Locating Stories of Time, Memory and Place in Urban Activism in Beirut

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of urban activists' narratives and experiences of space, place, the past, memory and time in contemporary Beirut (post-1990). It provides new insights concerning the relationships of Beiruti urban activists to time and space. This thesis shows that by considering the ways in which people narrate their memories and their interactions with their physical and temporal environments, new insight can be gained into how everyday life in Beirut is shaped by temporal and physical changes in the urban landscape. This research is interdisciplinary in nature, grounded in memory and urban studies, and finding inspiration in ethnography, human and emotional geography, narrative inquiry and thematic analysis. It is based on fieldwork pursued in Beirut (2017-2018) that included conversations with urban activists and observations of the city.

The conversations presented in the thesis make visible facets of urban struggles, and relationships to the past and to urban space, which are not accessible via documentary record alone, nor to an attention to institutional processes alone. This thesis contributes to memory studies interested in Lebanon by challenging the tendency to view the Lebanese memory context solely in terms of violence, division, and amnesia, thereby challenging the linear and cyclical conceptualisations of time that accompany these dominant thematisations. This thesis also contributes to memory and urban studies by questioning the dominant academic conceptualisation of Lebanese civil society as 'violently divided' and trapped in a sectarian system. Through detailed analysis of conversations with urban activists, it presents the urban activist scene as a platform for action that allows activists to negotiate the spaces of the city, society, time and memory: urban activists' narratives of time and the city reveal alternative lines of connection and division that run transversally to sectarian conceptualisations of the Lebanese, and constitute an important intervention in ongoing negotiations over the city.

The thesis begins with a contextualisation of the complex relationships to memory and the past in Lebanon in the last thirty years, situating contemporary urban struggles within the Beiruti context (chapters one and two). After a description of the approach to the study of 'timespace' in Beirut (chapter three) and the methods employed in this research (chapter four), the second half of the thesis analyses specific facets of the experiences of Beiruti urban activists, through the themes of emotions (chapter five), rhythms (chapter six) and the imagination (chapter seven).

Keywords: Beirut, Urban Activism, Memory, Nostalgia, Rhythmicity

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Lastly but firstly, millions of thanks go to all the people in Beirut who have contributed to this research, directly and indirectly. I have infinite gratitude and admiration for Beiruti urban activists whose stories, work and love for their city have been humbling, and the most important source of inspiration for this PhD. Thank you for sharing your stories, memories and thoughts with me, and for trusting that I would look after them.

A Nouhad, ma Teta

Author's Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

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INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

This thesis explores narratives of urban activists in Beirut in order to develop an improved understanding of how memory, time, 'the past', space and place are conceptualised in Beirut today. It does this through the analysis of urban activist narratives, gathered through ethnography-inspired methods, which reveal interrelations of time and space, and of memory and forgetting, that complexify those narratives that dominate both the academic and non-academic literature on Beirut and Lebanon. Beirut is typically cast as a 'post-conflict' city, and analyses of the city generally focus on, on the one hand, the dialectic of memory and forgetting as regards 'the war', and on the other hand, 'sectarian divisions' as the city's defining spatial characteristic. My analysis of the narratives of urban activists, people who are deeply engaged with issues around the spatial organisation of the city, but who are also motivated by specific visions of the past, present and future, unearths new lines of connection that complexify the ways in which memory, time, 'the past', space and place have been conceptualised in Beirut. It also demonstrates the complex temporalities that shape narratives of urban life, and the irrevocable connection between experiences of space and experiences of time.

By turning to the study of individual stories, narratives and vernacular memories, everyday practices of the city and the past come to light. I argue that these practices challenge, directly and indirectly, top-down processes shaping society and the city, and the narratives around them. There are many ways one can study and explore narratives and vernacular memories in relation to the city and the past in Beirut. My contribution to this endeavour through this research is an exploration of narratives and stories that I collected during fieldwork in Lebanon (2017-2018) through conversations with urban activists.

I use 'urban activists' to define the participants in this research, who were for the most part engaged in actions, activities and/or groups that promote more just, fair and accessible urban practices and contest the current state of affairs in urban politics and planning in Beirut. These activists are concerned with protecting, preserving and improving the urban

environment in and around Beirut. Their relationships to the space of Beirut are an essential way for me to investigate memory and time. To their narratives, I add my own stories and experiences as a source of inspiration. This research approach will be discussed further in this introduction.

Narrative analysis is my principal method for studying these narratives. What emerges most strongly through my research, a theme that I had not initially envisaged, is the significance of time and temporality in these narratives. Indeed, the participants in my research have all highlighted fascinating relationships to time that go beyond linear or cyclical, and that, to be made sense of, require an attention to memories, rhythms, emotions and imagination created in relation to places, explored in chapters five to seven.

The remainder of this introduction is divided into five sections. In the next section, 'Beirut', I introduce the city, providing a wider context for both Beirut and Lebanon. In section three, I introduce activism and more precisely, urban activism, in Beirut and Lebanon. In section four, I focus on my research questions and in section five, I zoom in on my own position and subjectivity as a researcher in Beirut. In section six, I outline the structure of the thesis.
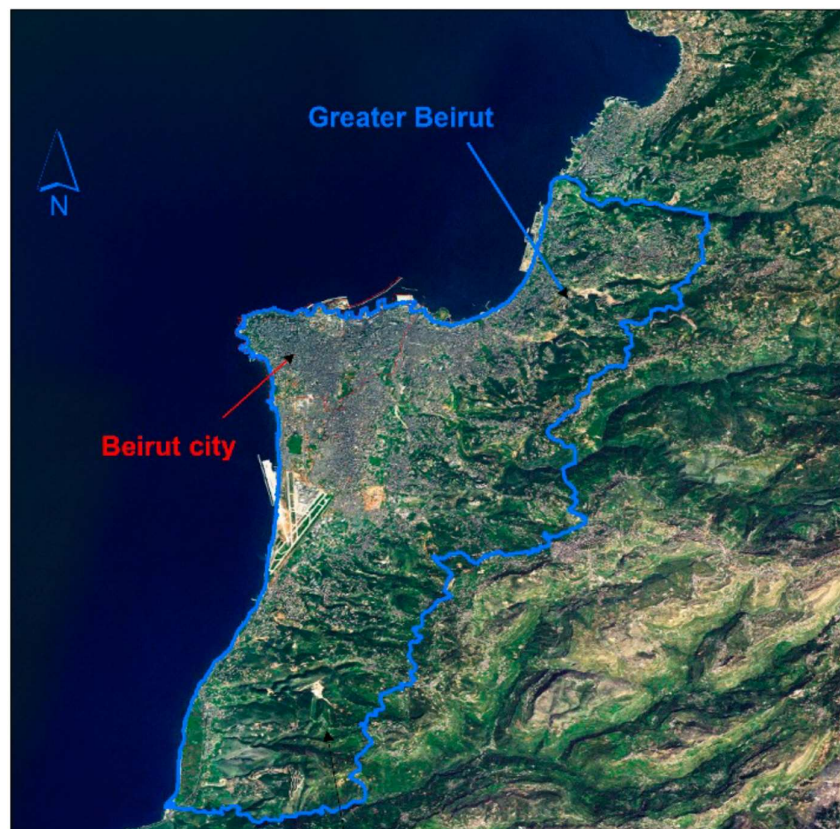
FIG. 1 Greater Beirut Area (source: Faour and Mhawej, 2014)
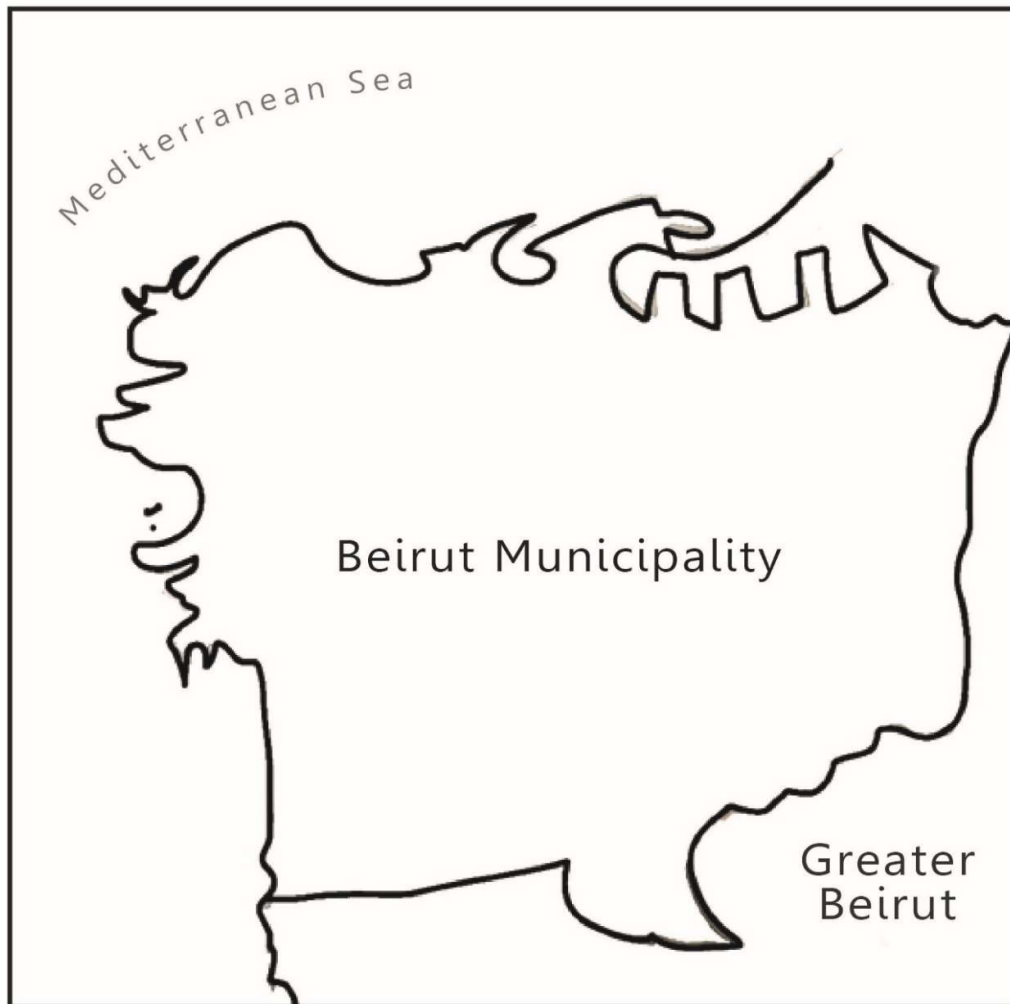
FIG. 2 The limits of Municipal Beirut (source: HMA)

2. BEIRUT

Lebanon is a relatively small country that spreads over 10 230 km², with a population of approximately 6 million inhabitants. Its capital city, Beirut, can be separated into municipal Beirut and the Greater Beirut Area (GBA), the latter extending well beyond the limits of the municipality[1].

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[1] Lebanon is divided administratively into nine governorates (*muhafaza*), that are further divided into 26 districts (*Kaza* or *Qada'a*), which are then divided into 1029 municipalities (*baladiyyat*). Governorates and districts are not independent legal entities, for they are affiliated with the central government under the Interior Ministry. Beirut is the only governorate that is not divided into districts and that only comprises one municipality, the Municipality of Beirut. Beirut thus has a Governor – the *muhafiz* – and a Mayor: as of October 2020, the Governor of Beirut is Judge Marwan Abboud and the Mayor of Beirut Municipality is Jamal Itani, who had been appointed President of the Council for Development and Reconstruction of Lebanon in 2001 by the late PM Rafiq el Hariri and later, in 2014, was appointed general manager of Solidere – thus, 'one of Hariri's men' (Harb 2017: 18). The Municipality of Beirut has an elected council of 24 members, elected for six years by the population. The Mayor of Beirut is then elected by the municipal council, whereas Governors throughout Lebanon are appointed by the Ministerial Cabinet. The last municipal elections held in Lebanon were in 2016. The Mayor of Beirut reports to the Governor of Beirut, who

Municipal Beirut is clearly demarcated with a surface area of 19.6 km², whereas Greater Beirut is more ambiguous, with all its suburbs and the absence of one single administrative district to manage it. Its surface area is estimated to be 67 km² with more than 50% of the national population living there (Yassin 2012: 64)[2]. These figures give a sense of the density of population found in Beirut. The city has a very low green space ratio: 0.8m²/person, while the average in European cities is 18m²/person (Mohsen et al. 2020: 2).

Below is a list of newspaper headlines returned from an Internet search for 'Beirut article' performed in July 2020:

- ·   'Beirut's Nightlife Survived Civil war. Can it Withstand Pandemic?'
- ·   'The Eternal Magic of Beirut'
- ·   'Beirut rocked by violent clashes in "week of rage"'
- ·   'Broke in Beirut. A long-feared currency crisis has begun to bite in Lebanon'
- ·   'Is Beirut's glitzy downtown redevelopment all that it seems?'
- ·   'Beirut shaken by "barbaric" protests crackdown'
- ·   'Lebanese police remove Beirut protest camp'
- ·   'Lebanon crisis: Dozens hurt as police and protesters clash in Beirut'[3]

These headlines describe violence (civil war, clashes, rage, shaken, barbaric, protests, crackdown, police, crisis, hurt) and they also describe 'fun' (nightlife, magic, glitzy), while at the same time, they give a sense of agitation and change. These headlines hint at the manifold elements used to describe Beirut.

War, violence and sectarianism are elements that are often at the centre of these descriptions. What is called the 'Lebanese civil war' has a particularly central place within these, to the point where people refer to it as 'the war' as if there had not been any other wars before or after it. 'The war' took place between 1975 and 1990-91. In September 1989, the Lebanese national assembly met in Ta'if (Saudi Arabia) to discuss a way out of conflict, and approved the 'Ta'if Agreement' that was later added to the Lebanese Constitution. The Agreement

has an executive function, thus many of the mayor's decisions have to be signed off by the governor, which often leads to conflicts and stalemates.

[2] My research in Beirut took place within the limits of Municipal Beirut, although I do mention a few places that are outside of it but within GBA, such as the international airport.

[3] This was prior to 4th August 2020 and the explosion at the port of Beirut that destroyed entire neighbourhoods of the city, killing more than 200 people and injuring thousands. A search on 19th August 2020 leads to titles such as: 'Lebanese Face Threat of Widespread Hunger After Beirut Explosion', '"Impossible" that Beirut port blast was caused by Hezbollah arms, says president', 'After Beirut Explosion, Lebanon Faces Surge in Coronavirus Cases', 'Lebanese President says it's "impossible" for him to resign following Beirut's deadly blast', 'How Beirut's port explosion exacerbates Lebanon's economic crisis'.

brought slight changes to the power-sharing system[4], including a more equal share of power between different religious groups, but the pre-1975 confessional system was mostly kept intact.

Despite the official end of conflicts announced with the Ta'if Agreement, Lebanon's landscapes continued to evolve, after September 1989, in a political and social context of armed violence and destruction[5]. Furthermore, the Ta'if Agreement gave Syria 'indefinite military presence' in Lebanon (Harris 2012: 255), which ultimately ended in 2005, while the South of the country was occupied by Israel until 2000. 'The war' of 1975-1990 is one of many violent, damaging and warring moments in the history of Lebanon. Habib Battah is quite explicit about this:

> '[...] this country has been mired in an almost constant state of war since its founding. Many analysts tend to focus on the 1975-1990 civil war to provide a political context, but the decades preceding and following those years have been marked by dozens of other conflicts, from air strikes to assassinations involving both local and foreign actors.
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> The perpetual chaos leaves no appetite or time to build a lasting state infrastructure or economy. There is no hierarchy of power or chain of command to plan or execute it. Every party rules its territory on its own terms. No cooperation, no teamwork, no unified national vision. And while many are happy to pounce on local backwardness as the essential cause, they often neglect the fact that this paralysis is also a direct

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[4] The Lebanese power-sharing system or 'confessionalism' has been put in place in the early 1940s at the time of the independence of Lebanon from the French Mandate. Power was formally shared between the different religious sects of the country, to the advantage of the Christians, especially the Maronites: powerful executive positions were given to them and quotas in parliament and in the public sector were based on a 6:5 Christian/Muslim ratio despite the fact that the Muslim population was equal, if not larger, in size (Nagle 2016: 1148). The Ta'if Agreement re-established the sectarian share of power after the collapse of the state during 'the war' although more balance of power was sought: Muslim populations, especially the Shiites were given more power, the quotas were revised to a 5:5 ratio, but matters of personal status (marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, and so on) were still to be governed by religious courts (Nagle 2016: 1148-1149). The power-sharing agreements have been presented, since 1943, as temporary, transitory, and as creating a system that had to be replaced as soon as possible (Krayem 2009: 71). For more on the 'temporality of the temporary' of the Ta'if accords, and demands to dismantle them, see Mikdashi 2019. For more on the reinforcement of sectarian divisions through power sharing in Lebanon, see Baytiyeh 2019. For more on the intersection between the confessional system and the borders of Beirut, see Mermier 2013.

[5] For example, the Syrian army's attack on the Metn region; fighting between the Amal and Hezbollah parties saw the displacement of 70000 Shi'ites and in June 1990 alone, 600 people died in Lebanon. The last military episode of the war only took place in October 1990, with the fall of the Lebanese army at the hands of the Syrian army. Syria's occupation of Lebanon continued until 2005. Lebanon saw the Antelias bombings in March and May 1991, the Basta bombings in December 1991, and Israeli bombings in the South of Lebanon in 1993, to cite only a few violent events. More recently, throughout 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008, violence, killings, political crises and war shook the country. The assassination of Rafiq el Hariri in February 2005, together with twenty-two other people, was followed by street protests and sit-ins – what some call the 'Independence Intifada' – to demand the withdrawal of the Syrian army and intelligence services from Lebanon. A wave of political assassinations followed. Israel's war on Lebanon in the summer of 2006, mainly targeting southern Lebanon and Beirut, but also infrastructure elsewhere in the country, left 'immense infrastructural damage [that] blighted the entire country, but most extensively Dahiya and southern Lebanon', leaving thousands of people displaced, and approximately 900 civilians dead (Monroe 2016: 2). In 2008, dozens died in violent street clashes between political groups. In 2015, the 'garbage crisis' saw the occupation of public spaces in Beirut, and yet another political crisis.

consequence of global politics. Local factions active in the country all draw their support from foreign allies. Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Syria, France, and Israel have all supported, armed or bankrolled one militia or faction, and this has gone on for decades, transforming the country into a chess board of cold wars, plots and mysterious explosions.' (2020)

On the other hand, Beirut is considered a cosmopolitan – and, in many ways, Western (Fernandez 2017) – city that grappled with the transition from armed conflict in the 1970s and 1980s to 'peace' very rapidly. The reconstruction of downtown Beirut that started in 1994 created an impression of a city that 'moved on' swiftly ('glitzy downtown redevelopment'). The physical remnants of the war – ruins and rubble – were thrown away, literally dumped in the Mediterranean Sea. Some of the physical traces of the war could thus be hidden away. Those buildings that were still standing in downtown Beirut – and that could have been restored – were simply destroyed to make room for new ones. The production of space and place in Beirut since 1990 and its tabula rasa method of reconstruction reflect the amnesia that politicians have tried to impose regarding the war, its causes and its effects (Becherer 2005). Urban struggles, on the other hand, have shown how the past is never over and how it bleeds into the present (Nagle 2020). Indeed, the politics of the production of space and place in Beirut, through the private appropriation, transformation and 'reconstruction' of Beirut's city centre, have constituted a major site of contestation since the 1975-1990 conflicts. Civil society actors, local residents, and the few owners who had sufficient financial resources, opposed the privatisation of the city led by Solidere – the public-private enterprise founded after 'the war' and placed in charge of redeveloping Beirut's Central District – and the mass evictions and expropriations that accompanied it.[6] In chapters one and two, more will be said on the social, memorial and urban consequences of war and violence in Beirut.

WHY BEIRUT?

My decision to focus on Beirut was based on the fact that it forms the epicentre of struggles over space in Lebanon. The battle over space in Beirut is more intense than anywhere else in the country and very often, what happens in Beirut shapes developments across the whole country. Also, most of the contestation surrounding the ways in which the country has been led and abused in the aftermath of 'the civil war' has taken place in Beirut. Beirut was and still is the nationwide hub for protests, demonstrations and activism. Talks, conferences, debates, exhibitions, and events relating to struggles over space and memory frequently take place in Beirut. As the capital city, the academic and cultural spheres are far more active in Beirut than

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[6] Solidere is the acronym for *Société libanaise pour le développement et la reconstruction du centre-ville de Beyrouth* (The Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District). I discuss Solidere's enterprise in chapter two.

in other Lebanese cities. Furthermore, Beirut is the most populous city in the country and offers the greatest opportunities for employment. These elements led to a unique urban design and to a degree of overcrowding not experienced in other Lebanese cities.

This being said, the issues that are fought about in Beirut – to cite only a few: privatisation of space, destruction of the physical heritage, lack of public space, lack of green spaces, lack of public transport, high rents, overcrowding, ageing infrastructure, corruption, violence – affect people similarly throughout Lebanon and, in recent years, more and more country-wide coalition groups have been created. Two recent examples of this are the Lebanese Coast Coalition formed in 2017 and the Waste Management Coalition.

Neither urban issues in Beirut nor Beiruti activists' claims can be detached from the broader context of the corrupt exploitation of land all around the country, where war and real-estate development have had similar destructive consequences, for 'the violence of acquisition and aggression blur at the urban scale' (Stanton 2007: 95): a fierce and systematic capitalist exploitation of land – with no consideration for what is being lost, for the ecological costs of relentless construction, or for the social, environmental and cultural costs of destroying and building (Becherer 2005, Makarem 2014). These issues are also the result of the absence of state initiatives to plan, manage and protect urban, coastal and mountain landscapes. It is therefore no surprise that all the activists that I have encountered in my research rally around very diverse place-related struggles in and outside of Beirut (and hence, in and outside of 'the urban'), and are supportive of each other and of other groups. In section 3 of this introduction, I focus in more detail on activism and more specifically, urban activism in Beirut.

BEIRUT CHANGES

As I was writing up this thesis, between October 2019 and October 2020, Beirut has gone through tremendous changes: firstly, a revolution, in a context of economic and financial crisis. The coronavirus crisis and its lockdown followed soon after and on the 4th August 2020, a huge blast hit the port of Beirut, situated a few meters away from residential neighbourhoods and the city centre, leaving the city shattered, and its inhabitants mourning the more than 200 dead, the thousands left homeless, and the thousands of buildings destroyed. Given the temporality of these events – the 'time of the revolution, pandemic and the explosion', coming after the 'time of my research' – I have not had a chance to include them in the analysis in this thesis, although they are mentioned here and there. I will return to them and to the 'current' context in Beirut in the conclusion to this thesis.

3. (URBAN) ACTIVISM IN BEIRUT

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Lebanon and Beirut host an incredibly lively activist scene that provides a social and societal support for a variety of constituents and issues: LGBTQI+ individuals (HRW 2020), migrant domestic workers (Mansour-Ille and Hendow 2018) or women's rights (Khalil 2019). Activists, in the context of this thesis, and following Curtin and McGarty's usage, are defined as 'people who actively work for social or political causes and especially those who work to encourage other people to support those causes' (cited in Kende 2016: 399).

One of my research participants dislikes the use of the word 'activists' to describe people like him and others who are engaged in the betterment of their city and society – for in the Lebanese context, activists are dismissed and ridiculed by the ruling elites, and so the word has a negative connotation. This points to the idea that 'activists and power holders attempt to ascribe different connotations to the terms they use, sometimes seeking to appropriate a term and saturate it with new meaning' (Schwedler and Harris 2016) and more generally to the politics of language and the difficulty of defining and naming the wide range of actions that activists are involved in, for the term 'activism' (*nishat* in Arabic) has

> 'diverse meanings both across the region and over time. Indeed, scholarly analyses and categories of activism often bear little resemblance to what local people understand as activism – if they use that term at all. In the Arab world, *nishat* is often little more than a catch-all description of efforts to affect or resist various techniques and institutions of political power. In other instances, the meaning of *nishat* is far more specific.

> In some of the word's iterations, an activist (*nashit*) is someone closely associated with the leftist political parties that were most active from the 1950s to the 1970s. In other cases, *nishat* refers to forms of political resistance explicitly juxtaposed to party politics (*hizbiyya*), social movements (*harakat*) and civil society organizations (*mu'assasat al-mujtama' al-madani*). That is, nishat is understood as a noninstitutionalized form of resistance.' (Schwedler and Harris 2016)

My understanding of activism in Beirut and Lebanon is large, and follows the definition of Schwedler and Harris:

> 'Activists engage in multiple struggles: they work to expand the boundaries of their own cause, seeking to draw in others and make them see the world in new ways. Scholarly categories often fail to capture what activists understand—not all acts against the state are acts of resistance, and not all acts supporting the state signal acquiescence. Indeed, not all activism is even directed at the state. Activists of every ilk seek to shape their political environment in large and small ways, altering the

field of politics even if through only minor shifts in the meaning of particular actions.' (2016: 5)

Over the last thirty years, most descriptions of Beirut and Lebanon, whether scholarly, journalistic or artistic, have been dominated by themes of sectarian division and by the memory (or forgetting) of the wars that took place between 1975 and 1990. Following Karam and his study of civil movements in Lebanon (2006), I support and pursue a study of Lebanese/Beiruti phenomena while moving away from the typical areas of focus that form part of research and theorisation on consociationalism in Lebanon. These include 'the war' and its consequences, Lebanese political elites and political arrangements, and the institutional context (Karam 2006: 16). In the meantime, studies focusing on 'new actors' or 'secondary actors', on civil society actors and organisations, have been rare, although in Lebanon, these groups and actors have been expanding, becoming 'political actors' in the sense of organising to defend 'the space of freedoms'[7] and human rights (Ibid.: 16-17). Starting in the mid-1990s, more research and studies have focused on these new actors, although both these studies and actors were still limited, in a context where Lebanon and Beirut were in the midst of reconstruction, controlled by Israel in the South and by Syria elsewhere, leaving very little room for open and free organising and protesting until 2005, as the participants in my research have often reminded me. Contemporary activism in Beirut

> 'relies on more horizontal ways of engagement, with multiple leaders and loose organisational systems, where social media play an important role in communication and decision-making. Such activism is not necessarily conducive to democratisation, nor is it durable as it is threatened by demobilisation, division and fragmentation. It is, however, enabling youth "to congregate, interact and dream" and pursue "a more civil, inclusive and liberatory form of democracy" […] While this resistance may be limited in time and space, youth activist groups embarrass, hold accountable and constrain hegemonic politics.' (Harb 2018: 75)

Another major characteristic of activist groups in the context of my research and others (Harb 2019, Karam 2016, Nagle 2016, Nagle 2020) is that they are non-sectarian; I have not focused on religious, sectarian or party activism.

3.2. URBAN ACTIVISTS

Urban activists are part of a wish for betterment shared by other activist groups: betterment of the environment they live in, of structures of power, of their city, of laws, of social and societal norms. My aim here is not to provide an overview of urban activism in Beirut or Lebanon, nor to assess their role and function in Lebanese society, so although urban activists

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[7] My translation from the original French.

are at the centre of my research, I do not study urban activist groups, the politics of activism, or the activist scene in Beirut per se, although I do acknowledge that the performance of memory is essential to the politics of civil activism in Beirut (Nagle 2020). Urban activists are of particular interest in this research because their narratives also speak, directly and indirectly, about time, temporality and memory.

Mona Harb calls 'the first urban activists' of Beirut the activists who opposed Solidere and its neoliberal plans for the city in the 1990s, who, although they have not succeeded in stopping Solidere's developments in the city, have produced considerable research and knowledge concerning the urban (Harb 2017: 16). In the mid-1990s, critical thinking on the urban began to spread in Lebanese universities, in a country where potentialities for urban activism abound, given the lack of public spaces, the lack of social space, and the numerous wars and other violent events destroying urban infrastructure (Harb 2017: 17). This 'new generation of activists' became involved in all sorts of urban initiatives, using social media to connect with urban activists and causes around the world and to voice their demands; confronting the political elite and the public sphere, and adding urban issues to political agendas – which was a change in comparison to the previous human rights-focused and environment-focused activism (Harb 2017: 17). Through the development of NGOs such as Nahnoo[8] and social movements such as 'YouStink'[9], new forms of activism emerged. According to Harb, they are distinctive in five ways: 1/ they are non-structured, open-ended, flexible structure – based on brainstorming and debating; 2/ they reject hierarchical structures and specific leaders, and promote the inclusion of women and LGBTQ individuals; 3/ research, including action-research, are at the core of their activism, which engages with fieldwork, archival research, and involves collaboration with experts in legal and other fields; 4/ reliance on social media as a means of communication and 5/ reliance on a wide range of strategies and tools: 'lobbying, negotiation, media and social media, protests, litigation, as well as performances, exhibitions, conferences, installations and design competitions' (2017: 88-89).

Throughout my research in Beirut, I have explored various types of urban activism. On the one hand, I have observed non-professional forms of activism: acts of everyday life that I

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[8] 'Nahnoo' means 'us' in Arabic. The NGO is described in chapter four.

[9] 'YouStink' emerged in the midst of the 'garbage crisis' that erupted in the summer of 2015. As explained by Kraidy, the 'garbage management crisis emerged in Beirut after Lebanon's main landfill was shut down without finding an alternative, and piles of trash grew bigger on the streets, triggering a wave of contentious politics. An activist movement emerged early during the ongoing crisis: called "You Stink," the movement is led by seasoned activists who display the usual social media savvy and artful protest tactics that echo activism in the Arab Uprisings.' (2016) Although 'YouStink' has not managed to overthrow the political elite in place as it had wished, it still contributed to growing the ranks of activist movements and groups in Lebanon that demand and lobby for an end to corruption and to the oligarchical system.

interpret as acts of urban activism and place-making, such as the use of a private parking lot as a recreational plot by local residents in the neighbourhood of Ashrafieh. On the other hand, I have observed cases of professionalised urban activism, such as involvement in NGOs and civil society groups, or organised lobbying and protests. As will be shown throughout the rest of this thesis, what they both have in common is a practice of the city and place-making that aims for a betterment of the city, and that translates into demands for more inclusivity, more public and green spaces, better urban planning, and road management that would serve the many and not the few. [10]

My choice to focus on urban activism was based on a desire to concentrate my study on people who do not necessarily claim that they work with or through memory and time but whose practice is influenced by these phenomena in various ways, and whose experiences of time, 'the past', memory, space and place as an ensemble have been overlooked. I argue that Beiruti urban activists are an incredible source of inspiration and knowledge for memory studies in Lebanon, for they complexify and nuance the taken-for-granted sectarian descriptions of space/place, memory and society in the country.

The most important aspect of urban activism in Beirut for this research is the fact that activists are activists because, I argue, they work – directly and indirectly – with notions of time. This central aspect translates in various ways: first, urban activism in Beirut is a constant process in the making, and it is fragile – battles are never over, they necessitate constant efforts and negotiations, as urban activists act and organise against a giant and powerful system of illegalities, corruption and feudalism. Thus, urban activism in Beirut is a precarious process in the making, which certainly does not mean that it is weak or based on unattainable dreams and hopes. The second most important aspect of urban activism in relation to time is the fact that looking back and looking forward, urban activists use a blend of stories, memories, imaginations, dreams and hopes to create narratives of the past, the present and the future for (re)imagining and (re)claiming urban space, time and memory. Urban activists in Beirut are working with and through these concepts in their correlation with space to create something different, a different way of being together, a different urban identity but also a different

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[10] In chapter three, I provide an overview of the groups and initiatives that my participants are involved in. In addition to that, in Appendix C, I provide an overview of other urban activist initiatives, causes and groups that I know of and that illuminate the wider context and business in which the people in this thesis evolve. It is important to note that although these groups differ greatly in size and focus, many of them collaborate on specific topics and certainly support each other. It is also important to note that this Appendix is not exhaustive – I did not have access to all the smaller activities, events and groups that deal with urban/environmental issues and have not included the emerging and new initiatives that have been created since the beginning of the revolution in October 2019, which has undoubtedly influenced urban activism in Beirut, and the same goes for the COVID crisis, confinement and the 4th August 2020 blast.

national identity of togetherness – and by looking at time, one sees that narratives of urban segregation and sectarianism are also being challenged by everyday practices on the ground that shape the identities of people and the city. By talking with urban activists, one realises that time is not an abstract value but an element that is worked through and with, that is used and that serves in different ways.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My research has been an inductive multidisciplinary project, grounded in and blooming from memory studies. My overarching research question is

> 'how do urban activists' narratives inform our understanding of past, present and future struggles in the reshaping and reclaiming of space, place, the city, time and the past in post-1990 Beirut?'

In order to respond to this question, I have had conversations with urban activists in Beirut, observed their interactions in the context of lectures and other events, observed and walked the city, and examined my own experiences and memories of the city that is the object of their activism. This principal line of investigation led to more questions: what are urban activists' rationales for their activist engagement and which narratives of the past shape these? What can we learn from looking at rhythms in relation to the city? What kind of temporality are urban activists invested in? In what follows, I introduce the various strands of inspiration that have shaped my approach to those questions.

MEMORY, TIME, SPACE AND PLACE

Conceptualisations around 'division', 'war/peace', 'sectarianism' or 'religion' have contributed to exceptionalising Beirut, as has happened to other Arab and 'post-conflict' cities (see Introduction in Karam 2006, Hashemi and Postel 2017). However, my view is that research on Beirut should contextualise phenomena as they apply to the 'region' and more particularly to the city. Drawing on Hammond and Mills, I argue that research on the Middle East should attempt to complexify 'assumed universal phenomena' in order to understand how places are 'situated products of particular connections between people, things and ideas' (Hammond and Mills 2016: 70 citing Massey 1994). These phenomena can no longer be 'conceptualized through East/West or European/Middle Eastern paradigms that grounded earlier scholarship' but need to take into account connections between local and global places, as well as 'power relations at work in those moments' (Ibid.: 170). Only this can provide the basis for embracing the complexity and chaos of Beirut, its nuances and phenomena in constant flux. This is the

approach that I have chosen to take to look at space, place, memory and time in Beirut: one that embraces fluxes, nuances, contradictions, local and global specificities.

Moreover, although I acknowledge the importance and value of the vast literature that discusses the concepts of 'space' and 'place' (Massey 2005, Ingold 2009, Shields 2013), conceptual and theoretical discussions around the use of either one or the other, or the processes behind the production of one or the other (what makes a place 'place' and space 'space') are beyond the scope of this research. I use both terms extensively throughout this thesis, following various definitions and descriptions of both concepts that have inspired me in thinking about Beirut, those that call for specificity such as Agnew's 'three part definition of place' that involves 'location, locale and sense of place' (1987, cited in Cresswell 2015: 12), and those that call for hybridity and connections, such as Massey's idea that places are the results of connections, that they are 'always hybrid' (Massey 1995: 183), stressing the importance of taking into consideration a series of influences, fluxes, changes, connections and disconnections when looking at places.

The idea of the 'sense of place' stresses the importance of looking at emotions, memories and stories. In the context of this thesis, the most important aspect of places is that they are locations made meaningful by people (Cresswell 2004: 7), as both things in the world and ways of understanding the world; as worlds of connections, experiences, stories, attachment and meanings (Ibid.: 11). Emotional geography has been central to this endeavour, as it allowed me to 'write more fully' about experiences of the city, memory(-ies), emotions, past, present and future selves that inevitably shape 'how people make sense of/practice the world' (Jones 2007: 206). These insights cannot be fully grasped using theory only, as Harrison suggested:

> 'There is something about emotions, or about 'emotional experience', that troubles the operation of social theory; that resists being bought into the thematization, conceptualisation and systematisation that must be part of any social analysis. [...] there is something about 'emotional experiences' that eludes our attempts at recollection, which resist representation' (2002: 3 cited in Jones 2007: 206)

Ingold has also been helpful in thinking 'place'. For Ingold, human existence unfolds not in places but along paths. Human existence is place-binding but not place-bound (Ingold 2009: 33). All inhabitants, in their movements, lay a trail and where inhabitants meet, their trails form a knot – a place. Places are thus 'delineated by movement, not by the outer limits to movement' (Ibid.: 34). Inhabitants follow paths that take them from one place to another:

> 'we tend to identify traces of the circumambulatory movements that bring a place into being as boundaries that demarcate the place from its surrounding space. [...] the

pathways or trails along which movement proceeds are perceived as limits within which it is contained' (Ibid.: 32)

According to Ingold, the volume that exists between places is not 'space' and is not 'everywhere' – it is the 'meshwork of intertwined trails along which people carry on their lives. While on the trail one is always somewhere. But every "somewhere" is on the way to somewhere else' (Ibid.: 34). Ingold, for whom a 'boundary is not a border but a horizon' (Ibid.: 31), for whom there is no enclosure or confinement in the concept of place, provides an encompassing definition for embracing the ever-changing nature, fluidity and malleability of cities as places, which is one that I draw on in my work.

Why use the notion of 'space' then? Unlike Cresswell, I do not think that 'space' becomes 'place' only once it is invested with meaning (Cresswell 2015: 19), nor do I think of 'space' as a vast entity in the constant search for meaning and purpose. I do not see a dualism between space and place either; both have their uses and importance. For instance, the widespread notion of 'public space' is important in this research and I wished to engage with questions around the public/private divide given urban activists' struggles to reclaim Beirut. I also wanted to focus on non-geographical spaces: the space of the body for instance, where senses and emotions unfold. I wanted to talk about 'the space of Beirut' when mentioning the city as a whole, beyond any specific site or locale in mind. I also wanted to engage with conceptions and studies of 'Timespace' (May and Thrift 2001) or space-time (Massey 1999) – a study of time and space together, in their relationships and multiplicity of trajectories (Massey 2001) for 'space without time is as improbable as time without space' (Crang and Thrift 2000: 1). This argument will be developed further in chapter three.

5. POSITIONALITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

My own autobiographical stories and experiences, as well as my positionality, are important and relevant in this thesis because they constitute the basis for the relationship that I created with urban activists – my primary focus – and with Beirut. In this section, I develop the idea that I am unable to disentangle myself from my research topics, participants and places.

I am a child of the Lebanese diaspora. My parents have migrated to Europe – France, then Belgium – in the late 1980s, in the midst of 'the Lebanese civil war'. I was born and raised in Brussels, where we did not have family connections. My summer were thus spent in Lebanon, surrounded by grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, and a lot of sunshine. Going to Lebanon to pursue my research thus meant that I was coming back to 'my parents' land' (Diawara 1985: 8). Being back in my parents' country had always been a source of excitement

and joy – seeing my family again, being surrounded with familiar faces, hearing the Lebanese language, enjoying the chaos, enthusiasm and familiarity of 'going back home'.

My position in Lebanon is one of privilege: I can enter and leave the country freely thanks to a dual nationality, and knowing Lebanon, having family there, sharing similar cultural codes with fellow Lebanese citizens was an advantage for my research. A Lebanese man once told me: 'You took the best of all worlds: a Middle Eastern culture, a European home and passport, and a British education!', which certainly sums up the extent of my privileged position. Having the liminal position that I have, pursuing research in Beirut following narrative inquiry came with its fair share of privileges and challenges, as explored below.

INSIDER AND OUTSIDER RESEARCHER: RESEARCH AT HOME?

Firstly, there is something emotionally draining in doing research in a country and a city that occupy a major place in your imagination, in how you self-identify, in your reality, in your memories, life and interactions with your family and friends. The entanglement of personal and intimate stories and memories with work has often slowed me down, for it took a long time for me to go through my own memories and stories, deconstruct them, pull out the links with other stories and narratives, but also to start seeing my own experience and memories as valid sources of knowledge.

Furthermore, navigating between family and the familiarity of my home in Bikfaya (and what goes with it: family commitments and social pressure) and the research that I carried out in Beirut was another central challenge during my time in Lebanon. That has a lot to do with my legitimacy (or lack thereof) as a 'Lebanese'. In Lebanon, I am often considered an outsider, who grew up in Europe and only knows Lebanon superficially. As both a member of a Lebanese global family spread all around the world and a member of European-based research institutions, and the global research community, these issues have always been with me and doing research in Lebanon has in no way simplified this. The fact that I do not speak Lebanese has encouraged this labelling as an 'outsider'.

As a researcher, I saw myself as both insider and outsider in Beirut, or as Abu-Lughod calls it, a 'halfie': someone 'whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage' (1991: 466; 476), although I disagree with the idea that our ethnic background can be defined in percentages.

The words of the anthropologist Kirin Narayan helped me to come to terms with the liminality of my position. Narayan positions herself against the distinction made between 'native' and 'non-native' anthropologists:

> '[...] The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux. Factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status. Instead, what we must focus our attention on is the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized Other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views, and dilemmas – people to whom we are bonded through ties of reciprocity and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise?' (1993: 671-672)

Further, she states:

> 'Even as insiders, or partial insiders, in some contexts we are drawn closer, in others we are thrust apart. [...] Yet, in that we all belong to several communities simultaneously (not least of all, the community we were born into and the community of professional academics), I would argue that every anthropologist exhibits what Rosaldo has termed a "multiplex subjectivity" with many crosscutting identifications (1989:168-195). Which facet of our subjectivity we choose or are forced to accept as a defining identity can change, depending on the context and the prevailing vectors of power' (Ibid.: 676)

It was important for me to embrace the 'crosscutting identifications' that brought me close to my research subject but that also sometimes made me an outsider. My complex identity meant that I reacted and connected emotionally to what was going on around me; but my sensitivity born from the closeness with the place and its people was not a weakness: it led to connections, to seeing myself in the other and sharing her struggles because I could sense, see, witness the direct consequences of the difficulty, on so many levels, of living in Lebanon. It also gave me legitimacy to interact in debates, to criticise, to join in with my respondents' rants and disappointments. On the other hand, I always had an option to say 'I don't know' or 'I don't understand this' thanks to the flexibility of my identity, thus being more an outsider in these cases.

Another important aspect of my positionality in Lebanon is the fact that I fully and wholly support the work that urban activists do and pursue in Beirut, and in that sense, I see myself as both a researcher and an activist, in the way that Hermez suggests that

> '[...] in order to deal with the politics of commitment, we ought to move from a metaphorical identification of the ethnographer as activist, playing the role of activist part-time, to one in which the ethnographer is activist, a stance that makes them inseparable. More broadly, for those concerned, it is to identify one's career as being inextricable from one's political and social engagements' (2011: 53)

Thus, as researchers, we bring into the fields various selves, various 'I's' (Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 10) – and as Peshkin (1985: 270) noted:

'participant observation, especially within one's own culture, is emphatically first person singular. The human I is there, the I that is present under many of the same political, economic, and social circumstances as when one is being routinely human and not a researcher...Behind this I are one's multiple personal dispositions...that may be engaged by the realities of the field situation. Because of the unknown and the unexpected aspects of the research field, we do not know which of our dispositions will be engaged' (cited in Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 10)

Embracing the complexity of my identity also meant embracing complexity in my participants' identities: they were no less complex, and their subjectivities were no less multiplex than my own. My immersion in the field, and my efforts to encounter different temporalities of other people was a necessary and indissociable element of my engagement with and understanding of urban activists and their stories.

Thanks to my position in the field, my subjectivities and experiences have also been a valuable source of information to connect theories and field practice, since doing research cannot be done in isolation from what we know already and who we are. At different points in the following chapters, this is also where my voices – the scholarly one, and the socially positioned one – are heard; I weave my own stories and memories into the narrative. Thus, my personal experiential understanding of the space and time of Beirut is indissociable from my understanding of it through living abroad, my family history, hearing stories and meeting urban activists. In chapter four, I develop these points further as I discuss my methodological choices.

6. THESIS STRUCTURE

CHAPTER ONE

In this first chapter, I describe the various ways in which 'the past' has been conceptualised and included in the present in Beirut and in Lebanon, providing an overview of the 'memory context' in the country. What comes out of this overview is the fact that 'the past' and memory have been studied mostly through the lenses of 'amnesia' and 'sectarianism', producing a literature and dominant discourses that focus on either a lack of memory, a surplus of memory or the idea that memory is divisive because of its supposedly localised nature within sectarian communities. These studies often equate memory with memories of war and violence and offer a conceptualisation of time as either linear progression from, or cyclical return to, the time of war. This first chapter sets the scene for the memorial landscape in which urban activists evolve, shaping their relationship to 'the past' and to time.

CHAPTER TWO

In the second chapter, I outline the dominant narratives and urban experiences associated with Beirut, which has been studied, conceptualised, talked about, transformed and experienced through four major lenses: sectarianism, violence, nostalgia, and exoticism. In turn, the politics around the production of space and place have also been examined through these lenses. The four dominant themes shed light on the relative power of different actors to produce the physical city within which the senses and memories of place lived by different groups interact. They allow me to introduce, in different ways in each section, a history and (emotional) geography of the city and the ways in which it has been and is being (re)shaped: how people live in it, remember it and make sense of it.

CHAPTER THREE

The overarching issue with the discourses and analyses presented in chapters one and two is that they have approached memory/time and space/place separately; they do not describe the temporality of space or the spatiality of time in Beirut. Furthermore, memory, time, space and place have mostly been approached as flawed, missing, wrong, divided and divisive, without taking into account their fluidity and ever-changing nature. In chapter three, I suggest ways in which the relationship between space/place and temporality/memory can be conceptualised in Beirut, to allow for a study of 'Timespace' (May and Thrift 2001). I do so through the exploration of three themes that illuminate the approach that I take throughout the thesis: 'Time, without a beginning or an end'; 'Memory is fluid'; and 'Where is change?'.

CHAPTER FOUR

Chapter four describes my research journey, choices and (in)decisions. My methods are described in detail and their relevance to both my research project and research questions is shown. To summarise, in my research I use narrative inquiry and thematic analysis, together with observational methods inspired by ethnography and (emotional) geography. These methods, and their role in researching urban activists' narratives in and of Beirut, will be justified and explained throughout the course of the chapter. The final section of this chapter is dedicated to conversations, stories and narratives.

INTERLUDE

A poem, 'Love Note to Bey', connects the four first chapters to the three analysis chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

In chapter five 'Narrating Beirut through Stories and Emotions', I explore emotions that were conveyed through my conversations with urban activists. Following the thematic analysis of

the transcripts of my conversations, I observed the complex entanglement of memories, place and emotions in the stories that I have gathered in Beirut. This chapter is based on the premises that 'memories of who we are now, who we were, who we wanted to become, are wrapped up in memories of where we are, where we were, and where we will be (would like to be)' (Jones and Garde-Hansen 2012: 4). These memories cannot be separated from who we are and were with other people and relationships, from our emotional relationships to places, for 'we are conglomerations of past everyday experiences, including their spatial textures and affective registers' (Jones and Garde-Hansen 2012: 8). Two themes guide this chapter: absence/loss and nostalgia.

CHAPTER SIX

In chapter six, I explore rhythmic elements that emerged from my conversations with urban activists, my own stories and memories, and my observations of spaces and people in Beirut. Through an analysis of three main rhythmic themes – status quo, impending doom and urgency – I show that temporal and spatial analyses need to take into account rhythms, and their flows, continuities and discontinuities, the tempos of the city, and of people – to get a better sense of how people relate to their environment and to their past. Through the exploration of these three rhythmic themes, I also analyse how time is reclaimed by urban activists. In this chapter, I wanted to transmit a sense of Beirut's rhythms through my writing. Thus, I wrote this chapter in the form of a diary.

CHAPTER SEVEN

My final chapter, 'Imaginary Timespaces', focuses on the possibilities of imagining Beirut differently. In this chapter, I focus on three main alternative 'timespaces' in Beirut: the building 'Beit Beirut' (the House of Beirut), which was renovated and repurposed following activists' struggles over more than twenty years; the contestation of urban landscapes through the re-interpretation of their meanings and scars; and acts of 'everyday activism' such as the reappropriation of a parking lot. I argue that all three contribute to creating tangible imaginaries, a tangible possible.

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, the three analysis chapters are brought together to describe the connections, divergences, continuities and discontinuities between them. A final argument about the presence, claiming and reclaiming of the past and the city in urban activists' narratives is made. I will also emphasise my contributions to knowledge and the scope for further research.

CHAPTER ONE:

MEMORY AND 'THE PAST' IN LEBANON

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis argues that paying attention to memory, time, 'the past', space and place in urban activists' narratives allows for a better understanding of both the presence of the past in the present and of urban activists' relationships to the past, memory and their city. This thesis reflects ways in which memory, place, space and 'the past' form threads of connection – made, unmade, and remade – in Beiruti urban activists' narratives. My participants' stories emerged in a specific historical and political context, briefly touched upon in the introduction to this thesis. In this opening chapter, I describe the ways in which 'the past' and 'memory' have been thought about and written about in Lebanon after 1990. This will allow me to situate, later in this thesis, my participants' stories, memories and relationships to the past.

This chapter tells the story of how discourses around amnesia became omnipresent in Lebanon following the Lebanese state's refusal to engage with the past and memory of the fifteen-year conflicts after 1990. I argue that these discourses began as a critique of the fact that Lebanese officials did not address the past, but soon created an overarching framework for thinking about memory in Lebanon. As I will show, over the years, the 'amnesia thesis' has created a context in which civil society actors, artists, scholars and journalists have generated extensive work on 'the war', supposedly to 'counter amnesia', thus creating a specific narrative about 'the war', whose trauma must be verbalised for it to be overcome. The extensive production of books, movies, scholarly works, art work, documentaries and articles about 'the war' since the early 1990s has been one way to show the Lebanese how important it is that they deal with their traumatic past. This, in turn, led some scholars to talk about an 'obsession with the war' or 'hypermnesia': this is the idea, coined by Hanssen and Genberg, that there is no more loss of memory but that 'memory is constantly present, multiple and celebrated' (2002, cited in Khalaf 2006: 37). Hypermnesia suggests the 'abundance of overlapping,

conflicting and rivalling memories of the war' (Khalaf 2006: 37). The Lebanese are thus 'tossed about between amnesia and hypermnesia' (Chrabieh Badine 2010).

Certainly it is important to challenge the state's refusal to engage with the past, and projects such as Act for the Disappeared, which supports efforts to help families find out what has become of their missing loved ones, should continue. My aim here and throughout this thesis is not to discredit either the discourse of amnesia or of counter-amnesia, each has its place, but rather to shift the terms of debate, such that the war is no longer understood as the unique lens through which to view memory and the past in Lebanon.

The remainder of this chapter comprises three sections. In section two, I introduce the approach of the Lebanese state in relation to the recent past and history of the country. In section three, I explore memory works: various discourses that have emerged in reaction to the state's attitude towards 'the past'. Finally, in section four, I explore the limits of such discourses, arguing that the past is present – and absent – in complex and subtle ways that cannot be reduced to memory or forgetting of the trauma of war.

2. THE STATE AND MEMORY IN LEBANON. FAILING TO DEAL WITH 'THE PAST'?

2.1. AMNESTY

In August 1991, the Lebanese Parliament agreed on a general amnesty for all war-related crimes (Mermier and Varin 2010a: 18). It was argued that it was impossible to distinguish between winners and losers of 'the war': the idea of '*la ghalib la maghlub*' (no victor, no vanquished) became very popular after 1975 already and showed how a state of oblivion was promoted to keep the system intact (Khalaf 2002: 150 cited in Haugbolle 2010: 70). Crimes committed against religious or political leaders were exempt from the amnesty law (Haugbolle 2010: 70), as well as crimes committed against foreign diplomats (Mermier and Varin 2010a: 18). The political elite, keen to 'turn the page' rapidly, presented amnesty as a prerequisite to reconciliation and national unity (Maalouf 2010: 270). However, militia leaders and fighters who could have been prosecuted remained free, for the amnesty had a clear political agenda: protecting the interests of the former warlords who were becoming the new political elite (Monroe 2016: 46), and who have been occupying ruling positions ever since. The proponents of an amnesty argued that it was necessary in order to allow Lebanon to 'reintegrate the

largest possible number of people by excusing, or ignoring, their crimes. Reconciliation would come with time when society was ready for it' (Picard, 1999: 8 cited in Haugbolle, 2010: 70). [11]

2.2. CENSORSHIP

In Lebanon, works can be censored for:

· Showing disrespect to any religion officially acknowledged by the state;
· Insulting the dignity of the head of state; disturbing the public peace;
· Disrespecting public order, morals and good ethics;
· Inciting sectarianism;
· Offending the sensitivities of the public;
· Spreading propaganda that is against the interest of Lebanon;
· Exposing the states [sic] to danger (MARCH 2018: 30)

Censorship laws ensure the censorship of what is deemed threatening to 'public order' or 'national sentiment' or deemed to incite 'racism' or 'sectarian tension', some of these laws dating back to 1947. [12] In this context, works and publications about memory, 'the past' and 'the war' that directly address questions of sectarianism, religion, events of the war or past and present political turmoil are very likely to be censored or banned[13] under these laws. Between 2013 and 2018, 49 movies were banned or censored in Lebanon, and '60% of all censored material are censored for religious or political reasons' (MARCH 2018: 31). There has been space, as will be shown throughout this chapter, for commemoration and memorialisation of the war, but only when these do not point fingers at specific individuals or actions, nor threaten or question state and religious institutions.

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[11] The Lebanese government never apologised after the fifteen years of conflict (ICTJ 2014a: 24). However, some former warlords and political figures have individually issued apologies for their crimes over the years, such as Walid Jumblatt, Samir Geagea, former PLO representative Abbas Zaki in 2008 and Assad Chaftari (who is now involved in the 'peacebuilding' NGO Fighters for Peace). The Conference 'Openness and Reconciliation', initiated by Amine Gemayel in 2008 to officialise Palestinian/Christian reconciliation is another example of such initiatives, as well as the 2001 'reconciliation' between Jumblatt and the Maronite Patriarch. However, these sporadic initiatives have not led to any official reconciliation process between all former warring factions or current party leaders.

[12] Religious courts also have their say as to what can or cannot be produced, played, aired, said or written in Lebanon (Merhi 2016, MARCH 2018).

[13] An example of this is the movie 'In This Land Lay Graves of Mine' ('*Li koubouron fi hazihi al ard*') by Lebanese director Reine Mitri (2014), that tells about a Christian woman selling a parcel of land to a Muslim, and all the sectarian discourses, divisions and memories that emerged from that. The movie was censored by the Lebanese authorities for religious reasons (MARCH 2018: 22).

2.3. TRUTH, JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

As amnesty prevailed, and as former fighters became part of the new political order, there were to be no 'truth and reconciliation' or 'transitional justice' processes. This was part of the overall silencing and 'moving on' approach taken by the Lebanese state in the 1990s. The International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) has been a strong, systematic critic of this approach:

> '[...] the country needed to adopt a sweeping approach to justice and reform in order to transition successfully from war to peace. [...] Yet, at the conclusion of the war, there was no attempt to deal with its legacy. Rather, a flawed transitional process emanated from a consensus reached at Ta'if among the conflict's protagonists.' (ICTJ 2014a: 1)

The ICTJ argues that a major consequence of this is that competing narratives about the past have emerged:

> 'Through a policy of "state-sponsored amnesia," the government has endeavoured to silence investigations and formal inquiries into the war, leaving political and social factions to compete over the dominant war narrative and victims without satisfactory answers as to what happened during the 15-year war.' (ICTJ 2014a: V)

The idea that 'competing narratives' from various Lebanese communities have emerged or would emerge in the absence of a national discourse around 'the war' has been a recurring element of the critiques towards the Lebanese state's approach to dealing with the past:

> '[...] a deafening official silence about the recent past. This silence is in perpetual contrast with material traces and other, less visible but everywhere present, traces of violence; it is also in conflict with the partial, biased and one-sided narratives of the memories carried by different communities.'[14] (Calargé 2017: 36)

> 'On a popular level, social practices structuring interpretations of the war feed into simplified antagonistic discourses of "the other," exacerbating the division between the Lebanese along sectarian lines. Arguably, the policies of the current regime have served to uphold such divisive versions of the war.' (Haugbolle 2005: 192)

This inverts the official argument of the Lebanese state that addressing the past would revive old tensions and hatreds, by arguing that it is the absence of official narrative about the war that creates divisions. These views imply that a multiplicity of narratives is necessarily linked to sectarian affiliations (communitarian memorialisation) and flawed[15], whereas I start from

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[14] My translation from the original French.

[15] Memoirs are another way in which war memories are thought to be divisive, for the personal narratives that they contain are typically presented as subjective and selective. In her analysis of the memoirs of those that she describes as 'author-actors' of the war, Carla Edde (2010) notes the absence of 'collective memory' or common memories of the war. She presents these memoirs as vectors in prolonging the conflicts: battles over history have replaced the

the premise that memory is inevitably plural, diverse and fluid. These points will be developed further in both section three of this chapter, and in chapter three.

2.4. THE DISAPPEARED AND MISSING

The lack of judicial resolution of the conflict and the lack of state involvement with memorial questions in relation to 'the war' have been particularly condemned by activists who demand justice, recognition and closure for the families of those who have been kidnapped and gone missing between 1975 and 1990[16]. The Lebanese state's excuse for not fulfilling its responsibilities towards these families was that it 'was not able to exercise full control over national territory at the time of the conflict' (Jacquemet 2009: 80). According to journalist Jacquemet, the kidnapped and missing were simply not mentioned at the end of the war; it is only after 2005 and the murder of Rafiq el Hariri[17] followed by the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon that the fate of the disappeared and missing started getting more political attention locally; while the 'right to know', 'right to truth' and the 'crime of forced disappearance' got more attention internationally (Ibid.). On three different occasions, the Lebanese state set up pseudo commissions to look into the issue: all failed, for the commissioners were biased, and the reports did not receive any follow-up attention or action, were shown to be unreliable or to contain untrue statements (Jacquemet 2009). Jacquemet argues that 'truth seeking' 'could be the entry point for addressing the larger legacy of the civil war' (Ibid: 71) and, like many others, doubts that peace is possible before these issues are addressed and solved (Ibid: 88-90, ICTJ 2014a, ICTJ 2014b, ICTJ 2017, Maalouf 2010)[18].

physical fighting. While trying to make sense of the war, these author-actors use the plural form in their writing, their perspective is presented as 'that of the Lebanese that they represent, in the name of whom they fought and behind whom they shirk their responsibilities' (2010: 44).

