefly on some of the more general aesthetic changes taking place in this new literary context before turning to the two texts under consideration in this chapter. I should note that my choice of women writers in this chapter is not a coincidence as one of the new literary trends in this period from the 1960s was the emergence of marginalized voices, such as women writers (Hafez 98). The emergence of these voices had important implications for the new literary tradition. Since writers aimed at expressing the experience of marginalized communities, the purely Western modes of articulation that were advanced by their literary predecessors no longer served them well. Instead, these writers were compelled to engage with "the rich oral tradition of their subcultures" (99).

On a thematic level, writers were no longer interested in the externality that was so central to the novels of the earlier period; instead, writers in the Arab world "produced works that were clearly more psychologically and existentially self-conscious than those of their predecessors" (Meyer 3). This turn inward and the consequent decreased interest in externality meant that the interest in social and political issues also declined. This decreased interest in political life was partly a result of ideological disillusionment, as I already discussed, but also there was a "widespread political intimidation" across the Arab World that "made openness a risky

endeavour" (Hafez 105). The former protagonist who was dynamically involved in her external reality became "entangled" and "besieged" by her critical awareness and her subsequent inability to make sense of the external world. These differences on the level of character had major formal consequences as well since the structures of these novels "became not one of plot and action but of probing the inner psyche of the character" (Hafez 105).

Meyer calls the novels that arose during this time experimental and, like Hafez, identifies the 1960s as a turning point in the Arabic novel. While Meyer studies the experimentalism of the Arabic novel under the rubric of modernism, his basic premise is that it is problematic to import the frameworks of modernism and postmodernism, as they are understood in the West, and apply them to Arabic literature. One reason, for the problematic nature of this importation is the diverse circumstances that gave rise to these modernisms in the first place. As Meyer notes, experimental Arabic novels were not only responding to the traditionalism of their own society, but also "to the weight of Western influence and literary precedent" (7). He argues, moreover, that the assumptions underlying literary modernism are not so easily transportable to the Arabic context. Most importantly, Meyer remarks that the modernist Arabic novel never developed "a psychological viewpoint to the degree that we find in its Western counterpart" (4). Instead, Arabic literary modernism has always been intensely politicized in its representation of "man as a socially determined entity" (4).[20] One way that this distinction manifests, for example, is through the idea of alienation or isolation that is often associated with modernism. While in the West, alienation corresponds to "the individual's feelings of anonymity within society, the urge

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[20] Here, Meyer notes that Arabic literary modernism resonates with existentialist trends we see in Western postmodernism.

to escape, and to justify this escape" (5),[21] alienation in the Arab world "is commonly felt to

have been forced on the individual against his or her ill, and the instinct is to combat it…rather

than to escape by…turning inward (5). In this sense, alienation in the Arab context is socially

imposed as opposed to inwardly experienced.

Despite these differences, Meyer recognizes that there are several characteristics of twentieth

century literary modernisms that can be observed in the experimental Arabic novel. Arab

modernist writers, for instance, like their Western literary counterparts, reacted against the

"formal unity, ideological bias, omniscient viewpoint, and heroism of realist narratives and

countered these with narratives that are fragmented, artistically determined, multiple-voiced, and

that reflect a sense of cultural crisis" (7). The formal, in this case, whether it is the shift in modes

in narration or the fragmented aesthetic that dominated these texts, is intimately connected to the

social and political changes characterizing the region. Here Caroline Levine's discussion of form

comes to mind as she reminds us that "Literary form does not operate outside of the social but

works among many organizing principles, all circulating in a world jam-packed with other

arrangements" (7). As Hafez convincingly argues, moreover, "The content of form is the key

factor in understanding the significance of these aesthetic changes and their textual

manifestations, for they are not merely changes in technique but also in vision and in the way the

novel interprets reality and communicates its transformations" (Hafez 101). Hafez is clearly

alluding to Hayden White who made the phrase "content of the form" famous and who argues

that narrative is not a "neutral discursive form" used to present historical facts (*Content of the

Form* ix). According to White, narrative discourse "entails ontological and epistemic choices

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[21] Meyer here assumes that there is a singular notion of alienation in the West. This assumption, however, overlooks other theorizations of alienation that undermine the distinction he makes between Arab and Western modes of thinking. Marxist theories, for instance, suggest that alienation is socially imposed through changes in modes of production.

with distinct ideological and even specifically political implications" (ix). White's theories trouble the traditionally rigid binaries between fact and fiction specifically when we consider his notion of figural realism, which suggests that "figurative language…refer[s] to reality quite as faithfully and much more effectively than any putatively literalist idiom or mode of discourse might do" (*Figural Realism* vii). White's ideas and those influenced by him are useful for thinking about form as a politically implicated structure that responds to politically shifting realities. I will briefly discuss some of these ideas before turning back to a discussion on the Lebanese context.

In "The Modernist Event," White argues that modernist strategies of representation, which have often been critiqued for dissolving the historical event by abandoning the "trinity of event, character, and plot" (4), are more successful instruments of representation than the traditional story telling techniques employed by historians (32). More specifically, writing in the wake of the post-Holocaust era, White argues that a drastic change had occurred in the social fabric, which "permitted the crystallization of the totalitarian form that Western society assumed in the twentieth century" ("Historical Emplotment" 51). This drastic change meant that the tenants of realism that had pervaded modes of representation thus far were no longer adequate for relaying the political and affective realities of this new era. My insistence that the Lebanese Civil War compelled a reconsideration of literary form echoes White's arguments about the necessity of modernist strategies in communicating historical truths.

Rothberg's concept of traumatic realism, which I discussed in the introduction, is relevant here as well. Following Eric Santner, Rothberg argues that to be completely committed to the project of realism in a post-Holocaust world is to risk eradicating the traces of trauma and loss by attempting to "convert a hole in the real into a real whole" (Rothberg, "Between the Extreme and

the Everyday" 102). While Rothberg's is sceptical of realist trends, his concept of traumatic realism "cannot free itself from the claims of mimesis" (103). Traumatic realism, then, "mediates between realist and antirealist positions" (*Traumatic Realism* 10) in order to reveal how the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of traumatic events coincide.

There are some aspects of traumatic realism that resonate strongly with the objects under consideration in this chapter. On the one hand, both Samman and Makdisi refuse to render the civil war a comprehensible and unified entity; instead, their narratives perform the traumatic traces of the war through a variety of formally experimental and figurative techniques. Both texts, moreover, inhabit an autobiographical space that demands, to some extent, a mimetic mediation of culture. In this respect, *Beirut Nightmares* and *Beirut Fragments* can be located at "the intersection of the extreme and the everyday" ("Between the Extreme and the Everyday" 102) or can be seen to represent the "survival of extremity into the everyday world" (103). On the other hand, however, the notion of traumatic realism assumes an end to the physical traumatic event that cannot be applied to the Lebanese context. Rothberg, for instance, writes that traumatic realism is not only turned to the past, but to the future as well "by virtue of its performative address to a post-traumatic context" (103). This possibility of a future orientation is not so easily applicable to the Lebanese context—in which the everyday becomes loaded by physical violence or the anticipation of it—from which *Nightmares* and *Fragments* emerge. The concept of a *post*-traumatic state, through which Rothberg can uphold the distinction between the ordinary and the extreme, is not transportable to these texts that were written during the war when no end to the conflict was in sight; therefore, while the notion of traumatic realism is productive for thinking about the interplay between fact and fiction in the representation of Lebanese trauma, the political potential that Rothberg endows the term with may be a little bit

more complicated in the Lebanese context.

Samman and Makdisi belong to a much larger group of Lebanese writers who found themselves in the midst of a violent political conflict that would last for another 15 years. This conflict compelled these writers to turn away from an engagement with Arabic culture and literature more generally. The turn inward that I have been discussing on the level of form also occurred on a national literary level as Lebanese writers were "forced to turn their attention to the present and driven to express the immediate moment in narrative" (Meyer 117). We cannot look at the literature that emerged during the civil war, then, purely in terms of disillusionment with ideological conviction—although this issue still bears significance. Instead, civil war literature emerged "as both social condition and literary symptom of the historical junction of this disillusion" (Nikro 6). Lebanese war literature registered as an *affective adjustment* to a shifting political and traumatic climate. The formal poetics that these authors employ can thus be read in terms of the "affective activity that makes beings bound to the present rather than to futures" (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 12).

Stefan Meyer identifies three major effects that the Lebanese civil war had on the Arabic novel being produced in Lebanon. Primarily, the war led to more experimentation among authors as they produced works that were very formally fragmented. Meyer understands this "radical fragmentation of form" in terms of an "attempt to express the sense of complete dislocation caused by the conflict" (117). Keeping Hayden White in mind, I would add as well that the conditions of the civil war *necessitated* a fragmentation of form since the linearity of previous novels could not contain the traumatic and affective realities that the civil war brought about. Secondly, Meyer notes that the civil war caused the emergence of women writers who sought to bring their own perspectives to the forefront, particularly in relation to the connection between

war and sexuality. Miriam Cooke, who is most well known for her discussions about the emergence of female writers during the Lebanese civil war, also describes how during the war, women emerged as the "most prominent and numerous" writers (*War's Other Voices* 1). She supplements Meyer's assertions, arguing that women introduced a new perspective about the war, particularly in regards to how the quotidian is affected by daily violence—what she calls "the dailiness of war" (3). While Cooke's writing tends to reproduce gendered dichotomies that assign women to the private sphere and men to the public realm, her discussions are useful to the extent that they recognize how the civil war did indeed bring about the emergence of new voices, which highlights how the war infiltrated all aspects, spaces, and areas of society. Finally, Meyer argues that the war "led to an increasing introversion on the part of writers" (118). This resonates with the turn inward that Hafez discusses as a characteristic of the second group of Arab novels. Writers were trapped by the conflict, literally unable to navigate the world in the same way; they were consequently "thrown back on themselves, contemplating their own lives, and combining memoir with fictional narration" (118). The war, in this sense, brought about a collapse of a clear distinction between forms that should be approached "not so much in terms of a postmodernist intermingling of forms, than a belated force of traumatic encounter emerging from the civil war and located in its restless aftermath" (Nikro 7). By necessitating an adjustment to a radically shifting ordinary, the war compelled writers to stay in the present.

Affect in Aesthetics

I wish now to turn to my methodology for reading the two texts at the center of this chapter. I offer a reading of affect here that is heavily inscribed in aesthetics, while also presenting the formal structures of these texts as processes of negotiation that seek to produce and adjust to new contours of everyday life in the wake of war. This production of the everyday is inflected with

traumatic traces as it is heavily anchored within a violent present that redefines the modes and boundaries of ordinary life. I am concerned precisely with *how* this affective reality is represented in the texts and finally how it weighs down on form and language contributing ultimately to an affective or aesthetic experience of the text. Here I should note that I'm not merely attempting to make causal claims—for instance, specific structures of feeling contribute to the affectation of form—rather, I want to make a claim about aesthetic experience as relaying particular affective realities and how these realities necessitate a consideration of form which in turn contributes to aesthetic experience. At the heart of my argument, then, is a dialectic (that I will elaborate on shortly) that seeks to understand aesthetic texts both as being shaped by affect and as being affective themselves.

Since the concept of aesthetics figures quite centrally in this chapter and since it is a term whose semantic valences have shifted over time, I will articulate my own relationship to the concept and my own investments in the field. There are two main related concerns that characterize the field of aesthetics, and those are the theory of beauty and the theory of art. The conventional interest in beauty underwent changes after the eighteenth century and broadened to include other aesthetic adjectives including the sublime and the picturesque. According to George Dickie, the theory of art can be subsumed under the theory of the aesthetic (or beauty), "but the aesthetic cannot completely absorb the concept of art" (4). For my purposes, since I am concerned with artistic representation, I am more invested in a theory of art as opposed to a more general theory of taste or beauty that frames the field of aesthetics. An aesthetic theory of art is not only concerned with determining and defining the contours of what is considered art; instead, a theory of art pays close attention to the various features of a piece of art in order to understand its inner workings. The issue of emotions plays a significant role in these theories as well, so the

questions that I am asking about the relationship between affect and form are in fact fundamental

to many theorizations on aesthetics.

During the nineteenth century and onwards, the view that art and literature were "the

expression of the emotion of the artist" (Dickie 48) came into being as a prevailing framework.

Clive Bell's "Aesthetic Hypothesis" maintains that art works provoke a particular emotional

response and this response can be traced to a particular *quality* of artworks. According to Bell,

this quality is "significant form" like, for instance, the combination of lines and colors that "stir

our aesthetic emotions" (18). "Certain forms" in artwork, then, or "relations of forms" evoke

emotional responses in us. Similarly, in her seminal work *Feeling and Form*, Susanne Langer

argues that "Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling" (40). She claims that art is

more than just an "'arrangement' of things" (40); instead, Langer states that "something emerges

from the arrangement of tones or colors, which was not there before, and this, rather than the

arranged material, is the symbol of sentience" (40). My own understanding of aesthetics

resonates with the imperatives of these theories to locate feeling on a formal level. My claim,

however, is slightly different. I consider the aesthetic texts that I am studying as being inflected

by a more general or public structure of feeling, and so I understand the affective dynamics in

these pieces as dialectical. Not only do the texts evoke affective responses, they are significantly

shaped by a historically situated mood. [22]

As I discussed in my introduction, my attention to affect here can be viewed as part of a

larger navigation in the humanities towards this field. The turn to affect in the literary humanities

often depends on Deleuzian strands of affect theory that maintain a distinction between affect

and ideology. This separation, as Leys insightfully notes, produces a "relative indifference to the

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[22] According to Charles Altieri, "Moods are modes of feeling where the sense of subjectivity becomes diffuse and sensation merges into something close to atmosphere, something that seems to pervade an entire scene or situation" (2).

role of ideas and beliefs in politics, culture, and art in favour of an 'ontological' concern with

different people's corporeal affective reactions" ("The Turn to Affect" 450). Leys, in this sense,

is critical of the tendency to privilege the reader's affective response to an aesthetic piece as

opposed to "the meaning of the work itself" (469). Eugenie Brinkema similarly criticizes

accounts of affect that emphasize the personal experience of the theorist, their "tremulous

pleasures and shudderings," because such accounts "tell us more about being affected than about

affects" (32). Like Leys and Brinkema, I am sceptical of these materialist inclinations that let the

viewer or reader's experience of an aesthetic piece stand in for an interpretation of the text

itself.[23] My own turn to affect privileges literary form as the mode through which to track the

emotional resonances of a historically shifting political climate. This understanding of affect here

resonates with Brinkema's claim that "*Affect is not the place where something immediate and*

automatic and resistant takes place outside of language. The turning to affect in the humanities

does not obliterate the problem of form and representation. Affect is not where reading is no

longer needed (original emphasis xiv)."[24]

    This intention to think through the relationship between form and affect assumes that

affect cannot necessarily be disconnected from representation and meaning. My move here

resonates with the imperatives of theorists like Judith Butler and Berlant who refuse to reduce

affect to an autonomic activity and instead acknowledge how it is one way to think through the

manner in which individuals are tethered to a larger political, historical, and social field. There

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[23] This is not to say that affective responses to texts and images are not important; instead I am arguing that we should not privilege these readings over ones concerned with determining how the inner workings of aesthetic pieces produce meaning.

[24] In this sense, my work can be considered in terms of the recent turn to formalism as well. Contrary to the classical new critical strain of formalism, however, I do not look at the text as a closed and bounded entity to be studied in isolation of all external factors. Instead, I argue that form is often shaped by political and affective realities. Like Caroline Levine, I am interested in considering the relationship between literary and political forms. Levine, however, warns against causal readings of literary forms as epiphenomenal responses to social realities and argues that they should instead be read as forms encountering other forms. This dialectical reasoning offers a nuanced understanding of how literary form is situated in a broader context.

have been other theorists, moreover, who approach affect as an issue or problem for reading.[25] In

Sianne Ngai's account on ugly feelings, for instance, she describes affect as "unusually knotted

or condensed 'interpretations of predicaments'—that is, signs that not only render visible

different registers of problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical) but conjoin these problems in

a distinctive manner" (3). She turns to aesthetic forms and genres to study how the

configurations of feelings she is concerned with reappear in the cultural artefacts she analyzes

and how these affects are bound up in a larger "matrix of social relations" (28). Similarly,

Charles Altieri's aesthetic approach to the affects pays attention to how art works "integrate

energies and develop resonance" (25). Altieri argues that "the more we can locate affect in the

working of the object, the better we can explain how the object itself can take on social force by

providing shareable and discussable models for our emotional intensities" (26). As I have already

mentioned, Brinkema also argues for the necessity of considering affect in terms of textual

workings. She claims that most contemporary conceptualizations of affect, particularly those

strands of affect theory that posit affect as a structure-less force that exists outside of

representation, are "fundamentally *incapable* of dealing with textual particularities and formal

matters" (xiv *original emphasis*). For Brinkema, then, in order to understand affects, we need to

read them as being "bound up with specific forms" (xv). She asks, "What…would happen to the

study of both affectivity and form if we were to reintroduce close reading to the study of

sensation…as wildly composed in specific cinematic literary, and critical texts" (xvi).

    While my own investments echo the ones I have articulated above, particularly my

attempt to move away from conceptualizations of affect that are too insistent on affect's

formlessness and my desire to bring close reading back into the affective fold, my arguments

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25 For a discussion on the relationship between affect and language, see Denise Riley *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect.*

also differ from these theorists quite significantly. For one thing, the accounts about the relationship between affect and aesthetics that I have encountered so far seem much too contextually removed for my liking. Of course, this issue perhaps can be traced back to the theoretic schisms between historicism and formalism that have characterized literary debates; however, what I hope to demonstrate in this chapter is that the two do not necessarily have to be so diametrically opposed as we think. Altieri, for instance, sets out his impressive book by admitting his oft-expressed disdain for literary critics who attempt to attribute the structures of the text to contextual workings. His own commitment to aesthetic formalism does not leave room for the consideration of how socio-political forces shape artistic forms nor does his account reflect upon the relationship of private affects to a wider public matrix. My own work here advances a notion of formalism that does not look at the text as a completely bound entity, but rather one that is dynamic in its circulation and impact and also one that is significantly shaped by the context in which it is produced. Forms, in this sense, are "auto-affectively charged, and affects take shape in the details of specific visual forms and temporal structures" (Brinkema 37).

My case rests upon the assumption that the affects I am studying within these aesthetic objects are both an effect and a cause—a result of a particular structure of feeling or an affective reality that is harnessed into the text through its formal structures; and a cause in the sense that these texts impact through their circulation and their encounters with other affected bodies. Here Michael Hardt's formulation of affects is useful to recall. He argues that "Affects require us…to enter the realm of causality, but they offer a complex view of causality because the affects belong simultaneously to both sides of the causal relationship. They illuminate, in other words, both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers" (ix). This double causality, then, is fundamental to my

own understanding of aesthetics texts that are both shaped by particular structures of feeling and that are affecting themselves.

Ngai's articulation of *tone* is useful to recall here as she describes the term as

> "a global and hyper-relational concept of *feeling* that encompasses attitude: a literary text's affective bearing, orientation or "set toward" its audience and world. In other words…the formal aspect of a work that has made it possible for critics of all affiliations…to describe a work or class of works as "paranoid"…,"euphoric"…, or "melancholic"…, and much more importantly, the formal aspect that enables these affective values to become significant with regard to how each critic understands the work as a totality within an equally holistic matrix of social relations" (Ngai 43).

Ngai's formulation is significant because unlike Brinkema, whose theorization of affect "fully shed[s] the subject" (25) and thus insists on texts as closed entities, Ngai's commitment to formal structures takes into consideration the affective bearings of texts, the manner in which they extend outwards. For my own purposes, I think about the texts I am studying as being affect*ing* as well as affect*ed*. A fundamental aspect of my argument, then, is to consider the manner in which form plays a part in establishing tone, thereby contributing to the text's affecting quality.

In choosing to study affect through texts and by positing the concept as a problem for formal reading, I face somewhat of a contradiction as affect is generally treated as a phenomenon that exists outside of representation. One of the original premises underlying much affect theory is that affect is something that escapes "theories of representation, of meaning, of ideology" (Grossberg 310), or something "not captured by notions of signification and representation" (318). If affect is, indeed, relegated to the realm of experience as opposed to representation, then

how do I justify using texts and memoirs to study particular structures of feeling? Here I turn to

Michael Richardson who, writing about torture and pain, claims that

> Writing torture…[means] to grasp the potential of writing to be more than representation.
> This means approaching the problem of pain from the angle of its emergence into
> relation, into contingency. It means expressing the folding, rupturing and fragmenting of
> time, not simply to replace it in narrative but to chart its affective force on bodies and
> worlds (170).

In this sense, therefore, I am studying the texts in this chapter not merely as representation of

the civil war or as representations of a particular affective state; instead, by focusing on formal

elements, I am considering how affects emerge into aesthetic forms and what narratives can tell

us about how traumatic affects impact bodies and worlds. I am not, moreover, positing affect and

traumatic affect more precisely as something that is necessarily *against* representation; rather, I

am interested in thinking about writing as being more than just a way to represent traumatic

affect and instead as a medium that is significantly shaped by the problem of pain and suffering.

Affective texts, then, do more than represent affect; instead, they *express* traumatic affect in a

manner that allows access into particular affective realities.[26] Berlant's articulation of affect and

its relationship to poetics is useful to recall here. She argues that affect's "activity saturates the

corporeal, intimate and political performances of adjustment that make a shared atmosphere

something palpable and, in its patterning, releases to view a poetics, a theory-in-practice of how

a world works" (*Cruel Optimism* 16). According to Berlant, affective activity is

multidimensional and it permeates the various manifestations of our existence. This permeation

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[26] This idea is very similar to Susanne Langer's idea about "artistic expression" that insists on the ability of art to convey feeling without directly representing it. See Langer, *Problems of Art*.

takes on a particular formal dimension or a poetics through which a specific shared experience

becomes accessible.

As I discussed in my introduction, my move towards affect theory as a framework to

discuss the impact of the Lebanese Civil War can be viewed as constituent of a more general

dissatisfaction with trauma theory as a completely successful hermeneutic.[27] These accounts are

often critical of the centrality of the individual in trauma theory. For my own purposes, I am

concerned with trauma on a more cultural level;[28] however, I am also intent on revealing the

inextricability of the private and public, the individual and the collective from one another.

Affect theory helps me make those links. I want to consider how the concept of affect, moreover,

helps us solidify our understanding of trauma as a persistent condition that is sutured to the

everyday and thus extends beyond the individual towards a more cultural and transgenerational

experience. Part of my argument about the two texts that I'm studying for this chapter is that

each of them reveals the inextricability of the public and the private, the very ways in which the

private and the public are extensions of one another. Affect, then, "allows exploration of the

prospect that trauma may not be inherently, or merely, a discreet subjective experience, but

rather it might primarily be a cultural and transgenerational operation" (Atkinson and Richardson

15).

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[27] See my introduction for more on how this move resonates with recent efforts to "decolonize trauma theory" (Rothberg, "Decolonizing"). While I insist that psychoanalysis does provide a productive heuristic, these critiques are not without merit as they make space for imagining different structures and experiences of trauma that do not always fit into the Holocaust influenced frameworks of trauma theory.

[28] There have been a number of theorists, particularly in the field of sociology, who attempt to reveal the utility of collective trauma as a framework of study and analysis (Eyerman, Alexander, Lazar and Litvak Hirsch). These particular articulations of collective or cultural trauma serve to suggest how such frameworks are not only useful in their explanatory sense but also in their invocation of a process of reconciliation and overcoming. These theories often reveal a strong understanding of trauma and the implications inherent in the concept, yet they rely on two assumptions that limit their theoretical utility. Primarily, theories of collective trauma assume that there is a conscious labeling of something as cultural trauma by leading social actors who ultimately guide, for better or worse, the "trauma process." Secondly, and more importantly, there is an assumption about the relative coherence of a collective entity as having experienced a similar traumatic event.

For these purposes as well, I want to move away from a conception of affect that is completely private or individual and instead to one that is more global and public. At the very least, I want to explore affect as a site through which such binaries can be renegotiated. It is here, then, that I wish to resuscitate Raymond Williams' famous formulation *structures of feeling*. Williams' concept, while subject to various definitions, constantly implies a particular "relationship between the personal and the historical" (Simpson 14). In this sense, the language of affect theory allows me to speak about trauma in a more collective more pervasive sense as well, since Williams' concept of a structure of feeling allows us to address the problematic between the individual and the collective or the private and the public.

As David Simpson has further noted, a structure of feeling is both "'the culture of a period,' but it is culture conceived as an aesthetic-individual experience, as 'the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization'" (16). Each of Samman and Makdisi's texts, for instance, is an individual aesthetic experience or entity that is narrated in the first person. Makdisi's work is a memoir, so the relationship between the author and the subject is perhaps less ambiguous than Samman's unnamed protagonist who shares some similarities with the author and who throughout the novel is writing a manuscript entitled *Beirut Nightmares*. Both of these texts, moreover, embody an affective response that "exemplif[ies] shared *historical* time" (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 15). While they are both *individual* aesthetic experiences, each is significantly infected by a more collective experience, a more general structure of feeling that makes it impossible to study these narratives as stories squarely about individuals. As Makdisi herself explains about why she did not choose the diary form for her book: "Part of the trouble with a diary is that it limits one to one's personal experience or that it reduces vast events to small anecdotes, for that is often how vast events are experienced. What, indeed, are vast events

but ones that affect a great number of people, whose individually insignificant tales may appear pathetic or comical, but rarely grand?" (26). What is significant about her explanation here is the idea that the diary form limits one to the individual experience—a form that is inadequate if she is to fully express the experience of living during the civil war. As Nikro points out, moreover in relation to Makdisi's memoir, "[The diary form] is somehow too individualised, too self-centered to adequately consider and relate how her sense of self is gathered/scattered by the wavering, shifting relationship between incidents and their eventuating significance as symbolic vehicles of understanding" (50).

For Nikro, the anecdotal nature of the diary form does not do justice to the collective experience of violence that is differentially *shared* and interpreted as well as to the shifts in symbolic value that accompany a war of such lengthy duration. Similarly, with *Beirut Nightmares*, many of the various nightmares at the center of the narrative do not include the protagonist at all; instead, she recounts or imagines the stories of other people and other scenarios or contexts removed from her own. These stories allow "the narrator…to delve more deeply into the war than would be possible simply through her own personal narrative" (Zeidan 124). So while there is a protagonist or a main speaker at the center of each of these narratives, each novel reveals how intensely the personal is related to the historical and how we can in fact access the historical through the personal.

Both Makdisi and Samman, moreover, through their individual accounts of the war, gesture towards a more general structure of feeling and the traumatic affect that characterizes wartime experiences. In this sense as well, the language of trauma is no longer enough because trauma theory often focuses on a particular kind of event, a rupture of sorts. The trauma associated with living during the Lebanese Civil War, however, cannot necessarily be confined

to this kind of rupture that is somehow always exceptional. While there are definitely particular moments or events that occur throughout this period that take on significant weight or become particularly emblematic, when we refer to the civil war, we are talking about a structure of everyday life that is in itself traumatic. Trauma, in this case, is no longer the extraordinary, the exceptional, the event; rather, trauma becomes the normative, the quotidian. As Veena Das puts it, in many non-Western contexts, "there is no clear boundary between war and peace" ("Violence, Crisis, and the Everyday" 798). For this reason, the language of affect is much more appealing because it allows me to conceptualize a more *pervasive* and persisting traumatic condition. Like Berlant, "I prefer tracking the work of affect as it shapes new ordinaries to the logic of exception that necessarily accompanies the work of trauma" (*Cruel Optimism* 54).[29] Both Makdisi and Samman allow me to work towards this end in different ways for while Makdisi's piece transverses a longer period of time to map out the shifting realities that characterized wartime Beirut, Samman's text zooms in on a bounded experience in time and space.

   In my study of *Beirut Fragments* and *Beirut Nightmares*, I will be focusing mainly on three formal features of the texts: time, space, and movement of the narrative between forms. I take my cue here from Charles Altieri who emphasizes four basic complexes of feeling, two of

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[29] One of the traumas that recurs in *Beirut Nightmares* is the loss of the protagonist's lover, Yousif who was killed prior to the novel's events at a checkpoint. Throughout the text, images of her bullet-ridden lover infiltrate the protagonist's nightmares as she struggles to come to terms with his loss. At the end of the novel, however, she imagines shooting him in a move that is often read as a shedding of emotional ties and her breaking free of patriarchal structures (Sbaiti). While there is evidence in the text to support this conclusion, there is another layer to this ending that is worth exploring. Towards the end of the novel, the protagonist reflects on how insignificant Yousif's belongings have become to her asking, "Was the war's continuation the only way for me to stop caring so much about *your* death [Yousif] to find myself on the verge of my own?" (362). In this sense, the earlier trauma of losing Yousif becomes increasingly irrelevant amid the continuing trauma of the civil war. This idea highlights the ways in which trauma theory and its focus on an exceptional event cannot always serve as a productive framework. Yousif's death loses its cathected energy not because of the healing trajectory outlined in some trauma theory; rather, singular traumatic events lose their potency with the accumulation of new wounds and the persistence of a traumatic condition.

which are relevant to my purposes.[30] Primarily, Altieri discusses the "expressive quality of

spatial relations" (235), by which he means the organization of space in a particular artistic

piece. Here he is also referring to the boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical

spheres. For my own purposes, I am thinking about the organization of narrative space in the

texts I am studying and specifically how particular affective states relating to space shape the

boundaries within the text. More specifically, I ask how narrative space becomes affected as

thematic space becomes steadily uncanny and encroached upon. What happens to language,

moreover, when private space becomes severely distorted? By looking at space and the

intersections between literal, metaphorical, and aesthetic conceptions of space, we can get a

sense of how particular structures of feeling emerge into formal renditions. The other aspect that

I will be considering is the issue of time, for as Altieri states, "where there is space, there will be

time" (236). In Altieri's words, "narrative arts control time by stretching scenes or making them

compact" (236). By looking at time in both *Beirut Nightmares* and *Beirut Fragments,* and

particularly the ways in which "the structure of times collapse[s]" (J.S. Makdisi 172), we can

begin to understand the affect generated by violent circumstances, or the various impacts and

effects reflecting a traumatic quotidian. In this sense too, I am interested in considering the

relationship between the fragmentation of narrative time and the particular affective states being

described in the text. What happens to form when the structure of time collapses as a result of a

traumatic state?

The last aspect that I consider is something that Altieri includes in his description of time

as a particular complex of feeling, but is an issue that I think deserves its own category and that

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[30] I should note here that Altieri is concerned with the intentionality of the artist/author, something that I do not consider entirely relevant to my own arguments. I am concerned with the emergence of affect into aesthetic form and I am relying on close reading in specific to make claims about how traumatic affect shapes the text. For this reason, while Altieri is useful as a starting point to consider the aesthetics of the affects, I depart from him quite significantly in making my claims.

is the movement of the narrative between forms. Altieri argues that "the most fundamental

affective qualities of movement seem to be organized around literal and figurative aspects of

pacing and of how gathering and releasing take on presence" (236). Here he relates the idea of

movement to time, for instance in the way that narrative arts control time; however, the idea of

movement can also be considered in terms of the formal shifts in narrative. In *Beirut Fragments*,

for example, the text moves from prose, to diary form, to a glossary, to poetry in ways that

suggest a particular affective dissonance that cannot be contained in one formal method and that

reflects her text's intention to encapsulate a more comprehensive experience of the civil war. In

Beirut Nightmares, the language often shifts from short brisk sentences to paragraphs composed

of series of questions, to forceful repetitions that echo and resonate throughout the text. In my

close readings, therefore, I will be paying attention to these formal shifts as I argue that they

evoke particular affective states that are in turn affecting to the reader. For instance consider this

passage from *Beirut Nightmares*:

> Where have I been living?
>   His question cast me back into a frightful reality. I was living on a battlefield without a single weapon to my name. Nor had I mastered the use of anything other than this skinny little object that went scurrying over the paper between my fingers, leaving quivering lines behind it like the trail of blood left by a wounded man crawling over a field of white cotton.
>   Where have I been living?
>   It seemed that I was living in a verse of poetry. My pillow was stuffed with myths and fairy tales, and my blanket was made of tones full of philosophical treatises. All my revolutions took place and all my slain met their end in fields strewn with letters of the alphabet and bombshells made of words…
>   'Where have you been living?' he asked.
>   Then an explosion went off and I felt a twinge of remorse.
> Why hadn't I learned to take up arms—not just the pen—for the sake of what I believed in? (4-5).

The question, "Where have you been living" is originally posed to her by her neighbour Amin

and is the closing line of the previous nightmare. The question inserts itself like a daunting echo,

a chilling refrain that repeats itself throughout this nightmare. It produces terror and its repetition works to build up the protagonist's sense of frightened energy that is ultimately diffused at the end of the passage as the question reverts to its original form, back to the exchange that signals her return back into reality. The repetition of the question, moreover, evokes and reveals an anxiety as well as generates a sense of heightened absurdity, as what follows is the attempt at an answer that is both insufficient and terrifying in its recognition of the inadequacy of the self in the face of her context. The lines she writes and the lines we read are transformed into the remnants of a wound that stain the page. Her writing, then, is the form through which her wounds emerge.[31] The futility of writing or at least the potential of this futility is evoked as she recognizes her entrapment in a literary world that does not seem to have potential beyond itself. This imprisonment and sense of helplessness can be traced on the level of form, for she writes that she is living in a verse of poetry, a statement that reflects the form of this nightmare as a lyric verse tightly bounded to emphasize the physical entrapment she experiences and the powerlessness she feels. On a larger scale, we can view this entrapment in terms of the nightmares that form the structure of the entire novel. Over the course of the entire narrative comprising around 200 nightmares, we find out at the end that only a week has passed. Just like a dreamer who is unable to awaken from a terrible nightmare, the civil war warps the experience of quotidian time, stretching out the waiting relentlessly—a temporality that is reflected in narrative time as well. As Samman's protagonist reflects, "how slowly does the sand of black darkness drop, when each grain of sand has become a nightmare?" (315).

In the above passage, the movement towards the last refrain is marked by a temporal event, a reinsertion back into narrative time for right before the explosion goes off she is

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[31] This sentiment is echoed in later parts of the text as well. For example she writes: "I wrote, with the words pouring from me like blood from an open wound" (317) to once again suggest how the text and its structures emerge from the site of traumatic affect.

transported away from her self reflection back to the direct exchange as the question reverts back into its original form and the frenetic energy is diffused as the nightmare approaches its end. This technique, specifically her repeated use of explosions as temporal markers that separate the different nightmares in her novel is one that Samman employs frequently throughout the narrative. Samman uses the explosion of bombs as a temporal device, a puncture of sorts that constantly interrupts personal reflection and that shifts the affective energy back into a heightened alert state. The bombs serve as rhetorical devices that create a rhythm in the text, one that indexes the structure of everyday life during war.

These temporal markers, moreover, become affectively charged as they serve as boundaries or framing devices that signal the end of one nightmare into the next. For Altieri, boundaries are essential to the ways in which affect is configured in aesthetic objects. He argues that,

> The most intense and intricate spatial feelings occur in relation to how boundaries and frames work. This is partially a matter of how separations can be rendered forcefully. But it also involves the qualities of potential and frustrated transition that circulate around the space charged by forming boundaries in the first place (Altieri 235).

The bombs, then, function as charged interruptions that constantly signal how quotidian, personal, and sensorial spaces are violently encroached upon. Their transitionary role between the various nightmares—as the explosions constantly interrupt the protagonist's reflections— evoke a frustrated potentiality that the narrator's entrapment induces.

In *Beirut Fragments*, Makdisi more explicitly reflects on the relationship of literary form to the violent context in which she exists. She writes,

The question remained, however, how to write, what form to choose. I tried to force the experience into a comprehensible shape. I searched for a form to fit it into, for some implement to help me impose my need for order on the chaos around me, and I found instead that the chaos imposed itself on me…Forms defaulted one by one as I held them up for trial against a crumbling reality. I wanted something uniform to hold it all, for I am one person—am I not?—and my need for unity and exactness grew in proportion as the country about me fell further and further apart (22).

Makdisi's reflections here reveal how particular structures of feeling *necessitate* a reconsideration of form. Writing, for Makdisi, is an attempt at imposing order on or making sense of what is going on around her. This idea, of course can be related to the oft-expressed belief in trauma theory about creating a trauma narrative to gain mastery over an overwhelming situation.[32] While Makdisi's desire to impose order can, in some sense, be related to this idea of gaining mastery, the issue that I am concerned with is precisely how the context that she exists in also actively shapes the form that this writing takes. For her to write effectively means that the particular forms she chooses will capture the specific reality she wishes to articulate. Her narrative reveals that the only way for this reality to be expressed is through the mingling of a variety of forms. The question that Makdisi poses to herself—"am I not" one person?—implies a negative answer for the uniformity that she seeks is immediately negated in the passage following this one, in which she reverts to diary form. The diary entry that follows is one that she imagines she would have written the first time her home was shelled. The entry is in italics signalling a clear departure from the previous narrative. She writes in sentences that are very

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[32] See for instance, Susan J. Brison's "Trauma Narrative and the Remaking of the Self." Brison argues that "transforming traumatic memory into a coherent narrative that can then be integrated into the survivor's sense of self and view of the world" (39) is fundamental to the healing process. According to Brison, the view that "such narratives contribute significantly to recovery is currently accepted as uncontroversial in the field of the psychology of trauma" (40).

short, brisk and that almost all begin with verbs. The subject in these sentences is often missing

emphasizing the insignificance of the individual in such circumstances and the fragmentation of

self in moments of violent trauma; the actions, then, the verbs are what drive Makdisi's

memories emphasizing a lack of control or how the individual is steered by overwhelming

circumstances.[33] The language starts off in abrupt rhythm recounted as a chronology of events—

as hasty panicked memories that create a sense of franticness. Immediately after this imagined

entry, she highlights the nature of memory as a regulative fiction[34] stating, "I could never have

written that on the day it happened" (26). By including the imagined diary entry and then

reflecting on its limitations as a form that does not adequately capture a collective experience,

Makdisi *performs* the defaulting of forms that she discusses in the passage cited earlier in order

to expose that *process* of channelling particular affective states through narrative. It is ultimately

the movement between forms, then, that is so essential to the telling of Makdisi's story because

this formal variety reflects the affective dissonance caused by the chaotic reality that she exists in

and that actively shapes her work. The formal shifts in narrative in both *Nightmares* and

Fragments indicate the ways in which "a historical moment…finds its genre" (Berlant, *Cruel*

Optimism 16) and the manner through which affect saturates form (16).[35]

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[33] In *Beirut Nightmares*, the issue of restricted agency is also highlighted through literary technique. In various instances of the text, the speaker "notices" that she has performed a particular action: "I noticed that I was sitting on the floor, curled up under the window" (17) or "Only then did I notice that my knees were shaking […]" (53). These instances underscore the impact of an overwhelming situation on individuals as bodies become constrained and impinged upon by external factors. In trauma theory, this kind of response is called dissociation and it is activated as a way to manage traumatizing events like sexual abuse, for example.