[16] The Committee of the Families of the Missing and Kidnapped in Lebanon, the Committee of the families of the missing in Syria (SOLIDE), ACT For the Disappeared and the ICTJ. See http://www.actforthedisappeared.com/ and https://civilsociety-centre.org/party/committee-families-kidnapped-and-disappeared-lebanon

[17] Former PM of Lebanon, killed in a suicide truck bomb on the 14th February 2005. He was overtly opposed to the Syrian presence in Lebanon. Massive protests against the Syrian occupation of Lebanon followed his assassination. Syrian troops withdrew from Lebanon in the spring of 2005, ending a 29-year occupation. Syria's physical withdrawal from Beirut did not happen without its own violence, though: between March and December 2005, fourteen terror attacks took place in Beirut and its surroundings, targeting famous critics of Syria and civilians in supposedly homogeneous Christian neighbourhoods (Borell 2008: 56).

[18] By 2010, after years of unsuccessful struggles, the families of the disappeared and missing had shifted their struggle from demanding to find the remains of their loved ones and to learn what happened to them, to focusing 'only' on achieving the 'symbolic acknowledgement of the difficult situation of the victims and their families, the process in which they are involved' and the 'acknowledgement of the dynamics at stake between the state, the judicial system, NGOs and victim groups' (Maalouf 2010: 283). During our conversation in June 2018, Nour el Bejjani Noureddine, the ICTJ's Program Expert and Head of Lebanon Office, reinforced this and expressed her fear that as long as ex-warlords and their descendants occupy powerful state positions, nothing will change. She said that the families of the disappeared are no longer demanding to hold the perpetrators accountable, but they now 'only' demand recognition of their struggles and pain, and to know where their loved ones are – in which prison or where they are buried.

2.5. COMMEMORATION AND THE 13TH APRIL

In Lebanon, there are no official commemorative celebrations of 'the war', nor are there official memorials to all victims of the conflicts. The 13th April 1975 marked the 'beginning' of 'the war'[19] and it is this date that is typically used by civil society for commemorating it. Year after year, editorials and articles about the war have been published around that day and since 2000, civil society has transformed the date into a commemorative one, organising events, celebrations and petitions (Ruiz Herrero 2010). Occurring just two months after the assassination of Rafiq el Hariri and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, the 13th April 2005 saw a boom of celebrations organised by civil society (Ruiz Herrero 2010).

In terms of war memorials, the only 'official war memorial' was designed by the French American artist Armand Fernandez and built in 1995, next to the Ministry of Defence in Yarze, near Beirut. It is a tower of military material: tanks, vehicles, artillery, guns – all piled up and stuck together with concrete, named 'Hope for Peace'.[20] There is no official memorial to all victims of the war, but there are local monuments and memorials to specific groups or people that speak to specific communities. This is significant because it reinforces further the absence of a unifying narrative to hold on to and contributes to what Haugbolle calls 'sectarian memory cultures' (Haugbolle 2005), such as those of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP)[21] documented by Mermier (2010).

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The 13th April 2015 marked the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the war. Lebanese newspapers published widely on the topic and provided their readers with extensive interviews, articles and special editions. The Lebanese francophone newspaper *L'Orient-Le Jour*'s editorial line that week was heavily focused on nostalgia, regret and condemnation of 'the status quo': it was argued that nothing had changed since the end of the civil war. Articles in the newspaper that week directly addressed the Lebanese people and aimed at making them feel more aware of or responsible for the fate of their country and focused on the idea that the war is unfinished: 'The impossible mourning of the Lebanese war '(Courban 2015),

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[19] With the shots fired at a Kata'ib group at a church in Ayn al-Rumana, leading to retaliation: members of the Kata'ib party aimed machine-gun fire at a bus containing thirty Palestinian travellers, killing them all. The 13th October, the official date for the end of 'the war', is the day when the Syrian army defeated Lebanese troops on Lebanese soil. For many Lebanese, this is not a date to be celebrated; it represents the victory of an external actor within national borders but also, for many, 'the war' did not really stop after the official end of military combats (Ruiz Herrero 2010: 111-113).

[20] In an article in August 1995, Robert Fisk wonders if the memorial is a 'Tribute to peace, or plain tank sandwich?' (1995). Despite studying Lebanon and memory for several years, I have never read anything about it in academic work, and had no idea that it existed until recently, which suggests that it has not achieved its aims as a memorial.

[21] Operating in Lebanon. Founded in 1932 on the idea of Greater Syria including Lebanon.

'13th April 1975-13th April 2015, what have we really learned?' (L'Orient-Le Jour 2015), 'What's left of the Middle Eastern Switzerland?' (Al-Attar 2015), 'In Ain Al Ramineh, the page isn't really turned' (Maroun 2015). One editorial was titled 'Memory of the ashes' (Goraieb 2015)[22]. Part of it was particularly striking, capturing many elements of the discourses outlined above:

> 'The Lebanese martyrdom, hey, we have just commemorated its sad anniversary. Forty years, it's a long time, it should give plenty of time to understand and learn, to draw lessons, to build everything again on a sane basis. But we haven't learned anything and the fallen heroes in the different camps are a mausoleum on the periphery of the imaginary of a population which still hasn't decided to turn into a people, and even less into a nation. Besides, what's the point in this masochist insistence in flogging ourselves every 13th April, a date usually remembered for the beginning of the war of 1975-1990, instead of celebrating, all together, year after year, in serenity and hope, the sacred day when the guns have finally hushed up? It's because the Armistice of 1918 put an end to a horrible war that the French set it as a major national celebration.'

The editorial denounces the lack of 'learning from the past', as well as the lack of national sense of unity, condemning divisions within Lebanese society, and finally, condemning the fact that commemorations of years of violence take place on the day that saw them start, implying that there is no peace to be celebrated (and hence, no end to violence).

2.6. HISTORY TEACHING AND TEXTBOOKS

In Lebanon, the idea that 'people do not know their history' is widespread.[23] In 2015, *L'Orient-Le Jour* published an article titled 'What happened on the 13th April 1975? I have no idea' (Abou Taha 2015) and at an international conference around the theme 'Heritage at war in the Middle East' (June 2017), geographer Liliane Barakat mentioned that both her students and the people that she takes on guided tours do not know most of the history of Beirut and of Lebanon, although they actually live in Beirut: 'they experience and evolve with the city' but do not know it at all. Larkin reached the same conclusion:

> 'Perhaps the most striking perception of history teaching amongst Lebanese high school students is its contemporary vacuum. [...] The classroom history of the many schools I visited is invariably that of a distant past, a "history of history" which draws on past civilisations and conquests, but steers clear of the complex sensitivities of Lebanon's triumphs and tragedies.' (2012: 59)

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[22] I translated all the *L'Orient-Le Jour* headlines and excerpts cited in this chapter from the original French.

[23] In this section, I do not focus on the complex and contested nature of history, historiography or history writing and teaching in Lebanon, which has been done extensively by historians and others (see Salibi 1988 or Kassir 2003) but on the idea that 'people do not know their history' and how it has been interpreted.

In Lebanon, the history curriculum ends with Lebanon's independence in 1943. There is no mention of the violence and conflicts that took place between 1975 and 1990, although the Ta'if agreement contained a provision requiring the Lebanese authorities to revise the history and civic education chapters of school textbooks. This endeavour began in 1996 with the creation of a committee charged with taking forward this work, but it never reached national public schools, after the Minister of Education Abdel Rahim Mrad (2000-2003) opposed its publication (Gilbert-Sleiman 2010). According to Gilbert-Sleiman, debating the past, the conflict and the assigning of responsibility was pretty much impossible at that time in the absence of a genuine process of memorialisation. She also suggests that the effect of the Ta'if Agreement was the instrumentalisation of history and history teaching for political purposes (2010).

The continuing absence of a common history curriculum and the lack of formal teaching about the war has been stressed and condemned repeatedly (see Larkin 2012, Haugbolle 2010, Calargé 2017) as a failure and a symptom of the continuing avoidance of war topics by Lebanese politicians. This failure has also been presented as provoking mistrust among students over what they are taught in schools – they do not know what and who to believe anymore (Larkin 2012: 62); and as another way in which 'the war' remains 'unfinished' without an overarching national narrative to reconcile the independent – and supposedly competing – mnemonic community discourses:

> '[...] a whole generation, born after a long period of war of which it has no recollection, [draws] its knowledge on the subject from the collective, antagonistic and paranoid memories of the country's different communities. Since all these communities are minorities, none of them can make its story prevail as national history, but each one of them can prevent a story that does not suit it from existing. Hence the current impasse concerning the absence of history textbooks in schools [...] Instead, the void in the national discursive field is constantly invaded, if not saturated, by a range of competing and antagonistic memories to the point that it is possible to adapt Wieviorka's expression to talk of "the lebanization of memory".' (Calargé 2017: 94)

Calargé is here referring to Olivier Wieviorka's phrase 'the balkanisation of memory', coined in his 2013 book on the memory of the Second World War in France. This phrase is used to describe the division of memory through the existence of concurrent memories in the absence of a unifying national discourse. Notwithstanding the racist nature of both phrases, they summarise the way in which memory in Lebanon has been conceptualised by scholars as a by-product of the sectarian system. Reflecting this system, memory would be localised, specific to particular families, groups or communities, and that would be a problem that needs solving.

This approach to history and memory is echoed by the Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi (1988) who insists on the fact that, in order to have a sense of political community, people need to share a common vision of their past, even if it is a fictional one. According to Salibi, homogeneous societies can easily do with fictional history and leave actual history to historians, but he argues that:

> 'Divided societies, on the other hand, cannot afford such fanciful indulgence. To gain the degree of solidarity that is needed to maintain viability, their best chance lies in getting to know and understand the full truth of their past, and to accommodate to its realities'. (Salibi 1988: 217)

Salibi's writing illustrates the crucial and complex relationship between history and nationalism and its importance in constructing a sense of 'identity in the present' (Hodgin and Radstone 2003: 169), a relationship in which memory plays a central role in 'constituting the historical narrative of identity', through its 'particular purchase on the construction of subjectivity, and its insistent bearing on the present' (Ibid.). The absence of national discourse about the past corresponds to a lack of national belonging: the Lebanese have been described as instead nurturing localised, communitarian memories, and hence, localised and communitarian senses of belonging (Calargé 2017: 36; Haugbolle 2005: 192).

3. MEMORY WORKS

The Lebanese state's silencing and ignoring of the war has thus been highly documented and condemned. It created the background for the development of the 'amnesia thesis'. This is the idea that because of the amnesty laws, the absence of a political memorialisation project or an official history of the conflict, coupled to the absence of truth and reconciliation projects and the political push for silence around all war-related issues and legacies, the memory context in Lebanon would be characterised by amnesia and forgetfulness. This idea is widespread across disciplines, in the arts and the media. To cite just a few representative examples, the sociologist John Nagle (2016), economist Hadi Makarem (2012), journalist Iolanda Jacquemet (2009), cultural and literature scholars Claire Launchbury, Nayla Tamraz, Roger Célestin and Eliane DalMolin (2014), French and francophone studies scholar Carla Calargé (2017: 128), journalist and historian Samir Kassir (cited in Haugbolle 2005: 193), journalist Michael Young (cited in Barak 2007: 50), the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) (2014a, 2017), and sociologist Samir Khalaf (cited in Barak 2007: 50) have all presented studies based on an acceptance of the amnesia thesis, offering variations on the phrase, such as 'state-sponsored amnesia', 'national amnesia' or 'collective amnesia'. Amnesty laws have been a central element of the 'amnesia thesis': the fact that amnesty laws had been

voted has been interpreted as a choice not only by the Lebanese state, but also by Lebanese society, to move towards collective amnesia (Mermier and Varin 2010a: 18, Calargé 2017: 93). Calargé calls this 'official amnesia regarding violence in the recent past' (2017: 128).[24]

Once memory was identified as lacking, missing and flawed, the response has been generating 'memories from below': people and works that addressed the violent past to counter the lack of national memorialisation effort. Some have argued that it is in cultural production and civil society initiatives (sometimes referred to as 'memory activism' (Nagle 2020)) that one can observe the memorialisation processes and initiatives that are absent from within the state apparatus (Barak 2007: 50-51)[25].

In Lebanon, scholars of memory have focused on a search for those war memories, and a form of celebration of them – through giving them a voice and space in research, journalism and art. Lina Khatib's book 'Lebanese Cinema: Imagining the Civil war and beyond' studies how Lebanese cinema is constructed and made in relation to war and national identity (2008), while Carla Calargé (2017) explores works by francophone Lebanese artists, writers and filmmakers in relation to war and memory in her book *Liban. Mémoires fragmentées d'une guerre obsédante. L'anamnèse dans la production culturelle francophone* (2000-2015)[26]. In 2012, Norman Saadi Nikro published 'The Fragmenting Force of Memory: Self, Literary Style, and Civil War in Lebanon', and in 'Beirut, imagining the city: space and place in Lebanese literature' (2014), Ghenwa Hayek dedicates two chapters to war and memory ('A city divided: Beirut in the Lebanese Civil War' and 'Commemorative counter-memories: Beirut in 1990s Fiction').

In 2014, a special issue of the 'Contemporary French and Francophone studies' journal was published under the title 'War, Memory, Amnesia: Postwar Lebanon' following the 2013 conference 'War, Memory, Amnesia: Francophone Perspectives on Lebanon' (Launchbury et al 2014). The issue's seventeen articles cover a wide range of artistic productions about the 'Lebanese civil war': photography, literature, plastic arts, poetry and films. Editors of the issue situate these artistic productions as a response to amnesty laws voted in 1991, that aimed to silence memories of the war and created 'overdetermined collective amnesia informed by

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[24] My translation from French.

[25] A focus on memories of 'the war' has been encouraged by scholars such as Barak who stated that groups have 'asserted themselves vis-à-vis both the state and the political society' by 'mentioning the war' and by 'challenging the official line regarding the war' (2007: 51). Barak argues that researchers should focus on 'which actors in post-war Lebanon have engaged in what type of behaviour with regard to their country's problematic past, and what interests, motivations, and constraints helped shape their behaviour' (Barak 2007: 50).

[26] Lebanon. Fragmented memories of an obsessive war. Memory in the francophone cultural production (2000-2015).

political and commercial expediency' (Launchbury et al 2014: 457). The Lebanese artists whose productions are documented, on the contrary, 'retrieve, reclaim, and restore memory cultures that run counter to state-generated anti-memorial discourses' (Ibid.: 458). The edited book *Mémoires de Guerre au Liban (1975-1990)*[27] (Mermier and Varin 2010b) combines, in thirty papers, the research done, between 2007 and 2010 as part of the programme *Liban, mémoires de guerre. Pratiques, traces et usages*[28]. Lebanese journalist Fady Noun's book *Guerre et Mémoire: La Vérité en face*[29] (2004), Haugbolle's book 'War and Memory in Lebanon' (2010) and Larkin's book 'Memory and Conflict in Lebanon: Remembering and Forgetting the Past' (2012) are just a few more examples of the immense legacy of the drive to generating memories of the war.

During my research, I have come across many more projects that promote reconciliation and peacebuilding through talking, sharing and educating about the war. The artist Zeina el Khalil summarises this approach:

> 'Rather than hide things under the rug as we have done in the past, I believe it is important to bring things to light. We have a new generation now that did not live the war and it is important that they know our history so that history doesn't repeat itself. Perhaps at the time, it was important to call the general amnesty that we did. But today, over 20 years later, I believe we are finally ready to hear and hopefully make the apologies that we never did. The thing with pain is that sometimes it is a lot easier to deal with than we realize. Sometimes, by simply shedding light through an apology or acknowledgement, the heart opens and pain simply dissipates.' (Frances Eng 2017)

These arguments are similarly used by the NGO Fighters For Peace (FFP), the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), or individuals such as psychotherapist Alexandra Asseily[30] who initiated the program 'Healing the Wounds of History: Addressing the Roots of Violence' (HWH) launched in 2011.[31] UMAM Documentation and Research is a centre that gathers archives from the Lebanese civil war and seeks to contribute 'to the ongoing debate over

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[27] War memories in Lebanon (1975-1990).

[28] Lebanon, war memories. Practices, traces and uses.

[29] War and Memory: Facing the Truth.

[30] I met Alexandra Asseily in London in 2016. She is one of the founders of the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS), that operates in Oxford and Lebanon.

[31] Participants joining the program attend a three-day workshop (300 USD fee). Information found online states that the program would 'help healing the unresolved, deeper roots of violence unconsciously activated in the present from previous generations. The challenges faced by Lebanon and the region are self-evident where cycles of violence have played out repeatedly through the ages. All of this is well documented, but what is less obvious is how the battles of the past are held in our memory and can deeply affect the present and future generations. Whether we are conscious of this or not, we may be reliving the trauma of our parents, grandparents or even long dead ancestors.' (CLS 2019).

Lebanon's past and what it views as the country's faulty collective national memory, it exists and operates in an environment that is exceptionally hostile to historical reflection' (UMAM 2020). The idea of 'dealing with the past' in order to reach peace in the present and the future is at the core of the centre's aims.[32] Moreover, Fighters for Peace (FFP) is an organisation of ex-combatants whose mission is 'to actively engage' 'fellow ex-fighters in peace building and reconciliation processes' to 'immunize the current youth against violence by sharing with them the stories' of ex-combatants' lives and their 'inner change, encouraging them to prefer dialogue to conflict'; FFP members go to schools, universities and other organisations to 'share their testimonies' (FFP 2018).

Projects such as *'Badna Naaref'* ('We want to know') or 'The War as I see it' are direct outcomes of the will to educate the youth and teach them about their country's violent past. '*Badna Naaref* is a project initiated by several NGOs and organisations (including UMAM and the ICTJ) in 2010-2011, whose goal was to create a dialogue between children who did not experience the civil war and their relatives who had first-hand experiences of it. Similarly, 'The War as I see it' is a project led by the ICTJ and funded by the Swiss Embassy in Lebanon. It focuses on 'Youth perceptions and Knowledge of the Lebanese Civil War' (ICTJ 2017)[33]. According to Nour El Bejjani Noureddine, the project showed how little the youth know about the civil war and that what they know is mainly based on their families' community-based testimonies. Often, students would blame 'the other' for their family or community's suffering, without realising that their community and/or family also had a role to play (ICTJ 2017, and my discussion with Nour in June 2018). In the project's report, Nour insists:

> 'Youth, victims and Lebanese society have a right to know the truth about what happened during the war, the guarantee of which is a crucial condition for sustainable peace and national reconciliation. Further, the post-war generation's scant knowledge of the country's recent history and intercommunal resentments and fears make them vulnerable to political manipulation and radicalism' (ICTJ 2017: 11).

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[32] The centre publishes and organises exhibitions and events on topics such as commemoration and the missing and disappeared of the war, and has an online database called 'Memory at work' that documents the Lebanese violent past. On their website, they situate the importance of their work in an effort 'to deal with the past':

'[...] the very notion of dealing with the past in an effort to appreciate and improve the present is still fighting for legitimacy in Lebanon. While UMAM D&R contributes to the ongoing debate over Lebanon's past and what it views as the country's faulty collective national memory, it exists and operates in an environment that is exceptionally hostile to historical reflection.' (UMAM 2020)

[33] Nour El Bejjani Noureddine, the coordinator of the project, travelled around Lebanon to present the project and lead discussions in schools, municipality facilities or universities. Approximately 500 young people took part in the project. Ex-combatants from the FFP group also joined in and gave testimonies.

The report's recommendations focus on the need to educate the youth, to provide schools with a national history textbook, to provide teachers with the tools to teach history, and to encourage interconfessional and intergenerational dialogues. However, the recommendations are not directed towards any organisation or official body as the ICTJ does not lobby locally – the report would be given to all interested organisations and individuals, as Nour mentioned during our conversation in June 2018.

The arguments and initiatives presented in this section thus condemn the absence of state initiatives to teach and educate about the past, and take on that responsibility. This is significant because these initiatives imply that by talking, sharing, learning, and educating about the past, violent events in the future can be avoided, and history would not 'repeat itself'. They thus imply a certain approach to time and history: they can go around in a loop if the past is not 'dealt with'. This is going to be discussed further in the next section, as well as in chapter three.

4. LIMITS TO MEMORY WORKS

In what follows, I suggest that the conceptualisations of memory and time presented in this chapter so far convey a limited idea of what a relationship to the past, to time, temporality and memory should be or could be in Lebanon. Firstly, I show how the lack of 'closure' of the Lebanese 'civil war' has been equalled with an 'unfinished war'. Secondly, the need to remember should not be asserted at the expense of the need to forget. Thirdly, I argue that 'memory works' give undue priority to violence and trauma as the central characteristics of all memories in Lebanon. This effectively invalidates narratives of the past that are not structured by accounts of violence and pain. Fourthly, I take issue with the idea that the coexistence of multiple narratives of the war is necessarily a source of division, and in particular, that such narratives and the divisions that they reputedly create are structured upon sectarian lines, where the homogeneity of the sectarian communities, as well as of the families that constitute these communities, is taken for granted. Finally, I problematise the dependence on the state as the creator of a national discourse that would unify the various communitarian discourses under a single hegemonic discourse about the war.

4.1. THE UNFINISHED WAR(S)?

Works on memory in Lebanon often begin with the assumption that the Lebanese are likely to repeat the past and its horrors if they do not address it. Consider the following quotation from Khalaf and Khoury:

> 'All wars are atrocious. The horrors spawned by the war are particularly galling in the case of Lebanon because they are not anchored in any recognizable and coherent set of causes nor have they resolved the issues which sparked the initial hostilities. It is in this poignant sense that the war has been wasteful and futile, ugly and unfinished. The task of representing or incorporating such inglorious events into a nation's collective identity becomes, understandably, much more problematic. But it needs to be done. Otherwise, the memory of the war, like the harrowing events themselves, might well be trivialized and forgotten and, hence, are more prone to be repeated.' (1993: XIV)

And the following excerpt from the ICTJ:

> 'Past lessons from history have shown that amnesties in the context of atrocious crimes are unlikely to be sustainable. The resulting impunity is an invitation for more abuse and most often a proclamation of victor's justice. Unsatisfied and unremedied parties prolong the climate of hostility, which in turn can revive the root causes of a conflict.' (ICTJ 2014b: 6)

Between Khalaf and Khoury's early argument for the necessity of a collective *travail de mémoire* and the ICTJ's condemnation of Lebanon's amnesty laws as prolonging hostility, the discourse of the unfinished war proliferated in scholarship on Lebanon: without proper recognition of what happened, war could return, and unhealed trauma will keep pervading Lebanese society. On such accounts, Lebanon would be stuck in a war that never finished. De Cauter talks about a state of 'latent civil war' in Lebanon:

> 'What is 'traumatic' is not just the experience, but also the impossibility of digesting those experiences. Traumatism continues in the potential for a new outbreak of civil war. The pain does not heal, because the civil war is not over, is never over. The civil war turns into an endless latent war.' (2011: 429)

Without an adequate resolution to the conflict, there can be no collective mourning of the war era:

> 'It is no doubt a self-defence mechanism, this loss of memory of a traumatized collective psyche. In Beirut, loss of memory is like mourning for the impossibility of mourning. For it is still going on, since the state of civil war remains latent.' (Ibid.: 425)

Launchbury et al. consider that 'even if active hostilities are ended, it is the sense of a long lull, rather than of conflict finished and completed, that prevails' (2014: 458), Haugbolle considers

the 'Lebanese civil war' 'unfinished', arguing that amnesty laws, the absence of trials and public debate around those responsible for crimes have had a 'negative effect on the capacity of the nation to deal with the memory of the conflict' (2005: 192). Fady Noun writes that 'without memory, the war will not end [...] the extent of this drama continues to be ignored. Worse, censored.' (2004: 9). Kinda Chaib considers that in the South of Lebanon, there is a 'latent atmosphere of permanent war,' for all generations have experienced war, which would 'exacerbate the presence of the past in the present, in a constant back-and-forth between those two times' (2010: 246), and Reina Sarkis Streib, through her study of war traumas on two patients and the repetitions of trauma, talks about a '*guerre infinie*', an endless, infinite war (2010: 333). Recently published books such as Hiba Bou Akar's 'For the War yet to come: Planning Beirut's Frontiers' (2018), and Sami Hermez's 'War is coming: Between past and future Violence in Lebanon' (2017) illustrate the constancy of this conceptualisation of violence and war in Lebanon as being simultaneously unfinished, ever present and always imminent.

All of these accounts turn around the idea that a failure to confront the memory of the war means repeating the violence of the past, in direct opposition to the discourse of the state that warns against reopening old wounds and hatred through public remembrance of the war.

4.2. The Need to Remember and the Duty to Forget

Throughout this chapter, I showed that in the literature on Lebanon, the 'duty' to remember has been privileged. The academic literature, as well as artistic/civil society initiatives have been overwhelmingly concerned with a *travail de mémoire*, a remembrance effort, overlooking *le devoir d'oubli*, the duty to forget (Augé 2001). I argue that the need to remember, while important, must not obscure the need, and indeed the right of people to not talk about the war. For example, my experience within my own family both in Europe and in Lebanon, has been one of paying attention to silences (to borrow Luisa Passerini's phrase (2003: 252)). Asking questions about 'the past' would mean breaking the tacit accord that family members' choice to not be reminded of their past and war experiences will be respected. I argue that these silences and this trans-generational wish to not provoke suffering through probing memory testify to the sensitivities and complexities of the processes of remembering (war), that cannot be understood only through the prisms of remembering/forgetting or memory/amnesia.

Very few voices have given legitimacy to an unconditional right to not be reminded of 'the war', to repress, to be silent about one's own traumas, to forget or try to forget. One of these voices has been the Lebanese novelist and poet Elias Khoury, who insisted on the

importance of forgetting, but also on the restrictive role that literature plays in dealing with the past. This is important, in a context where, as shown earlier, many scholars have turned to literature and arts to document memorialisation efforts. Elias Khoury claims that literature has a limited role to play in this context:

> 'In the Arabic heritage, in the Lisan al-'arab [Language of the Arabs], it says "summiya al-insan liannahu yansa" [he is called a human being because he forgets] [sic]. It is a human necessity to forget. People have to forget. If I do not forget my friends who died in the civil war I cannot live, I cannot drink and eat [...] Literature can provide a context for rethinking and contemplation but its role is not to recollect memory or the past. Literature can only question how things are put together and how they are seen.' (Mejcher-Atassi 2001)

Samir Khalaf is another one of the voices that have insisted on the importance of forgetting:

> '[...] it is understandable, considering the natural reactions of the Lebanese to all the unbearable atrocities and traumas with which they were beset, that they should try to forget or at least distance themselves from, and sanitise, as they appear to be doing, the scars and scares of almost two decades of cruel and senseless violence.' (2006: 33-34)

Khalaf argues that the creation of memorials and other memorial artefacts that focus the attention on remembering certain elements of the past, are actually 'vectors for the process of social forgetting' – they are not simply efforts to help people 'dwell on the pathologies of civil and uncivil violence' but serve to cultivate 'the sorely needed outlets for forgetting'. Furthermore, Khalaf notes that

> 'In no way have they [generations of Lebanese] – or can they – forget such dark and misbegotten episodes in their past. Indeed, they often remember them so well that they deeply resent being reminded of them. [...] much of the carefree abandon and exuberance – together with the proclivity of the Lebanese to embrace novelties, crazes and popular pastimes – are largely symptomatic of their eagerness to distance themselves from the dreaded memories of the war'. (2006: 36)

There are two important elements in relation to forgetting that are worth stressing here: on the one hand, Khalaf suggests that, at the intimate level, the Lebanese want and need to forget – similarly to Larkin, above, stating that the Lebanese youth do not want to remember – and have legitimate reasons to want to do so, and, on the other hand, at the national level, forgetting is not welcomed in the same manner: it invariably implies a form of manipulation of the past.

It is indeed easier to embrace the need for silence in the intimate and private spheres, while public silences are more suspicious and more difficult to defend (Passerini 2003: 247). However, as Passerini notes,

> 'if such public (and extending to the private) "amnesia" is imposed by the authorities, very often it requires some sort of complicity on the part of those who, not being in a position of power, accept and prolong an imposed silence.' (Ibid.: 243)

There is richness in silences, though – they are not void and have various possible sources and uses:

> 'Something may be unsaid because its memory has been actually repressed – by trauma, contrast with the present, conflicts of individual or collective nature – or because the conditions for its expression no longer (or do not yet) exist. Sometimes the change in these conditions may break the silence and allow memories to be expressed, while at other times silence can last for so long and under such conditions that it may contribute to the effacing of memory, and induce oblivion. At the same time, however, silence can nourish a story and establish a communication to be patiently saved in periods of darkness, until it is able to come to light in a new and enriched form' (Passerini 2003: 238)

Thus, following Passerini (2003), Hirsch (2008) or Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic (2012), I consider that there is memorial abundance in silences and a richness in turning to intimate, personal, often discreet ways of including the past in the present.

4.3. MEMORY OF VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA

In Lebanon, the urge to remember 'the past' is suffused with a focus on 'trauma' and 'traumatic memories'. Notwithstanding the fact that 'trauma' is not defined and taken for granted as being a defining element of the experience of war, there is also a lack of research on the embodied experience of trauma. As Nikro observes, trauma studies have been mostly interested with theory, and have been lacking the 'worldly, fleshy, and physical contours of a materialist phenomenology focusing on modalities of encountering, inhabiting, and embodying specific livelihoods – livelihoods of people, of places, of things, of objects [...]' (2018: 17). Trauma is lived, and experienced, not in a uniform manner, but in specific and personal ways. It does not exist in a vacuum and instances of its creation, as well as its embodiment, need to be documented in their specificity.

Furthermore, through memory work, there has been a form of censorship of certain narratives about the war: more specifically, happy memories or glorifying narratives of the war period, although they do emerge in conversations. For example, Hermez describes how former

Lebanese militiamen describe the war period as 'the good old days' (2017: 144) and Riskedahl states that

> 'it was commonly stated by [her] Lebanese interlocuters during fieldwork (1999–2001) that life was better during the war. [Her] fieldnotes are filled with comments such as, "At least we knew we were alive back then" and "Then only the important things mattered"'. (2007: 308)

The focus on the horror of war has left little room for other stories of 'the past', that are not traumatic, to emerge.

4.4. MEMORY AS DIVIDED AND DIVISIVE

The fourth key characteristic that my overview of memory studies interested in Lebanon has shown in sections 2 and 3 is a conceptualisation of memory as divided and divisive. The field of memory has been characterised by the sectarian framing of collective identities. I have shown that it is assumed that sectarian communities in Lebanon have encouraged sectarian remembering after the end of the conflicts and that, in the absence of a national narrative, these communitarian narratives would create further divides within the Lebanese society. It is also assumed that the youth share their families' and communities' preconceptions and memories of 'the war' when they talk about the past, thus recreating sectarian divisions (Larkin 2012).

My reticence here is twofold: there is no problematisation of 'sectarian communities' and there is no problematisation of 'family'. It is assumed that families and communities transmit trivialised memories but the ways in which families and communities remember, and differ in the ways they remember, are not documented. Families are seen as primary groups when it comes to transmission and it is assumed that they play a crucial role in shaping individuals' remembrance, how and what they remember. But how exactly memory is transmitted and shaped within families in Lebanon is unknown. As discussed above, within my own family, silence plays a central role in our response to the war and is an important factor in transmitting the meaning and experience of war from parents to children. There may be as many different approaches to remembering the war as there are Lebanese families, and within families, different strategies for remembering, forgetting and communicating the war may be at play.

As for sectarian communities, the assumed heterogeneity in remembrance is also deeply problematic. Different families and individuals within these communities often disagree. Assuming their memorial (or any other form of) heterogeneity is yet another way to

exoticize and label the Lebanese in ways that are not necessarily those they would choose to identify with. Craig Larkin, for instance, systematically names his participants' sectarian affiliation in his book 'Memory and Conflict in Lebanon. Remembering and forgetting the past' (2012), without problematising his participants' real or imagined relationships with their (super-imposed) communities, despite operating in a context in which our sectarian affiliations, as Lebanese citizens, are imposed upon us at birth.

Here, I am certainly not arguing for a sectarian study of memory, but I find it fascinating that the sectarian lens has been used repeatedly to approach memories in Lebanon, without this ever being systematically documented. It has simply been repeated over the years that various – supposedly divided – sectarian communities in Lebanon necessarily remember differently, and in a way that creates more divides.

4.5. The Need for Justice as the Duty of the State

The absence of a single hegemonic discourse about the war, provided through the initiative of the state, is widely seen as a problem by memory scholars. The duty to remember has been seen as a correlate to the duty for justice. This claim, however, is presented without attention to the critiques of the transitional justice narrative in other national contexts. Each country that has gone through 'truth commissions' after conflicts has done it in a particular international and local context and these commissions have not always been supported by local populations, as demonstrated by Colvin with the case of South Africa (2003). The ICTJ's conceptions of peacebuilding are focused upon storytelling, narratives, verbal and physical expressions of trauma intended to help victims (and nations) heal. These ideas have been criticised too. For instance, in the context of South Africa, where the Truth and Storytelling Commission (TRC) focused on 'storytelling' with a particular interest for traumatic stories (Colvin 2003: 153). Colvin highlights the problematic causal links made between narration and healing:

> 'These references to the dangers of a haunted past destructively repeating itself, like a festering physical wound, until it is lanced and cleansed, draw from a set of therapeutic narratives and images of trauma grounded in twentieth-century psychological knowledge and practice. One of the unique features of this recent emphasis on trauma, traumatic memory and the various therapeutic strategies for recovery is that the ground of the newly healed self – of the patient or of the nation – is understood to be constituted out of the mastering of a painful past.' (Colvin 2003: 156-157)

Not only do these accounts pay insufficient notice to the specificity of individual national contexts, they also fail to sufficiently problematize the role of the state in imposing a

hegemonic narrative of war. As Elizabeth Jelin argues (she is specifically describing the South American experience, but her point applies more broadly to other contexts, too), the sort of national discourse that amnesia theorists demand, involves 'advancing one version of history that [...] could serve as a central node for identification and for anchoring national identity' (Jelin 2003: 27). This national history would provide 'the reference points for framing the memories of groups and sectors within each national context', but this new national narrative would necessarily be selective, emphasizing the acts, experiences and memories of some, and obscuring or silencing those of others (Ibid.). The reproduction of such 'official canonical narratives' in textbooks and educational curricula plays an important role in political centralisation (Ibid.). Beyond the problematic aspects of granting hegemonic privilege to one account as the 'true' account of the war, to the detriment of all other accounts, there can be no guarantee that the political stability sought can be found through this process. Once established as a 'master narrative', this official state discourse likely becomes the target of 'diverse efforts at reform revisionism, and construction of alternate historical narratives' (ibid.). There is no reason to believe that such counter-hegemonic narratives will be any less divisive than the proliferation of competing, unofficial narratives that amnesia theorists problematise in contemporary Lebanon, unless of course, the state acquires the power to successfully suppress all but the official discourse.

5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have described the main tropes for memory studies in post-1990 Lebanon. Memory research has mostly focused on 'the civil war' or 'the war'. This is understandable, and it is vital to give a voice to experiences, needs and stories that were not acknowledged and represented in official discourses. However, in Lebanon, thinking about the past has been placed in a war straitjacket. Moreover, what the research says about the memorial context in Lebanon is based on a lexicon of 'absence': of memorials, remembrance, knowledge about and understanding of the past; as well as on a lexicon of 'failure': failure to 'deal with the past', to provide justice, to reconcile people, to unify knowledge. Alongside this lexicon of absence and failure, one can read descriptions of localised and divisive memories: those of former fighters, those of communities, families and individuals. Memory is seen as reproducing sectarian divisions, while concurrently it is claimed that the Lebanese could find cohesion and a sense of belonging to a national project through collective acts of remembering. Similarly, the Lebanese are urged to confront their past, for if the past is not dealt with, the Lebanese are deemed to repeat it, or be stuck in it. The absence of official monuments to the war and of an official historical narrative concerning the war are used to support a claim that Lebanese

society is in some sense continually supressing its memories of the war and as a consequence, always stuck in both the past and the war. Wherever the war is not being actively memorialised, it is being actively suppressed.

There are five recurring elements in accounts of memory that I challenged in this chapter. The first is the fact that it is contended that if the Lebanese do not address their past, that is, the trauma of war, they are condemned to eternal war, eternal sectarian warfare. The second is the insistence on remembering, at the expense of forgetting. The suggestion is that while the state would like the war to be consigned to oblivion, it in fact structures and inhabits all discourse about memory and the past. Because the violence and trauma of war is supposedly nowhere, it must in fact be everywhere; all discourse, precisely because it is not speaking about the war, must be understood as a kind of discursive silencing of the war. For this reason, the idea that prevails is that until the war is properly remembered, until Lebanese society has adequately addressed its past, then the war not only inhabits every discourse and every public space, it is also ongoing. In the next chapter, I will show the similarities of this approach in the analysis and understanding of the city of Beirut. Thirdly, 'violence' and 'trauma' have been at the core of memory works concerned with Lebanon. The fourth element is memory works' reliance on, and reproduction of, a sectarian analysis of Lebanese society. Finally, the fifth element is the focus on the need for justice as the duty of the Lebanese state, ignoring both the issues around transitional justice and the absence of any wish to do so coming from the Lebanese state.

I argue that the memory context in Lebanon is more complicated and complex than a dichotomy of remembering and forgetting. Moreover, in Lebanon, 'the war' is not the only element that organises people's narratives about the past or their relationships to the past; and there is more than one way to remember or forget. My research and experience in Lebanon show that the Lebanese are not talking about war all the time, nor repressing it all the time. 'The war' is not a central element of their narratives, which is not to say that it is not important in their lives. The sentiment underlying my argument in this chapter could be summarised in the following quotation by Norman Saadi Nikro:

> 'Yet my point is not that a researcher should not assume a moralizing or ideological argument or approach. Rather, my point is that the embodiment of this assumption should not become a substitute for giving an account of how my subjects of research themselves engage with and make sense—or perhaps avoid making sense—of their circumstances and livelihoods.' (Nikro 2018: 25)

The critique of the Lebanese state's approach to memorialising the war has come to stand in for a thorough investigation of the ways in which individual Lebanese people remember and

forget, and the ways in which their narratives construct and reveal the meanings in and of their lives. The analysis in this chapter informed my research practice: it has shaped my approach to fieldwork in a way that led me to allow my research participants to express how they themselves engage with and make sense of their lives and their pasts, and not to impose a prior framework of remembrance or forgetting of 'the war' or of any other event.

Finally, this dominant conception of 'memory' equalling 'the war' has led to misrepresentations of the presence of 'the past' in present day Lebanon and has provided a limited conceptualisation of time as linear or cyclical. The past should be something that must be addressed in order to leave it behind, to turn the page, to move on, from a situation of war to a situation of peace. This tells us about the future, too: it should be disconnected from the troubles of the past. However, my research shows that the entanglement of past, present and future in the lives of urban activists in Beirut is more complex than that: past and future are intertwined with the present in complex and varied ways. In the next chapter, I provide an overview of how the space of Beirut has been talked about and experienced in the past forty years.

SPACE AND PLACE IN BEIRUT

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I analyse four main tropes concerning how Beirut is and has been transformed in the past forty years, which affect how Beirut is talked about and experienced. These four tropes are: sectarianism, violence, nostalgia, and exoticism. This chapter seeks to provide elements for understanding the ways in which Beirut has been destroyed and rebuilt in the recent past and the underlying issues behind these processes, but it is not a historical account of the development of Beirut as a city, or an account of the history of its urban planning or design. Here, I am interested in the ways in which, on the one hand, space and place are transformed and experienced and on the other hand, space and place are talked about in Beirut. The four dominant themes shed light on the relative power of different actors to produce the physical city within which the senses and memories of place lived by different groups interact. These four salient themes allow me to introduce, in different ways in each section, a history and geography of the city, the ways in which it has been and is being (re)shaped and how people live in it, remember it and make sense of it.

The four themes also presuppose specific temporal relationships to the past and the city, revealing the intersection, in my research, between memory studies and urban studies. I argue that the dominant ways in which Beirut has been conceptualised and approached have their limitations, for they reproduce relationships to the city, time, the past and memory that are limited to specific tropes and hence, limit the thinking and analyses, for there is not room for the manifold, contradictory experiences to be taken into account. These observations echo those made in chapter one. In chapter three, I will expand on one way to reconcile these limitations to best grasp the complexity of experiences of the city: through a combined study of time and space.
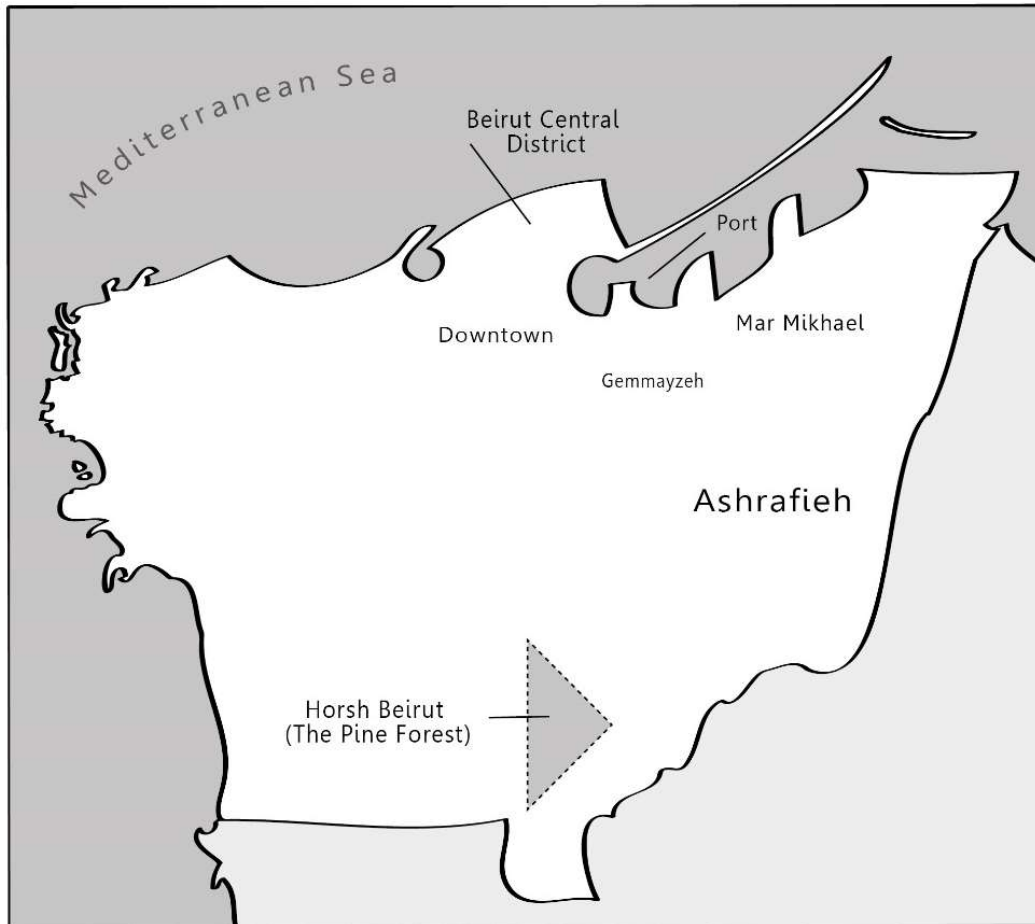
FIG. 3 Map of the places mentioned in chapter two (source: HMA)

2. THE SECTARIAN LENS: PHYSICAL AND MENTAL BOUNDARIES

In the 1970s and 1980s, Beirut

> 'imploded, and was fragmented in a multitude of confessional territories getting more and more segregated. The population deserted the capital, because of the daily fighting and the city knew an unlimited stretching. Urban morphology is, then, deeply affected'. (Barakat 2004: 490)

Beirut's boundaries and territorialisation developed and changed during 'the war' as 'Beirut was spatially divided along sectarian and party lines'. This has been described as 'Beirutization': 'a metaphor for the dissolution of community and the territorialization of a space into warring parts', also carrying the idea that

> 'inhabitants of this space […] are unable to move freely as their movement is caught up in a geography of closely guarded boundaries that mark off friendly and enemy territories. As shorthand, Beirutization and its proxy, Balkanization, are spatial renderings of complex histories of political conflict and violence.' (Monroe 2016: 36-37)

These readings of Beirut echo the 'lebanization of memory' mentioned in chapter one, referring to sectarianism to explain the violent segregation of people and places during the 1975-1990 conflicts.

The spatial habits adopted during the fifteen-year war have had lasting consequences on the ways in which the Lebanese navigate the streets of Beirut and Lebanon at large. First-hand and transmitted memories and experiences of 'the war' and the territorialisation that took place shape the ways in which people conceptualise particular neighbourhoods (Monroe 2016)[34] – as safe or not, welcoming or not, interesting or not, familiar or not, and so on – conceptualisations that influence their choices as to which places are appropriate places of leisure, of piety (Deeb and Harb 2013), places to socialise, to shop in or to visit even if, nowadays, neighbourhoods' physical borders are invisible. Furthermore, while scholarship is primarily interested in political sectarianism, issues of class and status are rarely taken into account in the study of Beirut's geography and negotiation of space and place, although they too matter 'in the space of Beirut' (Monroe 2016: 1).

As Kassir's quotation describes, divisions, borders and their violence have been at the centre of the analysis of Beirut's geography and experiences of the city:

> 'Even in the works of the most serious authors, "Lebanonization" gradually came to supersede "Balkanization" — the very word that so frightened the Lebanese at the beginning of their war — and Beirut found its name converted into a shorthand for the fascination with death.' (Kassir 2010: 20)

The Lebanese are mostly identified by and reduced to their sectarian affiliation, as exemplified in Norton's account of Lebanon, where, according to the scholar, 'one's life chances are shaped by the accident of being born a Sunni Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Maronite Christian, Shi'a Muslim or belonging to one of the 15 remaining recognised confessions that comprise Lebanese society' (2000: 35). The scholar further adds: 'Deadly boundaries – green lines[35] – are thankfully history, but inter-sectarian boundaries remain. Reconciliation, despite commendable initiatives, is, as yet, only a slogan.' (2000: 43). In this context, it is also assumed that religion and space are interchangeable in the Middle East: Beirut's physical boundaries

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[34] As Monroe describes, 'the politics of sectarianism are made public and visible in the city by various means, from the hanging of flags and banners in support of sectarian-identified political groups through the interpretation of monumental architecture as a political sectarian claim on parts of the city to understandings of public transportation as being in the pockets of leaders of sectarian-affiliated political parties. In these ways, Beirut is territorialized by—and the city's space is made an active agent in—the processes of political sectarianism.' (2016: 64)

[35] 'Green' because an abundance of trees and other vegetation grew on the demarcation line during the war, because the space was less inhabited.

are mostly conceptualised as sectarian boundaries and Beiruti neighbourhoods are labelled based on sectarian affiliation – 'Shi'a', 'Greek Orthodox', and so on (Davie 2011: 1). Moreover, these conceptualisations – that, in geography and urban studies, are represented on maps with coloured areas to grasp quickly which area 'belongs' to which specific religious group, ignoring the complex and nuanced identities of both people and spaces (ibid.: 4; 6) – are rarely questioned, are easily understandable, and are used as descriptive labels (ibid.). They produce 'inventories of identities asserted as homogeneous and supposedly spatialised' (ibid.: 6). These conceptualisations relate to '[...] our own cartographic conventions that lead us to imagine the surface of the earth divided into a mosaic of areas, each occupied by a named nation or ethnic group' (Ingold 2009: 34).

This is exemplified by the way in which Barakat conceptualised the space of Beirut, more than twenty years after the official end of the conflicts: she considered that the old militias' territories still remained, as former warlords and religious leaders use the 'social and community territorialisation as a weapon to control and deepen, in a better way, the city partitions' (Barakat 2004: 191). Beirut would be a 'kaleidoscope city', a mosaic of coexisting images, signs, symbols, ways of living that are linked and cohabiting but not actually living together (Barakat 2004: 191-192). As defined by Maier,

> 'territoriality means simply the properties, including power, provided by the control of bordered political space, which until recently at least created the framework for national and often ethnic identity. [...] territoriality has not been a timeless attribute of human societies. It is a historical formation, and its political form was also historical, that is, it has a beginning and an end.' (2000: 808)

However, in Lebanon, it is assumed that territorialisation is a fundamental and inevitable element of the production of space, without taking into account processes of 'deterritorialization': the ones that are 'destabilizing and tend to dilute an assemblage', the ones that blur spatial boundaries and increase heterogeneity (Cresswell 2011: 240).

Sectarianism has to be taken into account as a potential factor – *among others* – that could influence one's sense of space/place in Lebanon, but there needs to be evidence provided as to *how* this is or this is not the case – sectarian affiliation should no longer be proposed as a direct explanation for social interactions and negotiations of the city, but instead, as a symptom of specific politics in place.

I argue that boundaries and labels need to be contextualised, nuanced and complicated: there are no physical or mental boundaries that have not been created and that are not contested, questioned, blurred and thickened at times, and there are no

neighbourhoods that are homogeneous in terms of sectarian or political affiliation (Davie 2011), let alone in terms of relationship to space and place. These conceptualisations fix Beirut's invisible borders, ignoring fluxes, nuances and changes. They also give the feeling that the Lebanese either passively accept or actively reproduce these physical and social boundaries[36] whereas paying attention to people's narratives and experiences of places, as I have tried to do in the conversations with urban activists that are discussed in the later chapters of this thesis, as well as their prejudices, their perceptions, their emotions, their memories – real, imaginary and transmitted – creates the complexity necessary to grasp the many ways in which people understand and experience the spaces of the city. *There are no homogeneous experiences of sectarian affiliation and there are no homogeneous experiences of place based on sectarian belonging.*

3. VIOLENCE

As Hayek points out, 'the cityscape of Beirut has, in the past four decades, undergone massive physical transformation: destruction, reconstruction, demolition and construction have ensured that it is a landscape in constant flux' (2014: 3). This quotation hints at another dominant aspect of the discussions of space in Beirut: violence. I have separated sectarianism and violence into two sections to stress their specific attributes, but violence and sectarianism are more often than not blended in studies of Lebanon and Beirut; one would lead to the other and vice-versa. In this section, I describe the presence of 'violence' in discourses, studies and experiences of and about Beirut. In the next subsection, I focus on the violence of war, but I want to suggest that other forms of violence have greatly shaped the city, too: the violence of the destructive 'reconstruction' and privatisation of Beirut (section 3.2.), and the violence of a city that lacks public spaces (section 3.3.).

3.1. THE VIOLENCE OF WAR: DESTRUCTION OF THE CITYSCAPE AND LOSS OF ONE'S BEARINGS

> 'Was the war therefore forgotten? It was forgotten every day, without for a moment ever being absent from anyone's mind. [...] even for those who did not want to fight, there was no choice but to approach daily life as though it were an assault course – knowing when to take cover, constantly listening, straining to separate the background noise of random gunfire from the sound of shots that were meant to kill. [...] It is perhaps for this very reason that Beirut was so gruesomely fascinating – because life went on despite the onslaught, and because the city, in its decline and decay, nevertheless remained a city.' (Kassir 2010: 23)

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[36] This is particularly the case in scholarship that labels Beirut as a '(violently) divided city' (see, among many others Nagle 2017 or Mermier 2013).

Several wars, among them the wars of 1975-1990 and the July 2006 war, as well as population displacements during the various conflicts, bomb attacks and external occupations of both Lebanon and Beirut are among the elements that have 'most severely impacted the urban landscape', while conflicts modified the uses of urban spaces (Hayek 2014: 3). This led Fregonese to talk about the 'urbicide of Beirut', a 'deliberate killing of the city' (2009: 310, citing Graham 2004), residing in the idea that

> 'Beirut's wartime built environment has played an active part in the socio-political reimagination of the entire city and of the political spaces beyond it, such as the Arab world and the identity of Lebanon within it.' (Ibid.: 317)

During the 1975-1990 conflicts, while the intra- and inter-city displacements shaped the lives of those displaced, they also shaped the city itself. For instance, Beirut's southern suburbs developed during this period (Abi Samra 2010). While Shiites were seeking refuge in the south of Beirut, Christians left it. People from all religious communities experienced displacements: moving, sometimes several times, and seeking refuge, often in places where their religious communities were most present. Abandoned spaces were given new uses: hotels were occupied by militia men engaged in the 'Battle of the Hotels' in 1975-1976[37], and refugees squatted abandoned houses, trying to recreate a sense of home away from home, dealing with the struggles of everyday life in a war-torn city (Charara 2010), while the 'green line' divided East and West Beirut.

As introduced in the introduction to the thesis, Syrian hegemony in Lebanon was everywhere to be found, controlling both the Lebanese state apparatus and the country's space (Norton 2000, Kassir 2010, Monroe 2016: 40, 44, 47), inevitably shaping Lebanon's and Beirut's landscapes and the negotiation of space, for instance through the implementation of checkpoints – thus controlling movements, checking identities, asserting Syrian presence in the country. Syrian checkpoints have been, for me and my family, one way in which the wars of 1975-1990 and the negotiations of space that they created, have been transmitted and reproduced: both my parents, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, took decisions on where to go as a diasporic family back in Lebanon for the summer based on their memories of the war and on their assessment of danger and safety. At the end of the 1990s and early 2000s,

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[37] As Fregonese explains, 'The Battle of the Hotels was waged between December 1975 and March 1976 on a stretch of the seafront lying west of the city centre. Here, all along the 1960s and early 1970s, tower blocks were built according to the international style principles, to host the city's grand hotels for its global public of businessmen, bankers, celebrities and tourists. [...] When the militias reached the city centre from the south-eastern suburbs in September 1975, they began taking over the highest towers to gain vantage points for surveillance and for shooting. [...] The Holiday Inn hotel became a crucial part of this new strategic front [...] As the battles increased and the militias became more organised, the path of the Green Line was demarcated in the aftermath of the battle of the hotels.' (2009: 314-315)

during our summer holidays, my grandmother used to take my sisters and I, often accompanied by my mother or aunt, to a summer fair in Dhour el Choueir – a fifteen-minute drive from Bikfaya. My father never came along. I was never told why. When I asked about that recently, my parents said that they feared Syrian checkpoints on our way to Dhour el Choueir, because, they said, men from the region were still disappearing, getting arrested, or taken hostage by the Syrians back then. The checkpoints required cars to stop, drivers to open their windows and to greet the soldier who checked the car and its passengers and decided to let the car go or not. This choreography happened on all our road trips until 2005. My parents' fear of Syrian checkpoints only applied to men, because of their involvement during the war. Although my father did not fight, and was not involved politically during the war, the mere fact that he was from Bikfaya – a stronghold for anti-Syrian fighting during the war – was a source of worry for him. However, he did join us on trips elsewhere in the country, during which we also had to cross Syrian checkpoints. According to my mother, this was less of a danger because of the geographical distance between Bikfaya and the checkpoints. As a child, I had not realised that our movements in Lebanon were constrained and decided upon based on our sectarian affiliation, gender or my dad's village of origin.

3.2. THE VIOLENCE OF RECONSTRUCTION

> 'Massive rebuilding, moreover, was removing the tangible evidence of disaster. What earthquake? In Southern California we bury our dead, then forget.' (Davis 1999: 46-47)

In the context of post-1990 Beirut, the study of urban reconstruction and decision-making processes related to the physicality of the city unearths complex social relations, urban identities, loyalties and power dynamics (Sawalha 2010: 14).

In downtown Beirut, the privately-owned real estate company Solidere, founded by the late Rafiq el Hariri, managed the 'reconstruction' effort after the civil war. Hariri's profit-oriented plans have been condemned by academics and activist groups alike, Heiko Schmid describing them as an 'extreme privatisation of the urban' (2006: 368). The 'capitalist peace' that was created aimed to incentivise foreign direct investment, gentrification, land privatization and export diversification (Nagle 2016: 149). Hariri was a cornerstone in the rebranding of downtown Beirut and had already gained significant control over the area before the end of the conflicts. Becherer even describes the peace accords as the 'Hariri-designed peace pact' (2005: 20), so heavily was Hariri invested in both the political and urban reconstruction of Lebanon. He became Prime Minister in 1992, further increasing the strong ties between private and public investments. Those in charge of rebuilding Beirut's city centre

controlled the area and assigned new meanings to urban spaces, based on their interests in it and own interpretations of it (Sawalha 2010: 13-14), while some excluded from these processes voiced their opposition to the reconstruction work of Solidere (Khalaf 2006: 129; Sawalha 2010; Makarem 2012; Schmid 2006). The reading of the city's reconstruction and new physicality post-1990 also allows for a study of the interplay between various local and international actors, as well as different interests that can be 'spatially read' (Kappler 2017: 131).

The physical reconstruction of Beirut reflects the peacebuilding process that was implemented through the Ta'if Agreement: the violent past related to the civil war had to be left behind and the war not mentioned (Barak 2007). At the political and social level, amnesty laws and disregard for the war period encouraged people to 'leave the past behind' (Barak 2007: 57). When it comes to the reconstruction of downtown Beirut, this has been done through a 'tabula rasa' planning and building method (Kassir 2003; Barakat 2017). What is labelled as Beirut's 'post-war reconstruction' was actually a destruction of the city, for two-thirds of the eighteen hundred damaged but extant buildings in downtown Beirut were 'demolished for replacement by Solidere' (Becherer 2005: 17). Becherer gives a blunt account of the ethos of the reconstruction of the new Beirut Central District (BCD):

> 'To contemporary eyes the BCD site presents itself as a stark and surprisingly modernist tabula rasa, a vast space that operates as the best defence against hidden demons. 'Not a single building should be kept as it is to remind us of the civil war. There is no need to preserve this painful memory', so Rafiq Hariri recently pronounced. His message here is clear. To guard against recurrent trauma, erase. In the absence of collective memory, collective denial will do.' (2005: 18)

Furthermore, another major criticism towards the reconstruction of downtown Beirut is that Hariri's plan for the new BCD 'suffered from a severe case of gigantism' and had no

> 'relation to the city that had once existed or even to the city that remained. For this pharaonic project required not only that the rubble be cleared in order for a new downtown to rise in its place, but also the demolition of several neighbourhoods that had survived the war.' (Kassir 2003: 531)

Another important element of the reconstruction project is that it was intended to reassure 'a Western marketplace of the country's returning civil order, economic stability, and Westernised social identity' in order to attract business; it constructed a narrative 'for the city of capital re-emergent, the Switzerland of the Levant' and ignored the war, which 'constitutes the single shared experience to cut across all of Lebanon's social divisions' (Becherer 2005: 29).

The rebuilding of Beirut, through privatisation and a grand plan that privileged high-end designs, both excluded local inhabitants and was lacking a sense of locality:

> 'Critics of Solidere's reconstruction of the central district also often ascribe the superficiality of the planning and design to the orientation towards global capital and the concomitant absence of connectivity to the local'. (Naeff 2014: 553 citing Makdisi 1997: 704)

The plans were disconnected from Beirutis' claims, memories, experiences and stories, wishes and visions for the rebuilding of their own city, as shown in Sawalha's fascinating study of place and memory in post-war Beirut (2010). Sawalha describes downtown Beirut as an example of what she calls 'prohibited spaces':

> 'urban sites that were originally "public" and within reach for the majority of the city residents but, because of the war and the various urban renewal projects, had become "private", that is, inaccessible and out of reach for the majority of the population' (2010: 12)

Nagel considers that 'the re-building of Beirut must be understood as another 'battlefield' in the long-running struggle over national identity and sectarian inequality in Lebanon' (2002: 719). As such, the 'reconstruction effort' acts as one of the post-conflict struggles, in a context of 'unfinished war' (Haugbolle 2005: 192), creating more violence and division after the official end of armed conflict.

3.3. THE LACK OF PUBLIC SPACES

In this section, I describe the current situation in Beirut with the lack of public spaces, and the condemnation of this lack by urban activists. I argue that the lack of public spaces is a form of violence imposed upon Beiruti dwellers, another way in which Beirut has become a 'prohibited city'.

Urban planner and activist Mona Fawaz, in her recent 'Ten Point Action Plan for Beirut's Muhafiz', written for the newly appointed Beiruti governor, in June 2020, condemns the privatisation and marketisation of Beirut:

> 'The utopia of privatization upheld since the 1990s has reached its logical end: Beirut's historic core, its downtown, is a massive parking lot. Youth emigrates when it can, protests when it is forced to stay. These spaces must become productive, and the governor can make this happen. He should make sure those who profit are the young people eager to work and block the types of deals we saw last October when Solidere handed over the waterfront to a handful of banks. A healthy urban economy creates jobs and spaces to work, it doesn't sell pieces of the city.' (2020)

This excerpt underlines some of the issues at stake in the city – both the fifteen years of conflict and the 'reconstruction' process have made public space scarce: Beirut's public spaces changed in the process of war-making, and through the expanded process of privatisation of an already capitalist city, those in charge of the 'reconstruction' process made no room for them either (Barakat and Chamussy 2002).

The current lack of public space has to be situated and understood in a wider context of lack of public infrastructure, lack of public transport, lack of a long-term waste management plan, lack of green spaces, lack of sports facilities, lack of access to the sea – in short, a lack of consideration for the public good, whereas private and political interests are prioritised in urban planning (Saksouk Sasso 2015, Fawaz 2020, Salamon 2004). Both the Governorate of Beirut and the Municipality of Beirut have had a huge role to play in disregarding public interest, and dismissing urban activists' efforts to put forward sustainable projects to improve the city (Fawaz 2020, Salamon 2004).

Furthermore, Beirut is a car-dedicated city (UN-Habitat 2011: 68) and public spaces such as pavements, when they exist, are neglected, full of holes and dog excrement; used as extensions of shops or parking spots.

There are very few parks in the city and the only big green space in the city, Horsh Beirut (The Pine Forest), had been closed off since the 1980s. The park was bombed in an Israeli raid in 1982 and inaccessible to the public even after the end of the conflicts, despite a partnership and support from France to rebuild and reopen the park in the 1990s. The Municipality of Beirut kept it closed, and kept pushing the opening date further back. In 2010, as the park was still closed, the NGO Nahnoo started the campaign 'Horsh Beirut for All' to reclaim the Beirutis' right to their park and public places. It took Nahnoo five years of campaigning to succeed in reopening the park in 2015. Despite this success, Horsh Beirut remains threatened as a public space, for the Municipality of Beirut has not agreed to reject all construction projects in the park and started building a hospital in the Horsh in 2017 (Nahnoo 2018). The protection and accessibility of Horsh Beirut cannot be taken for granted; its reopening has been a fragile victory.

Moreover, Beirut's seafront is mostly inaccessible due to the encroachment of private infrastructure built illegally, mostly during the civil war (Dalieh Campaign Manifesto 2015: 12). Free access to the beach is meant to be a legal right in Lebanon but most beaches are privately developed, and a fee must be paid to access them. This is part of a much wider issue around the privatisation of the seafront in Beirut and Lebanon, as it is estimated that 'capital holders, some holding political office, own eighty-one percent of the coastal areas between the

Jounieh Bay and Beirut International Airport – that is a stretch of land approximately fifty-one kilometres in length' (Dalieh Campaign Manifesto 2015: 12), and this is not including the seafront North of Jounieh and South of Beirut Airport.

In this context, places that are meant to be public do not necessarily function as such (for example the downtown area, including the Garden of Forgiveness) and on the contrary, places that are meant to be private are sometimes used and reclaimed as public: some parking lots and abandoned plots are used as sporting facilities, despite their officially private nature, which shows how people, in their individual actions, also blur the boundaries between public and private spaces. This is the case in Ashrafieh, where a private, open-air parking lot that was situated right in front of the building where I stayed between May and June 2018, served as a reclaimed public space, a made-up place of encounter, of leisure and play. I will discuss this case study further in chapter seven.

As Fawaz claims, the public of Beirut 'needs a custodian' whose

> 'role is not to balance between the private interests of the few, the political aspirations of others, and the delicate sectarian balance that supposedly makes up our society. The public he serves has no sect. It has unifying aspirations for a livable city that responds to the needs of the 99% - not the interests of the 1%.' (2020)

The description in this excerpt of what the role of the city's desired custodian should not be sums up the approach taken by Beirut's governorates throughout the years, harming the city and its dwellers immensely. It also sums up the systematic condemnations by civil society of urban planning in Beirut, and the lack of consideration for the local population in thinking and developing the city. These elements will be important to keep in mind as they form part of the basis for understanding the stories that urban activists in Beirut have told me.

4. BEIRUTI NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia occupies an important place in narratives on and about Beirut, both in intimate and public spheres. Beiruti nostalgia means grieving a lost city, 'longing for a lost place and, especially, a vanished time' (Berliner and Angé 2015: 2).

GOLDEN AGE BEIRUT

> *'Comme si, au jour de la distribution des talents entre villes arabes, les fées avaient décidé que Beyrouth serait désormais le siège de la douceur de vivre'.* (Kassir 2003: 19)

> 'As if, when talents were distributed among Arab cities, the fairies decided that Beirut was to be the capital of relaxation and easy living.' (Kassir 2010: 11)

'La douceur de vivre' does not have an adequate equivalent in English – 'relaxation and easy living' do not translate the all-encompassing sweetness, easiness, and joy of living of '*la douceur de vivre'*. In the above quotations, Lebanese historian Samir Kassir mentioned *'la douceur de vivre'* to describe pre-1975 Beirut – 1974 to be precise. According to Kassir, Beirut was still *the* metropolis of the Middle East in 1974 before war and violence hit Lebanon: since the early 1960s, it had been one of the main urban hubs in the region:

> 'Extrovert by virtue of the many roles that it played, Beirut was outgoing also by virtue of its very personality. What made its reputation, and in large measure accounted for its charm, was not only the variety of services that it rendered; it was also, and perhaps especially, the fact that it was a bustling metropolis ['une ville en mouvement' in the original] — the like of which could not be found within a radius of several hundreds of miles. [...] a whole kaleidoscope of images must be conjured up to capture the sparkling effervescence of this golden age, which fell between the Palestine war of 1948 and the interminable conflict that began not quite thirty years later. Even conceding that the dizzying pace of life that accompanies every recollection of this period is, yet again, only an effect of nostalgia, it is nonetheless true that Beirut was then a remarkably vibrant city, more vibrant than any other in the entire region, at least to judge from its unrivalled power of attraction.' (2010: 8-9)

Kassir's nostalgic description of pre-1975 Beirut is representative of the 'Golden Age narrative' that represents pre-1975 Beirut as either the Paris of the Middle East or the Switzerland of the Middle East. The 'Golden Age narrative', found in literature, political discourses, but also mundane, everyday descriptions of pre-1975 Beirut, creates a discontinuity between three different historical periods: pre-1975 Beirut, Beirut during the 1975-1990 wars and post-1990 Beirut. It romanticises pre-1975 Beirut as a cosmopolitan, modern and Western city (Kastrissianakis 2015), a 'fashionable destination for European and American jetsetters', a 'city of pleasure' with sun and nightlife, but also the 'literary, publishing, and entertainment capital of the Arab world' (Monroe 2016: 30). Some of this also came out in my conversations with urban activists. Below is an excerpt of my conversation with architect and activist Abdul-Halim, in 2018, when he described the Beirut that he experienced as a child:

> '[...] I was born in the sixties. Lebanon was a fabulous, modern state in the sixties. Everything was brand new and elegant. Whether state institutions or buildings. There was a historical convergence of a national project, wealth and good taste that created amazing architecture. I mean, like the building we're in, these buildings, I mean... Lebanon in the late fifties and early sixties was just the modern Mediterranean nation, Beirut was the shining, you know, centre of that, and I was born in that environment, everything looked gorgeous, and elegant, and modern.'

These descriptions of pre-1975 Beirut shed light on the 'restorative nostalgia' associated with 'the lost home' (Boym 2001), the city that existed before 1975. What these restorative nostalgic

descriptions of pre-1975 Beirut also show is an association between modernity and Westernisation. These narratives tell us that pre-1975 Beirut was a modern and beautiful city thanks to its Western look, roles, organisation and perceived atmosphere. The way in which pre-1975 Beirut is likened to 'Paris' or 'Switzerland' is a testimony to that: the 'success' of Beirut between the fifties and the early seventies is thus associated with Western values and ways, seemingly ignoring the violence that came with the colonisation of Lebanon. Beirut's urbanisation is a direct consequence of the establishment and fulfilment of French interests in the region: roads, railways, universities, hospitals, schools, the constitution, parliament, the division of power, architecture – all have emerged from a 'long process of economic, political and cultural infiltration' by the French (Ghorayeb 2014).

Thus, Beirut's grandeur would be found in a past that would have passed: either in the ancient past (going back to prehistorical times and the Phoenicians, as Solidere's motto suggests: 'Beirut, the Ancient city of the future') or in a very limited-in-time past, as exemplified in the Golden Age narrative, presenting Beirut between the 1950s and mid-1970s as a city showered with modernity and power. In this context, the present, the recent past and the future can be freely (re)written and (re)conceptualised in relation to these periods of the past, that are set as the ideal type for the city. This resonates with Assmann when she writes that an interest in the past and 'attempts to reinsert it into the present' can be understood as 'nostalgia', for

> '[...] "creative destruction" produces its other in the shape of preservation and musealisation. The more the still visible past of our built environment is devalued, discarded and destroyed, the more likely the pendulum is to swing into the opposite direction: what modernists condemned to oblivion and singled out for destruction is now revalued and cherished. The past that once had been destined to silently disappear returns in many manifestations as a cultural resource now ardently preserved and protected.' (2013: 52)

5. EXOTIC BEIRUT

> '*Comme souvent, le regard des autres nourrit les mythes plus sûrement que la routine des autochtones. [...] Idéalisation du dehors.*' (Kassir 2003: 15)

> 'The perspective that outsiders bring to a place nourishes myths more surely than the routine experience of its native population. Beirut, more than most cities, naturally lent itself to this kind of idealization. Just as one must stand back a ways to appreciate the allure of the city's setting, so too one needs to keep a certain distance in order to let the eyes of the mind perceive the exhilarating fascination that Beirut once exerted upon occasional or seasonal residents [...]. For these distant travellers, as for those visiting from neighboring countries, Beirut's many

masks converged to create the image of an idyllic place – an image now converted by nostalgia into the memory of a lost golden age.' (Kassir 2010: 8)

Clichés about Beirut's grandeur and uniqueness are not only found in nostalgic narratives about Beirut's past: they are still very present in the ways in which Beirut is portrayed today. Beirut's hybridity awakens an incredible imaginary potential – it is exoticised freely and endlessly, and in turn, the Beirutis are too. I grew up in Belgium hearing all sorts of clichéd perspectives on Beirut, and Lebanon: the most beautiful country in the world; an amazing blend of mountains and sea; the most beautiful women in the world; a resilient people; the Lebanese are business people; the best food in the world; a blend of so many influences; Paris of the Middle East; Switzerland of the Middle East; the most Western country in the Middle East; a torn country; a divided country; as well as phrases such as '*C'est Beyrouth ici!*', or '*On se croirait à Beyrouth!*', which are used to describe a messy room, place or situation and which, luckily, have not made it into English. Beirut has become a metonym for chaos, civil war, a cliché for resilience, and a cliché for the westernisation of the Middle East.

PARTY CITY / SLUM CITY

Thinking about Beirut's hybridity, a good reference and representation of this is the contrast in the representations of Beirut in the docufiction 'Beirut Kamikaze', and those which present Beirut as the 'best party city'. The dialogue between these representations sheds light on contrasted spatial and social urban realities.

Anyone who has seen the docufiction 'Beirut Kamikaze' that was filmed camera in hand by the filmmaker Christophe Karabache, must remember the feelings of nausea and disgust that came with it, purposefully triggered by a shaking camera, poor image quality and sequences put together – selected for the harsh reality of Beirut that they depict. In 'Beirut Kamikaze', Beirut – the city, its suburbs, and all the vices that it carries – is the kamikaze: the suicidal city that kills herself, simultaneously provoking the abstract and physical death of others. A film without a narrative line, its images are meant to speak for themselves: a selection of short sequences of daily life in the suburbs of Beirut. According to Karabache, the film is meant to show 'underground and marginalized areas of the shanty-towns, bombed out areas and suburbs of the city' and to project 'a gaze that is at once angry and devastated at a country on the verge of an abyss, steeped in violence and ignorance', Beirut Kamikaze would be depicting 'the cruelty and extremism of a properly divided people' (Baghdadi 2011)[38].

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[38] My translation from the original French.

Karabache describes his movie as 'a radical poem-critique of decrepit Lebanese society where chaos, daily absurdity, cruelty and extremism are intertwined'[39].

The mundane material misery and social struggles that are the focus of this documentary shed light on the reality of a city that is not often represented – either in academic work or the media. It is a reality that is marginalised physically, as it is situated at the margins of the city, and in the abstract, ignored in social, political and intellectual works. In Karabache's docufiction, Beirut is not the party city that tourists and some locals alike experience. Miles away is the shiny, empty, polished downtown Beirut, and so are the gentrified areas, the trendy cafes and shops, pubs and art galleries that swarm neighbourhoods such as Mar Mikhael or Gemmayzeh, that have a lot in common with European cities. Miles away are the luxury shops and the mushrooming shopping malls.

Miles away are the images of a CNN Report titled 'Beirut best party city?' (2009) that shows, for over two minutes, a clichéd version of night life in Beirut, accompanied by comments such as:

> 'there have been tourism seasons lost in past years due to violence, but Lebanon seems, for the moment, to have found its balance: shaking its violent past, blending its finer traditions with a first-class party scene.'

Miles away is the journalist Marino's experience of Beirut, telling his readers 'How to party in Beirut like it's your last night on earth' and insisting on the fact that 'people in the rest of the world have been partying here for ages', for

> 'Lebanon is considered a beacon of peace and progressivism. It's where rich kids from Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Gulf buy their luxury goods and blow off steam. […] Beirut today is a gorgeous place, a picture of cosmopolitanism, with a promenade along the Mediterranean Sea and maybe the best nightlife I've ever witnessed.' (2017)

These accounts omit the political, financial and social struggles that the local population – including non-Lebanese domestic workers, Syrians and Palestinians – face in Beirut. Karabache offers an inversion of these images, takes the viewer to the other end of the spectrum of urban experiences in Beirut. He gives Beirut the power to kill herself and to kill those who live in and around her – humans, non-humans and infrastructure alike. One could wonder: how can such strikingly opposite realities cohabit in such a small territory? Are the shiny, luxurious, fun narratives, pictures and experiences really miles away from the misery depicted by Karabache? Karabache's docufiction, alongside the exotic and clichéd lines on Beirut, provide us with more

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[39] See the Director's statement on https://filmfreeway.com/810690

elements for the reflections on Beirut that will be developed further in this thesis, as a place that is 'always hybrid':

> 'places [...] are always constructed out of articulations of social relations [...] Their 'local uniqueness is always already a product of wider contacts; the local is always already a product in part of 'global' forces, where global in this context refers not necessarily to the planetary scale, but to the geographical beyond, the world beyond the place itself' (Massey 1995: 183)

Any essentialisation of Beirut's urban reality is limiting and hence, inevitably incorrect.

6. CONCLUSION

In a recent special issue of the French history magazine 'Historia' titled 'Beirut, a history of a rebirth', the then Beirut governor Ziad Chebib wrote, under the catchy title 'Beirut, the city in eternal rebirth':

> 'To go back through the history of the capital, from prehistory to a recent yesterday, passing through the different historical and archaeological eras, is to give homage, to return to the source, to reinterpret the past to better prepare for the future. It is to leaf through the archives of a city that has confronted every challenge without yielding. Against internal winds and regional and international tides, Beirut has risen again a thousand and one times, strengthened by a tireless resilience and by citizens who bend before nothing.' (Chebib 2019: 5)[40]

In Chebib's words, by looking into the past, by focusing on history, the past can be reinterpreted to better prepare for the future. At the same time, he presents Beirut as a resilient city, a strong city that has overcome various challenges '*mille et une fois*' – an invincible city. Nothing is said on the reasons why Beirut has had to become resilient, on the human, political actions that have destroyed it over and over again, including Governor Chebib's own decisions in terms of urbanisation, construction and destruction, constantly denounced and opposed by urban activists. Claiming Beirut's constant rebirth, resilience, strength – the idea that it can always rise again from the ashes[41] – brings the idea of temporal discontinuity and disconnection. It implies a rupture with what was before, a death, and in turn, legitimises the wiping out of past structure, of past experiences, of past buildings, of ruins and rubbles. If a city can be reborn, it means it died and can be buried, and something new can emerge,

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[40] My translation from the original French.

[41] The metaphor of the phoenix has been used repeatedly to describe Beirut, especially after disasters or violence strike.

legitimately in disconnection from everything that existed before, legitimising the erasure, physical and intellectual, of the past.

Beirut and Lebanon remain highly publishable topics – the immense scholarship proves it, and so does the mediatic coverage of the country, especially in times of heightened tensions or drama. Kassir condemned the sort of writing published in haste during periods of conflict, by journalists who capitalised 'on current headlines' and 'who had no scruples about posing as anthropologists of violence.' (2010: 20). This critique is undoubtedly still valid today, where it seems that anyone writing on Lebanon and Beirut can claim grand truths about the country's relationship to its past and to violence, without providing any questioning of why and how adjectives such as 'sectarian', 'amnesic' or 'violent' have become acceptable and unquestionable descriptions of both Beirut and Lebanon.

In this chapter, I have provided a description of four themes that I have identified as dominating narratives about and experiences of Beirut. I have shown that lenses of sectarianism and violence, often combined, are too simplistic to describe Beirut. Sectarian affiliation and violence in the narrow definition of the fifteen years' war have shaped Beirut and continue to do so. But experiences of sectarianism are not homogenous, and its geographic impact is easily overstated. I am not suggesting that social and mental boundaries do not create, in the everyday, real consequences but I am saying that there is a problem in the way in which Beirut has been conceptualised and thought about, in the ways in which divisions and communities have been reified and essentialised and in turn, the spaces of the city have suffered the same conceptualisations. This has real consequences in the present. The fluidity and ever-changing nature of places is ignored. In terms of violence, it is important to recognise that other forms of state-sponsored violence have shaped the city in addition to the war: the violence of the destructive 'reconstruction' of Beirut (section 3.2.), the violence of the privatisation of the city (section 3.3.) and the violence of a city that lacks public spaces (section 3.4.). Furthermore, nostalgia for Beirut's golden ages, whether in antiquity or a specific period from the 1950s to the start of the civil war serves to create a discontinuity in the way that we look at Beirut. This can serve to conceal important aspects of the context of the pre-1975 period such as the colonial legacy and the violence it was imbued with. Likewise, the narrative of rebirth and resurrection has been a distraction from looking at the causes of the need for rebirth and has legitimised a form of reconstruction that deliberately fails to conserve. A final way in which Beirut is essentialised and exoticised, is in the dichotomy of clichés between the slum/disordered city, and the beautiful/party/jewel-like city. These aspects coexist but are

often exaggerated, and any attempt to reduce Beirut to any one of these is of limited use, as my research shows in chapters four to seven.

Spaces of the city are always made and re-made, re-created, re-produced through struggles; the city is always a site of contestation. The ways in which the past is present and absent in Beirut is complex, and the accounts presented in this chapter give a sense of that already, but as I argue, in this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis, there is a need to take into consideration people's stories about the ways in which they envisage their surroundings, and how they conceptualise their own place in it, how their experiences and memories shape their relations with the city and its people, and how they make sense of their own activism for their right to the city – that is, their dreams and hopes for a better city, their right to be involved in decision-making processes, and their demands for a greener, safer and healthier city. In the next chapter, I will suggest ways in which the relationship between space/place and temporality/memory can be conceptualised in Beirut, to allow for a study of 'Timespace' (May and Thrift 2001).

CHAPTER THREE:

MEMORY, TEMPORALITY, SPACE AND PLACE

1. INTRODUCTION

'[...] most people I know hate Lebanon. White people, Lebanese people, they all hate Lebanon [laughing]. It's so funny they hate it so much, I've never been to a place so hated [...] And they get mad at you if you try to like, understand things from a nuanced perspective, or try to understand that power structures are kind of broader than individuals, you know, but they get really mad, you know. [...] There's a lot of Orientalism, a lot of cultural arguments [...] I mean there's a, an obsession with the sectarian frame, I think that's really, really troublesome, and really limiting, and really unanalytical. And there's a very deep cynical thread too, here, it's weird. [...] [The sectarian argument] means nothing, it's not really a tangible argument. It's like a grenade, you just throw it at any problem you don't understand: "Nah, it's sectarian", "Nah, it's all sectarian" [...] "How is it sectarian?" I always ask people, "How exactly is that sectarian?". You know, recently somebody told me that activism in the 1990s was ineffective, I was in this workshop, about the waste management issue, there was an activist from the 1990s when I was still like, a kid, she was like, she's like 10 years older than me, and she was like a hardcore activist, and she was kind of "everything we did led to nothing and everything you'll do will lead to nothing", you know and "it's all sectarian", the garbage, you know, crisis. Like how is it sectarian exactly? And she got really offended you know "What's wrong with you, you don't see?" [...] like it's an obvious thing. Like how can you even question an obvious thing, which is always the problem with obvious things right? And the word "obvious" in general. [...] And so it'll be reproduced by all the correspondents that come here and write about it and it'll always – it's called the nut graph in journalism, which is this one paragraph where you kind of summarise what's going on, what's the bigger picture [...] I always point it out, those things, those simple paragraphs where "sectarian political culture is part of corruption", it's just these kind of things that just, they're kind of really vague categories. You know, "corruption"...Even corruption, I really have issues with the way it's discussed. You know, it's as if Lebanon is uniquely corrupt. It's this constant kind of thing [...] And so we often like to conflate the sectarianism... I feel the sectarian thing is really an easy way of saying Arabs are stupid and need to grow up, and it's like a white man pointing his finger saying it: "You guys should stop with the way you're thinking". [...] The idea that if we just think differently our problems will be solved is complete bullshit. You know hmm – it's complicated, it's very complicated. Systems, networks

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that have evolved for decades, you know, with war, war also, it's just a central thing, for me, in understanding Lebanon. People often tell you "Oh, the war is over". What war was over ten or twenty years after it started, after it ended? There's no such thing as a war that ends. [...] Basically, so much of sectarianism is also reproduced by the Western countries. [...] Pretending that it's something outside of them. And they're reproducing it. [...] the Western media mentions, in Lebanon, sects, far more often than the Lebanese does [...] "Who is the Lebanese?" and "Oh, they're different! There's a Maronite Lebanese, there's a Christian Lebanese, there's a Druze! And the Druze are really exciting" you know. It's just an exotic festival, for them, you know, and they hate being told that how they're writing about it is wrong. [...] And I think it's because everybody is so frustrated in this country, and the foreigners are frustrated [laughing]. Imagine, you know! Cuz the foreigners are frustrated, imagine how the locals feel. You know. Hmm, I like that one, I am gonna write that one down [laughing]. The foreigners are frustrated! [...] I guess cynicism is a natural reaction, and I don't blame people for having it, but don't come to me and say that's a defendable academic position to be cynical, just tell me nothing will ever change in the country – who's that? You know, that's nonsense. There's no such thing as a static state, or a country. There's no such thing, there's no such thing as a static state of anything you know, but when you come to Lebanon "Oh, sectarian will never change", "they're elitist" [laughing]. [...] And, we're all privileged, you know, I mean, just having this conversation is a privilege you know, and so I don't know, I mean, I feel – why do we have to go at people? I just wonder sometimes, why? Where does that get us? Is it really cuz we're trying to advance the discussion? Or is it because we're trying to also, hmm, define ourselves? [...] you know, sectarian this, sectarian that, you know, so many simplistic explanations offered. And it pains me when I see that, because I feel like that only pushes us further away from doing anything. You know, the idea that nothing will change, just pushes us away from doing anything. "Nothing will change" is a good excuse to not do anything, I think. And that's the media narrative that we're being fed, both here and abroad, oftentimes, it's "Nothing will change", "It's all a grand conspiracy" [...] So I wanna push back against that, too.'

* * *

The excerpt above is from my conversation with Habib in Beirut in October 2017[42]. His powerful words are a starting point for me in setting out my understanding of and contribution to memory and urban studies in this thesis, in the light of the limitations identified in chapters one and two. The overarching issue of the discourses and analyses presented in chapters one and two is that they have approached memory/time and space/place separately: they do not

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[42] Habib is an investigative journalist based in Beirut. He was born in the US, and moved to Lebanon in the early 1990s, right after the end of 'the civil war'. I first met Habib in June 2017 during the Beirut Exchange, where he gave a talk and spoke about 'amplified activism' and journalism in Beirut and Lebanon. He mentioned issues related to public space and city conservation, which sparked my interest. Our conversation in October 2017 in Hamra was in English. We crossed paths again a few more times in the context of talks and conferences happening in Beirut. Habib has completely shifted my understanding of both activism and the conceptualisation of sectarianism in Lebanon.

describe the temporality of space or the spatiality of time in Beirut. Furthermore, memory, time, space and place have mostly been approached as flawed, missing, wrong, divided and divisive, without taking into account their fluidity and ever-changing nature, their respective temporal and spatial aspects.

In this chapter, I will use elements from Habib's excerpt that I will unpack and expand. I will suggest ways in which the relationship between space/place and temporality/memory can be conceptualised in Beirut, to allow for a study of 'Timespace' (May and Thrift 2001) or space-time (Massey 1999) – a study of time and space together, for 'space without time is as improbable as time without space' (Crang and Thrift 2000: 1).

It is through a focus on urban activists' narratives, combined with literature on 'Timespace' and a rejection of the imposition of a specific lens (war, violence or sectarianism) to look at people's stories, that I explore how urban activists in Beirut understand and make sense of the past in their present, in intimate ways, always connected to their wider environments. Analyses of 'Timespace' allow for complexities, contradictions and nuances to emerge and coexist. They lead to thinking about time and memory beyond the dichotomies of remembering/forgetting, present/past or past/future and to thinking about change, whereas in the literature on Lebanon, change is often presented as something for the future, to aspire to, but that is not available in the present. Looking at 'Timespace' shows how change is always there, already happening, discreet, complex, and imperfect. In what follows, I focus on three themes that illuminate my approach. The first theme is 'Time, without a beginning or an end'; the second is 'Memory is fluid'; and the third is 'Where is change?'.

2. TIME, WITHOUT A BEGINNING OR AN END

My observations in Beirut, my readings and my conversations with urban activists, illuminated complex temporalities: that is, they shed light on relationships to time that blur the dominant categories of past, present and future, the dominant conceptualisations of time as linear, as well as the hegemonic discourses about time, memory and place outlined in chapters one and two. Habib's excerpt above touches upon some of the many problematic discourses around Beirut and Lebanon, and their relationship with the past, for many depictions of the country and its society revolve around the ideas of status quo, of lack of change and fixity, for instance the stasis of sectarianism, violence and corruption. At the same time, Habib stresses the presence of 'the war' in the present, he says that 'the war' is central in understanding Lebanon and that there is no such thing as a war that ends, stressing the importance of its consequences in the present. Complex temporalities shed light on lived experiences of the fragmentation of

time – in Beiruti urban activists' stories and narratives, past, present and future are intertwined, separating and meeting again: there are ways in which the past haunts the present and the future, but there are also ways in which the present haunts the past: for instance, in some of my conversations with urban activists, the frustration that was felt in the present, and about current events or issues, was projected onto readings and narratives of the past.

As Bevernage and Lorenz asked in their edited volume 'Breaking Up Time', I started asking myself

> 'Is distinguishing between past, present and future rather a matter of "observing" distinctions that are "given", or does it involve a more *active* stance in which social actors create and recreate these temporal distinctions? Usually "the past" is somehow supposed to "break off" from "the present" on its own by its growing temporal distance or increasing "weight" – like an icicle' (2013: 9-10, emphasis in the original)

This spoke to me greatly. As shown in chapters one and two, 'the past' of 'the war' in Lebanon has been interpreted as both something that would either naturally fade away, becoming distanced from the present due to the passing of time and a refusal to engage with it, or conversely the huge elephant in the room that needs addressing in order to finally let us live in the present. The metaphor of the icicle aptly symbolises the situation in Lebanon too, where 'the past' of 'the war' has been presented as the 'icicle': intriguing, sort of majestic with its monstrous weight, distant, but coming closer, falling down on us, inevitably, threatening, hovering above our heads, and with the potential to hurt us, to cause trouble and more trauma. In this context, 'the past' has to be 'worked on', it has to be tamed, it has to be controlled, so that its impacts on the present and the future are contained and limited. That past needs to be left behind, for people to find closure. On the other hand, other aspects of 'the past' are to be celebrated: golden age Beirut, or the 'ancient' past – where Beirut's lost grandeur would lie. This celebrated past would be gone forever, and the destructive reconstruction of Beirut deleted as many traces of that grandiose past as possible. At the same time, time would be circular: if things from the past are not talked about, remembered and learned from, they would be repeated. The time of war would come back if there is not any work done to tackle the war, and to create a linear time, a definite separation between 'the past' and 'the present'.

One is thus left with different layers of complexity, and different appreciations of 'the past'. What they have in common, though, is their understanding of time: time should be clearly delineated between past, present and future. These approaches ignore how different temporal realities, temporal scales, temporal experiences coexist, continue and discontinue:

neither golden age Beirut nor the violent past are gone for good. Aspects of the past emerge, disappear, re-appear, merge into the present in different ways, at different times. As Habib says, there is no such thing as a static state of anything, and there is no complete escape from the past either.

Furthermore, although the Lebanese state's deliberate attempt to draw a clear line between past and present has been condemned for what it is – a political choice to protect personal interests and maintain the power in place – our own reproduction of dominant understandings of time in scholarship on Beirut/Lebanon has not been scrutinised in the same way. However, as Bevernage and Lorenz suggest, we all play an *active* role in creating and recreating time and the distinctions between present, past and future. This is also echoed by Munn who states that, as researchers, we have to be careful of the 'time we make'. She suggests that

> 'We and our productions are in some sense always "in" time (the socioculturally/historically informed time of our activity and our wider world) and yet we make, through our acts, the time we are in.' (1992: 94)

Time is thus imagined, created, recreated, made and unmade, thought about, spoken about, changed and modified. In the context of this research, I remained attentive to this, to the 'time I made', and to the time made by others, to the time that is superimposed and the time that is reinvented in personal lives, and to the places where those times collide, and the others where they part ways again.

* * *

As Habib described above, there is no such thing as an escape from the past of the war – or any past – but there is also no escape from change either, and it is this rhythmic and temporal balance that is often missing in descriptions, writings and studies on Lebanon. This led me to consider what one can learn from the use of prefixes such as 'post-war' and pre-war' attached to Lebanon and Beirut. I argue that the use of these terms conveys a linear and rigid conceptualisation of time and relationship to the past in Lebanon. These terms are not neutral temporal landmarks either: they create temporal – and physical – distance between past and present while at the same time defining the present in relation to 'the war' only (Vigh 2008, Ringel 2016). In the context of this research, I have mostly come across writings that use the notions 'post-war Beirut' and 'post-war Lebanon', and less 'pre-war' Beirut and Lebanon. However, what follows applies equally to both prefixes, for they both contribute to constructing the present and the future in relation only to a specific historical period.

Writings on 'post-war' Beirut and Lebanon are based on the premise that 'war' is the period between April 1975 and October 1990, but it is used in academic works without any indications as to what war it is referring to and as to when 'post-war' starts or ends. Examples include: 'Reconstructing post-war Lebanon. A challenge to the liberal peace' (Mac Ginty 2007), '"Don't mention the War?" The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetfulness in Postwar Lebanon' (Barak 2007), 'Amnesiac and Nostalgic Reconstruction in Post-war Lebanon' (Makarem 2012), 'Reconstructing Beirut. Memory and Space in a Postwar Arab City' (Sawalha 2010), 'Reconstructing space, re-creating memory: sectarian politics and urban development in post-war Beirut' (Nagel 2002), 'Economic Recovery and Reconstruction in Postwar Beirut' (Stewart 1996), 'The return of the displaced and Christian-Muslim integration in postwar Lebanon' (Harik 1999), 'Discourse and Multicultural Social Activity in Postwar Lebanon' (Bahous and Khalaf 2008). Alternatives to the prefix 'post-war' are 'post-civil war' and 'post-conflict': 'When Memory repeats itself: The Politics of Heritage in Post-civil war Lebanon' (Volk 2008), 'Actually Existing Neoliberalism: The reconstruction of downtown Beirut in post-civil war Lebanon' (Makarem 2014) or 'Post-conflict reconstruction and citizenship agendas: lessons from Beirut' (Hourani 2015).

In practice, the prefix 'post-war' implies that what came after October 1990 is not 'war'. But as shown previously, 1991 did not see the end of armed conflicts in Lebanon. Nor was it a year of tremendous social and political betterment in the country. 1991 was neither the end of fifteen years of conflict nor the beginning of a peaceful era[43]. It was also a trigger to new conflicts: political, social and economic. 1991 saw struggles shift and evolve, in the blur and rubble that armed conflicts left behind. All these challenges were already underway both before and during the war. Thus, although official armed conflict ended, more armed and social struggles were emerging in the early 1990s. In the pieces cited above, the centrality of 'reconstruction' is striking too, and is a description of 'change in the present', but as I have shown in chapter two, the processes of reconstruction have been another way in which the violence of the war was made present in the present, and led to more struggles and violence.

As shown in chapter one, this led to the idea that war is 'unfinished' (Haugbolle 2005, Ruiz Herrero 2010). If 'the war' is unfinished, how, why and when does 'post-war' start? The

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[43] As stated in chapter one, if one is to focus solely on armed conflict, the last military episode of the series of conflicts that took place between 1975 and 1990 is the defeat of the Lebanese army, led by General Michel Aoun, at the hands of the Syrian army on 13th October 1990. It was followed by the exile of Aoun to France and the occupation of Lebanon by the Syrian army for fifteen more years. Besides the fact that the fall of a national army to the hands of the neighbour's armed forces could hardly be conceptualised as a happy ending for the Lebanese, this episode was followed by more physical violence (Antelias bombings in March and May 1991; Basta bombings in December 1991; Israeli bombings in the South of Lebanon in 1993, to cite only a few).

idea of 'post-war' ignores the violence post-1990, as if the fact that snipers and cannons went quiet meant that violence had ceased. What about other forms of violence, such as that of unregulated capitalism, or of the sectarian system that was reiterated and reinforced by the Ta'if Agreement? There is also the violence of institutionalising division, after the war, and the violence of validation of the war by amnesty through the 'peace agreements'. As Habib says, there is no such thing as a war that ends twenty years after it started or officially ended. On the other hand, Antoine, another participant in my research, would say '*Khallas* [that's it], enough with the war' approving my wish to look at memory beyond the war lens. I read both Habib and Antoine's perspectives as expressions of the sentiment 'enough!' – they are tired of being defined only by that period of history, while at the same time they recognise and acknowledge its importance in the present. They are tired of the argument that nothing has changed since then, and that nothing should change because of the risk of reproducing the wrongs of that period.

According to Haugbolle, post-war Lebanon ended in 2005 with the assassination of Rafiq el Hariri:

> 'When postwar Lebanon ended on 14 February 2005, it came like lightning from a clear sky. A huge flash followed by a boom that ricocheted in the hills beyond Beirut and, in the minds of the Lebanese, a flashback to the war. [...] The date 14 February 2005 marked the end of an era of relative stability and enforced consensus that had characterised political life since 1990. Again, many Lebanese seemed to experience a hiatus of history [...] During the following months, mass agitation, bombs and dramatic political transformations transported people back to the war, with sights and sounds familiar but forgotten. This collective emotional déjà vu triggered the first widely national debate about the war and its lingering memories' (2010: 3)[44]

This excerpt is telling the readers several things. First, that everything was fine before Hariri's assassination and that this specific event broke all that stability – this is historically untrue, and unfair to those who lived under Syrian and Israeli occupations, dealing with the aftermath of violent conflict, and for all those who died, mourned, grieved, and were exiled between 1975 and 2005. Second, Haugbolle states that an era (post-war) came to an end following the assassination. Who decides when an era ends? For 'post-war' Lebanon to have ended, it must have started and while Haugbolle has spoken about an 'unfinished war', he simultaneously states that the Lebanese were 'transported back to war', and had 'a collective emotional déjà

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[44] As stated in the introduction to this thesis, massive protests against the Syrian occupation of Lebanon followed Rafiq el Hariri's assassination. Syrian troops withdrew from Lebanon in the spring of 2005, ending a 29-year occupation. Syria's physical withdrawal from Beirut did not happen without its own violence, though: between March and December 2005, fourteen terror attacks took place in Beirut and its surroundings, targeting famous critics of Syria and civilians in supposedly homogeneous Christian neighbourhoods (Borell 2008: 56).

vu'. Haugbolle also states that Rafiq el Hariri's assassination simultaneously brought 'the Lebanese' back to the past (i.e. the war) whose sights and sounds would have been forgotten (but are still familiar, so have they actually been forgotten?) and created a pause – a 'hiatus' – in history. So, the Lebanese would simultaneously have been 'post-war' (beyond the war) and stuck in it, paused, halted in it. They would simultaneously be 'post-war', beyond the war, but stuck in an unfinished war. Haugbolle also mentions a 'first widely national debate about the war', but as I have shown in chapters one and two, there has not been any debate about the war at the state level, neither in 2005 nor since then, and the many debates in and across the country contesting state amnesia are not 'national debates' for they are limited in scope with respect to the public they engage with.

In this excerpt, Haugbolle presents time and the relationship to the past as happening on a linear timeline, where 'the Lebanese civil war' occupies a central place, and all that happened before and after these fifteen years need to be told in relation to that period. As Habib said, both the 'Lebanese civil war' and sectarianism are presented as defining facts of Lebanon and the Lebanese society: they are used uncritically throughout academic, artistic, mediatic and literary works. In these works, the civil war and sectarianism are meant to give a sense of Lebanon and are often coupled with grim descriptions of a country that is stuck in the chaos and confusion of war and its consequences, while at the same time re-living, re-experiencing past trauma over and over again, without any sign of it stopping. In 2000, ten years after the official end of 'the Lebanese civil war', Norton qualified the Lebanese context as one of a 'malaise': 'Whether the focus is politics, society, peace, human capital or the economy, conditions in Lebanon reflect general malaise' (2000: 35). Norton goes on to cite nepotism, corruption, the national debt, Syria's influence in the country, confessional politics, sectarianism, the powerful men who benefit from this state of affairs, geopolitics and stakes at play in Lebanon, resentment against Syria's occupation of the country, the unhealthy economy, the lack of prospects for growth and the lack of social support. 'Lebanon may have its charms, but the government has no social conscience and provides no safety net for the poor. One turns to the family and a variety of sectarian charities for assistance' (2000: 44). The Palestinians' fate in the country and the lack of rights for Syrian workers are also cited in the long list of issues comprising 'Lebanon's malaise'.

In 2002, Nagel writes:

> 'despite corporate efforts to recast Beirut as a stable, unified place, the city remains a site of struggle over the meanings of Lebanese identity and nationhood. The physical remains of war may be expertly hidden by gleaming new structures, but

Beirut is a politicized space of competing meanings rooted in the region's turbulent history.' (Nagel 2002: 717)

Looking back at the civil war years, she uses subtitles such as 'Lebanon's collapse' or 'Beirut disintegrates'.

Norton's idea of a 'malaise' demonstrates the tendency to portray Lebanon as stuck in endless, inherent and underlying violence, turmoil and chaos that is rooted in a history of violence. These accounts perpetuate the idea that war is always just around the corner, and that the danger of impending doom always hovers above the Lebanese. There is something static and lingering in these accounts – something that is not going away, something that is fixed in place. The violence of the civil war and sectarianism seem to haunt students and scholars of Lebanon and their writings, far more than I have ever experienced in Lebanon myself, through my conversations with activists, citizens and family members.

'Post-war' clearly does not mean 'peace' in those works. If it is not peace, what is going on in Lebanon? 'Post-war' is not just a temporal landmark either, rather it says something about the present, time and temporality in the country. I argue that it is inherently loaded, in a similar manner to that identified by Ringel in his focus on the idea of 'post-socialism':

'[…] any 'post-'ascriptions (post-socialist; post-colonial; post-industrial) implicitly impose and inscribe a certain temporal logic as a property by presuming, first, that the object has a past which it broke away from, as is logically implied by the prefix; and, second, that its past continues – with or without the break – to determine, condition or affect its current existence in some causal way (in the case of post-socialism for over 20 years). But how can a whole city, region or era be convincingly characterized as 'post-socialist'?' (2016: 395)

Following Ringel, I ask, how can a whole city and a whole country be convincingly characterised as 'post-war'? 'Post-war' Lebanon and 'post-war' Beirut are used as substitutes and synonyms for 'Lebanon' and 'Beirut'. The prefixes freeze the country, Beirut and its inhabitants in a relation to past violence, in an unquestioning manner. They imply that the present can only be defined in relation to the violent past. It cannot just be that though, otherwise it will always be that.

This is why my initial focus, in my research, on 'memory' and 'the past' did not find much ground in my discussions with urban activists, whose stories complexified, very early on, the temporal and spatial referential points that I had. One early sign of this, for me, was the way in which my research focus shifted from 'memories of the past' to 'temporality' early on in my research, for my conversations with urban activists were never really about memory or memories only. 'Time' and 'place', however, were always present, directly and indirectly, in our

discussions, in many different ways. One eye-opener for me was the realisation that, during my conversations with urban activists, they did not use temporal markers to tell their stories, and their stories were not organised following a chronological sequencing. They did not usually mention dates, months or years, and during my first few conversations with activists, I often asked 'But when was that?' or 'Was that before or after the war?', 'Was that before or after you moved?' to try and organise their stories, as I initially thought that temporal markers were important to my research. But they were not. What really mattered was the content of people's stories, and the form of these stories, the references to the past, present and future that they were making. I stopped asking for chronological and temporal landmarks, but the fact that I initially felt that I should ask really unearthed some of the themes that run through this thesis, as it pushed my own limits in the way I was understanding 'time' itself.

As will be shown in chapters five, six and seven, my participants were showing, through their stories, the ways in which relationships between past, present and future are constantly blurred and complexified. They jumped between very recent and less recent stories and childhood events, or memories of their parents' childhoods without giving much sense of where these stories and events would align on a chronological timeline; they also showed how present, past and future intertwine differently in different contexts and stories. 'The past' can be both a source of shame and difficulty, and a source of happiness and motivation at different times: it is multi-faceted, reconstructed, recollected, malleable, imagined and reimagined in limitless ways.

Thus, time and stories were not happening on a linear timeline in these conversations, and stories were always anchored in spatial elements. This led me to focus more and more on time-space relations, and on questions such as how is 'the past' emerging and re-imagined in the experience of the urban, shaping activists' projects for the future? How are 'the past' and memory experienced in daily life, in the physicality of the city? Which references to the past help motivate actions for the future, actions that are aimed at, among other things, reclaiming a physical space? The complicated relationships to time and space that emerged in my conversations with urban activists greatly influenced my approach to time. I had to explore the complex temporalities at stake in both urban landscapes and in experiences of the city, which allowed layers of nuance and complexity to emerge: narratives were not chronological, memories and past events were referred to in order to support certain narratives; references to the past, the present and the future were part of discontinuous flows of stories. Complexities in time existed hand in hand with complexities in space: through urban palimpsests for instance (Huyssen 2003), but also through the sense that the objects of study and discussion

– the city, space and place – 'undergo rapid and often unexpected transformations' (Nielsen 2017: 399). As Nielsen states, 'it is through the continuous shifts of directionality and temporal orientation across [urban life] that cities are inhabited' (2017: 399). The various rhythms of the city and of participants' lives entangled with their activism, 'stability' but also 'the emergence of new possibilities through everyday temporality', their senses of space and time (Crang 2001: 187) and the urgency that their work is often entangled with, and all the emotions that colour all these complex temporalities – all these elements give rise to what Nielsen terms 'greater instability – or perhaps better, fragility – within the everyday, focusing on the flow of experience for the social subject' (Crang 2001: 188). Moreover, Barbara Bender's suggestion that 'landscape is time materializing: landscapes, like time, never stand still' and that 'landscapes and time can never be "out there": they are always subjective' (2002: 103) have been equally inspiring for this thesis: both time and the spatiality of the city are in constant movement; and in the city, one can find, sense, look at, and feel time.

3. MEMORY IS FLUID

The 'amnesia thesis' can only exist because of the incredibly huge production of art, films, articles, books, songs, exhibitions, mediatic and academic works in relation to 'the war' since the 1980s. Thus, amnesia can ultimately only exist hand in hand with its partner: hypermnesia. This is the idea, coined by Hanssen and Genberg, that there is no more loss of memory but that 'memory is constantly present, multiple and celebrated' (2002, cited in Khalaf 2006: 37). Hypermnesia suggests the 'abundance of overlapping, conflicting and rivalling memories of the war' (Khalaf 2006: 37). The Lebanese are thus 'tossed about between amnesia and hypermnesia' (Chrabieh Badine 2010). On this account, wherever one turns in Lebanon, whether in remembering or in forgetting, one cannot escape the war. The initiatives and discourses presented in chapter one are just a handful of examples of the memory work done at the level of civil society. What these initiatives show is a specific approach to and understanding of the past, and hence, of time, as at once circular (repetitive) and linear (chronological).

* * *

By talking to urban activists in Beirut, definitions and conceptualisations of memory, the past, time, space and violence became more complex, and more nuanced. Urban activists illuminated complex temporalities present in their own lives, and they referred to personal stories, memories, and dominant discourses to do so.

Talking with urban activists complexified and nuanced dominant discourses about the past and memory in unexpected ways; attention to time and temporality was essential in the understanding of the ways in which individuals include the past in the present and future of their own lives.

The complexities of activist work have to be understood in a complex web of time-space relations. In this context, Reavey's call for an analysis of 'experience through time-space' – what she calls 'scenic memory' – and the idea that 'the experience of memory pushes beyond narrative alone and emerges from specific scenes or settings, as much as time periods or stories' (Reavey 2017: 1) have been illuminating. Two elements in her suggestion for a new 'time-space' model for memory studies have had a major impact on my own research. First, Reavey stresses 'the need to grasp how continuities and discontinuities in episodes of remembering are enacted in the social world' (2017: 2) and insists on the importance of her '*expanded model of memory*' [emphasis in the text], which 'connects the past with the present self while attending to matters of time–space that are always considered within an experientially apposite zone; that is where relations, settings, as well as movements and flows are rendered visible. [...] It is an expanded model, precisely because it extends the mind into the world' (2017: 2). Second, Reavey stresses the fact that the future has an influence on the present, and vice-versa: 'Our actions do not simply bring about states of affairs in the present, they also realise or "make actual" future possibilities' (2017: 3).

I find the macro-conceptualisations of memory in Lebanon insufficient, and so in my research I turn to the study of 'micro-processes of memory formation at vernacular level and in everyday life', and to the 'dynamics of public memory at vernacular level' (Mihelj 2013: 61). Vernacular memory is defined by Bodnar as the 'diverse and changing forms of memory 'derived from first-hand experience in small-scale communities' (Mihelj 2013: 61).

I acknowledge and take into account the co-existence and combination of various pockets of influence into my analysis of stories and narratives, and remain open to discovering new elements of influence on people's narratives without imposing a specific lens – throughout fieldwork, I was not hoping to unearth 'war' memories or 'traumatic' memories, I was interested to learn more about the presence of the past in the present – and inevitably, the future. I follow the 'life-story paradigm' to approach my conversations with participants, in which

> 'analysis is more likely to begin from personal memories as recounted in oral-history interviews or other forms of life story, than it is from 'official' commemorative occasions, or national narratives of war, or the war memories

generated by artistic and other modes of cultural production' (Ashplant et al. 2000: 12)

My interest lies in how participants make sense of the world around them 'for themselves' and 'in their own words and stories', while simultaneously, and inevitably, relating their narratives and stories to the wider political and social contexts, as well as to other cultural forms of remembrance (Ashplant et al. 2000: 12).

Chris Healy, to conclude his analysis of memory of colonialism in the film 'Dead Man', suggests that the movie presents remembering as

> 'a culturally fluid process [...] partial and unfinished; rhythmic, haptic and bodily; anticipatory and sliding; above all, affective as well as institutionally performative. Thus remembering becomes a mode of contingent place-making [...] Dead Man offers a model of memory-work as part of the process of belonging [...] It offers some suggestions about how remembering can be thought, sung, imaged and spoken in ways quite other than those of anachronism or evidence, confession or cure, guilt or innocence. [...] remembering and forgetting as repetition and reiteration; remembering as necessarily sensory and affective, as mimetic and proleptic, as performative as well as traumatic, as trafficking and transacting in contradiction. [...] being in time – remembering as holding together present pasts and present futures in the contingent yet grounded moment of the present.' (2003: 234)

This is the complex, holistic, and nuanced perspective that forms the basis of my approach to 'Timespace' and memory. It includes rhythms, emotions, imagination, continuities and discontinuities, contradictions and changes.

4. WHERE IS CHANGE?

In Habib's excerpt at the beginning of this chapter, we can read his struggle with the widespread idea that 'nothing changes' in Lebanon, when he describes the 1990s activist telling him that all they did in the past led to nothing and all that activists do today will lead to nothing; and when he says 'the idea that nothing will change, just pushes us away from doing anything. "Nothing will change" is a good excuse to not do anything, I think. And that's the media narrative that we're being fed, both here and abroad'. Habib says 'there is no such thing as a static state of anything'; he wants not only to contribute to the tangible changes that are taking place around Beirut; he also wants to contribute to changing the nature of the discussion around what change is and where change is, and is pushing back against specific understandings of change.

Thus, the last point that I would like to make here concerns the idea of change, and the common expectation that first, with time should come some sort of change, at the personal and collective level; second, that 'change' should involve a betterment of the present and third, that 'change' in Lebanon only happens in times of crises – political, social, economic, war, violence – whereas other times would be 'status quo'.

In Lebanon, political and legal changes have been difficult to achieve as a result of the tight control of the ruling elites on political and legal apparatuses since 1990. There is considerable corruption and feudalism which are reflected in politicians' tendency to prioritise works, change and a betterment of infrastructure in their own communities or constituencies and to perpetuate the system in place, supporting vetoes when these allow them to maintain and protect their power and influence. In this context, looking at the state and taking a top-down analytical approach does not allow one to grasp and appreciate where and how urban and social changes have happened or the extent to which individuals, civil society groups and other activists have brought about and nurtured change in specific and precarious ways. As Habib Battah puts it:

> 'The study of recent activism in Lebanon may also provide a more nuanced alternative to commonly held and somewhat exotified expectations for reform in the Middle East that often pay more attention to regime overthrow than more subtle changes in political culture and media practices.' (2016: 2)

This resonates with the insights of Bayat:

> 'The idea of Middle Eastern exceptionalism is not new. Indeed, for a long time now, change in Middle Eastern societies has been approached with a largely western Orientalist outlook whose history goes back to the eighteenth century, if not earlier. Mainstream Orientalism tends to depict the Muslim Middle East as a monolithic, fundamentally static, and thus "peculiar" entity. [...] Middle Eastern societies are characterized more in terms of historical continuity than in terms of change. In this perspective, change, albeit uncommon, may indeed occur, but primarily via individual elites, military men, or wars and external powers.' (2010: 3)

Using time as a lens to study urban spaces and urban activism allows us to see how people are working with time and space together, in order to create change. Urban activists have contested the monopoly on place-making of the powerful; and through their activism – which I interpret as aiming at the creation of a better place – they have moved towards their idealised version of the city or one that at least is theirs.

I argue that the sectarian system – and the material, physical aspects of it, that have shaped the country, and more particularly the city of Beirut – have been challenged at the micro level in ways that have not received sufficient academic, mediatic or political attention:

everyday acts of resistance to structures of power have created urban, social and temporal changes in ways that have been overlooked. In doing so, I also wish to contribute to the never-ending contestation of the monopoly on decision-making that the powerful have in Lebanon. Discussions around place-making, sense of belonging or identity with my participants have shown that looking at urban spaces, temporality, rhythmicities, and emotions tells us something about change and fluxes, about continuities and discontinuities – in time, and in space.

Through my research, I wish to shed light on temporal practices and actions that bring about change, beyond the conception of 'revolution' only as a radical break from the past. Instead, the term 'revolution' suggests a cyclical, repetitive time, and 'the idea of repetition of what has already been' (Lawrence and Churn 2012: xi). Nothing exists in a vacuum, disconnected from what has come before, nor does anything exist simply as a complete repetition of the past. At the centre of my study of the narratives of urban activists is a conceptualisation of social and urban changes as the result of alternative temporalities. I argue that resisting power in Beirut – and the unlawful, unfair and exclusionary urban and social planning that go with it – is being done by activists creating, suggesting and reclaiming complex temporalities. Inspired by Lawrence and Churn (2012) and their work on revolutions, change and time, I wish to shed light on the revolution(s) that happen(s) in the everyday: how temporal and urban changes are created, prepared, nurtured, imagined and thought of both in people's stories about themselves, their pasts and their city (including their dreams, their imagination and contradictions) and in uses of the city that I have studied or observed. Essential to this study is the idea that

> 'time in revolution is at once opportunity and constraint, yet it is in time that changes occur, and thus time becomes a tool, a vessel through which social change and a more just society can be thought and acted upon' (Lawrence and Churn 2012: xi)

5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have outlined the ways in which I have approached 'Timespaces' in Beirut to think about time, memory, space and change beyond the dichotomies of remembering/forgetting, present/past or past/future and the limitations of the frameworks of violence and sectarianism. I focused on three entangled themes that illuminate my approach: 'Time, without a beginning or an end'; 'Memory is fluid'; and 'Where is change?'. These titles encompass the fluidity that I associate with time, memory and change; and my openness to finding them, and looking for them in unexpected places.

I focus on time and memory as everyday, fluid, ever-changing experiences. Time and memory come with their repetitions and disruptions, they are influenced by others, by the environment around us, and by social, political and cultural times, but they escape the frameworks of linearity and circularity. I also show how change is always with us, always already happening, often discretely but tangibly. Change happens in the everyday, in the practice of the city and time, it does not always come with violence or with sudden political or societal shifts.

These conceptions of time, memory and change influence the analyses that will be presented in chapters five, six and seven: I have not directed my conversations with urban activists to particular events such as the war, I have avoided repeatedly asking 'when was this' and have let temporal connections emerge organically within my conversations without trying to divert them towards specific temporal modalities. Before turning to my analysis however, I will first describe more formally the methods that I have employed in this research.

CHAPTER FOUR:

METHODS

1. INTRODUCTION

In the first three chapters, I have drawn the contours of the academic literature that shaped the research presented in this thesis. The two first chapters described the scholarly, historical, political, and societal contexts in which my research is inscribed and identified their limits. They laid the basis for shaping my own approach to memory, time, space/place and 'the past' in Beirut, as presented in chapter three. In this fourth chapter, I describe the methods that I have selected to provide responses to my overarching research question, namely 'how do urban activists' narratives inform our understanding of past, present and future struggles in the reshaping and reclaiming of space, place, the city, time and the past in post-1990 Beirut?' In brief, in this research I use narrative inquiry and thematic analysis, together with observational methods inspired by ethnography and geography. These methods will be justified and explained throughout the course of this chapter.

As developed in the introduction to this thesis, my research is grounded in Beirut, and is a study of urban activists' stories. I also discussed the liminality of my position as a researcher in Beirut, and why the use of my own subjectivity has been essential to my research methods. These elements are important to keep in mind as I discuss my methodological choices in this chapter, for my autobiographical and observational methods have allowed me to deepen my engagement with activist stories. This is also important to keep in mind as I go through the more 'formal' and 'procedural' aspects of my research in what follows. Indeed, during fieldwork, the university's ethics committee and the ethics procedure that I went through often felt disconnected from my reality in Lebanon. Institutional ethics and formal research planning did not help with dealing practically with relations of power, class and gender, or with familial relations that inevitably influence the self and being in the space of fieldwork. I will develop these arguments further in the chapter.

As will be shown further in this chapter, my methods were inspired by ethnography without my work being a 'full-blown ethnography' (Wolcott 2008: 3). I have observed, I have had conversations with participants, I have written my thesis in a way inspired by ethnography, for ethnography is a 'way of seeing' that seeks to look beneath the surface to ask questions such as 'what is going on here' and 'in terms of what' (Wolcott 1999: 69).