[34] I am indebted to Karyn Ball for this phrase.

[35] Before Berlant, Hayden White makes the claim about historical emplotment in which radically shifting political landscapes call into being new forms of representation ("Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth").

Beirut Nightmares[36]

Ghada Samman's *Beirut Nightmares* is the second part of a trilogy about the Lebanese

Civil War. The first book, *Beirut 75* was published before the war in 1974 and is often described

as prophetical in its description of the socio-political factors that would ultimately lead to the

breakout of the war in Lebanon. The last book in the trilogy, *The Night of the First Billion* (1986)

is set outside of Lebanon in Geneva among wealthy expatriates during the 1982 Israeli siege on

Beirut. Samman's depiction of this immoral and corrupt community and their exploitative

behaviour mirrors that of the bourgeois members of society within Lebanon who profit from the

war.

As I have already mentioned, *Beirut Nightmares* focuses on the experiences of a female

protagonist trapped in her apartment during the Battle of Hotels. The protagonist's relationship to

the author is ambiguous although some have made the claim that the novel is

semiautobiographical. The novel is formally very experimental, divided into nightmares that are

not only the bad dreams, often fantastical in nature, of the heroine, "but all her waking

experiences in that atmosphere of war and horror" (Zeidan 201). As Stefan G. Meyer notes, "Just

as there is no clear dividing line between the narrator's waking experiences and her dreams or

imaginings, there is also no firm dividing line between these and the separate stories she tells"

(128).

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[36] Due to the fact that *Beirut Nightmares* is a very long and rich text, I will not be able to fully reflect on all aspects of the novel. Instead, I attempt to draw together features and passages of the text that best allow me articulate my argument about the relationship between affective realities and formal aesthetics. For this reason as well, I will be looking mostly at the translated version of the text. The original Arabic version includes more nightmares and a section at the end (including one dream and sixteen notes or plans to be taken into consideration during the drafting of the novel) that is not included in the translated novel I am studying. While these differences may be important in another context, they are not necessarily significant for the scope of my argument. In terms of my methodology, I refer to the Arabic version only to verify that the passages I cite are not significantly altered in the translation.

Beirut Nightmares is a useful departure point for my discussion on the relationship

between aesthetic experience and its relationship to emerging political realities, not because of

any commitment to representing this reality, but primarily because of its affective attunement to

a particular historical *sense*. As Meyer argues, "What Ghada Samman evokes is not a social or

political reality, but an inner truth, the state of the city's 'soul'" (119). The various elements of

Samman's text come to serve "not as memories nor as scenes but as visual symbols of a mood or

an emotion" (Cooke, "Theatre of the Absurd" 135). The text can also be read as producing an

account of the everyday in civil war Lebanon. Samman here does not juxtapose scenes of the

ordinary with the extreme; instead, throughout the text, the everyday becomes horror filled with

traumatic affect. In this section, then, I outline various figurative and formal constructions

through which the traumatic everyday is affectively constructed.

One of the aspects about Samman's texts that literary critics most often discuss is

Samman's use of animals as symbolic devices. Joseph Zeidan refers to these symbolic vehicles

in T.S. Elliot's terms as *objective correlatives* that allow the protagonist "to express her thoughts

and feelings [without] being direct or sentimental" (202). In *Beirut Nightmares*, the protagonist

repeatedly visits a pet store that is often read as a symbol for the residents of war torn Beirut, and

more specifically its downtrodden members of society:

> The animals weren't hungry yet, but they were afraid, just like everyone else now being
>
> held prisoner in this neighbourhood. Every family was in its own cage and none could
>
> pinpoint the whereabouts of the person who held its well being in his hands. What was he
>
> doing? Did he see the fires burning? Did he hear their voices? And so on, in an unending
>
> series of questions…the houses in the neighbourhood had become cages, and all of us—
>
> except for the men bearing arms—were his simple-souled subjects…I felt the walls of my

own cage closing in on me more and more until I started banging my head against the

bars…Then a huge boom rang out, shattering the solemn, tense silence with a horrendous

series of explosions (16).[37]

The pet store works as a figurative device to accentuate the sense of incarceration that structures

the lives of residents encaged by a conflict orchestrated by figures of authority. The series of

questions that ensues generates a tone of accusation that underscores the mood of abandonment

that the protagonist channels through the pet shop owner. Notably, here, the explosion of a bomb

once again diffuses the energy of this nightmare as it marks the start of the next nightmares that

begins: "The cascade of fire kept pouring forth unabated…" (17). In this case, Samman's use of

the pet store as a metaphoric or symbolic device allows her to employ an imagery of confinement

that effectively mediates the atmosphere of captivity surrounding her neighbourhood. The

transitioning into the realm of the figurative, then, not only provides evidence for the process of

channelling affective states, but the metaphor itself becomes generative of the nuances in

affective experience. My attention to the poetics of Samman's text here echoes Ball's argument

that "figurative language circumscribes our assessments of contemporary problems and the

strategies we might pursue to resolve them" ("Losing Steam" 56). In her discussion on the

impact fast paced capitalism has on aging bodies, Ball argues that "imagery matters if we want to

awaken something akin to an 'awareness' about how political economic inequity is lived" (69).

In addition to the symbolic devices that Samman employs, many of the nightmares in the

text include the personal reflections of the protagonists as she lives and works through her

experience of confinement. Meyer argues that Samman joins three narrative aspects into her text:

the experiential, the creative, and the reflective (122). The experiential aspect refers to the

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[37] To avoid confusion, since Samman frequently uses ellipses, when the ellipses from the quoted material are not part of the text, I will use square brackets to indicate.

protagonist's daily experiences or the chronology of the narrative. The creative aspect is formed

by the multiple stories that often function symbolically. The reflective aspect refers to the

passages in which the narrator "relates various dreams and imaginings" that reflect her mental

anguish throughout her captivity. I would argue here that the creative and reflective aspects of

the text function as accentuations of the experiential component that serves to produce an

account of everyday life in moments of violent battle.

The reflective aspect of the text often entails the protagonist's renegotiation of political

ideals in the midst of her ongoing entrapment. As a prolific writer with previous political,

revolutionary commitments, the protagonist struggles to reconcile these commitments with her

violent reality. "These were my words," she thinks as she stares at the shelf of books towering

over her in the narrow hallway where she hides, "They had emerged from inside my books to

take on flesh as human beings who were now bearing arms and fighting" (47). This wavering of

political ideals and commitment reflects the general intellectual movement away from

commitment literature that I discussed earlier in this chapter. These passages also reflect the

extent to which previously established frameworks for understanding the world become

reconfigured in the everydayness of war. Samman's protagonist experiences an inner conflict

that manifests textually. As she questions the virtue of her previous ideals, the text splits into a

dialogue in which two voices—both belonging to the speaker—dispute the necessity of violence

for revolutionary ideals. In the midst of this dialogue, "the sound of bombs exploding continue[s]

to reverberate everywhere" (48). The dialogue stretches on in the longest nightmare up to that

point as the voices go back and forth about whether an artist can/should participate in violence

for the sake of revolution. The dialogue eventually erupts into this passage:

Voices, voices, voices, exploding inside my head and arguing out loud! With every voice

I heard, I'd feel that a new woman had emerged from inside me. I was no longer just one

woman in the hallway. Instead, I'd reproduced and multiplied until the entire corridor

was swarming with 'us'. Then there was a horrendous explosion I was certain had come

from somewhere inside the house went off, so I went back to being a single woman,

alone in the corridor on the dividing line between life and death (52).

The protagonist's inner crisis embodies the extent to which public discord permeates private

lives and individual bodies as well as how her increasing alienation compels her to look inward.

As Meyer notes, "The alienating nature of the narrator's surroundings pulls her within herself,

giving her a profound awareness of her own subjectivity" (123). The private calamity that she

experiences as a result of the agitation to her sense of self emerges in the formal splitting of text

through dialogue. As the shaking, cowering protagonist fragments into multiple voices and

positionalities while she struggles to renegotiate her selfhood in the face of extreme fear and

violence, so too does the text. It is only through the explosion of a bomb that this multiplicity is

shattered to forcefully remind us that the only relevant self here in this violent context is the

corporeal one. Her ideological fervour is dampened once violence boisterously intervenes to

"drown out the voices in [her] head" (53) and she is forced to abandon the intellectual struggle

for the sake of her survival.[38]

   We can also read this prioritization of corporeal reality in terms of the animal imagery

and symbolism that is laced throughout the rest of the text. As mentioned above, animals figure

into Samman's texts quite often and they are often read as metaphors or symbolic devices for her

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[38] As Alyssa Marie Miller argues, the novel's materiality in the hands of the reader suggests the novel's ultimate judgment on the importance of literary humanism. It is only after the protagonist manages to escape her apartment, however, with the help of a military tank, that the production of her manuscript becomes a possibility. Within the charged space of her apartment, the affective and physical reality challenges her subjectivity in ways that we see manifest in the formal structures of the text.

commentary on social oppression. I would like to push this analysis a little bit further by considering Giorgio Agamben's notion of "bare life" that most immediately refers to subjects who are refused both legal and political representation. In Agamben's words, bare life is "life exposed to death" (88). Samman's reliance on animal imagery often works to condense the distinction between man and animal in times of political violence and thus resounds powerfully with Agamben's concept, which also refers to the animal-ness of humans in times of political oppression.[39] Thus animals figure into her text not just as symbolic vehicles through which she expresses her reflections; instead, the reference to animals in *Beirut Nightmares* also works to highlight the process through which human lives are reduced to bare life. Consider, for instance, this sequence of nightmares:

Nightmare 101

Bullets. Bullets.
Thinking is an impossibility. The brain wasn't made to be used while nails are being driven into it.
I'm a frightened animal…
I whine and I howl…
I don't mediate or cogitate…
I bellow and I shriek…
I don't ponder or deliberate…
I bark and I whimper…
I whine and I howl…

Nightmare 102

I whine and I howl…
…………………………….
…………………………….
…………………………….
…………………………….
…and I howl…(231).

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[39] Some examples that often get discussed in relation to Agamben's concept of bare life are concentration camps, torture prisons, and stateless refugees.

In these two nightmares, Samman formally condenses the distinction between her protagonist, as a political and intellectual being, and the animals that connote a reduction to bare life. In this first nightmare, there is a juxtaposition between the intellectual work she does and the state that she is reduced to as a result of her violent context. Thus, she no longer mediates, cogitates, ponders, or deliberates; instead, the verbs transform to animalistic sounds, which highlight her diminution to bare life and therefore the ways in which her capacity to act as a political subject is limited. The refrain, "I whine and I howl" engulfs the second nightmare as the text is replaced with long ellipses that suggest the perpetuation of this state throughout and after the nightmare. On a visual level, the nightmare becomes condensed and all signs of intellectual activity are replaced by a loaded emptiness that signifies her state of helplessness. The sequence of these nightmares, then, and the boundary that exists between them evokes a kind of egress in which, once again, the protagonist's selfhood is gradually encroached upon and her corporeal existence takes precedent over other aspects of her subjectivity. The fantastical elements of Samman's text are significant in achieving the historical *sense* that the novel embodies. Here we can think once more of H. White who, in his defense of modernist strategies of representation in the wake of the Holocaust, suggests that "our notion of what constitutes realistic representation must be revised to take into account of experiences that are unique to our century and for which older modes of representation have proven inadequate" ("Historical Emplotment" 52).

In the words of Samman's protagonist, "once life becomes a nightmare, the senses are instruments of torture" (43). The "affective sensorium," then, to borrow Berlant's elegant phrasing, is central to the "sensing of the historical present" (*Cruel Optimism* 54). The aesthetic of the macabre dominates much of the text particularly in moments when the narrator retreats to the imaginative corners of her mind, yet the senses are crucial in the construction of this

affectively loaded aesthetic. A few nightmares after a bullet penetrates the narrator's apartment and grazes her ear—a significant location for the wound considering her previous statement that "only the deaf, having been freed from one of their senses would be able to live with Beirut's nightmares[40]—the protagonist concludes that it wasn't her ear that was causing her pain, "rather it was other ears" (64). "[She] close[s] [her] eyes to see better":

> […]I saw the remains of dismembered bodies pouring into the streets and accumulating in mounds that towered higher than rubbish heaps. I saw severed legs running away without their bodies and disconnected forearms waving along the roads, bearing white flags or stretching out their hands in search of someone to come to their rescue. I saw fingers floating through the empty streets and pointing accusingly at their executioners. I saw men whose blood had been drawn from their veins so that it could be given to others, running along as bluish corpses. I saw others who had been decapitated, scurrying down the pavements of this grieving homeland of ours in search of their heads, which had been cut off on some dark night. I saw heads whose features had been erased, so severely had they been tortured, heads which had been cut off and were now floating on a sea of blood and darkness in search of their tongues, which had been extracted with pincers. I saw them emerging from the ovens of torture and fire, running along with their bodies in flames and reeking of burnt flesh (64).

There are several aspects about this passage that are worth reflecting on. Primarily, the framing of this passage on a sensorial level creates the affective space for a macabre aesthetic to unfold. The sensory gesture here extends both outwards and inwards. She feels pain because of "other

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[40] Hearing as well was the main way through which non-combatants sensed the war as people would crowd around battery-run radios for news during long periods of electricity outages or listen to the sound of bombs or bullets as they hid in the shelters of their apartment buildings. Ziad El Rahbani's plays that were aired on the radio were often a source entertainment during the war as well as they provided a humorous social commentary on the civil war. Rahbani's plays are popularly referred to as the soundtrack of the civil war.

ears," a signal that marks the ways in which public trauma weighs down on individual bodies as

it evokes the larger context in which she exists. She *sees* better once her eyes are closed, once

she retreats inwards to the world of nightmares that she inhabits, to the wider horrors that she

does not necessarily *observe* but that she affectively *perceives*.[41] The description that ensues

formally bears the weight of this affective perception. The narrative is relentless in its mounting

images of morbidity and death. The language here is affect*ed* as its pace quickens and tension

increases through the use of repetitive sentence structure. This accelerated pace conjures up the

overwhelming affective response of bearing witness to these imagined atrocities as the narrative

attempts to encompass these perceived happenings. The repetition of "I saw" throughout this

nightmare works insistently to build up the affective perception of horror throughout the passage.

Miller argues that this "multiplication of events per minute may…be read as a manic state of

over-excitation precipitated by the ambient violence pervading the city block where the

protagonist is held in thrall" (28). She dismisses "Cooke's characterization of the underlying

affective current driving the novel's production as 'trance,'" (28) suggesting that such a

description posits the protagonist as battered and numbed by the blows of her external

environment. Miller instead reads the visual aesthetic of the novel as "suggestive of an

unwillingness or inability to look away," (28) which she argues reflects the protagonist's

"undeniable seduction by the violence" (28). To this end, Miller claims that the novel does more

than just bear witness to the violence; instead, the text "revels in the thrills of these violent

scenes, which amplify the allure of Beirut frisson of danger" (27).

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[41] There are other moments in the text in which the protagonist closes her eyes to intensify her perception:
for instance, "I shut my eyes again and could see Beirut's gaping wound [...] (325). Of course, this can be read
as a literary technique to get around the protagonist's entrapment in an apartment; however, I am also
arguing that the evocation of the senses plays an important role in the affective dimension of the text.

While Miller is correct to question Cooke's interpretation of the text as evoking a trance-like state, the implications of her alternative argument are somewhat unsettling. The passage above, like the text as a whole, evokes a relentlessness of horror that can be read in conjunction with Miller's characterization of the novel's pace as "manic." Miller's conclusion, however, that this relentlessness intensifies the "allure of Beirut" and reveals the protagonist's "undeniable seduction by violence" privileges the novel's horror film aesthetic without seriously considering the affective dimensions of this aesthetic and their political reverberations. Grief permeates the pages of *Beirut Nightmares* as the protagonist and the text become weighed down by the accumulation of horror:

> I was still sprawled out on my bed, feeling ragged and lonely. As I lay there, I thought:
> Even if your body were a wave on the sea which bullets could penetrate without doing it harm…Even if your heart were an electric pump which couldn't be paralyzed by fear and anxiety and whose rhythm was unfazed by human emotions
> …Even if your nerves were made of steel, or compounds primed to withstand the stresses of outer space…Even if your heartbeat were as predictable as a Swiss-made watch straight of the production line…Even if your sleep patterns were as constant as the Earth's orbit around the sun…And even if you had a capacity for joy and celebration as irresistible and overpowering as the waters pouring down Niagara Falls…
> Even if all these things were true of you, you'd still find after eight months of civil war that chaos had begun to penetrate the very depths of your spirit. You'd find it gradually infiltrating your thoughts, your most deeply held values, your feelings, your disposition, your relationships[…] (165).

This passage goes on for a couple more pages and forms the bulk of the nightmare. The language here evokes a sense of suffering that challenges Miller's assertions about the fast paced horror flick aesthetic. There is, therefore, a particular slowness to the general text despite the mounting of horror that accrues. This slowness does not completely correspond to Cooke's description of the text as trance-like for, instead of the half-consciousness or dazedness that a trance-like state connotes,[42] the protagonist is profoundly aware of her surroundings and is oversaturated by the affect that her ambience induces. The hyperbolic configurations that characterize the above-mentioned passage are one example of how this oversaturation shapes the text to exemplify the extent to which the external violence enters the core of the protagonist's subjectivity. The passage suggests a certain temporality, moreover, that counteracts the frenzied recounting of horrors. In this case, the reiteration of sentence structure throughout the passage conjures up a protracted slowness that reflects the protagonist's sense of depressive heaviness and inability to move—two qualities that Christine Ross argues contribute to an aesthetics of disengagement. The repetition of "even if" and its signalling towards an imagined reality evokes a sense of dragging as do the ellipses at the end of each sentence which suggest the "staggering of tragic potential" (Berlant "Living in Ellipses"). In this sense, the text slows down as it encapsulates the tedious temporality that characterizes the quotidian experience during moments of siege. After the end of this passage, the protagonist once again "find[s] [her]self sprawled out on [her] bed like a worn-out garment, feeling ragged and lonely" (168). The circularity of this nightmare, in which the protagonist finds herself in the same state she was at the beginning despite her hyperbolic imaginings, works furthermore to channel the sluggish temporality of her experience and contributes to the bleak aesthetic of the text.

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[42] The description of trance-like is useful to the extent that it connotes a state of being in between consciousness and unconsciousness, which can be read as a state between life and death. Samman's protagonist often describes herself as existing on the "dividing line between life and death" (52).

The meta-structure of the novel, in which the protagonist is writing a manuscript entitled *Beirut Nightmares,* often works as evidence of the autobiographical dimension of the text. There are other similarities between the protagonist and Samman—most significantly the location of Samman's apartment near the site for the Battle of the Hotels—that encourage such a reading as well. The text's meta-structure has political implications because it compels readers not to see the novel as purely fictional. Instead, through the meta-structural characteristic, the novel forces us to recognize the ways in which the text is, in fact, not an enclosed entity and is actually steeped in an external context that is very lived and experienced. The formal features of Samman's text enable an understanding of how everyday life becomes profoundly anchored within a violent reality that redefines the frameworks through which we understand the world.

Beirut Fragments

Despite the fact that Jean Said Makdisi's *Beirut Fragments: A War Memoir* was published in 1990 a few months after the official end of violence, it was written during the civil war when there was no foreseeable end (Nikro). The ending of the war, furthermore, was anticlimactic and uncertain as Makdisi herself attests in the afterword that was published in a later edition of the book. She observes that, when the war ended in 1990, they "did not at first know that it had…the last episode, which we took to be another in the long series of episodes that had constituted the war, turned out to be the final one—that is all" (255). Writing amidst violent upheaval when there is no end to the war in sight comes across powerfully in the formal structures of the text as her memoir "both symptomatically and critically resists any form of closure that would relieve, transcend and reconcile, the tension between experience and its condensation into a form of understanding" (Nikro 48-49). The experimentation with form is

symptomatic of this resistance to closure that characterizes Makdisi's attempts to write this memoir and in the result that she remains with once it is done: fragments. According to Levine, "Closure is not only the ending of a story, but the enclosing of discordant energies and possibilities into a single ideological whole" (40). The lack of closure in Makdisi's text indicates a refusal or inability to unify the dissonant affects and energies of her experience into a cohesive whole. The fact that the memoir was written when there was no end to the violence in sight renders the idea of closure inadequate to the relaying of experience and channelling of affective states.

Beirut Fragments is composed of ten sections including a chronology of civil war events at the beginning and an afterword that was added to the 1999 edition. In between unfolds: a prologue, a section that includes a glossary of terms used abundantly during the war, a detailed descriptive narrative about the new topography of Beirut, an autobiographical segment relaying her background and life up until that point,[43] a section about the 1982 Israeli invasion of Beirut, a section with small vignettes that reflect on some of the massacres that took place at the beginning of the war, a chapter entitled "Remnants," which is structured like a diary entry recording life during some of the battles that erupted towards the end of the war, and finally, a backwards alphabet annotated to describe elements of the civil war. These sections or fragments are all formally divergent as each captures a particular element, temporality, or layer, of the civil war. Together, these sections work to produce an account of everyday life during the war. These fragments, furthermore, are not relayed chronologically and there is no narrative arc that ties them together. In this regard, Makdisi's memoir "falls short on recognizable genre features,

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[43] Jean Said Makdisi was born to Palestinian parents in Jerusalem; however, she spent most of her childhood in Cairo until she moved to the United States to pursue a college education. She spent many summers in Lebanon before moving to Beirut with her Lebanese husband in the early 70s, a few years before the war began. Her autobiographical section begins: *I was born in Jerusalem, grew up in Cairo, aged in America, and died in Beirut* (93). She spends most of this section dissecting each element of this sentence.

coherent thematizations, and legible temporalities" (Goodman 29). This kind of fragmentation

can be read as a kind of symptom that retains the traumatic impact of the war. While this reading

is valid, I would argue as well that the fragmentation of the narrative and variety of formal

techniques is also necessary for relaying the shifting landscapes, temporalities, and affectivities

of the civil war. While Makdisi's account is subjective and personal, it resists a unified aesthetic

that would reduce the civil war to a cohesive or singular experience. Her text travels across time

and space and is moulded into various temporalities and rhythms that reveal the sometimes

depressingly stagnant, sometimes alarmingly frantic energies of life during the civil war.

Makdisi's memoir and particularly her sections on language and Beirut's new topography

significantly emphasize how the contours of the quotidian were reconfigured by the ambient

violence. We can recall here once again how the diary form alone would fail to adequately

capture this reality in its focalization on day-to-day life and its singular temporality. Makdisi's

sections on language and space instead reveal the larger dents made in the fabric of everyday life

and the carving out of a new reality.

In the third fragment of her memoir entitled, "Beirut: A New Topography," Makdisi

reflects on the kaleidoscopic landscape of the city, relentlessly describing how the streets of

Beirut were transformed into a rotting, decapitated version of themselves. "Some [buildings],"

for instance, "were reduced to a state of ghastly, lopsided ruin and decomposition, or, more

often, marred by layers of scar tissue" (77). "Skin diseases abound, and ulcerated limbs are

exhibited on filthy mats" (83). Amid these frightening changes, even the streets that remained

relatively unchanged "provide a shifting landscape of memoires and sorrow" (77). These

relentless descriptions not only relay the massive spatial abrasions and lacerations caused by the

war, they also reveal how familiar spaces are rendered uncanny and take on new significations in the face of violent political realities.

Makdisi's section on language, in which she presents the glossary of terms used in times of crisis, similarly reflects these kinds of shifting significations. In the beginning of this section, Makdisi narrates her family's experience during a bout of shelling and battles that occur in their neighbourhood a few months after the crisis had seemed to calm down. This brief prelude relays the family's renegotiation of everyday life as they manoeuvre around the emerging crisis. They debate sending the kids to school and hesitatingly go to work, shrugging off the "what-ifs [that] can only be waved away" (38). "You can't live like that," says her husband. "It's true: You can't" (38). She goes to work, the radio on in the background mediating the progression of the conflict; they go to a party at a friend's house: "There is nothing here, *ma fi shi*" (43), the friend insists, echoing her husband's earlier insistence that they should send the kids to school.

Eventually the clatter of forks is not enough to drown out the sounds of the escalating conflict, so they head back home to the underground shelter or parking garage, where they wait huddled for hours until they can finally emerge to witness the damage in their building and neighbourhood. "A terrible hush lies over the ruins," she writes in painful prose, "and we whisper to each other…It is as though we humans who tread gingerly on the shattered streets are intruding on the mourning of these inanimate, broken things; as though we have stumbled unwanted into the privacy of their shamed disarray" (48). Break to a new section: the broken glass has been replaced, "the rubble has been swept into neat piles here and there…classes resume today after weeks of disruption…Nothing has changed" (48-49). Through this prelude, Makdisi relays the patterns of affective adjustment that dominated their wartime experience. Indeed, as life absurdly returns to normal, nothing has changed and yet it is a loaded nothing, a

nothing weighed down by its implication: that while life grudgingly picks up its pace, it is irreparably burdened by the oppressing remnants and anticipations of violence.

In the following section, Makdisi presents her glossary of terms to reveal how "words and meanings metamorphose endlessly" (49) during the war. In doing so, she steps back from the individual experience relayed in the prelude to present a more global experience of adjustment. The glossary includes a number of words or phrases and places "that have achieved significance as landmarks in numerous battles" (49). Slight nuances have shifted the meaning of these words. In placing the glossary in the middle instead of at the end or the beginning of the narrative, where we typically expect glossaries to be, Makdisi centralizes the significance of this section as evidence for the ways in which a long-term conflict reconfigures the outlines of the ordinary. The presence of the glossary after the prelude, moreover, reflects the interplays between private experience and public realities that are so crucial to the unfolding of her memoir. She presents seemingly "innocuous phrases" that form an essential code for the ways in which the Lebanese often communicated during the war:

shu fi?	What's going on?
fi shi?	Anything wrong?
fi shi	Something
ma fi shi	Nothing[44]

(50) .

Traces from the prelude are apparent here: the phrase *ma fi shi* becomes a refrain repeated throughout other parts of the text either as a form of reassurance or "used ironically, as when all hell has broken loose but you say, '*ma fi shi*,' and smile bitterly" (50). These seemingly bland and vernacular phrases are inflected with new meaning in the face of ongoing violence and come to the forefront as essential elements in a system of communication developed in the face of ongoing violence. Similarly, the places that Makdisi names in her glossary come to function as

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44 Otherwise translated as "is there something?", "there is something," and "there is nothing."

emblems of war and violence: *Mar Mikhail* or St. Michael no longer refers solely to a church, but to "one of the hottest battle spots in Lebanon" (55). In other words, "the confrontation lines are marked by milestones of once-ordinary life" (74). Makdisi's glossary, then, effectively highlights the extent to which long-term violence makes dents in quotidian modes of existence as it reveals how language transfigures to accommodate new realities. The ordinary and the extreme here are not held apart but become inextricably merged together. This accommodation can be seen in the experimentation with form that Makdisi discusses in her prologue as she searches for a form that could "contain" the sense of suffering that accumulated with the progression of the conflict.

The search for the form or the language to represent her experiences is a persistent theme throughout Makdisi's memoir and constitutes the affective labour underlying the production of this book. The section on the 1982 Israeli siege of Beirut highlights this idea effectively through the abundant use of metaphor. She writes:

And how to describe those battles? How to capture in words the horror of those weeks? The sky orange with the unnatural light of exploding phosphorus bombs; the whizzing screams of jets darting for the kill; the graceful beauty of the flares falling gently in the night sky; iridescent golden balls on black velvet, lighting the whole world, it seemed, their charm belying their murderous intent. And the sound of the battles—one eschews *thunder* and *rumble* as too easy, too weak, to express it. It was a sound seemingly made by all the devils in hell beating gigantic drums under the earth and over it; a sound like that of the sea breaking its bounds of a frightful rebellious monster hatched out of the shell of the earth. / I would have to tell also of the fear seeping in like slow poison, panic spreading noiselessly; of gunboats sailing by gracefully, insolently, on the calm blue

waters; of the sudden whistle and crash of the shells they fired; of the mad scramble

downstairs to dubious shelter; of poor jokes told to quiet the nerves; of the growing sense

of finality and no escape…(162-3).

Shereen Abu Naga explains Makdisi's use of metaphorical language as a way "to momentarily

seal up the fragmented [self] without hiding it" (101). The metaphoric link, according to Abu

Naga is the "last resort of the self to find coherence" (101). I would argue that Makdisi's resort

to metaphor in the depiction of Israeli violence is more than what Abu Naga suggests, primarily

because I think the autobiographical self negates the ability to find coherence at the onset of the

memoir. The metaphoric language in this passage is evoked as a response to an excess of

circumstance that presses up against Makdisi's discursive realm to take the shape of metaphor. In

the passage above, Makdisi strikingly juxtaposes the beauty of her metaphoric imagery against

the horror that her metaphors recount. The language, then, evokes an image of sublimity that

reflects the scale of violence and destruction taking place. Underlying this aesthetization of

violence is a "profound poignancy" (Novak 185) that underscores the painful resignation to fear

and helplessness in moments of grand threat. "All of it was like a horrible dream," Makdisi

recounts, "a horrible mixture of hallucinatory images" (183). The reliance on metaphor in these

instances suggests a *grasping* for language that comes across in the temporal rhythm of the

passage. The metaphor comes as an answer to the questions Makdisi poses as she searches for

the form with which to capture the magnitude of events and their consequent affective

conditions.

The section entitled "Ghosts: A Mediation on the Massacres," is located towards the end

of the memoir and it centers on some of the massacres that took place during the civil war. The

placement of this section towards the end is consistent with the affective logic of the book. The

fragmentation of chronology here is more than just a traumatic symptom; rather, it simulates the temporal muddle of everyday life during the civil war where "hours fell about…like stones off a broken building. Sundays, Mondays—all the days of the week were alike and lost their character, and all the dates of the month as well" (Makdisi 172). Throughout this section, Makdisi relays various vignettes, specifically about the Mountain war, the Dammour massacre, and the Karantina massacre. The scenes of death come in outbursts as she relays the changing landscape of Beirut, specifically the emptiness of places previously frequented or the absence of people once part of their daily interactions. After relaying the story of an unnamed shop owner who regularly serviced their damaged electronic equipment, Makdisi recalls that he left the city during the war, "eschewing the noise, the uncertainty, the danger, the cruelty of Beirut" (197).

> His village was Bhamdoun. In 1982, his body lay on the ground, rotting and stinking in the sun amid the crumbled ruins of the town—his body and his wife's and his baby's, among about three hundred others (197).

This depiction of his death after an extended description of the shop owner's place in their lives reflects the kinds of loaded absences or ghostly presences that Makdisi channels throughout this section. "Today, Dammour[45] is no more," she writes, shortly after her mediation on the shop owner, subsequently reflecting on how they used to "drive through Dammour just about every Sunday" (197). The contrast between Makdisi's memories about the people and places she describes in this section and the abruptness with which she relays their subsequent death is significant to the aesthetic of the memoir. This kind of strategy captures the gradual sense of loss that crept up upon private lives as the country fell further and further in violent upheaval. It is in moments like these that Makdisi relays how her text is steeped in a larger structure of feeling so

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[45] Dammour is a coastal Christian town south of Beirut that was demolished at the beginning of the war.

that we may sense how "the public is always and constantly immanent in private life, in all of its

many historical phases" (Goodman 42).

In the last extended section before the annotated backwards alphabet, Makdisi's text

splits into a day-to-day diary format that she entitles "Remnants." Nikro reflects on the choice of

title for this section noting that "although the term remnant…has a connotation of a surviving

trace of the past, much of the chapter is written in the almost real time of the present, from 1989

to the first months of 1990, on the eve of the book's publication" (207). Nikro, then, insightfully

points out how "it becomes apparent that what remains, what comes to be signified and rendered

remnant, is not so much a lingering trace of the past, but *the present*" (*my emphasis* 53). He adds:

"Both self and present are more like leftovers, remainders, surviving traces of a situation in

which survival itself is to be regarded with amazement and incredulity, almost as an aberration,

considering the overwhelming destruction and mutilation" (53). His assertion here powerfully

captures the sense of an existence lingering between life and death as everyday life becomes

reduced to a remnant that bears the weight of past conflict and the anticipation of future violence.

The condensation of narrative time to a "stutter[ing] day by day account" (Nikro 54)

parallels the shift in tone that occurs in this section. The matter-of-fact recording of events and

sentiments during this stretch of time evokes a kind of resigned numbness: "At first, and once

again," Makdisi writes, "we thought the war was over…But no" (242). This numbness comes

across, moreover through juxtapositions in her writing: "The shelling has been worse than

ever…The death toll has been rising daily…Meanwhile the great powers are expressing their

concern, and the Pope has offered us his prayers" (232). The tragedies are no longer recalled

with metaphoric sublime imagery; rather, they are told in direct discourse contrasted bitterly

against an international impotence. While the section is dived into specific temporal periods,

moreover, there are no details about who is fighting, what battles are exactly taking place. Instead, the entries, while producing a fragmented, "panting" (Abu-El Naga 95) effect, simultaneously seem to blend into one another, rendering the temporal organization ineffective against the formlessness of painful time. In this sense as well, it is the affective condition of the everyday that is being remembered and historicized.

Ultimately, *Beirut Nightmares* and *Beirut Fragments* each expose the extent to which the everyday becomes reconfigured in the wake of war. The representation of the extreme here is not necessarily divorced from the condition of the ordinary, but becomes sutured to it in profound ways. Each text, moreover, foregrounds the importance of literary form for the evocation of a particular structure of feeling. In this sense, as well, each of these texts is formally weighed down by affect to reveal how the realm of aesthetic production responds to an emerging political reality. In Samman's text, this aesthetic is achieved through a warping of time that stretches out the spatial and temporal fixity of narrative setting through a formal experiment that evokes the drawn out experience of time during moments of siege. The language, repetitions, and circularities of the text work not only as indications of an inner affective state, but as evidence for the inextricability of public structures of feeling to individual aesthetic experiences. Similarly, the searching qualities of Makdisi's text for an aesthetic form that can contain the affective realities of war-torn Beirut expose the ways in which extended violent realities necessitate a reconsideration of form. The various temporal rhythms at the heart of her text conjure up the protracted nature of the conflict as one that gradually and violently reconfigured the outlines of quotidian existence.

Chapter Two: Haunting and the Neoliberal Encounter in Postwar Beirut: The Affective Terrains of *A Perfect Day* and *Terra Incognita*

In the last segment of Al Jazeera's 15-part documentary, *The War of Lebanon*, political analyst Kassem Jaafar declares that the Lebanese civil war ended like it never happened. At the end of the civil war, he observes, "all that happened was that the country had been destroyed along with its economy and its regional position." Kassem's declaration comes after a brief analysis about the impact of civil wars on other countries. He provides examples such as Spain and Yugoslavia, where civil war brought about fundamental and radical changes in the countries' social and political structures. In contrast, after Lebanon had been nearly annihilated by civil conflict, "nothing had changed." Jaafar's statement bears significant weight when contrasted to the narration that ensues shortly after. The narrator of the documentary solemnly lists the tragedies that the war of Lebanon brought about. "In the War of Lebanon," he declares repeatedly against documentary footage depicting soldiers returning from battle and hollowed out buildings hanging in ruins, "human beings went mad…tens of thousands were killed…innocent blood was shed…for no aim and in vain."

This last segment of Al-Jazeera's lengthy documentary deals largely with the Ta'if Accord of 1989—the agreement that ultimately ended the war in Lebanon. The Accord established Lebanon as a nation with "an Arab identity and belonging"[46] and secured Syria's hegemony over Lebanon. As Sune Haugbolle notes, the Ta'if Accord was a "half-hearted resolution" (*War and Memory* 67) that did not offer any tangible solutions to the issues that had spurred and perpetuated the war in the first place (the Palestinian issue, for example). Following

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[46] This characterization is in stark contrast to how the Christian community and its leaders described Lebanon. At the beginning of the war, the Christians, who held most of the executive power in Lebanon, rejected Lebanon's Arab character by evoking the country's Phoenician roots. One of the factors that spurred the war forward, after all, was this ideological rift between those who saw Lebanon as part of a greater Arab region and thus implicated in its various causes (like the Palestinian one), and those who wanted to distance themselves from these associations.

the Ta'if Accord, moreover, an Amnesty Law was passed in 1991 that pardoned all political

crimes committed during the conflict.[47] Surprisingly, while *The War of Lebanon* covers the ins

and outs of the Lebanese civil war and attempts to provide a critical perspective on the events

that unfolded, it does not mention the Amnesty Law at all and seems to present the Ta'if Accord

in a favourable light, or at least as a necessity for ending the war.[48] The documentary concludes

with a statement by El-Akhdar El-Ibrahimi, one of the delegates of the Arab league who was a

key player in the establishment of the Ta'if Accord. El-Ibrahimi closes the documentary by

defending the decision to allow Syria hegemony over Lebanon, arguing that the Syrians were

already in Lebanon. "We ended a war," he declares, good-humouredly pointing to the fact that

now residents of Lebanon could move alone in a car without fear. "It is now your turn," he says,

smilingly addressing the Lebanese citizens, "go on and build a good country."

El-Ibrahimi's statement seems to imply that the average Lebanese citizen had some

agency in the fate of his/her country—an issue that I will show throughout this chapter is, in fact,

not so clear-cut. The state of post-war Lebanon is largely characterized by an intensification of

neoliberal forces that increased the disempowerment of the Lebanese public sphere. The term

"post-war," is contentious moreover because it does not take into account the continuation of

political violence under the Syrian military occupation that lasted for 30 years and the Israeli

occupation of South Lebanon that ended in 2000.[49] To place the responsibility for rebuilding the

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[47] An important exception here is Samir Geagea, head of the right-wing Christian militia, The Lebanese Forces. In 1994, Geagea was accused of perpetrating a bombing near a church and he was subsequently imprisoned for 11 years. The Amnesty Law pardoned all crimes committed prior to 1990, however, there is speculation that Geagea was framed for the crime because he was beginning to show signs of dissent towards the Syrian authorities and the Ta'if Accord.

[48] I should note here that the documentary does illustrate how the establishment of Syrian hegemony was linked to international and regional changes. The United States, in particular, played an integral role in allowing Syria full control over Lebanon. As the documentary reveals, at the end of the civil war in the early 90s, the US made a deal with Syria that, in exchange for support against the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War, Syria would be granted control over Lebanon.

[49] While I use the term "post-war" to designate the official end of the civil conflict, throughout this chapter I

war-devastated nation on the average Lebanese citizen, therefore, is to overlook the larger

structures of power that perpetuated violence and exacerbated the inequity of the country's social

system. More than this, El-Ibrahimi's address to the Lebanese citizens fails to notice how the war

ended without a process of accountability—an issue that would not only prove to be a major

impediment to the healing of the country, but that further empowered the political elite at the

expense of the Lebanese public. As Norman Saadi Nikro insightfully points out, "the Amnesty

Law did not arise out of any curative process"; instead, the Law was mainly designed to

"rehabilitate the discrete privileges of a political elite" (34).

The post-civil war era is distinguished by a commitment to reconstruction as a way to

leave behind the scars of the past and move forward. The policies of amnesty and amnesia

reflected an unwillingness or inability of the Lebanese public to engage in a national discussion

about the civil war. At the same time, however, these policies were also "conscious[ly]…applied

in the name of national reconciliation" (Haugbolle, *War and Memory* 71), as they intended to

placate civil war animosities. My aim in this chapter is partly to think through the ways that

cultural production responded to this shifting political climate and how the abyss caused by

national amnesia figures into these cultural works. More than this, I am concerned with how this

national amnesia intersects with other oppressions unfolding in the wake of the war and the

affective dimension of these intersections. I will be looking specifically at Ghassan Salhab's film

Terra Incognita and Khalil Joreige and Joanna Hadjithomas's *A Perfect Day*. Kassem Jaafar's

observation that the Lebanese civil war did not affect any significant systemic change, it is also

nevertheless true that the Lebanese civil war inalterably affected the psychic state of the nation.

The question I ask here is how does cultural production tap into the subtle ways the civil war

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complicate the idea of a post-conflict nation by showing how this period continued to witness political violence.

altered the Lebanese social and affective landscapes, which are simultaneously marked by

residual violence and neoliberal imperatives? How do the films I study embody the emerging

structure of feeling of disempowerment through their accounts about daily life in the aftermath of

the war?

As a departure point, the Al Jazeera documentary is suitable to the aims that I am

thinking through in this chapter. The release of the documentary in 2001 reflected a shift in the

cultural climate about the ability to talk about the civil war publicly. In the late 90s and early

2000s, a movement from the cultural sphere became concerned with inserting the civil war back

into public discourse and countering the climate of amnesia and reluctance that had dominated

the early years of the postwar era.[50] As I mentioned previously, in those early years after the war,

there was a general hesitance to speak about the events, and leaders were quick to focus on

reconstruction efforts as a sign that Lebanon was moving forward. In 1996, however, the Qana

massacre took place, in which Israeli shelling killed 106 Lebanese people, including children,

sheltered in a UN compound. This massacre awakened the population to the fact that the war

was, actually, not over and that the state sponsored amnesia did not reflect social reality

(Haugbolle, *War and Memory* 76). The following year, the Lebanese state made April 18, the

day of the massacre, a national day of remembrance. It was expedient for the Lebanese state to

depict Israel as a common national enemy, although this day of remembrance was established "in

remarkable contrast to the lack of official commemoration on the anniversary of the outbreak of

the civil war each 13 April" (Haugbolle, *War and Memory* 76).

In turn, in the early 2000s, a number of initiatives from the cultural sphere and civil

society emerged to memorialize the civil war. Among these initiatives is the organization

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[50] It should be noted, however, that only one newspaper reported about the documentary, which reveals that the media was still not ready to debate the issues being put forth.

"Memory for the Future," which was founded by journalist Samir Kassir and historian and journalist Amal Makarem in 2001. The foundation sought to bring together distinct individual memories of the war, held across a wide spectrum of political and religious affiliations, under a common spatio-temporal framework, "for example by holding debates and commemorations of the civil war and building a memorial to its victims" (Abu-Assi 400). In accordance with these initiatives, cultural producers became more and more committed to archiving the experiences of the Lebanese civil war and for instituting its memory in public discourse. Lina Khatib observes, for instance, that 1998 marked the renaissance period[51] in Lebanese cinema when "Lebanese cinema began to operate on a mass…scale" (xv). During this period, as well, the Israeli army ended its 22-year occupation of South Lebanon and Syrian President Hafez El-Assad passed away. These events contributed to "a freer political climate in which [the South was now accessible to the rest of the nation and] open opposition to the Syrian presence in Lebanon was no longer taboo" (Haugbolle, *War and Memory* 77). I bring up these events not in an attempt to make causal claims that tie cultural products to political changes specifically. Instead, my claim is that the postwar period, and the major events that characterize it, embody emerging structures of feeling and my aim is to explore how cultural production adjusts to this shifting climate as well as the strategies through which the specter of the civil war is made present. The films that I study in this chapter make a critical intervention into the postwar present by gesturing towards the ways the memory of the civil war is constantly being concealed and by mobilizing the specter of the civil war through an invocation of figures and objects associated with the conflict. More than this, however, the films depict a thickly inhabited present that is riddled with competing intensities. Their accounts about everyday life evoke Lebanon's unfinished bloody past as one

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[51] This "renaissance" should be distinguished from the period of "Al-Nahda" or cultural renaissance" that took place in the Arab world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Al-Nahda refers to those intellectual reforms that occurred in response to external and internal political changes in the region.

force coming up against more contemporary oppressions. The films render visible the "connections between lived, daily experience…and the oppressive economic and political structures of modern, capitalist society" (Epstein 478).

While a number of cultural products emerged in the postwar period, including novels and memoirs, I will focus primarily on film for the purposes of this chapter. My insistence on film, to some extent, reflects the shifting social landscape of the postwar period. While some films were made during the war, it wasn't until after the war ended, and after 1998 in particular, that the film industry in Lebanon took off and filmmakers were able to distribute their work more widely. The end of the war, moreover, meant more freedom of mobility and as a result the public nature of cinema viewing bears some significance when considering how new forms of cultural products emerge more prolifically according to patterns of consumption. The two films that I focus on here also reflect a departure from the kind of cinema that was made during the civil war. As Kamran Ragestar points out, during the war, filmmakers were concerned with bearing witness to the atrocities through documentary techniques. Towards the late 90s, however, more filmmakers emerged who were concerned with the postwar context itself and the extent to which the unfinished nature of the civil war continued to disrupt public and private lives.

In this chapter, then, I am not interested in films that attempt to provide a narrative about the experience of living during the civil war, although many filmmakers during this period were concerned precisely with this endeavour.[52] Instead, I want to think about what it means to exist in a *post*war condition. What are the affective realities of living in a society that has moved on from war but is still deeply scarred by it and still experiences its residual violences? How is everyday life constituted within this context? In other words, what does collective trauma look like in the

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[52] See for instance, Jean Chamoun's *In the Shadows of the City* (2000), Ziad Doueiry's *West Beyrouth*, Joseph Fares's *Zozo* (2005).

postwar Lebanese context and how does this trauma intersect with and magnify other experiences of precarity in the present? In order to answer these questions, I return to theories of haunting and spectrality that help me understand how the unfinished nature of the civil war continues to play an active role in the present. More than this, however, and following Michael F. O'Reily, I maintain that an overreliance on frameworks of hauntology in postcolonial or post-conflict societies can potentially overlook contemporary forms of neoliberal violences that characterize the present. As a result, I build upon an exclusive concern with 'pastness,' which often dominates discussions about post-conflict and post-colonial societies. For this reason, I have chosen films that mobilize the specter of the civil war through tropes like militia men and missing persons, but that also focus largely on relaying the postwar present as enmeshed in its own violences, larger global conflicts and neoliberal tendencies.

A Perfect Day, is set in postwar Lebanon in the early 2000s and follows the experiences of Malek, who suffers from a sleeping disorder, and his mother who struggles with the disappearance of her husband during the war more than fifteen years ago. Joreige and Hadjithomas's *A Perfect Day*, revolves partially around the disappearance of Malek's father, Riad—one of around seventeen thousand people reported missing during the war. Riad's disappearance reigns over the lives of his wife and son in very different ways as his ghostly presence sits uneasily at the centre of the film's narratively incoherent plot. This film, however, is not about evoking a lost past; rather, it is concerned with mediating the affect of a present distorted and warped by the unresolved nature of its violent history as well as the grotesque trends of hyper-commercialism and consumerism.

Salhab's *Terra Incognita* follows the "moods, feelings and experiences" (Khatib 163) of a group of thirty somethings living in Beirut sometime after the civil war. The film is narratively

incoherent, often jumping from scene to scene with no apparent logical sequence. In terms of on-screen action, not much happens, but through various ambient gestures, the film signals towards a turbulent context in which the spatial and temporal frame of the film takes exists. There is no clear phantom, ghost, or specter at the center of Salhab's piece, yet I insist that it is still possible to consider this film within the realm of hauntology and spectrality, precisely because of the ways that Salhab conjures up objects and figures associated with the civil war. As I will discuss later on this chapter, moreover, *Terra Incognita* is preoccupied with ruins and, as María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Pereen observe ("Posessions"), this preoccupation is reminiscent of the relationship between archaeology and theories of the uncanny in which "a previously repressed emotional affect" (Vidler 397) recurs. In many ways, Beirut is the ghost at the center of the film, the ghost that now exists somewhere between life and death, between the horrors of past destruction and the grotesque attempts of resurrection/reconstruction.

Both Salhab's *Terra Incognita* and Hadjithomas's and Joreige's *A Perfect Day* take place in postwar Lebanon and both films do not reference the civil war directly, except in very minor and coded moments. I have chosen these two works because of how each film seems more concerned with mediating a particular *sense* or structure of feeling of everyday life as opposed to telling a story or constructing a narrative. The war is presented as a latent force brewing beneath the surface of a society unable to heal. The prioritization of affective mediation is significant to the aims of this chapter in which I explore how the specter of past trauma bears heavily on the present. My contention is that, through particular formal strategies, these films throw the idea of "post" war into doubt as they explore how the war takes on new forms in the troubled present. According to these films, then, the logics, that perpetuated violence during the civil war still exists in the present however with altered manifestations. Rather than just being concerned with

evoking the notion of haunting, however, these films provide a critical perspective on the

emotional state of the nation in a postwar present. Both films evoke the temporality of a

perpetual present and more precisely of a mood of being stuck between "the guilt of a dark

past…and the anguish of an uncertain future in a politically unstable region" (Joreige and

Hadgithomas, "A Perfect Day").

In order to make my claim about the relationship between cultural production and the

way that it mediates an emerging structure of feeling, I will first return to affect theorists who

discuss methodologies for locating and conceptualizing affect in cultural works. In particular, I

outline the schism between theorists whose study of affect in film and art tends to rely on

spectator engagement and embodiment, and those who criticize these inclinations. My own

argument emerges from this debate as I distance myself from spectator-based analyses and

instead locate the affective dynamics of the films I study in issues of haunting and spectrality.

Hauuntology offers a productive departure point for thinking through the extent to which the

present is loaded with the unresolved tensions of its recent past. As I have mentioned already,

however, the scope of the films in this chapter go beyond a preoccupation with haunting. Instead,

they motion towards the larger circuits of power that shape the everyday presents they represent.

For this reason, I provide a description of the socioeconomic context of the postwar period

before turning to my analysis of the films under study here. More particularly, I discuss the

reconstruction efforts that took place under the management of late Prime Minister Rafic Hariri's

company Solidere—French acronym for "Society for the Development and Reconstruction of

Downtown Beirut." In this section, I outline some of the major critical responses to Hariri's

endeavours in order to expose the sense of urgency that triggered cultural activists to produce

work about the civil war. Much of this criticism stemmed from Solidere's "blatant attempts to

rewrite the urban history of Beirut" (Hayek, *Imagining the City* 24) and for its hyper-economic

policies that marginalized large swathes of the population. The works I discuss in this chapter

provide a nuanced critique of this reality by mediating haunting as a pervasive structure of

feeling in postwar Beirut and for evoking a sense of disempowerment that stems from unjust

modes of governance that are primarily invested in accumulating wealth for the ruling elite.

Mediating Affect

In her monograph entitled *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Jill

Bennett discusses works that have often been overlooked as so called "trauma works" because

they are not directly or explicitly about trauma. As she notes about the art works she studies,

"The trauma...was not evinced in the narrative component or in the ostensible meaning, but in a

certain affective dynamic internal to the work" (1). According to Bennett, the kinds of art work

that she is concerned with contribute to an understanding of trauma "in [their] endeavour to find

a communicable language of sensation and affect" as opposed to reflecting "predefined"

symptoms and conditions of trauma (2). In the same spirit, Nadia Yaqub discusses Palestinian

films that do not necessarily provide an explicit narrative about the trauma experienced by

occupation; instead, the films she considers avoid direct representations of violence and operate

through refractive techniques, "which redirect viewers' perspectives of events, people, places,

and conditions" (154). In this way, Yaqub argues, the filmmakers avoid "the discourse of claims-

making that viewers have widely come to expect in the Palestinian context" (155) and instead

evince an "affective understanding" of traumatic circumstances (155). Following Bennett, Yaqub

argues that such techniques do not seek to "produce secondary trauma within the spectator," as

they create an experience of ethical empathy that affirms the distinction between viewer and

victim.

I start with Bennett and Yaqub here because both the films that I am concerned with in this chapter do not reference the civil war directly. Instead, each film *evokes* Lebanon's traumatic past as a force that weighs heavily on the present. The kinds of work that I am interested in for the purposes of this chapter resonate with the artworks and films that Bennett and Yaqub look at respectively. However, while both Bennett and Yaqub provide a productive departure point for my purposes, their theoretical investments do not fully help me articulate the issues I am concerned with, particularly because of their Deleuzian-inspired understandings of affect that are preoccupied with the spectator.

Bennett, for instance, relies on Deleuze's idea of the *encountered sign* "to describe the sign that is felt rather than recognized or perceived through cognition" (7). Bennett's preoccupations lie in understanding the "instantaneous, affective response, triggered by an image" (11) and the ways in which these responses eventually provoke critical inquiry. Yaqub's theorization of refraction echoes this idea because she argues that, rather than provide a trauma narrative about occupation, the films she studies *produce a feeling* that helps viewers achieve an affective understanding of the characters' experiences. While both Bennett and Yaqub make compelling arguments about the affective impact of the works they analyze, they do ultimately treat these works mostly as vehicles for spectator response. This kind of analysis, I find, can often elide something crucial about the internal dynamics of the works themselves and their relationship to cultural contexts. Here, again, I have Leys in mind who, as I mentioned in my earlier chapter, critiques the affective turn and its non-signifying, precognitive, and non-representational tendencies. In particular, Leys is sceptical of theorists like Bennett who rely on spectator response as a stand-in for interpretation and as a mode of analysis that, she argues, de-

politicizes reading. She observes,

> An entire aesthetic is involved here, one that emphasizes the reader's or viewer's experience of a text or image to the extent that that experience might be said to stand in for the text or image in question. An opposing position would insist that although a work of art might make us feel happy or sad or envious or ashamed, what matters is the meaning of the work itself, which is to say the structure of intentional relationships built into it by the artist. The fact that a novel or painting makes me feel or think a certain way may be a significant aspect of my response to the work, but, simply as my response, it has no standing as an interpretation of it. But cultural theorists who have turned to affect convert questions about the meaning of works of art into ones concerning their affective effect or influence on the reader or viewer ("The Turn to Affect" 451 n. 31).

Leys' concern here is that by privileging corporeal-affective responses to images or texts, we are eliding how the internal dynamics of these works produce *meaning* in and of themselves. The ontological turn that she is so sceptical of assumes a disconnect between affect and ideology, ideas, and meaning and thus, in her terms, has very depoliticizing consequences in its prioritization of response over content. In accounts that privilege the spectator's affective response to a cultural representation, corporeal concerns replace our investments in the epistemology of the piece and how its production of meaning is located within larger systems of power and signification.

While I share Leys' skepticism for affect theorists who place too much emphasis on corporal responses to cultural products, particularly because I think such readings potentially overlook many of the culturally inflected nuances that structure the texts or images in question, I would not go as far as Leys does in dismissing the significance of these theorizations completely.

I do see value ultimately in considering how cultural artifacts circulate in specific sociopolitical contexts, how they extend outwards and how, consequently, certain publics receive them. I find Yaqub's claims, for instance, about the two films she analyzes compelling. Her assertion that the films provide an affective understanding of occupation that differs from the ideologically explicit, claims-making approach that characterizes most Palestinian cultural production is convincing. Her reliance on spectators' affective involvement is useful in the Palestinian context where cultural producers attempt, through their creative works, to create agency "while representing all the forces that seek to destroy that agency" (157).

As I discussed in my earlier chapter, Eugenie Brinkema is also dubious about theorizations of cultural output that rely too heavily affective responses. Her critique of film theory, specifically, targets the obsession with spectator bodily response. Brinkema's insistence on the significance of formal reading in cinema resonates with general assessments of the affective turn, like Leys' and Ball's, which criticize the asignifying and precognitive theorizations of affect. Brinkema writes that "because form and affect have been taken as antonyms in the post-1970s battle over the discipline of film studies, this book will insist from the outset that *we have not yet asked enough of form*" (41 original emphasis). She discloses how even in instances "when form and affect have been considered together," there is always an insistence on "how form affects spectator" (44). In turn, she argues, the study of affects in the history of film theory has turned into "little more than the study of *effects*" (44). Her main preoccupation with formal matters in cinema, however, does not mean that she dismisses affect's relationship to the subject or the body completely. As she acknowledges, "it hitherto has been underdetermined what the body can do to form and even what form can do to a body" (41). Nevertheless, in her own work, she is uninterested in the body, as she attempts to recuperate a

formalist reading of cinema that pays close attention to the structures and details that pan out visually on a screen. She is invested, then, in exposing how affects are bound up in specific cinematic forms.

Through my methodology, I am concerned, to some extent, with reconciling those film theories that take into account the affective response of the spectator without abandoning the ways in which affect is registered formally. While I am not primarily concerned with thinking through the ways the films *affect* spectators, I do acknowledge that film is a medium that "works with all the senses" (Rutherford 93); I maintain, therefore, that when analyzing the how affect works in films, we are always, to some extent, considering how films *draw in* (or isolate) viewers.[53]

Returning to Bennett and Yaqub, their theorizations affirm to some extent what I am observing in the films under scrutiny in this chapter, particularly in terms of how each film does not represent the civil war explicitly and how there is instead a certain affective dynamic or mediation occurring. Similar to the works that Bennett and Yaqub study, the films in this chapter register a sense of crisis that occurs within the confines of the *quotidian*. The quotidian in Salhab's and Hadjithomas and Joreige's films is loaded with the unresolved tensions of past trauma and the perpetuation of an unjust political system. Unlike Bennett and Yaqub, however, I am not just thinking about how these films evoke a particular affective response in the spectator or how they help us make "sense of the war on an affective level" (Westmoreland, "Making Sense" 717). Instead, I locate the affective dynamics of the films partly in issues of haunting and spectrality that I argue are central to the films' aesthetic and political interventions and the intersection of this spectrality with contemporary oppressions. In this sense, I investigate how these films navigate, negotiate, and manage politics "as the permutations of evolving power

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[53] I make a similar argument in my first chapter. See Michael Hardt on affect and the realm of causality.

relations" (D. White 176). This negotiation and navigation is fundamentally affective and is

rooted in the dynamics of everyday life that the films work to represent. I explore, therefore, the

various formal strategies of these films to diagnose haunting as a pervasive structure of feeling

characterizing postwar Beirut and to think through the other layers of affective existence that

operate in this post-conflict society.

Hauntologies

Both *A Perfect Day* and *Terra Incognita* open the door for comprehending the structures

and dynamics of haunting, or the ways in which ghosts make themselves known and alter social

landscapes. Here I take my cue from Gordon Avery who offers a "cultural hypothesis" about

haunting as a "shared *structure of feeling*, a shared possession, a specific type of sociality" (201

my emphasis). A structure of feeling here refers to those "elusive, impalpable forms of social

consciousness which are at once as evanescent as 'feelings' suggests, but nevertheless display a

significant configuration captured in the term 'structure'" (Eagleton qtd in Avery 198). By

evoking a certain spectrality through a sensorial representation of the postwar present, the films

evidence the emergence of a new structure of feeling, as well as provide a critique of the

amnesiac structures of postwar Lebanon and their connections to the larger neoliberal structures

at play in the postwar period. The fact that each film does not provide a narrative about the civil

war, like many other films produced during this time do, is fundamental to their evocation of

haunting. As Avery argues, the ethical imperative of haunting "is not a return to the past but a

reckoning with its repression in *the present*" (183 my emphasis). Through an evocation of

spectrality in the present, then, the films expose how the logic of the civil war perpetuated into

the present-day context and how the present's impetus to reconstruct and forget reflects the

"incomplete forms of containment and repression" (Gordon xvi) through which the specter of the past interferes. Like Kamran Rastegar observes, "with the cessation of the cycle of violence and hostilities…a specter rose over Lebanese cultural life—a specter representing in some measure the war itself, but also *the absence of a process of accountability, as well as an accounting of the history of the war*" (158 my emphasis). It is the repressive forces of the present, then, that account for the force of the specter in Lebanese postwar society.

Hauntology as a theoretical framework is a productive place to begin thinking about the state of postwar Lebanon because, as Colin Davis acknowledges, "it is part of an endeavour to keep raising the stakes of literary study, to make it a place where we can interrogate our relation to the dead, examine the elusive identities of the living, and explore the boundaries between the thought and the unthought" (379). In that spirit, I will outline some of the general literature on hauntology to provide a better sense of its various inflections and to further elucidate the framework for this chapter.

It is importantly primarily to recognize how haunting lies on a continuum with trauma studies. More particularly, theories of hauntology have been most often been evoked to understand the effects of transgenerational trauma and memory on children of parents who experienced violent histories, most notably the Holocaust (see for instance, Miriam Hirsch and Gabriele Schwab). Additionally, hauntology has been evoked to understand the lingering effects of "abusive systems of power" (Gordon xvi) like slavery and colonialism. C. Davis observes that the field of hauntology, as a critical and psychoanalytic discipline, has two main sources. The first and most often cited source is Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* and the second, "chronologically prior yet less acknowledged" (373) source is the work of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok. In Derrida's renowned text, he explores how the spirit of Marx and our

inherited legacy of Marxism haunt us in the wake of post-communism. Derrida in this sense provides a formal structure of hauntology or spectrality as he asks, "What is the mode of presence of a specter?" (46). For Derrida, a specter is always a *revenant* in that it "*begins by coming back*" (11 original emphasis). In Derrida's terms, moreover, spectrality designates slippages between absence and presence or the past and the present. One cannot so easily "differentiate between the specter of the past and the specter of the future" (48) because, as Derrida argues, the "*spectrality effect*" consists precisely in undoing the opposition "between actual, effective presence and its other" (48). The spectrality effect, then, accounts for the various ways that the past intrudes on the present and gestures towards the future because it throws doubt on "the reassuring order of presents" (48). What we learn from Derrida, moreover, is that there is always a kind of opacity when we are dealing with specters. In speaking of our inheritance of the legacy of Marxism, for instance, Derrida writes that,

> An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction* to *reaffirm by choosing*. "One must" means *one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret. If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as by a cause—natural or genetic. One always inherits from a secret—which says "read me, will you ever be able to do so?" (18).

A fundamental quality of an inheritance, then, is a certain unreadability because, as we see above, if we did not need to decipher the inheritance of legacy, then it would be nothing more than another cause affecting our development. The readability of a legacy, then, is always elusive

and secretive and always requires multiple interpretations. It is never homogeneous or

straightforward and is usually multivocal. These characteristics of an inherited legacy, or what

Derrida calls the specters of Marx, inform us of the aesthetics of haunting. It is with this

opaqueness in mind, for instance, that I select the films under study in this chapter. The non-

linearity of the films, and their refusal to narrativize the past or evoke clear causal relationships,

renders them effective in exposing the haunting legacy of violence on the present.

In Abraham and Torok's account of hauntology, they deal with the figure of the phantom,

which represents the transgenerational effects of undisclosed traumas on its descendants.

Abraham and Torok's version of psychoanalysis offers an alternative to Freudian theories that

rely heavily on instinctual forces in explaining the symptoms of trauma. For Freud, as we recall

from my introduction, trauma operates according to a temporal logic of delay or "deferred

action" (*Nachträglichkeit*) in which trauma is made up of the dialectical relationship between

two events or experiences that are not in themselves traumatic: the first event, sexual in nature,

that came too early in a child's life for it to be understood and the second event that triggered a

memory of the first event that only then was given traumatic meaning. The first childhood

experience establishes the "libidinal 'substructure'" (Ball, *Disciplining* 153) upon which future

"neurotic" experiences are based. In Abraham and Torok's formulation of the phantom,

however, traumatic symptoms are not necessarily related to instinctual life. Instead, "the diverse

manifestations of the phantom, which we call *haunting*" (Torok 181 original emphasis), result

from inheriting the "secret psychic substance of…ancestors' lives" (Rand 166). The phantom,

then, represents the "transgenerational consequences of silence" (Rand 168). As Abraham notes,

"what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left in us by the secrets of others (171). In this sense,

Abraham and Torok move psychoanalysis beyond the realm of the individual to account for the

ways that traumatic symptoms are tied to collective and transgenerational dynamics.

What draws me most to the work of Abraham and Torok is their preoccupation with silence (and its various forms) as a theoretical entity. As discussed, in the postwar Lebanese context, the civil war was largely repressed as a shameful past that no political party wanted to take responsibility for and that most perpetrators were pardoned for. The atrocities of the war, then, were suppressed and silenced by the absence of a process of accountability. In addition to the reluctance of leading politicians to "probe the misdeeds of their past…Lebanese society itself showed reluctance towards remembering, even if some people were more willing to look into the past than others" (Haugbolle, *War and Memory* 69). These silences surrounding national trauma have most certainly had effects on the Lebanese psychic landscape. As Haugbolle argues, while on the one hand, the amnesty law and general amnesia maintained the semblance of civil peace, on the other hand, this collective forgetfulness produced a lacuna between personal and collective memory (*War and Memory* 72). Haugbolle here refers specifically to those who were too young to remember the war or who had escaped it early on. Since the public sphere in postwar Lebanon was not receptive to the articulation of personal memories or to the establishment of a collective narrative, a cavernous gap developed in the psychic life of the nation. The cultural products that emerged in the wake of the postwar period were an attempt to manage that gap; however, they too, participated in their own forms of concealment. The question, then, that Abraham and Torok guide me to is: how do films manifest the haunting of silenced histories?

The main difference that C. Davis identifies between Abraham and Torok's phantom and Derrida's specter is that the specter does not belong to the order of knowledge. As discussed above, Derrida maintains that, to some degree, the specter always lies beyond interpretation,

beyond resolution. In contrast, for Abraham and Torok, "the phantom's secret can and should be revealed" (C. Davis 377). C. Davis seems critical of the utility of Abraham and Torok's conclusions as he sides with a Derridean approach that views the secret as "a productive opening of meaning rather than a determinate content to be uncovered" (377). Of course, it should be recalled that Abraham and Torok's psychoanalytic intentions to cure patients afflicted by the phantoms of their predecessors accounts for their position that the phantom's secrets should be revealed and dispelled. Derrida's spectrality, on the other hand, suggests that "rather than being expelled, the ghosts should remain, be lived *with*" (Blanco and Pereen, "Introduction" 7). C. Davis's scepticism about Abraham and Torok's conclusions ultimately seems to stem from the utility of their theories for literary studies. He acknowledges, for instance, how one of the reasons why the impact of Abraham and Torok's work on literary study has been so limited is "perhaps because the endeavour to find undisclosed secrets is likely to succeed in only a small number of cases" (376). For my own purposes and departing from C. Davis, I am not so much interested in choosing a side, so to speak, mainly because I find Abraham and Torok's theories useful for conceptualizing the effects of a silenced traumatic past on those who inherit it. Following Meera Atkinson, then, I believe that the "usefulness in teasing out the distinction [between Derrida and Abraham and Torok] perhaps lies less in establishing a conflict between them and more in collapsing the two approaches into a complimentary amalgamation…" (268). Derrida's theory on spectrality provides a productive framework for conceptualizing the ways in which we interact and live with the ghosts of the legacies we inherit, while the specificity of Abraham and Torok's phantom allows us to think about how a silenced past makes its way into and disrupts the psyche of those who follow it.

The utility of hauntology as a conceptual framework for this chapter stems largely from its concern with a *present* that is affected by the ghosts of an unresolved past. As María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Pereen explain, "studies of ghosts and haunting can do more than obsessively recall a fixed past; in an active, dynamic engagement, they may expose the insufficiency of the present moment, as well as the disconsolations and erasures of the past, and a tentative hopefulness for future resolutions" ("Introduction" 16). The films in this chapter anchor themselves within a larger political, social, and economic network of the present without necessarily providing an overtly didactic narrative about the issues they seem to be exploring. In order to fully grasp the ways in which these films are immersed within the realities and contexts they emerge from, it is worth commenting more specifically on some of the developments occurring in the aftermath of the civil war.

Solidere and the Culture of Amnesia

After the Lebanese civil war ended in 1991, there was a general reluctance to speak of the war in its immediate aftermath, and there seemed to be a consensus that it was best to leave behind the troubles of the past in order to move forward. This attitude was coupled with a climate of suppression that the continued Syrian military presence in Lebanon created. Late Prime Minister Hariri's private-sector company Solidere, which was tasked with the reconstruction of downtown Beirut in the 1990s, best encapsulates the mindset of looking to the future as opposed to the past. As I will explain shortly, while Solidere was officially established in 1994 as the caretaker of Beirut's reconstruction, the original plan for reconstructing Beirut began much earlier before Hariri even became prime minister (see Salem 180, S. Makdisi). Many of the demolitions carried out in cooperation with Hariri's company, therefore, were

unauthorized or unapproved.

Much of Solidere's rhetoric invoked nostalgic sentiments about a prewar Lebanon. The company aimed to recreate Beirut's image as the "Paris of the Middle East" and so it marketed itself as a restorer of Beirut's great legacy. The Solidere project, however, drew much criticism from intellectuals, architects, artists, and others who felt that the company's interest in preserving Beirut's heritage was merely a marketing scheme focused purely on image. In this sense, critics argued that Solidere's corporate agenda effaced significant traces of Beirut's heritage. As Saree Makdisi posits in his well circulated and oft-cited 1997 article, "Laying Claim to Beirut: Urban Narrative and Spatial Identity in the Age of Solidere," "It is worth asking why this project relentlessly clings to the language of the re- rather than admitting that it is not about the resurrection, redemption, recuperation, reinvention, remembrance of that past but rather its invention from scratch" (682). For S. Makdisi and others who share his abhorrence for Solidere, Hariri's mission rendered Beirut's city centre a clean slate or tabula rasa on which to implement a corporatized version of Lebanese identity that alienates large swathes of the Lebanese population, intensifies class schisms, and sanitizes Lebanese history.

While Solidere presented itself as recuperating Lebanon's historical identity, the company is in fact responsible for more destruction and demolition of buildings than the war itself is (S. Makdisi 674). Many of these buildings, as Elise Salem points out, could have been salvaged. Still, Solidere clung to its proclaimed identity as a reviver of Beirut's historical associations and "a keeper of national heritage" (Nagel, "Ethnic Conflict" 227). The company's slogan remained, after all, "Beirut: An Ancient City for the Future." This slogan eventually became established in response to critics who accused Solidere of "wilful amnesia" (Haugbolle, *War and Memory* 85). In turn, Solidere capitalized on the ancient Phoenician and Roman ruins

located in Beirut's downtown as evidence for its commitment to Lebanon's historical identity.

As critics like S. Makdisi, Cooke ("Beirut Reborn"), and Caroline Nagel convincingly argue,

however, Solidere's preservation of architectural heritage is less about igniting a process of

historicization or remembrance, and instead about "creating a 'name brand' for Beirut—a place

identity that is easily marketable to tourists and investors and that adds value to downtown real

estate" (Nagel, "Ethnic Conflict" 224). This appeal to history, then, is nothing more than a

marketing strategy inspired solely by a concern with "appearance and façade" (S. Makdisi 686).

Even more troubling about this commitment to historical appearances is that it effaces Beirut's

local history. As Miriam Cooke poignantly writes, Solidere "revives the regional past

(Phoenician and Greek) to erase the local past (the war) and to launch this new Beirut into a

global future…The traces will soon be gone. It will no longer matter who was responsible for the

war nor why it was fought" ("Beirut Reborn" 422).

Ultimately, the most resounding condemnation towards Solidere is that it embodied the

colonization of public interests by privatized, neoliberal ones. S. Makdisi shows how Solidere

came into being without any regard for the public, most notably for those whose property the

company was expropriating (672). He estimates that "there were as many as 250,000 property-

rights claimants in the central district" (n. 10, 670). Many of these property claims were largely

disputed due to archaic inheritance laws; however, the fact remains that the properties were all

expropriated without any consideration for the claimants. S. Makdisi notes, as well, how the

early demolitions carried out by Solidere were in fact unauthorized by any governmental or

public authority. Even more strikingly, since the company and its investors would not be taxed

for the first ten years of operation, the government denied itself any potential tax revenues[54] and

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[54] This is, of course, idealistically assuming that any tax revenue would not be squandered by public corruption anyway.

was to reimburse Solidere for all infrastructure costs incurred (S. Makdisi 676). Hence in the age

of Solidere, it very soon became apparent that with the ascendancy of what many have called

"Harirism," came a "dramatic intensification of the presence of market forces" (S. Makdisi 694)

in the Lebanese political and economic scene, as well as the "astonishing self-enrichment for the

members of [Hariri's] government and their wide circle of business associates" (694).

Najib Hourani argues that this neo-liberal order that characterizes post-war politics is in

fact not a new phenomenon, but an extension of the politics that dominated during the civil war.

He argues that the "militia economy" that operated during the civil war "was never outside of

larger processes of financial globalization, [instead] it was integrated into a global realm

consisting not of financial corporations operating according to a universal capitalist rationality,

but rather one of similarly constituted networks of capitalists, companies and other institutions

working within and alongside a variety of states in pursuit of politico-economic power" (290). I

agree with Hourani that the same capitalist logics that characterized the postwar period were in

fact an extension of the militia system that dominated the civil war and benefited those who

perpetuated the violence, but what is unique about the postwar phase, perhaps, is the monopoly

of power and capital by one businessman turned politician. Hariri's policies as prime minister

were largely "wedded to his private business empire" (Salem 180) as he not only oversaw and

benefited from the construction of Beirut's downtown, but also managed dissent by changing

media regulations in his favour (Salem 180, S. Makdisi 697) and bringing school curricula under

much tighter government control (S. Makdisi 697).

It should be noted here that these regulations occurred in the spirit of or under the

auspices of suppressing the potential for sectarian conflict. For instance, the appeal of preserving

Lebanon's architectural heritage was that it created a "Phoenician Levantine identity…that

supersedes narrow sectarian affiliations" (Nagel, "Ethnic Conflict' 226). In fact, many during

this period regarded Hariri as a "formidable persona" (Haugbolle, *War and Memory* 91) coming

to Lebanon's rescue. Samir Khalaf and Philip S. Khoury's 1993 anthology, *Recovering Beirut:*

Urban Design and Post-War Beirut, is one example where we can find such attitudes. In their

preface to this anthology, which includes entries by a number of architects and urban designers

who would go on to blithely attack Hariri and his Solidere project and whose visions for the

reconstruction of Beirut were largely incompatible with Solidere's, Khalaf and Khoury

surprisingly record:

> As we write, the news of appointment of Rafic al-Hariri as Prime Minister reconfirms
>
> this hope that Lebanon may have finally taken the road to recovery…[He] has evolved
>
> over the past decade into a folk hero of sorts…Partly because of his Cinderella-like
>
> success story…and his selfless benevolence on behalf of his country, he commands now,
>
> particularly among the beleaguered masses, an aura of unmatched respect and hope (xiii).

It is indeed curious, despite the initial appeal that Hariri might have held, that these two

academics would so uncritically characterize Hariri's actions as "selfless benevolence." This is

especially surprising considering the plethora of harsh critiques that Solidere would come under

from cultural producers, activists, intellectuals, and citizens who felt left out of Hariri's corporate

vision for Beirut.

One of the few cultural products that deals explicitly with the reconstruction efforts

occurring in postwar Lebanon and what it meant for less privileged members of society is

Joreige and Hadgithomas's 1999 film *Around the Pink House.*[55] The film depicts the experiences

of two families, the Adaimis and the Nawfals, who have lived as squatters in an old Pink House

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[55] There are other films that do reference reconstruction (the ones under study in this chapter, for instance, as well Jean Chamoun's *In the Shadows of the City*, to name a few); however, *Around the Pink House* is one of the only ones in which reconstruction is the central issue.

since the early years of the civil war.[56] The new owner of the Pink House, the sleek businessman

Mattar, is making plans to demolish the building and build a large commercial centre. The film

relays how various characters deal with this new reality, some depending on former militia ties,

others distributing a petition to stop the demolition, and others attempting to negotiate a

compensation deal with Mattar. Eventually, the characters realize that the demolition will happen

regardless of their efforts and so they rent a bulldozer to tear down the house themselves in order

to retrieve some agency in the playing out of their fate. Their destruction of the building also

prevents the new owner from using the front of The Pink House as part of the aesthetic of the

new commercial centre—an issue that is telling of Solidere's uses of memory as a surface or

façade for marketing purposes. What the film ultimately uncovers is that "the promises of

reconstruction [during the postwar era] seemed geared towards the upper stratum of society"

(Haugbolle, *War and Memory* 66), while the rest of society was left out of the envisioned future

of Lebanon. In this respect, *Around the Pink House* echoes some of the major opponents of

Solidere who criticize "its plans for considering only physical appearance and future revenue and

for ignoring the social aspects of reconstruction, public interests and needs, residents' diverse

historical pasts, and their memories of intimate urban places" (Sawalha, *Reconstructing Beirut*

29).