Inspired by ethnography's overarching mission to look beneath the surface, I characterise my methods as informed by ethnography as opposed to just using conversations or observation as methods in their own right. I have also been inspired by ethnography for it is based on exploration – it allows one to embrace the idea that methods change as research progresses (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019: 4). Notwithstanding their specific purpose of analysis, research and knowledge production, ethnographic methods are not

> 'far removed from the means that we all use in everyday life to get information and to make sense of our surroundings, especially of other people's actions, and perhaps even of what we do ourselves.' (Ibid.)

Most importantly, ethnography relies on the exploration of a range of diverse, unstructured data (Ibid.): documents, chats, encounters, memories, media, interviews, recordings, transcriptions, and so on. Ethnography recognises that inspiration can come from all these places and beyond; and its inductive nature (O'Reilly 2009: 3) was thus well adapted to the research I wanted to pursue. This chapter consists of two main sections. In the next section, section two, I give an account of the (in)decisions that I took in regard to methods and fieldwork. They are (in)decisions because they were my attempts to on the one hand, negotiate the research space and time by creating a coherent research journey and on the other hand, to avoid over-directing the research and instead to let it evolve organically and inductively, to not impose a prior framework (such as war and violence) for collecting and analysing urban activists' stories, but instead to try to let the conversations, encounters, observations and thinking guide me onto different paths. Working inductively thus goes hand in hand with working 'abductively', embracing the inherent messiness and uncertainty of analysis and knowledge production:

> 'Abductively, rather than search for evidence, we follow hunches and omens, reading signs and playing with possible explanations that draw on the things we know, and looking for clearer signs or clues. We gather evidence towards a pattern, but not in a linear way. Shank says we must try to remain sensitive to the most subtle nuances in the field in case we overlook something of importance or foreclose the emerging theoretical understanding.' (O'Reilly 2009:107)

Abductively, we 'move forward slowly', 'to avoid tuning out important data simply because they do not seem relevant to the concepts we have latched onto or theories we are using as a framework' (Ibid.) and there is an understanding that analysis 'does not proceed in a neat linear fashion but emerges subconsciously out of the interplay of logic and experience' (O'Reilly 2009: 108, paraphrasing Whyte 1996) and that 'feeling your way' is crucial in knowledge production – the need to remember how we feel, why certain things move us, and how fieldwork and experiences have unfolded (Ibid.: 109).

The remainder of this chapter is divided into two sections. In section two, six subsections describe the various aspects of my work: who I spoke to, when, where and why, language and transcriptions, walking and observations, the limits imposed by the British Foreign Office, and the challenge of 'getting out of the activist bubble'. In section three, I show the richness of narrative inquiry, coupled with thematic analysis. I go through the different phases of my own narrative inquiry process: conversations and the ethics around them, including the process of 'co-construction' with research participants, the rich entanglement of urban activism and storytelling, and thematic analysis. I end this chapter with a summary of my methods and their relevance to the exploration of my research question.
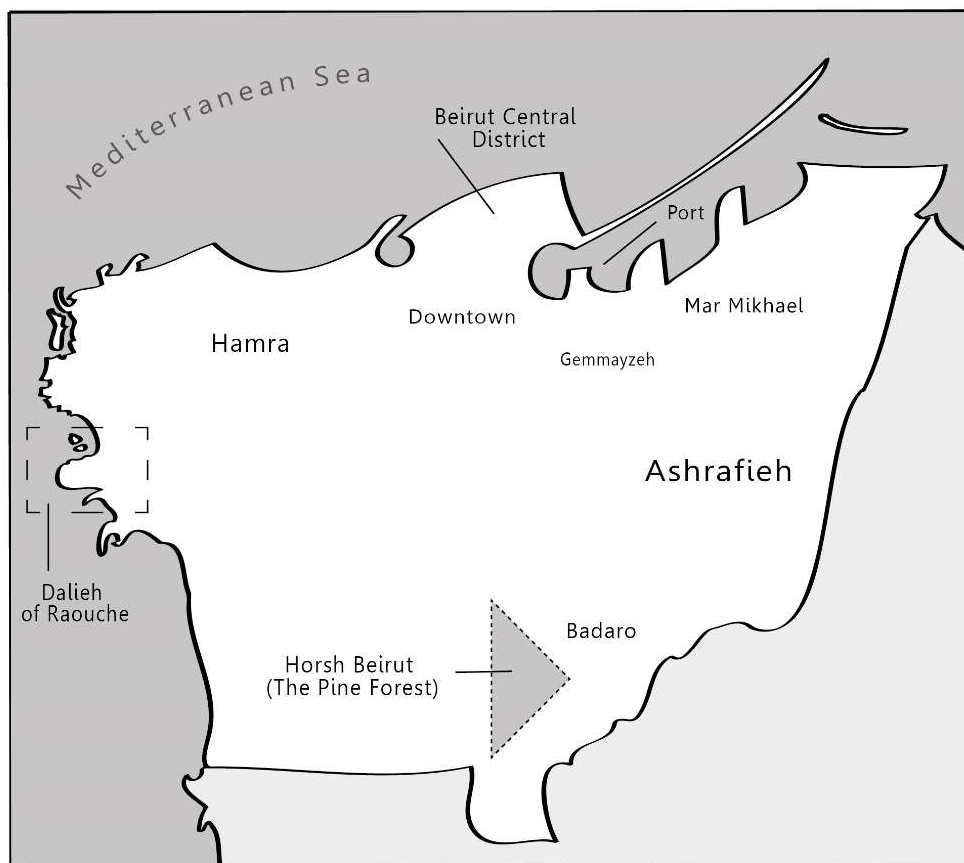
FIG. 4 Map of the places mentioned in chapter four (source: HMA)

2. Methods: Fieldwork Through People of the City

2.1. Who?

In order to provide possible responses to my overarching research question, my main interest throughout fieldwork was in conversing with urban activists in Beirut. Since I am interested specifically in the stories of individual activists rather than with the structural forms of the organisations in which they participate (when they do), I have not studied these groups in detail, nor have I undertaken observation of the groups' internal structures and dynamics. Below I provide details of the groups associated with the 'professional activists' involved with this research.

'Save Beirut Heritage' (SBH) is a grassroots NGO of three core members; its aim is to raise awareness about the disappearing architectural heritage of Beirut and to fight and lobby for its preservation. In collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, it also acts as an emergency platform to denounce illegal activities perpetrated against heritage buildings. The second group is Nahnoo (which means 'us' in Arabic). It is an NGO that undertakes advocacy campaigns on several issues, including reclaiming public space. Their major campaign, and their biggest success, was the reopening of the urban park Horsh Beirut in 2016 after a five-year struggle and after the park had been closed since 1982 (Nahnoo 2018). The third group is the 'Dictaphone Group'. It is a research and performance collective that creates live art events based on multidisciplinary studies of space. The aim of their projects is to question our relationship to the city, and to redefine its public spaces (Dictaphone Group 2020). Another group is 'The Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche'. It is a 'civil coalition of individuals and nongovernmental organizations invested in the safeguarding of Beirut's liveability' (Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche (Dalieh thereafter) 2015). Although their main focus is to protect the rock and beach of Raouche in Beirut, which is threatened by privatisation, they also campaign more broadly for the safeguarding and reclaiming of the Lebanese coast. The activists of the Dalieh Campaign describe themselves as 'propelled by a shared love of the city in its social and ecological diversity but also an uncontrollable urge to enshrine democratic and inclusive processes of decision-making in the production and organization of the everyday spaces of Beirut' (Dalieh 2015). Some of the participants in this research have also been involved in 'The Civil Coalition Against the Highway Project "Hekmeh-Turk" Axis ("Fouad Boutros" Road)' that started in 2012. The coalition stood against the building of the 'Fouad Boutros' highway that would cut across Ashrafieh. Instead, the coalition lobbied for the expropriated land meant to be used for the highway to be turned into public, green spaces, 'The Fouad Boutros Park'. Although the coalition succeeded in

stopping the highway project, it has not yet managed to have the park and green spaces created.[45]

I could not force myself into people's lives if they did not have any interest or time to talk with me. This may sound self-evident; but because of the nature of this research, and the need to create meaningful, respectful and safe links with people for them to feel comfortable telling (their) stories, I have never insisted on meeting anyone – however 'big in the field' of Beiruti urban activism they were – if there was not an initial positive reaction or a form of opening to my request. The way I approached fieldwork and conversations meant, however, that I did not need to 'gain access' to specific groups, places or people per se, nor was I trying to research people who were 'completely unknown' to me (O'Reilly 2009: 5-6). I contacted people via email or on social media. I did not have a specific sample in mind, nor was I hoping to produce a piece of work that would be 'representative' (O'Reilly 2009: 194) of urban activism in Beirut. In the course of the PhD, I had 12 organised one-on-one conversations with 12 different people and the length of my conversations ranged from one hour to four hours. Ten of them are in this thesis.

I initially contacted people that I thought could illuminate my understanding of spatial and memorial issues in Beirut. I had met one of my participants – activist and architect Abir – in the context of the 'Beirut Exchange' in 2015 – a two-week programme of meetings with politicians, journalists and civil society actors in Beirut, organised for students of Lebanon who have an interest in social, political and geopolitical issues relevant to the country and the region. During the Exchange, Abir gave a talk on the Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche, and more generally on environmental and spatial issues in Beirut and Lebanon. I found Abir's talk fascinating, and it greatly influenced my approach and thinking about place, space and activism in Beirut. I thus contacted Abir and she became one of the participants in my research.

In April 2017, during a trip in Paris to attend a conference where he was presenting, I organised my first meeting with architect and activist Antoine (who is one of the three members of the activist group Save Beirut Heritage (SBH)). After this first meeting with him, we met again twice, once in Beirut and once informally in Brussels. During our conversations, he directed me towards people that he thought could be interesting to talk to – some were his close friends, some were not, but he knew all of them personally, and was known by all of them personally – urban activism in Beirut is a small world. Antoine thus became a 'key

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[45] See their website 'Stop the Highway' https://stopthehighway.wordpress.com/

participant' because of 'who and what [he] know[s]' (O'Reilly 2009: 133); my encounters and discussions with Antoine, and the lessons that I drew from him, have been the cornerstone of my project. I was able to meet and talk with four people through him, and then one more person through that network, but only four of them are present in this thesis: Naji, Joana, Abdul-Halim and Cynthia.

In 2017, I attended the 'Beirut Exchange' again, during my first period of fieldwork with the University of Brighton, and met another future participant: journalist and activist Habib whom I introduced in chapter three. Two of my participants are tour guides in Beirut, and I was interested to know more about them and from them given their specific relationship to the city and their wish to show an 'alternative Beirut' to people: I met Moustafa in Beirut in July 2017 – he is the co-founder of 'Alternative Beirut Urban Tours' and I 'met' Marc on Skype in February 2019 – he is a university student and the creator of the 'Layers of a Ghost City: Downtown Beirut' walking tours. I consider both Moustafa and Marc to be 'urban activists' for their dedication to Beirut, its betterment and their contestation of the current ways in which Beirut is planned and appropriated by those in power. The last participant that I mention in the thesis is the ICTJ's Program Expert and Head of Lebanon Office Nour, who I met in Beirut in 2018.

Some of the activists involved in this research are also academics and/or researchers and have another full-time job. For instance, Cynthia is a full-time architect in a Beiruti studio, involved in Nahnoo as a volunteer, but she also pursued detailed research on coastal exploitation and illegalities in Lebanon, that materialised in the publication of a book '*Le Littoral'* in 2017. Abdul-Halim is an architect and urban designer, he is the co-founder of an architecture and urban planning studio in Beirut, and teaches at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK), and is a former staff member of the American University of Beirut (he was a member of Antoine's architecture juries during his studies). I had two long conversations with Abdul-Halim in the course of my research – during the first one, he was a fervent member of a nascent independent political group 'Beirut Madinati', and during the second one, a short time after parliamentary elections in Lebanon in 2018, he told me that he had left Beirut Madinati and was getting involved in a new political group. Architect and urbanist Abir is part of two activist/research groups in Beirut: Dictaphone Group and The Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche, though her work with 'Public Works Studio' is her fulltime job. Public Works Studio was co-founded by Abir, and is a 'multidisciplinary research and design studio that engages critically and creatively with a number of urban and public issues in Lebanon'

(Public Works Studio 2020). Abir has also published academic work. Habib is a lecturer in journalism and media at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

Who?	Occupation	Activism	Where?	Notes
Abdul-Halim	Architect, Activist, Lecturer	Fouad Boutros Coalition; other campaigns and causes	Beirut	Beirut Madinati
Abir	Architect, Urban planner, Activist	The Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche; Dictaphone Group	Beirut	Public Works Studio
Antoine	Architect, Activist	SBH; Fouad Boutros Coalition	Paris Beirut Brussels	Based in Paris. Led me to meet and talk to 5 people.
Cynthia	Architect, Activist, Researcher	Nahnoo (volunteer)	Beirut	Published *'Le Littoral'* in 2017
Habib	Investigative Journalist, Activist, Lecturer	/	Beirut	Covers issues related to heritage, public space and environmental protection. Lecturer at AUB.
Joana	NGO employee, Activist	Nahnoo (paid employee); SBH	Beirut Brussels	
Marc	Student, Tour Guide, Activist	Layers of a Ghost City: Downtown Beirut	Skype (Beirut/Brighton)	Skype conversation
Moustafa	Tour Guide, Activist	Alternative Beirut Urban Tours	Beirut	Conversation in Beirut + I attended one of his walking tours
Naji	Activist	SBH	Beirut	
Nour	International NGO Employee	International Centre for Transitional Justice	Beirut	

FIG. 5 Table detailing the ten main participants to this research (source: HMA) [46]

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[46] It is not an exhaustive list – I am indeed not able to describe fully my participants' involvement in different groups, causes and coalitions, especially as things have changed tremendously since the 'Lebanese revolution' that started in October 2019 and even more so since the Beirut blast in August 2020. This is only the information that I collected during my fieldwork.

Activists' ties with academia do matter in creating a community of like-minded practitioners and intellectuals; and the specific case of urban activism in Beirut shows how research and activism are strongly interconnected.[47] Urban activists in this research, from what I have observed, identify their careers as being 'inextricable' from their 'political and social engagements' – their careers and activism are 'identified *through* each other' beyond any sort of hierarchies, what Hermez hopes would lead to 'a "radical posture" of solidarity' (Hermez 2011: 53, emphasis in the original). Urban activism in this research also serves as an alternative example of activism and social action in the Arab world – where social movement/activism studies have been saturated with the 'Arab Spring' and the stereotyped visions of the – often violent – 'Arab activist' that go with it. This was already condemned by Bayat, long before the so-called 'Arab spring': 'The "Arab street" has become an extension of another infamous concept, the "Arab mind," which also reduced the culture and collective conduct of an entire people to a violent abstraction.' (2003: 11). My study will thus also contribute to nuancing and complexifying 'the Arab Street' and the people who contest its uses.

2.2. WHEN? WHERE? AND WHY?

For personal and practical reasons, I decided to be on and off the field over a period of one year. My fieldwork was thus spread between three different periods: June to August 2017, October to December 2017 and May to June 2018. Dividing fieldwork into shorter periods was the most appropriate way of doing research for me, as it allowed me to take a step back, reflect, read and write more, before heading back to Beirut with a fresher mind and new ideas. Temporal and physical distance from Lebanon also allowed the different rhythms of the research to intertwine more fully: the busy, exciting, fast rhythm of research in Beirut alternated with the slower rhythm of material analysis, transcription, reading and writing, before getting ready for fieldwork again.

My fieldwork experience in Beirut resonates with Hiba Bou Akar's, who describes her fieldwork in Beirut in 2009 as follows:

> 'Yet another challenge was how to do fieldwork around what felt like a moving target. How could I research something that was simultaneously unfolding in multiple temporalities and spatialities? In Beirut in 2009, the very issues described in this book [...] had become central to local and national politics. These issues were taken up in multiple forums, including frequent media reports, legal proposals, planning schemes, and civil-society initiatives. They were also a frequent topic of

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[47] The American University of Beirut (AUB) is a major hub for urban activism in Beirut with a very active research community and clusters there (City Debates, Beirut Urban Lab and the Neighborhood Initiative), and some major figures of Beiruti urban activism being scholars there: Mona Fawaz, Mona Harb, Mona El Hallak, Habib Battah, Abdul-Halim Jabr (alumnus), Antoine Atallah (alumnus), Abir Saksouk-Sasso (alumnus) among others.

conversation in cafés, gyms, and homes. [...] On the one hand, it was interesting to be doing fieldwork that seemed so inherent to the everyday lives of people. On the other, it was a challenge to continuously redefine the field of study.' (2018: 15)

When in Lebanon, I stayed with my family in Bikfaya for most of my two first fieldwork periods, and although Bikfaya is really close, I often felt lonely in Beirut, surrounded by the business and frenzy of the city. Beirut has always been an exciting and overwhelming city for me, and it became even more so during my research – there is so much going on in the city that it is impossible to keep up, and in the field of 'rights to the city'/urban activism, activities, protests, conferences, talks, meetings, projects, book launches, exhibitions, film screenings and all sorts of other activities were always lining up, making it impossible to attend them all.

Also, there is very little breathing space in Beirut – very little space to reset, relax, or disconnect from the noises, smells, and business of the city. Even between the walls of a hotel room or rented flat in Beirut, I could hear, smell, and feel the city, its people, engines, never-ending humming. Beirut is packed, polluted, busy and hectic. This is what makes it an incredible fieldwork place, but also something that often drained me. Also, the constantly changing political and geopolitical contexts were sometimes a source of uncertainty and stress, which added to the draining nature of Beirut – a point that I will develop further in chapter six.

Moreover, as the city and its people are in constant flux and going through constant changes, Beirut is a complex city to pursue fieldwork in, as Bou Akar (2018) describes above. Sawalha also described her experience of research in Beirut in the 1990s as one of 'Changing Methodologies and Identities' in a context where 'the physical landscapes changed constantly' and stated that

'Beirutis lived in a state of liminality and uncertainty. Therefore, conducting fieldwork in an unstable environment required flexible methodologies and techniques to accommodate the emerging needs. [...] It was a challenge to conduct anthropological research in an unpredictable, transitional, yet modern urban context.' (2010: 14-15)

Sawalha then goes on to describe issues around her identity as a Palestinian, and single woman in Beirut and how this affected her relationship with participants and her gathering of data. Both Bou Akar and Sawalha wrote about the liminality of their position as Arab, female researchers in Beirut, navigating societal and familial expectations.

In my case, institutional ethics felt disconnected from real life and research in a complex place such as Beirut where research is entangled with issues of politics, class divides, gender norms, violence, turmoil, ever-spreading poverty and poor or absent public

infrastructure. Furthermore, institutional ethics do not help with unpacking and understanding our place and role as 'Arab women in the field' (Altorki and El-Solh 1988), including issues around how who we are as researchers 'affect not just experiences in the field but knowledge production about the societies about which [we] write' (Abu-Lughod 2017: 67). They also do not help with the 'emotional, visceral, sensory, embodied and ethical engagements of ethnographic work' and how 'overbearing' the 'conditions of ethnographic work today for a generation of Arab women doing fieldwork "at home"' can be (Ibid.).

Having said that, I have been lucky, throughout my research, to be working and conversing with activists who were not reproducing societal pressures and sectarian and cultural norms onto me and our exchanges. In that sense, my experience of fieldwork differed from Sawalha's and Bou Akar's who have had to negotiate their own identities as Arabs, women and researchers to navigate fieldwork and data collection. With research participants cited in the thesis, my identities as an Arab, Lebanese woman from the diaspora, educated in Belgium and the UK and not speaking Lebanese were all embraced and respected. However, outside of research participants, I have had to navigate family members' and others' expectations, unsolicited advice and stark reminders of my gender and sectarian belonging. For instance, I reverted to trying to meet the '"modesty" expectations' (Sawalha 2010: 18) of people around me, by lying about or avoiding the topic of my unmarried status, while living with a partner – a dilemma that Saleh (2017) also had to deal with whilst pursuing fieldwork in Beirut. I have also never shown signs of affection to my partner in public or in front of family members. Family members would tell me how to dress/not to dress in certain neighbourhoods; one of my mother's friends refused to rent her apartment to me in Beirut when she heard that I would be there with my partner. Or another example, a taxi driver assumed my sectarian identity and as we were driving through the southern suburbs of Beirut ('Muslim' in his eyes), asked me what I thought of them and criticised Muslim people, insisted that 'they are not like us' (my name, and where I was going, were enough for him to assume I was 'like him' and that he could freely speak his mind). Likewise, others have assumed my political affiliation because of where my family lives and comes from – Bikfaya, the headquarters and place of origin of the Gemayel family, founder and leader of the Kataeb party.[48] I have been texted by a male participant almost twice my age, the morning after our conversation, asking if I slept well, how my night was, following up on his flirty and patronising manner the day before. I have been unable to engage with the transcript of my conversation

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[48] Like Bou Akar describes, in those instances, I, too was 'categorized as part of a sectarian group based on my family name and where I said I came from. These assumptions were made immediately and without asking me directly about my position on religion or politics' (2018: 190)

with him – it never made it into the thesis. I have been told to never comment on or engage with violence in public space, even towards a woman, for it could turn against me; I have been told to not take my own decisions in terms of where to be/where to go but to follow family members' advice for 'they know better'; I have been told by a man that I have to wax and epilate, because 'God made women this way, they have to be pretty and delicate and look after themselves'; my research project has been dismissed by a man who thought that not choosing my participant sample based on sectarian affiliation was a mistake; and I have been told an incredible number of times 'this is how things work here' because surely, I needed someone to tell me. These examples show how different aspects of my identity – or perceived identity – have been, at different times, labelled, organised and addressed in ways that made sense and were convenient to those interacting with me: a woman, an outsider, a foreigner, a Lebanese citizen, a clueless, young researcher needing guidance and advice, a Maronite Christian or a Kataeb supporter – challenging the way I perceived my own self.

Thus, the combination of the challenges and obstacles of doing research in an ever-changing urban environment and its 'critical', 'overbearing conditions' (Kanafani and Sawaf 2017: 7)[49] and their consequences at the intimate level with the challenges linked to my identity made me feel an ever-present 'intimate estrangement' – a phrase that Bou Akar borrows from Edward Said and tweaks to describe the spaces of fieldwork in Beirut as 'quite familiar' but remaining 'unknowable and strange' (2018: 190). Indeed, my identification with Beirut entailed a deep emotional engagement with and interest in the city, 'carrying the weight

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[49] Kanafani and Sawaf use the word 'overbearing' to describe fieldwork conditions in the Arab region for it characterises

'the weight of seemingly unmoving and non-negotiable circumstances and forces, which materialize on the level of spatial arrangements, violent conflict and dominant discourses, as well as hegemonic political and economic regimes. Their overpowering effect on the ethnographic experience is such that the ethnographer is compelled or constrained to devise unanticipated ways of grappling with research in that moment. […] our sense is that the overbearing circumstances of ethnography are pertinent indices of the political and ethical contours within which research unfolds and which beckon innovative forms of sensibility, analytical attention and critical self-awareness in the pursuit of social science.' (2017: 4)

The two authors want to avoid a

'spectacular and spectatorly framing of experience, which indexing current affairs necessarily entails' – they 'rather qualify these ethnographic contexts as existing within what Hage explains as routinized crisis (2012). This global condition is crisis without foreseeable resolution, and violence as protracted and permeating most aspects of daily life' (Ibid.: 7)

And they wish to '[eschew] contribution to a discourse of exceptionality on the Arab region, which is all too often made emblematic of crisis, war and violence. Yet, as we proclaim to focus on the conditions of the field, adapting our practice and attention to its terms, it is these critical (from 'crisis' in this case) conditions that present themselves as overbearing and deeply impinging on the lifeworlds we research and on the methods we devise to comprehend them. These include spatial, discursive, remembered, sensory, embodied and emotive dimensions of work and life in the field, which substantiate the workings of various dominant systems and discourses, through a self-aware reflection about their effects at the intimate level of the ethnographer's experience in the field, and their effect on understanding.' (Ibid.: 7)

and worry of the presents and futures of the people and places where fieldwork unfolds' (Kanafani and Sawaf 2017: 10); while at the same time, as described earlier, I was finding myself, oftentimes, isolated, overwhelmed and estranged by the city and people around me.

BIKFAYA-BEIRUT, AND BACK
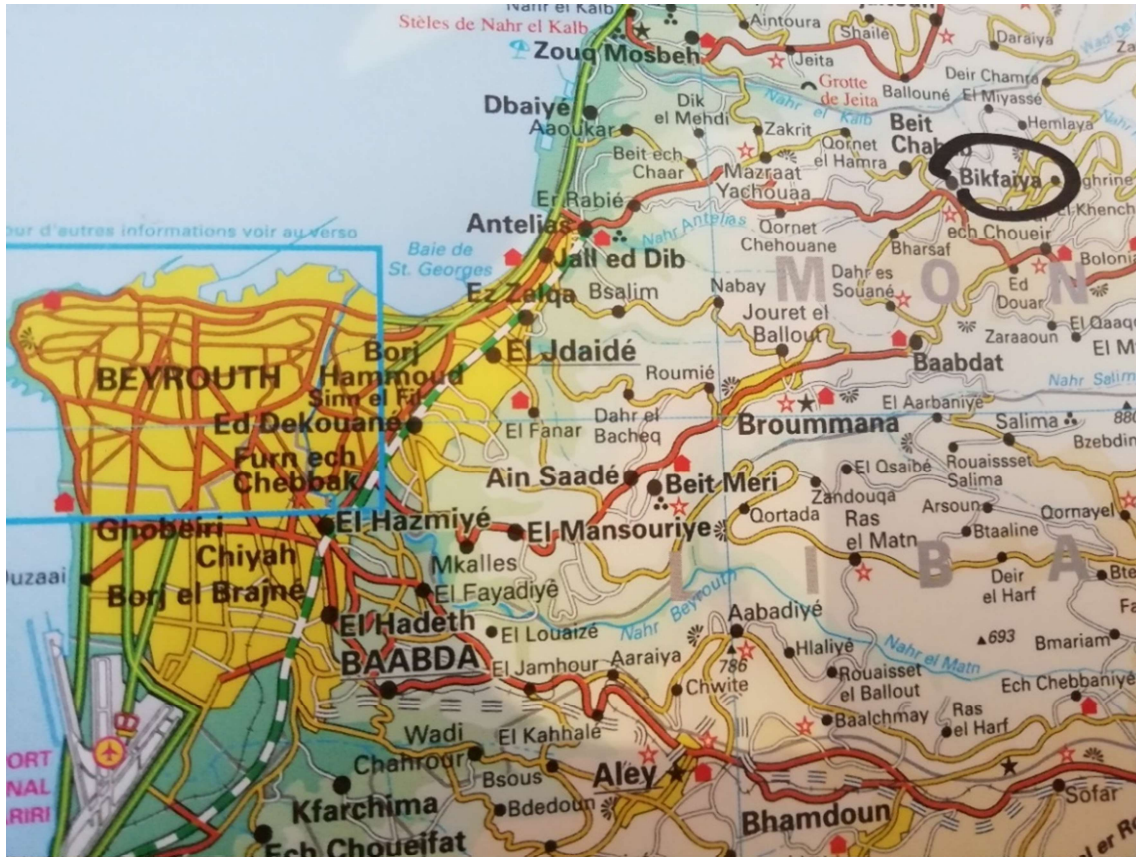
FIG. 6 Bikfaya, 23km North-East of Beirut (source: HMA)

Bikfaya is a mountain town (900 meters above sea level) in the Metn region less than 30 kilometres North-East of Beirut. I lived with my paternal grandmother, in her home there, where I also spent most of my summer holidays. Her flat is the middle one of three in our family building, named *Immeuble Estefan Abi Raad* after my grandfather. The upper flat – now vacant – belongs to my paternal uncle who emigrated with his family to Canada, and the ground floor flat belongs to my paternal aunt, who lives there with her husband, son, daughter-in-law and grandson. Our family building is representative of a fairly widespread building tradition in Lebanon, where family members build or own units in the same building on land that was purchased by parents or grandparents. Since Lebanon is a very small and highly populated country, it makes sense to build vertically and save money through not buying new land. Many of my childhood stories and memories are rooted in Bikfaya and in our family building, as opposed to Beirut, where I spent very little time as a child in the 1990s

and early 2000s. Bikfaya is a short drive from Beirut when traffic is fluid – three of my family members who live in Bikfaya work in Beirut and commute on a daily basis, but often spend hours in traffic, for Beirut can feel like just one eternal traffic jam. Bikfaya is urbanised and busy, but still has that village feel to it, where people know your family, and where your own extended family lives all around town. In Bikfaya, I had all the comfort and space I could wish for and I commuted to Beirut whenever I needed to – for events, talks, conferences, meetings with activists and walks, and I included hotel stays in Beirut several times during my first two fieldwork periods, in Hamra, Ashrafieh, Gemmayzeh and Downtown Beirut. For my last fieldwork trip (May 2018 to June 2018), I stayed in a flat in Ashrafieh. This allowed for more observations, more walking and more exploring in the city, allowing me to understand the city and its dwellers more fully.

Nonetheless, my understanding of Beirut was very much linked to my commutes between Bikfaya and the capital: my physical journey between the mountain and the city, the contrast between altitude and valley, and between what to me was somewhere calm, familiar, safe and steady, and something far from that. These contrasts hugely influenced my experience of Beirut, which in turn affected and continue to affect my understanding of processes of urban change, and my ability to respond to activist stories and conversations.

2.3. LANGUAGE AND TRANSCRIPTIONS

All my conversations were either in French or English, sometimes both, and in all cases, words of Arabic were included here and there. Mixing Lebanese, English and/or French and switching from one to the other in informal speech and informal writing is not an uncommon practice in Lebanon among multilingual people. A combination of the history of colonialism, communitarianism, cosmopolitanism and globalisation means that in Lebanon, instruction is carried out in Arabic, Lebanese, French and/or English (or other languages such as Greek or Armenian) depending on the school, and in certain schools, students have the option to get a '*double bac*', to take both the Lebanese and the French end of secondary school diploma's exams. For instance, all my family members in Lebanon speak French – not necessarily in their daily lives and all have different levels, but they can converse perfectly – which is why I was not taught Lebanese by my own parents.

Switching from one language to another is very much part of language habits in Lebanon, and it differs among different communities: for instance, my mother and her mother used to switch between Lebanese and Greek; my own parents use both Lebanese and French and constantly switch from one to the other; two of my cousins grew up in Lebanon speaking

almost no Lebanese and had a French/English education, whereas another cousin speaks Lebanese to most people in Lebanon, but switches to English when he has to dictate digits or order food in certain places. Words such as '*bonjour*', '*bonsoir*', 'please', '*merci*' or 'thanks' are fully part of everyday interactions.

Although I have a good understanding of domestic vocabulary in Lebanese, I have not mastered the language, which limited the options for conversing to either English or French. Although none of my participants has ever commented on the use of language in my research, for English and French are so widespread among university-educated people, it still was an issue in relation to ethics and the reproduction of schemas of privilege and power. I could not tell my participants to pick the language that they preferred as I was approaching our meetings with my own language restrictions. That is one way in which, although equality with my participants was always at the centre of my ethics, I did not have the ability to provide Arabic as a language of discussion and let them guide this choice. However, as stated earlier, most of the participants in this research spoke English or French fluently in addition to Lebanese, as they have one of those languages as their mother tongue or if not, have mastered these through their education or work. To cite only a few of them: Habib was born in the US, where he spent part of his childhood before his family – of Lebanese origins – moved back to Lebanon in the 1990s. He went back to the US for his studies. Joana was born and raised in France. Her parents are Syrian and Lebanese, and she moved to Beirut with them in 2009. Abir studied in London, while Antoine was born and raised in Beirut but only spoke French, he was not taught Lebanese. He improved his Lebanese when he moved to Paris. Nour does all her work in English as she works for an international American organisation, while Abdul-Halim studied architecture in the US and worked and lived there for many years before moving back to Beirut.

In chapters five, six and seven, I always indicate the initial language of the conversation and quotations if I translated them.

2.4. WALKING AND OBSERVATIONS

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, I use my own experience of and in the city as evidence: my approach involved including myself fully in the knowledge production process; and to use all my senses in doing so. Thus, an important aspect of my research practice in Beirut were my walks around the city. The benefits of walking as a research practice have been widely studied and integrated into fieldwork research, for they consist of an invaluable source of knowledge per se (Pinder 2011, Solnit 2001, Kusenbach 2003, Wunderlich 2008, Edensor

2010, Ingold and Vergunst 2008). Walking is essential to our understanding of the world around us, for 'the body itself is grounded in movement' and 'walking is not just what a body *does*; it is what a body *is*' (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 2, emphasis in the original) and in that sense, it is inseparable from fieldwork research. Moreover, walking, being 'on the move' allows one to understand the space between the sites of research, 'along the highways and byways upon which they lie' (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 3).

How I felt, how I navigated the streets of Beirut, my speed, my sense of comfort or discomfort, and why these would emerge were essential to that endeavour. My observations took place while simply 'being in Beirut': walking, commuting, shopping or being in taxis. I did not put time aside to 'observe' the city and its people per se but used my everyday encounters with the city as a source of knowledge and learning. I did not sit down to look around and take notes, I did not wish to be the outsider gazing at people or to be still in places of constant movement. My observations focused on two main threads: first, observing the city – its buildings, architecture, pavements, or lack thereof, landscapes, noises, smells, colours, rhythms, movements, and people. The second thread involved observing my own reactions and feelings in relation to the experiences of being in Beirut – feeling comfortable or not, rushing, slowing down, sad, worried, scared or unsafe. I believe my role as a researcher walking the streets of Beirut lies somewhere between 'participant observer' and 'observer as participant' pursuing covert observation[50] (O'Reilly 2009: 154-155) although I had not conceptualised it as such back then; I really just wanted to explore the city, and to focus on the influence that the city had on me to try and connect with my participants' experiences of Beirut, and connect with what they described, condemned, and fought against. I walked with people and alone, sometimes with a clear goal in mind, and sometimes not. Whenever I was in Beirut, I typically walked between thirty minutes and several hours each day and I explored a wide range of neighbourhoods. As I will develop in chapter six, not many people walk in Beirut, for the city is not pedestrian-friendly. People who can afford it have a car or a scooter, and those who cannot use '*bostas*' (buses and vans) and '*services*' (shared taxis).

Being a pedestrian in a busy, car-focused city came with its own feeling of vulnerability that I will also explore in more detail in chapter six, but observing streets, roads, noises, smells, buildings, getting lost, feeling constantly looked at (especially by men), feeling oppressed,

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[50] It was practically impossible to inform city dwellers and all the people who I crossed path with on my walks that I was a researcher. In that sense, my walking and experiencing the city resembled that of a '*flâneuse*', not in the sense of randomly abandoning myself to the city but rather in the sense of pursuing an active '*flânerie*', i.e. 'the observation of people and social types and contexts; a way of reading the city, its population, its spatial configurations whilst also a way of reading and producing texts.' (Jenks and Neves 2000: 1) for, as I develop further in chapter six, I did not want to lose myself fully in the city, I did not want to get lost or be seen as a wanderer.

overwhelmed, breathing exhaust fumes, having to avoid rubbish, dog excrement, holes, cars and motorcycles, noting the absence of trees and green spaces (the list goes on) – all of this opened my eyes to the many issues surrounding city planning and urban design in Beirut that my participants were mentioning, experiencing and fighting – issues that I would have been unable to connect with had I not walked the city. As Rendell writes:

> 'Through the act of walking new connections are made and re-made, physically and conceptually over time and through space. Public concerns and private fantasies, past events and future imaginings, are brought into the here and now, into a relationship that is both sequential and simultaneous. Walking is a way of at once discovering and transforming the city.' (cited in Wunderlich 2008: 127)

> '[Walking] provides a way of understanding sites in flux in a manner that questions the logic of measuring, surveying and drawing a location from a series of fixed and static viewpoints. When we walk we encounter sites in motion and in relation to one another, suggesting that things seem different depending on whether we are "coming to" or "going from".' (cited in Harrison 2020: 86)

Just as Rendell describes, walking allowed me to think about Beirut as a city of different times and different places, to appreciate and observe complexities and nuances, both architecturally and socially, in terms of neighbourhoods' atmospheres and cachets. Walking is a rich practice that allows a person to connect viscerally with the world around them, while at the same time connecting profoundly with their own thoughts. It is an incredible way of connecting, travelling both inwards and outwards, as Solnit describes:

> 'Moving on foot seems to make it easier to move in time; the mind wanders from plans to recollections to observations.' (2001: 5)

> '[...] a certain kind of wanderlust can only be assuaged by the acts of the body itself in motion, not the motion of the car, boat, or plane. It is the movement as well as the sights going by that seems to make things happen in the mind, and this is what makes walking ambiguous and endlessly fertile: it is both means and end, travel and destination.' (2001: 6)

The entire body is engaged in the act of walking, and the entire body occupies the spaces of the city with its energy, its rhythm, its senses, its presence. I wanted to inhabit the outdoors of the city, and allow myself to be present in the city in a way that felt uncomfortable a lot of the time, but also necessary to remain grounded in a form of urban reality that is not accessible in the comfort and bubble of a car. As Solnit writes,

> 'On foot everything stays connected, for while walking one occupies the spaces between those interiors in the same way one occupies those interiors. One lives in the whole world rather than in interiors built up against it.' (2001: 9)

Finally, walking was also an act of reclaiming the city. It was a way to disperse bits of me, of my presence in the city, in a way that is not encouraged in Beirut or Lebanon at large. Walking was a way to reclaim the city, make friends with her, and give some of myself in return. Solnit describes this process beautifully when she writes:

> 'When you give yourself to places, they give you yourself back; the more one comes to know them, the more one seeds them with the invisible crop of memories and associations that will be waiting for you when you come back, while new places offer up new thoughts, new possibilities. Exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains.' (2001: 13)

2.5. GEOGRAPHICAL LIMITS IMPOSED BY THE BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE

All my research was carried out in areas classified as 'green' by the British Foreign Office[51]. Even as a Lebanese citizen, I had to comply with these limitations for I was doing research in a British institution. I thus had to accept the fact that I could not set foot in certain neighbourhoods of Beirut where fellow Lebanese citizens were living their lives, because the British Foreign Office decided that they were potentially dangerous neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods are labelled 'Shi'a' or 'Hizballah' strongholds; hence the geographical limits, that simply reproduce narratives of segregation and divisions, and that are not representative of the reality in the field.

Following these policies was frustrating and in practice, meant that I had to miss out on an opportunity to meet a potential participant in my research, who refused to meet me outside of Haret Hreik, one of the neighbourhoods where I was not allowed to go. On this specific occasion, I felt like an outsider, even a tourist, for having to distance myself so much from the reality of people living next to me. In an email to me in June 2018, he wrote:

> 'I don't want to be negative or to put any blame on you but as "the regulations" compel you not to come to Haret Hreik I suggest that we organize a Beirut-Beirut Skype; (obviously, I may be Skyping from Ashrafiyyeh or Badaro!). I think that's more genuine to e-meet than to meet!
>
> PS: Going back and forth to the airport implies necessarily cruising through Dahyeh!'

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[51] The British Foreign Office (FO) issues travel advice and guidance for 229 locations, available online. When pursuing research at the University of Brighton and benefitting from the University of Brighton's insurance and research support for fieldwork, one must follow and comply with the FO regulations. In the case of Lebanon, throughout my research and depending on the political and social context, areas on a map were coloured either green, orange or red: oranges zones are 'advise against all but essential travel' and red zones are 'advise against all travel'. Green zones were ok for me to travel/live/pursue research in. Throughout my research, most of Beirut was green, apart from the southern suburbs and the area around the airport that were either orange or red. All travel within 5km of the border with Syria was always advised against.

Ashrafieh and Badaro were neighbourhoods where I could have gone and met him, but he disapproved of my complying with the regulations imposed by the British Foreign Office, and never got back to me after my response to that email. This specific email exchange shed light on the issues touched upon in the introduction to this chapter: the entanglement of my 'outsider' identity with the vicious circle in which one can find oneself when caught between personally disagreeing with institutional regulations; and wanting to get one's research approved.

2.6. GETTING OUT OF THE ACTIVIST BUBBLE

Being constantly immersed in a network of urban activists, attending talks, conferences and events where I would see the same people over and over again was sometimes disorientating. I had to constantly fight the tendency to amplify the impact that activists have on society at large and consequently, the tendency to magnify activists as powerful, society-changing individuals. I would also often spend many days interacting only with highly educated, engaged, relatively well-off people. It was easy to feel overly positive and enthusiastic about urban struggles and their outcomes. This was not necessarily representative of the reality on the ground. I used two techniques for bursting out of the bubble and giving myself a 'reality check'. First, I used walks around Beirut, alone or with company, to re-engage with city life. This helped to get out of my comfort zone and to experience the variety of neighbourhoods and ways of living to be found around the city. Second, discussing my thoughts and meetings with family members who were not involved in activism was always helpful in bringing me back down to earth. None of them knew any of the groups I was talking about, nor the events, demonstrations, talks, or struggles that I was participating in. All had heard about issues surrounding the privatisation of the coast or the waste crisis (which impacted all citizens), or the summer 2015 demonstrations, including the 'YouStink' movement, that got the whole country agitated and saw thousands of people in the streets, but the day-to-day research and activism around place-related struggles remain unknown to many Lebanese, especially outside of Beirut.

Having discussed the various practical elements of conducting research in and on Beirut, I will now go on to describe the research method that I employed in my studies of memory and urban activism, namely, narrative inquiry.

3. CONVERSATIONS, STORIES AND NARRATIVES

> [...] we need now, more than ever, concrete, sharp, complex, empathetic, and politically sensitive portraits of what others might be really like if we are to learn, tolerate, balk, help, confront, instruct, or otherwise adjust to the uncountable ways of living and being that surround us.' (Van Maanen 2011: xvii)

Through studying and transcribing Beirutis' personal stories, I was engaged in 'narrative inquiry' or 'inquiry into narrative', where 'narrative' is 'both phenomenon and method': indeed, 'narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study' (Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 2). Through narrative inquiry, I hoped to unearth some of the complex and heterogeneous ways in which 'the past' is present in the present – in both quotidian and exceptional ways.

I wanted to understand how individual urban activists told their own stories of their relationships to the city and to their past, and in that sense, turning to narrative inquiry made sense, for it is a method based on the idea that

> 'people live and/or understand their lives in storied forms, connecting events in the manner of a plot that has beginning, middle, and end points (Sarbin, 1986). These stories are played out in the context of other stories that may include societies, cultures, families, or other intersecting plotlines in a person's life. The stories that people tell about their lives represent their meaning making; how they connect and integrate the chaos of internal and momentary experience and how they select what to tell and how they link bits of their experience are all aspects of how they structure the flow of experience and understand their lives. Narratives organize time (Ricoeur, 1988) and are performed for particular audiences.' (Josselson 2011: 224)

In narrative research, the multiplicity of truths is embraced; historical truth is not what narrative researchers are after. Instead, 'the focus is on how events are understood and organized' (Josselson: 225). This is important because narrative research thus also allows for a multiplicity of times and understandings of times to emerge; although narratives 'organise time' and structure meaning, they create, at the personal level, links between events – in the past, future and present – in unique ways, for a narrative is always based on a narrator whose perspective of the world and rationale to make sense of it is not necessarily based on a historical, chronological sequencing of events.

I also want to stress here that the term 'narrative' itself, in the context of human sciences, can mean various things, as described by Riessman:

> 'The term narrative in the human sciences can refer to texts at several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive),

interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant's and investigator's narratives.' (2007: 6)

All three definitions of narrative are of relevance to my thesis, as will be further developed with the idea of 'co-construction' – as a researcher, I was involved in hearing, collecting and writing the narratives of others and I made my own sense of them, while at the same time I wrote and thought about my own narratives, and was involved in making sense of my own self and life in relation to my respondents and research; and involved in producing a thesis that is a narrative itself. All this in the full awareness that readers will create their own narrative of my work.

In the context of this research, I use both the terms 'narrative' and 'story', for both are at the centre of narrative inquiry (Kim 2016: 6), but although the conceptualisations of narrative and story are many, and fascinating (see Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 2, Kim 2016: 9, Riessman 2007: 3-10)[52], they do not make a difference to the shape of this thesis, or to my analyses of my fieldwork material. I thus use both interchangeably, following Riessman's exemplar, who adopts 'contemporary conventions, often using the terms "story" and "narrative" interchangeably in writing' (2007: 7). I consider both stories and narratives to use narrative form, which is a temporal sequencing of events told by a narrator from whose perspective the events described are perceived and known; and telling about the past is an essential function of the use of narratives by individuals (Riessman 2007: 8). For clarity, when describing what is sometimes called an 'overarching narrative' or 'dominant narrative', I have and will instead use the term 'discourse' in order to describe the ideas that provide the framework for the stories presented.

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[52] Kim differentiates between narrative and story as follows:

'[…] a narrative is a recounting of events that are organized in a temporal sequence, and this linear organization of events makes up a story (Abbott, 2002; Cohan & Shires, 1988). Thus a story is a detailed organization of narrative events arranged in a (story) structure based on time although the events are not necessarily in chronological order. This is what we mean when we say stories (not narratives) have a beginning, middle, and end […]. In this sense, a story has a connotation of a "full" description of lived experience, whereas a narrative has a connotation of a "partial" description of lived experience. […] stories, just like narratives, are always subject to interpretation; that is, stories as we know them begin as interpretations (Kermode, 1981). Narratives constitute stories, and stories rely on narratives.' (Kim 2016: 9)

Connelly and Clandinin draw a distinction too, as they consider that 'people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience' (1990: 2)

3.1. CONVERSATIONS

As is likely clear by this point, I am profoundly interested in urban activists' narratives, stories and experiences of the city, in their everyday spaces and memories of them, their rhythms, trajectories, dreams, their emotions and how all these are eventually reflected in their involvement in urban, social and political engagement.

Conversations were my main method of gathering these narratives. Some naturally occurring conversations have inspired me too. They emerged from moments that I spent with family members in Lebanon and Brussels, taxi drivers in Beirut and with other people in Lebanon that inspired me through the chance of a conversation. These conversations, encounters and observations that I have had and made in streets, at conferences, talks and other events, have all added up to form the 'fieldwork material' that I use in this thesis. Each conversation opened up new doors of enquiries, interests, questions and issues.

Two quotations describe best the approach I wished to take by using conversations as a method:

> 'If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk to them? Conversation is a basic mode of human interaction. [...] Through conversation we get to know other people, learn about their experiences, feelings, attitudes, and the world they live in. [...] their dreams, fears, and hopes [...] their views and opinions [...] their school and work situation, their family and social life.' (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: xvii)

> 'The proper ethnographic interview is a conversation in which ethnographers risk the appearance of naivety and ignorance in order continually to satisfy themselves that they have understood what is being said [...] the conversations [...] are instruments...for stripping away the ballasts of expectation and assumption [...]' (Cohen 1984: 226)

The lack of formatting that conversations involve allows various topics and discussions to emerge organically. All my conversations with participants were one-on-one meetings. During my conversations with urban activists, I usually started by introducing myself and my research, before asking people to tell me more about themselves and/or about the group that they were involved in, or their job. This proved to be a useful way of allowing my participants to open up and for getting to know them. Telling people, 'Tell me more about yourself' or 'I'd like to know about you' meant letting them go in whatever direction they wanted to go. In short, the subjects discussed, questions asked, and lengths of the conversations varied greatly depending on the participant: our conversations evolved following the dynamics between us, and around us. It is one of the reasons why I consider conversation as a methodological

(in)decision. I deliberately avoided deciding upon a framework, questions or a direction for conversation prior to our meetings.

3.2. CONVERSATION ETHICS

I would like to mention here three ethical aspects of my use of conversations as method. Firstly, I will focus on the anonymisation of data. Secondly, creating a comfortable basis for dialogue was essential to my research practice and thirdly, I will focus on conversations as a co-construction process.

3.2.1. CONSENT

The two most important aspects of my formal approval in terms of ethics from the University of Brighton were, first, participants' informed consent to meet me and be recorded and, second, participants' informed consent to have their words and names used in my thesis.

All the research participants knew about my research when they were invited to participate. They knew what I was interested in, and why I wanted to meet them[53]. All my participants gave their consent for both recording our conversation and using recordings in my research.

Participants signed consent forms for taking part in the research (see Appendix B). The consent form stipulates that all my data will be anonymised. However, a few participants, at the time of our encounter, gave me verbal consent for using their real names or did not want me to use a pseudonym or to anonymise their data. I thus sent each participant an email, towards the end of the PhD, specifically asking for their consent to not be anonymised in the thesis. All of them were also sent the transcript of our conversation, and I sent some of them the exact excerpts that I use in the thesis from our conversation. All ten of them gave their explicit consent for me to use their actual names in the thesis.

3.2.2. COMFORTABLE BASIS FOR DIALOGUE

I have followed my conviction that the standards and ethics that guide our lives outside of research should equally apply to our lives in research, for 'what is at stake is the creation of situations of trust in which the storytelling urge, so much a part or the best parts of our social life, finds expression' (Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 12). There and then, I was very much my 'human self' that I 'generally am in everyday situations' (Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 10 citing

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[53] See Appendix A – Information sheet – this was attached to an email in which I introduced myself, my research interests and wish to meet.

Peshkin 1985: 270), nurturing care, attention and respect in my encounters with others. I made every effort to try to create an environment in which every conversation was a comfortable moment of sharing – I met participants where they felt comfortable to meet, I announced my interest in people's own backgrounds and stories straight away, and also shared my personal stories, doubts, my ignorance of certain topics, and my wish to learn from them.

The loose structure of our chats, our common interests, and my eagerness to know more created a context of informality, although the research formalities typically caught up with me. Indeed, the formal/informal liminality was a difficult one to navigate: how to nurture informality when the entire research process needed to be formalised, recorded, and needed to respect a standardised series of ethical requirements and limits. Research devices such as my recorder, the consent form, my notebook, kept reinforcing the formality of the process. Despite this, most of my conversations felt like chats with friends – or friends of friends that I was getting to know. Most of my research participants are of my generation, too, which created more links and shared experiences. I connected with them on social media, and I also met a couple of them on their visits to Brussels – in an informal context, beyond the researcher-participant relationship.

'Equality' with my participants was an important aspect of my research ethics early on. Broadly speaking, they and I shared many aspects of our 'cosmopolitan' lives: education, social class, multiple nationalities for some of them, being educated in several countries and several languages, well-travelled, having a paid job/activity, all elements that show positions of privilege, both for me and for them in Beirut. In this context, I did not feel that my participants and I were involved in an imbalanced relationship of 'utilitarianist researcher vs powerless participant'[54]. My participants, in the context of Beirut, do not live at the margins of society, they are individuals with considerable social capital, connections, knowledge and access to information and social support. Having said that, it is also very clear that many of them struggle in the space of Beirut differently at different times – sometimes to find work, to make ends meet, to maintain hope and motivation, and several of them have had issues with the police and with justice. Two participants in my research came from less privileged backgrounds, and were struggling to make a living in Beirut, or to see opportunities for their

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[54] Instead, I believe that most of my participants and myself 'shared power' to a certain extent, first because we 'have a voice' and at the same time, we have the privilege to be silent on certain issues, because we share 'a world view' in the fields we were interested in – social and urban issues, urban activism – and in this sense 'silence is power' for it 'exists against a dominant shared cultural understanding that need not be voiced, in that it is required to explain and justify self' and to the question 'To what extent do you and the research participant share knowledge that need not be voiced?' I can reply yes; and to the questions 'Is there a shared understanding of the nature and functions of research in society? Of higher education? Of notions of the common good?' I can reply yes, underlying a shared understanding of values, and shared power (Fivush 2013: 20-21)

futures in the city, although both did have paid jobs, accommodation and considerable social capital. As stated previously, many of the participants in my research are academics: they give talks, meet at conferences, they are published and mediatised. All this coexists with the fact that urban activism in Beirut, and in Lebanon in general, is mostly voluntary work (alongside their full-time job) and is an incredibly tedious, exhausting and rarely successful endeavour. As will be shown in chapters five to seven, urban activists have to deal with the destruction of their city, their environment, their landscapes, and they are involved in never-ending struggles against gigantic political and economic elites that have no or very little interest in their 'rights to the city'.

It is also important to note that although the urban activists that I talked to benefit from a relatively comfortable lifestyle, unavailable to many in Lebanon, the fact that urban activists in Beirut are mostly middle class and educated people is first, true but not absolutely true, and second, their middle-class membership does not make them invalid. The critique that Habib hinted to in the excerpt in chapter three, when he says that 'they're elitist' is one of the critiques thrown at activists, one that further 'pushes [them] away from doing anything' is one, I argue, that contributes to dismissing and silencing them further, in a way that is damaging for grassroots movements in general. To be clear, there are without any doubt, very important class and socio-economic aspects to activism in Beirut – and beyond – that need to be acknowledged. In the past four years, since the beginning of my research, the Beirutis and Lebanese in general have had to deal with increasingly terrible circumstances, which have sharpened *all* inequalities.

However, it is important to differentiate between different 'elites' in the Lebanese context. As Habib says,

> 'You know when someone[55] is just like struggling against all odds to put something together, and they're not getting any money out of it, or anything, and then you come along and have an epistemological attack on them. I don't know, it's very, I don't think it's a very productive use of time. [...] we're all elite in some sense. We're all elites, we're all hmm you know, there are vast parts of the world that have no connection you know, no education, no semblance of institutions so who's elite, who's not elite, it's another one of these problematic things'

Though there are some overlaps, there are also huge differences between the political, financial and economic elites that benefit first-hand from corruption, steal tax money and international donations, disregard the lives of their people, that live in outrageously luxurious

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[55] Here, Habib is referring to activists.

conditions, with all the safety, security, comfort, enjoyment and fun that go with that[56], and an intellectual elite that is involved in academic, social and political work to try and create a more fair and accessible city that would potentially benefit a large number of people. In Lebanon, those who suffer the most from poverty, lack of access to resources, information, education and work are also those who suffer the most from the lack of possibilities to organise, get together, and think about politics, social and spatial issues, let alone debates, conferences and talks. These people have even less of a voice in the political, social and economic landscape. We are unfortunately not hearing them in this thesis either, the disenfranchised people of Beirut, the domestic workers, Lebanese and foreign, the refugees, stateless individuals, street vendors, beggars, homeless individuals, sex workers, squatters, prisoners, and all those trying simply to survive in Beirut.

3.2.3. CO-CONSTRUCTION

Following a holistic approach (Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003), I have approached my encounters and conversations with urban activists as 'processes of co-construction'. By focusing on narratives and stories, one can also shed light on processes of co-construction of the self, place and space, the world around us and its complexity. As Mihelj states, 'as interviewers, we inevitably influence the interviewees with our questions, yet at the same time, their answers are also guided by the wider historical and cultural context that is independent from the interactional situation' (Mihelj 2013: 64). Although I did not see my role as an 'interviewer' or my participants as 'interviewees' per se, Mihelj's point is still appropriate to my research: I was very much aware of the role that I was playing with initiating meetings and conversations, and of the role that the people that I was spending time with had in shaping my research, and my stories and narratives, in a specific historical, urban and social context that was influencing our bodies, thoughts, lives. One participant told me that our discussion allowed him to formulate things that are in his mind in ways that he never takes the time to do; another one told me that our discussion 'messed up' with his mind (positively, he said) – that it made him think about things that he took for granted in a different way; one other told me that he likes our conversations because 'I come with a different perspective' – all these comments stress the role that I have played in co-creating specific narratives.

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[56] Such as the 'happy few' who, in the middle of a global pandemic and terrible economic crisis in Lebanon early summer 2020, were enjoying the luxurious hotels, restaurants and clubs of Faqra in the mountains, disconnected physically and socially from the misery spreading elsewhere in the country:

https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/au-liban-les-riches-trouvent-refuge-dans-un-havre-luxueux-loin-de-la-crise-29-07-2020-2386023_24.php

These processes of co-construction also involved acknowledging that the stories that I collected did not belong to me, despite my role in interpreting these stories and putting them to use in my PhD study. In practice, during my conversations with urban activists and others, this meant letting conversations evolve organically and flow, without pushing or pulling them in certain directions. Another element of my co-construction with participants was the fact that I sent transcripts of each conversation to individual participants, giving them the opportunity to read through them, amend them, or to decide that parts of them or even the whole transcript should not be used in my research. A couple of participants got back to me with requests for transcripts to be amended slightly: one asked me to not use the swear words that were in the transcript, and one suggested a couple of slight changes to make the quotes that I was planning to use in the thesis more clear.

Although these stories do not belong to me, I am solely responsible for the interpretations that I have made of them, based on a series of interpretations collected through fieldwork, for

> 'ethnography is always something of an interpretation of an interpretation because what we call our "data" are constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to at certain times, in certain places.' (Van Maanen 2011: 65)

In this sense, not only have I co-constructed stories, but I have also reconstructed them through interpretation.

Another aspect of the project of co-construction is that my own stories and experiences are also part of this thesis, as introduced in the introduction to this thesis. My approach to using autobiographical stories in this thesis reflects Purcell's description of a reflexive approach to autobiography, where

> 'knowledge is taken to be actively "produced" by the researcher (in collaboration with many others)' as opposed to 'preexisting, to be collected and reported by the researcher'. (2009: 236)

This approach is based on the idea that 'the researcher enters into complex relations with those being researched. Those relations play a central role in producing the knowledge the research creates' (Ibid.). The autobiographical stories included in the research thus serve to explore positionality and relations with participants, and 'do not aim at a comprehensive account of a life, since that life is not the focus of the inquiry' (Ibid.). Purcell's description of reflexive autobiography as a method confirms the position that I have been in while doing research in Beirut:

'The researcher in many ways becomes part of the community, in the sense of having entered into a web of relationships with those she or he is studying. The more embedded the researcher is, the greater the degree of incorporation will be, and the more the autobiography will bleed into ethnography. It will become harder to make distinctions between self and other, between insider and outsider. As a result, this approach undermines the idea of the self contained, autonomous individual. Rather it sees individuals as overdetermined by multiple social factors.' (Ibid.)

I would like to summarise my approach and end this section on co-construction with another excerpt from the same text, where Purcell, still writing about reflexivity in autobiographical methods, states that:

'this approach to autobiography posits a political struggle. It sees academia as an ongoing contest among multiple arguments, and those arguments are always necessarily subjective, embodied, and partial. That argument is of course part of the wider (originally feminist) claim that the personal is political, that one's subjective experience should be made absolutely central to public and academic discourse.' (2009: 237)

I find this last quotation very powerful, for it summarises beautifully the importance and power of stories in the research process. I develop this aspect below with a focus on the connection between storytelling and urban activism.