How, then, does this reality figure into the films under study in this chapter? *A Perfect*

Day and *Terra Incognita* do not tackle reconstruction as overtly or as centrally as *Around the*

Pink House does. Instead, reconstruction is figured as an active backdrop or dominant force

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[56] The war caused the forced migration of large amounts of people, many of whom lived as squatters in abandoned buildings and homes. These squatters were not given any consideration in the postwar phase. S. Makdisi cites how on Feburary 6, 1996, a family of squatters was killed when Solidere demolished the building they were living in while they were still inside (700). He writes that it then became solidified that "there would literally be no space in the revitalized and gentrified cosmopolitan city center for such destitute and 'undesirable migrants'" (700).

framing each of their storylines. Most significantly, as my analysis will shortly show, the structures of the films summon the mood of a disempowered public sphere by gesturing towards larger political developments that frame the everyday lives of the characters, but that they are somewhat removed from. Just like Solidere privileged corporate interests and became established without any regard for the general public, the films represent the average civilian in postwar Lebanon as a spectator to the developments occurring around them. The civilians wander around the constantly changing city, yet they are rarely represented as agents in the changes taking place. As I have mentioned, however, unlike *Around the Pink House*, these films do not relay these issues to us explicitly; instead, through an evocation of spectrality in a nuanced and dynamic representation of the postwar present, the films embody the various tones of affective existence in post-civil war Beirut. Reminiscent of the formal structure of haunting, the films refrain from clear-cut narratives and causalities because, as we know, the dynamics of spectrality are rarely so straightforward.

The Affective Landscapes of *A Perfect Day* and *Terra Incognita*

In the following section, I explore how the films make a critical intervention into the postwar present by revealing a darker layer of Beirut's affective reality, one that is inhabited by the unexorcised ghosts and phantoms of its recent past. I aim, furthermore, to go beyond a consideration of haunting as the primary structure of feeling of postwar Beirut, and to think, instead, about the ways that the latent specter of the civil war encounters other forms of neoliberal violence and oppressions in the postwar present and what the affective dimensions of these encounters are. By focusing on the unfolding of the everyday in the postwar context, the films invite us to consider how an unfinished traumatic past intersects with more contemporary

oppressions and the affective dimension of these intersections. Through a series of visual motifs and audio techniques, *Terra Incognita* and *A Perfect Day* track how forces from the past encounter a wholesale embrace of neoliberalism, commercialism, and present violence to create a kind of affective impasse in everyday life that plays out either in depressed apathy or in excessive indulgence.

The recurrence of the undead in the Lebanese art scene has been theorized either as evidence for the absence of a mourning process (Westmoreland) or as a trope that signifies the unjust end of the war (Ragestar). I do not refute these claims, but I argue that an exclusive focus on the undead potentially obstructs an understanding of the ways in which this haunting confronts other dimensions of the postwar present. In his analysis of *A Perfect Day*, for instance, Ragestar focuses exclusively on Claudia's encounter with the ghost of her missing husband as the well as how his absence has prevented her and Malek from joining the realm of the living. His analysis is illuminating for thinking about the extent to which the specter of missing persons in Lebanon painfully discloses the unfinished nature of the civil war; however, it also elides the other affective dynamics at play throughout the film.[57] Here I am reminded again of Michael F. O'Reily who warns that an exclusive focus on haunting "as a mode of recovery of colonial history" in postcolonial theory can "obsess memory and divert the critical gesture from contemporary issues requiring intervention and immediate attention" (4). Keeping this caveat in mind, then, I wish to consider how the evocation of spectrality in the films is embedded within a larger affective and socio-political context that frames ordinary life in Beirut.

In order to analyze this encounter, it is first necessary to consider how the specter of the civil war is represented in the postwar mood that *Terra Incognita* and *A Perfect Day* evoke. Each

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[57] Of course, Ragestar's purposes differ from mine, so my observations here are not a comment on the quality of his work; rather, I am revealing how our arguments differ.

of these films attempts to articulate the extent to which haunting, as a kind of "experiential modality" (Gordon xvi) makes itself known in the everyday of a postwar present riddled with its own violences. When we speak of haunting here, we are speaking of the undead, the ghosts, or specters that interfere with the configurations of the present.

As I already mentioned, *A Perfect Day* revolves around the disappearance of Malek's father, Riad—one of around seventeen thousand people reported missing during the war. Riad's absence is the only way that the civil war is evoked throughout the film. In one scene, for instance, Malek lays out old newspapers that advertise his father's death. The camera lingers on the image of Riad at the corner of the page before it slowly travels across the newspapers, layered on top of one another, to reveal headlines and images from the civil war. As the camera travels upwards, exposing darkened photos of destruction and wrapped up corpses, and glimpses of sombre headlines, the non-diegetic sounds become more intense, glum, and eerie. The camera finally pauses once again on the image of Riad, with the words "Missing" typed above his photo. The scene, then, situates Riad's death in the mayhem of the civil war. Amid the changing images of chaos and destruction and the layers of newspapers that represent the tragic persistence of time, Riad's picture remains statically situated in the corner of the page, shrouded in mystery, as his absence continues to plague the lives of his wife and son.

This film, ultimately, is not about the past; rather, it is concerned with mediating the affect of a present distorted and warped by the unresolved nature of its violent history. For while "death exists in the past," as Gordon reminds us, "disappearance [exists] in the present" (113). The film, then, uncovers how absences and their uncertainties are constantly negotiated in the present. Gordon argues that it is precisely these uncertainties that render disappearance an

exemplary instance of haunting. Disappearance, she contends, undoes those borders between

knowing and not knowing (113).

Riad's disappearance reigns over the lives of his wife and son in very different ways as

his ghostly presence sits uneasily at the centre of the film's narratively incoherent plot. One of

the central conflicts in the film revolves around the decision to declare him legally dead. Claudia

is uneasy with this undertaking, as she is unable to foreclose the possibility that her husband

might return. Unable to mourn her husband, Claudia is stuck melancholically in the present as

she exercises a persistent attachment to her loss. Ruth Kluger suggests that, "Where there is no

grave, we are condemned to go on mourning…" (80). The lack of grave in Kluger's sense

resonates with Claudia's inability to reach closure regarding her husband's absence, for as

Kluger notes, "the grave is not necessarily a place in a cemetery, but simply clear knowledge

about the death of someone you've known" (80). Claudia is still haunted by her missing

husband, she still sees and feels him and has been denied the possibility of mourning him; the

lack of a grave, therefore, both literal and figurative, makes it necessary for her to be stuck

melancholically in the present, unable to move forward in the way that the political elite deem

necessary. She wears his shirt and stares in the mirror, pulling her hair back, desperately trying to

glimpse an image of her lost husband; she sits in vacant rooms looking around apprehensively

and reaching out to empty chairs, trying and failing to touch what seems to be there but cannot

be found; she wanders around the house and down to the street pausing at each car horn and

looking around searchingly in anticipation of what never arrives. In these instances, in the loaded

absences and vacancies of Claudia's life, she oscillates between the boundaries of certainty and

doubt.

Unlike his mother, Malek wants to believe in the certainty of his father's death, insisting that they should declare him legally dead. Despite this expressed certainty, however, Malek is plagued by narcoleptic fits that reveal a troubled psyche. Constantly retreating into the realm of the unconscious, Malek is unable to fully exist in the present. His slips into narcolepsy, then, also reflect the ways in which "haunting alters the experience of being in time and how we separate the past, the present, and the future" (Gordon xvi). In one scene, for instance, this dynamic is played out formally. When Claudia and Malek drive back from the lawyer's office, Claudia accuses her son of not feeling his father the way that she does. As she is speaking, seemingly to herself, the camera shifts to Malek who rests his head against the back of his seat and falls asleep. With Claudia's last words, the screen goes blank and silent for a few seconds before the sound of beeping horns and Claudia's voice calling out her son's name abruptly awaken Malek. The transition from Claudia's speech to the black screen and back to the noisy streets of Beirut effectively interconnect the past and present together in a striking and insinuating manner. As Claudia is speaking, viewers are drawn into the private experience of a woman haunted by the disappearance of her husband. The effects of a traumatic past are evoked directly in this instance as the outside city, the representation of the present that the directors vividly take viewers through, is relegated to the background. With a jolt, however, both Malek and the audience are transported from the lull of the black screen, which represents Malek's narcoleptic slip, and back into the chaotic noises and suffocating traffic that inundate the streets of Beirut. A kind of slippage between the past and the present is, thus, enacted as the past emerges in the schism between Claudia and Malek and then is once again superficially masked by the indulgences and excesses of the present.

Unlike *A Perfect Day*, *Terra Incognita* does not have a clear phantom at the centre of the plot. Rather, the film evokes haunting by unnervingly conjuring up images and figures associated with the civil war into the present day postwar context that it represents. The film is a grim piece, paradoxically named, for while the title evokes an unexplored region or territory, the film is in fact concerned with relaying the various inhabited and neglected layers of Beirut. *Terra Incognita* follows the experiences of a group of thirty-somethings who go about their daily lives and struggle with the various issues plaguing the country in the wake of the civil war. Its main character, Soraya, is a tour guide who leads curious Westerners through the country's ancient civilizational structures that have been discovered because of Solidere's reconstruction efforts. As she leads tourists through the country's newly uncovered history, Lebanon's most recent history—the civil war—is strikingly absent from her presentations (as one character, Tarek, observes on one of the tours that he intrudes upon.) Tarek, who has just returned from abroad in the film, cannot decide whether to stay or leave, an issue that plagues other characters, like Soraya, as well. Nadim is a Solidere architect who struggles with his profession, as he spends most of his time going over maps of the city seemingly searching for a version of the city that he can identify with. Leila is a depressed existentialist who constantly questions her existence. Finally, there is the character of the radio-announcer who Salhab films either reporting the daily news that forms the background of many scenes throughout the film, or going about mundane daily activities. Like *A Perfect Day*, the film never references the war, however, its specter reigns over the lives of the characters in significant ways.

In the film's opening sequence, we hear Soraya speaking in French about the ancient Roman temples located somewhere in the Bekaa valley outside of Beirut. As she explains, credits roll on the screen against a background of Salhab's ID card outlining basic information

about him including, most notably, his religious sect: Muslim Shiite. Soraya is subsequently

filmed with a group of French UN peacekeepers navigating the undulating landscape of the

Bekaa and discussing the financing of these temples,[58] before the camera shifts once again to an

image of Salhab's ID card, this time with his photo in the frame and the film's title sprawled

across the screen: *terra incognita*. The insertion of Salhab's ID card into the opening sequence is

a significant framing device considering the importance, or rather, infamy, this object held

during the heydays of the civil war, when slaughterings based on sectarian identity were rampant

at checkpoints located across the country. The ID card, then, that lingers between the opening

frames of the film, is a daunting echo from the past as it unnervingly enacts that notorious

exchange of identification, but this time between the director and the viewer. It should be noted

here that the id card, and his sectarian identity, specifically, represents a kind of essential system

of identification on a diasporic and local level. Salhab's upfrontness about his sect also functions

as a way of referencing how Lebanese people themselves recognize themselves and others. One

of the first questions a Lebanese person often asks the other, after all, when they first meet, is

"where are you from," as a way of discerning sectarian identity based on geographic belonging.

This technique, of inserting figures and images associated with the civil war into the

filmic landscape, is a method that Salhab uses throughout the film, and it is how he mobilizes a

formal dimension of haunting or spectrality that is crucial to his mediation of a postwar structure

of feeling. Most strikingly, for instance, is the repeated presence of army or militia figures that

constantly enter the film's frame. We can interpret the constant and mysterious appearance of

these soldiers as representations of the endurance of Syrian hegemony over Lebanon. The

persistent military presence in the film corresponds to the postwar climate when Syrian

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[58] Here Soraya explains how the inscriptions on the temples are for the names of those who financed their construction—an issue that echoes the ways in which Hariri's imprint on Beirut is tied to his financing of its reconstruction.

checkpoints were prevalent across the country. Another way to think about these figures is through the lens of spectrality. These army men in the film are often unacknowledged by the characters, functioning simultaneously as the "undead…whose amnesty has not provided them with redemption" (Westmoreland, "Catastrophic Subjectivity" 200); or they are briefly recognized as they intrude, often unexpectedly, upon the dialogue or development of the film to signify perhaps how the perpetuation of unjust power interferes with wholesome progression. In one particularly evocative scene, the ghostliness of these armed men is educed quite clearly. After driving to the bar to go meet his friends, Nadim walks past a marching line of army men carrying rifles across their chests. The armed men are blurry compared to Nadim, as they often are when represented in the film as unacknowledged background figures. Nadim walks besides them as though they were not there, until finally pausing to glance back. The sequence slows down, dwelling on a shot of Nadim's back, as he stands there frozen with an eerie high-pitched noise in the background. The camera then re-establishes him in his car, as he was before when he was driving to meet his friends. That moment, therefore, with him and the armed figures, is fleeting and its position within the temporal narrative is unclear. The scene disrupts the progression of Nadim's drive to meet his friends, functioning almost as a memory or a hallucination. These figures in uniform are crucial to the dark layer of Beirut's history that Salhab represents, precisely because of the uncertainty surrounding their existence. As they march through darkened streets, they evoke a sense of unease, representing the unfinished nature that a lack of amnesty imposes on the psyche of the country.[59]

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[59] Similar to these militiamen, *A Perfect Day*, includes the figure of the security guard, likely ex-militamen, who spend their days guarding big shot politicians. While they don't function in the same haunting manner that the armed men in *Terra Incognita* do, both films employ these figures to indicate the endurance of old structures of power in the postwar period.

In addition to these spectral evocations, the films also represent phantomhood as a more generalized condition characterizing the characters and the city itself. With the massive reconstruction projects enveloping Beirut, the films portray the city as being grotesquely revived from the dead, as Soraya's conversation with the tour's bus driver reveals. He tells her, "If Beirut wasn't destroyed, we wouldn't have discovered any of [these ruins.]" "Seven times it was destroyed," she replies, referring to Beirut. He continues, "seven times we died and came back to life." "Not us," she retorts, "it." Beirut, then, is the phantom city that plays an active role throughout both films. Other critics argue that in addition to the phantom city, the civil war created a phantom citizenship (De Cauter), rendering the citizens of Lebanon "ghosts among ghosts" (Wright 15). Whether it is Malek whose narcolepsy prevents him from joining the realm of the living, or Leila who wanders around aimlessly ruminating about the fleetingness of her existence, these characters are demoted to the role of inverse or false phantoms, to use Lieven De Cauter's term. He writes that: "Just as real phantoms have only their appearance and no matter, false phantoms have only their body, their naked life…because they have lost their citizenship, their belonging, their civic human appurtenance, their form of life" (428). There is, then, a certain hollowness to the lives of these characters, a gap created by the suppression of a traumatic legacy.

Haunting, ultimately, as a prevailing sense in these films, is tied to what Joreige and Hadgithomas identify as the *latency* of the civil war in the postwar era. They write that latency connotes "what is often felt in Beirut, in face of the dominant amnesia prevailing since the end of the war, in face of this strange paralysis that pervades the city, in face of this violent desire to place things between parentheses – to censure oneself" ("Latency" 40). The idea of parenthesizing the past, as though it were not essential to the fabric of Lebanese society, is

something that preoccupies Joreige and Hadjithomas throughout their work. The nature of

latency for them is troubling because, as a force, it cannot be clearly identified. The memory of

the civil war is instead "strangled" by desperate attempts to push the country forward into the

global economy. As a result of this stifling reality, Lebanon is thrust into a form of paralysis, a

stuckness that we find resonating throughout the formal features of their work.[60] Interestingly,

Salhab also comments on this sense of entrapment in the postwar present. He describes postwar

Beirut as being "imprisoned in the present." "It is frozen in time," he tells Lina Khatib in a

personal interview (163).

These filmmakers, then, establish this quality of stuckness as fundamental to the affective

dimension of the everyday in which the forces of spectrality encounter the impulses of

modernity. This temporal quality comes across in the visual motifs of the films I analyze here. In

A Perfect Day, the camera shots are frequently clustered by the visual noise of Beirut, with the

frame often crowded by intruding figures, buildings, or honking cars. Some of the predominant

shots are filmed in traffic, where the characters are literally stuck, unable to move forward

because of an absence of effective regulations. The entire course of the film takes place in the

course of one day, further evoking this idea of being confined in the present and echoing

Lefebvre's insistence that "the history of a single day includes the history of the world and of

civilization" (4). Similarly, *Terra Incognita* removes viewers from the comfort of linear

narrative, dispersing seemingly unrelated scenes together, creating a stagnant temporality. The

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[60] Here Joreige and Hadjithomas's theories resonate with Freud's description of melancholia, which he distinguishes from mourning. Melancholia denotes the condition by which one is psychically stuck, unable to heal, as the subject incorporates the loss into the ego. Latency also holds a psychoanalytic connotation, as it is central to many theorizations of trauma. In Freud's articulation of trauma, for instance, the second traumatic event triggers a memory of a *latent* first event. It is the memory of this first event or its deferral that forms the basis of traumatic experience. In Joreige and Hadjithomas's case, the latency they discuss corresponds more to Abraham and Torok's theories, which do not associate latency and trauma with libidinal experience. Abraham and Torok, instead, explore the psychic consequences of treating an event like it never happened— an issue that echoes with the reality that Joreige and Hadjithomas diagnose and respond to.

camera shots often include characters staring blankly into the screen, or moving about their days

in a slow paced motion. This stuckness is a dominant characteristic of the postwar present that

the directors represent and it is linked to the stifling of the past that the films evoke through their

preoccupation with the undead. More than this, however, the stuckness is a result of the

confrontation between an unresolved past and the adamant desire to propel the country forward

into the global economy.

Reconstruction is one orientation in which Joreige and Hadgithomas and Salhab expose

the forward-looking initiatives of the country. Reconstruction is frequently figured as an

intrusive force in both films: not only forming much of the background against which events in

the city unfold, but also actively intervening in scenes, often dominating the visual and audible

frame. In one of the first shots of *A Perfect Day*, for instance, the camera shifts between different

frames of the Beiruti landscape. The images expose clusters of buildings crowded together

against a disappearing green landscape as well as emerging high rises looming tall next to

towering cranes. As the camera moves between these various images, sounds of drilling,

hammering, and clanking are heard. Reconstruction, therefore, dominates the sensory frame of

Beirut that these directors represent. Malek, an engineer, is then filmed surveying a construction

site and discussing the details of the site with one of the foreman, but their conversation is

eventually muffled by the resounding noises of construction. Salhab uses a similar technique in

Terra Incognita, which also portrays reconstruction as an intrusive and domineering force in

Beirut. As Soraya and Leila stroll down the street, the sounds of reconstruction are clamorous.

Leila then notices that Nadim's name appears as one of the architects of a new building. The

camera shifts to a low-angle shot of the building—a towering and bland structure that takes up

most of the frame. Soraya and Leila stare up at the building before Soraya angrily marches

across the street and demands to borrow a stranger's phone to call Nadim. "Listen to me well,"

she barks at Nadim through the phone, "I'm standing in front of one these fucked up buildings

that are being newly built. Your name is on it. They posted it for you on a nice, fancy sign…" As

she continues to pace and rant at Nadim, her voice is eventually completely drowned by the

deafening sound of drilling. Here, once again, reconstruction is figured as a hostile force,

imposing on the characters' everyday lives.

The kind of impasse distinguishing the postwar structure of feeling that each of the films

depicts ultimately contributes to a mood of disempowerment that the persistence of corrupt

power and the endurance of a politically volatile climate create. In both *Terra Incognita* and *A*

Perfect Day, the characters are represented as spectators to the developments taking place around

them. Through various ambient gestures, the films situate their accounts of everyday life in a

turbulent context that seems strangely removed from the lives of the characters. In *Terra*

Incognita, the radio announcer best exemplifies this removal as he recites the daily news that

forms the background of many of the film's scenes. The news often relays the ongoing conflict

between Israel and Lebanon or issues like immigration that both gesture towards a context still

grappling with unresolved tensions. Salhab films the announcer going about his daily routine,

jogging along the corniche (pedway along the sea in Beirut), buying fruit, and having dinner

alone. In this sense, the disembodied voice of the news becomes embodied in this mysterious,

lonesome character. He is the only character that is not connected to the rest of the group,

signifying the extent to which the tumultuous news that he personifies is detached from the lives

of the other characters. Similarly, in *A Perfect Day*, the radio is employed as a vehicle through

which the directors gesture towards an external and turbulent context. The radio is always on in

Malek's car as the news switches from announcements about people demonstrating against the

country's unfair economic policies, to a football championship that Lebanon is on the brink of winning. The radio, then, which is rarely acknowledged in both films, is a sensory tool that the directors use to show how crisis becomes registered within the confines of the quotidian. As characters go about their daily lives, the radio mediates a sense of unrest, invoking how the burden of present violence and the specter of future conflict hangs over the country and the ways in which the characters affectively negotiate this uncertainty. In *Terra Incognita,* this specter is further evoked through the representation of sonic booms that Israel implemented as a form of psychological warfare across Lebanon. The sound from the sonic booms is reminiscent of a bomb going off, so it is a triggering reminder of the civil war, poignantly representing and embodying the ways in which sounds of the past operate in the present. It is also an audible reminder of the Israeli occupation that still looms on in the South of Lebanon. Characters are often un-phased by these sounds, either briefly looking up at the sky or ignoring the noise completely. One fruit vendor responds humorously, saying, "At least they didn't forget about us," referring to the Israeli aircrafts.

Characters are unmoved and numbed as the news becomes a nuisance instead of a source of concern in the rare moments when it is acknowledged. The two times, for instance, that characters acknowledge the radio news in *Terra Incognita,* they bemoan how they are sick of the constant outbursts of violence that erupt around the country. The characters, then, are spectators to the larger events around them, unable to affect any change and so they plummet into indulgent and excessive behavior. By representing the characters as spectators, the films do not imply a kind of innocence that other representations of the civil war do.[61] Instead, the kind of apathy with which the characters live their lives expose how ties to their context have been severed or strained by the various forces at play in the postwar era. The films, then, do not romanticize

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[61] See for instance *West Beyrouth (1998), Where do we go from here? (2011), and Zozo* (2005).

Lebanese citizenship as they uncover how the characters are complicit in the indulgent and often escapist trends characterizing the country.

The characters, therefore, are not represented as active agents in the country they exist in. Instead, the films use these characters as vehicles through which to take viewers through everyday life in the damaged city with all of its affective connotations. As Malek drives aimlessly throughout the city, point of view camera shots are crowded with views of honking cars and life size posters of pop stars advertising Pepsi cans. He makes his way though packed nightclubs swarming with youth smoking excessively[62] and swaying to the sounds of pop songs and techno beats. In *Terra Incognita*, as characters roam the city, the intertwining sounds of Muslim calls to prayers and church choirs resonate in a paradoxical reverberation as the camera glides across a gritty Beirut landscape. The sensory spectrum is mobilized here to throw the idea of "post-war" into doubt. This doubt is achieved not by explicitly relaying the conflict, but by evoking the various tensions and contradictions making up the heart of the city.

The unresolved nature of past and present conflicts exists on the periphery of the film, pressing up against the unfolding of the mundane and the everyday. In the final sequence of *Terra Incognita*, a bitter ex-lover physically attacks Soraya. This attack, however, does not occur within the camera's frame and only becomes obvious in the final shot of the film, as Soraya strides past one of the ever unfolding reconstruction sites, her face bruised and swollen from the blows she endured. The actual scene of violence occurs on the periphery of the camera frame, echoing the ways that past and present violence are suppressed and unacknowledged in post-civil

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[62] In the preface to Samir Khalaf's *Lebanon Adrift*, Ghassan Hage has an interesting analysis about the extreme prevalence of smoking in Lebanon, which he argues reflects a kind of "let it be" attitude. He reads this attitude as having a "regressive, infantile nature," which reveals a "desire for withdrawal and immunization from the social," or a retreat back into the womb (9). Smoking, he observes, is connected to sucking, which "in psychoanalytic terms, is itself symbolic of a desire to return to the womb" (9).

war Beirut. Soraya's wounds, however, render the presence of violence undeniable as they are significantly juxtaposed against the forward pull of reconstruction.

The forward pull of the political elite to modernize Lebanon without catering to the wounds of an ugly past plays out in these films through striking juxtapositions that the directors construct. In both these films, moreover, the country is ridden with images representing a forthcoming Lebanon and by commercial advertisements that gesture towards a sense of futurity.[63] But alongside these desperate and superficial attempts to imagine a modernized future, a reality of decay musters within the city.

A Perfect Day, for instance, inserts lingering images of decay and neglect in order to play out the affective reality of living in a nation that has not yet recovered— that is still marked by festering scars and unhealed wounds. As Malek walks past concrete walls plastered with cheap posters of pop stars, he crosses an entrance of an abandoned building with a sign warning no entry, as the structure is on the brink of collapse. Reconstruction plagues the city and new luxury buildings emerge, either towering over old ones or, as this shot relays, leaving them to tumble in decay. In the new Beirut, old wounds are not catered to; they are abandoned and left to rot while a shallow and glossy layer forms in a desperate attempt to mask the hideousness. In the lawyer's waiting room, Claudia flips through pages of Mondalite Magazine, covered with pictures of made-up socialites, beauty pageants, and elite societal events—images of fleeting significance that she quickly tires of and that Khatib argues mirror the fakeness of Lebanon after the war (75). A pacing Malek then turns his attention to a vase on the counter—an image on which the camera

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[63] For more about how consumerism and commericialization become essential features of postwar Lebanon, see Samir Khalaf's "Consumerism in a Traumatized Society" in *Lebanon Adrift: From Battleground to Playground*. I should note here that while Khalaf makes noteworthy observations about the state of postwar Lebanon, his tone and descriptions of Lebanese people are extremely moralizing and condescending. While his observations about the presence of excess and indulgence in Lebanese society are not incorrect, his framing discloses a troubling disdain for his society as well as an irritating sense of superiority. It is for this reason that, despite the relevance of his work to the kind of realities the films depict, I have refrained from referencing his work more explicitly above.

lingers: dead, wilted sunflowers flowers that gesture towards the sense of neglect and deterioration that characterizes the psychic state of the nation. This juxtaposition that the directors visually map out—between the superficial glossiness sprawled out across the pages of Mondalite magazine and the abandoned decayed flowers—works to intervene in the indulgent present in which the film unfolds. Similarly, in *Terra Incognita*, as the camera transitions smoothly from a church choir group rehearsing to Soraya waking up in her bedroom to the sound of a sonic boom, she looks up at the peeling paint on her ceiling—flaking due to the moisture created by bad pipes. The camera pauses on this image of neglect and encroaching deterioration, the sounds of the city gently playing in the background. These images of degeneration are scattered throughout both films, visually evoking a sort of waning affective state that corresponds to the aesthetic of stuckness that the directors represent.

In postwar Beirut, then, the forces from the past encounter a wholesale embrace of neoliberalism and commercialism to create a kind of affective impasse that plays out either in depressed apathy or excessive indulgence. Gordon reminds us that the case of the ghost is "often a case of inarticulate experiences, of symptoms and screen memories, of spiraling affects, of more than one story at a time, of the traffic in domains of experience that are anything but transparent and referential" (25). Her description of ghostly matters here resonates with the affective quality that comes across in *Terra Incognita* and *A Perfect Day,* as each attempts to capture the various flows and circulations that characterize everyday life in postwar Beirut, without reducing it to a flattened out representation. The films present a nuanced critique of how larger frameworks of power work to disempower Lebanese citizens, without exonerating or victimizing their characters. As the films make clear, Lebanon's past is one force coming up against the impulses and violences of traumatized modernity.

Chapter Three: Ordinary Affects: Nostalgia and Belonging in Postwar Lebanon

"*This* lighthouse is the main beacon, the *real* one. It's been here for 200 years, and just like that, with a strike of a pen, it becomes irrelevant?!" Victor Shibli, Beirut's lighthouse keeper, asks this question from the corner of the filmic frame, as the camera looks down on him and the giant lighthouse lantern that is now turned off, no longer in use. Shibli here mourns the old black and white lighthouse that had been in his family for generations, and that had recently been replaced by a newer one built a few kilometers away. His story is only one of the oral histories that Mahmoud Hojeij collects for his documentary *Memories for Ras Beirut: Wish You Were Here*, yet his sentiment characterizes the general tenor of the piece: the new is not as good as the old. Whether it is the local barber who laments how no one greets each other the way they used to, or the mourning of space lost due to hasty urban development, or even the remembering of coexistence and religious indifference before bloody sectarian strife took over, the memories in Hojeij's documentary are teeming with nostalgia for a better time. His piece, then, paints a picture of a romanticized prewar Ras Beirut—the part of the city that is often associated with the "Golden Age" of Lebanon, when coffee shops were bustling with intellectual activity and the city was brimming with vigour and possibility.[64]

The documentary begins with the sea, filmed from the edge of a fishing boat that is slowly making its way to the coast lined with buildings and the two lighthouses in faint sight. The sea, as sociology Professor Samir Khalaf shortly explains, is fundamental to Ras Beirut's identity as a "metaphor of expansion and horizons." The sea is essential to Ras Beirut's symbolic identity as a city of cultural diversity and it frames the oral histories that Hojeij includes in his

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[64] For an account of the narratives of exceptionalism that surround Ras Beirut, see Maria Abunnaser's doctoral dissertation: "The Making of Ras Beirut: A Landscape of Memory for Narratives of Exceptionalism, 1870-1975."

documentary. The consensus, however, seems to be that the essence of the city, which the sea represents to some degree, has been eroded. Some of this nostalgia is tied to the general lamentation of modernity—as Economics Professor Samir Makdisi observes, a Mcdonald's now "unfortunately" stands where the local restaurant *Faysal's* used to host young activists and students heatedly debating political issues. In the main nostalgic narrative that this documentary seems to tell, however, the civil war is figured as the violent and unsolicited force that disrupted the progress of a flourishing city. In the closing shots of the documentary, as historian Kamal Salibi recites a passage from his book, *Crossroads to Civil War, Lebanon 1958-1976*, the sea is filmed once again from the edge of a small, blue fishing boat; this time, however, the camera lingers on an empty plastic carton, mouldy and floating aimlessly in the undulating murky waters. At the heart of Hojeij's documentary, then, is a lamentation for the possibilities that Beirut once seemed to carry before the civil war barged in as an unwelcome visitor. Importantly, however, this lamentation is simultaneously bound up with a sense of pride and affection that the interviewees express through their nostalgic narratives of Ras Beirut.

I begin this chapter with a description of Hojeij's documentary because I am interested in precisely those stories that we tell that articulate some sort of positive relationship to a postwar nation. My main observation is that nostalgia is fundamental to these articulations. Often in memory studies, we are focused on the effectiveness or limitations of certain remembrance practices—an issue that we must undoubtedly continue to pursue as responsible critics of power and capital. In doing so, however, we must be careful not to completely invalidate the narratives that people develop out of a need to subsume painful pasts into some kind of livable existence. It is important to engage with those narratives, which emerge out of a need to sustain a positive relationship to the national collectivity, in order to better understand the structures of belonging

in a place imbued with traumatic histories. Here I have to resist my instinct, for instance, to

critique the narratives of exceptionalism within Hojeij's documentary that detach Ras Beirut

from the violence that eventually enfolded the entire country. Generally speaking,

romanticization of the past does not necessarily result in a critical confrontation with the forces

that lead to protracted violence. Such a critique, however, while necessary, also seems to

invalidate the nostalgic registers that characterize so much remembrance in Lebanon without

necessarily thinking about the appeals of such remembrance or how these forms of remembering

become sutured to, not just the stories we tell about a place, but to the stories we tell about

ourselves and our place in the world. In other words, we need to take seriously nostalgia as an

affective register deeply implicated in the ordinary as a site in which loss and trauma are

negotiated. My attention to nostalgia in this chapter is an attempt to think through the accounts

about the past that we develop as a way of negotiating belonging in the face of collective loss. As

Berlant explains, "It is like mourning at a funeral: you can't judge people's styles of living with

loss in the middle of a situation where loss might be all there is even though one is living on and

not dead" (Helms and Vishmidt).

Nostalgic Registers in Lebanon

Khalil Joreige and Joanna Hadjithomas observe that, in the postwar period, "the

mythified and nostalgic past of Beirut—the pre-war period" (Latency" 40), was a dominant

image in the collective visual landscape. In this chapter, I aim to unpack this nostalgic register

across a multiplicity of contexts to make a number of related claims about nostalgia's place

within the postwar affective landscape. The first context that I analyze is what I describe as a

nostalgic façade in which nostalgia serves as an empty placeholder or a convenient ingredient for

opportunistic, market-driven incentives. As I discuss, this sort of capitalization on nostalgia often

serves as the basis for cynicism about nostalgic sentiment in the Lebanese context. My primary

claim here, however, is that while nostalgia is fundamental to the way power operates as a top

down structure, it is also embedded within a more diffuse network of public narratives and

discourses. In this sense, I invoke nostalgia as an *ordinary affect* that emerges in "disparate

scenes and incommensurate forms and registers…[as a] tangle of potential connections"

(Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* 6).

In this vein, I then turn to the nostalgia that circulates widely in popular culture to

understand the appeal such understandings of the past possess. Here I am interested in thinking

about nostalgia as an affective attachment to a specific type of national belonging that is readily

consumed. In this sense, I interrogate the various structures of nostalgic yearnings in popular

culture that contribute to a commodifiable national identity and that become essential to

articulations of national belonging. I explore how certain narratives garner popularity and

become exemplars of a nation-defining project—however contentious and incoherent such a

project is in the first place. Building on this section, I turn to works that are characterized by a

complicated relationship to nostalgia. I look particularly at literary texts here that seem critical of

nostalgic tendencies, yet fall into their own forms of affective yearnings. I argue that it is through

this ambivalence that these works summon alternative modes of national belonging.

By exploring nostalgia across a diverse range of narratives, I show how it functions as an

affective negotiation that is central for subsuming the memory of the civil war into the ordinary,

which "unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming" (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 10).

Through my attention to a wider range of cultural products, moreover, I aim to invoke Kathleen

Stewart's observation that "Nostalgia, like the economy it runs with, is everywhere" ("Nostalgia"

227). Stewart argues that nostalgia is never a "given content" (227); rather, nostalgia's "forms, meanings and effects shift with the context it depends on [and] where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present" (227). In this respect, nostalgia acts as an affective frame through which the civil war is given meaning in the postwar present. My understanding of nostalgia as a lens or frame through which to view the past is influenced by Susannah Radstone's argument that nostalgia must be understood as "an intermediate or transitional phenomenon…[which is] best approached…not as an end-point or theoretical home-coming but as a point of departure…" (189). In this connection, nostalgia open us up to questions about the production of knowledge and its relationship to the various orientations and politics that nostalgic memory "condenses" (Radstone 189).

To some extent, this reading of nostalgic narratives can be thought of as reparative. Here I have in mind Eve Sedgwick's famous critique of paranoid reading in which she calls for a turn to reparative reading that would offset the close-endedness of the paranoid position in which we locate texts and objects of analyses within a closed circuit of power.[65] By contrast, reparative reading approaches objects not from a hermeneutics of suspicion but one of love and allows us to see the "ways in which selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" ("Paranoid Reading" 31). In this sense, instead of reading certain texts or cultural objects for their complicity in perpetuating ideology, reparative reading would take seriously the "powerful emotional experience [these] texts provide for its consumers" (Ronda 5). My inclination to engage with nostalgia as an affective negotiation and to read popular nostalgic texts beyond

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[65] Sedgwick's distinctions here are influenced largely by Melanie Klein's articulation of the paranoid/schizoid position and the depressive position. Unlike the paranoid position that is characterized by a "terrible alertness to the dangers posed by…the world around" (7), the depressive or reparative position seeks to repair "the murderous part-objects into something like a whole" (7).

evidence of their ideological complicity, can be thought of as reparative only so far as reparative

reading removes us from the binary mode of conceptualizing texts either as "trangressive or

ideologically complicit" (Ronda 5) or "progressive or reactionary" (Cvetkovich 462). I do not

seek to ignore, for instance, how certain stories are allowed visibility in the Lebanese public

sphere as a means of obscuring the injustices of the present—for instance, the fact that warlords

during the civil war still occupy major positions of power in the postwar era.

Generally speaking, most scholars who evoke nostalgia in the Lebanese context view it as

a regressive sentiment that is incompatible with responsible memory politics (Haugbolle, *War*

and Memory) (S. Makdisi, "Beirut") (Aghacy, "Lebanese Women's Fiction). This sort of

evaluation is understandable given the absence of an official historical narrative about the civil

war. In this sense, nostalgic understandings of the past are seen as escapist attempts to sanitize

history. I do not of course deny the problematic ways in which nostalgia has been mobilized in

the interest of upholding asymmetrical power relations—an idea that I will return to—but I

maintain that dismissing nostalgia because of its "inauthentic" nature also misses something

crucial about the extent to which representations of the past are filtered through *present*

preoccupations. I am not interested, then, in condemning certain post-war narratives as

counterproductive or uncritical; rather I am invested in thinking about these styles in terms of

their circulation within a larger economy of affective negotiations that unfold as a reaction to

loss in a modernity infused with its own injustices. In this regard, my approach can be read as

oscillating between the paranoid and reparative approaches.[66]

In order to better understand the dynamics of this affective landscape, I begin with a

theoretical overview of nostalgia to delineate how I am conceiving of it in this chapter. Scholarly

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[66] For more on how reparative and paranoid reading approaches are implicated in one another, see Robyn Wiegman's "The Times We're In" and Heather Love's "Truth and Consequences."

discourse surrounding this concept has often been polarized between those who critique it on the basis of its inauthenticity and those who attempt to redeem it for its transformative potential. It is necessary for me, then, to articulate my own investments in the concept within these debates. In these instances, I am not necessarily interested in making an argument about the inherent valuableness or unproductivity of nostalgia; rather, I am invested in how it operates in specific cultural contexts. Next, I move to a discussion of nostalgia within the Lebanese context, that I discussed above, tracking the various ways in which nostalgia operates in the public sphere as well as how it informs popular cultural productions, like the work of popular singer Fairouz and Ziad Doueiry's film *West Beyrouth*. In this section, I am interested in revealing how national belonging is largely articulated as an expression of loss. I end with a discussion of novels, namely Rashid Al Daif's *Dear Mr. Kawabata* and Hanan Al Shaykh's *Beirut Blues*, which express an ambivalent relationship to nostalgia or exist on the periphery of these nostalgic discourses that have become so essential to the articulation of national belonging. This ambivalence is shaped by the internal contradiction between an affective yearning for home and a refutation of the place that has inflicted so much pain. It is through this ambivalence, I argue, that a new form of national belonging emerges, one that refuses both the amnesiac narratives of the postwar state and a diasporic existence that would perpetually secure home as a thing of the past.

The Theoretical Dimensions of Nostalgia

Although nostalgia currently signifies a complex constellation of yearnings that have both spatial and temporal connotations, the concept of nostalgia first emerged as a symptom of increased travel. The Swiss physician Johannes Hofer first coined the term nostalgia (literally

meaning 'longing to return home') to describe the affliction that struck Swiss mercenaries in the French army "who longed to return to their Alpine villages" (Cross). Eventually, nostalgia developed conceptually from its pathological individualistic origins to a more "historical emotion," as Svetlana Boym puts it. Boym traces the emergence of nostalgia as a historical emotion to the Romantic era and the birth of mass culture. More specifically, Boym associates nostalgia with the "rapid pace of modernity and industrialization [that] increased the intensity of people's longing for the slower rhythms of the past, for social cohesion and tradition" (16).[67] Nostalgia, then, is typically regarded as an affective symptom of modernity in which an "adoration of the past…triumphs over lamentations for the present (F. Davis 448). Fred Davis argues that the nostalgic experience always "encompass[es] some necessary inner dialogue between past *and* present," (448), yet the two sides of the dialogue are never equal as the conversation is always destined to conclude "the superiority of times and things past" (448).[68] Due to this form of idealization, nostalgia has often been denounced in scholarly discourse as a self-indulgent obstacle to responsible historicization.

According to critics of nostalgia, it is a concept associated with a romanticization of the past and it has the tendency to obfuscate inequities, transgressions and difference. In much academic discourse, nostalgia is viewed as "the illness of excess sentimentality, or inauthentic longing, that must be cured" (Dames 272). As Boym acknowledges, after all, nostalgia "too easily mates with banality" (339) and can often evoke a singular version of national identity that may have dangerous implications. Additionally, many view nostalgia with apprehension because

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[67] For more on the relationship between modernity and nostalgia, see the Tammy Clewell's edited collection *Modernism and Nostalgia: Bodies, Locations, Aesthetics*. For a perspective of how nostalgia exceeds modernist boundaries, see Alastair Bonnet's *The Geography of Nostalgia: Global and Local Perspectives on Modernity and Loss*.

[68] F. Davis here points out that there are two aspects of nostalgic experience that help us understand its "relationship to society at large." Primarily, nostalgia arises out of "a perceived threat in identity discontinuity" and, secondly, it plays a role in "engendering *collective* identities among people generally, but most especially among members of the 'the same generation" (448).

they see it as a kind of succumbing to "a fairytale or illusion" that ultimately distracts them from

the "pressing problems of the current moment" (Outka 253). This view is based on the

assumption that nostalgia is fundamentally opposed to veridical historical discourse. Most

notable is Frederick Jameson's critique of what he calls a postmodernist nostalgia that he deems

incompatible with "genuine historicity" (19). Jameson characterizes the "nostalgia mode" as a

regressive sort of perspective (156) that reduces the past to a shallow emphasis on style and

glossy or lavish images.[69] Jameson's critique resonates with many other concerns about how

nostalgia frames shallow representations of the past. Margaret Farrar acknowledges how

nostalgia often coincides with market-based incentives that capitalize on a selective imagination

of the past. Farrar here refers to the developers, city planners, and architects that "claim to

resurrect lost places or provide sites of manufactured community" (729). In these instances,

nostalgia is capitalized on to reduce the past to a stylistic interpretation or to evoke a sense of

history that encourages identification with an exclusively elite way of life.

Scholars, then, have frequently described nostalgia as a trivialized and overly sentimental

version of historical imagination. Despite these criticisms, however, there have been attempts

throughout scholarly discourse to salvage nostalgia from its infamous reputation. Svetlana Boym

finds a way around these tensions by dividing nostalgia into two categories: what she calls

restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia focuses on a return to origins

and is associated with those regressive and uncritical forms of nostalgia that may produce an

exclusive form of nationalism that attempts to "rebuild one homeland with paranoiac

determination" (354). Her way of salvaging the concept is to differentiate this regressive

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[69] Some critics have pointed out that despite Jameson's dismissal of nostalgia, he himself falls into nostalgic tendencies. Of course, Jameson here is discussing a particular kind of engagement with the past that flattens out historic nuance, so his arguments should not be dismissed just because there are other forms of nostalgia that might be more beneficiary.

restorative nostalgia from *reflexive* nostalgia that is based on the "imperfect process of

remembrance" (41). Reflective nostalgia here does not conceive of the past in nationalistic terms

and is instead rooted more in individual and cultural memory. It is a type of memory that

"savours details and memorial signs" (49), as opposed to symbols and tradition. While

restorative nostalgia attempts to construct a wholesome narrative about the past, reflective

nostalgia "cherishes shattered fragments of memory" (49) and reveals how "longing and critical

thinking are not opposed to one another" (49). Through establishing this type of dichotomy

Boym lays the groundwork for thinking about how nostalgia can be resuscitated as an effective

force while also acknowledging the extent to which narratives steeped in nostalgia can embody

or be coopted for hegemonic or non-inclusive means.

Similarly, in her exploration of the relationship between modernity and nostalgia, Tammy

Clewell notes that while nostalgic forms of memory may be inclined to idealize and romanticize

the past, nostalgia also has the capacity to "expose the mechanized brutalities, social inequities,

dizzying effects of technological change, [and] the spiritual emptiness of the age" (3). These

arguments reflect Alastair Bonnet's observation that "nostalgia has the power to question and

challenge our categories and this is also true of our notions of left and right, progressive and

reactionary" (16). According to Bonnet, "one of the most interesting things nostalgia does from a

political point of view is to mess up these kinds of demarcations" (16). To reclaim or denounce

nostalgia, then, is an attempt to "corral it within narrow political parameters" (16) and thus to

ignore the wider scope and more pervasive terrain of the nostalgic imagination.

Inherent to nostalgia is a certain type of comparison or dialogue, to bring up F. Davis

again, between the present and the past. My intention, however, in thinking about nostalgia is to

move away from attempts to determine the essence of the concept (what nostalgia *is*), and

instead to think about how nostalgia operates in a multitude of contexts—what Nicholas Dames calls "the complex emplotment of nostalgic yearning in discrete historical and political circumstances" (270). Here Dames argues that if we are to gain anything from the study of specific nostalgias, we must move past conclusions about the concept's inauthenticity and instead consider how nostalgia *functions* in a particular cultural context.

As I discussed above, I evoke nostalgia as a largely *affective* frame of memory. My evocation of nostalgia's affective quality should not be mistaken for those attempts to situate nostalgia within a new materialist understanding of affect. I have in mind here theorists like Jennifer Kitson and Kevin McHugh who explain nostalgia as "an enchantment with distance, a felt encounter that engenders practices of nearness" (490). Kitson and McHugh's conceptualization of nostalgia seeks to think about nostalgia as an affective response that is "anterior to conscious meaning" (489). In this sense they situate their theories within the project of new materialism that is based on the idea that "all materialities have agency and the capacity to affect" (489). In doing so, they remove nostalgia from any context of specificity to explain it as a sensory experience not necessarily rooted in any certain representation of or longing for the past. Nostalgia, they assert, "is less about time (a specific history) and more about diffuse longing—less about home (a specific geography) and more about cultivating sensual environs (pastness)" (488). These types of theorizations result in a very depoliticized understanding of nostalgia that does not take into account how nostalgias are often shaped by historical and sociopolitical forces. Kitson and McHugh distance themselves from debates about nostalgia's uses for progressive or revisionist politics by focusing on nostalgia as a pre-signifying sensual experience. While I, too, do not attempt to make conclusions about the inherently regressive/effective forces of nostalgia, the wilful disregard of these tensions ignores how

nostalgia fundamentally shapes political life. My evocation of nostalgia as an affective frame relies on Ball's articulation of affect as "differing degrees of intra- and intersubjective reactivity to and investment in ideational or external sources" ("Tales of Affect" 182). Unlike Kitson and McHugh's understanding of affect as a pre-ideological force that does away with any notion of the subject, Ball's definition makes space for conceptualizing affect within a discursive context and a larger field of political and cultural relations. More specifically, by conveying affect in terms of reactivity to or investments in ideational or external sources, Ball allows us to think about nostalgia, on the one hand, as a collective or individual investment in certain images or ideas about the past that are invoked as part of an attachment to a national ideal. On the other hand, her articulation provides a framework for thinking about nostalgia as a reaction to the disappointments of modernity that contribute to the idealization of a former moment.

A Nostalgic Façade

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, most scholars who discuss nostalgia in the Lebanese postwar context treat it as a regressive sentiment that interferes with effective memory practices. In the 1990s in the wake of the civil war, nostalgia was central to conversations and debates about war memory and reconstruction (Haugbolle, *War and Memory* 96). Those who resisted the amnesia that underlined Solidere's reconstruction policies were critical of the nostalgia for prewar Lebanon that the government mobilized through their reconstruction efforts. More specifically, Solidere's promotional plans highlighted their attempt to "recapture the spirit of Beirut in the 60s when…it was known as the Paris of the Middle East (for its sophistication) and little Lebanon was the Switzerland of the Middle East (for its mountains and banks)" (Fricke 171). This sort of appeal to Beirut's prewar glory days is prevalent in postwar Lebanon and is

one of the reasons in which any type of nostalgia for a former Lebanon is often admonished by those who rightfully bemoan the state's refusal to engage with the country's recent past. Saree Makdisi, for instance, observes how visitors of modern day Beirut will find it nearly impossible to locate postcards that depict Beirut in its current state. Instead, visitors "can find dozens of cards showing the city in its former glory, presenting, for example, images of Martyr's Square bustling with cars and people in the 1950s, of the gleaming Phoenicia Hotel in its heyday in the 1960s, or of the crowded streets of the commercial center in the years before the war" (202). Visual representations of Beirut's prewar landscape occupy bookstores and magazine stands around the city, giving the sense that "Beirut has been frozen in time" (203). S. Makdisi here does not characterize these images as an expression of nostalgia or even amnesia. Instead, S. Makdisi describes the plethora of images documenting Beirut's prewar past as prosthetic devices that "do not so much rekindle collective memories of those lost times and places as much as take their place" (203). In a similar vein, it was not a particular nostalgic yearning for Beirut's golden days that shaped Solidere's market-driven incentives; rather, nostalgia served as a valuable sentiment to capitalize on and as a useful guise for softening the company's market-driven incentives. It is precisely this opportunistic use of memory—in which a selective imagination of the past is evoked to exacerbate asymmetrical modes of relationality—that forms the basis for much of the criticism of Lebanese nostalgia in academic discourse.

Asseel Sawalha is one scholar who observes how debates about heritage in Lebanon are often driven by a nostalgic desire to preserve and safeguard selective remnants of "authentic" or "traditional" practices while disregarding the people who engage in these lifestyles. Sawalha observes how conversations about heritage in Lebanon are often carried out by city-dwellers who express investment in "collecting, preserving, restoring, and replicating proverbs, songs, fables,

marriage traditions, and, interestingly, religious rituals" ("Reconstructing Heritage" 196) that are associated with rural people. Heritage, according to Sawalha, largely concerns the state and the elite of the country who aim to preserve cultural forms that they "frame as public property of the nation" (196) without much regard for the people from which these cultural forms originate. In her ethnography about a multi-confessional village in the mountainous Shouf-district of Lebanon, for instance, Anja Peleikis explains how in the postwar period, local municipal officers of the village became "agents of nostalgia for the sake of future-oriented local development policy" (142). In this way, Peleikis observes how the elite members of the municipality, whose memories of the village are confined only to childhood experiences, evoked a romanticized version of village life that was at odds with the experiences of those members of the community who have a more direct and embedded relationship with the village. Much like Solidere's capitalization on Beirut's former glory as a marketing strategy for its development plans, and as both Salwalha and Peliekis argue, the desire to preserve the past among governmental or business sectors in Lebanon is not about a particular longing; rather, "the past and the rural are valued as ingredients with which to shape [a] future Lebanon…that is integrated into global systems" (Sawalha 196).[70]

Susanne Abou Ghaida and Alia Al Zoughbi make a similar claim about the elite's mobilization of nostalgia in their account about "Golden Age" discourses in Beirut. They argue that established golden age narratives are mostly the product of an intellectual elite "who have the access and prestige to publish and distribute their versions of history" (380). Here they refer to those narratives that discuss a prewar Beirut[71] of the 1950s and 60s, "when the city was thriving economically and was the hub of Arab and foreign intellectuals" (380). Abou Ghaida

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[70] I should note here that Sawalha and Peleikis are careful to distinguish nostalgia as an expression of loss from the ways in which nostalgia becomes mobilized in service of the elite.
[71] Specifically Ras Beirut here, home of the American University of Beirut.

and Al Zoughbi insist, however, that oral histories in Beirut challenge this established narrative about Beirut's glory days. In this sense, the authors invite us to think about nostalgic expressions of history as multiple and varied. While, for example, the "Golden Age" narrative celebrates the urbanization of Beirut and its subsequent cosmopolitanism, some oral histories reveal a yearning for a rural Ras Beirut that was disrupted by processes of urban development. More surprisingly, they note that some oral narratives express a longing for the years of the civil war and "the social, economic, and political networks that helped them during [this time]" (Sawalha 190). This particular version of nostalgia is at odds with the established story that posits the civil war as a violent interruption to Beirut's golden years.[72]

While it is important, therefore, to recognize the extent to which nostalgic narratives often serve as a reflection of uneven social relations—if not a force in their perpetuation, I maintain that our conversations about nostalgia should go beyond the ways in which the elite mobilize it. In fact, it is precisely this *appeal* of nostalgia and its perceived value that make it a useful concept to investigate. Nostalgia is not merely a mechanism that the elite exploit to carry out practices or narratives that exclude the poor; the centrality of nostalgia to narratives within Lebanese popular culture, for instance, complicate the assertion or conception that nostalgia is largely an elitist sentiment that is capitalized on to carry out unjust social programs—this observation is especially pertinent when considering the accessibility of popular culture to the economically marginalized.

My attention to popular culture stems from my general interest in the everyday as a productive site through which to explore how the legacy of the war intersects with other social dynamics. As Mohamed Zayani explains in his account about Arab media studies, "seizing the full significance of everyday life requires eschewing the reductionist traditional understanding of

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[72] Ghassan Salhab's 1998 film, *Phantom Beirut*, is one cultural product that explores nostalgia for the civil war.

super-structural phenomena as a mere reflection of the economic base" (66). In this respect, an investment in the potential of the everyday as a site of elucidation requires us to go beyond an articulation of popular culture as evidence for the pervasiveness of repressive power structures. The everyday, in Zayani's Lefebvrian understanding of the concept, upends the distinction between "high-brow and low-brow or, more pointedly, between elite and popular culture" (66). It is my interest in the wide *consumption* and circulation of nostalgic narratives that motivates and structures my turn to popular culture. Such an attention eschews Muhammad Ayish's criticism of Arab literary criticism that is often "oblivious to central questions of cultural production and consumption beyond institutional frameworks" (91).

Nostalgia as Commodity in Popular Culture

In the following section, I focus mainly on the reception of Fairouz, a Lebanese singer who is lauded and celebrated as one of Lebanon's "national treasures," and Ziad Doueiry's commercially successful film *West Beyrouth*, as two examples from the cultural sphere whose popularity reveal significant insights about the affective negotiations of living with loss in the Lebanese context. The nostalgia present in the works of Fairouz and Doueiry is often intimately tied to an element of commodification that packages national identity as an easily consumable commodity, yet their works also uncover how the negotiation of national belonging in the Lebanese context regularly takes place across a nostalgic spectrum, as an expression of loss.

What I am interested in, then, is interrogating the affective registers that allow these works to garner such widespread popularity. In order to launch this discussion, I have to evoke the contentious term "*public*" here. I characterize this term as contentious because of the multiplicity that such a collectivizing concept has the potential of effacing. This issue is

especially tricky in the Lebanese context because of the various schisms that the public sphere is characterized by. These schisms exist sharply and explicitly across sectarian lines, but also quite sharply across class lines as well, as suggested by my discussion of the elite business of heritage making. When I discuss publics in this context, however, I am explicitly talking about Michael Warner's definition of a public that "comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulations" (66). Warner here argues that, "a public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself" (67). In thinking particularly about Doueiry and Fairouz and their popularity and wide circulation, I am concerned with making sense of the discourses they perpetuate and that a large segment of Lebanese people actively and readily consume. If we are thinking about publics that come into being in relation to texts, the popularity of Doueiry and Fairouz's works allow me to talk about a *national* public in a way that literary texts would not. Considering the dearth of public libraries in Lebanon, literary texts often circulate exclusively among the intellectual elite. Discussing popular culture, then, does not necessarily allow me to make generalizations; rather it permits me to think about the kinds of narratives of national belonging and identity that become cemented in the Lebanese public sphere. Here I am also thinking of consumer publics, to use Berlant's term, because of how these works circulate as commodities. These popular cultural artefacts that circulate in the public sphere ultimately "facilitate nostalgia as a way of feeling and thinking" (Pickering and Keightley 930).

I argue that Fairouz and Doueiry each mediate a form of Lebanese national identity that is easily exportable as a commodity because it expresses and shapes perceived conventions of belonging. I understand belonging here, as a "profoundly affective manner of being" (Probyn 13), that is "performed in the knowledge of the impossibility of ever really and truly belonging, along with the fear that the stability of belonging and the sanctity of belongings are forever past"

(8). Probyn's articulation is useful for thinking about belonging as an affective structure of longing that is shaped by its very impossibility. My intention in studying these popular cultural figures is not to condemn the inauthenticity of their works or their potential for the advancement or obstruction of critical memory practices. I acknowledge that to a large extent, through a certain romanticization, these works engage in amnesiac depictions of Lebanon. However, as Berlant reminds us, "national sentimentality is not about being right or logical but about maintaining an affective transaction with a world whose terms of recognition and reciprocity are being constantly struggled over and fine-tuned" (*The Female Complaint* xi). In this sense, Berlant invites us to take seriously those narratives or even fantasies, which may be obstructive to or inconsistent with our flourishing, yet to which we are affectively attached. Fairouz and Doueiry each employ nostalgia as a dominant affective mode that frames issues of belonging. The popularity of these works and their circulation within Lebanese commodity culture suggest a continued investment in exporting a particular type of Lebanese national identity regardless of whether or not it is at odds with empirical reality. In fact, as Berlant argues, "Ideological incoherence or attachment to contradictory ethics and ways of life is not a failure but a c*ondition* of mass belonging" (22 *my emphasis*).

Belonging as an Expression of Loss: Fairouz's Nostalgia

Berlant's argument is especially informative when thinking about the contradictory politics that shape Fairouz's productions. The widely acclaimed and deeply admired Lebanese singer, whose extensive body of work includes nearly 1,500 songs, 85 albums, and 20 musical plays, has been both "a champion of…the Palestinian cause…a siren for Jerusalem" and a voice that "helped to forge an elite Christian nationalism that pitted itself against the Palestinians and

other "Others' inside of Lebanon" (Stone 156). Despite these contradictory political expressions,

Fairouz is often figured as a symbolic force that transcends the narrow confines of politics. This

assessment is remarkably apparent in the outrage that unfolded after her son and manager, the

composer Ziad Rahbani, stated in an interview that Fairouz was a fan of Hassan Nasrallah, the

leader of political party Hezbollah. Khalid Majzoub, presenter of the Middle East Broadcasting

Centre, for instance, wrote an angry and well-circulated response to Rahbani. In his letter he

writes indignantly, "No one, not even you - the prodigal son - should even contemplate ensnaring

Fairouz in some daft political agenda!...She may be your biological mother, but she's a spiritual

idol to hundreds of millions of us!" Similarly, Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Progressive Socialist

Party declared that "Fairouz is too great to be criticized, and at the same time too great to be

classified as belonging to this or that political camp, or to this or that axis."[73] These comments

reveal not only the esteem that Fairouz holds in the Lebanese symbolic sphere, but also the

anxieties that manifest when Fairouz is taken from her position as a unifying force and brought

down to the divisiveness of Lebanese politics. Of course, this anxiety about maintaining

Fairouz's transcendent status disregards the contradictory politics that characterize her expansive

body of work.

Christopher Stone argues that it is the "fuzzy" nature of nostalgic recollection framing

her songs and performances that allowed her work to speak to various and conflicting

nationalisms (90). While all forms of recollection "involve a certain amount of uncertainty,"

Stone asserts that "nostalgic recollection is perhaps the fuzziest of all" (90) and hence able to

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[73] A similar kind of uproar, which I will discuss shortly, occurred when Fairouz was recruited to sing in 1994 at the opening of Solidere.

cater to contradictory politics.[74] I agree with Stone that the centrality of nostalgia to the Fairouz

project is essential in the perpetuation of her success, however I would also add that Fairouz's

resonance across conflicting nationalisms has less to do with the haziness of nostalgia and more

with the framework of belonging that her artistic project offers. The nostalgia that resonates

throughout Fairouz's music provides and operates as a space on and through which national

belongingness can be performed. In this respect, while the content of Fairouz's expansive project

may not be entirely coherent or inherently unifying, the manifestations and reception of her work

operate differently.

Stone attempts to deconstruct the unifying connotations of Fairouz, and how she becomes

a metaphor/metonym for the nation, by tracing the evolvement of her career from her

collaboration with the Rahbani brothers (her husband and brother-in-law) to her work with her

son, Ziad. As he observes, nostalgia figures into these collaborations quite significantly. Through

her initial collaborations with the Rahbani brothers, for example, Fairouz promoted nostalgia for

a rural and simpler version of Lebanon. In the 1960s, in particular, the Fairouz/Rahbani team and

their musical plays would become essential to cultivating a folkloric image of Lebanon that was

steeped in a romanticization and idealization of village life. These representations came in the

midst of internal and external migration, and so the longing nature of these early works found

deep resonance amid the desire for a stable sense of belonging in Lebanon. Stone argues that

these works showcased a narrow version of Lebanon that was "analogous to the Christian Mount

Lebanon village" (2). By extension, he argues that through their celebration of an exclusively

Christian version of Lebanese identity, the Rahbanis contributed to an exacerbation of sectarian

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[74] Stone here discusses songs like "Return me to my Country" ("Ridni ela biladi) and "We Shall Return One Day" ("sa-Narji'u yawman") that express a longing for a homeland that could apply to both Palestinians and the Lebanese diaspora. He observes, "One's longing for one's occupied land…could sound much like one's longing for a return to one's ancestral mountain village" (90).

tensions. This observation and intervention is undoubtedly valuable for thinking through the

extent to which the Rahbani project was potentially interpreted, mobilized, or even influenced

for and by sectarian bias; however, it also elides the manner in which Fairouz's popularity cuts

across sectarian lines *despite* these biases. Stone does acknowledge the contradictory ways in

which Fairouz is appropriated; however, his analysis is not concerned with explaining these

dissonances beyond the idea that the unclear and fuzzy nature of nostalgic sentiments can

accommodate conflicting positions. I would like to propose an alternative interpretation.

Despite any sectarian resonance in the early works of the Rahbanis, the 'folklorization' of

Lebanese culture, as Elise Salem calls it, was also essential in shifting the popular music scene

away from popular Egyptian works to a platform that celebrated Lebanese culture (Salem 73). In

this sense, by peppering their performances with "witty dialogue, colourful costumes, and

rousing dabke dance" (73), the Rahbanis "tapped into a yearning for a comforting image of the

country" (72). Prior to the 1960s, in the newly independent Lebanon, Egyptian works dominated

the musical and theatrical scenes, whereas festivals like the Baalbeck festival—which would

eventually become synonymous with the Rahbanis (Stone 13)—were focused solely on Western

productions. The Rahbanis dramatically altered this scene, so by celebrating a nostalgic version

of Lebanese identity—regardless of the incompatibility of this identity with lived experience—

the Rahbanis were still able to gain symbolic status by providing a common form of

entertainment that presented itself as exclusively Lebanese. In this respect, we can understand

the *consumption* of Fairouz's work as always, some extent, nostalgic. Salem eloquently notes

that, in the late 50s and early 60s, "The Rahbanis succeeded like no one else in *'turning on'* the

nation" (*my emphasis* 73)." In this way, Fairouz became essential to articulations of national

belonging, and thus, through these associations, her continued circulation and consumption

within Lebanese publics and the diaspora, is always structured and informed by a kind of

nostalgic relationship to the nation in which belonging is performed as an expression of loss.

These issues become especially telling when we consider her transition from working with the

Rahbani brothers to collaborating with her son, Ziad in the aftermath of the civil war.

While Fairouz chose not to sing during the long years of the civil war "for fear that her

appearance and voice would be exploited by various sides in the conflict" (Stone 163)— a fact

that undoubtedly contributed to her cementation as a unifying figure as well as her nostalgic

appeal—her son, Ziad, was a dominant voice throughout this period. Ziad produced several plays

during the war that explicitly sought to debunk the romanticized myths that had characterized his

parents' project. His plays were a huge success mostly because of their combination of humour

and cynicism that resonated with audiences in the lead up to and midst of the civil war.[75] The

success of Ziad's plays, moreover, is intimately tied to the centrality of the Lebanese dialect to

his humour. As Nada Elzeer notes, "Ziad Rahbani was a pioneer in directing Lebanese humour

towards the 'linguistic' and away from the 'situational'" (198). Elzeer here observes how

language and the manipulation of language become crucial sources in the production and

subsequent success of Ziad's humour. She argues convincingly that because the content of Ziad's

work is inextricably tied to his use of language, his plays are virtually untranslatable.[76] While

Ziad's work often explicitly distanced itself from his parents' project, to some degree, his plays

functioned in a similar manner to his parents' work. The plays' edgy and cynical commentaries

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[75] In 2015, one of Ziad's most popular plays, *Bil Nesbe la Bokra Shu (What about Tomorrow?)* was reproduced cinematically with new technology, using old footage from rehearsals and show nights. This feat not only revealed the enduring popularity of Ziad's work, but it was also ground-breaking as most Lebanese people had never actually seen the play. In the advertising trailer, the catchphrase was: "You've been listening to this play for more than 35 years"—now Lebanese audiences were being given the opportunity to watch it.
[76] Elzeer here argues that Ziad's plays are untranslatable according to the Benjaminian model of translation that "allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully" (Benjamin 79 qtd in Elzeer). The centrality of language to the content of Ziad's work renders the Benjaminian model the only viable translation paradigm, which is ultimately the same reason why translation here is impossible.

were aired on radio stations across the country and therefore offered a necessary form of

entertainment for wartime consumers whose mobility was restricted due to violence. More than

this, the plays' exclusively Lebanese humour functioned as an implicit celebration of Lebanese-

ness at a time when ties to the nation were severely strained. One of the comedic points in the

1978 play, "Bil Nesbe la Bokra Shu" ("What do we do about Tomorrow"), for example, is the

main character's inability to communicate with Western customers at his bar. While the

protagonist Zakariya's (played by Ziad) inability to speak a foreign language functions as a

hindrance in his economic progression, the character's relatability and centrality also work as

implicit celebrations of Lebanese identity, not in terms of grand or unifying narratives—but more

in the way that the play offers a platform to celebrate the familiar communicative modes and

humour that are exclusively Lebanese. Despite Ziad's own leftist political leanings, therefore, his

plays still found resonance among audiences across sectarian lines.

By the time that Ziad and Fairouz became a creative team, each had achieved well-

established symbolic status through their artistic platforms that promoted or encouraged a sense

of belonging that Lebanese publics could relate to. Fairouz's collaboration with Ziad did not

diminish her associations with national belonging; rather, these associations informed the success

of their partnership as well as signified a shift in what it meant to belong to Lebanon. The

popularity of Ziad's work as a cynical endeavour that parodied his parents' project[77] has to be

understood within the civil war context that rendered idealized narratives irrelevant. In this

regard, Ziad's success is also informed by a sense of loss. While Ziad's work rejected nostalgic

and romanticized visions of Lebanon, moreover, his partnership with Fairouz capitalized on and

participated in nostalgic commemorations of her as a national symbol. Despite the new music

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[77] Christopher Stone argues that the success of parody hinges on the thinness of the line between it and homage, a line which…Ziad would constantly cross" (94).

that he produced for her, which generally had her singing love songs in a more informal dialect as opposed to grand productions of national pride,[78] Ziad often framed her performances with older songs from her previous collaborations with the Rahbani brothers. Most controversially, as well, is Ziad and Fairouz's participation in the 1994 Solidere-sponsored concert in downtown Beirut. News of the concert was met with huge outcry from people who rejected Solidere's development plans. Ziad himself admitted that he agreed with these reservations, but was contractually obligated to comply (Stone 163). The concert, which marked Fairouz's first performance in fifteen years, was nevertheless a huge success with around 40,000 fans pouring in from various parts of the country.

As Stone argues, then, this second Fairouz project "expresses [and invites] nostalgia, not for the Lebanon envisioned by the Rahbanis in their folkloric musical-theatrical performances, but for the Lebanon which was the *context* for those performances" (*original emphasis* 174). I would add here that Fairouz's work with Ziad also responded to a new public mood in Lebanon in which glorifying folk culture no longer made sense, and so the shifting meanings that Fairouz produced also depended on shifts in public sentiment. While I find the framework of two different nostalgic projects useful, unlike Stone, I am not interested in criticizing the first nostalgic project on the basis of its inauthenticity. Rather than follow Stone's refrain throughout his book that the idealized depictions in early Rahbani productions never existed, I am interested in thinking about the sort of nostalgia being produced through Fairouz as a sentiment that shifts according to political and social landscapes and as one crucial mode through which belonging is continuously performed in the national public sphere. My concern, furthermore, with bringing up Fairouz in this chapter is to think of her not so much as a symbol or signifier for the nation, but

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[78] I should note here that some of the songs that Ziad produced for Fairouz were explicitly nostalgic. Most notably, for instance, is the song "Li Beirut" ('For Beirut'), written by Joseph Harb in which Fairouz laments the destruction of Beirut in the wake of the civil war.

as vehicle of affective attachment that indexes modes of national belonging. By extension, Fairouz and her music deliver a "punctum of affective recognition" (Berlant, *The Female Complaint* 271) that lends insight into the ways a public is shaped amid loss and increasing fragmentation and the way that one negotiates their relationship to said public.

The Yemeni artist, Ibi Ibrahim, offers a creative framework to think through the affective structures of belonging that Fairouz registers as a cultural figure, and particularly how those structures in some way are always severed and destabilized. Ibrahim's installation project "letters to fairouz', which he worked on during an art residency in Beirut in 2015, attempts to reconcile with Fairouz's iconic status in the country and more so with the kinds of attachments and associations that Fairouz evokes. The project compiles a series of letters addressed to Fairouz that Ibrahim collected from various Lebanese citizens and expatriates. In the initial presentation of the project, the letters were folded up and inserted amid barbed wire—a common sight in Lebanon, reminiscent of security breaches, violence, and the tumultuous, prickly conditions that Lebanese people constantly have to navigate—as Ibrahim recited some of the letters out loud. The use of barbed wire as a prop of sorts for the letters is a significant aesthetic choice that creates a contrast between the letters that evoke Fairouz as a kind of bond to home, and the jagged edges of barbed wire that serve as a reminder for how those ties are constantly undermined. For the final version of the project, Ibrahim ultimately composed a short video in which he and Lebanese artist Jean-Claude Boulos recite some of the letters against gentle sounds of crashing waves and black and white images and videos of Fairouz superimposed upon one another through double-exposure. The letters they recite are tender and affectionate and reveal how Fairouz evokes affective attachments that inform one's relationship to the nation as home: "Through you I reconnected with Lebanon;" one letter says, "I imagined it, reconceived it while

thinking where I fit in." Fairouz's music and her voice, "her aura like warm honey," offer an avenue through which people who have left the country can stay connected to it. These letters do not necessarily romanticize the nation; rather, their attachments to Fairouz imply a sense of loss for a better nation that she seems to represent: "You are what Lebanon could have been. What it should have been." In this respect, attachment to Fairouz as a sort of bond to the nation is an attachment that is always informed by a sense of loss. One letter asks her, "Where is the Lebanon that you sang and drew in your songs? The Lebanon that your voice made more and more beautiful. Where is it? Where is the real Lebanon? I am looking and I cannot find it." The "glory" of Fairouz is an assumption that underlies these letters and the project as a whole; but the letters also reveal a form of resignation about the limitations of Fairouz's project and the loss of possibility she was once perceived to embody. "I still love you," one of the letters tells her, "but the grandness with which I once saw you no longer stands. Where there was once pride there is now only affection, kept aflame by the warm glow of familiarity." In these utterances, the understanding that Fairouz's grandeur and transcendent status is limited does not preclude the attachment the writer feels towards her. This attachment is informed, instead, by *familiarity* as an affective experience that is fundamental to structures of belonging.

Nostalgia as Tourism in *West Beyrouth*

In an interview following the International Auto/Biography Association Conference at the University of Sussex in 2010, Berlant claims that, "in conditions of structural transition we are stuck in an imaginary impasse, living on while not knowing what to do, and developing accounts and practices of how to live" ("Life Writings" 183). Her work, then, incites us to consider the kinds of creative and affective negotiations that allow some notion of the collective

or social to unfold in the midst of fluctuating landscapes. In her own words, she invites us to think about the "multiple affective registers of collective life that keep people loosely knotted together…while the ground is shifting" (183). In the following section, I wish to reflect briefly on Ziad Doueiry's film *West Beyrouth* (1998) and its unprecedented local success as one way to think through how norms of national belonging were configured in the transitional post-civil war context. In this connection, we are "tracking mass-mediated norms of belonging in the affective register" (Berlant, *The Female Complaint* 22) to better understand the types of emotional attachments that inform a sense of the Lebanese national public. Here again I am speaking about a public as, "an imaginary world into which people enter without a high bar of self-consistency but with enormous needs to hammer out bearable and just principles of convergence" (Berlant, "Life Writings" 185). Conceiving of publics in this manner allows us to account for the emergence of narratives of collectivity as a kind of affective negotiation that maps out and charts different senses of belonging.

West Beyrouth is a semi-autobiographical account that portrays the early stages of the war and how it developed through the eyes of the teenager, Tarek and his two friends, Omar and May. In a light-hearted manner, *West Beyrouth* depicts how the young protagonists of the movie come to terms with the religious schisms that manifest in the division of their city, between the Christian East and the Muslim West. The story is largely concerned with portraying the civilian experience of the war and how everyday life was infiltrated and eroded by the civil conflict. Doueiry's film represents somewhat of a landmark in Lebanese cinema as it marked the first time a Lebanese film gained such a wide local viewership and received worldwide attention. As Lina Khatib argues, *West Beyrouth* marked the beginning of the "renaissance period" in Lebanese cinema because the film's commercial success opened the door for other Lebanese

filmmakers to make their films. Khatib cites, for instance, how one Lebanese distribution

company refused to release Lebanese films on DVD until the success of *West Beyrouth*. It was

also the first Lebanese film to be picked up by American distributors.

Two obvious reasons for the film's local success are its higher production standards,

which also employed a Western film aesthetic, and the film's use of Lebanese dialect and

humour. This latter point is especially significant considering how many Lebanese films and

television shows attempt to cater to different Arabic dialects, which results in an unnatural

sounding script. *West Beyrouth* is also heavily nostalgic, an aspect that I will unpack shortly.

This nostalgia is intimately bound up with a particular sort of commodification that is central to

the film's production. I argue, then, that in many ways, the local success of *West Beyrouth* is tied

to the fact that the film was made with a Western gaze in mind. As I will show, there is a

nostalgia that runs powerfully throughout the film and that informs a sense of Lebanese

belonging which resounded with local audience members; the resonance of this nostalgia,

however, has a lot to do with the way the film created a digestible version of Lebanese identity

that bode well with Western viewers. In this respect, the film showcased a *consumable* Lebanese

experience—which played on internal bias through dialect and humour, but that was ultimately

directed *outwards*. Khatib states, for instance, "watching *West Beyrouth* for the first time, I felt

proud" (*my emphasis* xv). The fact that Khatib feels *pride* here is very significant, because pride

is always bound up with issues of public presentation. In the postwar context, then, the film

offered an easily consumable framework of familiarity and identification—an *authentic* narrative

that was simultaneously palatable as a commodity for Western audiences through its positive

representation of Lebanon and its use of images and frames that would be recognizable in the

West. At the end of the film, for instance, a montage of documentary footage is presented with

the sombre tunes of Tarek's father's *oud*[79] playing in the background. The compilation of these

images primarily implicates foreign powers in the civil war. A young Yasser Arafat is shown

followed by an image of Beirut up in smoke and George Bush senior is depicted giving a speech

after which militia trucks drive by with a young Lebanese woman running after them in fury.

Doueiry also includes images of the former Syrian president Hafez el-Assad and a team of

soldiers with an American flag planted in front of them. While these images of foreign

intervention work to alleviate the Lebanese of responsibility for the war (an issue I will discuss

shortly), they also serve as familiar frames of reference that would be recognizable to Western

audiences. Mark Westmorland argues that the use of "televisual imagery and newsreel

footage…in Lebanese film" (41) is a reflexive technique responding to the hyper mediation of

the Lebanese conflict in Western media. In the west, he notes, "headlines about the conflict in

the Middle East dominate our understanding of this region" (41). To a large extent, therefore,

West Beyrouth is a response to how Beirut has been represented in international media, in the

sense that it aims to depict a more light-hearted version of the country that supplements

depictions of violences and horror inundating media images. Ultimately, then, the film's use of

universally familiar news footage to reference the civil war has to be understood as one

mechanism through which Doueiry's film is *outwardly* directed—an issue that is crucial for

grasping the nature of the film's success.

Miriam Rosen notes that when the Western viewer "become[s] a major factor in the

filmic equation" (36), "the director-as-guide is suddenly conducting an audience of tourists

through his or her culture" (40).[80] We can see this issue clearly throughout *West Beyrouth*'s

aesthetic. Tarek and his friends ride their bikes through the streets of Beirut against a background

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[79] A stringed instrument resembling a lute or mandolin.
[80] Rosen here is talking about foreign funding in particular. Doueiry himself relied on foreign funds to make his film, however, he has also stated that he made the film with an American audience in mind.

of hip disco soundtracks. They drift along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and through the

narrow alleyways of the city as the camera glides past charming storefronts. Tarek and May

stroll against a dynamic and colourful backdrop of vegetable markets and walls plastered with

political posters, with Tarek pausing to greet various community members, evoking that

nostalgia for effortless community that informs many golden age narratives about prewar Beirut.

He banters with Hassan, the old and hearty baker, with a sense of affectionate familiarity as the

camera lingers tenderly on a falafel wrap, the exported Middle Eastern sandwich so beloved and

familiar in the West. In these scenes, the filmic frame acts as a tour guide, directing viewers

through the charms and intimacies of the city. Similar to the nostalgia in *Memories of Ras Beirut*

that I discussed in the opening of this chapter, the civil war here is figured as an interruption to,

rather than an extension of, the glory of a vibrant and welcoming city.