3.3. STORYTELLING AND URBAN ACTIVISTS

As this thesis develops, I create a dialogue between the information that I have collected through my conversations and observations in Beirut and theoretical conceptualisations of the city, memory, emotions, rhythms, place and space. This dialogue will shed light on the personal and emotional bonds that my respondents have with certain places and times, through narratives about their own past and past places that have played a role in making sense of their environment, their places and roles in them, and of the ways in which they experience change. My focus is on intimate stories that reveal intimate links with certain places: some of these stories are about family homes, buildings, or natural sites, they are about family members, about pain and loss, about nostalgia, joy and sadness. Focusing on storytelling and conversing with urban activists was thus important for it allowed me to unearth these stories, testimonies of the importance of 'past geographies' in our present selves, for

'Each spatialized, felt, moment or sequence of the now-being-laid-down is, (more or less), mapped into our bodies and minds to become a vast store of past geographies which shape who we are and the ongoing process of life. The becoming-of-the-now is not distinct from this vast volume of experience, it emerges from it, and is coloured by it, in ways we know and ways we don't know.

If we are all vast repositories of past emotional-spatial experiences then the spatiality of humanness becomes even deeper in extent and significance' (Jones 2007: 206)

Narratives and stories have power: they help us make sense of the world around us, and of our place in the world, they also help us make sense of our life paths and connections with other life paths, and make sense of both difficult and mundane events. Although these are individual stories, they depict complex social events as interacting with participants' values and beliefs: they are always embedded in broader social relations and acts of remembering, they are products of collective and social practices created in particular environments among specific, unique, individuals and groups. As such, they also dare to question who controls dominant discourses, who has the power to tell their own stories or shape narratives (Sandercock 2003: 26), and whose narratives eventually turn into decision-making processes, and into influencing the course of social life, or urban planning or decisions about 'the past' and the city in Beirut.

The narratives that I have collected, in their relation to the urban environment that is the focus of my participants' activism, arise out of memories of geographies, but they also give rise to geographies of memory. Of course, I only have fragments of the vast volume of experiences in and of the city of Beirut, this is only a limited sketch of a geography, but in this sketch can be discerned the outlines of alternative visions of the city, visions that resist a framing of the city solely in terms of war and violence, or of sectarian identity and division, or of capitalist development. Such narratives are not only imaginary alternatives. Individual stories can both reinforce and challenge dominant discourses (Kappler 2017: 131); they have the potential to become acts of resistance against the dominant discourses of Beirut as a city of conflict and division, or of a mnemonic landscape whose only feature is the chasm separating the before and after of war, or a city that needs to grow and develop in a capitalist fashion, for 'personal narratives can also encourage others to act; speaking out invites political mobilization and change [...] In a word, narratives are strategic, functional, and purposeful.' (Riessman 2007: 9)

In that sense, these stories lay the ground for understanding the critiques formulated by urban activists towards the Lebanese state apparatus, real-estate companies, and private investors. Activists' stories allow us to situate critiques in a context of urban struggles, grounded in activists' emotions and ways of seeing the world, their city and the ways they make sense of it (Tsibiridou 2014). Urban activists' narratives are shaped by the challenge they pose in imagining the city other than how it is. As Sandercock boldly states, 'the telling of stories is nothing less than a profoundly political act' (2003: 26). Turning to these narratives,

one is confronted by urgent questions around how to think about and influence the creation of places and of space, of inclusive and democratic spaces, of spaces that connect people together, but also connect people with their environment and their past, through radical social and spatial change. Eventually, these questions get us back to thinking about Lebanese society and its segregated spaces, its class, social and ethnic divisions, to questions of belonging and identity, to political intentions and projects.

These narratives also have the power to

'mobilize others into action for progressive social change. Major resistance movements of the twentieth century [...] were born as individuals sat together and told stories about small moments of discrimination. Commonalities in the stories created group belonging and set the stage for collective action' (Riessman 2007: 9)

Although I study the individual narratives of a small number of individuals, I contend that these narratives of engaged citizens have a relevance that goes beyond the individual. I contest the invisibility of citizen narratives that constitute urban space but that are not reflected in political and urban construction (and destruction) projects in Beirut. Urban activists' engagement with urban, social, and political issues means that they have a specific, and valuable, perspective on many issues. A lot of thought, research and work has been dedicated to the causes that they defend and this impacts upon their vision of Beirut. Their narratives exist in relation to their contestation of large-scale state and institutional practices, but are also situated in relation to their fellow citizens, and to their own personal stories, emotions, connections, feelings, experiences, and memories. I agree with Kim that

'by way of storytelling, we allow stories to travel from person to person, letting the meaning of story become larger than an individual experience or an individual life. Such storytelling provides inspiration, entertainment, and new frames of reference to both tellers and listeners [...] it improves our social cognition and the conceptions of our own lives beyond the here and now, reflecting power relationships and domination' (2016: 9)

3.4. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

I manually transcribed all my conversations[57], which meant spending more than 200 hours transcribing about 35 hours of recording – conversations and talks. It was important for me to go through the process of transcribing conversations myself, as this was to me the start of my analysis: a 'pivotal aspect' of my research that certainly influenced the way I understood my participants (Oliver et al. 2005: 1273). The first listens gave a sense of what my conversations

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[57] I needed help for one transcription of a conversation with one participant, who used a lot of legal terms in Arabic when telling me about her work.

could potentially bring into the research and it took a lot of listening, transcribing, reading and re-reading again to really get familiar with these conversations. Since I was interested in the content of my conversations with urban activists – on what was said rather than how it was said (Azevedo et al. 2017: 161) – my transcriptions were mostly 'denaturalised': I did not transcribe all time gaps, noises, sniffing, coughing, or all the stretching and stressing words, although I did include laughter, hesitation, pauses and response/non-response tokens such as 'Yeah', 'Hmm', and so on (Oliver et al. 2005: 1276).

I thus analysed my transcripts and material using a thematic analysis approach; my primary focus was on the 'content of talk, its subject matter' (Edwards and Potter 1992: 28 cited in Flick 2009: 339); on '"what" is said, rather than "how"," "to whom," or "for what purposes."' (Riessman 2007: 54). My conversations became written documents, through the transcription process – documents that created a new reality, a new life to the narratives that I collected. As described by Flick,

> 'This substantiation of reality in the form of texts is valid in two respects: as a process that opens access to a field and, as a result of this process, as a reconstruction of the reality, which has been transformed into texts. The construction of a new reality in the text has already begun at the level of the field notes and at the level of the transcript and this is the only (version of) reality available to the researchers during their following interpretations. These constructions should be taken into account in the more or less meticulous handling of the text, which is suggested by each method of interpretation.' (2009: 302-303)

By opting for thematic analysis, I moved away from traditional narrative inquiry methods, which usually prefer the analysis of accounts as full units, 'rather than fragmented into thematic categories' (Riessman 2007: 12). This was, however, the most appropriate form of analysis for my fieldwork material, given my inductive approach – I did not have a specific focus of inquiry or specific questions and themes in mind prior to my conversations, but instead, I let them emerge, which means that my conversations are very eclectic; they touched on a wide variety of topics, and were not 'life accounts' as such, but rather narratives of life experiences.

I listened to some of these recordings again, after transcribing them, to immerse myself once again in the atmosphere of the encounter. Hearing the background noises – mostly city noises – the tone and accent of my participants' voices, volumes, the pace of their voices, brought important elements that needed to be considered when writing. The emotions transmitted during these encounters – only partially perceptible on voice recordings – are fully part of my analysis and have influenced my thought processes. I would like to note here that I consider both silence and the body to also be part of my analysis. Indeed, I do not limit my

understanding and analysis to verbalised stories (through spoken or written words): emotions, the senses, and silences expressed, shown, and felt through the research complement the narrative analysis – for the city is also known through the senses and emotions (Sandercock 2003: 11-12). I had commented on these aspects of my conversations in my notes following my meetings.

I read through my transcripts repeatedly, coding my material – i.e. sorting and labelling it, exploring it and 'assigning it codes' (O'Reilly 2009: 34), which in my case were themes that became more and more significant as my analysis progressed: emotions, rhythms, time, temporality, and complex relations to both time and space. As O'Reilly notes, how coding is achieved

> 'involves a creative, reflexive and interpretive interaction between the researcher, the data, the literature, theoretical ideas that framed the research as well as those that emerge from close analysis of the data, and the researcher's feelings, emotions, experiences, and memory.' (2009: 35)

Thus, after identifying these themes, I combined and analysed my ideas with the rest of my material: academic publications, notes, memories, documents collected through fieldwork, newspaper articles, recordings of talks and conferences, websites and blogs.

5. CONCLUSION

> 'For the things the inhabitant knows are not facts. A fact simply exists. But for inhabitants, things do not so much exist as occur. Lying at the confluence of actions and responses, they are identified not by their intrinsic attributes but by the memories they call up. Thus things are not classified like facts, or tabulated like data, but narrated like stories. And every place, as a gathering of things, is a knot of stories.' (Ingold 2009: 41)

Ingold's words are a perfect way to conclude this chapter. Indeed, his description of learning and knowing about a place not through facts but through actions, responses, stories and memories is at the centre of my own learning about and understanding of Beirut. In this chapter, I have described the central role that narratives and stories have had in my research, as the most important source of knowledge and as guides for my main method: narrative analysis.

In the first part of this chapter, I went through a description of my methodological (in)decisions. I provided details about the people, times and spaces of my research, as well as details about my ethical approach to research, through a stress on creating a comfortable basis for dialogue, and the process of co-construction. I also discussed the difficulties

surrounding language and transcriptions, the limits imposed by the British Foreign Office and the need to 'get out of the activist bubble'. These sections showed how my methodological 'choices' were not always the result of an active decision on my side, for the reality of fieldwork in Beirut led me onto different paths that I could not anticipate.

In the second part of this chapter, I described my approach to narrative inquiry. To summarise my methods here, I use narrative inquiry and thematic analysis together with observational methods inspired by ethnography and geography to try to understand how urban activists' narratives inform our understanding of past, present and future struggles in the reshaping and reclaiming of space, place, the city, time and the past in post-1990 Beirut. I tried to allow the conversations and the other encounters that gave rise to the narratives and stories that are the object of my research to evolve organically, without imposing prior assumptions about which categories or events may inform those narratives. In carrying out the research, I recognised my particular positionality as at once a limit and an aid to my research and tried to give full recognition to my subjectivity both as necessarily influencing the knowledge produced but also as itself a valuable source of knowledge production.

I would like to end this conclusion with Barbara Bender's words that provide a perfect segue between this chapter and the next three. Indeed, they summarise where a study of time, memory and place meet in my own research, and where I believe they meet in the most fruitful manner – through a focus on narratives:

> 'Landscapes are created out of people's understanding and engagement with the world around them. They are always in process of being shaped and reshaped. Being of the moment and in process, they are always temporal. They are not a record but a recording, and this recording is much more than a reflection of human agency and action; it is creative of them. Landscapes provoke memory, facilitate (or impede) action. Nor are they *a* recording, for they are always polyvalent and multivocal. There is a historicity and spatiality to people's engagement with the world around them.' (Bender 2002: 103, emphasis in the original)

The next three chapters will demonstrate the importance of talking to people, and letting them tell their stories, in exploring some ways to move beyond the exceptionalising of time and space in Lebanon. My analysis of narratives led to the exploration of three overarching themes that will be the focus of the three next chapters: emotions, rhythms and imagination.

Interlude - Love Note to Bey

Mess, noise, ruins

Cars are queens here

A bay and roots

Pubs, clubs and kids

Kids with no home

Kids not at school

Bins, trash, smells

Gas and fumes

Sea is close, yet feels far

Sea is not for us

Green is not for us

Air is thick

Shop, eat, buy, fake it

It seems fake

Where is the real Bey?

What is real?

The past?

Do I know this hub?

New and old clash

Give us green, give us hope

Give us the sea, a sense of home

Are we there yet?

I wrote this text initially in May 2019 in Brussels, during a creative writing workshop on the urban. It is inspired by urban activists in Beirut, their continuous work, research and contestation to protect and defend the city they love.

NARRATING BEIRUT THROUGH STORIES AND EMOTIONS

'Beirut, asphyxiated, crushed, put to death so many times, yet always rising again from its ashes and from the sea. Beirut, like my life, complex and contradictory, with its multiple identities, its wounds barely healed, the scars still spotted with blood, reconstruction still in its first stages. [...] Beirut will be a modern city after all. I regret the disfiguration of the landscape, the loss of the center that we used to cherish in my childhood. I weep at the loss of my childhood and of the part of me that lies buried in these ruins' (Accad 2002: 89)

'My aim isn't to shock, my aim is to express the pain that I felt with all my heart for five years for that building, or for another space, for my memory or for the other memories, but nobody can feel what I have felt for all these years.' (Conversation with Naji, November 2017)

1. INTRODUCTION: STORIES, PLACE, MEMORY AND EMOTIONS

The two quotations that open this chapter reveal how memory is always 'bound up with place, space, the body, practice and materiality' (Jones and Garde-Hansen 2012: 10). Both quotations also give a sense of how the 'self' is affected, suffers, weeps, regrets, is in pain in reaction to what happens to the physical environment around it. These quotations both talk about emotions and identity: emotions arise from a connection with places; and identity is constructed through those emotions and through those places.

In this chapter, I look at the complex entanglement of memories, place and emotions in the stories that I have gathered in Beirut. Expanding on emotional geography, this chapter is based on the premises that 'memories of who we are now, who we were, who we wanted to become, are wrapped up in memories of where we are, where we were, and where we will be (would like to be)' (Jones and Garde-Hansen 2012: 4) and that these memories cannot be separated from our emotional relationships to places, for 'we are conglomerations of past

everyday experiences, including their spatial textures and affective registers' (Jones and Garde-Hansen 2012: 8).

What do emotions reveal in the stories of my respondents, what do they tell us about their relationships to their city, to the past and the future, and about their engagement in urban struggles? This is the first facet of the response to my overarching research question: how do urban activists' narratives inform our understanding of past, present and future contestation of place and the past in post-1990 Beirut? Indeed, this chapter seeks to explore what emotions tell us about the past, the relationship to the past, to time, to Beirut and the wider memory and urban studies focus of my thesis.[58]

In my conversations with urban activists, several layers of complexity emerged in relation to the presence of the past in Beirut, and in people's daily lives: some stories that I have heard touch upon the deep connections that people have with places that existed in the past but that have been physically altered or destroyed – in the context of war and violence or through 'post-war' destructive reconstruction, or in the context of real-estate developments. These stories are about lost places, about memories of specific spatial and temporal experiences, about destruction and reconstruction, about personal loss and mourning in relation to a city and places that have disappeared or whose meanings and uses have changed. They are about attachment and interconnectedness. They are about places or practices that symbolise the spirit of a lost era, and with it, past or lost ways of being in and using the city. Urban activists' narratives show how loaded places are with emotions and memories, and how attached my participants are to both these places and the memories of them. These emotions and memories persist through time and space: many of these places have disappeared or people have left them, but the emotions linked to them are still very much present in my participants' narratives.

The remainder of this chapter consists of two sections: the first section focuses on stories of absence and loss and the second section focuses on nostalgia. These two sections comprise a complex entanglement of emotions, explored through various stories. I will show how absence, loss and nostalgia are multiple and complex. Focusing on those three themes is of interest because it enables me to illuminate urban activists' relationships to time and space in dialogue with the commonplace discourses around either the absence of the past in the

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[58] It is not my intention here to examine either the concept of 'emotion' or 'affect' theoretically, although I acknowledge the importance and richness of the extensive literature on these concepts (Golańska 2017; Pile 2010; Hadi Curti et al. 2011). Although they differ conceptually, emotions, feelings and affects are used in this chapter as jointly constructive of 'affective' and 'emotional' relationships to places, and their conceptual distinctions do not influence either my analysis or my conclusions.

present, or an overwhelming presence of the past in the present. The first section on absence and loss consists of two stories: that of Moustafa and that of Naji. The second section on nostalgia contains three main stories: Abdul-Halim; Abir and the site Dalieh of Raouche, and a third section on the practice of picnicking. Ultimately, this chapter will show how emotions illuminate the complex entanglement of place, the self and time.
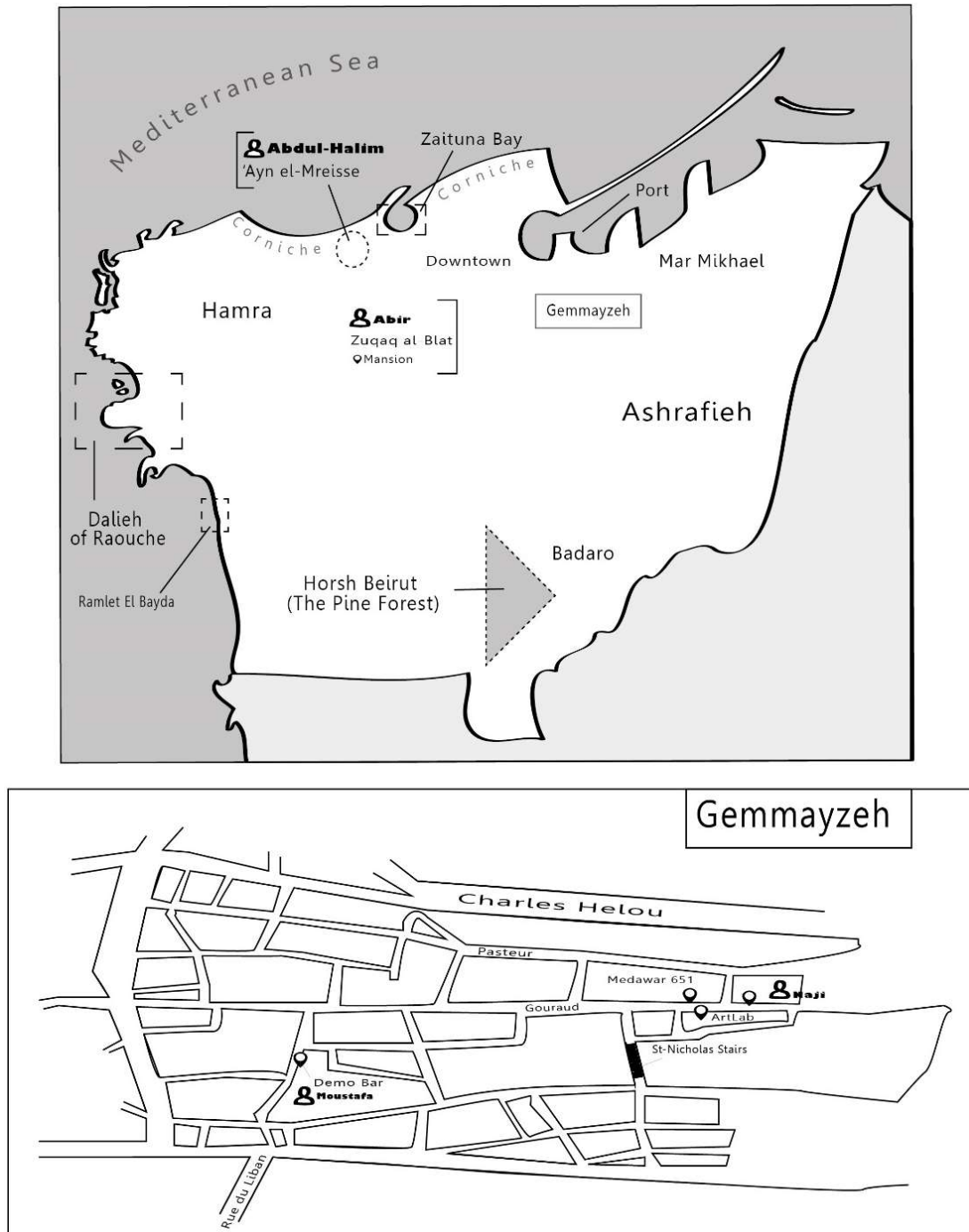

FIG. 7 Map of the places mentioned in chapter five (source: HMA)

2. STORIES OF ABSENCE AND LOSS

In this first section, I will show the entanglement of the relationship to time, the city and places through a focus on stories and emotions of absence and loss. I will do so by focusing on the narratives of two of my participants in Beirut: Moustafa and Naji. Both Moustafa and Naji's stories are powerful in how they illustrate struggles and pain, caused by the loss and absence of places, or, in the case of Moustafa, the fluctuating nature of 'hope' (losing and finding it) in Beirut.

2.1. MOUSTAFA: LOSING AND FINDING HOPE IN BEIRUT

I met Moustafa at the Demo bar in Gemmayzeh, Beirut, in July 2017. The Demo bar was clearly his hood: he had worked behind the bar there, knew everyone and greeted a lot of people who passed by during our conversation. He and his partner had created 'Alternative Tour Beirut' in 2015 to provide a 'holistic, local and complex perspective on Beirut' (Alternative Tour Beirut 2020) through walking tours, at a time when there was no other 'alternative' tour in the city. His project was to show people (mostly tourists and foreigners) various neighbourhoods of the city, walking from East to West Beirut. I wanted to meet Moustafa as I wanted to know more about his own experience and past in the city, and I was curious to understand what he meant by an 'alternative' way of experiencing the city. When I initially met him in July 2017, I had not gone on one of his tours yet, but I did later, in November 2017, and brought my parents along, for I knew that Moustafa wanted to see more 'Lebanese people' on his tours.

In what follows, the focus of Moustafa's story is Beirut itself, 'ways of living' in the city, and the many struggles that Moustafa identified as being part of living in Beirut[59]. When I asked Moustafa about the 'alternative' way of living in Beirut, he mentioned the idea of 'getting out of one's comfort zone' by 'knowing one's society and culture' but deciding to 'live in a different way', in a 'more open-minded way, in a way that doesn't see sectarian differences or cultural differences or differences between a man and a woman'. He then went on to mention flat or house sharing with non-family members or between non-married partners – both uncommon practices in Lebanon – and Moustafa stressed that it is illegal to live with a partner when not married, and that if the law was to be applied, these practices would be prosecuted as if they were prostitution. According to Moustafa, these practices have developed in Beirut because of the presence of foreigners, who have inevitably led to certain areas 'accepting' these ways of living. He also mentioned cycling in the city, or 'alternative' cafes such as Demo

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[59] Our conversation was in English. All my transcripts include the exact words and formulations that the participants in my research used. Where necessary, I added words into brackets, to provide more information on the content or context of the story.

where we were, as being part of the 'alternative' way of living in Beirut. When I inquired about his focus on 'foreign habits' in his conversation, and inquired if the 'alternative way' of living in Beirut was mostly influenced by foreign tendencies, Moustafa replied:

> 'No. Maybe I concentrated more about the foreigner approach, but hmm, it's mainly influenced by people who have opened their minds more, who have refused to stay connected with their cultural backgrounds [...] they don't want these roots to still affect them at the moment, because they have started realising that these roots are the reason why the city is not doing as good as it was doing back in, between 1965 up until 73 or 74. These people who are affecting, but at the same time we cannot forget that, or we cannot, yeah we cannot forget that also, that that the fact that the existence of these foreigners and their way of living is also affecting the city. It's also affecting, hmm, it's also affecting the tenants who are living over here, who started realising 'No, we shouldn't be that attached to our roots', and in a way that there is another way to survive in the city. At the same time, one of the main reasons that this alternative way of living has opened up is the fact that there is so much pressure. And the fact that it's – I am giving small details – the fact that it's impossible for me to afford my own flat, to live by my own flat. It's the fact that public transportation is super hard to use in the city, it's the fact that there's too much traffic in the city, the fact that it's an over-populated city, the fact that we have migrants from all over the world, who are coming to Beirut. The fact that hmm. Yeah, mainly, in my own personal view, that's mainly it. The fact that we exited our safe zones, the fact that we actually took a decision to not stay, in my personal experience, not to stay in the Southern suburbs, to actually get out of there, to actually, since a very long time, it has only been not a long time ago that I actually defied my, my father's point of view, that I started fighting his points of view, that he has been trying to implement on us [...] and me starting to realise that actually these sectarian separations and these sectarian agreements is the actual reason why we're not progressing forward, this is the reason why our economy is going down, [...] The fact that there is a great social differences between social classes, between the upper, middle and lower class and the fact that it is super hard now for a lower middle class to upgrade in the pyramid or go... a lower middle class is considered to be educated and to have a university degree but it's almost impossible for that person to progress. The fact that if I need to get my university degree certified, I need to call someone who knows someone who knows someone who's at the Ministry to actually certify that paper or it would take me, the normal way would never work. This is the reason why this alternative way of living or these alternative movements are popping up in the city.'

I asked Moustafa if this 'alternative way' of living only occurred in Beirut or if it was also happening elsewhere in the country, to which he replied:

> 'It's mainly only occurring in Beirut. In villages it's super hard to start getting out of your comfort zone. The people who want to get out of their comfort zones, they don't stay in their villages anymore. They're either moving into the city or migrating out of Lebanon [...] I have thought about leaving Lebanon, I have thought about leaving the city that I adore so much and I have tried moving to a different place.

What keeps bringing me back [to Beirut] the whole time are these people, the connection with the people, more than the connection with the city itself. As a functional city, it's a broken functional city, so it's not functional anymore. It's a continuous struggle every single day that you wake up and it's a continuous struggle that I am having, for example to plan one year ahead. And it's a dangerous, it's a very vital dangerous subject that we are thinking one month ahead, this is the maximum we can think ahead of us due to the fact that the simplest details is that rent for example is super expensive, I need to work two to three jobs for me to afford living to the end of the month, the fact that I am not planning ahead means that there is no stability in the city, which is part of the reasons why I am being always, there is a continuous struggle within me to stay over here or to actually just leave, to lose hope in the city and just leave. And again, the main reason that keeps bringing me back are the people, who are trying to do a difference, it's a type of hope that exists, at the same time, it's tiring. The longer the city stays like this, the longer the people who actually have hope start losing it. [...] At the same time, the reason why I think about leaving is the fact that I don't have enough freedom. Freedom is suppressed over here, on all different forms. Freedom of expression, freedom of – and I am almost 27 years old and I haven't voted once in my life, this is the simplest form of freedom and I don't have that freedom, hmm even if I vote, the voting system is broken [...] The city has changed tremendously, the longer that I stay alive in this city, the longer it's changing. It's such a volatile environment, I witnessed two wars, or invasions, and yet I strive to stay in the city but at the same time, I would never bring up my children in Beirut.'

Moustafa stressed how the city makes him feel, the mix of struggles and hope, the attachment to the people of the city, the violence that he has witnessed and gone through and the lack of freedom that he has to deal with. Beirut is the symbol of this complex mix of feelings and experiences, and the symbol of what he cannot have: stability, job security, freedom, and so on. In these two excerpts from my conversation with Moustafa, the wide range of emotions that he expressed shows both the complexity of his relationship to the city and to the past and future. In what follows, I will develop these two aspects in detail.

2.1.1. RELATIONSHIP TO THE CITY

In his book 'Spaces of Hope', Harvey starts his chapter 'The spaces of Utopia' by stating:

'I have lived in Baltimore City for most of my adult life. I think of it as my home town and have accumulated an immense fund of affection for the place and its people. But Baltimore is, for the most part, a mess. Not the kind of enchanting mess that makes cities such interesting places to explore, but an awful mess.' (2000: 133)

Harvey then names and describes all the flaws and plights of Baltimore City, describing what makes the city 'a mess', leading to a 'sense of helplessness' and to the idea that 'we the people have no right to choose what kind of city we shall inhabit' (2000: 154). Harvey then moves on to focusing on 'utopia' and the city, describing how thinking through utopia can help remake

and reimagine the cities we inhabit – for despite the limits imposed by the institutional and built environments around us, we are still tasked with the remaking of our cities, and imagination is central to that process, for 'architects erect a structure in the imagination before realizing it in material form' (2000: 159). Harvey beautifully writes that

> 'When, therefore, we contemplate urban futures we must always do battle with a wide range of emotive and symbolic meanings that both inform and muddle our sense of the "nature of our task." As we collectively produce our cities, so we collectively produce ourselves. Projects concerning what we want our cities to be are, therefore, projects concerning human possibilities, who we want, or, perhaps even more pertinently, who we do not want to become. Every single one of us has something to think, say, and do about that. How our individual and collective imagination works is, therefore, crucial to defining the labor of urbanization.' (2000: 159)

Without wanting to get into a discussion on utopianism and its potential for change here, I believe that Harvey's thought process helps to illustrate Moustafa's grappling with various emotions in relation to his city. Harvey journeys from expressing affection for his city, to despair and pain for what he witnesses and conceptualises as 'a mess', to then expressing hope – for there are different futures possible – that coexist with the 'sense of helplessness' and the sense that 'we the people' have no decision right to shape the city we inhabit. Moustafa journeys through a similar entanglement of emotions and thoughts when he describes his own self through the city's spatiality and ways of living: affection and adoration for his city are intertwined with annoyance at how 'messy' the city is, and at how difficult it is to live in the city.

Moustafa gives agency to Beirut: the city is at the centre of his story, he grants it power and potential to provide or suppress freedom, stability, sectarianism and traditions. And although Moustafa says that 'people' are central to his constant coming back to the city and to staying in the city, he does express 'adoration' for Beirut. 'The city' seems to be an independent entity in a lot of what he says: 'the city is not doing as good', 'a broken functional city', 'to lose hope in the city', 'the city has changed tremendously', 'such a volatile environment' – as opposed to identifying the reasons and actions that make the city what it is.

In Moustafa's comments, one can read tensions between hope and despair, a mix of affection and tiredness for a city which, although it provides alternatives and options for freeing oneself from their community and from sectarianism, still does not provide the freedom that Moustafa is looking for. Different layers of contradictions coexist in Moustafa's narrative in relation to his feeling of 'freedom': Beirut is, on the one hand, the city where his

freedom is suppressed and cannot be realised, and on the other hand, the place where he could actually self-emancipate, where he could explore what he calls the 'alternative way' of living, where he could actually settle in a different housing arrangement than is usually the norm in Lebanon. It is where he could experience something different to what he had experienced in the past, and where he could start questioning his father's perspectives – the city is thus both suppressive and emancipatory.

Moustafa talks about violence in the city; and the danger of not being able to plan ahead, the precariousness of his jobs and financial situation. Beirut, then, is also the place of insecurity and hardship. Moustafa uses the verb 'to survive' in the city as opposed to 'living' in the city, he insists on the 'struggle' that it is to be in Beirut every single day and he insists on 'pressure' which comes from a wide range of sources: precariousness, traffic, over-population, migration. And the pressure, also, from what he calls 'comfort zones', 'safe zones', 'cultural background' or 'roots' – all things that seem to be in opposition with 'freedom' and the 'alternative way of living' in Beirut. In that sense, Moustafa's stories also resonate with other narratives explored in previous chapters, for instance with the documentary 'Beirut Kamikaze' mentioned in chapter two, where Beirut – the city, its suburbs, and all the vices it carries – is the kamikaze, the suicidal city that kills herself, simultaneously provoking both the abstract and physical death of others.

Moustafa's perception of the city as a place of struggle is very powerful also because it stresses the sectarian perception of the city that Moustafa has, and how he associates his neighbourhood of origin with a certain way of being. When Moustafa says that people's roots and their 'cultural backgrounds' are 'the reason why the city is not doing as good as it was doing' in the 1960s and early 1970s, he is also referring to sectarianism, but although he condemns it and conceptualises it as a plight, he simultaneously reinforces it by creating a dichotomy between certain neighbourhoods, and between Beirut and 'the villages', as if there was no hybridity in each and every neighbourhood or village in Lebanon. His conceptualisation of Beirut as a sectarian city was made very clear when he said:

> 'Most of the people who come to Beirut, or read something about Beirut before coming, they think that Beirut is a harmony city where all sects live together in harmony and that they coincide together in the same region, and it's bullshit. I am sorry to disappoint everyone who I always confront and say them it is bullshit. Each sect and each religion live in a different street and there is a separation of two to three minutes between each street and the other, and this is visually present from the beginning of the tour to the end of the tour.'

This reinforces Moustafa's narrative that his way of living is 'alternative' – while all the rest of the city is divided and sectarian and people are rooted in their cultural and sectarian communities, him and people like him have distanced themselves from that. He would be an 'exception' of mingling and moving away from his family and southern suburbs in a city where separations between sects would be obvious and everywhere.

It is important to note the ways in which Moustafa's narrative of his own self overlaps with the struggles of others and of the city. In the excerpt above, Harvey also stresses the importance of the relation between identity and place: we construct ourselves through the construction of our urban environment. That is apparent in how Moustafa included his personal decisions and experience of leaving his neighbourhood in dialogue with his description of 'the city' – the narrative of his own journey is completely embedded with the description of the city, and ways of living in it. Moustafa constantly goes from stating general realities about Beirut to focusing on the particularities of his own life: in his narrative, Beirut and his own life journey are completely entangled. This is particularly obvious when he mentions the idea of getting out of one's comfort zone, of refusing 'to stay connected with their cultural backgrounds' by actually moving out of a place, a suburb, a village. I argue that by presenting the city and the country as such, and the 'alternative way of living' in reaction to sectarianism among other things, Moustafa is also constructing a narrative of himself and of how he wants to be perceived – as an open-minded, beyond-roots kind of man, and while doing so, creating another dichotomy between him and those who do live within their communities – the 'others', stuck in their sectarian ways.

2.1.2. RELATIONSHIP TO THE PAST AND FUTURE

Attention to time is crucial to illuminating Moustafa's experience of the city. Here, I want to stress two main elements that are of particular interest to my thesis's overall focus: first, Moustafa's relationship to the past is based on both a nostalgic conception of pre-1975 Beirut and on a conception of fellow Beirutis as 'living in the past'. Second, an attention to hope in his story illuminates Moustafa's own complex relationship to time: hope vacillates and corresponds to how past, present and future also vacillate in his own life.

My first point here is that Moustafa's relationship to the past has to be understood through his conceptualising of pre-1975 Beirut as a 'Golden Age', when he says: 'they don't want these roots to still affect them at the moment, because they have started realising that these roots are the reason why the city is not doing as good as it was doing back in, between 1965 up until 73 or 74.' In his narrative, roots and cultural background, i.e. sectarian communities and their divisions, are the reason why Beirut 'is not doing as good' as during its

'Golden Age'. Here one can read a combination of two of the dominant narratives that I outlined in chapters one and two: nostalgia for 'golden age' Beirut and sectarianism. Moustafa makes sense of present-day Beirut in light of what he perceives as on the one hand, a past to celebrate – golden age Beirut – and a past to discredit – the post-1975 past that would have encouraged divisions. Fellow Beirutis and other Lebanese that remain in sectarianism thus live in a more recent past that is shameful, a past that has stained Beirut – they do not share the same temporality, the same chronicity, the same reality as him. In doing so, I argue that Moustafa also reinforces his own identity narrative as someone living 'alternatively', in a way that is 'beyond' sectarianism and 'beyond' the past.

Another way in which Moustafa's emphasis on 'comfort zones' and the idea of escaping these by living 'alternatively' in the city is interesting is because it highlights the ways in which Moustafa sees both hope and lack of hope in Beirut. In his narrative, hope vacillates, it disappears and reappears: there is less hope in the city, while at the same time, there is hope in people and ways of living that are 'alternative'. Moustafa is torn between feeling hopeful and hopeless – and the future is equally as precarious as hope: there is very little planning ahead, there are very few opportunities, and the excerpt ends with him saying that he would not bring up children in Beirut – which can be seen as the ultimate expression of a lack of hope for what the future holds. So, despite his engagement and hope in movements and people that try to make a difference, losing hope – which is equated with leaving Beirut – is always an option. The absence and loss of hope create frustration and concern for the future. The changes in the city and the volatility of the environment in which he evolves are seen by Moustafa as negative – changes seem to be going only in one direction.

In what follows, I explore Naji's story with a focus on 'home' and in the conclusion to this second section, I will show how both Moustafa's and Naji's stories and their emotions illuminate the complex entanglement of place, identity and time.

2.2. NAJI: ABSENCE OF HOME

Naji is the founder and one of the three core members of 'Save Beirut Heritage' (SBH), together with Antoine and Joana whom I mentioned in chapter three. I first met Naji in November 2017 at ARTLAB, an art gallery in Gemmayzeh, in Beirut, at the opening of the exhibition 'Reconstructing Memories' that he co-created following the recent destruction of an art deco building (Medawar 651) in Gemmayzeh. Medawar 651 was opposite ARTLAB, and Naji, through SBH, had fought for years to stop its demolition, unsuccessfully. In 'Reconstructing Memories', Naji and other artists 'reconstructed' memories of the building using stones and other

remnants of the destroyed building as prompts for their art. Naji's contribution to the exhibition was an installation with a big piece of sandstone from the destroyed building, surrounded by a net, with a few tools, accompanied by a panel that read: 'the sandstone from the Medawar 651 plays the role of a memory chamber from its former space and time'. Visitors could 'use the tools to break a piece from the previous memory, take it home and transform it into a new memory' (exhibition panel).

During our conversation[60] a couple of days after the opening night, Naji told me that initially, his idea for the art installation was to be himself next to the stone, and to have a tube connected to his veins, with blood dripping on the stone whilst visitors break a piece of it. He wanted something 'more personal', to show and express his pain, but the idea was rejected by the gallery owners, for it could disturb visitors. The opening quotation to this chapter refers to that episode:

> 'My aim isn't to shock, my aim is to express the pain that I felt with all my heart for five years for that building, or for another space, for my memory or for the other memories, but nobody can feel what I have felt for all these years'

Naji wanted to showcase the embodiment of his own pain and struggle at the destruction of this building – and other buildings. Blood dripping from his own veins onto the stone would have hinted more aptly, according to him, at the sort of intrinsic suffering that one goes through when losing or leaving a place that is dear to them, and the suffering of living with the memories of those places. Medawar 651 forms, in Naji's narrative, connections with other buildings that have suffered. Indeed, his attachment to Medawar 651 has to be understood in a context where only 300 of the 4500 buildings that were classified as 'traditional' and in need of some sort of protection in the aftermath of the 1975-1990 conflicts were still standing in 2017. All others had not 'resisted speculation, the absence of a grand plan, of an urban vision and of a heritage consciousness' (Hadjithomas Mehanna 2017, my translation). Most importantly, his attachment to Medawar 651 has to be understood in the light of the loss of his childhood home, from which he, his mother and grandmother had been evicted in 2005. Below is his story of loss and absence:

> 'It's been twelve years since I left my Art Deco building in Gemmayzeh, Rue du Liban, it was a beautiful building, there are not a lot left since there used to be a lot of these buildings in the city centre but they were demolished after the war by a company called Solidere. [...] So, I've lived all my life [there], my father was on the first floor and my mother was on the third with her family. So they met in that same

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[60] Our conversation was in French. Translation to English is mine. We met at Naji's workplace, in a small shop in Gemmayzeh, that was empty and quiet.

building, they got married in the same building, I was born in the same building, I've seen all the people, the old people dying in this building, living, being born, you see... The evolution of everything that happened outside was different to the evolution inside the building. In 2005, after the death of Hariri, all the investors were very opportunistic, because Hariri's death made the price of land drop, especially in Ashrafieh, [and] near downtown, especially downtown too. This generated a boom in investment in property, but here, the owner was a big businessman in oil, with Metco, an oil company. Well, he didn't need to sell, he just needs to demolish and make new buildings, a new building for his company, you know? Now, the aim was, in 2005, at the end... mid-2005... in 2005 yeah, to leave the building. It wasn't so easy for me, for my grandmother and for my mother. We were the only ones in the building after everyone had left or had died, even my mother's brothers had left, had got married and had got apartments elsewhere. We were the only ones in the building [left] to leave, we closed the door, it was as if it was our building in the end you see? It was my playground, where I had all sorts of experiences you see, on the terrace on the roof, on the third floor where my uncles were, it was my playground you see. During those years, it wasn't like it is with the young today. The apartments, the buildings, they were the only playground for children. Me, I was born, I'm 29 now, in '88, so my teenage years weren't easy because there were wars going on, the wars of 2006, the wars before, the wars of 2003, the wars of the '90s too. So it was like a fortress you see. Of a space and a place and of an important memory in my mind, a very big space of memory in my mind, it's there, still. We left in [...] around the end of 2005. Now I live in Ashrafieh too, but until 2013 I had dreams that I was there. The dreams are always in that place, not in the new apartment, not anywhere else. It's just so you understand, you know, this connection with this building.'

Naji's account of his former house and of the memories that were created in it shows his long-lasting attachment to his childhood house. Naji's childhood building is both a symbol of lightness, safety and play, and a symbol of the uprooting and violence of eviction, of having to leave one's home. Indeed, his childhood house forms a space of safety and security in his mind – a 'fortress', disconnected from the violence that is happening outside of it – the violence of wars, but also the violence of real-estate developments. The childhood building is also associated with play and lightness – the fortress is protective but not reductive – on the contrary, it opens from the inside, it allows for a world of imagination and play to exist. Naji's mention of that 'fortress' and of the protective nature of his childhood building together with the dreams that he still has of it resonates greatly with Bachelard's assertion that

'beyond all the positive values of protection, the house we were born in becomes imbued with dream values which remain after the house is gone' and that 'a house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.' (1994: 17)

With Naji, the feelings of safety and protection are re-enacted through narrative, dreams and imagination. The protective element of the 'fortress' is also associated with family members,

family ties and roots, that create a sort of nest, in which Naji could feel grounded, safe and grow at the same time. Bachelard beautifully writes that

> 'in order to make so gentle a comparison between house and nest, one must have lost the house that stood for happiness. So there is also an alas in this song of tenderness. If we return to the old home as to a nest, it is because memories are dreams, because the home of other days has become a great image of lost intimacy' (1994: 100)

The nest, today, feels even more painfully distant because these ties have been lost – with Naji's uncles, late father and grandmother all gone, and the house left behind, and because the memories have turned into dreams.

On the other hand, the building is the symbol of uprootedness, of rupture, of the pain that remains, and of memories that haunt Naji. Naji's account is one of both loss and absence, and one of pain at the recollection of past memories. Reading through his story of attachment to his childhood home allows for a better understanding of his painful relationship to Medawar 651, and to 'other buildings' which, as he says, are suffering the same plight. All these elements resonate with Owain Jones's story when he writes about the farm where he grew up:

> 'So it has all gone, doubly – as time and as space. I get a feeling of panic, that my whole existence is thinned as the spaces of the past have been eradicated. They are mapped into my memory, re-form in my dreams, and form hybrid landscapes with other places I have known or know now.
>
> But this is a story of losses of kinds which many have faced, and in a way, which we all face, the loss of past geographical selves. It is difficult because there is so much that could be said and could be shown.' (2007: 217)

There was so much that could be said and shown, and Naji told me so little, but what he told me already hinted at the depth and intensity of feelings that his childhood building sparks. It creates 'hybrid landscapes' in Naji's mind, with buildings such as Medawar 651 and others throughout Beirut that have seen their inhabitants evicted, and that have been demolished or are at risk of being demolished. The building lives in his memory, and re-forms, re-appears in his dreams, just as Jones describes.

I would like to note here that Naji never described the building to me – I actually do not know what the building looks like, how tall or small it was and how many units it had, if it is in a loud, quiet or busy environment. I do not know how Naji's apartment was, or what his bedroom looked like. For all these details did not matter – what mattered to Naji was for me to understand the 'connection with this building' – the practices, the emotions, the people

that he links to the building, for as Bachelard wrote 'the house we were born in is an inhabited house' (1994: 14).

In what follows, I would like to explore more in detail Naji's story, deconstructing further his narrative to illustrate, on the one hand, his relationship to the city and to places of the city and on the other hand, his relationship to the past and the future.

2.2.1. RELATIONSHIP TO PLACE AND TO THE CITY

I argue that Naji's relationship to the city and to other places that are dear to him can be illuminated by focusing on two main elements of his story.

Firstly, his use of pronouns such as 'my' and 'our' to define his relationship to the childhood building shows an attachment and sense of belonging to places that are 'not his' in terms of legal ownership. Just like with the building 'Medawar 651', Naji shows his strong attachment to these places, and his sense of duty to cherish and protect both the physical buildings and the memories of them. He makes claims on buildings for they house memories, family histories, stories. Thus, claims are made on a place on the basis of their use, as well as the attachment to them, rather than the legal status of the place (tenant/owner, legal rights, and so on). Naji's attachment to places and his memories do not provide any legal right to a place or any power to influence their fate but places that have disappeared or that are no longer 'his' can be symbolically claimed or referred to using memories or objects that symbolise them. Naji kept the keys of his childhood house. Before leaving the building when he moved out, he wrote on one of its walls 'Goodbye home, hope to see you again'. The building has not been demolished (yet) or sold[61], and although he does not go there as often as he used to, the keys that he is keeping are a symbol of his attachment to the place and of the difficulty to leave it, but also a symbol of the house being his, of the senses of belonging, nesting and protecting that his childhood home brought into his life.

Secondly, and this inevitably follows from the first point and resonates with Moustafa's story, Naji's relationship to places and the city can be explored through the ways in which he narrates the story of himself in parallel with the story of the city and of places: his own self, and sense of identity, evolve with and through the materiality of the city. As Jones and Garde-Hansen state:

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[61] After 12 years, the building is still there, empty. Maybe sold to someone else, or to a company, maybe awaiting destruction. This hints to the temporalities of (re)development in the city of Beirut, that are entangled with those of finance, economy, and (geo)politics. The selling of the building was probably, for the previous owner, a way of getting rid of property – and paperwork – at a time when the political and security context in the capital was very unpredictable. In the meantime, it led to a family being uprooted for no direct, obvious reasons.

'How memory folds into the practice of ongoing identity is in complex interplay between the space and practice of the present and the spaces and practices of the past. Family life, work life, and all their spatiality and materiality (both past and present) are complex and anticipatory in the practice of identity. There are inevitably growths, transitions, losses, bereavements and joyous highlights when through memory's input, ongoing everyday life and identity become particularly powerful, traumatic and poignant' (Jones and Garde-Hansen 2012: 19).

In Naji's story, one can read that his childhood building represents the space and practice of the past: the building saw his parents meet, and get married, the building was a playground and the various spaces of the building – his apartment, the terrace on the roof, the third floor – created that sense of wholeness within the building. It was not only their own apartment in the building that was his safe zone, but the entire building, where he could roam and play around freely, which could not be the case outside of the building, elsewhere in the city.

Naji said of 'the evolution' of the building that changes outside of the building were not the same as the evolution inside of the building, but at the same time, both what was happening inside and outside of the limits of the building was influencing his life: Naji establishes a border between 'outside' and 'inside' of the building, of home – but at the same time, in his account, one reads that the fortress, home, cannot be protected fully from the outside, from violence, from investors, geopolitics, real estate concerns, and so on. In his story, political and economic forces infiltrate the intimate, and influence his life, eventually leading to him leaving his home.

2.2.2. RELATIONSHIP TO THE PAST AND FUTURE

Naji talks about 'a very big space of memory in [his] mind' to stress the importance of those practices and spaces in his present. This leads us to think about Naji's relationship to the past and future as shown through his narrative. In Naji's story, two main elements are of particular interest: firstly, his recollection of memories of the past in relation to his childhood building and secondly, his reference to dreams.

Naji's recollection of memories of the past show how particular places haunt his present and his imagination. The past seems very present in his present through the memories and recollection of the childhood building that houses his memories: materially when he refers to the actual building, the different places in the building that have seen him come to life, grow, play, suffer, and leave, and mentally, when he refers to a 'very big space of memory in [his] mind' that is 'there, still'. The past and the memories of it are not going away, they are there with him, and with us through our conversation. This resonates with the idea of the

'phantom' that needs to be taken seriously in our understanding of our ethnographic space and time, as described by Navaro-Yashin:

> 'The ''phantom'' in the attribution of the phantomic, then, has to be read for real, must be understood literally or concretely. The specter is not just a figment of the imagination, an illusion, or a superstition. In the ethnographic space and time in hand, phantoms or ghosts appear or linger in a slice of territory in the form of ''non-human objects''' (2012: 13).

In the case of my conversation with Naji, the phantoms exist through the mention of the materiality of places – the apartment, keys, a terrace, a wall, a stone. The affective presence of Naji's past is expressed through the materiality of these objects. This is important because it is through this strong attachment and connection to both the physical environment in which Naji has grown and to the memories of it that Naji has developed his activism: he has the capacity to empathise with other buildings, other stories and other memories, and also the capacity to act to safeguard them, because he himself has gone through the loss and absence of home.

The last element that I would like to stress here is Naji's reference to dreams, when he says 'until 2013 I had dreams that I was there. The dreams are always in that place, not in the new apartment, not anywhere else'. His reference to dreams is important because it allows one to understand further the entanglement of memory, imagination and emotions, and how they are equally grounded in the past, and turned towards the present and the future. The fact that Naji's dreams still take place in his childhood house eight years after leaving it is not surprising, for the childhood house is a refuge, it is reassuring and provides a mental space of stability. Again here, Bachelard illustrates the importance of this connection with a childhood building and its presence in dreams when he writes:

> '[...] we are in the unity of image and memory, in the functional composite of imagination and memory. The positivity of psychological history and geography cannot serve as a touchstone for determining *the real being* of our childhood, for childhood is certainly greater than reality. In order to sense, across the years, our attachment for the house we were born in, dream is more powerful than thought.' (1994: 16, emphasis in the text)

And further,

> 'It is on the plane of the daydream and not on that of facts that childhood remains live and poetically useful within us. Through this permanent childhood, we maintain the poetry of the past. To inhabit oneirically the house we were born in means more than to inhabit it in memory; it means living in this house that is gone, the way we used to dream in it.' (1994: 16)

Naji's childhood house has shaped him – as shown in how he describes the many moments of his life and the evolution of his life in the building – and continues to shape him, shape his imagination, his dreams, and his future, through his activism. The childhood house keeps living in him and through him, and I believe this is exemplified in Naji's proposed art installation project for Medawar 651 – the blood dripping from his vein onto the stone, the pain materialising in blood onto a symbol of loss and absence.

2.3. 'I WANT TO LEAVE, I WANT TO LEAVE NOW, I WANT TO LEAVE'

Both Moustafa and Naji are involved in projects and groups that seek to beautify and promote Beirut – Save Beirut Heritage and Alternative Tour Beirut – and they are at the same time suffering from living in the city: both struggle with Beirut and their lives there. Towards the end of our conversation, Naji became so emotional that I stopped recording. Once he indicated that I could start recording again, he stressed the fact that 'he needs to leave' and will never be able to make it in Beirut. He then said:

> 'Me, if I had a passport other than the Lebanese one, I would have left five years ago, but I cannot. I am thirty, I have my mother here, I can't. Me, I want to leave, I want to leave now, I want to leave. [...] Nobody likes me here in this city [...] I hate this country, I hate these ways of not understanding anything, people walking by a building whose façade [needs saving from dereliction] and they'd say 'Oh never mind, it's screwed, it needs to be demolished', all the people...I need to leave. [...] I am thinking about leaving, *khallas* [that's it]. I have a friend in Egypt, if I have a bit of money, I'll spend three months at his, maybe explore something new, I don't know... [...] I have to leave, I can't take it anymore.'

When I saw Moustafa a few months after our initial encounter, in the context of one of his walking tours, as he was chatting with my father, I heard him say that he was planning to leave Beirut, too. My dad encouraged him to do so.

This is to say that both Naji and Moustafa experience a strong entanglement of emotions – pain, frustration, love, adoration, hope, hopelessness and helplessness – in their relationship to their city. Their engagement in urban activism is grounded in stories of uprootedness – from a neighbourhood, a house, a community – and loss. In Moustafa and Naji's stories, we read the oppression of the city, and the struggles to remain in it. Their activism is to be found and understood in places of struggle – both in actual places in the city, and places within themselves. These personal struggles exist in relation to what the city does to people, to how the city shapes people's lives and what it inflicts upon people.

Both Moustafa and Naji's stories stress the strong entanglement of emotions, identity, memory and space/place. In this section, a focus on absence and loss has shown how

transformative these emotions are, and how they shape individuals and their relationships to places and the city. Ultimately, they talk about identity and the construction of oneself through an affective relationship to places. Places and habits of the past have a phantomic nature and keep existing in Moustafa and Naji's lives: they materialise in past and present places, neighbourhoods, buildings, as well as in 'ways of living' as shown with Moustafa – elements that can be fully grasped only when one is aware of the places and habits of the past that they respond to. In the next section, I will explore stories of nostalgia, and will start with Abdul-Halim who also focused on his own childhood house.

3. STORIES OF NOSTALGIA

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Nostalgia has been present in various ways in this thesis so far. In chapter two, I showed that the destructive reconstruction of downtown Beirut was not only disconnected from the past and the Beirutis physically, but also intellectually by ignoring Beirutis' claims, memories, experiences and stories that linked them emotionally and socially to Beirut. The grand urban plans were disconnected from Beirutis' wishes and visions for the rebuilding of their own city, as shown in Sawalha's study of place and memory in post-war Beirut (2010) cited in chapter two. Sawalha describes downtown Beirut as an example of 'prohibited spaces': 'urban sites that were originally "public" and within reach for the majority of the city residents but, because of the war and the various urban renewal projects, had become "private", that is, inaccessible and out of reach for the majority of the population' (2010: 12). According to the author, these 'prohibited spaces' became sites of nostalgia and remembrance: pre-war memories of the space were recalled to express 'feelings of loss, exclusion and helplessness in the present' by groups and individuals 'excluded from the process of reconstruction', while 'investors, developers, and governmental institutions that controlled the physical rebuilding of the city were shaping Beirut's past and history through the deployment of new meanings assigned to selected urban spaces' (Sawalha 2010: 12-13). In chapter two, I also included a section on nostalgia, where I explored various ways in which nostalgia for Beirut's past grandeur is expressed through the 'golden age narrative', both in intimate spheres and in mediatic and academic publications.

My aim in this section on nostalgia is to look at three ways in which nostalgia is present in urban activists' narratives and practices, in a way that goes beyond a melancholic description of lost place and time. The three stories below show aspects of 'reflective nostalgia' – that is, 'new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis' where the focus is on 'the meditation

on history and passage of time' (Boym 2001: 50). Indeed, the nostalgia expressed in the stories below is not an ode to a past that is supposedly lost forever, but a reflection on the presentness of past times and places, for 'reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space' (Boym 2001: 49 cited in Legg 2004: 100). It is exactly this aspect of 'reflective nostalgia' that I am interested in here, for nostalgic feelings expressed in my participants' stories in this chapter unearth a deep attachment to elements of the past, as well as a conceptualisation of time as embodied in certain places, ideas, values, experiences and relationships.

In what follows, I will first explore Abdul-Halim's account of his childhood house, which resonates with Naji's story above in various ways. I will then focus on Abir and her relationship to Dalieh, a rocky site on the West coast of Beirut. In a third subsection, I will explore picnicking as a practice of the past used to claim rights to the city. I have selected these three specific stories because they use a place, space or practice to express nostalgia for what urban activists perceive as a time that has disappeared. These stories describe locales and practices that are irrevocably changed, and that are still changing – those changes create both sorrow and determination: sorrow in relation to the ways in which things have changed, and determination because the ways in which things have changed are insufficient for the present and the future – they provoke (re)action.

3.2. ABDUL-HALIM: A CHILDHOOD HOUSE

I crossed paths with Abdul-Halim a handful of times during my fieldwork in Beirut: twice in the context of a conference, and twice in his office in 'Ayn el-Mreisse following my requests to meet for a chat,[62] and lastly at an event that he co-organised, where his architecture students were presenting their work in front of practising architects and activists (Abir among others). Abdul-Halim is a practising architect, a university lecturer, an activist and is also involved in politics. His story below resonates with Naji's account of his childhood house above, telling the story of how a house shaped his life, his emotions and relations to buildings, and influenced him in his life choices. The story initially emerged after I asked him about his own background, and what made him want to become an architect. He said, 'a box of crayons, modernism and the power of architecture'. The box of crayons was the focus of his longing as a three-year old boy, but was refused by his mother, who told him that crayons were for engineers and architects, which became the starting point for his future university and career choices. He was later gifted that box of crayons by his father and told me that he still has it

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now. The excerpt below details his relationship to his childhood home and the power of architecture. Abdul-Halim situates his story and relationship to space/place in relation to the broader context, such as what Beirut looked like when he was a child: he talked about Lebanon and Beirut in general to situate his own, personal story about a family mansion:

> 'Then, you know, my parents divorced, we moved into the mansion, and I remember, I mean I was born in the sixties. Lebanon was a fabulous, modern state in the sixties. Everything was brand new and elegant. Whether state institutions or buildings. There was a historical convergence of a national project, wealth and good taste that created amazing architecture. I mean, like the building we're in, these buildings, I mean…Lebanon in the late fifties and early sixties was just THE modern Mediterranean nation, Beirut was the shining, you know, centre of that, and I was born in that environment, everything looked gorgeous, and elegant, and modern […] that was for me the normal. […] we moved to this old mansion and suddenly, my awareness is totally shifting to old things. Suddenly, I have the cognition and the evidence to appreciate vintage materials. […] I was six years old when we moved. So after a lot of conditioning into modernist, you know, things, I suddenly, I am thrown into this beautiful old mansion which the family, you know, led by my grandmother, lovingly restored with a very good architect, and six years old I wake up in a, in a sparkling white mansion, all marble, you know, and I am staring at a fresco in the ceiling. I mean that I still remember so vividly. […] moving from a modernist apartment with low ceilings and rectangular openings, to a mansion with high ceilings, and arches, and marble, and, you know, and frescos, and trompe l'oeil… I mean, suddenly, I mean, I mean, I am six years old and I am highly sensitive to forms and colours and I am always talking about being an architect and I am in this grand space…I had, at six I had these cars that I used to drive… I could drive it indoors! Cos the reception area was so huge and we hadn't moved the furniture…you know, how Beirutis move, you know, there's a scout party that moves in, claims the place, and then furniture starts coming in so the first night, you sleep on a mattress, you pack a picnic box but there's no furniture, so you wake up in this like amazing white marble reception hall and you can drive your car and few years later I could fly my helicopter, you know I had this kind of plastic helicopter and it could fly a few meters. […] So, the power of architecture, you know, the scale, the presence, I mean, I discovered a different kind of presence that is probably more traditional, more grand, more monumental, that I had not, you know with modernism it's asymmetrical, casual, colourful, etc. whereas you know our old mansion was white marble, and pastel colours, you know, you know, a different kind of vintage. […] so my aunt who lives in an old apartment, you know, not as old as the grandfather mansion, but maybe 1920s, it's a listed building, so she said why don't you use my apartment until your apartment is ready and sleeping there, I got to reconnect physically, viscerally, with what it means to be in an old building, because, I mean, the walls are so thick and they absorb all the noise of the city. In an old building, you don't feel the noise of the city, it doesn't vibrate, you don't hear it, the doors, they're not laminated wood, they're solid wood […] you'd be in a room and you cannot tell if there are other people in the apartment […] you know old buildings are like that, so for a couple of weeks I got to sample what it feels to be in an old building, frankly, I was tired from moving, you know, the whole day of

movers, and you know, then I remember sleeping and you know, the kind of comfort you get from crawling under the comforter in winter when it's cold? The old building has that, it kind of hugs the people in it, it has that kind of 'I protect you' kind of feeling, so that's the kind of refresher, more kind of sensory connection with old buildings. I had forgotten what it feels like to live there, because OK you visit people in old buildings, but you don't sleep over, so sleeping over, you know, feeling the night, and you know, the ceilings are high, the rooms are big, so even, you know, you don't feel claustrophobic, you can spend all day…you don't have a view in old buildings because they're low, hmm, you don't get much light, because you're surrounded by high buildings, but they have an amazing kind of hugging quality to them'

In what follows, I would like to discuss two elements that illuminate Abdul-Halim's relationship to space, place and time, through an analysis of his words and emotions transmitted through his story of attachment to his childhood house. Firstly, I argue that Abdul-Halim's affective relationship to his childhood house suggests that the memories of the house are inscribed into his body, and that these memories can be re-lived when prompted by a similar environment to that of his childhood. Secondly, I argue that Abdul-Halim's affective relationship to his childhood mansion creates, through nostalgia and 'enchantment' (Bennett 2010), an impetus to appreciate 'the old' in the present and a fluctuating ability to engage – socially and emotionally – in urban activism and urban politics.