In one of the pivotal scenes in Ziad Doueiry's *West Beyrouth,* in which Tarek

inadvertently finds himself in a brothel, the sarcastic and hefty owner, Oum Walid, teasingly

converses with him amid the music, clutter, and lively energy of the bar. She sits back with her

narguile and casts a longing look at the flirtatious scenes unfolding around her, lamentingly

proclaiming: "*rizk allah 'aa eyemek ya Beirut*" (a nostalgic expression bemoaning the past glory

days of the city). As she says this, the crescendoing sounds of the *nai*,[81] which had been playing

in the background, are joined by percussive beats and melodies to erupt into a lively harmony

that courses through the dancing and clapping bodies on screen. Oum Walid's nostalgic

declaration, then, is amplified by this musical culmination that transforms the mise-en-scene into

a celebratory party as swaying bodies crowd the camera's frame. To a large extent, this scene

represents the affective structures that inform Doueiry's film. Oum Walid's brothel is one of the

few places left in the city where divisions between "east" and "west" do not matter, and where

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[81] A flute like instrument that is the main wind instrument of the Middle East

the sounds of music drown out the noise of bombs. In this brothel, then, the nostalgia for a recognizable Beirut is bound up with the resilient celebratory and musical spirit that Beirutis pride themselves for. This form of representation not only showcases a vibrant and exotic side of Beirut, it also seeks to distance the inhabitants of Beirut from the turmoil of the civil war. The effectiveness of *West Beyrouth* as a remembrance practice, then, ultimately stems from its ability to alleviate the Lebanese of their complicity in the conflict. The movie does not dwell on the actual violence that took place during the civil war; rather, it portrays the Lebanese as victims instead of perpetrators. Scenes of nostalgia depict sectarianism as an external and invasive force that penetrates a blameless, liberal, and religiously indifferent society. The success of the film ultimately exemplified the need to construct a positive image of Lebanon that could alleviate the guilt and shame that the civil war left behind. In this regard, the film offered a framework of belonging that subsumed Lebanon's violent history under a more flattering image of resilience and exuberance.

After the dark years of war, *West Beyrouth* was a welcome and arguably necessary event that offered a means to make sense of the war and integrate it into a self-defining narrative that is simultaneously uplifting. In this way, the film confines the war to the past; as one Lebanese director puts it: *West Beyrouth* renders the war a souvenir or postcard (Salhab). It places the conflict in the rear-view mirror as opposed to confronting how it actively takes shape in the present. The use of footage from a super-8 camera in the opening and closing shots of the film works effectively to this end. The film's framing sequences are made up of choppy black and white scenes presented against the whirring sounds of the super-8 camera's motor, ultimately creating a documentary-like effect. As Mark Westmoreland observes, however, the "documentary integrity of the super-8 footage" is undermined in the first scenes of the film, as

the camera not only records its own sound, but "it has [also] somehow magically recorded its own presence as the viewer sees the super-8 camera through its own lens" ("Post-Orientalist Aesthetics" 40). According to Westmoreland, this contradictory self-referential technique "creates an effect of bearing witness, the feeling that one is given the embodied sense of not merely watching, but documenting the observable world" (40). Westmoreland's valuable observations and analysis here work to defend Doueiry's film against critics that dismiss the film as "uncritical" (40). In doing so, however, Westmoreland seems to overlook the ways in which such techniques actively contribute to a narrative that severs the past from any associations to the present. The black and white, amateur documentary footage serve as nostalgic devices that actively secure the past and distance it from the contemporary moment—an aspect of the film that undoubtedly contributed to its immense local success. In this sense, the film produces what Roger Simon calls frozen memory in which "the past is nothing but the past" (32). The grainy depictions that make up the opening and closing scenes of the film aesthetically archive this past and thus create a way to dissociate from the ways that it might still operate in the present.

Ultimately, Doueiry's film, along with Fairouz's body of work, reveals how nostalgia is fundamental to articulations of national belonging and to the shaping of a public sphere on a nation-wide level. In my final section, I wish to turn to texts that have garnered less popularity, but that offer a more ambivalent take on nostalgia. In these texts, nostalgia is looked upon suspiciously yet never fully avoided.

Ambivalent Nostalgia in *Dear Mr. Kawabata* and *Beirut Blues*

In this final section, I turn to two canonical Lebanese novels written and published shortly after the end of the civil war. *Dear Mr. Kawabata* by Rashid al Daif and *Beirut Blues* by

Hanan al-Shaykh have both been discussed in terms of their complicated relationship to nostalgic

discourses. The nostalgia that the texts contend with is not necessarily for a glorified pre-war

Lebanon. There is no clear-cut source of nostalgic longing; rather, the texts engage with

nostalgia in postwar Lebanon as a "composite feeling of loss, lack and longing" (Pickering and

Kneightly 921), that they seem to simultaneously resist and succumb to. I argue that this

contention with nostalgia that unfolds in the texts is a means of negotiating postwar belonging as

a "dynamic process of relation to place" (Magee 110). This belonging unfolds across a nostalgic

spectrum, but is always contested, insecure, and unstable.

I situate these novels, then, within the scholarly discourse that reckons with how each text

engages with nostalgia in order to further reflect on my claim that nostalgia is fundamental to

structures of belonging in Lebanon. Each text is constructed in epistolary form; *Dear Mr.

Kawabata*, a semi-autobiographical novel,[82] is written as an extensive address to the late

Japanese Nobel Laureate Yasunari Kawabata while *Beirut Blues* is made up of a series of unsent

letters addressed to various places and people in the narrator, Asmahan's, life. We can think of

the one sided nature of these letters as a kind of subversion of the epistolary form, which I argue

is intimately tied to the ambivalent nostalgia present in each text. The one-sidedness of these

letters also suggests a form of self-centredness that corresponds to nostalgia's idealizing and

therefore narcissistic tendencies.[83] Janet Altman explains that in the epistolary form, "the letter

writer is always in dialogue with a possible respondent [and] any letter appears as part of a

potentially ongoing sequence" (10). In both these novels, the structure of reciprocity inherent to

the epistolary form is undermined by the fact that Daif's narrator, also named Rashid, writes to a

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[82] The narrator shares many similarities with the author. In addition to both being named Rashid, they both moved to the city from their Maronite villages, and they were both active members of and fighters for the Communist party. Like the author, Daif's narrator eventually becomes disillusioned with the party.
[83] I am indebted to Karyn Ball for this idea.

deceased entity,[84] and that Asmahan's letters are *thought* as opposed to written—suggesting that they do not anticipate a response.

The unsent nature of these letters evokes a sense of relationality that is always severed or incomplete. This severance, I argue, reflects the ambivalent position that the texts take towards nostalgia as a mode of engaging with the past. While the texts seem to be critical of nostalgic discourse for its sentimental and aestheticizing tendencies, neither narrator can ever fully distance themself completely from nostalgic memory as a way of negotiating belonging. Nostalgia in this case, then, operates "as a negotiation between continuity and discontinuity" (Atia and Davies 184) in the sense that it serves as the means by which one remains attached to a place imbued with painful and traumatic memories. Both texts exemplify how nostalgic memory recognizes the bond between our present and the fragments of our past selves, while insisting on "the force of our separation from what we have lost" (Atia and Davies 184). This force of separation can be traced formally through the severed letters. By extension, we can imagine these texts as embodying a particular discourse of belonging that is shaped by the affective realities of postwar Lebanon.

In order to understand each novel's relationship with nostalgic discourse, it is important to explain the literary tradition from which these texts emerge. The *qasida* has been the predominant form of Arabic poetry for centuries, and it is composed of three components, most importantly here, the *nasib*, which is inherently nostalgic in its evocation of loss and ruin (Stetkyvch 166). As Hayek explains, in the *nasib*, the poet "stand[s] at an abandoned encampment" to commemorate the happy times he once shared with those who lived there, "especially his now-departed beloved" (*Imagining the City* 116). The *nasib* is inherently

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[84] Although we find out at the end of the novel that the narrator is recounting his life to Mr. Kawabata from a "morgue where his body is piled among corpses" (Seigneurie, *Standing by the Ruins* 69).

nostalgic because it always mourns love and happiness which are now gone (Seignurie, *Standing by the Ruins* 15). The critical attitude towards nostalgia that emerges within each text, then, seems to be a pushing back against classical modes of representation that lose relevance in the postwar era. These modes are not necessarily fully abandoned, as we will see; rather, they are reconfigured to suit the demands of the postwar present.

At the beginning of *Dear Mr. Kawabata*, the narrator Rashid questions the limitations of Arabic literature "especially poetry [that] is pervaded by sadness" (10). He wonders if this sadness "deprives a man of the capacity to see and understand clearly and intelligently" (11). As Rashid writes to his recipient of his "prodigal memory" (Hayek, *Imagining the City* 102), moreover, by which he can "recollect the color of every day [he has] lived from the moment [he] was born—or even earlier—until now" (13), his critical attitude towards nostalgic tendencies is made explicit. He asks Mr. Kawabata,

> "Why is it that we, the ordinary people, or at least the ordinary elite, can only talk about
> the past with nostalgia? Why can't we simply talk about it in a neutral way? I would
> almost say objectively, but I hesitate to" (13).

Scholars like Hayek and Seignurie cite these passages as evidence for the narrator's "deep suspicion" (Seignurie, *Standing by the Ruins* 63) of nostalgic discourse. The form of memory that the narrator opposes, they argue, "serves to reinforce a nostalgic distortion" (Hayek 102) that is merely "vain emotionalism" (Seignurie 64) and thus counterproductive to progressive visions of the future. They each acknowledge, however, that this critical attitude is ultimately undermined by later moments in the text whereby the narrator either "registers [his] uneasy complicity" in the same discourses he critiques (Hayek 104) or succumbs to an affective investment in the past (Seignurie). I would go even further to argue that, from the onset, these

passages are formally inviting us to recognize the narrator's inability to fully depart from nostalgic discourse. Rather than cite these passages as evidence of his critical attitude, that is only later undermined by explicit statements, I read these passages as embodying ambivalence from the beginning. Such a reading is significant because it reframes understandings of nostalgic critique—in this case, as always ambivalent or incomplete. Instead of using the text as evidence for the criticism of nostalgia and thus treating the narrator's nostalgic inclinations as secondary, I read the text as producing a specific form of postwar nostalgia that is itself marked by ambivalence. When the narrator critiques the literature of sadness, he follows it up by promising that he will not succumb to such inclinations—he will not let his reader hear his weeping. After a short tirade of things the narrator promises *not* to do, he ends the section:

> No!
>
> *What do I mean by 'no' hear, Mr. Kawabata?*
>
> I promise you, and I will try to keep my promise.
>
> I will try! (11 original emphasis)

The conclusion of this section, then, casts doubt on the narrator's ability to fully distance himself from the nostalgic tendencies of Arab literature. The emphasis of "No!"— which affirms his commitment to his earlier promises that he will not succumb to the literature of sadness—is weakened by the following line in italics (in parentheses in the Arabic version), that works to qualify the assertiveness of the former statement. The technique of parenthesizing or italicizing certain portions of the text is used throughout the novel and these instances often work as comments that explain cultural nuances, or, such as in this case, as asides that embody a switch in tone and register. The switch in register here serves to minimize the seriousness of the previous passage. The grand promises become an admission that he can merely try to keep such promises.

The repetition of "I try" that concludes this section, then, invites us to view the narrator's critiques with a grain of salt, as it foreshadows his potential contradictions and his propensity to fall privy to the tendencies he critiques. In the passage cited above, for instance, where he questions the ordinary elite's tendency to talk about the past with nostalgia, there is more going on then just a critique of "nostalgic distortion," as Hayek calls it. This passage, in fact, interrupts the narrator's own nostalgic sequence. As the narrator discusses his prodigal memory with Mr. Kawabata, he breaks into a nostalgic structure:

> I remember….
>
> Winter was a passing stage of the year in our beautiful country when I was young[…]
>
> I remember…
>
> Our house was security[…]
>
> I remember…(13).

The final "I remember" in this sequence is interrupted by his scepticism of nostalgia—"why can't we simply talk abut [the past] in a neutral way? I would almost say objectively, but I hesitate to. Or is it that the past, among all the moments of time, is the strongest—or even the only present?" (13). Instead of thinking about this passage, then, as evidence for a critique on nostalgic memory, the text invites us to consider the function of nostalgia as an inevitable structure of remembering. The self- reflexivity that accompanies these slips into nostalgic discourse limits any romanticization of the past. Instead, the past is recollected here as a sort of certainty that we cling to in moments of tumult and insecurity. Here it is not so much about *what* we remember about the past, but the *way* we invest it with meaning and affect to orient us in the present. The text, then, does not, as Seignurie suggests, follow a trajectory of critique only to ultimately fall into its own nostalgia; rather, from the beginning, there is a way of engaging with

the past that occurs between two registers: that which is critical and weary of sentimental discourses, and that which is inevitably bound up in these modes. This ambivalence, then, emerges in the postwar period as a way of negotiating a sense of belonging to a place from which one has been severed. This belonging, however, remains a process informed by its own impossibility.

In *Dear Mr. Kawabata*, the narrator's scepticism about nostalgia is tied to his migration from the village to the city, where he moves to join the communist party. In this move, he is encouraged to rebel against the traditionalism and spirituality of village life and the attachments that bind him to it. This rebellion against traditionalism is intimately tied to an exposure to Western ideals and ideologies. The narrator, for instance, recounts that when he returned from his studies in France, he was "proud of [his] experience and determined to use it in the service of the party and the cause of the working class" (123). In the wake of this return, however, he recalls that he needed to cut "the umbilical cord [of] childish longing for the countryside" (123). Nostalgia, in these instances, is conceived as an infantile sentiment counterproductive to the development and progress he commits himself to after exposure to Western ideologies. Samira Aghacy argues that, to a large extent, Al Daif's novel represents "the impact of modernity on Lebanese individuals and society during and in the wake of the civil war" ("Contemporary Lebanese" 561). For Aghacy, modernity here is largely a Western project that poses particular challenges in the Lebanese context. Through the narrator's disillusionment with the communist party and his inability to fully shed or distance himself from his traditional identity, he comes to recognize the limitations of a Western project of modernity, or a "monolithic modernity" (Aghacy 576). According to Aghacy, the narrator is then left "abandoned and displaced, groping frantically in an empty void" (575). While I do not intend to present a more optimistic reading of

the narrator's displacement from these competing ideologies, I would argue that the ambivalent— or even negative—affect here can be conceived as engendering a new, critical type of belonging that is shaped by a place of contention. Here I am inspired by Nadia Ellis, who explores queer black diasporic aesthetics that emerge out of "a persistent sense of the insufficiency of existing modes of belonging" (3). In each of the cases she describes, new dynamics of belonging are formed that are "powerful in the *potential* to which they give rise, a potential that suspends rather than resolves" (4 *original emphasis*). These forces are often shaped by a tension between "a quest for affinity and a desire to separate" (6)—a dynamic that we see unfolding in both *Dear Mr. Kawabata* and *Beirut Blues.* It is the *failures* of these affinities or modes of belonging that, "by virtue of being attempts," (10) form the basis for imagining something better. We can trace these kinds of tensions in the ambivalent nostalgia that unfolds in *Beirut Blues*.

The bulk of Asmahan's ambivalence about nostalgia occurs in her letters to or about those who have left Lebanon, most notably one of her love interests, Jawad, and her best friend Hayat whom Asmahan opens and closes her novel with a letter to. In these instances, Asmahan both covets and disdains the way with which Lebanese expats view their country in the midst and wake of the civil war. The novel culminates in the final letter to Hayat, with Asmahan at the airport torn between leaving to France with Jawad and staying behind in Lebanon. The airport here is a significant site for these ambivalences and uncertainties to play out. As Mark Westmoreland writes, "the airport is filled with competing affective intensities of longing for the past and fantasies about the future ("Experimental Film" 39). Asmahan's uncertainties about leaving Lebanon are tied to her refusal to succumb to a nostalgic, diasporic perspective—"I don't want to turn into one of those pathetic creatures who are always homesick, always saying I wish

I were still in Beirut" (366). This wariness of leaving, however, does not emerge out of a romanticization of home, since she knows she is unhappy in Lebanon, "but why should [she] be unhappy in two places?" (366). After much confliction, then, Asmahan finally decides to stay behind "to confront the city which had made its war die of weariness (370). In a sense, she succumbs to the nostalgia that she battles in the face of leaving her country. Her nostalgia, however, like Daif's narrator's, is contained and self-reflexive: "I saw everything I had left behind in Beirut through a fine veil of nostalgia," she thinks, "perhaps because of the distinctive atmosphere of airports, although I knew I would soon view it once more as a tawdry run-down circus" (368). Despite the fact that Asmahan gives in to her nostalgic vision of Beirut by staying behind, she tempers this nostalgia with an acknowledgement of the circumstances that produce it. It is within this tension between giving into nostalgia and criticizing it, that Asmahan abandons her plans of immigration to attempt and negotiate some sense of belonging in postwar Lebanon. Nostalgia in these instances serves as a "point of departure," to quote Radstone again, instead of an "endpoint" of sorts (189).

The critique of nostalgia that seeps through both texts is related to a certain kind of commodification that is bound up with the respective narrators' resentment of foreign perspectives of Lebanon. This idea, of course, resonates with my earlier assessment about the way nostalgia functions in *West Beyrouth*. Through critiquing nostalgia, the texts are simultaneously critiquing the foreign gaze that "capitalize[s] on the tragedy" (Salem 214) of war. As I will reveal, however, this critique is entangled in the narrators' own nostalgic yearnings; the nostalgic longings reveal a relationship to place—a wavering sense of belonging—that is articulated against a disdain for the commoditized gaze. It is through the critique of foreign perspectives that are imbued with nostalgia that the narrators' own sense of contested belonging

can be established. In her letter to Jawad, for instance, Asmahan writes: "The root cause of my annoyance with you is that you regard us with a foreigner's eye…You see us as folklore" (225). This disdain, however, is not so clear-cut. She questions the source of her annoyance, "is it that living away from here you carry a beautiful picture of your homeland in your mind, while I only see a disfigured image of it?...An encounter with the past must restore a person's soul, give him new life; otherwise why are you so relaxed, while I dangle on a thread of smoke?" (226). In these moments, then, it is not so much Jawad's nostalgic vision of Lebanon that disturbs her; rather, it is her inability to see her country in that way. The envy she feels about Jawad's perspective on Lebanon complicates arguments that read her annoyance of Jawad as a critique of nostalgia. Any nostalgia that Asmahan might have of the past, however, is obstructed by her experiences in war—it "deprived [her] of the opportunity of using the past to live in the present" (359). At the same time, she is saddened by the prospect of leaving the war behind, and that "pleasurable feeling when the fighting stops of getting dressed at last and doing [her] hair" (360). These moments of ambivalence and indecisiveness have to be read as a process of negotiating a sense of belonging in postwar Lebanon; belonging in these terms is always a potential, never an endpoint. This process of negotiation, moreover, is fundamentally ambivalent and is able to unfold through the narrator's engagement with different nostalgic registers. Ultimately, while Asmahan longs for the ability to see Lebanon through Jawad's eyes, she refuses an existence that would secure home as a thing of the past.

In both *Dear Mr. Kawabata* and *Beirut Blues*, the narrators each reckon with Martyrs' Square—the once bustling centre of downtown, or the "heart of the capital" (Daif 114), that was demolished during the war and that Solidere appropriated in the wake of the conflict. As Daif's narrator writes, "Before the war [Martyr's Square] was the heart of the capital, with its markets,

banks, cinemas, popular theatres, hotels, and red-light district, and its bus stations and taxi ranks

served by vehicles from every part of Lebanon. It was the heart of Lebanon" (115). The square,

once referred to as Burj Square, is currently the central site for political protests and gatherings,

but it is no longer characterized by the same public energy. In both texts, the narrators reveal an

emotional investment in the square that is measured against the commodification that is implicit

to a foreign gaze. In this sense, the texts are inviting us to consider the relationship between

nostalgic sentiment in Lebanon and commodification, yet their own emotional investments

provide a more nuanced layer to this form of critique. In her letter to Beirut, Asmahan recounts

her own reaction to the demolished square, but this memory is framed by her visit there with

Jawad and his touristic gaze. "Now I am bored by these ruins," she says, although

acknowledging that it will take time for Jawad to absorb it all. It is then that she remembers her

initial reaction to the destructed square and her own nostalgic memories of "hurrying pedestrians,

blaring horns, and distinctive smells of coffee, grilled meat, and garlic" (265). Hayek argues that

this sort of framing, whereby Asmahan and Jawad each succumbs to their own private memories

of the Square, reinforces a Halbwachian view of memory in which there is a "dynamic interplay

between an individual's and the group's memory" (107). For Hayek, "there can be no isolated

memories of a public space" (106). I would add, as well, that the touristic gaze is a significant

aspect in this interaction between individual and group memory. Jawad, who "pick[s] the bitter

fruits of war and write[s] in a Western language" (359), often embodies those commodifying

practices that capitalize on the tragedy of war. By enfolding her own nostalgia about Martyr's

Square within Jawad's touristic perspective, the narrator avoids retreating into depoliticizing

sentimentality while still acknowledging the affective impact of the Square. In this sense, we can

see these instances as a subversion of the *nasib*, in which the poet stands nostalgically by a

ruined site. The nostalgic impact of Martyr's Square is present, yet it is always qualified by the

presence of the commodifying gaze that capitalizes on the square as an affective magnet of

attachment.

Similarly, in *Dear Mr. Kawabata,* as Rashid expresses difficulty in talking about

Martyr's Square without getting upset, he brings up his French friend's reaction to the

commercial centre. Upon seeing the square for the first time, his friend proclaims, "*C'est beau!*

C'est poétique!" (118). The narrator recounts how he angrily protested his friend's

romancitization, accusing her of belittling the destruction and tragedy that had befallen his

country. He quickly admits to his reader, however, that these words—*c'est beau! c'est*

poétique!—expressed exactly how he felt as well. Scholars have often invoked this passage as

evidence for the extent to which the narrator "self loathingly participate[s]" (Hayek 105) in the

commodifying and "obfuscating" (Seignurie 66) remembrance practices that surround the

square. These readings point to the difficulty of responsibly commemorating Martyr's square, yet

the language of complicity here also connotes a position of guilt or fault on the part of the

narrator. I would argue that these instances in the text do more than provide a critical perspective

on commodifying remembrance practices; instead, upon closer reading we find that these

passages of commemorating Martyr's square—in both *Beirut Blues* and *Dear Mr. Kawabata*—

are both tied to a sense of negotiating what Carol Magee calls, elective belonging. This type of

belonging does not necessarily depend on formal recognition by a community; rather, "it entails

having a sense of spatial attachment, social position, and forms of connectivity to other places; it

has to do with how one expresses ideas about place and position to one's self and others" (110).

What the texts offer, then, is insight into the appeal such places hold for commodifying practices.

Shortly after Rashid's confession, the text breaks into a nostalgic structure of "I remember," in

which he recalls his memories of the square that he saw every morning from his balcony. The square as a public space that was demolished by war and appropriated by Solidere is essential to the elective belonging that unfolds in these instances of the text because of the connectivity and affinity that such spaces evoke. The French friend's perspective here once again limits the extent of romanticization and also implies a mourning that is twofold: mourning for the destruction of public space and bitterness about how emotional ties to Martyr's square have been exploited.

These two texts, ultimately, engage with nostalgic discourses as both necessary and inevitable reactions to loss and as reductionist, exploitative approaches to history. The narrators in each text are marked by contradictions and ambivalences that are fundamentally tied to their attempts to negotiate their place in a postwar country. Their slips into nostalgic yearnings speak to the success of postwar popular cultural productions that were characterized by nostalgia. Nostalgia in these instances offers a way to remain attached to a place imbued with traumatic memories. The ambivalences and self-reflexivity that accompany these nostalgic moments, however, engender a discourse of belonging that is capable of critical capacities.

Ultimately, my intention to salvage aspects of nostalgia from criticisms of complicity, stems from my sense that it is fundamental to how people in Lebanon live with loss. While nostalgia is often implicated in troubling power structures, it is simultaneously embedded in the *lived* experiences and negotiations that are needed for the perpetuation of everyday life. Nostalgia, then, belongs to those ordinary affects, which are "public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but…are also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of" (Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* 2). They are what "give everyday life the quality of a continual motion" (2).

Chapter Four: Crisis and the Ordinary in Post-2005 Cultural Production

In my junior year of university, a few years after the assassination of Rafic Hariri and the July 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, I was called upon to participate in a book project that aimed to anthologize a collection of creative works that responded to the political moment of our times. The idea for this project came about in the midst of a tense political moment, a string of assassinations and deadly clashes, and a looming war in the North of Lebanon that was taking place between militant groups and the army. There was a sense of urgency, perhaps, to capture the feeling of living in a situation as politically volatile and tumultuous as that present moment in Lebanon. The project, unfortunately, never came to fruition, but I will share below some (of the less embarrassing) snippets from the piece I drafted at the time.

> *January. Jafet Library. Reading Period. Flipping through the pages of my political sciences textbook, I study the difference between multiparty and two party systems:* "Multiparty systems allow for a healthy diversity of opinions, but the conflicting nature of coalitions threatens the stability of such a system." *I flip through pages and I gather my books and I head to my exam and* **a bomb goes off**, *and I get out my pens, and then I write about the elements of a multiparty system.*
>
> *Sitting in De Prague café, discussing our plans after final exams, sipping wine, and the army is* **shooting citizens** *with M16s.*[85] *We drink to Heath Ledger who died of an overdose.*

My main sense at that time was that Lebanon was living through a surreal moment. The inconsistency between the violent tensions escalating in the country and the ways in which ordinary life continued to unfold struck me as particularly strange and meaningful. These snippets were an attempt to capture some of the absurdity of engaging in the everyday as the

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[85] This incident occurred after violent clashes erupted between Sunnis and Shiites at Beirut Arab University.

political situation continued to worsen around us. In the passages above, the violences of the moment, although set apart formally by their boldness, enter the text as part of the fabric of the ordinary, as casual additions to the sequence of the everyday. In this sense, they are "both in continuous time and stand out from within it" (Berlant, "Intuitionists" 846). In the same piece, I write that, "The turbulent encumbrance of various assassinations, incessant political tension, and the last July war, weaves its way into our social bliss through the heated controversy of political debate. Yet the heated aspect of the debate cools off as cigarettes are lit, the lights are dimmed, and music is played." The polarizing nature of politics, which underscored the violences erupting around the country, was ultimately drowned out by the perpetuation of the social, fogged out by a cloudy haze of cigarette smoke.

The general tone of this piece, which I wrote nearly ten years ago, ultimately strikes a moralizing tone, as I seem unsettled by the normalization of violence being increasingly entrenched into public discourse and consciousness. I am not currently interested in engaging in such moralizations. Instead, I am concerned with the interplay between the everyday and the extreme that plays out so dominantly in my response to that particular historical moment. In his recent ethnographic book *War is Coming*, Sami Hermez seems similarly captivated by those moments of ordinariness that occur in the midst of political violence and conflict. He refers to these moments as living "in the meanwhile"—a reference to superhero comic strips that, following images of fighting, include slides with the caption "in the meanwhile." This notion of "in the meanwhile" functions for Hermez as a lens through which to study social life amid protracted political conflict (*War is Coming* 2). I wish to pick up on this thread more explicitly in this chapter. The impetus behind the unrealized book project was that there was a certain historical moment unfolding that we needed to try and capture, respond to, and negotiate. In this

chapter, I am interested in cultural products that do similar work. More particularly, I look at works that investigate and uncover the modes through which extreme events of violence in the wake of Hariri's assassination become folded into the ordinary. The three works that will form the center of my analysis here are: Rabi Jaber's novel *The Mehlis Report* (2013), Mai Masri's documentary *Beirut Diaries: Truth, Lies, and Videos* (2007), and Wael Noureddine's short film *Ça Sera Beau: From Beirut with Love* (2005).

Jaber's *The Mehlis Report* recounts the experiences of Saman Yarid, an architect living in Beirut after the assassination of Hariri. In the novel, the country is anxiously awaiting the results of the Mehlis report, an investigation charged with revealing who was behind the assassination. The violent realities of Lebanon during this period figure into the novel subtly as most of the text is actually concerned with relaying the protagonist's mundane experiences. In this respect, I argue, the novel addresses "the normative affective sensorium that registers history in transitional moments" (Berlant, "Intuitionists" 846). Masri's documentary works to capture the mood of the so-called Cedar Revolution that erupted after Hariri's assassination in 2005. It follows the experiences of Nadine Zeidan, a regular participant in the demonstrations and sit-ins. Through Zeidan's experiences, the documentary reveals how Hariri's assassination carved out a new historical present in which the event and its violent aftermath were renegotiated into a new sense of the ordinary. The historical present refers here to an "emergent historical environment" (Berlant, "Thinking about Feeling" 5) that relocated the Lebanese "within a new temporal architecture" (Harootunian 471). Noureddine's short film is an experimental piece that plays with filmic techniques and devices, particularly with the soundtrack and editing (Westmoreland, *Crisis of Representation* 162), to capture various affective intensities unfolding in the wake of

Hariri's assassination. Not much happens in the film, but the camera's roaming and jumpy

quality creates a mood of anticipation and uncertainty.

Each of these cultural products reveals how Hariri's assassination, as a violent rupture,

became folded into ordinary existence in profound and inextricable ways. The historical present

being drawn out in each of these films is constituted as an adjustment to a particular political and

affective shift that plays out in the wake of the assassination. The three works under study here

diffuse the extreme event into the patterns of everyday life and connect the violences of the

present with those of the past. While the post-assassination period is depicted as shaping new

ordinaries, the past is constantly refolded into and reinterpreted in the present moment.

Importantly, each of these works engages in a particular kind of mapping or a tracing of the

various intensities, layers, dimensions, and contours of the country that are shifting and adjusting

to the historical present being produced in the aftermath of the assassination. This mapping

functions to encapsulate the affective landscape particular to that time. Mapping, which is a

dominant aspect of many Lebanese cultural productions, functions as a renegotiation of

boundaries and one's relationship to space. The Beiruti landscape is constantly shifting to

accommodate the forward pull of the present and the new violences and inconveniences that

constantly reorganize the city's spatial and temporal dimensions. These shifts require a

renegotiation of one's place within and relationship to the city. This mapping, moreover, which

resonartes with De Certeau's notion of "walking in the city," is central to the production of

everyday life as a continous space of negotiation and as an essential concept for understanding

the effects of living in the constant shadow of past, present, and future violence.

In order to carry out my exploration, I will first provide an overview of the major events

unfolding in the wake of Hariri's assassination. Next, I will discuss some of the theoretical

frameworks guiding the inquiries in this chapter. Here, I am interested in accounting for those theoretical conversations that are invested in locating affect's place in the mediation of historical moments and the ways in which crisis is experienced, not necessarily as an extreme and exceptional event, but rather as a mundane ordinariness that continually accommodates new/old violences. Finally, I will turn to a sustained analysis of the three works under consideration in this chapter.

The Cedar Revolution and its Aftermath

Between the years of 2005 and 2008, Lebanon experienced a tumultuous historical moment marked by various assassinations, wide-scale protests and sit-ins, a 34-day war with Israel, a 6 month violent conflict between the army and a militant organization in the North, and a one-week local strife. Many of these tensions were largely sparked by the assassination of former prime minister Rafic El Hariri. Throughout this chapter, I am interested in thinking about what happens in the shadow of these various events and how they shape shifting contours of the ordinary. By extension, I discuss the post-2005 period as a particular present that unfolds in the shadow of violence. My conception of the present here resonates with Berlant's definition of the present as "an unfolding, historically saturated moment coming together and apart at the seams…("Structures of Unfeeling" 193). The atmosphere of the *historical present*, then, suggests "a shift of historic proportions in the terms and processes of the conditions of the continuity of life" (Berlant, "Thinking about Feeling" 5).

Hariri's assassination marked the end of the postwar period, as Sune Haugbolle observes (*War and Memory*), in that it altered the political landscape that had entrenched itself since the end of the civil war and thus contributed to a distinct affective climate. In thinking about Hariri's

assassination, however, I am also interested in revealing how the event of this assassination is actually tethered to the everyday in profound ways. Here, then, I reflect on the extent to which "the everyday grows the event; [and how] violence, even if it appears shocking, shares in the heterogeneity of everyday life" (Das, *Life and Words* 136). In historical terms, Hariri's assassination marked a shift in the Lebanese political order and a political awakening that seemed to infiltrate all aspects of social life. What my analyses will reveal, however, is that by studying the contours of the ordinary, we can understand how the violent rupture of this particular event and its turbulent aftermath were "embedded in the 'normal' patterns of sociality…" (Das and Kleinman 15).

While I begin with Hariri's death, my concern later on will not be on the actual scene of violence but rather on what happens at the boundaries of such events. Here it is not so much about the event, but "an emergent historical environment that can now be sensed atmospherically, collectively" (Berlant, "Thinking about Feeling" 5). In discussing Hariri's death as a transformative event, moreover, I do not make the argument that it produced or triggered a *new* or unprecedented historical moment. My concern here is not with novelty; rather, I argue that the assassination produced a historical present that is *affectively* distinctive from the postwar period. The death of Hariri, a larger than life persona whose name had become synonymous with the postwar era of reconstruction, triggered a rearrangement of political life that made it possible for civil war alliances and allegiances to recalibrate. On an affective level, this readjustment marks a significant shift, but by studying the production and representation of the quotidian in the context of the assassination, we can simultaneously understand how the violent aftermath of Hariri's death is sutured to everyday life.

One significant occurrence that moves to the periphery in this type of analysis is the July 2006 war in which Israel "launched a merciless 34-day bombing campaign" (Hout, "What is Out There" 28) on Lebanon—particularly the South of Lebanon and Dahieh, a southern suburb of Beirut—in response to Hezbollah's capture of two Israeli soldiers. This particular event in its own way marked a significant effect on cultural work, which suggests perhaps that we can also think about the 2006 war as producing its own kind of historical present, especially for those communities most affected by the violence. As Rasha Salti explains in an interview, for instance, because of the war, there was a "proliferation of digital video and web technology that document[ed] everyday life" (101). She reflects that these short videos, which were streamed for a worldwide audience, function to "inspire solidarity with the plight of the Lebanese people" (101). A number of documentaries and web-based initiatives, as well as a few feature films that represent the conflict and its effects, emerged in the period following the war.[86] This cultural output provided a contrast to prior representations of the war in news media and created archives that responded to a lack of 'official archives' about previous wars (Demos 101). Although the war was perhaps more drastic than Hariri's assassination in that it affected a much larger number of people and contributed to wide scale destruction, for the purposes of this chapter, I will explain the 2006 war as part of the post-2005 context as opposed to a separate rupture.

In the same 2007 interview cited above, Christine Tohme, director of Ashkal Alwan, a non-profit organization that produces and facilitates creative works and endeavors, argues that the Israeli invasion of Lebanon "is not something new, but an embedded part of Lebanese political life" (Demos 100). Tohme's comments resist the inclination to posit the Israeli war as a rift from the circumstances inspiring cultural production and curatorial practices in Lebanon.

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[86] Some groups involved in the production of digital and web-based works are: Cinesoumoud, Cinemayat, Namle At3a (which translates as passing ant), Beirut DC, and Askhal Alwan.

Similarly, in this chapter, I consider the July war within the realm of a turbulent post-2005 setting and not separate from it. There are two reasons for this framework, one that exists on the level of argument and the other on the level of practicality. The first reason is that after Hariri's assassination, Hezbollah emerged as an especially contentious group who many argued did not have the legitimacy to hold weapons anymore. After the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the South in 2000, especially, many felt that Hezbollah's status as a resistance group was no longer relevant. In 2004, moreover, a few months before Hariri's assassination, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1559 which called for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the country and the disbanding of Hezbollah's military wing. As I will explain shortly, when Hariri was killed and the country became polarized between pro Syrian and anti Syrian camps, resolution 1559 became a main source of dispute. The 2006 war with Israel, then, can be seen as an extension of these kinds of conflicts as well as an exacerbation of these schisms. Those opposing Hezbollah resented the group for entering into conflict with Israel, while those supporting them saw the war as evidence for the necessity of Hezbollah's weapons.

The experience of the war itself, moreover, was extremely disproportionate: while some neighborhoods and towns, mainly Shiite areas, were being heavily bombed to the point of obliteration, other areas were completely cut off from the violence. Although businesses and institutions across the country were closed because of the war, many people in Lebanon did not consider the July war *their* war. During this period, for instance, as Israel launched its massive airstrikes, Faraya, a popular ski destination in the winter, was bustling with nightlife and social activity. The actual experience of the war across the country was hugely varied and asymmetrical and it reflects the political schisms that were accentuated in the aftermath of Hariri's assassination. This issue brings me to the second reason for why the 2006 war will not take a

central position in my analysis in this chapter—there is not enough space here for me to do this discrepancy justice. The representation of the July war and its relationship to past violence, as well as the extent to which it exposed a highly disproportionate and asymmetrical experience of violence, are all issues that require their own analysis that does not necessarily correspond to the imperatives of this chapter, which is concerned with the reproduction of a historical present in the aftermath of Hariri's assassination. Such a concern, with how an "emergent historical environment" (Berlant, "Thinking about Feeling" 5) is sensed affectively and unfolds in the wake of violence, does not leave enough space for reflecting on the representational challenges that the destructive and asymmetrical nature of the July War poses. I will now provide a brief summary of some of the events characterizing the period under study here in this chapter.

On Valentine's Day, February 14, 2005, a massive car bomb killed Rafic Hariri and others in an act of violence that would have reverberating repercussions for the years to come. He was killed in front of the hollowed out St George Hotel that stands at the center of a fierce legal battle between the owner of the hotel and Hariri's real estate company, Solidere.[87] In a morbidly poetic twist of fate, a commemorative statue of Hariri stands today gazing upon the void hotel that is plastered with a massive billboard reading, "Stop Solidere." In the months leading up to his death, Hariri had taken an anti-Syrian stance and stood in favor of resolution 1559 that called for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the country.[88] The initial outrage following his assassination, therefore, was directed towards Syria, as his death seemed to mark the culmination of people's frustrations with the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon. People

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[87] After the war, the owner of the hotel, Fady El-Khoury's efforts to revive the hotel were complicated by Solidere's desires to build a massive marina opposite the hotel, thus limiting the hotel's access to the sea. This conflict resulted in a fierce legal battle that has yet to be resolved and that has prevented the renovation of the hotel.

[88] Hariri's relationship with the Syrian regime "had always been complicated" (Young 25). As Young explains, for much of his tenure as prime minister, Hariri "had propped up the postwar Syrian order, if not always by conviction" (25). In the months leading up to his assassination, however, "bad blood had grown" (25) between Hariri and the Syrian regime, which is why the public was quick to blame Syria for Hariri's death.

from all over the country poured on to the streets in downtown to express grief, anger, and the desire for change. This chain of demonstrations became known as The Cedar Revolution, or the Independence Intifada. Oussama Safa observes, that late February and March of that year marked "the most intense period of street marches in the history of modern Lebanon" (31).

In a broad sense, politics after Hariri's death were reshaped across two axes: those who were anti-Syrian and those who were pro-Syrian. Closer inspection of this framework, however, reveals that things were not necessarily so clear-cut. While the political discourse that emerged from the event seemed to present two polarized sides, there were deeper schisms running through Lebanese society that complicate this binary framework. As Karim Knio argues in an article written in the midst of the 2005 upheaval, "it is naïve to assume that Lebanon is polarized between pro- and ant-Syrian camps…behind the eventuality of this short-term goal [of a Syrian evacuation] lies a substantial identity problem that is that is still shaking the very basic foundations of Lebanese society…" ("Lebanon: Cedar Revolution" 229).

In the days and weeks following the assassination, former enemies and people from all walks of life gathered in downtown and set up camps, a tent city, to protest the Syrian occupation, call for the pro-Syrian government's resignation, and demand a truth investigation into the murder of Hariri. This group, "a coalition of Druze, Sunni and Christian politicians [and their supporters]" (Haugbolle, "Spatial Transformations" 64) became known as the opposition, or the *mu'arada*, and was eventually able to "break the pro-Syrian politicians that had dominated the Lebanese parliament since 1990" (64). On February 28, the crowds that had gathered in Martyr's Square watched on large screens as the pro-Syrian Prime Minister, Omar Karami, announced his resignation. This announcement was considered to be a major victory for the opposition and was met with elation from the protestors. As Safa observes, "The crowd's

euphoria was unchecked by the wintry sea breeze whipping off the Mediterranean as demonstrators celebrated the prime minister's resignation" (32). It seemed, then, amid these protests and sit-ins that Lebanon was on some sort of road to recovery. This hopefulness was amplified by the impression that old animosities seemed to die down in the face of a common goal. Of course the mood of unity was complicated by the fact that a major segment of the population, mainly Shiite Hezbollah supporters, did not seem to be on board with the tenor of the developments taking place.

On March 8, 2005, against what many perceived to be a united national front, Hezbollah organized a massive rally of nearly half a million people in downtown Beirut to thank Syria for all it had done for Lebanon and to warn against imperialist intervention in the form, for instance, of UN resolution 1559. Hezbollah worried that the opposition's increasing presence in Lebanon would summon more international pressure for the implementation of Resolution 1559 (Safa 33). Additionally, as Haugbolle convincingly argues, the rally held a somewhat symbolic significance for the "suburban workers and 'little men' who participated in the demonstration [because] downtown Beirut equaled a bourgeois vision of Lebanon from which they were largely excluded" ("Spatial Transformations" 64). In this respect, these demonstrators were reclaiming "the public space at the heart of the nation and using it as a stage for their dissent" (64). The protestors, moreover, largely carried Lebanese flags as opposed to party flags, an indication that Hezbollah "did not find itself in total disagreement with the mainstream opposition" (Safa 33). The fact that Hezbollah was explicitly thanking Syria for its role in Lebanon, however, was especially infuriating and shocking to those who had suffered greatly at the hands of Syrian authorities.

In response to Hezbollah's rally, on March 14 the opposition organized an even bigger demonstration of historic proportions. Around a million people, more than a fourth of the country's entire population, descended onto Martyr's Square to reconfirm their demands for the withdrawal of Syrian troops and an investigation into the murder of Hariri. These two protests would go on to represent a new political order in Lebanon comprised of the March 8 and March 14 camps. It should be noted here, that in many ways, the imperatives of these two movements overlapped. Both groups, as Knio notes, "agree[d] to pursue an international investigation into Hariri's assassination and the withdrawal of Syrian military presence in Lebanon" ("Lebanon: Cedar Revolution" 226). The difference, however, is that Hezbollah refused to engage in anti-Syrian rhetoric and argued that the Ta'if agreement, instead of UN Security Council Resolution 1559, should remain "the basis of any potential constructive national debate in Lebanon" (226). March 14 very quickly became solidified in the public imagination as an iconic day of unity and patriotism. Sune Haugbolle notes that, a year later, many people looked back on the "spirit of March 14" nostalgically as it was characterized by a celebratory, carnival-like atmosphere in which a semblance of unity and victory finally seemed to embrace the country ("Spatial Transformations" 65). The Lebanese flag dominated the landscape of this massive demonstration as people set aside their party flags and banners to march under a unified front.

It is important to note here that this alleged unity was in fact very precarious as people's priorities during this demonstration were not necessarily one in the same. As Michael Young notes, some people "accentuated the search for the 'truth' of who had killed Rafiq al-Hariri" (39) above everything else. Others, however, considered "Hariri's death disconnected from the political demands" (30) of the moment. Some people ultimately "wanted the truth certainly, but…above all wanted Syria out" (39). This choice to exclusively use the Lebanese flag during

the demonstration, therefore, was also perhaps a strategic move on part of the political leaders of

the movement to avoid any hostilities or animosities erupting as people suddenly found

themselves in the same space as their political opponents (Haugbolle, "Spatial Transformations"

66).

In April of that year, the opposition put together a festival called "National Unity Week"

to commemorate the anniversary of the outbreak of the civil war. This celebratory week also

marked the end of Independence Intifada as "various events were organized to…expel the ghost

of the war that had reared its head over the previous two months" (Haugbolle, "Spatial

Transformations" 70). During this week, a festive mood dominated downtown Beirut as people

engaged in various activities like walking tours, kite flying, and most importantly, "spend[ing]

money in the process" (71). The week was organized, after all, in an attempt to "revive the

economy's fledgling economy" (Dempsey). While the week was intended to serve as a point of

recovery from the wounds of the civil war, the kind of "commemoration as consumption"

(Haugbolle 71) that characterized the festival limited the transformative potential of

remembrance. As Haugbolle argues, "Aspects of what made Solidere's downtown a problematic

venue for national memory were repeated in Unity Week: nostalgia, the nationalism of tourist

representations, and very little debate about the war itself" (71). Like Solidere, moreover, this

festival seemed marketed towards the upper stratum of society. In fact, the Independence Intifada

itself is often criticized for being "confined to design-conscious Beiruti middle classes who 'did'

the revolution á la chic…[with] some observers worry[ing] that…the aim of the demonstrations

was really to mock the Shi'a and the poor in a broader sense" (Haugbolle 69). This observation is

noteworthy when we consider how the unified spirit of March 14 was severely undermined in the

months and years to come. It is relevant to note here that, by coincidence, "much of the branding

for the Independence Intifada had been prepared before Hariri's assassination" (Young 38).

Journalist Samir Kassir, who would be assassinated in June of 2005, and Eli Khoury, the head of

the marketing company Quantum Communications, began planning "for what would become the

'Independence 05' brand, to be unveiled at demonstrations during the election period" (Young

38). It is significant, here, then to observe the ways in which the Cedar Revolution was part of a

branding campaign that aimed to dismantle the Syrian presence in Lebanon, but simultaneously

prop up corporate and political elites. In many regards, the "spirit" of the Cedar Revolution was

merely an appealing surface concealing and intensifying the deep, albeit shifting, schisms that

continued to haunt Lebanon in the aftermath of the civil war. The Lebanese media is one site we

can look at to further understand how the unified ethos of the Independence Intifada quickly

eroded.

Zahera Harb, for instance, divides the period following Hariri's assassination into two

phases: the period immediately following the attack, and the period between 2007 and 2008 in

which Lebanon experienced an especially tumultuous stage in its history. Her categorization here

relates to the role of the Lebanese media in the mediation of internal conflict. To be clear here,

the Lebanese media scene is highly pluralized and diverse with most media organizations being

owned by or affiliated with Lebanese politicians and political parties. Harb argues that in the first

period, the media "helped mobilize people and led them to achieve change to the political status

quo" (29). The second period, however, witnessed a media "model of confrontation that

facilitated sectarian tension and hatred among the Lebanese" (29). With the end of the

Independence Intifada in mid April and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the country,

politicians began preparing for the parliamentary elections. In many ways, then, the branding of

the Independence Intifada would come to serve as a political campaign for established political

elites. As Haugbolle argues, the "efficient branding and support from the media transformed the

emotional energy released by Hariri's death into a political program based on truth,

reconciliation, and political renewal, which resonated with the majority of demonstrators" (74).

The fact that politicians would "reassert their grip" on the political developments taking place,

however, disappointed "those who saw in the uprising the basis of a new Lebanon" (Young 29).

After the May parliamentary elections, the March 14 coalition won the majority of seats making

Hezbollah and its allies the official opposition. During this time, former commanding General,

Michel Aoun, returned from his 15-year exile in France where he had been forced to seek refuge

after his 1988 campaign against Syrian intervention in Lebanon failed to garner enough

international support (Safa 35). Aoun eventually signed a memorandum of understanding with

Hezbollah, "thus steering his (Christian) followers further away from the March 14 coalition"

(Helou 102). Samir Geagea, a former Christian militia leader, was also released from prison in

July of that year, further putting a seeming end to the postwar political order. In the months and

years following the assassination, political tensions began to dramatically escalate as the media

disseminated an increasing "environment of political and sectarian hatred" (Harb 34).

Various assassinations and assassination attempts rocked the country[89] and the

devastating July 2006 war exacerbated the divisions across Lebanon. A few months after the

2006 war, for instance, Lebanon became plastered with a visual campaign "carrying the words 'I

Love Life' (ILL) on billboards and other spaces throughout the country" (Helou 102). This

campaign appeared shortly after the assassination of Pierre Gemayel, a leader in the Phalangist

party and a member of the March 14 coalition. While some claimed that there was no single

entity behind the campaign, the posters carried within them an inherent political message

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[89] In 2005 alone, there were around 15 bombings and assassinations. These incidents continued for the next few years. Most of the political victims were supporters of the March 14 movement. These assassinations also worsened the schisms in the country as many began accusing Hezbollah of being complicit in the attacks.

targeting Hezbollah and its supporters. The timing of the campaign after the 2006 war seemed to

carry an indirect message that Hezbollah "hates life and loves war" (Saab qtd in Helou 104). In

response to these billboards, an explicitly political campaign appeared that was in direct response

to the "I Love Life" posters. This campaign was called "I Love Life in Colors" (ILLC) and was

"an overt political response to what was perceived as a covert political message through ILL"

(Helou 104). Some signs read "I Love Life in Dignity" or "I Love Life Undictated" (Helou 104).

At this point, and following the example of color revolutions that were happening in places like

Ukraine, for instance, colors in Lebanon had become associated with different political parties.

The colors in the ILLC campaign corresponded to the colors of the political parties making up

the opposition (yellow for Hezbollah, orange for Aoun's Free Patriotic Movemement Part, etc).

Sami Saab, creator of the ILLC slogan, says that the point of ILLC was "to agree with the

general message [of ILL] but with a complete and national version…I love life too, but I love life

in dignity" (Helou 104). These campaigns, then, provide a sense of the increasing political

divisions dominating the country, as they give "a visual dimension to the battle over discourse

and power" in Lebanon (Helou 102).

After this period, Lebanon faced a major institutional impasse as government and anti-

government forces clashed over Hezbollah's demand for "greater representation of its allies in

the cabinet" (Knio, "Is Political Stability Sustainable" 448). Five of Hezbollah's Shiite ministers

subsequently resigned from government in an attempt to prevent the passing of a law that would

require unconditional acceptance of the international tribunal pursuing an investigation into

Hariri's murder (Knio 448). After the government managed to approve the vote for this law, pro-

Syrian president Emile Lahoud and speaker of parliament, Nabih Berri, declared the government

unconstitutional, "given that a major sect is no longer represented in the cabinet" (448). This

deadlock led to Hezbollah staging an open-ended sit-in in the downtown area on December 1.

The sit-in, which coincided with various political assassinations, would last 18 months and

culminate in a wave of deadly clashes between Hezbollah and pro-government forces that took

place in May 2008. The clashes were ultimately sparked by the government's call to investigate

Hezbollah's phone network and undermine its influence. The clashes not only resulted in "the

killing and injuring of dozens of Lebanese citizens from all groups, but also deeper distrust

between the March 14 Bloc and the March 8 group, in general, and the Sunnis and Shi'ites, in

particular" (Haddad 409). Eventually, after around a week of fighting, the Qatari government

intervened and invited all major Lebanese politicians to a meeting in Doha "in the hope of

putting an end to more than 18 months of grinding politics" (Knio, "Is Political Stability

Sustainable" 449). An agreement was ultimately reached that gave the opposition veto power in

a newly formed cabinet and resulted in a new president and electoral law.

Ultimately, what I have aimed to reveal in this section is the turbulent political and social

climate that overtook Lebanon in the wake of Hariri's assassination. Politics became an

increasingly volatile topic as the suspicions that once dominated during the civil war resurfaced

in alternate manifestations. I am interested, then, in discussing the post-assassination moment as

an emerging historical present that "reorganize[ed] the relation of affect and feeling to

knowledge about living" (Berlant, "Thinking about Feeling" 5)—a moment that is affectively

distinctive from the immediate aftermath of the civil war. My concern in this chapter,

furthermore, is more precisely with the modes through which new contours of the ordinary are

shaped in the midst of these developments. I turn to cultural productions here that I argue aim to

harness the affective and temporal energies emerging during this time. A close analysis of these

works provides us with a better sense of how seemingly extraordinary events unfolding in the

aftermath of the Hariri assassination became sutured to ordinary experience in Lebanon. Before

delving into these works, I will outline some of the theoretical frameworks that guide the way I

will be reading these works as well as explain my choice for them. Here I am interested in

theorizations that help me think about how new political landscapes are formed and the affective

adjustments that help identify the contours of these landscapes. I am also invested in

theorizations and frameworks that help me think through the relationship between rupture and

structure, between the event and the everyday.

Theorizing the Post-2005 Moment

There are three main concepts or issues that make up the framework of this chapter: the

historical present, the event and its relationship to the everyday, and finally the role of affect in

these theorizations. My focus in this chapter is on the present as opposed to the past. In this

respect, I am interested in works that are concerned less with relaying how the past is

remembered or how it plays a role in the present; rather, I want to think about the relationship

between representation and the lived experience of violence as it continues to unfold. Here I take

my cue from Das, who I will return to shortly, who argues that the tropes of hauntology that

make up the main discourse on violence and trauma theory "are often evoked too soon—as if the

processes that constitute the way everyday life is engaged in the present have little to say on how

violence is produced or lived with" (*Life and Words* 205). While I am interested in how the

everyday or the quotidian unfold in the shadow of violence, I am not so much concerned with a

theory of everydayness. For one thing, when we consider the manner that extreme violence

transfers into everyday life, "we realize that a radical reconceptualization of everyday life seems

necessary" (Das and Kleinman 16). Instead, what interests me more is the idea of a *historical*

present. Here, I am largely influenced by Berlant's notion of the *historical present*, which is useful for me in thinking about the post-2005 moment. In her terms, a historical present is a "disturbed time; [it] is not "just everydayness because the atmosphere suggests a shift in historic proportions in the terms and processes of the conditions of continuity of life" ("Thinking about Feeling" 5). For Berlant, then, a historical present signifies a change in the circumstances of everyday life. Her interest, however, is not so much with the source of this shift than it is with the adjustments and continuities of life that occur in the wake of this change. For the purposes of this chapter, I am concerned with the historical present that unfolds in the tumultuous aftermath of Hariri's assassination. In order to theorize this shift more precisely, however, we need to reflect on the notion of the event and its place in historicization as well as its relationship to everyday life.

Berlant, for her part, resists the inclination or tendency to draw a stark distinction between the event and the processes of ordinary or everyday life. She relies on the Foucauldian term "eventilization[90]" to explain how events become "absorbed in a new ordinariness" ("Intuitionists" 858). In this sense, she sees activities of eventilization as that which influence our understanding about what is "predictable, reliable, [and] tractable" in ordinary life ("Thinking about Feeling" 5). She understands eventilization as the "need to undo the moment when a happening moves into common sense or a process congeals into an object-event that conceals its immanence, its potentially unfinished or enigmatic activity" ("Intuitionists" 848). Eventilization, then, reverses the processes through which an event becomes transcendent. As Thomas R. Flynn explains, moreover, eventilization is one way in which Foucault broadens our understanding of the notion of the event (179). An event, for Foucault, "is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a

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[90] For more on Foucault and eventilization see Paul Rabinow (Ed), *What is Enlightenment? The Foucault Reader* p. 32-50 and Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge.*

battle, but the *reversal of a relationship of forces*, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a

vocabulary turned against those who once used it" (qtd in Flynn 191). Eventilization refers to a

process that consists primarily of a rupture phase or a "reversal of the evidence on which our

received understanding and practices rely" (Flynn 189), and secondly of a gearing down in

which we can rediscover, through the event, the forces operating in history. Here, however, it is

important to note that this gearing down phase does not necessarily imply continuity with a

previous condition; rather, gearing down "multiplies rather than reduces aspects of intelligibility

in endless profusion" (Flynn 189). Foucault, therefore, resists the opposition between the event

and enduring structures of history. He argues that "it is by 'squeezing the individual event' that

those massive phenomena emerge" (Flynn 182).

I start here with Foucault's reflections on the event and the process of eventilization in

order to uncover what it means to think about or discuss Hariri's assassination as a

transformative event in Lebanese contemporary history. In these terms, it is important to

understand the assassination as both belonging to and departing from larger historical structures

and processes. Here I am simultaneously interested in cultural works that "de-objectify" the

event to provide insight into how the event becomes "unbounded," so to speak in its relationship

to everyday life. In this respect, these cultural products diffuse the exceptionalism of Hariri's

assassination to reintegrate it into the historical patterns and entrenched power structures that

frame everyday life. My interests in this chapter resound strongly with anthropological and

ethnographic pursuits that aim to think through how people exist in the shadow of violent

events.[91] Das is one thinker who has heavily influenced my inquiries in this regard. Her work is

rooted in two major historical events: the Indian Partition and the assassination of Prime Minister

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[91] See for instance, Pettigrew and Adhikari "Fear and Everyday Life in Nepal," Lewis, "Sex and Violence in Brazil," and Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*.

Indira Gandhi, yet she writes that her book "is not *about* these events in the sense that a historian

or a psychoanalyst might construe them" (*Life and Words* 1).[92] Instead, it recounts the lives of

the people and communities who were implicated in these events and "it describes the way that

the event attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of

the ordinary" (1).

Similarly, while I present Hariri's assassination as a framing event for this chapter, my

analysis here is not so much about the representation of this event as it is about the ways in

which the event becomes absorbed into a sense of the ordinary. Like Berlant, Das aims to deflate

the transcendent nature of an event to think about how it is embedded in everyday life. She

argues importantly that, "the particular mode in which the subject is immersed in the temporal

shapes the contour of the event" (97). The works I have chosen for this chapter provide insight

into how subjects become absorbed in the temporal in the wake of Hariri's assassination. Das

ultimately provides a framework for thinking through the relationship between the event and

structure. She argues that the event is "always attached to the ordinary as if there were tentacles

that reach out from the everyday and anchor the event to it in specific ways" (7). The question I

pose to the cultural works in this chapter is: how do they present an account about the specific

modes through which the everyday anchors the event? I argue here that paying attention to affect

is one approach that helps us answer this question. I will now briefly outline two separate

frameworks for thinking about the conjunction of affect, the event, and everyday life. The first

approach is cultural studies oriented and the second is anthropological. I aim to inflect my

analysis with each of these frameworks as they have each aided me in theorizing the period

under study in this chapter.

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[92] Das begins with the idea of the event "as a historical construct that constitutes a rupture" (223 n1).
Throughout her book, however, the notion of the event "becomes analytically more complex as its relation to
language and to everyday life begins to unfold" (223 n1).

The Historical Present and the Refrain

In this chapter, I begin with the observation that in the wake of Hariri's assassination, there was a shift in the affective atmosphere. In this regard, I am interested in cultural works that seem concerned with "writing the history of the present" (Berlant "Intuitionists" 845). Like Berlant, I argue that this issue is a problem of affect because writing about the present involves "*sensing* [that which is] coursing through it" (*my emphasis* Berlant "Thinking about Feeling" 9). More importantly, affect or "the body's active presence to the intensities of the present" immerses the subject in a historical context (Berlant, "Intuitionists" 846). The investigation of affect in these terms enables us to "communicate the conditions of an historical moment's production as a visceral moment" (Berlant "Intuitionists" 846). Like Berlant, then, I explore affect as a kind of "intelligence about history," precisely because affect works in the present. Instead of the historical present being a subject for retrospective objectification, it "stands here as a thing being made, lived through, and apprehended" (848). From this standpoint, Hariri's assassination can be thought of as a "historico-traumatic moment" that upends, shifts, or even abolishes "the frame of an ongoing translocal life in a national context" (858). By extension, "the sensorium of everyday life" is radically altered and becomes embedded in a new ordinariness (858). Another way of thinking through this shift is through Felix Guattari's notion of a *refrain*. Bertelsen and Murphie provide a very useful and relevant interpretation of Guattari's "logic of affects" in their discussion of the Tampa Affair—the August 2001 incident when Australian authorities denied the Norwegian freighter *MV Tampa* carrying 438 rescued Afghan refugees entry into Australian waters. They interpret the arrival of this ship and its "persistent redness sitting on the horizon" (143) as a *refrain*, or a "gathering of forces…[that] *come from the outside,*

as a challenge to established forms" (*original emphasis* 145). If we consider Hariri's death as a refrain of sorts, it opens us up to a better conceptualization of how his assassination functioned as a "reorganization of affective forces" (139). Here, however, we are not thinking of the assassination as a "new kind of signifier" (139); instead, I am interested in how it produces a shift in affective intensities.

According to Bertelson and Murphie, events like the red ship or Hariri's assassination produce temporal contours and vitality affects that signify shifts in intensity and internal feeling states.[93] These temporal contours and vitality affects are then "gathered into refrains, diagrammed with other refrains [to] stimulat[e] the nation's nervous system" (147). The nation, then, is enlivened in times of such crises because of the very new 'temporal contours' that radically reorganize and transform modes of ordinary existence. Relevant here is that refrains work as "openings to possible change" (145). The fact that they attach themselves to future forces helps explain how Hariri's assassination, for instance, mobilized a movement calling for change, for a reconfiguring of the political landscape. In the aftermath of Hariri's assassination, moreover, a refreshed vitality was injected into political and social spheres. Politics was everywhere and everyone had to have an opinion about the political crisis continuing to unfold. As Bertelson and Murphie convincingly argue, "opinions and arguments matter of course, but *it perhaps matters more that an opinion had to be had*" (*original emphasis* 144). The assassination ultimately resulted in a "staging of powers to affect and be affected" (143) and a "cast emerged to be taken up by these powers" (143)— the protesters, the media, political parties, Hezbollah, and old and returning political elites. The refrain, then, functions as one way to theorize Hariri's assassination in terms of the affective landscape that developed in its aftermath. More

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[93] For more on temporal contours and vitality affects see Daniel N. Stern, *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life.*

particularly, the notion of the refrain provides a framework to discuss the emergent the historical

present as a shift in affective atmospheres and intensities. It signifies a "consequential

eventfulness…which exceed[s] the framework of received forms of marking time" (Harootunian

472).

Anticipation

In anthropological accounts about the relationship between violence and everyday life,

the idea of anticipation often plays a central role. In societies in which the boundaries between

peace and violence are often blurred, anticipation provides one type of temporal experience

through which to discuss the realities of living within close proximity to potential violence. As

Das eloquently puts it, "The fragility of the social becomes embedded in a temporality of

anticipation" (Das 9). Pradeep Jeganthan, for instance, claims that in the Southern Sri Lankan

context "the anticipation of violence—rather than its perpetration—occupies an

incomprehensible place in the logic of the modern" (111). In this sense, she isolates anticipation,

or "tactics of anticipation" (122), as she calls them, as an object of study to elucidate the ways in

which Sri Lankans negotiate the uncertainties of living in the shadow of violence. Similar to the

imperatives of this chapter, Jeganthan is not interested in explicit realities of violence; rather, she

is invested in conceptualizing the anticipation of violence as a condition that provides insight

into how everyday life unfolds in proximity to violence. The notion of anticipating violence in

accounts like these functions as way a of thinking through "regular mundane encounters of

everyday life in states with protracted conflict" (Hermez, "The War is Going to Ignite" 327).

Sami Hermez's ethnographic account about the mundane experiences of Lebanese people, for

instance, helps him explain how war becomes an absent present of sorts and the way "practices

of anticipation" shape how subjects live in and interact with the state (*War is Coming* 5).

Anticipation, for Hermez, bridges "the anxious gap between perception and truthful or certain knowledge" ("The War is Going to Ignite" 333).[94] Das explains the affective texture of this dynamic as one produced "on the registers of the virtual and the potential" (*Life and Words* 9). While the experience of fear is real and visceral here, it is "not necessarily actualized in events" (9). Violence in these instances is experienced as a potential not in the sense of something that will appear in the near future, "but rather as that which is already present" (9).

The logic of anticipation, then, provides a useful framework for thinking through the affective realities of living in post-2005 Lebanon. My own work in this chapter participates in these discussions as it builds on investigations into the affective realities of living in places with protracted conflicts. Like Jeganthan, I aim "to think over that condition again and again, and touch its texture in different ways" (123). Through my analysis, however, I reveal that we must also go beyond anticipation as a main paradigm for thinking through the relationship between violence and the everyday. Anticipation ultimately evokes an active sort of relationship to crisis, which is undoubtedly present in the body of work that I analyze, as it is one aspect of the affective realities that these works convey. As I will shortly reveal, however, the affect worlds that these cultural products express are simultaneously entangled in a more complex network of negotiations in which proximity to crisis produces adjustments that do not necessarily fit into the active process of anticipation.

Affective Flatness in Rabee Jaber's *The Mehlis Report*

To a large extent, we can view Rabee Jaber's novel, *The Mehlis Report*, as a historical novel. *The Mehlis Report* is largely concerned with "capturing the zeitgeist" of the post-Hariri

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94 For a sociological account about everyday life in the wake of the 2005 assassination, see Klas Borell's "Terrorism and Everyday Life in Beirut 2005: Mental Reconstructions, Precautions, and Normalization."

assassination and post-March 14 moment (Creswell), and so, in this sense, the novel provides an account of a historical moment that is particular to post-2005 Lebanon. As Berlant explains, the historical novel "points to a unity of experience in an ongoing moment" ("Intuitionists" 847). This moment is only later regarded as "epochal" but the historical novel's project is to relay how, at the time, this moment "was evidenced as a shared nervous system" (847). Jaber's novel relays the life of Saman Yared, an architect living in Beirut in the wake of the Hariri assassination and the turmoil that followed it. The scene of Hariri's death, while never taking a central position in the text (except for the last chapter, which I will discuss shortly), nevertheless shapes the world of the novel in significant ways. In one particularly telling passage, Saman flips through a French magazine as his girlfriend Cecilia cooks in the kitchen. The text reveals what Saman reads in his magazine:

> A picture of the Saint Georges Hotel balconies collapsing. A picture of broken glass in front of the Phoenicia Hotel. A picture of a charred corpse. A picture of an overturned car surrounded by piles of ash and rubble. A picture of the pit filled with rainwater. A yellow ribbon and bare olive and pine trees that had not been burnt. A white electrical generator. Cameras, and a truck. At the bottom of the page: a shampoo ad. On the opposite page: an interview with a writer from Senegal.
>
> Cecilia is frying cauliflower (6).

In this instance, the story of Hariri's assassination emerges through photos sprawled out across the French magazine article. The violent event, which frames the reality in which the novel unfolds, makes itself known through the casual act of flipping through a magazine. The sensationalized content of the photos is neutralized by the monotonous repetition of the text and the sequencing of images that become more mundane as the passage progresses. The shampoo ad

at the bottom of the page creates a striking contrast between consumerism and images of horror and death. This juxtaposition signals the continuity of life and endurance of capitalism amid life altering traumas and violences. The rhythm of this passage, which concludes with Cecilia frying cauliflower, embodies the general tone of the text that counteracts the impact of violence with scenes of ordinary life. The text, then, anchors violence in processes of the everyday to reveal how extreme events—although initially experienced as ruptures—reintegrate into the fabric of the quotidian. In this sense, the novel reveals how Hariri's assassination as a refrain works to "fold the chaos into the beginnings of structure" (Bertelsen and Murphie 139).

The characters in the text are all anxiously waiting for the results of the Mehlis Report, which was intended to reveal who was behind Rafic Hariri's assassination. In this sense, the novel is structured around anticipation that informs the perpetuation of everyday life represented in the text. *The Mehlis Report* constructs the report as a turning point for the country. Saman's sister writes to him from Paris, asking and pleading with him: "When, she asks him, will he finally leave Beirut. 'I haven't decided yet,' he replies. 'I'm waiting for the Mehlis Report'" (4). Saman's reply concludes the first chapter, which loads his statement with a dramatic edge that informs the rest of the novel. Although the Mehlis Report in these instances is posited as a sort of crossroad, the actual report was somewhat inconclusive and anti-climactic. The novel never reveals, moreover, the actual report because Saman dies of a heart attack before the report is released. In this respect, the novel is constructed around a potential, an uncertainty from and around which everyday life continues to unfold. Saman's death precludes the possibility of a future in the text, which reinforces the novel's emphasis on the historical present as a lens through which to think about crisis. Crisis in these terms "reveals and creates habits and genres

of inhabiting the ordinary while reconstituting worlds that are never futures but presents thickly

inhabited, opened up, and moved around in" (Berlant, "Intuitionists" 848).

The reason that I have chosen to study this novel is not merely because it relays the

historical moment in the wake of the assassination—an issue that undoubtedly makes the text

useful for my analysis. Importantly, however, my interest with this novel is due largely to its

concern with the mundane and the ordinary. The text's emphasis on the mundane as a framework

through which to evidence the historical is crucial to its narration of the historical present. The

mundaneness of the text is loaded, as it becomes redefined by the context of crisis in which it

unfolds. This kind of representation is crucial for teasing out the affective experience that

unfolds when the boundaries between peace and violence are blurred by the anticipation of future

conflict and the unresolvedness of past violence. Mundaneness produces an affective flatness in

the text that becomes "exemplary of a shared historical time" (Berlant, "Intuitionists" 845).

Through this flatness, moreover, which is embedded in the formal structures of the text, the

dichotomy between peace and violence is upended as the novel captures the processes of

negotiation and adaption that unfold when violence enters the fabric of the ordinary. Violence

occurs in distant proximity to the characters of the novel—not directly affecting them, but

injecting the places they inhabit and move around in with loaded anticipation. Who, then, are the

characters that populate Jaber's novel?

Saman Yared is a middle-aged architect who has many female companions, sometimes

lovers, who he interacts with throughout the novel. He seems most strongly attached to Cecilia, a

cook at a large supermarket in Beirut, with whom he spends the most time. He has three sisters,

two of which immigrated, and one who was abducted during the war. In the second half of the

novel, his kidnapped and—as we find out—murdered sister, Josephine, takes over the narration

from an underworld inhabited by the dead of Lebanon who spend their days writing the stories of their lives. Josephine watches her brother's life play out from afar and reflects on how her life turned out the way it did. The last chapter is told from the perspective of Rafic Hariri himself in the moments when he has become aware of his own death. Like Josephine he is represented as a "dislocated observer" (Creswall) wandering around the city that so heavily bears his impact. Hayek suggests that the underworld in Jaber's novel functions as a critique of the utility of testimonial narratives as a response to traumatic pasts in an ongoing anxious present ("Beirut"). Because the dead in Beirut are constantly engaged in writing their memoirs "to no avail," Hayek argues that the novel "seems to draw a large question about the usefulness of testimonial narratives as a form in which to engage with Beirut's bloody past" (596). I would supplement this conclusion by arguing that Josephine's narration in the text involves more than a rewriting of her past.

A large part of Josephine's perspective includes observations about her brother's world. In one sense, this narration potentially foreshadows her brother's death in that it draws a line of connection between the underworld and Saman. Throughout the novel, for instance, Saman receives mysterious phone calls that never go through. We find out from Josephine's first narration that it is her attempting to call him from the other side. Much of Josephine's perspective, moreover, involves narrating what we see Saman doing in other chapters, but from a different vantage point. "You look at the dome," says Josephine addressing her brother, "and you know the building isn't the Opera Cinema anymore, it houses an insurance company now" (60). Her statement comes a couple of pages after Saman walks past the old Opera cinema and reflects how "he had seen countless movies there, long years ago" (57). This structuring of the text, then, whereby Josephine re-narrates the happenings of the novel from the perspective of Lebanon's

underworld, invites us to think of the dead who represent Lebanon's past as a persistent "present absence." The text incites us, then, to no longer think "about the past's presence as revenant, but about the present's ongoing condition" (Berlant, "Intuitionists" 858). The dead here do not function as revenants, but as vantage points through which the historical present is further conveyed. In the last chapter, Hariri roams the city much like Saman does throughout the novel, walking past the same buildings, observing the same scenes. The style of narration is similar, suggesting a likeness between how the dead and the living navigate the city. In these moments, the text offers a way to reconceptualize the past's relationship to the present. The novel does not privilege the memorialization of past violence; rather, the past functions as a heuristic that leads us back to a charting of the historical present.

The rest of the novel oscillates between third person limited narration and Saman's occasional first person narrative that remains in quotation marks. This type of narration, as well as Josephine's, works to make it as though the reader is observing him from afar; in other words, the narration situates Saman in a historical context that readers gain access to through the unfolding of Saman's everyday life. Saman spends much of his days walking around the city, mapping present-day Beirut. This mapping is a fundamental aspect of all the texts under consideration in this chapter and is crucial to a charting of the historical present. As discussed earlier, a discussion of a historical present is concerned with the adjustments and continuities of life that occur in the wake of crisis. It a discernment of a kind of atmosphere that is outlined by "the scenes one walks into and responds to, feels out and judges" (Berlant, "Thinking about Feeling Historical" 5). Capturing the historical present, then, requires a sort of mapping, a teasing out of the intensities, patterns, relations, and dynamics that play out in particular context. As Saman moves around the city, "recalling stories of his grandfather's time, and of the

destruction caused by war" (Hayek 596), the text registers how Lebanon's violent past and future

conflict "become continually reinscribed in the ordinary spaces of the present" (Westmoreland,

Crisis of Representation 178). Saman's continual movement throughout the city and his presence

as a flâneur works to reveal the layers of Beirut and how the impending threat of future violence

reorients the ways in which ordinary life plays out. Through Saman's navigation of the city, the

text recounts how everyday life registers the collision between past, present, and future violence.

Let us consider, for instance, this passage that takes place as Saman walks to his swimming

workout:

> Saman crosses the empty white plaza and takes the road beside the ruins of the City
>
> Palace Cinema. He passes behind the Lazariyyah Complex and then behind the 'Teatro'
>
> Theater, which they haven't finished restoring yet. He intentionally avoids passing
>
> through Amir Bachir Street and the Parliament District. That area is packed right now
>
> with friends and acquaintances of his, and he doesn't want anyone derailing his exercise.
>
> He passes behind the car park and enters the street with iron roadblocks set up in front of
>
> the UN's ESCWA building. Remembering he's carrying a bag, he keeps away from the
>
> security men, passes the roadblock, and crosses the intersection in front of the Bladour
>
> Hummus, Bean, and Fattah Restaurant. He doesn't go down the street with all the banks
>
> (112-113).

This passage belongs to a larger descriptive sequence that recounts the various scenes and

locations that Saman observes as he traverses the city. On his walk, he is mapping the

contradictions and paradoxes of a fast changing city. The version of the city that he records is

fleeting as new construction and urban development continue to unfold around him despite "all

these assassinations and explosions, all this tension, all this fear of falling back into civil war"

(Jaber 113). Saman navigates Beirut with ease and familiarity and the political tensions of the moment become immersed in the ordinary act of walking towards the gym. It is ordinary, experience, therefore, that registers the moment of crisis in which the text unfolds. The regularity of the sentence structure and Saman's routine of "crossing, passing, taking, avoiding" in the present tense, capture the habitual nature of this experience and absorb the crisis that presses up against this sequence. Evidence of past violence emerges in the ruins of the City Palace Cinema that Saman walks beside. Iron roadblocks indicate a heightened level of security—large unmovable structures that expose a city on edge anxiously anticipating future violence. This reality, however, is acknowledged in the text through an adjustment. Crisis, in this instance, requires a new ordinary that unfolds through Saman, almost passively, "remembering he's carrying a bag" that might make him suspicious to security guards and thus derail his routine. The seamless nature of the ordinary is somewhat hampered by the presence of security guards and by iron roadblocks that require adjustments and shifts in routine. This interruption, if we may call it that, however, does not disrupt the sequence of the passage that registers the succession of everyday life. Rather, the tense political moment weaves its way into the patterns of the ordinary, becoming absorbed by the perpetuation of the everyday. These strategies evoke what Berlant would call a flatness in the text, a "waning of the melodramatic" ("Thinking of Feeling Historical" 4), where the historical present is not perceived in terms of trauma, but in terms of flatness. The iron roadblocks that index past and future violence are absorbed by the act of walking in the text; they are recalled not explicitly or dramatically, but passively as a potential inconvenience that will interfere with the perpetuation of the ordinary.

Throughout *The Mehlis Report*, news of renewed violence is constantly wedded to descriptions of mundane activity. The novel unfolds in the post-Cedar Revolution context when

violent political assassinations and bombings became a regular occurrence. At the beginning of

the novel, Saman receives news of Samir Kassir's assassination. His reception of and reaction to

this news are significant for understanding the relationship between crisis and the everyday in

Lebanon:

> He spends the morning hours in front of the blue computer screen […] he reads the news
>
> and sends short emails to friends within the city, and to friends outside. Friends and
>
> lovers. His short fingers are somewhat plumb […] He drinks his coffee and looks out the
>
> window at the pigeons flying between the buildings and minarets, at the company he has
>
> kept on two employees. The tall one is adept at making coffee. The short one is useless.
>
> He doesn't know what she does—eight hours everyday.
>
> On the morning of June 2nd, a head peeped around his office door, and her face was pale:
>
> "They killed Samir Kassir" (2).