3.2.1. EMOTIONAL AND SENSORY MEMORIES OF A CHILDHOOD MANSION

Abdul-Halim's story of the childhood mansion exemplifies what Bachelard meant when he wrote that 'our house is our corner of the world. […] it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word' (1994: 4). If readers could hear Abdul-Halim's voice when he told me this story, they could hear his smile, his enthusiasm and nostalgia when he described the childhood mansion, and especially waking up in it for the first time, the playing with his car and helicopter. The universe that he was creating for himself in there, with the high walls that protected and separated him from the outside, was a whole 'cosmos', and one could spend entire days there without needing to be outdoors.

Abdul-Halim's old mansion is gone, it was bombed during the 1975-1990 wars. But this place is mapped into his memory, re-formed in his discussions with me, and potentially re-forming in his dreams, as described in Naji's and Owain Jones's accounts above. The old mansion has 'an enduring affective presence' (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 14) in Abdul-Halim's memory landscape and stories. Indeed, it left an affective trace on him, which is inscribed onto his body, which is made clear when he describes the 'hugging' quality of old buildings, his 'sensory connection' with them, the protection that they provide, and which was experienced again when he stayed at his aunt's house. These affective memories resurfaced through

spending time in such a house again. In this sense, this affective reaction to the building and the comparisons that Abdul-Halim drew with other dwelling spaces show how his childhood house is 'engraved' in his body, as described by Bachelard:

> 'But over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways, we would recapture the reflexes of the "first stairway," we would not stumble on that rather high step. The house's entire being would open up, faithful to our own being. [...] In short, the house we were born in has engraved within us the hierarchy of the various functions of inhabiting. We are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme. The word habit is too worn a word to express this passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget, with an unforgettable house.' (1994: 14-15)

The last point that I would like to make here is that Abdul-Halim's story describes sensory experiences and salient sensory memories created by buildings, such as his sense of 'crawling under the comforter in winter'. What Abdul-Halim described is *what it feels like* to be in certain places, what places do to us, and as he said, the power that architecture and places have over us. Places have agency and power:

> '[...] the environment exerts a force on human beings in its own right [...] there is something in space, in material objects, or in the environment that exceeds, or goes further and beyond the human imagination, but that produces an affect that may be experienced by human beings, all the same.' (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 18)

3.2.2. ENCHANTMENT

Abdul-Halim's story shows an awareness of the environment around us that goes beyond a human-centred approach, beyond human subjectivity, putting the materiality of buildings at the centre of his considerations. This echoes what Bennett emphasises in her study of enchantment:

> 'the figure of enchantment points in two directions: the first toward the humans who *feel* enchanted and whose agentic capacities may be thereby strengthened, and the second toward the agency of the things that *produce* (helpful, harmful) effects in human and other bodies. Organic and inorganic bodies, natural and cultural objects [...] *all* are affective.' (2010: xii, emphasis in the text)

Thus, in Abdul-Halim's story, there is a sense of nostalgia as longing for what is lost, 'a longing for what is lacking in a changed present... a yearning for what is now unattainable, simply because of the irreversibility of time' (Angé and Berliner 2014: 3). His story is also filled with enchantment, described by Bennett as a: '[...] strange combination of delight and disturbance' (Bennett 2010: xi).

Both his nostalgia and enchantment for the old mansion are a source of inspiration for action. Similarly to Naji, they are the basis of his activism, as they were the initial emotional sparks for things that he believed deserved attention, care and protection. After the 1975-1990 conflicts, Abdul-Halim was involved in mapping old and heritage buildings in Beirut, making proposals for which ones should be or needed to be saved. That was the beginning of his activism in and for Beirut, in 1997. Indeed, he became involved in activism after his efforts to map Beirut, and proposals to include this mapping into urban planning for the city, were totally ignored by the planning authorities. This resonates further with Bennett's work:

> '[...] moments of sensuous enchantment with the everyday world – with nature but also with commodities and other cultural products – might augment the motivational energy needed to move selves from the endorsement of ethical principles to the actual practice of ethical behaviours' (Bennett 2010: xi)

I argue that in Abdul-Halim's case, the practice of ethical behaviour lies in his activism for the protection of Beirut's built heritage, as well as his engagement in civil society coalitions for a number of political, social and urban causes. The phantoms of his childhood – 'in the shape of built and natural environments, survive and challenge the agencies geared to phantasmatically transform a territory' (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 15): they have exerted and still exert a force and power in shaping his actions to oppose changes to Beirut that do not correspond to his vision of the good city. Abdul-Halim's experience of activism epitomises the link between time, sensory and emotional experiences and moral actions: he describes his engagement in activism as one that evolved with time, through periods of disillusion and lack of motivation. His 'post-war' motivation to save Beirut's old buildings, once confronted with the refusal of those in power to listen and take into account his work, dissipated and led to 'disillusion'. He then went through a period of ten years of 'not doing much' in terms of activism, until Antoine (another of my participants) called him in 2013 to ask if he wanted to get involved in a campaign against the construction of a motorway that would cut through one of Beirut's neighbourhoods. Abdul-Halim agreed, and said that he 'went back to things that are close to [his] heart', and this led to more involvement in the politics of space and place in Beirut, including in the literal sense of engaging in the political process through the nascent political group Beirut Madinati. When I first met Abdul-Halim in November 2017, he was in an ecstatic state in relation to his political and social engagements. He was cheerful, hopeful and very optimistic about the future. A few months later, when we met again in May 2018 – a few days

after the parliamentary elections that took place on the 6th May 2018 (the first in nine years)[63] – Abdul-Halim's mood was completely different, tainted with disillusion again:

> 'We're at an all-time low, on every front […] so, morale is very low, with the civil society, Beirut Madinati, within everybody who participated in elections, even there was a major blow to the waterfront cause recently, because the outgoing council of ministers approved two major projects on the coast […] we're settling in a new kind of 'business as usual' that has been now legitimised by elections. I mean, civil society could previously accuse the parliament of not being legitimate because they had extended their mandate, you know, unilaterally. But now that they crafted the elections in a way that will legitimise them […] basically there's a general disregard to public opinion […] civil society now is divided, is disseminated, you know, internally, Beirut Madinati is a very sick institution now, mass resignations… […] Helene, when people like Antoine tell me 'why? What happened?', I tell them 'Santa Claus doesn't exist', you know, Beirut Madinati was the Santa Claus of politics and… finally we know. […] this is the general mood now.'

This last quotation shows how motivational energy fluctuates with time, through enchantment and disenchantment with everyday worlds. Agency and motivation to engage in and for ethical principles indeed find roots in the enchantment described above. Abdul-Halim's fluctuating motivation and activism show that agency and action struggle in the face of everyday disenchantment.

In the following subsection on nostalgia, I focus on Abir and the Dalieh of Raouche, to show how nostalgia and the past are used in urban activism to spark action and claim rights onto a place.

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[63] That resulted in the re-election of the same (men) in power. It also resulted in divisions within Beirut Madinati, the nascent political group in which Abdul-Halim was involved, for some of them wanted to run for parliamentary elections, while others thought it was too early. Abdul-Halim resigned then.

3.3. ABIR AND THE DALIEH OF RAOUCHE

FIG. 8 The rocks at the Dalieh of Raouche (source: HMA)

As I wrote in chapter four, architect, urbanist and activist Abir is part of two activist/research groups in Beirut: Dictaphone Group and The Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche, though her work with 'Public Works Studio' is her official job. Abir co-initiated The Civil Campaign to Save the Dalieh of Raouche in 2013, whose *raison d'être* lies in the following lines that open their 2015 campaign booklet:

> 'As a civil coalition of individuals and nongovernmental organizations invested in the safeguarding of Beirut's livability, we have come together to advocate for the protection of the city's sea-front façade as a shared-space, open access zone to be used by all city-dwellers and visitors in a civil, yet unscripted form. We are propelled by a shared love of the city in its social and ecological diversity but also an uncontrollable urge to enshrine democratic and inclusive processes of decision-making in the production and organization of the everyday spaces of Beirut. We take issue with those calling Beirut an ugly city and mourning its once beautiful face. Instead, we perceive current disfigurations as momentary embodiments of the greed that has motivated building processes in the city. Our message is directed to all city dwellers; we invite everyone to join us in struggling for her/his right to the city, a city where private capital cannot trump the desires of the urban majorities in enlarging and improving the city's shared commons.' (Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche (Dalieh hereafter) 2015: 1)

'Dalieh' is a natural site on the West coast of Beirut. It includes two rocks in the sea and a rocky, sloping beach that extends from the shore into the sea. 'Dalieh' in Arabic refers to hanging plants, so the site is called 'Dalieh of Raouche' because the terrain 'slopes gently towards the sea' from Sakhret el-Raouche (Dalieh 2015: 2). The site has been used historically as a public space of encounter and became at risk of being privatised and destroyed in the summer of 2014 when:

> 'fishermen were evicted, their stalls and restaurants demolished, replaced with stacks of large cement blocks highlighting further reclamation of the sea, and a new fence [limiting] access to the area (and the sea) and obstruct[ing] the view.' (Dalieh 2015: 3)

In 2015, Dalieh and Ramlet el Bayda – the last public beach in Beirut – were the 'only two rocky and sandy sites that remain[ed] of Beirut's natural untamed landscape heritage, still accessible to the public.' (Dalieh 2015: 13). In their campaign booklet, the group claimed that Dalieh

> 'has always been a place for swimming, promenading and fishing that is engraved in the memory of Beirut and the Beirutis, a landmark and a landscape heritage ensemble that is of ecological and social significance.' (Dalieh 2015: 13)

This quotation shows the interconnectedness between a place that is still here in the present, still existing, but because it is 'threatened' by potential damage and changes, or already going through these changes as is the case for Dalieh, is simultaneously the focus of nostalgia over their evolution, and possible disappearance. Nostalgia for the site is looking forward, grounded in the future and in what *could* happen to the site. This is uncertain and undefined but based on perceptions, imagination and previous experiences of private investments and subsequent developments disfiguring urban spaces. These fears for the future play a role in creating that nostalgia; it is not simply what the site was or has been in the past.

Nonetheless, a key part of activists' argument is that the future of Dalieh should be based on its historical uses and their importance, both in the city and lives of Beirutis. The use of 'always' in the quotation above gives a sense of longevity and paints an idea of the site having been untouched until that threat in 2014. It identifies that threat to the site as a sudden turn of events, and a sudden change to a previously communal use of the site, open to all. Furthermore, the suggestion that Dalieh is 'engraved in the memory of Beirut and the Beirutis' and is a 'heritage ensemble' implies that Dalieh is almost sacred and is thus grounded too deeply in the lives of the city and its peoples to allow any kind of destruction or change to the site. This use of the past and of memory resonates with what Sawalha described in her case study of fishermen in 'Ayn el-Mreisse (Beirut):

'[...] the fishermen did not possess any documents to legitimate their claims to the port. Instead, they used their memories of the port to legitimize their attachment to the place and to argue for their spatial rights. [...] The fishermen sincerely believed that their knowledge of the sea and their attachment to the fishing port should allow them to continue using it.' (2010: 71)

Dalieh's past uses occupy the imagination of the activists involved in saving it and finding new uses for it: the booklet is replete with old pictures of Dalieh, of the site packed with people picnicking, swimming, fishing, boat riding, and so on. It also includes a mythological story and historical facts about Beirut to ground focus and activism, claiming that

'by eliminating [Beirut's] marine geology we eliminate the mythological memory of the emergence of the city, and the movement of its people through human history. These are the remnants of the foundations of knowledge, science and unique philosophies, tested by the peoples of the region in different epochs, in these sites' (Dalieh 2015: 33)

Thus, in the case of Dalieh, it is the fact that it is a 'place of the past' that makes it an important 'place of the future'. It is Dalieh's roles and functions in the past that provide legitimacy for contemporary activists' claims for the future. By defining the history of Dalieh as mythical, activists also define themselves and their fight to protect Dalieh: the myth is spatially near – embodied in the landscape of Dalieh – and provides an anchor for their struggles. The mythological memory that is mentioned in the booklet serves to glorify the site, further justifying the need to protect it, for it defines the identities of both the city and its inhabitants.

Abir's account of her relationship to Dalieh below (excerpt from my conversation with her in November 2017)[64] describes these complex relationships between the uses of a place and its status in the past, present and future, as well as the complex evolution of relationships to places:

'I always really enjoyed nature in the city and enjoyed places that are not scripted, places that I feel a certain amount of, like, freedom, and like organic behaviour [...] Totally opposite to a mall, so I've always liked going to these sites. Now, and, this has never stopped, whether before campaigning or after campaigning. But what is sad is that a lot of us, our relationship to Dalieh itself has sort of changed, because the site is in quite a bad condition, so we've been going, we've been going to it less and less and also, without consciously doing it, our relationship to these sites has become a relationship of activism more than a relationship of, like, a person to a site, hmm I think a lot of us try to break this thing and try to go and just enjoy these sites, but it's very difficult. Because when I go there, apart from enjoying it, I

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[64] Abir and I met at Mansion, a shared communal and creative space in Zuqaq al-Blat in Beirut, where Public Works' office is. Our conversation was in English. As mentioned in chapter four, I had met Abir for the first time during the 'Beirut Exchange' in the summer of 2015. I saw her a few times during my fieldwork at various events.

don't stop thinking about what we should be doing and what we could have been doing, and… you know. So, it's sad in some ways but I think it was inevitable, like… Dalieh stopped being what it used to be the day it was fenced. So, we can never imagine that Dalieh would become, would go back to what it used to be. Because what it used to be, it was this invisible site in the city, this informal site, where people would escape to. Now, everybody knows about Dalieh because of the campaign. It'll never be what it used to. It's going to be something else; we just need to make sure that this something else is, is a communal place and is a place that respects users, respects cultural history and respects its natural features.'

In Abir's story, one can read the fear and uncertainty of what can potentially happen to the site in the future, as well as how her involvement in trying to save the site has completely transformed her relationship to and perception of it – her experience of the site is potentially forever changed due to the threats posed to the site and to her involvement in trying to save it from private investors. Despite the sadness and discouragement expressed by Abir, one can also read aspiration and imagination directed towards the future: she is not expecting Dalieh to become (again) what it used to be, and she recognises that it will be something different – she does embrace the fact that the site will evolve, and that resonates with Boym's definition of reflective nostalgia cited above. Indeed, in the past of Dalieh, there is hope and imagination for a different future.

The damage already caused to Dalieh is a source of sadness, too: Abir mentions the fencing of the site as something that changed it completely: 'Dalieh stopped being what it used to be the day it was fenced'. The fence around Dalieh was a symbol of the future damage that was going to be done to the site, the loss of how Abir knew the site, how she had experienced it. It was also the symbol of a new border that made Dalieh inaccessible to the public. Later during our conversation that day, Abir mentioned that the fence had been taken down by activists in the summer of 2015 during the 'garbage crisis' and that 'not a single person criticised' that action back then. That fence then, was not a fixed border, but it created a limit, a frontier in activists' minds, as well as a reason and a motivation to (re)act. The symbolism of the fence thus lies in the fact that the border here is both a barrier to certain actions (accessing Dalieh, fishing, bathing, picnicking on the site, and so on) and a stepping stone to others (a civil campaign to save the site, to think about the site differently, to imagine it differently, and a wake-up call to the fact that although Dalieh had been accessible all these years, its legal status was not one of a public space, and so on). The fence could have been taken down considerably earlier than in the summer of 2015, but activists left it there – perhaps because the materiality of the fence created power and a form of deference within them, until the turmoil of 2015 gave activists room for a reaction towards something they despised. The

fence was also the symbol of ownership and property, even though it was known, way before the campaign started, and way before the first evictions, that Dalieh was private on paper.

FIG. 9 Two pictures of the Dalieh of Raouche (source: booklet 'Campaign to Save the Dalieh of Raouche')

3.4. Picnicking as a Radical Act of Protest

Urban practices that have disappeared and/or evolved are also remembered through talking about places that housed and promoted these practices. These places locate memories of (lost) practices. Here I focus on picnicking practices that have mostly disappeared in contemporary Beirut. These practices, these get-togethers, appear to haunt urban activists' imaginations of the ideal city, as well as their memories of what Beirut used to be like, and what made it enjoyable.

Several participants mentioned picnics as a social practice whose disappearance they regretted, which they linked to the increasing disappearance of (green) public places, including the privatisation of the coast, and more generally to a lack of interest by state officials in addressing the absence of places of leisure in Beirut. My own mother, when talking about her pre-1975 family life, always mentions picnicking as an activity that she missed once it became impossible to practice post-1975. Her reminiscences of picnics include the freedom and the possibility of discovering new regions and places in and outside Beirut over the weekends, going on day trips, having fun outdoors and spending quality time with her family. Throughout my research, picnics were presented as a popular public practice that was accessible to all, and the current absence of possibilities for picnicking is seen as a deficiency of the city. I argue that the recurring mention of picnics by family members and urban activists is significant: picnics are a link to the past and the memories of them trigger emotions that are easy to relate to. Indeed, picnics have a seductive, nostalgic quality attached to them, for they represent lightness, fun, family and childhood, time off, relaxation, warm weather, sharing food and playing. The longing for picnics and the regret over their disappearance are a longing for these moments and emotions that they represent.

In a piece titled 'Making Spaces for Communal Sovereignty: the Story of Beirut's Dalieh', Abir mentions picnics several times, situating the social practice in a wider analysis of rights in and to the city, against official decisions regarding the uses of the city:

> 'The mayor listed a wide array of "undesirable" activities he believed would dominate the park if it were open: picnicking, walking on the grass, smoking nargilahs, kissing, and engaging in political violence' (Saksouk-Sasso 2015: 296)[65]

Further, Abir stresses the importance of picnicking in the practice of Dalieh too:

> '[...] although Dalieh is neither a park nor public property, it is one of the main spaces for the public in the city. The area boasts a number of informal seashore

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[65] Here, Abir is referring to Horsh Beirut or the Pine Forest.

kiosks and a steady stream of visitors enjoying the sea, picnicking, swimming, bathing, and strolling.' (Ibid.: 303)

The fact that a site has been used as a picnic destination is also an argument for protecting it and defending it. Picnicking reminds us of play and childhood: it is symbolic of the construction of family groups, of the safety and freedom of childhood, and of communities and group belonging. Reclaiming picnics is thus a way to demand the lightness, safety and freedom of childhood to be present in the city. Thus picnicking – supposedly a mundane, popular, fairly apolitical act – becomes a political statement, a way of claiming and reclaiming the city 'from below', as Abir documents:

> 'Since the 1940s, countless stories attest to Dalieh as a picnic and outing destination for families on holidays and Fridays' and further, 'recently, many people frequently cross the fence of a privately owned green piece of land overlooking the sea to have picnics.' (Saksouk-Sasso 2015: 306-307)

The idea of 'picnic as protest' was also reaffirmed in my discussion with Joana[66], in November 2017, where she described a 'guerrilla picnic' initiative that she got involved in with both Nahnoo and Save Beirut Heritage as an awareness action to demand the re-opening of Horsh Beirut:

> 'it was like patches of green grass all around Beirut where people would do a picnic or stuff like that [...] I led the thing actually for Save Beirut. We took the Gemmayzeh part, the Saint Nicolas stairs, you know the platforms, we took several platforms, we put the patches, it was awesome. [...] And it was cool because people were playing cards, dogs you know... And it was small, but you know, kids were just doing things'[67]

The idea of a 'guerrilla picnic' subverts the play, lightness and childhood usually associated with picnics, and as shown further, contributes to the construction of an activist community.

Indeed, more recently, this idea of 'picnic as protest' was again enacted during the *thawra* – the revolution – in November 2019. The picnic protest *'khibez w meleh'* (bread and salt) took place on the Corniche and in Zaituna Bay (a privatised and exclusive area on the

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[66] As introduced in chapter four, Joana is a full-time employee of the NGO Nahnoo, and one of the three main members of 'Save Beirut Heritage'. She grew up in Paris and has Syrian/Lebanese parents. She moved to Beirut with her parents in 2009. She had visited Beirut to see family and friends before living there, but as she put it, visiting and living there are not the same things. Joana and I met in Beirut in November 2017 and had a two-hour recorded conversation in the courtyard of an art exhibition centre. Our conversation was mostly in English, with some French and Arabic words woven in her speech.

[67] Joana is referring to Nahnoo's 2012 series of 'guerrilla picnics' events. The first event invited 'citizens and the media to a public picnic in the closed park, without the event being explicitly authorized by the municipality' and the second event – that Joana mentioned explicitly – involved a coalition of 12 NGOs that organised picnics all around Beirut: squares of green grass are laid out across the city, people bring chairs, food and games to make use of these patches as if they were an actual park' (Nahnoo 2018).

Beirut coast consisting of cafes and restaurants, as well as a yacht marina and a car park, among other things). No marching was organised: the protest was all about occupying spaces of the city for a picnic and sharing food. One of the co-organisers described the picnic protest in relation to past practices and past understandings of the city:

> 'we are celebrating something that all Lebanese used to have. [...] every Sunday, families of all religions and social classes packed their food and got together at a... public place. We didn't even think of them as that.' (Middle East Eye 2019)

Thus, what is now presented as a unifying and previously common and widespread practice – which has become rare and difficult to practice in Lebanon – has become a symbol of activism and protest.

The last point that I would like to make here is that picnicking as re-enacted and reclaimed by urban activists represents a conceptualisation of urban space that goes beyond the private/public divide. It is through this lens that I look at picnicking as a radical act of protest, that is grounded in a mourning for a social and urban practice that has disappeared from the landscapes of the city. The places – Horsh Beirut and Dalieh, among others – that have housed these practices in the past have become the symbols of these practices, and they haunt urban activists' imaginations, memories and dreams of what 'a good city' is and what it should provide. Places like Horsh Beirut and Dalieh contain, defend and foster the tangible imaginative potential of places and urban practices.

3.5. NOSTALGIA ROOTED IN THE FUTURE

The stories of urban activists explored in this section on nostalgia shed light on various aspects of their nostalgic relationships to the city and its various places and sites. Nostalgia goes beyond a 'golden age' narrative, mourning a once grand Beirut gone forever and instead finds creative potential in looking back and reminiscing about past places, but is also grounded in a concern for the future, and the future of places.

In this section on nostalgia, I showed that urban activists' use of 'the past' is inclusive and positive: in 'the past', there is inspiration for change, for preservation, for celebrating culture and cohesion. The past is a source of melancholia and pride all at once. Urban activism is rooted in a form of nostalgia that does not look at the past with regret or glorification – nor does it lead activists to want to preserve what is left from 'the past' for the mere idea of preserving what is left from it. Urban activism in Beirut opposes the idea of a past that should be left behind or that should be a source of shame. It is a form of nostalgia that forms the basis for clear political and societal projects. I argue that Beiruti urban activists' nostalgia offers

new, constructive ways of 'dealing with the past' that are deeply grounded in present-day struggles and future projects. It is a form of nostalgia that is rooted in the future: it enables the past to inspire present and future projects. The past – storied and shared with me – became present in my conversations with Abdul-Halim, Abir, and also with Naji, similarly to what Lems describes about the sharing of past stories with a participant: 'the lightness and homeliness of this time felt ghostly present, provoking a sense of bittersweet enjoyment from revisiting a time that was irretrievably past' (2016: 428) and further:

> 'the nostalgic experience [...] speaks of an ambiguous temporality that is past and present, remembered and imagined, faraway and here, all at once. While a sense of discontinuity between past and present plays into these dynamics, Halima's experience also highlights nostalgia's potential in re-creating temporal continuity and stability. Instead of reading her nostalgic look back to her childhood as an escape or a refusal to deal with the present, it can be understood as a direct and active engagement with the world she is confronted with here, now [...]'. (2016: 430)

In this section, nostalgia and its 'ambiguous interplay between nostos (return home) and algos (pain)' (Lems 2016: 435) thus shed light on some of the everyday complex temporalities created through the presence of the past into the present and the future. Nostalgia thus questions the limits of linear and cyclical times, and provides ways of thinking about the self in time – simultaneously in the time of the interview, the time of the memory or story shared, and the time of the future, where memory leads to.

4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have explored stories of place, memories and emotions. The stories selected in this chapter and the relationships and analyses drawn from them are far from exhaustive. Instead, I see them as snapshots of ever-changing realities and experiences. These stories were about relations that are always in the making. Time plays a central role in shaping these relationships: both in terms of the events that take place during a specific period, and in terms of the inevitable passing of time that shapes memories, emotions and stories.

I acknowledge the fact that these observations, stories and emotions emerge from my own reading of my participants' words. It is possible that they used words that did not match their actual emotions, or their affective and physical reactions to the world around them. I am not able to comment on the intensity of the emotions described in this chapter, or on their life spans. My conversations with urban activists in Beirut were never about emotions or temporality as such: instead, words and expressions of emotions and temporality emerged in all my conversations and have become central elements though my reading of these

transcripts. It could be that these emotions – that now carry a sense of rigidity and permanence as words have been ascribed onto them – were just passing through.

This chapter shows that there is a complex world of emotions and memories in relation to space, place and the city, where the past lingers in the present. The loss, absence and nostalgia explored in this chapter illustrate the complex appropriation and personalisation of complex, larger-scale issues into the quotidian of the urban activists presented in this chapter. The political is and becomes intimate and it is through an analysis of the stories and emotions of urban activists that I have explored the interrelations between the intimate and the political in Beirut. The emotional reactions of urban activists to the world around them fundamentally shape who they are and how and why they act.

The first section on absence and loss showed the struggles associated with the city, and the role that the surroundings play in shaping individuals' experiences and emotions. The second section on nostalgia, explored through Abdul-Halim, Abir and the practice of picnicking stressed the forward-looking use of the past, important to contemporary and future imaginings of Beirut. Through the re-enacted practice of picnicking, people reclaim their collective and individual rights to the city, and to city life.

This chapter sought to provide a response to the question 'what do emotions reveal in the stories of urban activists, what do they tell us about their relationships to their city, to the past and the future, and about their engagement in urban struggles?' The partial response to this question – for more emotions and more stories will emerge in the following chapters – lies in three main elements.

Firstly, the stories and emotions explored in this chapter revealed a deep, visceral attachment to places of childhood, be they homes, mansions, or picnicking spots. The places of childhood are associated with safety, security, play and imagination, and there is a central entanglement of emotions, memory, imagination and place in the stories of my research participants, that is even more salient when places of childhood – and their loss – are mentioned. The sharing of the emotions related to these places has been essential in my conversations with urban activists, and essential to my understanding of their relationship to places, to their city, and to the past. As Bachelard writes:

> 'by approaching the house images with care not to break up the solidarity of memory and imagination, we may hope to make others feel all the psychological elasticity of an image that moves us at an unimaginable depth.' (1994: 6)

And I firmly believe that the transmission of emotions through stories and writing about them help create a web of connections between people, places and practices to protect the places that we believe make us who we are.

Secondly, urban activists described Beirut as a space they do not feel they belong to, that has not been designed for them, for people 'like them' as described by Moustafa, Naji or Abir, but for some kind of political and economic elite that they do not feel represented by. The stories describe a love/hate relationship with Beirut, and an urge, a longing for a sense of belonging, while at the same time despising what Beirut represents, and does to them. There really is a sense of having been ripped off, of having been deprived of something that should belong to them, be dedicated to them. These stories illuminate a longing for the places of childhood, and this is where dreams and imagination have been hugely important. Indeed, these places of childhood are recreated in stories and dreams, and are re-imagined through activist practices: trying to save a building that is about to be demolished, re-creating the memories of a demolished building, taking people on tours to show them the beauty of one's city, overthrowing a fence or picnicking in different places in the city.

Thirdly, the stories and emotions explored in this chapter reveal relationships to time that are complex. Naji described the overwhelming presence of past memories and images of his former house in his present life, and how past struggles remain in his present life in the form of pain; Moustafa showed how his past experiences of the city have completely shaped his life choices, and how he is trying to escape from his past, to cut roots and ties with his neighbourhood of origin through living in an 'alternative way'. Abdul-Halim showed the bittersweet presence of the past in his life: some aspects of his past, such as his childhood mansion, are a source of nostalgia, whereas more recent past events, such as his activist disillusions, are a source of struggle and disenchantment. Abir expressed pain and sorrow at how the city changes, and how her relationship to the places that she loves is changing with them. Through picnicking practices, activists put forth a demand for practices of the past to be present in the present and future of the city. All the stories and emotions in this chapter stress a relationship to time that goes beyond any form of linearity or cyclicity: past, present and future intertwine all the time, in various ways – through narratives, activist practices, dreams, stories, memories, everyday experiences of the city and all the emotions that make us relive and re-experience past events. In the following chapter, I will explore that temporal complexity more in detail through an analysis of rhythms in and of the city of Beirut.

CHAPTER SIX:

RHYTHMICITIES IN BEIRUT

BRUSSELS. JULY 2020. INTRODUCTION

In chapter five, I analysed stories and emotions that emerged from my conversations with urban activists in Beirut. Through an exploration of loss, absence and nostalgia in my respondents' stories, I suggested that urban activists' narratives provide alternative and nuanced ways for thinking about the presence of the past in the present and the future, as well as the presence of the past in the city. That was the first facet of my response to my overarching research question: 'how do urban activists' narratives inform our understanding of the contestation over space, place, the city, time and the past in post-1990 Beirut?' Indeed, thinking about and through emotions allowed for a consideration of 'the past' and the city as something that is appropriated, reclaimed and felt individually in various and complex ways. Ultimately, the recognition of the existence of diverse emotional experiences of the city and of the past enabled a reconsideration of the dominant discourses around the past, memory and the city presented in chapters one and two.

In this chapter, I add another facet to my analysis: rhythms. I argue that by looking at and recognising the complex and plural rhythmicities of Beirut and of the Beirutis, one can illuminate the gap that exists between, on the one hand, models of temporality and urban analysis based on sectarianism and violence, and on the other hand, those lived by urban activists in Beirut. In this chapter, I argue that an attention to rhythms and to personal experiences of rhythmicity illuminates further the inadequacy of a scholarship dominated by geopolitical and macro discourses of sectarianism, violence and trauma. Instead, an attention to lived experiences of rhythms illustrates further the various ways in which a specific urban environment is understood and appropriated at an intimate level differently by different people.

The three rhythmic themes that I wish to explore in this chapter are: status quo, impending doom and urgency. I will explore how these three themes that coexist in physical, social and political spheres are experienced, reproduced, narrated and reclaimed in urban activists' stories, as well as my own. In the remainder of this introduction, I introduce my understanding and approach to rhythms.

* * *

Why attend to rhythms? Lefebvre, in 'Rhythmanalysis' wrote: 'Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm' (2004: 25). Further, he added that rhythms *connect* 'space, time and the energies that unfold here and there' (Ibid.: 28). He thus suggested that we should 'listen to the rhythms of the city'. Following that call, Crang suggested that 'it may be we need to refigure the idea of the urban not as a singular abstract temporality but as the site where multiple temporalities collide [...]' and that we should 'think through everyday rhythms as a multiplicity, forming distinctive concordances' (2001: 189). In the context of this thesis, rhythms are thus an essential tool to help us think about the connections between spatial and temporal experiences of the city; 'everyday temporal structures and processes that (re)produce connections between individuals and the social' (Edensor 2010: 2).

It is in this sense that I understand rhythmicity as a multiplicity – the assemblage of rhythms, tempos, times, movements, energies, senses and flows that characterise places and beings. 'Distinctive concordances' sums up beautifully the complex entanglement of differences and similitudes that rhythms allow us to consider. Indeed – rhythms are about movement and change as much as they are about repetition and similarities (Edensor 2010: 2): for example, in the rhythms within and outside of the body that happen through speech, the senses, breathing, muscles, or pulses that regulate – and deregulate, at times – the body and life (Edensor 2010: 4-5). The body is thus essential in understanding urban life, for

> 'the senses mediate our contact with the world. In urban environments, this means that public life is first and foremost experienced through the sensory body [...]' (Degen 2010: 23)

Individuals' spatio-temporal dimensions of the city are entangled with rhythms: they happen in relation to the urban fabric, urban rhythms and urban landscapes[68], for one's own rhythmic experience is influenced by the movement and rhythms of other beings, places and objects

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[68] Here, I use a 'peopled definition' of 'landscape' in the sense of 'phenomenological landscapes': 'where the time duration is measured in terms of human embodied experience of place and movement, of memory and expectation' (Bender 2002: 103).

(Lefebvre 2004: 18-19). Environmental and weather movements such as rain, sun, heat, wind and the seasons will also rhythm the body, the city, social interactions; and rhythmicity is also about social and cultural rhythms: diurnal/nocturnal distinctions, calendars, celebrations, religious holidays, school and bank holidays (Conlon 2010: 72).

As suggested at the end of chapter five, emotions will stay with us throughout the rest of the thesis. Understanding what architecture and the city *do to us*, and how they *affect us*, is indissociable from an attention to rhythms, as it is from an attention to emotions, time and memory. Pallasmaa suggested in 'The Eyes of the Skin' that:

> '[...] architecture is engaged with fundamental existential questions. All experience implies the acts of recollecting, remembering and comparing. An embodied memory has an essential role as the basis of remembering a space or a place. We transfer all the cities and towns that we have visited, all the places that we have recognised, into the incarnate memory of our body. Our domicile becomes integrated with our self-identity; it becomes part of our own body and being.' (2012: 76)

Following Pallasmaa's argument, I also understand rhythms as an essential part of the bodily experience of architecture and cities. My sensory reactions to the city are, without any doubt, entangled with my memories of the city; for they transform the moment by linking it to past moments, past sensory experiences (Degen and Rose 2012).

Urban rhythms operate in similar ways to those of the body: a city slumbers, a city has a pulse[69], sleeps, awakens, gets busy, messy, reaches fever pitch, or boiling point, a city roils[70], a city moves, a city can be 'dead'. Thus, rhythmicity is also a complex combination of bodily and environmental elements that interact to create a feel for a place, as described by Edensor:

> 'Spaces and places thus possess distinctive characteristics according to the ensemble of rhythms that interweave in and across place to produce a particular temporal mixity of events of varying regularity. Such multiple rhythms are dynamic, producing an everchanging, dynamic time-space, or, where place appears to be stable, they disguise its endless maintenance through the serial reproduction of its consistencies, through the reproduction of the changing same.' (2010: 69).

This is significant because it illuminates the idea that cities do not consist of one rhythmicity in one place; they are a multiplicity of rhythmicities in various places. Also, the suggestion that movement and change do not only happen in a sort of frenzy is important, for changes also

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[69] See, for instance: 'Urban Pulse: Capturing the Rhythm of Cities' (Miranda et al. 2017).

[70] See, for instance, the CNN article 'How a Lebanese city was pushed over the edge' where it is stated that the Lebanese city of Tripoli 'roils with violent demonstrations': https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/02/middleeast/lebanon-tripoli-hunger-protests-coronavirus-intl/index.html

happen in what can seem or what can be perceived as stasis, as I will explore below with the narratives around 'status quo' in Beirut.

Geopolitics, political and economic changes will also influence people and city's rhythms, so will state-imposed rhythms, such as curfews, lockdowns, working days, or even pension age. Imposing rhythmicity on groups of people is one way of controlling them, controlling their bodies in space and time, for influencing and controlling temporality and rhythmicity is power and has the potential to create norms, exclusion and oppression:

> 'Nations are held together by popular conceptions of shared times which often function to exclude minorities and repress their actual histories, while class antagonisms are partly characterised through ideas of productive time, exchange value and leisure time.' (Lawrence and Churn: xii)

Indeed, rhythms are also key to the politicising, policing and controlling of the city. An example of that, in the Lebanese context, are the curfews imposed since 2013 on Syrian citizens (who are often refugees) residing in Lebanon:

> '[t]he curfews are typically announced with a large banner erected in a main street, outlining the times during which Syrians, foreigners, or foreign workers are not allowed to be outside or gather in large groups. The banners, which address 'foreigners' and 'foreign workers', are widely understood to refer to Syrians.' (Human Rights Watch 2014)

The curfews are one way in which the Syrians residing in Lebanon have their time and their freedom of decision and movement controlled through physical and temporal constraints.

Another important asset of an attention to rhythms, in the context of my thesis, is that through rhythms and time, through rhythmicities that are claimed, reclaimed and created, a sense of groupness and sense of belonging can be created:

> '[...] new rhythmic groupings may be emerging, not mapping on to the image of stable, permanent (residential) communities, but transient, episodic affinities and comings together – what Maffesoli (1996) termed neo-tribes. [...] The rhythms of the city thus include the pulsing formation of these intensities and affinities as collective groups – and their dissolution, fragmentation and reformation.' (Crang 2001: 191)

This last quotation is important, especially in the context of Beirut, where, as shown in chapters one to three of this thesis, groupness and senses of belonging have mostly been associated with sectarian groups – as if they were all-encompassing and representative of all facets of people's experiences of time-space in Beirut. Looking at rhythms allows us to think about the collectives created through rhythms as not necessarily super-imposed, formal or set groups

of people. I argue that sharing a form of temporality and rhythmicity with others has the potential to – even if only temporarily – provide a sense of belonging, imaginary or real.

THE LIMINALITY OF MY POSITION AS A RESEARCHER IN BEIRUT

In my research, through my wanderings and walks around Beirut, through my many visits, and my conversations with urban activists and others, my sensitivity and ability to sense rhythms have increased: the rhythms of the city, the variations in rhythms and tempos, the rhythms of day/night, the various paces of walking, or driving, or being in a taxi, my constantly changing feeling that things were going either way too fast or way too slowly, the sense that I was missing out, that too many things were happening at the same time, that I couldn't keep up.

My bodily, sensory and affective experiences of the rhythms of Beirut are inseparable from my writing on rhythms in and of Beirut. As Lefebvre suggested, 'the theory of rhythms is founded on the experience and knowledge [*connaissance*] of the body; the concepts derive from this consciousness and this knowledge, simultaneously banal and full of surprises – of the unknown and the misunderstood.' (2004: 77).

Thus, my own positionality in this research has been even more present in the thinking and writing of this chapter. The liminality of my position in Beirut is brought out by different rhythmic experiences. On the one hand, as a member of an extended Lebanese family, as a European researcher and member of a global research community and on the other hand, as experiencing a mountain dwelling rather than a city dwelling within Lebanon. The rhythmicity and temporality of the city would affect me even more as I commuted between Bikfaya where time felt slow, almost suspended, boring and easy and Beirut, where things often felt like they were happening to me, where I would often feel overwhelmed by a form of frenzy, business, speed and energies that were difficult to process all at once. My journey between the mountain and the city, the contrast between altitude and valley, and between what to me was somewhere calm, familiar, safe and steady, and something far from that – these contrasts hugely influenced my rhythmic experience of Beirut, put me in different and contradictory places, and gave me conflicting emotional and temporal experiences of the city, as shown further in the chapter. All these aspects of my position in Lebanon affect in many ways my bodily reactions to the city and its rhythms, that were key in helping me to understand my respondents' stories of their own experiences in and of Beirut, and are in dialogue within me as I write. My immersion in the field, and my efforts to encounter the rhythms of other people, is a necessary and indissociable element of my engagement with and understanding of urban activists and their stories.

Thus, Beirut is not one time in one place; it is a multiplicity of times in several places. In Beirut, those who navigate the city in the space of their own cars do not share the same rhythmicity as those who walk the city, or those who rely on public transports or taxis. Their physical and emotional – and temporal – experiences of the city differ. This is also made obvious when one looks at daily activities: the temporality and rhythmicity of a street, a mall, a bank, a museum, a park, the seafront, downtown Beirut or various Beiruti suburbs and neighbourhoods all differ from one another. Being stuck in what can feel like endless traffic jams in the middle of August in sunny, hot and polluted Beirut can lead to annoyance, impatience, anxiety or anger; navigating a city that lacks green public spaces can create feelings of suffocation and claustrophobia, or resentment towards the state and municipality for not providing those spaces. Similarly, the increasingly rapid destruction of old and historical buildings can create feelings of pain and loss for certain people – whilst for other people, indifference or joy can accompany processes of rapid urban change.

In this chapter, I do not pursue a 'rhythmanalysis' of Beirut or of a neighbourhood of Beirut per se, and I do not study in detail my participants' or my own embodied rhythmic experiences of the city either. Instead, I use rhythms to complexify further the understanding of urban activists' relationships to space-time to undermine the temporalities assumed in much of the memory work on Beirut discussed in previous chapters.

In my observations, readings, and conversations, I have observed elements that suggest the coexistence of various rhythmical narratives and rhythmical experiences of Beirut. Without ever initiating discussions around 'rhythms' as such, I have realised, reading through my transcripts, that various elements of my discussions with people hinted at the importance of rhythms in their experiences of time and space. I have observed that often, rhythms are present in urban activists' narratives, and mine, in ways that either reproduce or appropriate dominant rhythmic themes superimposed by the state and the media, that are: an urgency to act/react, to enjoy, to move, to buy, to sell, to party, to travel – before it is too late, before the impending doom, the potential danger, war, violence, refugees, bomb attacks – all this in a context of status quo: nothing can change, nothing will change, things are too bad or too urgent to allow for change.

Experiences of status quo, urgency and impending doom are grounded in experiences of Beirut, an urban environment dominated by globalizing political and economic forces of dispossession, accumulation and greed. I understand status quo, impending doom and urgency as collective affects that can be expressed or felt intimately through emotions. Conceptualised in this way, attention to these three rhythmic themes unearths complex

relations between embodied, emotional experiences and urban changes. In Beirut, these relationships are experienced, among other things, through the rapid changes in urban infrastructure and the lack of public spaces. Through the stories explored in this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis, one can read, among other things, the anxiety and fear for the future of places in Beirut. This anxiety is born, I argue, out of a sense of urgency and the speed at which Beiruti landscapes are being denatured and destroyed. I suggest that experiences of urgency, status quo and impending doom within collective projects and struggles can also challenge dominant temporalities of speed, efficiency or violence usually associated with Beiruti life.

During my research, I observed how activist practices might help reclaim the intimate dimensions of these three rhythmic themes, as felt through embodied experiences that involve multiple and contrasting temporalities. A reclaimed urgency, reclaimed status quo or reclaimed impending doom might be a way of resisting temporal narratives that dominate the way in which memory, the past, national identity and relations towards 'otherness' are constructed.

These three rhythmic themes are not mutually exclusive; instead, they coexist in urban activists' narratives and experiences of the city. The theme of urgency uncovers temporalities of fear; as well as temporalities of hope, joy and happiness; the theme of impending doom unearths questions around the temporalities of apprehension and violence and finally, the theme of the status quo questions the temporalities of inaction, resilience and tenacity (also in relation to the notion of 'post-war' and the various relations to past violence explored in chapters one to three).

THE FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE REMAINDER OF THE CHAPTER

What follows is a narrative from which the themes introduced above will emerge. I wrote the remainder of this chapter in a diary form. This 'diary' comprises fieldwork stories of mine, that I tell in the first person, and stories of others, who are always named. I also included some of my childhood stories, and a few notes that I took during fieldwork. This diary is not chronological – I go backwards and forwards across different temporal moments, places and different voices. This is because in my head – and as I have written before, in my respondent's stories – memories, stories and events are not remembered, re-experienced, or told in a chronological manner. Our memories, emotions, sensory experiences all form an archive in our bodies, and elements of the archive come up to the surface, unexpectedly. This chapter is also a reflection of that, of the rhythmicity of our thoughts and conversations, memories,

emotions, that mix, disappear, and re-appear. Because of the chapter's format, I have not included subsections as such, but simply places, months and years.
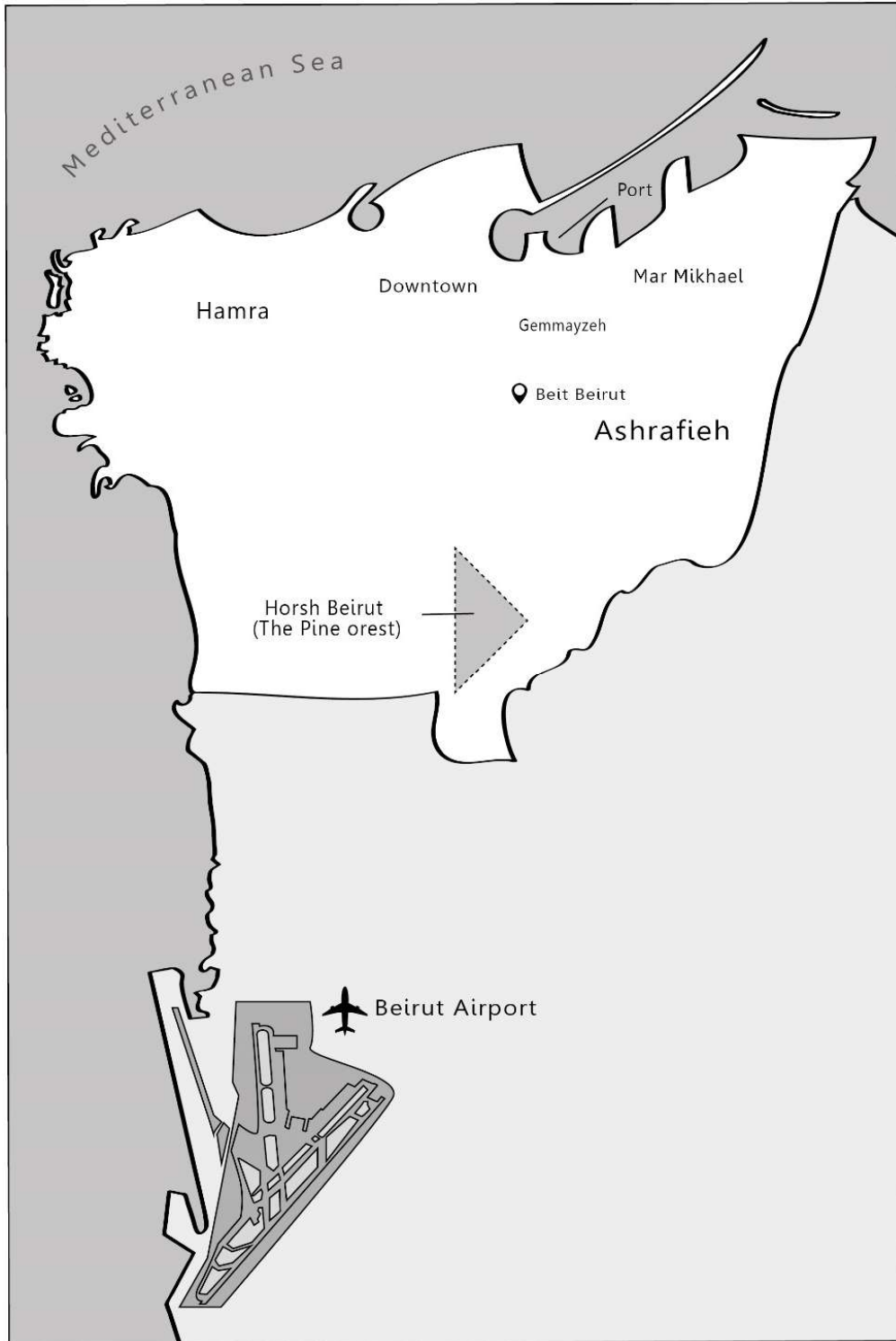

FIG. 10 Map of the places mentioned in chapter six (source: HMA)

BIKFAYA. OCTOBER 2017.

My grandmother says 'There is no conscientiousness in this country. The rich that have benefited from the war want things to remain the same. They want the poor to remain poor so they can guide them the way they want'.

I think: I have heard this narrative so many times. People around me have described, over and over again, the idea that 'nothing has changed since the civil war'. In their narratives, the urge and wish for betterment in the future is not shared by all: a few people benefit and want to keep benefiting from a form of status quo. In these narratives, the feeling of status quo, or inertia, arises from the fact that the same people have been in power since 'the civil war' and from the perception that it is impossible to change this because of an environment and a system that are unfair to most Lebanese, as my grandmother described.

Status quo. The violence of the system.

BIKFAYA. APRIL 2019.

I am in Lebanon for the fourth time in less than two years. This trip is a short one; I will only be staying for two weeks. I came to see my family. I had wanted to spend time in Lebanon with my family without thinking about fieldwork. I long to be in Lebanon again without a 'research agenda', for the days when I was still going to Lebanon only for holidays. I know full well that research is constantly with me, that there is no such thing as disconnecting from research since it is also conducted simply by 'being in the world'.

Apart from the regular jokes on how long I will still need to finish my PhD, family members do not really ask any questions about my work and research. One evening though, over a bite to eat, my cousin in law asks me what I think my preliminary thesis conclusions will be. It is April 2019 and my submission date is months away. Preliminary conclusions?! Will I even have conclusions?

I sidestep the question: 'my research has always been inductive... I am trying to draw links between the Lebanese memory context and the physicality of Beirut...' These few sentences get everyone going. There I am again, thrown into my research, completely fascinated and absorbed in a whirl of comments coming from the three people in the room. It was supposed to be a lazy evening in. Below is the list I made, a few hours after our conversation, in my fieldwork notes, of all the topics or fragments of narratives mentioned by

one or more people in the course of our twenty-minute exchange, but not retold in chronological order.[71]

- · *Elections.*
- · *Solidere and the historical construction of Lebanon.*
- · *'Lebanon as it is should never have existed. We are originally different clans that worked very differently and that have been forced to live together under a new political system imposed by the French. We don't share the same culture.'*
- · *'Originally, people living in the mountains – the Druze and the Maronites – had their own ecosystem and ways of living together.'*
- · *'People in Lebanon are individualistic; they focus on their own communities.'*
- · *'There isn't one Lebanese people.'*
- · *'People identify with their religious sects first.'*
- · *'In Bikfaya, there is a monument for the Martyrs of the Kataeb party that have fallen during the war, with a list of names. That's the case in other places too. There isn't a monument for all martyrs of the war across the country. There isn't an idea that all Lebanese victims are equal and that all the Lebanese have suffered similarly during the war years.'*
- · *'People conceptualise the other as the terrorist, and us as victims.'*
- · *Martyr square has become a parking lot.*
- · *'Have political leaders, in the aftermath of the war, not talked about the past because they didn't know how to do it or because they didn't want to do it.'*
- · *Me: 'Where should change come from?'*
- · *Civil marriage is the solution.*
- · *Change won't come only from one source; it has to be a combination of various elements.*
- · *Our political elite won't change anytime soon, except if a revolution takes place and no one wants that. People aren't in the street.*
- · *'We went and protested in 2005, what did that do? Nothing changed!'*
- · *Me: 'But change can come from small, individual actions, alongside voters trying to vote differently, alongside educative projects, and spill-over effect from civil society actions. It will be a combination of all these elements that little by little will change the system.'*
- · *'No one in power wants civil marriage.'*
- · *'We do work together [with Muslims] but we don't mix.'*
- · *'We still look at people as if they're different.'*
- · *'If a Sunni came here [in Bikfaya], we would still stare at them with mistrust.'*
- · *'But what about your friend's Muslim wife? And the daughter they are going to have? Isn't she going to be an example of tolerance and understanding of various religions?'*
- · *'No, her father is a Maronite, she will be a Maronite.'*
- · *'The power-sharing system is important and must be defended, it protects vulnerable communities.'*

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[71] My translation. The initial conversation was in French.

Three elements strike me in relation to rhythms. Firstly, the speed with which all these topics emerged and followed each other. Secondly, despite the speed of the exchange, a form of stasis was also present – born, I argue, of disenchantment with the lack of change, and the lack of possibility for change. Thirdly, my family members also expressed the idea that 'the system' or the 'status quo' carry with them a form of reassurance, the safety of what is known, versus the unknown of the future or of any kind of change outside of their comfort zone. I will now develop these three elements in more detail.

SPEED

The exchange described above happened quickly and felt like a brainstorming session around the theme of 'what is wrong in Lebanon?', for it provoked a whirl of comments and reactions, bouncing from one very important comment to another. It felt like the three family members present that evening had not recently had a chance to express all their frustrations. The way in which they all interrupted each other at speed, trying to prove different points, demonstrated the frustration that builds up towards a country and a system that do not provide much prospect of improvement to their citizens. This exchange says a lot about the entanglement of issues of the past and the present: they appear as a block in people's narratives, one quickly leading to another, without anyone explicitly connecting the different issues.

STASIS

The condemnation of all these elements coexists with the idea that things either should not or will not change, demonstrating the complex entanglement of both resilience/acceptance and rejection/condemnation towards what is described as a bad situation, a bad system and a bad country. This conversation gave a sense of stasis and exasperation at the lack of options for change. This can also be seen in the lack of originality of those comments, for they were the same that I had heard pretty much all my life, from sceptics of the possibility for change in Lebanon. This exchange also reminded me of many more that I have had, where people talk at me, telling me how things work in Lebanon, supposedly the things that I do not see, or that I am not able to see – I was the outsider being given a lesson on how grim things were. Whenever I mention activism, or change, there is someone to tell me 'things will never change'.

Speed, and stasis.

STATUS QUO

In this exchange, the speed of the delivery of the words spoken did not correspond with the rhythm of the elements described: they described a situation felt to be static, but also a situation that somehow should not change, because it provides a sort of security – the comfort

of what is known. In this case, the power-sharing system, sectarianism and community boundaries are presented as things that exist de facto. The reference to the protection of 'vulnerable communities' is interesting because in this case, the 'vulnerable community' was actually 'us' – or what was perceived as the group we were for we share similar sectarian affiliations. This was another way in which the boundaries were reinforced and maintained, by one group ('us') over others ('them'). The beliefs and values associated with 'vulnerability' are enough to validate the entire system. Referring to the power-sharing system[72] helps to make sense of the present and its struggles, for the power-sharing system is a system, it organises people, places, habits, movements. It is reassuring when one believes in it and sometimes even when one does not.

Speed, stasis and status quo are there, together.

Below are Cynthia's and Habib's accounts, which resonate with that and demonstrate the 'status quo, nothing will ever change' narrative, in this case used by others when talking to them, both to describe the state of affairs in the country and to discourage them from getting involved in activist/societal endeavours.

BEIRUT. JUNE 2018.

CYNTHIA[73]

> 'Yes, I think everybody is aware but you can divide people in two categories. Those who are aware and want to do something about it, so these people become activists or researchers, or teachers, everybody in his own way, really defends what he believes in. You have people who are aware but who are hopeless, and who think that change is very slow in this country and it will not come, so I have many friends who tell me "Cynthia you are wasting your time […] instead of spending your afterwork time writing researches and working with Nahnoo, volunteering with Nahnoo, you can start working on your own business, make a little extra money, be efficient"…and this is also…we cannot say that they are not right, you know…'

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[72] What has been in place and been maintained, one way or another, since the 1920s, an institutional, Western-imposed system that is arguably also a reason for the 'civil war' in Lebanon.

[73] As presented in chapter four, Cynthia is an architect whose work is Beirut-based. She is a volunteer for Nahnoo. She co-wrote a book titled *'Le Littoral'*, which studies issues of the illegalities of constructions on and exploitations of the Lebanese coast. I attended the book launch and the talk she gave on it in Beirut, which was how I first crossed paths with her. Our conversation in Ashrafieh in June 2018 lasted two hours and a half, and included a mix of French, English, and Arabic. When no translation is mentioned, the excerpts used are the original ones.

BEIRUT. NOVEMBER 2017.

HABIB

> '[I am] a real person who just keeps coming back to this place [Beirut]. No matter how much it tells me to leave. You get a lot of that too, you know, if you're an activist, or if you're a journalist, or if you're trying to do something in Lebanon you find productive, you get a lot of "you're wasting your time", "what are you doing here", "are you stupid" [...] You get that "what are you doing here" but you hear it from like people, like colleagues of mine, or friends in New York and the US, and they'd be like "Really? You're staying there?" and it's so funny, you know, there's no one, very few are excited for me to be here. So, it's like a strange environment to work in, to constantly being told that what you're doing is meaningless, just forget it.'

I argue that Cynthia and Habib are subjected to both the 'status quo' narrative and the 'urgency' narrative.

The 'status quo' narrative, in this case, is a discourse addressed to them based on discouragement and pessimism regarding Lebanon and its future. It is the idea that nothing changes or will change, and encourages them to either leave the country or resign to its mediocrity. The status quo narrative creates a form of surrendering to it, even among activists who embody the possibility of change. Both belief in change and belief in stagnation – in status quo – coexist there for, as Bissell remarks, 'within every period of stasis, of stilling, is contained the potential to be otherwise, the possibility of rupture' (cited in DeLyser 2010: 153-154).

Despite their commitment to activist work, and their own conviction that their work is worthwhile, both Cynthia and Habib are affected by those discourses – that tell them to leave, to stop, to do something else: Cynthia says 'we cannot say that they are not right' – giving credit to those who discredit her work – and Habib stresses the idea that 'Beirut' tells you to leave, and that he is told by others to leave it. The idea that a place tells you to leave, and Cynthia acknowledging the veracity of those who tell her to do something else with her own time and life, stress the hardship of living and working as an activist in Beirut. Though Cynthia and Habib practically challenge the 'status quo' narrative through their work, they also acknowledge the difficulty of standing for the idea that things can and will get better in Lebanon. This also resonates with Habib's narrative in chapter three, where he links this idea of unchangeable stasis to discourses around sectarianism in the country, suggesting that these discourses are 'stuck' themselves, fated to repeat the same thing over and over again. In the excerpt in chapter three, he also mentioned the 1990s activist telling him that all they did in the past led to nothing, and that all activist work will lead to nothing.

Cynthia and Habib's extracts also resonate with the urgency narrative in three ways. First, through a focus on efficiency, on productivity, on the idea that activists 'waste their time'. The urgency narrative associates time with monetary value and worth. Time must be productive; it is precious and should not be wasted on 'useless' endeavours, it is associated with immediacy and speed: tangible results, quickly, through making money, another job, 'real work', in a context of 'precarity as a temporal phenomenon in which the entire time of social life is put to work to create value for capital' (Brown 2012: 176). Joana also confirmed this when she told me about the comments that she gets when she says that she works for an NGO: that it is not well paid, that it is not an actual job and that she does it either because she cannot find anything else or because she has too much time on her hands. The urgency of acquisitive capitalism is reproduced there; and activists are criticised for not embracing that urgency in the way they are expected to.

A second way in which one can read urgency in these extracts is in the way in which Cynthia and Habib are encouraged to do something else with their lives, to be somewhere else, in a Lebanese context where one is encouraged to 'have a situation', i.e. to have a career, job security, a partner and a family. In the context of this chapter, the push to 'have a situation' in Lebanon is to be understood in relation to the unpredictability of the national and regional context of poverty, political instability, wars, population displacements, economic crises and lack of job opportunities. One must secure their 'situation' so that they can actually survive in this context of constant urgency and uncertainty around not knowing how bad or good things will turn out to be in a month, six months or a year. In what Habib says, he is also ridiculed for choosing to stay in Lebanon – staying should be for those who do not have a choice, whereas Habib does have a choice per his double nationality alone. Also, of all the activists present in this thesis, only one is married, at least two are queer and none has children. These are other ways in which they do not conform to the urgency of 'having a situation' in Lebanon, for they do not reproduce the typical family model. Their life rhythms, trajectories, are different.

Finally, I would like to make a link here with the way in which a lot of urban activists work is actually done in Beirut: in and through a sense of urgency. Because access to information is limited and because so many decisions regarding the city are taken behind closed doors or through private deals between powerful individuals, activists often must react to things in a sort of emergency, to try and stop a process already underway. A good example of this is when ancient ruins are unearthed during new building projects, when activists need to hurry to try and stop the destruction of the site[74]. Another example is the way in which

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[74] They very rarely succeed, as Habib has documented extensively through his investigative journalism.

Ramlet-el Bayda, the last public beach in Beirut, has been built upon by a private real-estate company, a project that was illegal but supported by the Municipality of Beirut. Despite activist efforts to suspend the project after the building permit had been given, a luxurious resort was built on the beach, making it private, exclusive and exclusionary. The rhythmicity of urban activism networks thus combines speed and urgency, while the objects of this activism often give an impression of longevity and steadiness, of slowness: the coast, a beach, rocks, buildings, a forest. It is the potential risk – the impending doom – that creates speed and urgency. Urban activists have to constantly negotiate and react to the rhythmicity of private and political decisions and processes that they often do not know about until after they are already underway, and always together with the rhythmicity created by the political situation in the country. Despite the enormous work constantly being done by urban activists in the background of this urgency (research, knowledge dissemination, awareness work, conferences, talks, protests), they inevitably end up in a re-action to events, creating a delay – described by Antoine as *'toujours une forme de retard dans l'action'* – always a sort of lateness, delay in the action.

In the introduction to this thesis, I argued that I understand urban activists to be activists because they work with and through notions of time. Here, one can see how this translates in practice, how urban activists challenge – real and perceived – dominant rhythmicities and discourses around rhythms. They 'liberate time' in the way that Brown, following Negri, defines it:

> 'Negri's understanding of liberated time is based on the idea that time is produced through doing, Therefore, when we do something different and when we do so collectively we produce a different temporality. In precarious times we are continually confronted with a capitalist timepiece that drives us to work harder and faster yet we simultaneously engage in a multitude of lines of flight and moments of liberation' (Brown 2012: 180)

And further:

> 'Liberated time is the time we create when we produce something other than capital. It is time stolen from capitalist work, from the production of surplus value, but it *is* productive time.' (Brown 2012: 182, emphasis in the original)

When urban activists attend to the causes that are dear to them, when they struggle, unpaid and against all odds to try and fight the gigantic tentacles of capitalism, real-estate, corruption and the financialization of land in Lebanon, and when they fight the denaturing of their city, when they protest, report, research, organise, write, meet, create, think about alternatives and embody these alternatives – it is productive time. It is also revolutionary time – for 'in

precarious times revolution cannot be considered as a singular moment of rupture located at some point in the future but must be found in the liberation of time from capital in the present moment' (2012: 176). It is in this sense that politics of time can become revolutionary: 'when people create, imagine, and hopefully institutionalize a new kind of time' (Chollet 2012: 281).

In what follows, Antoine shares his intimate relationship with activism and the city, and how they have evolved through time and space. This helps to understand the intimate experience of the three rhythmic dynamics set out above.

BEIRUT. NOVEMBER 2017.

Antoine and I met in a restaurant called 'Memory Lane' in Mar Mikhael, Beirut. Behind me on the wall is a huge, old map of Beirut. The restaurant is decorated to represent the former sewing factory that was once there.

I asked Antoine about his engagement in urban struggles in Beirut, and the evolution of it, to which he replied[75]:

> 'Listen, my involvement has been reinforced over time, because it's addictive. Being an activist is addictive. [...] My sensitivity to these things has increased over time. Me, before [moving to] France, there was a magnificent building next to mine [in Beirut] that was demolished, I didn't lift a finger. Well, I regretted it, but I didn't lift a finger. [...] I've now become someone who, each time there's a hole made in a mountain, or in a place that I've spent, like, three seconds of my life in, I have a nervous breakdown. I've become ultrasensitive to this country, to what is dear to me in this country, to what I find important in this country. I feel like I'm responsible for it. With time, I've developed a sort of responsibility, a feeling of responsibility that has come over me unexpectedly... [...] So I will be just as sensitive to the disappearance of the coast as to a quarry in a beautiful landscape, or to an indecent/ugly urban development that ruins a landscape, a dam that destroys a beautiful valley, or the loss of a fantastic mansion in Beirut, or an inn [Antoine used the word 'khan'] that disappears from Tripoli. These days I throw a fit about more or less anything. I get frustrated about everything. I can get frustrated about everything. Fortunately, I'm an optimist so that allows me, you know, to not get too frustrated... [...] If ever I find out that there's a risk they're going to make a little scratch on Mount Hermon, I move heaven and earth to stop it, even though I don't live there, I must have spent at most two weeks there, but I've fallen in love with

that place and so I'm ready to fight tooth and nail to protect it. You're always more, more productive, and more able to fight, when it's for something that's close to your heart. And the problem is that now, in fact, there are a lot of things that are close to my heart. So that means that I have a lot of restless nights over things and places and buildings that in reality I've never seen, or hardly seen in my life, but somehow I feel responsible all the same. And that, that's developed over time, and it's the fact of becoming engaged with one thing, then another, then another, that has sensitised me to it all. [...]'

Antoine expressed a sense of responsibility towards the city and the environment, which was also shared by Habib, who said that he feels a form of 'obligation' to report on what he can and to take part in documenting the work towards change that he sees (and is part of). Habib expressed this in the following way:

'I feel that it's also a responsibility for me to not only point out the problem but also point out who is working on things that are interesting, that could, you know, help better situations, and, and, and I think, highlighting those groups and what they're doing, has also become a bit of a mission of mine. [...] there's so many activists, lawyers, architects, young urbanists, archaeologists, preservationists, so many people that are doing such interesting work, and none of this gets mentioned.'

The responsibility, the form of duty that urban activists carry and share is important, for it shapes the way in which they relate to the city and to what they perceive as needing saving or protection, as shown in chapter five. As Antoine says, this responsibility evolves with time, and time makes it stronger, more prominent and overwhelming in his life. But also, time makes the things that need protection even more at risk: as time passes, fewer and fewer heritage buildings remain, more damage is done to the coast, the sea, and the mountains, and as time passes, the urgency to save these actually becomes more urgent. Antoine described restless nights spent thinking about things and places that he feels responsible for. Here one can see how urban activism gets caught up in an acceleration of urgency – as one becomes aware of the urgency to react to damage that has already happened, or that is about to happen, more and more damage becomes clear, but the speed at which this damage happens is considerably faster than the speed of activists' reactions and actions, and so there is always a need to rush to the next thing, to constantly be busy and on one's guard. Antoine's account also shows how sensitivity and attachment to places evolve with time and experiences and do not necessarily entail being from those places or having long-term experiences of certain places. Attachment can also be born from the knowledge that a place is at risk of disappearing or being destroyed, damaged, changed. In Antoine's story, but also, as described in chapter five, in Naji's and Moustafa's stories or in Abdul-Halim's work in the 1990s, to document all heritage buildings in the city, one can read anxiety and concern for the future of places in Beirut: there is a sense

of living somewhere 'at risk', where violence can erupt at any time against what is dear – and where violence does not only come from the potentiality of war, but also from the urgency of capitalism and urban development in Beirut, which actively denature the city in ways that do not correspond to urban activists' attachment and sensitivity to their city and to what they want to keep within it.

This sense of responsibility, and the need to constantly be looking at the past (what needs saving, heritage buildings, past practices) and at the future (the city we want, the changes we want, the continuity we want) illuminate further urban activists' relationships to time, their grounding in the future and the past – they have a 'temporal orientation that extends beyond the present and into the past and the future' (Pietrzyk 2012: 18). They are

> 'haunted by spectres from the past [...] they have internalized a sense of being involved in a process of history that extends long before, and will endure long after, their individual life-times. They are not "all there," in the present, because they are in their minds living as much in the past and in the future. Even in the most day-to-day activities, they carry with them the idea of a more general historical pattern into which these activities fit.' (McKay 2005: 120 cited in Pietrzyk 2012: 18)

In this sense, urban activists in Beirut undo, or untie 'la tyrannie du présent' – the tyranny of the present – to coin Jérôme Baschet's study of the Zapatistas and their relationships to time (2018): beyond the idea of a revolutionary big moment that will come, or a confinement in the present of the action. Instead, their work maintains the richness of the 'now', the care for the future, action in the present, a sense of urgency, a need to prepare and strategic anticipation altogether – they render the future possible.

* * *

Below is an excerpt of my conversation with Joana, which also speaks to these themes, and resonates with Antoine's story and with his attachment to the city. Joana also stresses a series of contradictions or paradoxes that she experiences in the city, that also make the city special.

BEIRUT. NOVEMBER 2017.

> **JOANA**: I mean, at first I didn't feel I belonged [in Beirut] and you know, petit à petit [little by little] [...] I felt more and more, like, I belonged to this place, like I have this love/hate relationship like everybody with this place, but that it's also, it's, I am proud to also, you know, live here and, with all the issues, with all the advantages also, and I'm also proud to be in such a rich city, culturally. [...]
>
> **HMA**: Do you sometimes regret moving to Beirut?

JOANA: I do, from time to time. Because things are not perfect, that's for sure. Hmm, but not as much as the first two years, where I still didn't know anything, anyone, etc. It's also the people, let's not forget, not just... Of course, the people also, they're very special, very contradictory, that's what makes the charm, you know. But, no, it happens less and less. But it will, from time to time, come out, because... because of our challenges also. It's really challenging to live here. Really, *on n'est pas bien partis yaane* [we're not well on track, I mean] but there's such potential that we have, I personally have super, a lot of hope to see the city really improve and become a very, like, agreeable place to live in, quality of life I think could very much improve, it's very much possible. [...] Now I go [to Paris] because I want to see my friends, my sister still lives there, I want to breathe some, you know, sometime just breathe and be in a country that's less crazy than Lebanon, stability... reaching for stability, reaching for walking in the street without necessarily being... Now I need to be careful if there is a hole or not. Steadiness, I would say. This is what I miss and... I long to when I go back to Paris. But yes, no, they're both part of my identity [...] The paradox we live in, [...] Lebanon is a country of extremes. In everything, absolutely everything. And, and this is why it makes it like love-hate relationship, like a boiling *heyda* [thing], things are fast, etc. While France is more balanced, I would say.

[...] because it's true, the way we function in Lebanon is not the normal way... because it's out of the world, really, this is how I felt it, actually... That France was reality, the way we lived in Paris was reality and the way we live in Lebanon, until now I have this feeling, the way we live in Lebanon is not reality. I mean, while at the same time, the challenges we go through, is... *c'est la, la dure vie* [it's a tough life] you know... Like living without electricity... [electricity] is a given for people, but actually, electricity hasn't always been around and this is how life really is, but at the same time, all the *wastas* [nepotism], and, and... the, the, the way politicians, you know, do their fares, etc. and this, this, many things, features in Lebanon are not what real life should be [...] it's as if I am not living the real life in Lebanon, especially as things are going so fast, you don't see it happen. Life is much slower in Paris. [...] I go back to Paris, slower pace, you get to enjoy actually! And see things happen, actually, feel them happen, before you, in a more impactful way, I would say, *mich* [not] impactful, it's more like... I mean, the experience is more like, you get the time to do the experience. Here things happen so fast... So, I travel to Paris for a few days, for vacation, for whatever, I come back here, it's as if I come back to a swirl, *un tourbillon*. [...] and here you know, it's not like in Paris, for example, oh I can miss that, something else is going to happen, or you always have the choice, here people, there's a myth here of missing out, the concert of someone, for example, might not come back! So even if you're not a super fan, you're gonna go. And for the entertainment, basically. If that was in Paris I'd say 'ah, I'll see him next time' for example or 'I am not so much a fan, I am not going to put that much money in it, I have other choices...' but here it's not the same because we don't have the same variety of choice, the same quantity, so you feel you have to live it. Plus there is that emergency we live in, you never know what's gonna happen, are we going to have a summer or not, this is especially after 2006... because every year there was something at the border, etc. so people were like 'are we gonna have a summer'...Not sure, so the first ten days [of summer] for example, it's really you

know party party, or enjoy the sun, etc. So, there's really this emergency that I feel [...] To be honest, life is more exciting in Lebanon, there's more adventure, but it's also very fast, as we were saying and it's also, because it's small, you also are in contact with a lot of people. [...] and that goes with the safety, this sense of security or safety. I feel more safe in Beirut at 3am than in Paris, in the chicest area of Paris for example... By experience, by the way! And this is because I think, there is a link between people here. In France, *c'est l'anonymat* [anonymity], *c'est...A Paris, la enno* [because] of course other than Paris is very different, but... Anonymat, it's big, it's very different people and here you know, people are linked, not just also family and stuff, but... [...] it's weird because we say we don't have unity, but we have this sense of 'oh we're both living in the city and we're both Lebanese', for example... Not necessarily Lebanese, but hmm, I don't know how to express that, but... It's easier to... To communicate with people here, actually... so, that's why, yeah, I feel like... I am not saying... Of course, things happen, bad things happen, etc. but, *yaane* [I mean], there is also, you feel safe also because you know that there is people around, if you're going to get mugged or in an accident, people are going to run to you. You have like 20 people...sometimes too much! A crowd happening... but... [...]

Joana's words really show the tensions between status quo and change, and between hope and a form of realism: one can read a similar combination of frustration at the current situation and desire for things to change as the one described in the discussion with my own family members earlier in the chapter or with Moustafa in chapter five. As Joana stresses the idea of paradox and extremes, I argue that rhythms are at the centre of these tensions. Indeed, on the one hand, she deplores a present that is not satisfying: the present can and should be bettered – things should improve, but the current situation makes it difficult to improve them and to believe in a quick change. Indeed, she says 'we're not well on track', that the foundations are wobbly, that there is a form of stickiness in the present. On the other hand, she says that things are boiling, that they are fast, that they happen quickly – that one does not feel them happening, as opposed to Paris where things are slower and one can really experience them. In Beirut, things happen to you – you end up in a whirl, so you don't have control over them, and over where you are or what to do about them, you are caught in a rhythm that is not yours. Joana indicates how the rhythms of the city and of the things that happen around her affect her body and the way she feels. In the same way, Joana compares her sense of stability in her own life with the absence of calmness when walking in the streets of Beirut. In Joana's words, her own self is in tune with its surroundings, and this really sheds light on the intertwining of bodily rhythms with the rhythms of the environment, as described by Palmer:

> 'Thus, proprioception – the unconscious awareness of the body in relation to its surroundings – balance, feeling and emotion can also serve as perceptual sensors connecting the embodied self to the world.' (2017: 35)

The unevenness of the pavement represents the lack of steadiness that she longs for, and the challenges of living in Beirut: she says she wants to breathe, and longs for stability and steadiness, and a context less crazy than the Beiruti one. Joana expresses nostalgia for the life that she used to have in Paris, but also describes the way in which the instability, unevenness and rhythms of the landscape affects her – both when she actually walks the streets of Beirut, but also in how she envisages her own life. At the same time, this feeling of instability is paradoxically intertwined with a sense of belonging and safety that Joana has in Beirut: she knows she is not alone; she is not an isolated individual in a crowd. Joana's sense of belonging has evolved, and has its own rhythm, based on the people of the city. Her sense of belonging is born out of the 'love/hate relationship' that she describes: acknowledging the challenges and hardship of living in Beirut while expressing her attachment to the city. She says that 'everybody' has that relationship to the city, which situates her in an imaginary group of Beirut-loving/hating people. Joana mentions the people of Beirut as a central element of her attachment to the city, which is very similar to Moustafa's account in chapter five, who says that the people of Beirut are what keeps bringing him back and what makes him stay in Beirut.

This leads me to the last point that I would like to make here in relation to Joana's excerpt. She stressed two very important elements of life in Beirut: first, the idea that it is 'not reality', not 'the real life', not 'the normal way', that it is 'out of this world' and second, she talked about the 'emergency' that people live in in Lebanon. Although Joana used the word 'emergency', I believe that she meant 'urgency' for in French, her first language, it is the same word – *urgence* – that signifies both 'emergency' and 'urgency'. This is important as it says a lot about the rhythmic experience of the city: the entanglement of living somewhere that is so difficult to comprehend and whose contradictions are so strong that it feels disconnected from 'reality'. At the same time, this non-reality is completely embodied in her, in her senses, in her experiences of the city – this non-reality has real consequences on her and others. It creates a sense of rapidity, the 'emergency' that Joana mentioned, because of the impending doom – because no one knows what will come next. Joana mentions the fear of 'not having a summer' – the fear of the impending doom materialising in the summer, and ruining the summer fun. That fear leads to people enjoying as much as they can, as quickly as they can – what I call the 'urgency of now', the idea that things become necessary to experience quickly because of the fear of not being able to enjoy them in the future and a fear of missing out, if and when things do go wrong.

* * *

In what follows, I develop further the analysis of the entanglement of urgency and the impending doom with three stories of my own experiences in Beirut. These three stories resonate very much with Joana's account; speaking with Joana allowed me to reflect on my own experiences and my own perception of urgency, danger, and the impending doom. Following these three stories, I expand further on the perception of these rhythmicities.

BRUSSELS. GROWING UP. THE 1990S AND 2000S.

People never use the term 'peace' to describe Lebanon. Growing up in the West, people have always asked me 'What's the situation in Lebanon at the moment?'. This question has always troubled me. Have I missed something? Did something happen? With time, I came to understand that what people actually meant was 'Is it currently a turbulent or calm period in Lebanon?' – an approach that I, too, had internalised, as I would often reply to the 'situation question': 'It is calm at the moment, but we never know when things might explode'. 'Calm' did not mean 'peace'. It did not mean 'war' either. To me, it meant 'business as usual': that I didn't know when I would be able to see my family next, as our visits to Lebanon were dependent on the geopolitical context there. To me, a 'calm' situation simply meant that I had not been made aware of protests, struggles, violence, bomb attacks or wars through western media or my family. It meant that my parents didn't seem worried about Lebanon and our family there. During the 1990s and early 2000s, my understanding of Lebanon and 'the situation there' was completely dependent on my parents' senses of fear and apprehension. We would or would not travel to Lebanon over the summer based on their reading of 'the situation there'. Whatever the 'actual' situation was, the idea that things might go wrong[76] unexpectedly and very quickly was always in the background, but as children, we were not given any information as to why, some years, we could not go to Lebanon other than 'the situation is not good'. Once the travelling decision was made, though, I never thought anything could happen to us while in Lebanon, as my parents had taken the decision for us to travel. I had no judgment of my own, my sense of safety and security were completely reliant on my parents' decisions and I never, ever thought about danger whilst in Lebanon. Status quo. Slowness of our time there. Holidays, privilege.

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[76] Read: war breaking out, a bomb attack leading to some sort of vendetta and escalating into war, Israel bombing Lebanon, or possibly one of Syria, Iran or Saudi Arabia taking ill-thought-through decisions that would have huge impacts on Lebanon.

BIKFAYA. JULY 2006.

'I don't know if I'll come back home at the end of my working day' – my aunt says, on her way to work in Beirut, leaving two young children at home. My first experience of war. My first experience of war, during my summer holidays! How dare they ruin my summer holidays? I am 14. My younger sister is in Lebanon with me; we travelled together, just the two of us. My parents and older sister are in Brussels. War broke a few hours after we landed in Beirut. The Israeli airforce bombed the airport[77]. We could have been there, we could have been anywhere. Things change so quickly. I cry a lot. Not because I am scared, but because I don't want to leave Lebanon, and everyone around me says we'll have to be repatriated to Belgium as soon as possible. Time moves fast. On the phone – Mum, Dad, it's my summer holidays! I want to stay here, it is quiet here in Bikfaya, there aren't any bombings. I cannot feel the urgency of war here[78]. I cry so much. All my school year, I waited for the summer holidays, I longed for Lebanon. I don't want to go back to Brussels, not now! We are prioritised to be repatriated to Belgium since we are two unaccompanied minors. My aunt calls the Belgian embassy in Beirut every day. I am trapped: they are going to repatriate us. I am trapped in other people's sense of safety/security/urgency/danger. Everyone is waiting for the green light to drive us to the port, where we'd take a night boat to Cyprus, and then a flight to Brussels. I cry. I am not scared; I just don't want to leave Lebanon. My mum says my dad can't sleep, he's too worried for us. I have no idea what images they see on TV, but here everything is alright and I don't feel scared; I want to stay. The bombs I hear sound like fireworks. They're distant explosions, they're only distant fireworks – the same I have heard on every other trip to Lebanon. Quick, quick, quick, driving to the port, about eight days after reaching Lebanon, to be sent back to Brussels. Driving to the port I can start to feel the urgency – my uncle drives very fast – overtaking, screeching round corners[79]. For the first time since arriving I am scared, but not of

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[77] We landed late on 12th July, and the airport was bombed on 13th July.

[78] The 33-day war or 'summer war' in July-August 2006 followed Hezbollah's capture of two Israeli soldiers and saw an incredibly destructive response from Israel towards Lebanon, provoking the death of 1200 Lebanese, and the displacement of one million people in the course of 33 days, bombing the airport, national infrastructure and private housing, mostly in the South of the country and the Southern suburbs of Beirut (Hamieh and Mac Ginty 2009: 104-105). International embassies quickly organised the repatriation/evacuation of their citizens. On the 17th July, only 5 days after the beginning of the war, Sweden, France, Italy, the UK, and the US started evacuating their nationals by ship or helicopter, given that Beirut airport had been bombed (Canadian Senate 2007).

[79] As we were on our way to the port, passing the Canadian embassy in Beirut, I could see crowds of hundreds of people there waiting to be repatriated. To give a sense of the scale of the repatriations in these few weeks, Canada evacuated 14.000 nationals from Lebanon in the course of 4 weeks. That summer, my cousin, who has dual nationality, emigrated to Canada, having only a few days to take the decision to stay or leave. His brother decided to stay. Two of our next-door neighbours in Bikfaya emigrated to France, via Damascus, joining their diasporic family there. This is just to say that in addition to being a horrible, deadly 33 days, many of the Lebanese who could emigrate then, or at least leave the country for the rest of the summer – typically those who had the privilege of having dual nationality – did it, therefore expanding the ranks of the Lebanese diaspora. But this is also to say that

bombs rather of a car accident. The aggression, dangerousness and speed of his driving hit me, I now feel that sense of impending danger, a sense that things are wrong, but the doom is already there, with us, and I am not really aware of it. Once back in Brussels, spoiled with visits from friends of the family, flowers, hugs and calls, their fears and subsequent relief following our return start hitting me too. People brought me piles of newspaper articles published in Western media whilst I was in Lebanon. Yes indeed, journalists were covering a war zone. That was not my experience there. I was upset my summer holidays had been ruined. It took me years to make peace with the fact that although I was in Lebanon that summer, my experience of war, violence and repatriation was one of privilege, distance and safety. Things happened so quickly.

BEIRUT. JULY 2015.

My first real (created) fears of danger and violence in Lebanon happened in the summer of 2015, when I first attended a two-week programme of meetings with politicians, journalists and civil society actors in Beirut, organised for students of Lebanon who have an interest in engaging with local geopolitical issues, mainly. The introductory meeting – a sort of induction session – took place in a hotel in Hamra. A Western, white man, native English speaker, gave us a one-hour session on what to always carry with us when out and about in Beirut, what to be wary of, told us that the situation is always worse than we feel it is, how things can go wrong very quickly, and that the situation had not been so tense in the country since the civil war (!) and that we had to be ready to be evacuated within a few hours. This meant: always carrying a 'grab bag' with us. Below are the notes I took that evening:

> 'Always have a grab bag on you, which includes: – money (as much cash as possible), valuables (gold, jewellery, etc.), credit cards – immediate medical needs – food + water (things containing sugar) – air ticket – light/torch – ID, Passport – phones, all chargers and electronic devices – spare clothes, suitable clothing (something warm) – book/magazine – a notebook + pen – anything that you might need in the next 12 or 24 hours – It has to be only 1 bag. Carry when told.'

My first affective reaction to this speech was bewilderment – was this a joke? Is that how Westerners are introduced to the country when they visit?[80] – my entire family was going to

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back then, I had no idea of the extent to which Lebanon's infrastructure was destroyed, the number of deaths, and even the fact that people around me were leaving the country for good.

[80] As developed in chapter four, after I started my PhD in Brighton in 2016, I became familiar with the British Foreign Office Travel advice pages, having to comply with the advice for Lebanon whenever I visited for fieldwork. Until then, I never visited a website to get a sense of 'danger' in Lebanon. As developed in chapter four, British travel advice is based on political decisions disconnected from the reality on the ground, hence stigmatising Lebanese citizens based on where they live. The fact that Beirut's southern suburbs are systematically 'red' no matter how 'calm' or 'restless' the situation is in Lebanon is based on the fact that these places are said to be controlled by

work every day; a sense of normality was in the air. It was summer, diasporic families were back and the summer was going to be great. None of my family members had told me anything about violence and tensions, or anything about the potentiality of it. My second reaction, and it followed the initial one very quickly, was fear. I remember the room we were in, on the top floor of that hotel, it was already very dark outside, and the room had big, large windows. I literally started thinking about bombings and the fact that we were in the centre of Beirut, and a very easy target as we were visible, but unable to see properly what was outside. And that if anything did happen – in my head then, the only tangible violence that occupied my thoughts was bombing – I would have to try and find a way back to my family in Bikfaya as quickly as possible. Throughout the entire two-week programme, whenever it got dark and I was by myself, I would have the same fear and thoughts coming back to my mind. How come I had never been scared in and of Beirut before that? That man, talking about intelligence and secret grand plans, and geopolitical tensions, completely shifted my own affective relationship to Beirut, and my experience of it. All that he said was based on suppositions and assumptions – but it created tangible fears, based on my anxiety at the thought of having to flee from Beirut to somewhere safe in case of bombings. The city, then, felt more threatening, and bombings even more scary. Impending doom. Fear of an imperceptible danger. But also: parties, drinks in town, sun, beaches. It's summer in Beirut and I am having a fantastic time. The urgency of now.

* * *

The last three sections above touched upon urgency and impending doom, and with them, temporalities of joy, enjoyment, fear and danger that they involve. In these three stories, the doom – real or imaginary – exists in relation to – again, real or imaginary – armed, physical violence and memories of it. In what follows, I elaborate on the three sections above by focusing on two aspects of impending doom and urgency. Firstly, the idea that the combination of urgency and impending doom leads to the 'urgency of now', and that temporalities of fear, in Beirut, are very much linked to temporalities of joy. Secondly, I show how the sense of impending doom and urgency live in and rhythm the body.

As developed in chapters one and two, in the Lebanese context, violence and/or conflict are thought of as being always there with us, but also always about to happen. The impending doom is the myriad of rhythmic experiences of life and the city that emerge from

Hezbollah and Hezbollah is considered a terrorist organisation. Therefore, those areas – and the Lebanese who live there – are not to be visited. This is to me another, obvious way in which segregation is pursued and reinforced by Western nations, creating different classes of Lebanese citizens. What would I have done if my family lived in one of these 'red' areas?

this apprehension of violence and turmoil. I am not interested here in how violence is conceptualised or imagined or in how it actually materialises, but in the way in which the apprehension of violence is formulated in various ways in my own and my participants' stories.

Beirut is conceptualised and talked about as a city that is simultaneously still torn by its violent past, struggling with its present and always on the edge of further violence.[81] Beirut is the place where, it seems, anything and everything disruptive could happen, and because of that, the apprehension of violence is always with us, too. This is not usually due to the certitude that violence is about to happen, but because of the sense of impending doom that is hard to escape – the idea that things *could* go bad, *could* escalate, *could* turn into war in a heartbeat, based on the conceptualisation of – and often, memories of – Lebanon and Beirut as volatile places. In her description of the anticipation of violence, Monroe describes how in Beirut 'politics regularly change the course of one's daily activities, and feelings of safety, in the present' (2016: 65), and that

> 'This kind of temporality, with actions and reactions overlapping and no time in between, was one of the disquieting aspects of the city's political climate as violent events could spin off of one another very quickly, gaining fervor, leaving residents to suddenly and quickly take up positions of defense and seek out places of safety' (2016: 66)

> 'In this way, temporal fields of both remembrance of the past and anticipation of the future overlap in Beirut's fraught political landscape as the city is a terrain where residents' experiences of earlier political violence become entangled with concern about the violence that is to come. Violence is anticipated as an outcome of deductions made by residents as well as by state and privately hired security personnel and can be based on interpretations of the current level of political tension [...]. Through this beefing up of security in public space, residents figure out that the members of the security apparatus are gearing up for a potentially volatile situation, and, as a result, residents anticipate not only the possibility of violence but also the necessity for altering their daily movements through the city.' (2016: 66-67)

The impending doom is also difficult to escape because it is encouraged by the media and their sensationalism. Every so often, a Western newspaper article announces the possibility or

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[81] Monroe wrote that '[...] temporal fields of both remembrance of the past and anticipation of the future overlap in Beirut's fraught political landscape as the city is a terrain where residents' experiences of earlier political violence become entangled with concern about the violence that is to come. Violence is anticipated as an outcome of deductions made by residents as well as by state and privately hired security personnel and can be based on interpretations of the current level of political tension that is conveyed through the daily tenor of news broadcasts as well as through the intensity and vocabulary of political debates by news commentators. [...] Through this beefing up of security in public space, residents figure out that the members of the security apparatus are gearing up for a potentially volatile situation, and, as a result, residents anticipate not only the possibility of violence but also the necessity for altering their daily movements through the city.' (2016: 67-68).

imminence of war in Lebanon[82]. These articles give a sense of a constantly boiling, ready-to-explode Lebanon and with it, Lebanese. The impending doom exists because people would constantly be on the edge of resorting to violence.

A lot could be said on the dubious nature of these statements and on who might benefit from that discourse being one of the ordinary and acceptable ways of describing and thinking about Lebanon and Beirut, but that is beyond the scope of what I aim to do here. However, I would like to cite Asef Bayat here, for his analysis is important in understanding how turmoil or normalcy in the Arab world has been conceptualised in Western media. He wrote, in a 2003 article, that:

> 'In the narratives of the Western media, the "Arab street" is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't – it is either "irrational" and "aggressive" or it is "apathetic" and "dead". There is little chance of its salvation as something Western societies might recognize as familiar. The "Arab street" has become an extension of another infamous concept, the "Arab mind," which also reified the culture and collective conduct of an entire people in a violent abstraction. It is another subject of Orientalist imagination, reminiscent of colonial representation of the "other," which sadly has been internalized by some Arab selves. [...] The "Arab street" matters only in its violent imaginary, when it is poised to imperil interests or disrupt grand strategies.' (2003: 11)

These discourses are indeed reproduced in the intimate sphere. In my family, people have often described the possibility of violence even more present because individual people 'still have weapons from the civil war in their own houses', implying that they can resort to them in a heartbeat if need be. That statement has never been followed by more information, as it was supposed to be obvious, implying that people – civilians – could turn into fighters – again – very quickly. That statement implied that we were surrounded by potential fighters. I have also always been advised to never interfere in a fight, or argument in the street in Beirut because violence would turn against me. Thus, the impending doom is not only the possibility of war – the impending doom is also fellow Lebanese citizens, 'the others' – those who have violence in them, who embody the doom – we are the impending doom for each other. The diabolising of fellow Lebanese citizens participates in the maintaining of the impending doom. During the *thawra*, the revolution that started at the end of 2019, counter-revolutionaries were called 'thugs' for their disruption of the *thawra*. The dehumanising of others, the distancing between

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[82] See, for instance, in recent years only – in 2018: 'Order from Chaos. Another war in Lebanon?' (Byman 2018); in 2019: 'Another suspected Israeli strike in Lebanon as war fears intensify' (Sly and Haidamous 2019), 'Hezbollah Readies for Next War Against Israel' (Anderson 2019); in 2020: 'A Row Over Trees Could Spark the Next Israel-Lebanon War' (Nissenbaum and Osseiran 2020), 'In A Third Lebanon War, Israel Will Have To Contend With Increasingly Lethal Hezbollah Missiles' (Iddon 2020), 'Hezbollah dragging Lebanon closer to new civil war' (Koleitat Khatib 2020).

'us' and 'them' thus creates a sense of belonging, between the 'good' and 'bad' people, further entrenching divisions within the Lebanese society, and further encouraging the divide and rule approach to politics.

In Lebanon, it appears that nothing of what happens betwixt and between, in the liminal spaces[83] – betwixt and between war, betwixt and between the everyday: the normal, the random, the 'regular', everyday concerns, struggles and joys that colour the lives of Lebanese people – is of interest as they do not reflect the two clichéd extremes of either chaotic violence or glittery apathy. The accounts of impending doom in the media are at the level of national or geo-politics, but the reactions to them are felt in the body, in the senses and emotions, and affects, just as the Western speaker in 2015 managed to create fears in me through his description of the 'situation'. Likewise, Joana's assertion that 'every year there was something at the border' and that this drove her own feeling of urgency with respect to enjoying the start of summer as much as possible, shows that perceptions of geopolitical danger feed into personal fears and concurrent urgency to enjoy life while you can, or flee, or move, and so on.

The impending doom coexists with rhythmicities of urgency – on the one hand, the imaginary planning of what could happen in case of an eruption of violence where one would need to react at speed, and on the other hand, the urgency to enjoy what there is to enjoy, as much and as soon as possible, before a potential, unpredictable violence potentially takes away that enjoyment from us – the 'urgency of now'. This combination of temporalities of fear and of joy lead to the 'urgency of now', co-existing with the doom and status quo. It is in this sense that urgency and the sense of doom rhythm the bodies and the senses of Beirutis.

In Beirut, the idea of the impending doom emerges from various temporal and affective relationships to time and the city (and to the city's rhythms). Also, the impending doom materialises in various affective and discursive forms: fear, anxiety, panic, disappointment, hopelessness, helplessness. Joana finds herself missing stability, certainty while in Beirut, and her sense that one has to watch carefully where one treads is obviously meant literally, but can also be seen as symbolic for an overall sense in her body of a lack of balance. She also refers to the inability to breathe in Beirut, which shows how the sense of doom manifests physically. My own sense of danger and my understanding of the impending doom and of urgency are indissociable from my positionality in Lebanon, as exposed both in chapter four and in the introduction to this chapter. Whether in Lebanon or not, my position

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[83] Not just in relation to positionality as previously used, but for the people of the city as well.

as a researcher who is constantly both in and out, but also indissociable from a position of privilege, of being able to leave Beirut – and either find refuge in the mountains with my family, or leave the country altogether if and when possible. The ability to come and go does not make anyone less exposed to danger as such, but it does provide, in moments of heightened tensions or actual danger, a privilege – both the peace of mind of having an exit out of danger if things do go wrong, and the actual possibility to flee.

Although I grew up knowing somehow that going to Lebanon was never to be taken for granted, I was never taught why that was the case. It is only after 2006 that I started getting a sense of the decision-making process that my parents had to go through before deciding to send us to Lebanon for the summer. It is important because, in my lifetime, there have been very few years during which traveling to Lebanon was perfectly safe (at the geopolitical/war level) (maybe six?) or as safe as staying in Belgium for the summer, but in my family, the default was Lebanon for the summer, and I had no conscious understanding of the dilemma my parents were in every year to decide whether we should go or not – basically taking a decision without ever knowing if that was the right one, for things could explode any time, and it's only after 2006 and mine and my sister's own experiences of war that my father has started saying that 'things can explode at any time' and that we had to be careful – but careful of what? If a foreign nation decides to bomb Lebanon, there is nothing that can be done at the individual level. Life happens in the knowledge that things can explode at any time, but also in the knowledge that they might not. And this creates incredible stress. And it is only recently, in the past four years, that I have been able to connect with my own stress when in Beirut/in Lebanon, only because I feel the absence of it when I am back in Europe. This resonates strongly with Joana's experience of feeling she can only breathe easily in Paris, not in Beirut. As soon as I set foot in Europe, there is a relief that happens, there is a huge weight that gets off my shoulders, and I realise that I had been tense and anxious the whole time in Beirut, and to a certain extent in Lebanon, but definitely less so in Bikfaya. That stress is caused by my absorption, through the years, of an archive of bomb attacks.

BEIRUT. 19TH OCTOBER 2017. FROM MY FIELDWORK NOTES.

I decided that I wouldn't use taxis and *services* and instead, would walk around Beirut for the next few days. Walking from Hamra to Beit Beirut [...] was the first 'long' walk I've ever taken alone in Beirut. I loved it, although I felt very uncomfortable and out of place most of the time. I crossed paths mostly with men, who felt no shame in looking at me, turning around when I passed. Their presence was heavy. Independence Street is busy, lots of shops, full of cars,

honking, people speaking loudly. Too many things to process, to take in. Reaching the tunnel before Elias Sarkis Avenue, it gets smelly, messy, dirty. Kids are in or on top of bins, looking for what? Food? Things to sell? They are so small, so resourceful, it seems. Our worlds must be so far away from each other. [...] I thought of survival. I wondered if they were working for someone, if someone was looking after them [...] The bins are covered with this white chemical powder used to kill bacteria, I thought these kids' health, skin, lungs must be badly damaged. I thought they must be hungry, worried. I was happy to reach Beit Beirut, looking forward to attending the talk.[84] [...] I learn that it took many decades after the war for Palermo to have a proper master plan, and an inclusive reconstruction. Maybe some hope for Beirut. [...] I left during the Q&A and walked back to Hamra, in the dark, quieter streets of Beirut.

REFLECTIONS ON WALKING AND RHYTHMS

In chapter four of this thesis, I included a section on walking, as it was an essential element of my methods, experiences and observations in Beirut. Walking around Beirut was essential for me to connect with the city: its smells, its noises, its business, and its rhythms. Through walking, I was able to connect – even if only briefly or superficially – with realities and experiences of the city that are not mine, and experience spaces and places where the lives of others unfold. Walking allowed me to connect with other rhythms, through crossing paths with others, hearing them, sharing moments, even if only in passing, for 'walking is inherently rhythmic, as is place. [...] Walking practices, with their pace and rhythm, together with the temporal character of places imposed by their place-rhythms, influence our perception of time, in terms of its experience and representation' (Wunderlich 2008: 134). As stated in the introduction to this chapter, exploring my bodily reactions to the city, its tempos and rhythms was also key in helping me to understand and connect with my participants' stories of their experiences in and of Beirut. In what follows, I reflect on the entanglement of walking with rhythms by considering excerpts from my conversations with Cynthia and Abdul-Halim and the excerpt above from my fieldwork notes.

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[84] The talk I attended was titled 'Beirut-Palermo-Torino, 3 cases of architectural development'. Only Beirut and Palermo were covered, by Mona El Hallak and Pietro Airoldi. The talk was part of a 40-day project in Beit Beirut: 'Sacred Catastrophe: Healing Lebanon' mentioned in Chapter one of this thesis.

BEIRUT. JUNE 2018.

CYNTHIA[85]

> 'I didn't used to come to Beirut often, we used to come by car, I didn't walk in Beirut, except on the Corniche maybe, and the city centre was a construction site, so it's only when I was 18 that I really started having a sensorial experience of this city. The fact that I am an architect encouraged my curiosity to read more about this city. My mother is from Beirut, in fact. And she would often tell us some of her childhood memories. My father, he's not from Beirut, he's from Ain Saade, where I live now. So, my experience in the city is shaped by the architect's eye, the curious eye of anyone who listens to the stories of Beirut, who's never lived in Beirut and also, I don't know if it's the same with your parents, but my parents, when they tell me about Beirut, it's as if 'wow', it was *la vie en rose*, that is, the beautiful life, and there was a garden on Martyrs' Square, and cinemas, and they would do everything on foot. [...] If I want to go from one place to another, I have to take the car and it's an ordeal, I want to walk in this city! And I do it…Me, here in Beirut, Ashrafieh, I try to walk as much as possible, but if I need to go from one neighbourhood to another, no I need to take the car.'

BEIRUT. NOVEMBER 2017.

> **ABDUL-HALIM:** [...] that's by walking that I got to know Beirut in the late nineties, because we walked it, we had our little maps, you know, clipboard, colour markers and we were walking. I know, yeah, I mean, and it comes in handy in teaching because you know sometimes you know, student comes with a map this size and you recognise, because you walked it with the map, so you know the corners…

> **HMA:** [...] when you're in your car, windows closed, music on, you don't hear the city, you don't smell it, you don't experience it, you don't feel the struggle [of] walk[ing], right?

> **ABDUL-HALIM:** Absolutely, absolutely. [...] You know, for example, in Hamra, there's a guy who's been at that corner for 25 years. Exchanging money. When the money devaluated, he would carry dollars and exchange money. Still there, two brothers, you know coming down from Bristol Hotel to Hamra, the intersection with Barbar and the beautiful old, new church. These two brothers, they've been there since 1992. [...] I mean, yeah, you cannot know that unless you walk.

* * *

After my first long walk alone in Beirut, I made walking my primary and favoured means of transport in the city. Although Cynthia started having a sensorial experience of Beirut years ago, she does not experience the city by foot – it is only for short distances within the same neighbourhood that she walks, for although Beirut is a relatively small city, it is intensely car-

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[85] My translation (French and Arabic to English).

centred, and even the shortest distances are travelled by car. As Joana described earlier, public spaces such as pavements, where they exist, are neglected – they are full of holes and dog excrement; or used as extensions of shops or parking spots. They are typically uneven and do not give a feeling of security and steadiness, which influences one's walking pace and practice – the gaze has to be down, focused a few metres from the feet, anticipating the next obstacle.

I often felt out of place for the sole fact that I walked Beirut, surrounded by cars and other motorised vehicles. I was walking a city that I had always experienced by car, which is again a consequence of my privileged position, for in Beirut, people use buses, vans, the 'services' – shared taxis, private cars or private driver where they can afford to. Others – the poorer, and some tourists, walk. Feeling out of place contributed to the fast speed of my walking. I was not being a '*flâneuse*' in Beirut: my walking was energetic and confident, and I believe that whenever I walked alone, I always had the attitude of someone who knew where they were going, even when I got lost. When alone, though, I did *not* want to get lost: I would study the map and make sure that I knew my way mentally before leaving the hotel room or the flat where I was staying. I feel like I was reproducing, through my walking and attitude, the arrogance of the big SUV cars that invade Beirut. I know now that this was based on my feeling of vulnerability in the city. It was not home; I was alone, I did not know people and was going through streets and neighbourhoods to which I had no personal connections. Although I was privileged in the city, I felt vulnerable walking it. When I wrote 'I was happy to reach Beit Beirut' after a walk across the city and passing by those kids by and on top of bins, I believe it had to do with a feeling of being in a comfort zone again, somewhere where I was surrounded by people I could relate to, and somewhere where I was less vulnerable in relation to the city. When accompanied by other people, though, this feeling of not being legitimate in the city dissipated, and I felt less vulnerable to the city and to the rhythms of others around me – human and non-human elements alike. My own sense of legitimacy for *being*, existing in Beirut, for exploring the city by foot, increased. I felt a sense of security and safety that I was unable to reproduce when walking alone.

Beirut is also quite a chaotic city in terms of driving practices, which meant for me, as a pedestrian, that I had to constantly pay attention to potential sources of danger, typically motorised vehicles that could suddenly emerge out of nowhere. This contributed to the rushed rhythm of my walking, and the urge to move fast, quickly, adjusting to the rhythms of those – streets, cars, motorcycles, buildings, bins, beings – around me, although they often did not feel like mine. This resonates with my conversation with Abdul-Halim: it is only by walking that the characteristics, specificities and details of the city become known.

Beirut was draining, too. Beirut both gives energy and sucks up so much energy in return. I would often end my fieldwork days in Beirut with a headache, sticky skin, exhausted and in need of calm and silence. My senses had been very busy through my walks and days of exploration: mostly my senses of sight, smell, and hearing. As I was letting my senses and my body be in the city, be influenced by the city and the landscapes around me, I was finding myself, my thoughts and my voice. I was immersing myself in the city that I wanted to understand. Solnit writes that

> 'The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it. A new thought often seems like a feature of the landscape that was there all along, as though thinking were traveling rather than making.' (2001: 5-6)

My hearing was a central part of my sensory and rhythmic experience of Beirut: the people talking, screaming, laughing, the honking, the engines, the AC humming, the church bells, the calls to prayer, the music. All these noises are very present in my conversation recordings, too, and made my transcribing more complicated but reminded me of what Beirut sounds and feels like. All the noises consisted of a buzzing around me, surrounding me with their constant, sometimes oppressive presence, but with time, they also became companions in my walking, a bubble around me, guiding my steps. Honking, for instance, is a warning of danger – when it is not a taxi or van trying to get your attention to check if you want a ride, which happens about every thirty seconds when walking in Beirut. Beirut's soundtrack is noisy and chaotic, but somehow also reassuring. My sense of smell was also always stimulated, subjected to an intense mix of smells: putrid smells of bins, garbage or sewage, smells from the sea that were no more agreeable, smells from people's fragrance, from cafes, restaurants and *fur'n* – our 'ovens' where freshly made doughy delights are made, diffusing a delicious smell around the shop, smells of car fumes, of benzine, of dust, of wet and warm concrete freshly cleaned, as is habitual in Beirut for shop keepers to do in front of their shops in the morning, but also the smells of chemicals, of bleach, of the AC inside shops, restaurants and hotels. My sight was in a constant state of alert too, mostly focused on looking down – if I was going to walk fast, I had to be very attentive to where I was stepping. But also, I wanted to avoid eye contact with men, whose overwhelming presence in the streets of Beirut made me feel uncomfortable and oppressed when walking alone. All my senses guided my steps and influenced the rhythms of my body – accelerating, stopping, slowing down, heart racing, breathing slowing down or intensifying depending on the heat, the smells, my feelings, my speed, my muscles. It was often very warm, I would be sweating, experiencing the heat between buildings, the obvious

lack of shade, trees, and green spaces. That absence was suffocating. I was completely vulnerable to the heat – and I feared the heat too. But being outdoors was necessary; I needed to connect viscerally to the heat outside that everyone was trying to avoid through air conditioning, that makes the air outside even less breathable. My entire body was responding to what I could sense around me, and that created a particular experience of time and the city. Repeatedly choosing walking over motorised vehicles was essential to understanding the rhythms of Beirut, with its beats and tempos, both because walking creates rhythm in the body and because the city's rhythms could only be fully sensed through being physically in contact with them. Solnit sums this up beautifully when she writes that:

> 'Walking itself is the intentional act closest to the unwilled rhythms of the body, to breathing and the beating of the heart. It strikes a delicate balance between working and idling, being and doing. It is a bodily labor that produces nothing but thoughts, experiences, arrivals.' (2001: 5)

FIG. 11 Walking around Beirut, one can find 'One Liban' (source: HMA)

Here I would like to draw a link with 'urgency' too, for walking is also an enactment of specific rhythmicities that challenge the urgency of speed, of moving fast, of being 'productive' with one's time, of rushing from place A to B to C. Walking, in a city like Beirut, is a reassertion of a right to the city, of a right of being there, fully present with one's body in the urban landscape. Solnit, again, says it more beautifully than I can:

> 'If there is a history of walking, then it too has come to a place where the road falls off, a place where there is no public space and the landscape is being paved over, where leisure is shrinking and being crushed under the anxiety to produce, where bodies are not in the world but only indoors in cars and buildings, and an apotheosis of speed makes those bodies seem anachronistic or feeble. In this context, walking is a subversive detour, the scenic route through a half-abandoned landscape of ideas and experiences.' (2001: 12)

BRUSSELS. APRIL 2020. SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that an analysis of rhythms in my research suggests the importance of three key rhythmic themes: status quo, urgency and impending doom, which exist alongside and impact on each other.

Status quo can be seen in the sense of political stasis and the cliché that the sectarian balance/conflicts freeze everything. It is also present in the hopelessness directed at the urban activists whose stories were developed in this chapter, and in the reactions from my own family to the themes in my research. It also comes through strongly in the status quo narrative constantly repeated back to activists, which suggests that nothing can change, as a result of forces that are too strong to counter, with sectarianism typically invoked as one of these.

Urgency can be seen in the fear of missing out, which is connected to the impending doom and the sense of a future that is deeply uncertain: if we miss out now, we might never again have this chance. Urgency is also shown to be present in the physical rhythms of the city: noises, smells, the traffic, the lack of green, breathable space. One can also find urgency in the emotions of activists motivated by love of the city and the fear of its destruction, as exemplified in this chapter by Antoine and Habib. Urgency has become a necessary modus operandi for these activists, due to the need to act quickly in the context of a structural power imbalance and the ensuing lack of transparency and access to information that they face.

Impending doom rests in the fears and memories of war and other kinds of violent conflicts, but also, crucially, fears and memories of changes and destruction inflicted on the city by powerful economic interests that the city's politics are unable or unwilling to control.

Conceptualised in this way, attention to urgency, status quo and impending doom unearths complex relations between physical sensations, emotional experiences and urban changes. In Beirut, these relationships are often experienced through the rapid changes in urban infrastructure and the lack of public spaces. For the activists involved, as shown with Antoine and Habib in this chapter, this manifests in feelings of responsibility, frustration and overall sensitivity to the prospect of changes to the urban landscapes, provoking restless nights and the sense of being close to a nervous breakdown. I argue that materially grounded experiences of urgency, impending doom and status quo within individual and collective projects and struggles can also challenge dominant temporalities of speed and efficiency usually associated with urgency.

Recalling my exposition of the notions of pre and post war in chapter three, I want to stress again here that post/pre-war prefixes are a redundant way in which to describe Beirut, as they do not capture the rhythmicity of the city. Just as with sectarianism, and the views of Lebanon as representing both doom and status quo that I experienced growing up and which persist to the present day, these prefixes prevent any deeper explanation of the challenges experienced by the cities' inhabitants and the power that they are subject to. The 'status quo' narrative provides a poor explanation of the actual impending doom felt by citizens, while at the same time, some activists have internalised and reproduced this discourse. The use of prefixes plays into the idea of the status quo – that one is now in the post-war period, where nothing is changeable. However, their usage does not explain the impending doom also felt by activists and citizens, which is wider than simply war or violent conflict, consisting also in the failure of the government to provide effective governance that responds to the needs of the people, or to preserve the things that are important in the city. The prefixes deny the urgency of now, as if being in a 'post-war' era did not include its own urgency, violence and troubles.

This chapter also showed that overarching discourses around rhythm have important consequences on how people see and understand the world around them, and how these both live in and rhythm the physical body. It has revealed some of the ways that rhythms are understood, reclaimed and enacted in personal lives. This was demonstrated by the discussion in 2017 with my family members, where elements of status quo, urgency and doom appear in almost the same breath. Joana's account also demonstrates the interplay between doom and urgency. Her fear of missing out in the early days of summer or when a particular concert was on in town in case there was to be 'no summer' due to conflict or in case the musician never returned, generates an urgency to enjoy while it lasts. This resonates with my own experience

in 2015, where a sense of doom was triggered by a briefing on Beirut and its dangers from a Western perspective, experienced as tension and dread in the body. At the same time, this was combined with the enjoyment and the business of the experience of summer in Beirut. This combination of impending doom and a sense of urgency showed that temporalities of fear, in Beirut, are very much linked to temporalities of joy, and together they create the 'urgency of now'.

My experience from 2006 as a teenager affected by Israeli bombings encapsulated impending (near at hand) doom and urgency. But this was experienced by me more as frustration until the urgency (of driving to the airport) triggered a sense of doom. Subjective experiences of Beirut unearth a wide spectrum of privileges that shape experiences of the city and that are indissociable from my own experience of and writing on Beirut, and are equally as important for the city's inhabitants and the powers that they respond to. Rhythms of the city are crucial to understanding how the city is experienced by its inhabitants. Physical and emotional affects experienced by urban activists and myself show this. Through walking the city I was able to connect to its rhythms – with all my senses and my whole body responding to the noises, sights, sounds and smells around me. Elements of the rhythmic themes explored in this chapter were viscerally expressed to me through my walking – in the danger as a pedestrian, the lack of air and green spaces, the need to move quickly, while both reinforcing and temporarily reducing the extent of my liminal position as researcher/mountain dweller/dual citizen.

This chapter showed the entanglement of social and urban change with accounts of inactivity, lack of change, and pessimism in relation to the perceived stasis of things. That perceived status quo coexists, I argue, with subtle, fragile, precarious changes that are to be seen and observed outside of the political apparatus, in actions that are made in the shadow of the everyday and whose invisible labour creates tangible changes. The idea that 'nothing changes' does not bear scrutiny when confronted with the realities on the ground. This coexists with flows, changes and movement: during my research, Beirut was changing rapidly, and its civil society was burgeoning, groups were forming, social media were flooded with new struggles, Beirut Madinati was created, civil marriages arranged to oppose personal status laws; fights were fought ranging from 'right to the city' activism to domestic workers' rights, women's rights, civil rights, and the LGBTQI+ scene in Beirut, which was incredible to observe. There was so much going on at the civil society level that it was hard to keep up. Also, people were changing, feeling, experiencing, creating, voicing their demands, and shaping the city, using it, claiming it. Urban activists reclaim the city through reclaiming its temporality and

rhythms, by being in it, and experiencing it in ways that are not in line with the 'dominant' approaches to the city that promote urgency, impending doom and status quo in specific ways – urban activists reclaim their city through other forms of urgency, impending doom and status quo that involve walking, protecting, caring, worrying, being responsible, being involved, and wanting to preserve.

In the next and final chapter, I turn to the imagination, to explore how imaginary timespaces are created in Beirut.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

IMAGINARY TIMESPACES

1. INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, I am interested in thinking about imaginary timespaces in Beirut. Imaginary timespaces are *not* unreal spaces and times. They are urban activists' spaces of contestation, dreams and hopes in Beirut, that create alternative senses of place and time that are non-linear, and consequently challenge the dominant ways in which the city is experienced physically, sensually, rhythmically, and temporally. The struggles around preserving Beirut's heritage inevitably involve contestations over what is worth preserving, and over the meaning of traces of the past, which is an aspect of urban struggles that I will explore in this chapter.