The structure of this passage is important as it is composed of a series of unrelated and

seemingly mundane details of Saman's day-to-day morning routines. The details here work to

create a particular temporal framework that shifts and readjusts with the news of violence. The

organization of details creates an idle temporality, snippets of ordinary experience in which news

of violence is ultimately received. The text, then, seems to purposely create a contrast between

the mundaneness and generality of Saman's morning routine and the extremity and specificity of

Kassir's death. The news, however, does not necessarily mark a shift in the narration. Instead,

the narration that follows gradually begins to fold the news of this violent event back into the

everyday. Saman's eyes cloud over for a moment upon hearing the news and he begins to

remember and contextualize this man whose path, he recalls, he had crossed often in the

downtown area. He remembers, for instance, that he had seen him not too long ago at the Etoile

Restuaruant: "It had been a Friday. Saman only goes to that restaurant on Fridays. Because of the fish plate: rice with stewed fish and onions. An old habit—on Fridays he always eats at the Étoile or the Balthus" (3). The mundane details here are significant in that they ground Saman's reception of the news in the patterns of ordinary experience. The entire text in this sense is structured around the oscillation between mundaneness and anticipation. News of Kassir's death weaves in and out of the descriptions of Saman's everyday life.[95] In between the brief pieces of information that his two employees convey to him about the incident, the narration wanders to describe the banal rhythms of Saman's existence:

> "They blew up his car in front of his home on the Furn al-Hayek Street, the La Rose building."
>
> This time it was the tall employee who was speaking. He had no connection to either of them […] in fact if anyone ever asked what he does in the office, he'd say: I drink coffee.
>
> "The La Rose building. In front of the Black Tulip" (3).

The movement, between the extreme and the everyday here works to index the ways in which violence is experienced in an ongoing present. The text manages the violent event by neutralizing it with scenes of ordinary life that become more loaded in the face of the bombing. Saman's run-ins with Kassir inject the places that he inhabits and navigates with danger and uncertainty. Violence here in Jaber's novel is always peripheral, never central. It does not engulf the text; rather the interplay between violence and mundaneness reconfigures the contours of the everyday. The text, then, seems to ask the question, what does it mean to live on the unstable boundaries of violence?

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[95] Jaber uses a similar strategy when Saman is talking on the phone with his sister Mary who lives in America. As Mary expresses her anxiety about the state of Lebanon and the dangers she keeps hearing on the news, the narration wavers between her anxious state and Saman reflecting on the light pouring in through the house's skylight and the oak tree that his grandfather planted in the 1920s (23-27).

Jaber's novel is largely concerned with relaying how subjects are immersed in the temporal as they live in the shadow of violence. The concern with the mundane throughout the text, therefore, has to be understood in terms of "the temporal realignments that prolonged engagement with violence seems to create at the level of local society" (Das and Kleinman 11). The tense political situation in Lebanon, often ominously referred to as "the wada'a" (the situation), becomes a refrain in the wake of Hariri's assassination and the reality of the novel. As Bertelsen and Murphie explain, "refrains enable modes of living in time, not in 'states'" (145). The novel's preoccupation with the patterns of everyday life is one way in which it relays the nature of existing in the temporal in the historical present. Towards the end of the novel, for instance, the text describes Cecilia and Saman's dynamic over a week. They recount how everyone is talking about the Mehlis Report, everyone at the supermarket where Cecilia works and the politicians and journalists at the coffee shop that Saman frequents. After this brief conversation, the narration changes course as it breaks down into a nightly recounting of what they cooked for dinner: "On Wednesday night he said: Tonight I'm going to learn how to cook Japanese […] She taught him instead how to make potato salad […] Thursday night she taught him how to make spaghetti with tomatoes, basil, and olive oil…" (144). This nightly patterning of the text creates a flatness or a monotony in which the crisis of the moment is embedded. In this sense, the text offers a way to think about historical experience in terms of quotidian intensities. They turn on the news that has "been the same all day: the suicide of the Syrian Interior Minister, General Ghazi Kanaan; Pakistan's concern about aftershocks following the earthquake; the Brazilian ship with seven thousand cows on board leaving the port of Beirut after a warning from the municipality; Bayern Munich was preparing for a match against…" (144). The petering out of the text here reflects the way in which reports of political instability

(Kanaan's suicide) become absorbed by the generalized noise of the nightly news. On Saturday night they went to the mall, which was "teeming with people" (145). Saman notes that people will leave soon; they "were afraid to gather in places like that too late at night" (145). In the midst of descriptions of the ordinary, Saman's thought suggests a disturbed time in which the processes of ordinary life are shaped by crisis and anticipation. This anticipation however is embedded within an affective flatness that comes across in the descriptions of mundaneness that flood the text. The emphasis on this mundaneness embodies an approach to historical experience that rethinks the relationship of violence to everyday life.

Reintegrating the Event in *Beirut Diaries: Truth, Lies, and Videos*

Mai Masri's documentary, *Beirut Diaries: Truth, Lies, and Videos,* provides an account of the immediate aftermath following Hariri's assassination. More specifically, the documentary follows the experiences of Nadine, a frequent participant in the demonstrations, to track various scenes within the protests and the tent city that emerged in the wake of the assassination. It aims to capture the contradictions at the heart of the Independence Intifada, the social schisms that underlay the movement, and the scenes of everyday life in the tent city. In this sense, Masri's piece traces the affective intensities and dynamics that characterize the post-2005 historical moment. Because the documentary is about the immediate aftermath of the assassination and the upheaval that Hariri's death seemed to bring, it does not deal with flatness in the same way that Jaber's novel does. Masri's work does, however, reveal how the assassination became folded into enduring power structures. The documentary here relays the post-2005 moment as a "stretched out 'now' that is at once intimate and estranged" (Berlant, "Thinking about Feeling" 5). This stretched out historical present "merges an intensified present with senses of the recent

past and near future" (5). The past in Masri's documentary merges with the heightened present moment to construct a narrative in which the 'newness' of the present becomes reabsorbed into the same unjust power structures that existed before. In many ways, then, the documentary constructs a narrative of disillusionment and disempowerment to critique the limitations of social agency in a country plagued by corruption and injustice.

Beirut Diaries reveals the extent to which Hariri's assassination can be thought of as an affective event. As Bertelsen and Murphie remind us, affective events "begin in a *powerful indetermination*…a chaos that soon begins to press upon a context" (*original emphasis* 139). The documentary opens with the sound of a pen scratching on a paper as Nadine writes in her diary: February 14, 2005: the day Rafic Hariri was killed. As the camera films Nadine in a low angle shot, her voice can be heard in a voice over. She explains how all the glass in her house broke because of the explosion and how she cannot describe what she felt on the day of the assassination. Her voice trails off as she is speaking and the non-diegetic sounds of ambulances begin to dominate the audio-scape of the film. The camera shifts to shaky footage of chaotic scenes unfolding near the site of the assassination as the pulsing sound of a beating heart succumbs to the noisy wails of sirens and roaring sounds of fire burning. Gruesome images of men carrying away the remains of charred corpses and frenzied scenes of panic dominate the visual landscape of the film. The scenes slow down in a drawn out tempo and as the screen goes black, we hear Nadine let out a sigh. The overwhelming drama of the assassination is diffused by a sigh, an exhalation that releases the frantic energy of the violent event and grounds it back in a scene of the ordinary.

The documentary, then, evokes Hariri's assassination as an affective event that ultimately calls on "refrains to fold the chaos into the beginnings of structure, to bring a little order"

(Bertelsen and Murphie 139). Masri's camera works to capture the gathering and scattering of forces that emerged in the wake of the assassination. It reveals the ways in which the crisis of the violent event embedded itself in an emerging structure. In this sense, the documentary provides an account of the historical as it is unfolding, "for modes of living *as they come into being*" (*original emphasis* 141). While the documentary provides a rough chronological narrative of the various happenings occurring in the wake of the assassination, the structure of the piece is not necessarily linear. The film, instead, is composed of various scenes from the protests strewn together to create a general ambiance about the demonstrations and the context in which they unfolded.

In one sense, *Beirut Diaries* reveals the extent to which the Independence Intifada was *experienced* as a moment of unity with the potential to enact real change. The documentary is injected with scenes of national unity, of massive crowds gathering beneath an endless sea of Lebanese flags and chanting for 'freedom, sovereignty, and independence'—the chorus of the March 14 movement. At the same time, however, Masri's camera captures a *scattering* of energy that is important for understanding the ways that the movement became reabsorbed into ordinary existence and enduring power structures. Towards the end of the documentary, for instance, a black car comes honking through the crowds. This scene falls shortly after the announcement to dismantle the camps was pronounced and Nadine, and others who participated in the movement, express outrage and disappointment at this decision that was "taken from above." As the black car passes through, the text on the screen reads: "26 April, 2005. In front of Parliament." This date is also the day Syrian troops completed their evacuation from Lebanon. The celebratory, unified mood that we witness at other points of the documentary, however, is missing from this scene as the black car, presumably carrying a politician, makes its way through the gathered

crowd. What follows is a scrambling, a dispersion of energy that seems to shatter the spirit of

unity and hope that had washed over Beirut's downtown areas in other scenes of the

documentary. Someone from the crowd angrily yells, "this road is not for you, you dogs" as the

car's tires screech loudly on the pavement. The camera here becomes immersed in the crowd that

is now frantically shoving each other, swarming the visual frame with bodies as it makes its way

through the mass. As the camera emerges to the front of the crowd where people are banging on

the windows of the black car, two shots are fired. A scene of mayhem ensues with people

rushing to a body laying on the floor, a woman frantically calling out, ambulance sirens wailing.

The incident is not clear here, as the camera remains immersed in the frenzied and agitated

movement of the crowd. Following this scene, the outrage and confusion over the decision to

dismantle the camps continues. Nadine explains: "The parties that agreed to dismantle didn't tell

their supporters. They didn't take us into account. That's when my disappointment began. I was

shocked."

What is significant about this scene, which is structured around the passing of a black car

carrying a politician, is that it draws a visual connection between the endurance of corrupt power

figures and the scattering of a harmonious energy that had seemingly characterized the

movement. In this sense, through this dispersal, the documentary reveals how the events of the

moment reattach themselves to enduring processes of power. The scene of scattering can be

thought of in the Foucauldian sense as a "gearing down" that resituates an event in the multiple

processes that constitute it (Flynn). This "down shift" does not necessarily imply a continuity

between the event and a previous condition; rather, "gearing down is centrifugal…it multiplies

rather than reduces aspects of intelligibility in endless profusion" (Flynn 189). The footage here,

which is composed of various shots edited together, works to heighten a mood of confusion and

disillusionment as it remains submersed in the frenzied rush of the crowd. The event of Hariri's

assassination, while experienced and represented as a rupture, is now reintegrated into the

systems of power that made his ascendency and death possible.

The unified mood of the March 14 movement that unfolded in the aftermath of Hariri's

death is not just undermined at the end of *Beirut Diaries*, but complicated throughout the entire

piece. The documentary achieves this largely by recording many of the conversations taking

place in the context of the demonstrations. The conversations reveal deep schisms and

disagreements among those gathered in the downtown area as well as differences in priorities for

being there. Throughout these conversations, Masri's camera is often acknowledged, evoking the

sense that the camera is a participant in the dialogues it is documenting. This effect, in which the

protestors gesture towards the mediating camera as they debate the events consuming the country

and their positions within it, accentuates the negotiation of self as performative. One particularly

telling moment in the documentary occurs after a conversation about exploiting Hariri's death

for political purposes. In this scene, during a discussion among a small crowd gathered in the tent

city, a young man interjects, speaking both to the camera and the other people participating in the

conversation. The following conversation ensues:

He says, "Look, if I die, if they were to come now and kill me, I would write a will that

says please exploit my death so that you can liberate the country. Rafic Hariri was martyred,

true, but everyone is exploiting his death. I am exploiting his death. I am exploiting his death to

free my people." At this point in his declaration, another man interrupts him firmly repeating,

"With all due respect, I will not allow you [to say such things]; I will not allow it." As the sound

of the brawl continues in the background, another man gives his opinion: "Not all exploitations

are negative, some are positive. This man has the courage to speak his mind."

The sounds from the disagreement between the first two men become louder as the camera, in a continuity shot, shifts to a crowd seemingly witnessing a fight. A few men from the crowd turn to the camera and march towards it with their hands in the air, demanding that it stop filming. The camera loses focus as the filming becomes shaky, with the lens jumping to upward shots and shots of the ground in rushed disorder. The camera's role and presence throughout this scene is significant. The camera here records an instance of discord among members of the protests as the priorities of these men differ. Those who were gathered in downtown to demand the truth behind Hariri's assassination clashed with those who did not prioritize the call for truth and instead saw in Hariri's death an opportunity for change. The camera's presence as a participator in the conversations works to capture how the present moment becomes apprehended as "emergently historic" (Berlant, "Intuitionists" 848). These conversations that take place throughout the documentary reveal an emerging historic moment that requires an adjustment, a reconfiguring that we see unfolding through various interactions, through attempts to work through the political present. The documentary here is tracking how previous others are coming into proximity with one another and the fabric of these interactions. The disagreement that the camera is prevented from witnessing is part of this adjustment. The fact that the Masri's camera records its own silencing is significant because it exposes how the image of unity and the spirit of conversation that dominated the Lebanese mediascape at the time masked the deeper fault lines running through the movement.

One of the main sources of dispute throughout the piece is the issue of Hezbollah. In the middle of a heated dispute about Hezbollah at the beginning of the documentary, someone begins playing the national anthem, interrupting the flow of the conversation. The woman, who had been heatedly making her point, raises her hand, praising the person who turned on the

national anthem. Seamless camera shots, then, show people standing up, with their hands raised

in respect, singing along to the anthem. In another continuous shot, with the national anthem still

playing, the camera reveals a crowd of people carrying Lebanese flags. Soon text appears on the

screen: "Riad El Solh. March 8, 2005," as Hassan Nasrallah's voice is heard speaking above the

sounds of the national anthem. The camera zooms out in a wide angle shot to reveal a massive

crowd gathered to show support for Hezbollah. This broad view accentuates the mood of protests

that consumed the post-assassination moment, but also swiftly affirms the potential for discord

that the March 8 protest signified. The ongoing sound of the national anthem through the

transition, from the conversations in Martyr's square to the images of Riad El Solh, evokes a

continuity that is juxtaposed against the political divide that the March 8 movement represented.

Such techniques are crucial for revealing how the political schisms emerging at the time were

continuous with the general fabric and dynamic of Lebanese society.

The documentary follows Nadine as she meets with students at the Lebanese University

who disagree on certain issues, most notably Hezbollah's status as a resistance group and its

subsequent right to hold weapons. By documenting these conversations that emerge at various

points throughout the film, Masri seems to make the argument that Lebanese citizens are capable

of working through their differences. The exacerbation of schisms, however, is due to the

political class who exploit political or sectarian differences for their own advancement. While

this representation can be construed as idealistic, the documentary uses these moments to reveal

how attempts at building a better country are always coopted by the continuing dominance of the

elite. In this way, Masri also exposes how the present's experience of violence and political

conflict are loaded with resonances from the past.

The past, then, is an aspect that Masri frequently returns to during the documentary. Throughout the film, Nadine and other protestors constantly pause beneath the Martyr's monument in Martyr's square, which was built in honor of martyrs executed during the Ottoman rule, and that now stands riddled with bullet holes from the Lebanese civil war. In this way, Masri injects the present moment with the persistent memory of past violence that gazes down at the protestors gathered in downtown and that her subjects often interact with as they reflect upon its significance. In one particularly evocative scene, Nadine walks through an abandoned building, still bearing the effects of the civil war. This scene includes various shots of the building, the bullet holes, a mysterious silhouette on the wall, the stairs, as Nadine describes her experiences of the war in a voice over. Her experiences infuse the images of the abandoned building with history. The sound effects become more daunting and intense as the camera lingers on a hole that Nadine is peering through. The sound of a gunshot is heard and the scene transitions to black and white footage from the civil war as seen from a window with broken glass—a sniper's view. This transition creates a visual echo that connects Nadine's view with that of the sniper's. Amid the various black and white scenes that Masri depicts from the war, Nadine's face appears again, still peering through the hole in the abandoned building as if witnessing the history that the footage relays. The footage ends with multiple depictions of bombs whose noise resonates in the next shots of the abandoned building, quickly strewn together in sync with the sound of the explosions. This scene visually interconnects the past and the present, yet the order of presents is unclear here as the visual and audio techniques create fluidity between images of the abandoned building and the footage of the civil war. Such representation, in the midst of Masri's account of the historical present, is significant for

aesthetically situating the past in the post-assassination context. The past is not so much a revenant here as it is inextricably woven into the unfolding present.

The civil war enters often into the conversations of Masri's subjects, most notably for instance after the April festival that commemorated the war and that marked the beginning of the end of the movement. In the midst of celebratory and carnival like depictions of the festival, Masri films a few protestors gathered in a tent discussing how they feel disconnected from the festivities taking place. One of the protestors, Zeina, explains, "I was born in 1981, I'm living the consequences of this war. How can they expect me to participate in a festival commemorating the war if I still don't understand what happened from 13 April 1975 to 13 April 2005?" Zeina's lack of understanding here hinders her from participating in the festivities. She still experiences the effects of the civil war and so is unable to partake in commemorations that claim to celebrate the exorcism of the war from the public sphere. Through such conversations, the civil war enters the landscape of the present as an "absent presence," to use Sami Hermez's term, as a "structuring force in social life" ("The War is Going to Ignite" 330) that distorts the experience of being in time. The cynicism that Masri's subjects express, as they huddle in a tent, contrasts starkly against the images of celebration that unfold in the rest of downtown. In many ways, Syrian's evacuation from Lebanon and the toppling of a pro Syrian regime seemed to indicate the end of the civil war era, and the celebratory videos that Masri documents lend credence to this idea as the hope for change entered largely into the affective landscape of the post-assassination moment. The documentary, however, simultaneously provides insight into how this spirit of progress was not necessarily different from the forward-looking initiatives that characterized reconstruction efforts in the immediate aftermath of the civil war and that

disregarded the festering wounds of the past. Nowhere does Masri more forcefully portray this issue than in her representation of the families of disappeared persons.

Towards the end of the documentary, Nadine walks up to a small group of people gathered behind a large banner that reads: "It is our right to know the fate of our loved ones." The gathering is for families of those who were kidnapped and who had disappeared during the war. She speaks with one of the family members who explains to her: "There is a truth we all want to know, who killed Rafic al Hariri. But there are also 17,000 truths that we want to know." The woman continues speaking, explaining that she does not trust any of the political leaders, whether they are loyalists or oppositionists. This articulation displaces the issue of disappeared persons from the unfolding political climate. In this way, the documentary attempts to capture how the downtown area, as a public space, became re-appropriated by competing voices and causes. As the woman is speaking, the camera captures various shots of other family members, perched on the ground, carrying pictures of their lost ones. Masri then films tearful and powerful testimonies by some of these family members as they hold up their photos to the camera and expose their painful and fruitless searches for the truth. "Since 1982 we've been looking," cries one woman, her voice cracking in pain. "Nobody listens, nobody sees. May their hearts burn like ours do!" Shortly after these testimonies, Fairouz's song "Where are they?" (*Waynon?)* plays amid various shots of people holding photos of missing persons and signs demanding investigation into these cases. The crowd loudly reiterates Fairouz's plea in the song as they echo her refrain: Where are they?

This scene is fundamental to the way Masri frames the unfolding historical moment of the Cedar Revolution. The figures of the disappeared persons are static in comparison to the dynamic energy that overtakes other parts of the downtown area. By incorporating these static

images poignantly represented to the sound of Fairouz's melancholic serenading, the documentary inserts the relentless wounds of the past into the affective landscape of the historical present. The demand for an investigation into Hariri's murder magnifies these unhealed wounds and their stagnancy in the visual framing of the documentary exacerbates the past's contentious relationship to the present. As Valentine Daniel argues, "When the past facts return in memory and experience only to reactualize themselves, the past does not enter the flow of time in the full sense" (125). The investigation into Hariri's death reflects an unjust power structure that leaves the issue of missing persons unaddressed, but the assassination also reactualizes the violence inflicted during the civil war and therefore serves as a affective magnet that renders whatever is in the past more visceral. The resurfacing of unhealed and unresolved wounds through the static images of disappeared persons de-exceptionalizes Hariri's death by placing it on a continuum with memories of past violence still embedded in the present.

In the concluding shots of the film, there is once again a scattering of energy as the tumultuous events following the dismantling of the tent city and the end of the Independence Intifada are relayed in layered news clips. Quick images from news footage flash on the screen as snippets of headlines are heard evoking a sense of violent disorder. The blending of different news events, bombings, assassinations, protests, and more, works, in one way to solemnly reveal the failed mission of the Cedar Revolution. The blending and layering also works as an affective technique to expose a particular rhythm that erodes the experience of inhabiting the ordinary. There is a sedimentation or accumulation of violent events that pile upon unfinished past traumas to impregnate the everyday with the constant shadow of violence. In the final moments of the documentary, Hariri's death becomes absorbed into a well-rehearsed historical pattern that frames the unfolding of ordinary life in Lebanon.

De-familiarizing the Ordinary in Wael Noureddine's *Ça Sera Beau: From Beirut with Love*

Noureddine's short film, *Ça Sera Beau: From Beirut with Love,* belongs to a larger body of experimental Lebanese film and visual art that explore postwar subjectivities and the representational challenges that arise from existing in a postwar nation still in the throes of crisis.[96] The experimental form in Noureddine's short film works to capture the contradicting and intersecting affective intensities that circulate in Beirut in the wake of the Hariri assassination. His searching camera accounts for a particular affective landscape that is not unilateral or univocal. Many scenes are filmed from the perspective of a moving car, driving through the streets of Beirut to sounds of upbeat mellow music, which counteracts the violent intensities that Noureddine represents. In these moments, he engages in a kind of mapping that is central to his evocation of an affective landscape. Westmoreland argues that through his formal experimentation, Noureddine produces an "affective critique" of the city. He argues that through editing strategies, Noureddine loads mundane and ordinary moments with "nervous anticipation" (*Crisis of Representation* 162). I would add here that, in the external spaces where his camera roams, Noureddine also de-familiarizes scenes of the ordinary. As Ben Highmore observes, "it is only by defamiliarizing the everyday that the everyday can be recognized as alienation" (143). The mundane scenes that Noureddine films become counter-intuitively de-familiarized through an intensified focus. His probing camera captures and lingers on scenes often hidden or excluded from the purview of mainstream representation (drug addicts, poor neighborhoods, an abandoned

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96 For more on experimental visual art, see Westmoreland *Crisis of Representation* and Michele Cohen Hadria "Nothing New Under the Western Sun."

Jewish cemetery[97]), while also subverting representations of sensationalized aspects of the city.

Noureddine rarely seems concerned with being at the center of violence; rather, violence is often

insinuated, as it presses up against the images that the camera captures through filmic strategies

that evoke anticipation and unease. The film, then, is concerned with encapsulating an existence

that "lies in the interstices of the modern, almost beneath its cognizance" (Jeganthan 123) to

track the texture of living in proximity to or in anticipation of crisis.

The short film begins in a moment of agitation: a gliding shot of a helicopter in the sky is

interrupted by the sound of an explosion, where the screen goes black before scenes from the site

of Hariri's assassination are relayed to us in jumpy shots. These opening shots of the aftermath

of the explosion are the only moments in the film where the camera immerses itself in a site of

violence, seemingly finding its bearings in the midst of chaos. The editing uses jump cuts to

combine scenes of frenzy with images of a burning car that seems to pulsate on screen for

emphasis as it supplements the unfolding mood of panic. Between these images, a black screen

with a curtain-like red light flashes by, fleetingly interrupting the diegetic sounds of roaring fire

and the indistinct voices of men. The color scheme of this transient scene resembles that of a red

darkroom used for the processing of photography. In the next shot of a burning car, fumes from a

fire extinguisher turn the scene white as images of the assassination are now relayed in negative

form. The darkroom and negative footage highlight Noureddine's mediating role as the

filmmaker. As Westmoreland writes of Lebanese photographer Abdallah Farah's artistic

collection of negatives, such techniques "implicate the viewer in the contemporaneity of the

media object rather than the indexical representation" ("Catastrophic Subjectivity" 182).

Additionally, Noureddine's conclusion of the scene with negative images implies a kind of

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[97] There is an abandoned Jewish cemetery in Sodeco, East Beirut. Today, a miniscule Jewish community resides in Lebanon (less than 100 people). For an account of the history of the Jews in Lebanon, see KE Schulze's *The Jews of Lebanon: Between Coexistence and Conflict*.

reversal, a playing with temporality that undoes the cementation of Hariri's assassination as a well-known referent. The negatives in this sense draw attention to the original world in which images of Hariri's assassination become processed.[98]

With an abrupt screech, the screen goes black before the camera cuts to a point of view shot from a car driving through a darkened tunnel to the sound of mellow lounge music. The frenzy of the previous scene is diffused by the upbeat tunes as the camera/car emerges from the tunnel and approaches an army checkpoint redirecting traffic away from the site of the assassination. From the darkness of the tunnel, therefore, the camera seems to emerge into a new reality. The imagery of the camera moving through the tunnel evokes an emergence from the womb, signifying the extent to which a new moment seems to be born in the aftermath of the assassination. It is significant to note here, however, that the film ends with a retreating shot of the tunnel, as the camera glides backwards from the end of the tunnel before becoming immersed in total darkness. Throughout this retreat, the following words gradually appear across the screen: "everyday he wakes up/shaves his beard/does not brush his teeth/takes a sip of whiskey/looks through the window, sees only victims/tries to remember where/he forgot to plant a bomb." The statement suggests that the mysterious "he" appears to be a perpetrator in the various explosions occurring throughout the country. The recoiling imagery associated with this statement, then, implies a regression that is connected to the endurance of violence in the present day.

A recurring motif throughout Noureddine's film is the image of a massive, hollowed out building riddled with bullet holes. Those familiar with the city will recognize that the giant structure is located on the green line that formerly divided West Beirut from East Beirut during

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[98] For an interesting theorization of the association of negatives with time travel, see Ana Peraica "Time Travel and Photographic Negatives: Theory of the post-negative word."

the war. The building indexes Beirut's violent past and exists persistently as part of the urban landscape. Noureddine's camera works to de-familiarize the ways in which the building becomes embedded in the urban terrain. After the sound of an explosion punctures the audio scape of the film, multiple shots of the camera sliding down the building are edited together to create a falling effect. The sound of an explosion occurs while Noureddine's camera lingers on a present day, barbed up minefield. In this sense, the present day explosion becomes an echo from past violence. Noureddine uses editing to blur images of the building as whooshing sounds are heard to amplify the effect of falling from such a high building. In the next shot, the camera then slowly glides up the abandoned structure, revealing the building's multiple bullet holes as the following French text staggers across the screen: "During the civil war/from the top of this building/militiamen threw other militiamen/into the void." The lingering effects of this statement are accentuated as the camera continues to move up the seemingly endless building stories, never quite reaching the top. In this moment, Noureddine uses camera and editing techniques to load the static building with historical valence. In this way as well, he de-familiarizes the extent to which the building becomes part of the ordinary landscape of Beirut. While the building's bullet holes bear witness to past violence, its fixed presence becomes normalized in scenes of everyday life. What Noureddine does, however, is unfix the building's status through camera movement and editing to ultimately unsettle its normalized position in the urban landscape. The experimental form of the film, then, is central to conveying the affective realities of present day Beirut.

In one significant scene, after the camera had been driving along boarded up reconstruction sites to the tunes of funky music, the sudden sound of an ambulance siren interrupts the sequence. Noureddine cuts to a 360-degree spin around shot in which the camera

rapidly swivels around blurry scenes to the sound of the ambulance. The scene sets a tone of

crisis. What follows are different shots of army men, scraping metal barriers across the concrete,

standing on a large tank, and leaning over a railing observing a protest beginning to unfold.

These shots are often filmed at street level or from behind the army men, never providing a full

frame. In this sense, the frames are always blocked or incomplete. The sound of a helicopter

contributes to the tension unfolding on screen. We can think of these filming strategies as

subverting typical representations of protests in Lebanon. When the protestors are represented

directly in the film, the camera is positioned at street level, capturing only their marching legs as

daunting music mingles with their muffled chants. Noureddine here records the intensities of the

protest from the periphery. The positioning of the camera captures the protests as a sensory

experience contributing to a particular affective landscape. This kind of representation does not

necessarily privilege the protests as a transformative moment in Lebanon; rather, it coveys them

as part of the general noise in Lebanon in the post-assassination period. The protesters,

moreover, are usually represented from a distance through a frame crowded by army figures as

the sound of a helicopter overpowers their muffled chants. The focus on army figures as opposed

to the protesters works to highlight the persistent presence of unwavering power structures

during a moment of perceived change. In one particularly evocative shot, the camera is

positioned at a downward tilt from the base of a soldier's M16 rifle. In this way, the camera

records how the rifle points down towards the protestors, evoking a specter of violence that

frames the unfolding demonstrations.

    One of the more controversial elements of the film, which subjected it to censorship upon

its initial release, is the unflinching representation of drug addicts using heroine. As

Westmoreland notes, the junky, in this case, "is a vehicle for a withdrawn subjectivity occurring

at the site of surpassing disaster" (*Crisis of Representation* 163). We can think of this withdrawn

subjectivity in terms of Noureddine's preoccupation with the periphery or with capturing crisis

through scenes that do not typically enter the frame of the mainstream yet still exist as part of the

fabric of the social. These explicit and often disturbing scenes, which unfold in dirty, stale, and

badly lit apartments, evoke disengagement and stagnancy as central to the temporal experience

of a society jarred by impending crisis. The only domestic or private spaces that Noureddine

represents in the film are those inhabited by junkies. Silent shots of vacant rooms, worn down

mattresses, and sinks full of dirty dishes are what lie beyond the walls separating these interior

spaces from the external city and become central to Noureddine's account of "the psychology of

Beirut people" (Srour 85). Within the realm of the film, then, these aesthetically unpleasing

spaces, where junkies gather to inject heroine into their veins, come to represent the internal state

of Beirut.

Westmoreland writes that "Nothing" happens in Noureddine's film, especially when held

up against the conventional documentary form. Noureddine's documentary instead functions as a

collection of scenes, intensities, significations that do not necessarily form a coherent whole. As

Westmoreland notes, the film is less about an unfolding narrative than it is of a "refolding of

associations and resonances" (*Crisis of Representation* 163). To this end, Noureddine works to

provide an affective account of the encounter between the ordinary and the extreme. In one of

the final sequences of the film, Noureddine's camera drives by various scenes of the city at night

in a series of continuity shots. Noureddine mostly uses low-key lighting in these scenes, creating

a shadowy and darkened effect. Some of the scenes that his camera passes by are coffee shops,

groups gathered on street corners, people walking by, storefronts, building entrances, and so

forth. Throughout these shots, the steady plucking of an acoustic string is heard, occasionally accompanied by the sound of piano keys, and mysterious phrases appear gradually on the screen:

"the bullets resonated/Vodka…/I fucked her over the rail/and I told the sniper/here!/a lucky strike cigarette/[…]suitcase, airport, france/the bomb has been swallowed up—has flown away/photos of Yasser Arafat/and my wife/I'm leaving the city/my love/but I will drink/first of all/a Nescafe[…]/I will fly like an explosion[…]"

As the sequence progresses, the cuts become faster paced, almost as if the camera has begun to run away. In these instances, Noureddine's camera functions as a passer by, an aimless wanderer in a city immersed in its own ordinary. The steady sound of the background music produces a rhythmic effect that underscores the unfolding of the city's ordinary life. The words on the screen, however, de-familiarize this ordinary as they suggest a sort of turbulence, a desire to escape a city warped by crisis's infestation of everyday life.

The cultural products in this chapter all reveal the extent to which the "rupture" of Hariri's assassination and its ensuing aftermath were ultimately sutured to the everyday in profound ways. The argument these works seem to make is that the violences of the 2005 and post-2005 moment are somehow anchored in the unresolved violence of the past. This claim is significant for understanding the extent to which the past is constantly interpreted in relation to the present and for conceptualizing the endurance of violence and trauma in seemingly post-conflict states. Jaber, Masri, and Noureddine, in this sense, all provide a formal argument for the ways in which crisis and the ordinary cohabitate. The works I have focused on relay the affective consequences of such an existence while critiquing the entrenched power structures that frame and enable the encounter between violence and the everyday.

Afterword: Why the Ordinary?

In the afterword of Elise Salem's foundational book, *Constructing Lebanon: A Century of Literary Narratives,* she begins by reflecting on the state of Lebanon at the start of the new millennium. She asks a series of questions about the uncertain consequences of various regional and local tensions: how much of a hand will Syria continue to have in Lebanon? How will the "deteriorating" Israeli/Palestinian conflict affect Lebanon? "Will the Lebanese state be able to deal responsively with political and economic challenges in the context of ongoing regional changes?" (239). Her questions gesture towards the fact that, at the beginning of the new millennium, Lebanon remained in the midst of a precarious political situation that threatened any prospect of lingering stability.

It is interesting to me that in the concluding statements of my work, nearly two decades after the publication of Salem's book, I feel compelled to also reflect on the various conflicts and tensions that structure Lebanon's present. Lebanon has barely emerged from a twenty-nine month political crisis that included a stifling garbage crisis, a presidential vacuum, and an unconstitutional parliament reelecting itself after failing to agree on an electoral law. The effects of the neighboring Syrian civil war are already felt in Lebanon, with political parties and their supporters inhabiting different sides of the conflict. War against ISIS rages on in the north of the country, as news channels are currently flooded with tragic stories about missing soldiers and their grief-swept family members. Additionally, it is uncertain how the estimated 1.2 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon will affect Lebanon's fragile political and economic stability.[99] The mounting xenophobia towards Syrians is often eerily familiar to the discourses mobilized against

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[99] This is the number of registered refugees according to a UNHCR report. The number may be significantly higher.

Palestinian refugees in the context of the Lebanese civil war. These seemingly exceptional events

perhaps beg an inquiry into the paradigms that frame this project: *why the ordinary*?

The fact that Salem and I both conclude our accounts about Lebanese cultural production

with a series of uncertainties about the country's present and future suggests that precariousness

and political turmoil in Lebanon have possibly *become ordinary*. The rhythm and temporality of

everyday life being punctured by violent events or news of them, as the country's worsening

economic and political conditions continue to be entangled in archaic power struggles, have

become a state of normalcy for Lebanon. This normalization of political turmoil is perhaps what

has fueled the recent turn to the ordinary in fiction and scholarly work on Lebanon that I discuss

in my introduction. My own investments in the ordinary emerge from the observation that

cultural works in Lebanon are often preoccupied with tracking the textures of everyday life in the

wake of various conflicts. As the civil war moves further into the country's cultural memory, the

ordinary, in its affective registers, is a site through which to investigate the past's resonance in a

present plagued by its own violences. The stakes in this sort of endeavor are twofold.

Primarily, by privileging the ordinary as a lens through which to approach conflict and

post-conflict societies in the global south, we gain a better understanding of how communities

live with violence. To insist on the ordinary, as it is "lived on the level of surging affects"

(Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* 9), is to resist the spectacularization of violence. When violence is not

spectacularized, or when violent events that seemingly disrupt the everyday are understood *in*

terms of the ordinary, as part of its general fabric or extensions of it, we better understand the

embedded power structures that pave the way for such violences to unfold. As Ndebele argues in

the South African context, "ordinary day-to-day lives of people should be the direct focus of

political interest because they constitute the very content of the struggle" (Ndebele 156). In this

regard, the emphasis on the representation of lived experience and affect does not do away with interrogations of power; rather we understand the ordinary as a navigation of those very structures.

Secondly, it is important to situate my turn to the ordinary, and the general turn in the humanities towards affect that is often concerned with ordinary life (see my introduction), within a larger global context. The ascendency of fascism and white supremacy along with the continued institutionalization of xenophobic practices make it pertinent to question the ways in which we engage with cultural productions and narratives from the global south. Mark Libin observes how trauma and conflict narratives from the global south are finding increasing popularity "both in academic circles and in mainstream readership" (71). The engagement with these works is often structured in terms of an empathetic relation that "supposedly obviates any need for critical self-reflection" (Craps and Buelens 5). This understanding of empathy is based on Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's foundational book *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. The empathetic consumption of postcolonial trauma narratives often dangerously models the inherent power relations of Felman and Laub's therapeutic model. In Craps and Buelens terms, "the respective subjective positions into which the witness and the listener/reader are interpellated are those of a passive, inarticulate victim on the one hand and a knowledgeable expert on the other" (4).

My insistence on foregrounding the ordinary in my study of Lebanese cultural production, therefore, can be viewed as part of an ethical imperative for engaging with narratives from the global south more generally. Whether it in the context of international film festivals or world literature syllabi, the representation of the ordinary in contexts of the global south is necessary not only for breaking free of the empathetic relationship that often seems to

accompany our consumption of these narratives, but also for undermining the discursive and visual frameworks that render white, Western lives more grievable than others. According to Butler, "Ungrievable lives are those that cannot be lost, and cannot be destroyed, because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone" (xix). The ordinary, therefore, in its ability to account for a more complex emplotment of dynamics and intensities that thicken and nuance our perceptions of how "Others" live, has the potential to resuscitate this lost and destroyed zone. An explicit attention to the ordinary is one way to combat the dissonance between mainstream discourses of Islamophobia, for instance, and the lived experiences of the people these discourses target.

Throughout this dissertation, I have tracked shifting notions of the ordinary in Lebanese cultural production. By studying the production of everyday life as it unfolds in proximity to or amidst violence and loss, my investigations have undermined the binaries between the ordinary and the extreme. I have made a case for studying the ordinary through an affective register and by foregrounding the notion of the *present* as opposed to the past. In the first chapter, I advance my methodological investment in reading affect formally to understand how cultural productions are attuned to shifting affective climates. More particularly, I study how everyday life in the wake of the war becomes reconfigured as familiar spaces are intruded upon by violence. This reconfiguration of the everyday requires affective adjustments that are reflected in the formal modes of expression I study. In the second chapter, I explore how the mundanity of everyday life intersects and interacts with the haunting nature of an unfinished past and the material experiences of violence, surveillance, and neoliberalism that frame ordinary life in post-war Lebanon. The films that enable my analysis evoke the sensory experience of the everyday as the primary site through which to understand these intersections. My third chapter turns to nostalgia

as an *ordinary affect* that dominates the visual and discursive landscapes of postwar Beirut. I

unpack popular cultural productions that emerge from and for the everyday to better understand

nostalgia as an affective negotiation unfolding in the wake of loss. I situate these popular works,

moreover, within a wider matrix of power relations and literary narratives to underscore

nostalgia as a fundamental structure of belonging in postwar Lebanon. Finally, in my fourth

chapter I think through the 2005 events that seemed to propel Lebanon into a new "temporal

architecture" (Harootunian) or historical present. I explore cultural productions that place these

events in conversation with ordinary life to better understand the violences of the present on a

historical spectrum. In other words, this chapter thinks through the "tentacles" (Das 1) that

connect present violence to everyday life and the normative power structures that frame it.

What I have shown, ultimately, through each of these chapters is that, in the context of

enduring violence and trauma, the ordinary is a constant process of negotiation. Accounting for

the ongoing-ness of the ordinary as an accommodating and developing source is one way to

"claim the present tense of Arab everydayness" (Sabry 10), and to thus ensure a more

responsible and ethical engagement with Lebanese culture.

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