This chapter is the final facet of my response to my overarching research question: 'how do urban activists' narratives inform our understanding of past, present and future struggles in the reshaping and appropriation of place and the past in Beirut?'. In chapter five, I demonstrated how an analysis of emotions in activists' narratives can inform our understanding of their relationships to the past and the city, and how emotions reveal bonds, motivations for action and political engagement. An analysis of loss, absence and nostalgia illustrated the appropriation of complex, larger-scale issues, intertwined with the quotidian of urban activists. In chapter six, I have explored three rhythms of the city through the stories of urban activists and my own experiences and observations in and of Beirut. Chapter six showed that focusing on rhythms such as status quo, impending doom and urgency opens up another window for understanding urban struggles: the rhythms explored in that chapter were disruptive in themselves. Status quo, impending doom and urgency are simultaneously dominant rhythms imposed upon the city and its inhabitants, and a way for urban activists to contest ways of living and experiencing the city that do not correspond to their visions of the good city, or their dreams for the future.
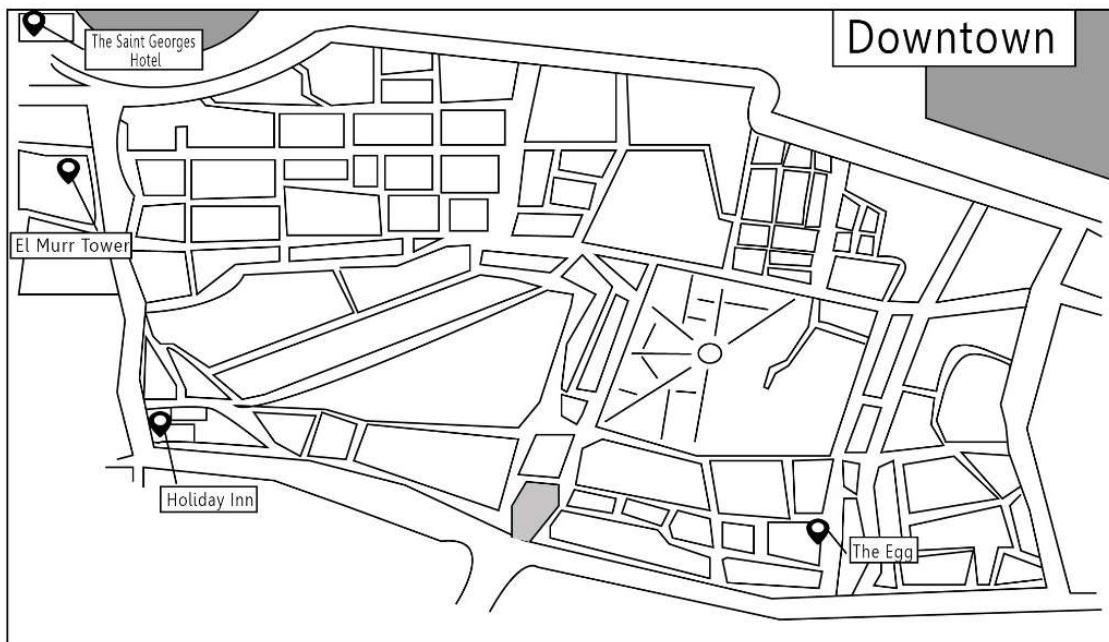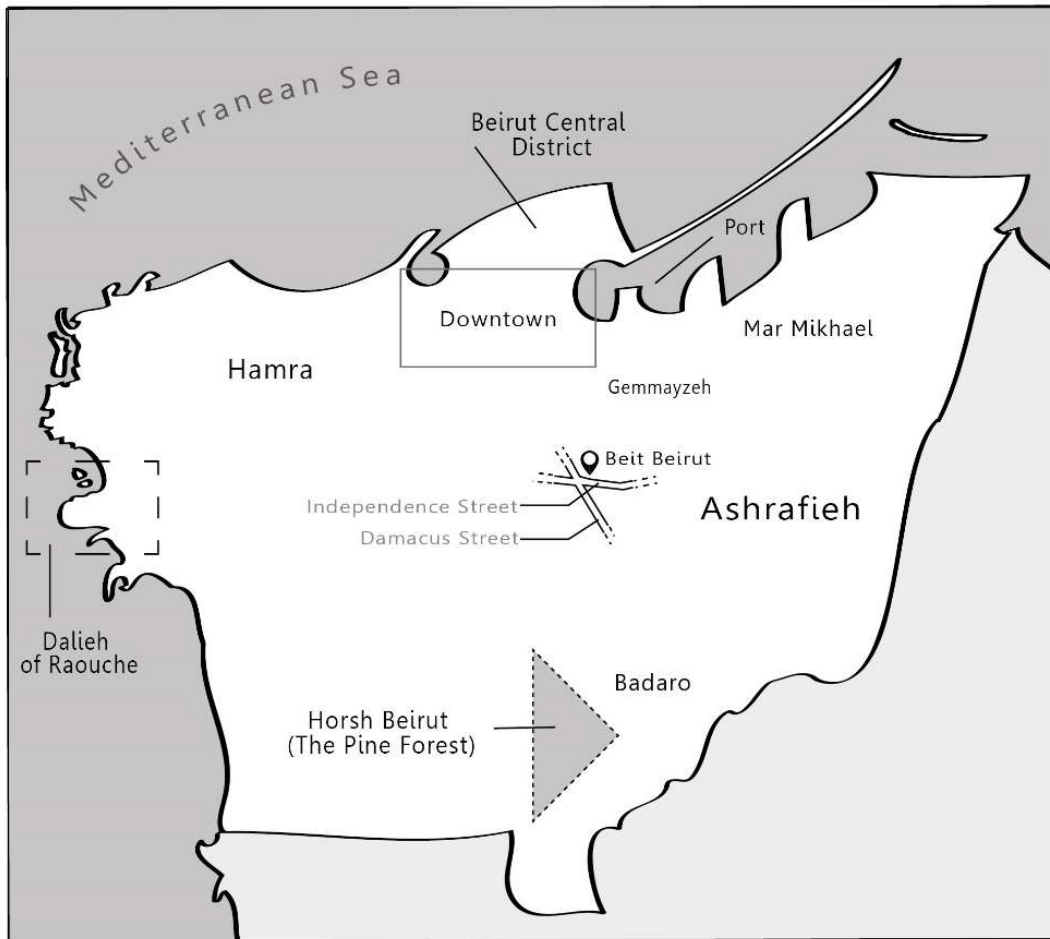
FIG. 12 Map of the places mentioned in chapter seven (source: HMA)

The case studies and stories presented in this chapter bring together and strengthen the arguments and analyses of the thesis. In this chapter, I focus on urban activists' relationships to traces of the past: their re-imagination and re-appropriation. An attention to this aspect of urban struggles sheds light on the constant negotiation of the timespaces of Beirut and the challenges around that: the contestation of both the physical spaces of Beirut and their temporalities. The (re)interpretation of traces of the past sheds light on the relationship of urban activists with 'the past' and how they want to include it in the present.

The first case study presented in this chapter concerns 'Beit Beirut' and its preservation and renovation, following Mona's fight against its destruction. Beit Beirut underlines the multiplicity of voices and interpretations of 'traces of the past' that meet in any given space. Stories from Antoine and Marc will then complement that case study. During my discussions with them, each has focused on the presence of the past in the present of Beirut differently: Antoine focused on the 'palimpsestic' nature of Beirut, while Marc focused on its ghostly nature. These stories will be complemented by other examples such as the building known as 'The Egg,' or the broader downtown area, that show both the spontaneous creation of spaces with an enormous variety of uses – the creation of many diverse timespaces in one physical space. The last section of this chapter focuses on an open-air parking lot in Ashrafieh. My observations of the parking lot will shed light on instances of urban activism bleeding into seemingly mundane places, where everyday, non-professional activism takes place, intertwined with everyday times and rhythms. The open-air parking lot is an instance of appropriation of space that also contributes to thinking about space and place in Beirut beyond the public/private divide. What these examples and stories show is the coexistence of a multiplicity of timespaces in Beirut, which I argue is a central aspect of urban activism in the city.

Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia' has inspired me to think about the hopes, dreams, imagination and imaginaries materialised in place-making in Beirut as part of the spectrum of tangible realities that inhabit the city, as opposed to conceptualising them as distant utopic spaces used by and useful for a handful of people only. In a text written in 1967 but published only in 1984, Foucault differentiated between utopias and heterotopias, stating that 'utopias are sites with no real place. [...] They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces' while heterotopias are

> '[...] real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the

culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.' (1984)

More specifically, heterotopias help us think about the potential and power of ephemeral spaces and practices – such as the space of a protest, an exhibition, an event or a walk in the street. In their edited volume on heterotopia and the city, Dehaene and De Cauter describe the notion of 'heterotopia' as being 'at a crossroads of the conceptual flight lines that shape public space today', the first one being 'The reinvention of the everyday: the ordinary and the extraordinary' (2008: 4). Dehaene and De Cauter consider that the academic focus on the everyday – led by Lefebvre and de Certeau – 'counter Foucault's emphasis on the extraordinary by mapping the vital potentialities of the ordinary (McLeod 1996)' but they wonder if the focus on the everyday does not allow for an idealisation of the world around us, and 'reinforce the ever more encompassing simulation of normality' (2008:4). They ask, 'can the everyday of today survive outside heterotopia?' (Ibid.). In the context of Beirut, it has been claimed that through urban planning, reconstruction and building anew, a form of normality could be re-created, in contrast with the turbulent and violent past. Solidere has been the main driver of this claim in downtown Beirut, but all the while building a city centre disconnected from both the everyday lives and everyday concerns of the Beirutis and their socioeconomic statuses. In contrast to Dehaene and De Cauter, I believe that the everyday uses of Beirut actually redress and tarnish the shiny and glittery reality that urban planners and developers have tried to impose upon Beirut as described in chapter two: high-end buildings, unaffordable residential units, grandiose architecture – prioritising a mercantile rapport to the city, based on material consumption, shops, malls, cafes and restaurants, and housing units of high standing, all representing specific cosmopolitan lifestyles inaccessible or unaffordable to the majority of the population. I argue that focusing on practices that belong to 'the everyday', or the 'uneventful' in Beirut, involves focusing on heterotopic spaces: they completely intertwine – spaces that are not 'extraordinary' in and of themselves, but that are dissenting because they carry the message 'this city also belongs to us and this is how we want it to be'. This can be compared to the practice of reading, used as a metaphor by de Certeau:

> 'A different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient. Renters make comparable changes in an apartment they furnish with their acts and memories [...] as do pedestrians, in the streets they fill with the forests of their desires and goals.' (1988: xxi)

In Beirut, urban changes are also to be found in the reality of the habitation of the city, in the uses of the city and in the realities of dwellers, inhabitants, activists. Beirutis' desires, goals, projects for their own lives and for the city materialise in acts, actions and re-actions that show the potentialities of 'everyday urbanism', as described by Lewis:

> 'the common, repetitive, or spontaneous actions that take place in the interstitial spaces between well-defined territories of home, work and institution, as when a yard sale transforms a lawn into a venue for economic exchange'. (2009: 157)

This final chapter complements the previous chapters by focusing more specifically on how space, place and time are reinterpreted, used, thought and appropriated in ways that create alternative realities, even if only ephemerally and temporarily. These alternative realities, I argue, belong to a landscape of possibilities for being and experiencing the city for Beirutis: they constitute tangible options for being, thinking and experiencing the city, that do not necessarily have the pretence or goal of revolutionising space and place making, but through the performance of such acts of appropriating the city – even if only intellectually – citizens affirm their own agency and creativity onto the spaces of the city, in ways that reaffirm their needs for particular timespaces.

2. BEIT BEIRUT

Beit Beirut, its safeguarding, and renovation projects show it to be linked to multiple temporalities. Beit Beirut epitomises a fight against state-led and real estate urban planning that have chosen to 'leave the past behind'.

Beit Beirut (literally 'the house of Beirut', also known as the Barakat building and the Yellow House) is a large, spacious, yellow building situated in the Sodeco neighbourhood of Beirut, at the intersection of Damascus Street and Independence Street. Initially designed by architect Youssef Aftimus and built in 1924, Beit Beirut was a multi-purpose building commissioned by Nicholas and Victoria Barakat. Between its construction and 1975, it hosted apartments, a photo studio and a dental practice among other things. During the 1975-1990 conflicts, it was used by militia fighters: its large openings onto the city, its height and its strategic location on the former demarcation line made it an ideal combat base.

In 1994, returning to Lebanon after a year abroad, architect and activist Mona El Hallak took it upon herself to protect the building from imminent demolition, and to archive the documents, pictures and other objects she found in it. She and other activists campaigned for its preservation, restoration, and transformation into a cultural centre – what she hopes will eventually become a museum of memory. Mona has been so heavily involved in Beit Beirut's

renovation that it became 'her building', which was exemplified by her receiving of the French medal of honour (*Ordre national du mérite*) by the French ambassador in Beirut for her work for Beit Beirut; supported by French institutions (Battah 2015).[86]

The building was expropriated by Beirut City Council in 2003 and the renovation, led by architect Youssef Haidar, started in 2012. Beit Beirut is not officially sponsored or administered by the Lebanese state, but is under 'inconsistent guardianship' of Beirut's City Council and 'cannot be disentangled from nationalist claims': 'Beit Beirut, in its incomplete status, indicates a Lebanese state willing to acknowledge the urban legacy of violence but reluctant to take responsibility for a critical historical examination of the past' (Larkin and Parry-Davies 2019: 88), which would be translated in the absence of a long-term project for Beit Beirut. The renovation was officially funded by Beirut City Council, although the project was co-managed by the City of Beirut, the *Mairie de Paris*, the *Institut francais du Liban*/French Embassy and a scientific committee including academics and civil society actors (Larkin and Parry-Davies 2019: 83; Beitbeirut.org). On the official website of Beit Beirut, however, one can read that the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs/French Embassy in Lebanon 'are institutional partners that offer ideas and help with the smooth running of the project by co-financing the cooperation between the City of Beirut and the City of Paris, as well as organizing numerous lectures to support the Beit Beirut cultural project' (Beitbeirut.org). The official opening of the newly restored Beit Beirut took place in April 2016, although the centre had still not been appointed a management board or a permanent cultural function when I first visited it in July 2017, and still has not at the time of writing (October 2020).

Below, I discuss some of the features of Beit Beirut and the struggle to preserve it, including bullet holes in the wall, graffiti, and a snipers' nest turned into a screening room. As Larkin argued, in Beirut, 'research has been directed to the transformative processes and the principal actors involved' but 'little attention has been given to how the next generation of Lebanese are negotiating Beirut's rehabilitation' (2010: 414). Beit Beirut is one example of more than twenty years of negotiating – in the literal and metaphorical senses – Beirut's physicality, pushing the boundaries of what is deemed worthy of interest, investment and protection.

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[86] I argue that this is both a case of local activism winning international support and funding for a local project that is dear to local activists, and an appropriation of a local fight by the former colonial power.

I visited Beit Beirut for the first time in July 2017. I met Mona El Hallak outside of the building. She had organised a tour of Beit Beirut for a small group of us[87].

We are standing next to the building, on Damascus street, by the huge, green tree that covers that façade of the building when looking at it from afar. Huge green trees are rare encounters in Beiruti streets, so much so that it strikes me whenever I see one. Mona quickly tells us about the history of the building, before showing us how the traces of the 1975-1990 conflicts – initially there, the bullet holes on the façades – have been modified and polished following the plans of the architect in charge of the renovation. The cavities are still there but they have been sanded down: they look smooth and fake. Mona disapproved of the restoration project and was critical of how these traces of the past had been 'recreated' – she insisted that 'architects never recreate traces' and compared Beit Beirut's walls to climbing walls for children. We then go through the big metal doors that hide the grandiose entrance hall of the building. Looking up, I can see the sky – the building is tall, open, and it gives an impression of grandeur but also of protection. All of a sudden, we are in a different reality, still connected to the road beyond the metal doors through sounds and smells, but immersed in a landscape that has nothing to do with what exists on the other side of the doors. There is a security guard there, guarding the empty building. The yellow stones, the building pillars and the metal beams to hold them all together are tall, and humbling. I have never seen something like that in Beirut, such a mix of old stones and metal, such an impressive structure. As we get into the building, the vibe is different, though: modern materials prevail in the entrance hall, although old pillars are still visible, as well as the old wall, although full of those sanded down bullet holes. Moving through the building, it is a constant blend of remnants of the original building with new additions to keep everything together, forming a new ensemble.

As we head to the first floor via a modern and steep staircase, we can roam around the rooms freely as they open onto each other – the building is spacious, the ceilings are high, and there are openings onto the city beyond the walls. I feel I am indoors, protected by the structure around me, but I feel very connected to the city on this first floor. In Beit Beirut, there are more traces from the 1975-1990 conflicts apart from the bullet holes: sandbag barricades, graffiti of militia insignias and names on the walls, sniper nests, blown-out walls and shooting holes. All those traces have been subjected to some sort of change, polishing, and taming. Those traces coexist with traces of the most recent past, too, especially those of the renovation, that involved additions and modifications to the existing building: refurbished floors,

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[87] Given the nature of this first encounter with Beit Beirut – a visit, led by Mona, for a small group of people interested in Beit Beirut – I do not have a recording of Mona's descriptions as such. Her quotes are from my notes.

electricity throughout the building, air conditioning, modern lighting, windows, a spiral staircase that connects all floors, lifts, and metal beams holding the walls together. A new wing and a rooftop terrace have also been added to the building. Traces of the pre-1975 uses of the building are still present, too: decorated doors, old floor tiles, the yellow stones, the skeleton of the building that testifies to its grandeur, the wide openings and terraces that offer amazing views onto the city, and illustrate its strategic importance for militia fighters.

Larkin and Parry-Davies describe Beit Beirut as 'diverging from the state's approach to war memory, not least as a building that has been restored with the signs of violence left intact, rather than reconstructed in the Solidere fashion' (2019: 91-92), but that is not entirely the case. It is correct that Beit Beirut's renovation differs greatly from Solidere's approach to rebuilding downtown Beirut. As discussed in chapter two, in the 1990s, Hariri insisted that 'not a single building should be kept as it is to remind us of the civil war. There is no need to preserve this painful memory' (Becherer 2005: 18). In Beit Beirut, traces of the conflicts of 1975-1990 have been retained but have not been left intact: they have become modified, reworked and polished remnants of the past. Where Western academics Larkin and Parry-Davies saw 'intact' signs of violence, Mona saw a disgraceful renovation project that denatured the traces that she wanted to protect. These smoothed scars in the walls of Beit Beirut are not simply memorial remnants of war that have escaped the state's attempts at erasure, but interventions in a contested history in which the question of which memories have a place in a Beiruti museum of memory, and how they should be remembered, remains unresolved.

FIG. 13 An example of the smoothed, 'recreated' bullet holes on one of the walls inside Beit Beirut (source: HMA)

Beit Beirut's smoothed bullet holes contrast with other war-torn buildings one can find around Beirut that have not benefited from any form of renovation. Indeed, the signs of the past, on

these other buildings, are not (yet?) seen as an advantage or a betterment for the building that bears them by preserving the last (violent) chapter of its existence (Haidar 2017). On other war-torn buildings around the city, traces of the war remain open wounds. Although they have weathered over time, they have not disappeared or healed, whereas in the case of Beit Beirut, the traces of injury are still there, but they are softened. They remind visitors of the history of violence without confronting them with the crude, raw traces of the shootings.

FIG. 14 Beit Beirut (source: HMA)

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FIG. 15 View onto the street from Beit Beirut (source: HMA)

FIG. 16 An old pillar and new additions in Beit Beirut (source: HMA)

FIG. 17 Beit Beirut façade (source: HMA)

FIG. 18 Polished walls, new lighting, refurbished floor, an older and a more recent pillar (source: HMA)
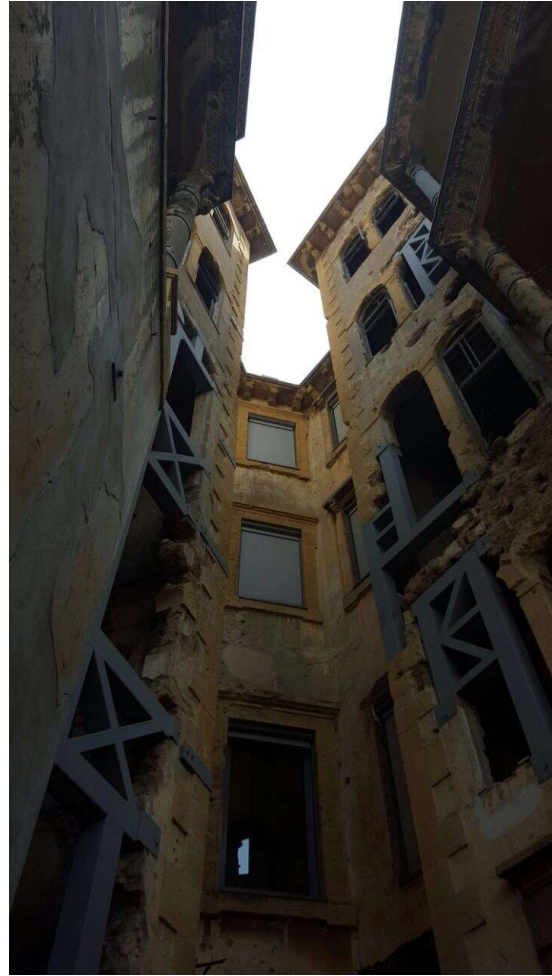

FIG. 19 New metal beams supporting the older structure (source: HMA)

Here I would like to focus on two other renovation processes that have shaped and modified traces of the war past of Beit Beirut to give them new meanings and uses: two graffiti and a screening room. I argue that the graffiti and the screening room in Beit Beirut illustrate both the taming of wounds of the war and their monumentalisation.

GRAFFITI

On the first floor of Beit Beirut, a couple of graffiti apparently made by militia fighters during the 1975-1990 conflicts have been 'framed' as part of the renovation project. They now exist behind glass attached to the walls. The temporary, spontaneous, and precarious nature that graffiti carry is no more – these graffiti look fixed in time and space, they have been monumentalised. However, there were no signs next to them to provide context or information to visitors, as if the graffiti were self-explanatory. As Julie Peteet argues in the context of the

Intifada, 'how and under what conditions graffiti are produced and what their production means for their writers and audiences are central questions' (1996: 140). These questions are left unanswered within the walls of Beit Beirut, letting the viewers imagine a context and meaning for those graffiti, very much like one would for graffiti on outside walls throughout the city. Although a lot could be said about the significance and parallelism between these graffiti and other forms of street arts and public space interventions, here I will only focus on their monumentalising within Beit Beirut, in dialogue with temporal and memorial processes.
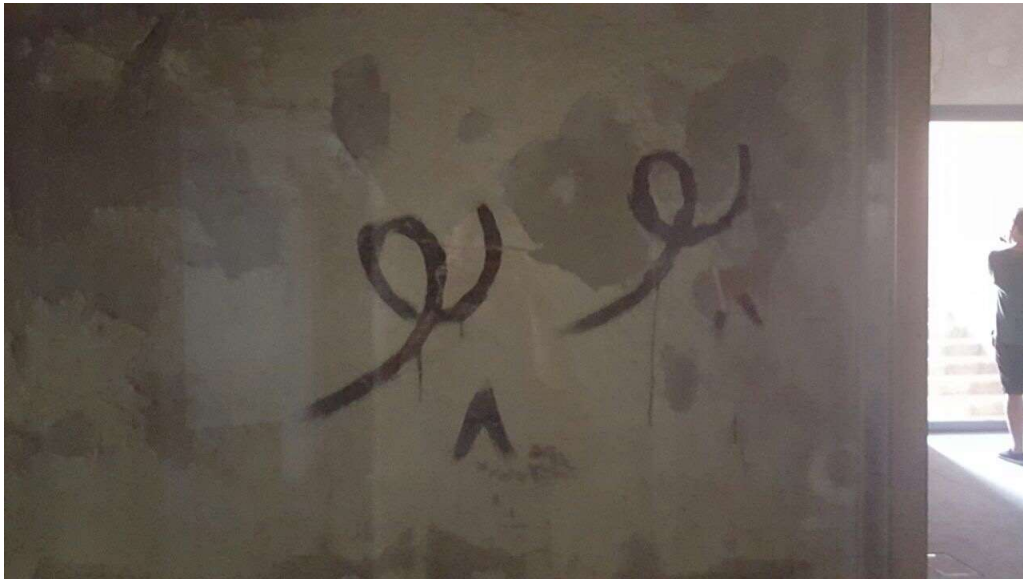

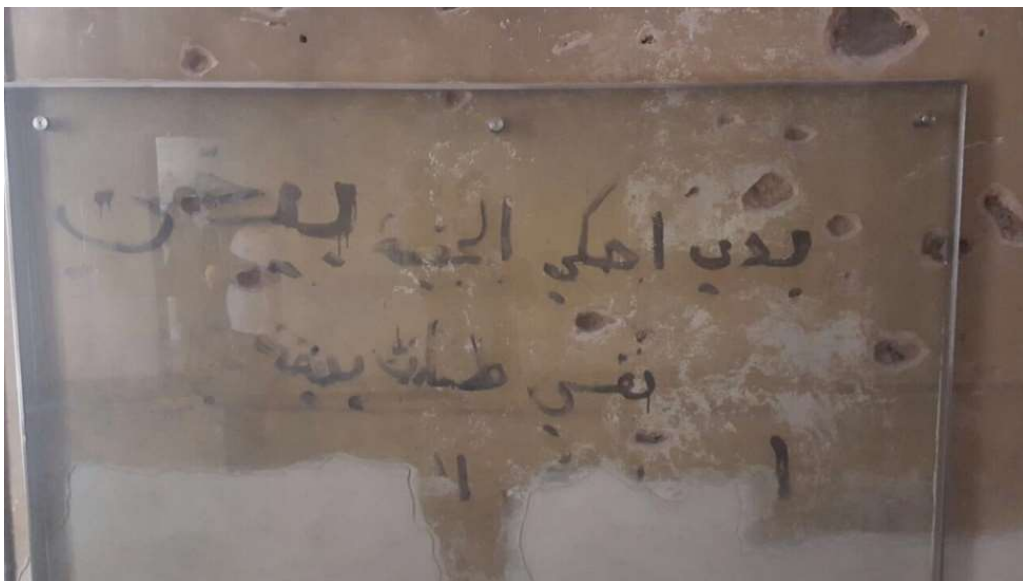*FIG. 20 Graffiti monumentalisation. The graffiti reads 'Ruru' (source: HMA)*

FIG. 21 Graffiti monumentalisation. The graffiti reads 'I want to tell the truth. My soul has become filthy' (source: HMA)

I read the painting on the walls by militia fighters as a way to stamp their authority and ownership over the building, in a context where the whole of Beirut was being contested, fought for, appropriated and divided, and where new controls over space were established. The walls of the city, then, carried those claims for control and appropriation (See Maasri 2009 and 2010). In the intimacy of Beit Beirut, one of the graffiti reads 'ruru', which would be, according to Mona, the nickname of one of the fighters who used Beit Beirut as a combat base. The other graffito reads 'I want to tell the truth, my soul has become filthy'. Writing graffiti inside the house shows a will to break from usual codes in relation to home making. Writing those graffiti was perhaps a way to re-organise the space of the building, to re-claim it and to give it new meanings beyond the pre-1975 uses during which, one can imagine, inhabitants would not have painted graffiti on the walls. Graffiti are a sign of contestation; these fighters 'made the stone walls into encoded tablets, public, didactic, archival, and interventionist spaces of riposte' (Peteet 1996: 148), serving as territorial markers despite their indoor position. Beit Beirut, then, was a space where, in the time and place of war, such 'deviant' or 'alternative behaviours' could be enacted.

The second graffito, claiming that the truth is being spoken – which could arguably be the aim of all art, explains in a way its framing, its making into art. The framing could be seen as a form of recognition of that pocket of truth and art amidst war. I argue that this specific graffito has a function 'in relation to all the space that remains' (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986: 27). Indeed, telling the truth and admitting that the soul has turned filthy is a way of condemning the other spaces, the space of the war, it creates 'a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory' (Ibid.) – in Beit Beirut, the truth was being said, and written on the walls to be asserted even further, the madness of the war was being condemned, while simultaneously being played out. This graffito can only be interpreted in relation to the space and events outside of the walls of Beit Beirut.

The formalisation of graffiti as art exhibit is innately heterotopic as well: there is a will to 'accumulate time' in an 'immobile place' (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986: 26), and to link the time of the present with something from the past that is presented as fixed in time, intact and unchangeable (put behind a glass). Standing in front of these graffiti, one finds oneself in a place where different 'slices in time' (Ibid.), different layers, different epochs coexist: the wall itself – the carrier of the graffiti – is part of the building's structure, part of a building designed as residential and commercial units; the graffiti is another layer of time added onto this initial structure, while the glass is yet another addition that connects the ensemble to the present

time, and the current function of Beit Beirut. The large panes of glass put onto the graffiti on the walls are an illustration of a wish to stop time: to fix some traces of the past in space and time, while modifying or destroying others, through making the graffiti into art pieces and exhibiting them as such. Interestingly, the glass panes placed on top of the graffiti leave a few centimetre opening between the wall and the glass pane, and it is possible for visitors to touch the glass panes, touch the walls, or even find ways to modify what is behind the glass. My point here is that no monumentalisation process can actually produce fixing in time and place; and the walls, the graffiti and the glass panes will remain ephemeral and dynamic, subject to changes and new imaginations.

Finally, the monumentalisation – the staging – of these traces of the past, very much like the bullet holes are monumentalised, juxtaposes 'in a single real place several spaces' that are incompatible (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986: 25). Indeed, on my initial July 2017 visit to Beit Beirut, the building was empty and had not yet hosted its first events. This allowed me to engage with the space and traces of the past more fully, to get close to the walls, to touch them and appreciate the very different atmospheres in each one of the rooms. This was the only time that I was in Beit Beirut when it was not hosting an event. I could roam around the building and let my mind wander, listening to Mona's stories: she told us about the dental practice that was once here, the photo studio, too, as well as the militia fighters who occupied the space during the fifteen-year wars – stories based on the objects that she collected while exploring Beit Beirut in the early 1990s: photos, documents, letters. She had brought many of them with her that day. I could see, read, feel, engage with them – they gave materiality to her stories and allowed my mind to create new images of that space: as a home, full of life, movement, furniture, objects, a space filled with people and their stories, pains, struggles. My imagination took me to all these different past realities and times at once, they all coexisted in the same space in my mind, even when I knew that they had not shared the physical space of Beit Beirut at the same historical time. However, as shown with the graffiti, all these stories coexist and are juxtaposed in Beit Beirut, similarly to what Silverman describes with his idea of palimpsestic memory:

> 'the present is shown to be shadowed or haunted by a past which is not immediately visible but that is progressively brought into view. The relationship between present and past therefore takes the form of a superimposition and interaction of different temporal traces to constitute a sort of composite structure, like a palimpsest, so that one layer of traces can be seen through, and is transformed by, another' (2013: 3)

Beit Beirut is palimpsestic in that sense, for it constitutes a 'combination of not simply two moments in time (past and present) but a number of different moments, hence producing a chain of signification which draws together disparate spaces and times' (Silverman 2013: 3). All the different layers in Beit Beirut are not immediately visible or obvious: it took me a while, with Mona's help, to disentangle what can seem, at first, like a modern, newly built structure that simply comprises 'traces from the past' or what looks like imitated traces. Initially, I looked at what was around me following a simple dichotomy between 'war elements' versus 'new elements' when in fact the reality around me comprised 'a number of different moments' in the past and a 'number of different moments' in the present and the future. Indeed, all the changes made to the building between the 1990s and today have been interested in the past and the future: they have had at their roots visions of the past for the future. This goes for Mona and other activists' long struggle to save the site, for the renovation architect and the teams in charge of the renovation, and for the institutional powers involved in the process: all had different and competing visions and imaginaries for the site, which translates, still today, in the lack of '*raison d'être*' for Beit Beirut: it does not have a management board or a long-term function. As these competing visions have accumulated upon and within its walls, Beit Beirut is perhaps more complex and conflicted today than it has ever been. Neither its function or its meaning can be captured by any single vision of the building, its past or its future.

Screening Room

In Beit Beirut, as part of the renovation project, two new screening rooms were created, one of them in a former sniper's nest. This screening room offers another example of a renovation process that has modified and redefined traces of the building's violent past. The screening room still bears the architecture of war and violence. In addition to the bullet holes in the wall, a new interior wall was added during the war to protect snipers while providing them with shooting holes. That specific wall has been maintained through the restoration process, and a retractable screen was added to allow projections onto the wall. Carpet, speakers, stairs, a projector, seats and lights have also been added, making it a fully functional screening room.

FIG. 22 Two pictures of a screening room in a former snipers' nest. A retractable screen can be pulled down: the architecture of the war can be hidden (source: Habib Battah, http://www.beirutreport.com/2016/05/inside-beit-beirut.html)

FIG. 23 View of the screening room from the other side of the protective wall, through one of the shooting holes (source: Habib Battah, http://www.beirutreport.com/2016/05/inside-beit-beirut.html)

This screening room offers another example of melting the architecture of the war into a more modern building with new, modern uses. Indeed, in the screening room, the architecture of violence can be partially hidden thanks to the retractable screen: when pulled down, it hides the snipers' wall, and one finds oneself in a modern-looking room. I found that in this particular room, the violence of the war actually felt even more present: the small room felt claustrophobic, as it is lit mostly with artificial lights, and is disconnected from the rest of the building and the street; it can be shut with a door, which is not the case for all rooms, and the shooting holes create an unsettling feeling of being trapped and potentially looked at.

In the screening room, there is a double process of staging traces of the war. On the one hand, the fact that the seats are facing the shooting/protective wall transforms the architecture of war into something to be looked at, a spectacle, shocking and powerful. On the other hand, the reality of the war can be hidden with a screen, which is a meaningful act in and of itself: pulling that screen down, preparing for a different reality to be projected, to transform the space completely.

The screening room, with its retractable screen, juxtaposes 'in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986: 25). Foucault himself used the example of the cinema in his writing: as a real place being the stage for other places that do not coexist. The screen of the cinema has the potential to present very different realities and sites that are 'in themselves incompatible'; the screening room in Beit Beirut offers an extreme instance of this juxtaposition of incompatible realities.

The screening room, the graffiti and the bullet holes in the walls of Beit Beirut show the staging of both the traces of the war and the erasure of traces of the war: the staging and monumentalisation of the traces of violence create a sharp contrast with other non-war elements of the building.

* * *

After my initial visit in July 2017, I visited Beit Beirut on various occasions during my fieldwork – always to attend an event, an exhibition or take part in workshops. Several large events were organised in the building while I was in Beirut, including the first ever event to take place there: 'Sacred Catastrophe: Healing Lebanon', led and curated by artist Zena el Khalil[88]. That was followed by a two-week exhibition/celebration led by the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) for their ten-year anniversary, titled 'Ten Years Later. How to Tell when the Rebels have won' (between the 10th and the 25th November 2017). Although the event had no direct relation to the war(s) of Lebanon, Rasha Salti, the curator of the exhibition, stressed the symbolism of the site it was taking place in, describing Beit Beirut as 'an allegorical architectural symbol of Lebanon's Civil War and perhaps of the region's embattled contemporary reality' (AFAC 2017: 10). More than forty artists from Arab countries who had been supported by AFAC showcased their work in Beit Beirut as part of the event. One of the photography exhibitions part of 'Ten Years Later' was Mona's 'The Photo Mario Project. Recapturing the Memory of a Neighborhood Photography Studio' (not war-focused)[89]. When I got back to Beirut in the spring of 2018, I attended further events in Beit Beirut: the exhibition 'Nazra: On Memory and War', and other events that were part of the Beirut Design Week. Nazra took place in May 2018, it was a photo exhibition following a contest launched by the United

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[88] A 40-day event, war-focused, that took place between the 18th September and the 27th October 2017.

[89] Three other exhibitions followed, while I was away from Beirut: Shifting Lights; Beirut: Echo of Silence (neither was war-focused) and Haneen (a collective work of Lebanese and Syrian artists on the impact of war on childhood – the exhibition focused on '39 Syrian children living in different informal settlements in Lebanon' whose poems and stories were 'interpreted by 47 Lebanese and Syrian artists' (Lebanon Traveler 2018)). The curator of Haneen, Chadi Aoun, claimed that 'Beit Beirut was undeniably our first choice [for the exhibition], a building we all hold dear and representative of our scars of war: a place that stands as the memory of war' (Lebanon Traveler 2018). This was followed by Elie Saab's new postage stamp celebration in March 2018 (not war-focused).

Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Lebanon and was co-organised by the UNDP in Lebanon, the Lebanese Association for History, the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon, the NGO Fighters for Peace and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)[90]. Eleven pictures by professional and amateur photographers were exhibited and a film was screened. This exhibition was heavily grounded in 'peacebuilding' and 'transitional justice' discourses, at the centre of the organising groups' objectives and narratives. Finally, during the Beirut Design Week, a series of events, public (art) interventions and installations, tours, talks, workshops and exhibitions took place all around Beirut, most focusing on how to think and (re) create the city. An eclectic mix of works was exhibited in Beit Beirut that week and when I visited, the building was absolutely packed with people, colours, and art works.

These different events show the current multi-purpose nature of Beit Beirut. What has been created through Beit Beirut's renovation is a space open to different interpretations, uses and claims (which comes with its own challenges). Larkin and Parry-Davies stressed the fact that in Beit Beirut, in 2018 and 2019, 'regular events, including book launches and sales for products from mosaics to designer scarves, would suggest that the space is used more for commercial hire than pedagogical curation', as exemplified with the celebration held in Beit Beirut for the fashion designer Elie Saab's new 'dedicated postage stamp' (2019: 84).

There is a tension in how Beit Beirut is being conceptualised as a space. Currently, the building is used for temporary exhibitions and events of all sorts. However, Beit Beirut's ultimate function as a 'museum of memory' has been interpreted as 'memory of the civil war' (See Middle East Eye 2018; Larkin and Parry-Davies 2019) and in turn, the absence of permanent managing board and permanent museum in Beit Beirut has been read as the failure to agree on a memorial function for the space (Ibid.).

This focus on Beit Beirut as a museum of the civil war only is limiting as it selects a specific period of the history of the building and of Beirut to be put forward and remembered. It also ignores the fact that Beit Beirut was not initially renovated as a memorial to the civil war, but as a multi-purpose cultural centre that would – among other things – include sections on the history of Beirut, including but not limited to the history of the civil war. Furthermore, the shortcut describing Beit Beirut as a museum of the memory of the civil war alone, does

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[90] Most of these NGOs are funded by international bodies such as the British Council, the Norwegian Embassy, the German Foreign Office for the NGO Fighters for Peace; the British Embassy, the European Union, the Embassy of Finland and the Swiss Embassy, among others for ICTJ.

not reflect what Mona described during my first visit of Beit Beirut with her. There and then, she said that Beit Beirut should become a museum of stories and said: 'Only stories should be told in this building. It's only through stories that we can reach reconciliation.'

Mona's struggle to protect Beit Beirut from destruction and transform it into a museum should be resituated in her initial 'discovery' of Beit Beirut: Mona said that when she came back to Beirut in the early 1990s after a year abroad, she was desperate to 'see what was happening with downtown Beirut', and as she walked around Beirut, she came across Beit Beirut. As a young architect, she had a dream of restoring and rebuilding Beirut. She said, 'suddenly our downtown was rebuilt' and that she could not find any references to the landmarks of pre-war Beirut that she knew. She opposed Solidere back then and still does today. The contestations presented in this section recall the state's attitude towards memory, and the past in general. The struggles to preserve, reclaim, change, use and imagine Beirut's buildings and landscapes could not be separated from the fight to preserve and remember the past of the city. And this cannot be separated from the 1990s context of intense destruction and wiping out of the past in Beirut.

Mona's explicit disapproval of and discontent with the modifications made to Beit Beirut and to the physical traces of violence on and in the building is exemplary of the contested nature of traces of the past, which do not tell the same stories to everyone; and which are not used by everyone to tell the same stories. As stated earlier, the struggles around saving Beit Beirut not only show the ineptitude of the Lebanese state to engage with questions of memory, heritage and history; they also unearth contestations over symbols of and narratives about the past.

3. CONTESTATION THROUGH RE-INTERPRETING URBAN LANDSCAPES

In this second section, I focus more closely on how urban landscapes are re-imagined and re-interpreted. Firstly, my conversation with Antoine in November 2018 around his vision of Beirut as a 'palimpsest' helps us to think about 'heritage' and traces of the past more broadly. Antoine described Beirut to me as being a city that was and still is 'marvellous' thanks to the 'cohabitation of very different urban elements, of buildings of all sizes, shapes, epochs and styles'[91]. He talked about a balance that exists in Beirut. His main motivation in his activism is the maintenance of this balance and the urban fabric as a whole, and not the aesthetics of either the city or its buildings. Antoine mentioned the hotch-potch [*cohabitation de choses*

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[91] Our conversation was in French. Translation is mine.

très, très différentes] of Ottoman, French mandate and modernist buildings, some knocked down and replaced by completely different structures, other given new towers or spires. He said that it was rare to have such diverse architectural styles squashed together in such a small space [*un équilibre rare dans un si petit espace*]. But despite the architectural chaos, for Antoine, this still reflects a certain 'social coherence' that reflects Beirut's history. If an Ottoman building was destroyed and replaced by another building of a different, incongruous, style, or even if tower blocks are added to the mix of Ottoman, mandate period, and modernist buildings of Beirut, this, for Antoine, is not in itself problematic: 'In any case, that's how Beirut has always been built throughout its history.' Antoine developed further,

> 'I think that it's absurd to want to protect this or that thing, this building, but [...] having no problems that the one next to it, that is less beautiful [...] disappears. Because they are [...] It is a matter of coherence, it is a matter of the way in which a fabric has developed. And then, and then, these fabrics have their coherence, their social coherence [...] their coherence in the way they function, they have their function.'

More problematic for Antoine are the instances where a whole row of houses is destroyed leaving a street with a small house alongside a tower block, 'detached from the street, set back, fenced off, secured'. What is important to Antoine is the coherence of a palimpsestic social fabric that reflects a palimpsestic urban space: the role play that buildings play with each other. Antoine insisted that

> 'there certainly is a form of classical defence of heritage in me. Just like others, I will be sensitive to "Wow, this building is beautiful, it should be preserved" but I am not complacent with that narrative, it isn't enough, it's really not enough.'

Antoine's excerpt here also resonates with my earlier analyses, that showed that there is more to attachment to old buildings than their aesthetic beauty, for instance childhood homes with deep emotional associations, that inform the desire to preserve them.

Lucia Volk, in her article 'When Memory repeats itself. The Politics of Heritage in Post civil war Lebanon' citing Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004), wrote:

> 'Heritage has been defined as a "mode of cultural production that gives the endangered or outmoded a second life as an exhibition of itself." The reinterpretation and presentation of a site of history as a site of memory revitalizes the treasured yet endangered heritage and endorses it as a past that is worth saving'. (2008: 292)

I would like to return to Beit Beirut here for a moment, for Mona's work can be understood within this definition: she wanted to preserve Beit Beirut for she is convinced that the building's past is 'worth saving'. Mona, through her safeguarding of Beit Beirut, contributed to fighting

Solidere's enterprise and policy of erasure, that took the opposite view, stating that the past was only worth leaving behind. Beit Beirut resists the attempts to abstract it from its social and historical surroundings to become a timeless monument to past war, stubbornly retaining its traces of a time before the war and inevitably acquiring new traces and new meanings that add to its multivocal nature as a hybrid space in which a myriad of imagined spaces and times can be remembered and envisioned. Mona's rejection of Beit Beirut's restoration has to do with the fact that the renovation architect's approach to renovating Beit Beirut might have been one that conservation architect and academic Mazen Haidar described as denial of the trauma of the war, a lack of understanding of the size and importance of what had happened to the building, coupled with an ordering and a taming of the scars (Haidar 2017). For Mazen Haidar, stigmas of the war on the built environment in Beirut are a manifestation of traumas experienced on a daily basis: the trauma of the loss of one's bearings (*repères*), the trauma of the void, and of the metamorphosis that Beirut suffers day after day (2017). This interpretation echoes Mona's dedication to saving the building, and her approach to war traces on Beit Beirut. Indeed, these traces and their preservation are not the actual focus of Mona's activism – they are instead the physical manifestation of her worry for the future: what stories are going to be told about Beirut, its people and its past, in Beit Beirut and elsewhere. Mona's work has allowed Beit Beirut to re-become a site for a varied history, varied stories and various understandings to emerge through the sole fact that Beit Beirut is still standing, still there. Indeed, despite her disapproval with the renovation process, I do believe that Mona has managed to transform Beit Beirut into a *lieu de mémoire*, that is, a space that will keep being re-created, re-invented and re-imagined simply because it exists and is used, which echoes the initial definition of a *lieu de mémoire* by Nora, which is anything but a site fixed in time and place:

> 'For if we accept that the most fundamental purpose of the lieu de memoire is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial-just as if gold were the only memory of money-all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs, it is also clear that lieux de memoire only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications' (Nora 1989:19)

RE-IMAGINING BEIRUT'S SCARS

Restoration and construction in Beirut after 1990 inevitably involved dealing with scars from the past that are the product of an intentional act of destruction (as opposed to a more subtle deterioration caused by time or natural elements) and that cause negative emotions: these scars are a tangible manifestation of trauma, a physical manifestation of a dark past but

simultaneously carry with them the potentiality to be re-written, exploited, manipulated or given new meanings (Haidar 2017). Interventions on these scars are thus loaded with and led by that negative charge rooted in both architects and actors of restoration projects, who would either pursue restoration projects that crystallise the trauma by conserving the stigmas of the violent past or projects that promote erasure of these scars, a certain form of rebirth and a passage to peace (Haidar 2017).

In Beirut, the reality of the relationship to these scars and the wish to preserve them or erase them is complex. These different approaches to maintaining or modifying traces of the past evolve on a large spectrum of possibilities, involve complex temporalities and a myriad of different relations to the past (and its physical traces) and different hopes for memorialising it. Different approaches can potentially coexist in one renovation/reconstruction project as shown with Beit Beirut. Similarly, one or the other approach can be privileged on a specific project and exist in isolation in a landscape that has taken on a different approach.

As developed in chapter two and five more specifically, downtown Beirut's official reconstruction projects after 1990 did not take into account citizens' wishes and demands, their memories, their lifestyles or hopes for the future of their city. Downtown Beirut became isolated from the rest of the city, renovated in a way that would give it some sort of grandeur, making it attractive for investors and upper-class dwellers and tourists, but not for the majority of the Lebanese.

Another aspect of these destructions is the fact that ruins of ancient Lebanon have consistently been wiped out and demolished at the hands of developers, real-estate companies and quarrying projects, in a context of total impunity. Habib, in his article 'Race Against Time: How luxury developers are wiping out ancient Beirut' (2019), condemns the freedom with which prehistoric and Roman sites in Lebanon have been bulldozed, flattened to make space for property construction or quarries. In the 1990s, hundreds of archaeologists came to Lebanon to explore what could be found below the ruins of the war, benefiting from Solidere's false stress on archaeology as an asset for the city – archaeologists had to rush to excavate, to 'beat the bulldozers which were clearing the way for the shopping centers and residential towers that Solidere envisaged', while Hariri's government claimed that 'archaeological work shall be programmed in such a way that it does not delay reconstruction works' (Battah 2019). The following few lines by Habib sum up the approach taken by Solidere when it comes to conceptualising ancient ruins and cities buried beneath the surface in Beirut as 'heritage':

'By the late 1990s, more than 120 archaeological sites were excavated, according to Dominic Perring, one of the project leaders in Lebanon's post-war excavations. Only seven of these ancient sites remain intact today but they are largely forgotten, overgrown with grass, littered with garbage or inaccessible to the public, lying in the shadows of major construction projects. [...] Nearly 25 years since the reconstruction project began, promises by Solidere to build an array of archaeological parks, gardens and museums to celebrate the city's history have never materialised. On the other hand, Solidere has sold most of the old city to wealthy property investors and dozens of luxury glass towers have transformed its skyline. Yet the company, now worth $8 billion, has failed to erect a single sign to alert the public about the ruins that lie beneath the skyscrapers.' (Battah 2019)

In Beirut's landscape, not only does Beit Beirut's renovation highlights the high-rise and luxurious buildings, it also stresses the presence of the buildings that did not benefit from any form of renovation – both large buildings, and smaller residential units. In those cases, there has not been a thought process of monumentalisation of the past. Scars and traces of the past on private/residential buildings show a different approach to renovation, and a different relationship to traces of the past. They illustrate the 'spontaneous reconstructions' that took place throughout the 1975-1990 conflicts. They were initiated and performed by Beiruti dwellers – renters and owners themselves – at a time where, on the one hand, no one knew how long it would take until violence would end[92] and on the other hand, local inhabitants were left to their own devices as neither insurance companies or the state would provide support or means for repairing their houses. The Lebanese had developed 'crisis management skills' (Haidar 2019), using precarious means to secure their living spaces – traces of the war and their aesthetics were not a priority to maintain. The system of adaptation to the crisis developed by the Lebanese, the effects of destruction on their perception of the built environment, and the evolving meaning of reconstruction and rebirth during the long period of the conflict (Haidar 2019) led to precarious modifications made to the built environment: temporary, spontaneous reconstructions and renovations were thus the norm throughout and after the war and this spontaneous architecture is still visible around Beirut. What were meant to be temporary, DIY, precarious modifications are now fully part of the Beiruti landscape, as a result of a lack of financial means, a disengagement from the state and from owners and the absence of a grand plan for the renovation of Beirut outside of its city centre. This example shows how 'traces of the war' are in some cases a profound disruption, an obstacle to safe, secure and agreeable dwelling spaces and how the approach in these cases has been to hide, repair, compensate physically for the damages that these traces cause, unlike what happened

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[92] What is now defined as 'the Lebanese civil war(s)' was for a few years called by locals 'the events', carrying the idea that violence would not last, and that it was all temporary.

in Beit Beirut. The continued existence of these traces is also symbolic of the temporality and relationship to violence in Lebanon.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

Activist and tour guide Marc[93] told me about the 'inconsistencies in the landscape' that he sees in Beirut. During my conversation with him in 2019, we talked about traces of the past, haunting and ghosts, and about contrasts in Beirut that make the past ever more present. Marc contests and re-claims Beirut's landscape through his thinking, and practically through the tours that he gives in Beirut. Below is an extract from my conversation with him:

> MARC (M): [...] the vision for the area that Solidere had, it's obviously meant to be a high-end place, luxurious place that caters for very high class, very perfect and polished, this is very obvious what they're trying to convey, but they can't see people walking around, they can't see businesses flourishing, they can't see that, so this is the gap between what is supposed to be. [...]
>
> HMA: When you say it's a ghosted city, where are the ghosts and what are the ghosts in your city?
>
> M: I think for me personally it's not the ghosts of militia fighters fighting on the rooftops...[...] for me it's the ghost of the people that were supposed to be here according to Solidere, of course...I don't imagine ghosts, with like Gucci bags, but it's just people that were supposed to fill this area, regardless of their class or whatever, that are not there, these are the ghosts, the ghosts of what it should have been, whether it's my vision or Solidere's vision...because what's common in the two visions is that you have people, now from which background they come from it's different, because Solidere they want people from a certain class, for me it's for everyone, but we both agree that we want to fill it with people and you don't have these people. [...] for me these are the ghosts and not really ghosts from the past. [...] People, simply, we don't know which people. [...]
>
> HMA: So, it's not the people who were there in the past and who are not there anymore?
>
> M: No, no, no, no, for me at least it's not that.

The ghosts, in Marc's narrative, are the people that have never come and the uses of the space that have never materialised, the ghosts of those who should have used that space after the end of the conflicts, the ghosts of those who should be able to claim downtown Beirut as their city centre, either those that Solidere had in mind, or those that Marc had in mind. The ghosts

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[93] As introduced in chapter four, I 'met' Marc on Skype in February 2019. Back then, he was a university student. He is a tour guide and founder of the 'Layers of a Ghost City: Downtown Beirut' walking tours. Our conversation was in English.

are missing shadows – they are the shadows left by someone's physical absence, by people who might have come.

Here, I would like to introduce three buildings: the Holiday Inn, the Murr tower and 'the Egg'. All three are situated in Beirut's city centre, and have not been subjected to any form of real-estate modification since 1990. The Holiday Inn is a former hotel; it is a very tall structure, used during the 1975-1990 conflicts as a combat base and has been left untouched since then, still bearing the traces of conflict. It is a gigantic presence of the past in the city. The Murr tower is also a very tall structure in the centre of Beirut. Its construction started in 1974 and was halted by the conflicts, although 40 floors were already built. It is now in limbo, with an uncertain fate, left untouched since the 1970s, still and heavy in the city. The Egg has had a similar life so far. Initially built as a cinema, part of a bigger structure that was meant to include a shopping centre and a car park in the 1960s. It is nicknamed 'the Egg' for its egg-like, rounded shape. It is a seemingly abandoned building that has served several purposes since its initial construction but has been kept in its war-ravaged state since the end of the conflicts, although it is situated in the 'Solidere area'.

FIG. 24 The Holiday Inn, a still standing spectre of the conflicts in a sugar-coated area (source: Wikimedia Commons)

FIG. 25 The Murr Tower, an unfinished building in downtown Beirut (source: HMA)

Another way in which Marc and I discussed ghosts was by focusing on the spectral presence of the conflicts in Beirut in the form of buildings, streets and infrastructures that Solidere tried to hide and destroy through their 'reconstruction' process. They have only succeeded in bringing, according to Marc, a more important presence of the violent past into the present of the city. The ghosts of the war have had consequences in terms of the way that Solidere tried to hide them, to leave them behind. They have also had consequences in terms of experiences of downtown Beirut as it is now, as described by Marc when he talks about the 'haunting vibe' of downtown Beirut:

> 'Like this sugar-coating that they did, this extra layer that they built, that, you know, crushed all of the other layers, whether metaphorically or literally, hmm it's actually, it's pretty recent and it's kind of a, it's sugar-coating something beneath it, which is, I mean, we're not talking about any physical structures anymore, we're talking about the history, yeah this is the idea I am trying to convey. [...] When you think about the dark past, the Holiday Inn is super straightforward, very explicit, you can see how it bring this feeling of, you know, the past haunting the present, but in Solidere, when you go inside the downtown area, you don't have this straightforward, explicit, figures, you know, it's a very implicit and it's…it's exactly…a psycho killer in a suit. It's not the obvious profile for, I mean, the Solidere buildings are not really your typical triggers for the past haunting the present but you still feel it anyway.'

For Marc, buildings such as the Holiday Inn, the Egg or the Murr tower in Beirut are symbols of a violent past that is still present (the past that Solidere tried to erase is still very much there, in his walking tours Marc talks about militia fighters being thrown out of the Holiday Inn's windows during the war, for instance) as well as a symbol of resistance to Solidere and its grand plans. Solidere has not managed to take the ownership of the entire downtown area. The still-standing buildings that suffered through the war are a reminder of that, too. The contrast between the buildings not destroyed by Solidere and not renovated and the 'new' buildings creates an even more salient presence of the violent past in the present. Walking around downtown Beirut, Marc describes a feeling of something 'fishy', he thinks that 'something is not right':

> '[...] why are these buildings so empty? You can immediately see the buildings, you walk around downtown, you barely ever run into another pedestrian. They immediately feel that, but it comes more interesting, and this is for me related to the haunting part, it's when you see the contrast [...] this is where you really start to feel that there is something wrong, you don't know what that is but you feel that there is something that is inconsistent. You feel like, you feel like there is something that is not supposed to be here, so it's either the Holiday Inn that is not supposed to be here or it's the whole area [Solidere] that is not supposed to be here, but this sharp contrast or even with the Egg or any other building that is not one of these

luxurious buildings makes you feel like there's ...I mean, it's a mind fuck, you see the Holiday Inn and you see Beirut terraces and the Murr tower [...] There is an inconsistency that is a bit disturbing, if I can call it that. You feel like it's either...it's kind of, either black or white, you know. You feel like [...] one of the two is not supposed to be here, and this is why I think I usually take advantage of this, let's say of this scene or this landscape of the new buildings of Solidere [...] this is where we realise we have an amnesia approach that was adopted during the reconstruction and I feel like it kind of tingles – the feeling that people were having about these inconsistencies. [...] I recently saw a movie that was filmed in 1994, and, and it's a story happening in Beirut and the entire movie...we saw footage of the Holiday Inn and this entire area in 1994, so before Solidere even stepped in, of course it was...you know, the damaged area, buildings were damaged, infrastructures, the roads were pretty crappy as well. But what's interesting is that the Holiday Inn wouldn't stand out as much as it stands out today, in terms of the past haunting the present, because the more you contrast it with you know, new urban fabric, the more you feel like it's actually haunting, because if you had the entire area still abandoned, the Holiday Inn would maybe be impressive because of its size, it's a huge building, it's the tallest building in the area, OK but in terms of the past haunting the present, it wouldn't be that....so let's say they renovated the whole area it wouldn't feel so much as the past haunting the present when you have a huge contrast with extremes. So the more Solidere built new buildings around the Egg, around this building, around the other areas that are right outside of the downtown area, the more they built high-end buildings, the easier it is to see the contrast between buildings, the more they're kind of pushing this vibe of the past haunting the present from the other buildings that are not, that are either still abandoned or carry traces of war, etc. but these buildings that carry traces of war, if they're not contrasted with an extreme, they're not that haunting, as much as they are when they are contrasted with the new buildings. Two extremes and when you compare the two extremes, it kind of emphasises the extremity of both sides, you know. [...] it's like two extremes, so basically Solidere contributed in making the Holiday Inn an even more haunting building, simply by building the extreme next to it, the other extreme right next to it. [...] It's the gap that brings out this vibe even more [...] you're basically contributing very much to making it even more haunting, because you're making it even more out of context, you're making it even more special, more unique, more out of place, you're making it even more an elephant in the city, you know...'

'[...] So if you're new to the city and you're walking around this area for the first or second time, it's like 'guys don't be fooled this is a cover-up' [...] a cover-up for a pretty dark past, specifically when referring to the war, because I am comparing it to the Holiday Inn, and the people being thrown out. [...] The amnesia approach is 'OK the war ended, OK we want to build the centre for investors and we know that investors don't like dark stuff, they don't like the dark history, the dark past, so we have to'... – it's not a face lift, a face lift would be a high end renovation – this was killing the area and just replacing it with another one, so putting everything under the rug and building a new centre.'

Here, Marc provides more insight into the ways in which traces from the past scream to demand their place in the present, in the face of a 'reconstruction process' that did not make room for them. His words are important for they provide yet another perspective on the question of emotions in relation to the urban: Marc feels the presence of the past strongly in his interactions with the urban environment around him, and this presence is disturbing for it is not embraced in the urban landscape. Marc uses the word 'feel' a lot to describe the affective impact of the urban on him. His perspective is that Solidere failed to reach their goals of erasing the past; they have only made it more present and obvious. Later in our conversation, Marc insisted that he keeps walking in the streets of downtown Beirut to keep fighting Solidere's enterprise, for it is a centre that has not been built for 'people like him' – but by occupying it with his presence, he shows Solidere that they have not won.

* * *

In this third section, I have shown how various interpretations and experiences of traces of the past influence Antoine and Marc in their everyday interactions with the city, in dialogue with Mona's and Habib's perspectives on 'heritage' and 'preservation'. The re-imagining of traces of the past re-create the presence of the past in the city beyond the dominant urban planning approach that has been to try to wipe out the physical presence of the past in Beirut's landscapes. Imaginary landscapes are immune to these reconstructions: urban activists let urban landscapes travel beyond their own temporal moment to include past traces in their own understanding of their surroundings, in a way that suits the imagining of the city that they want to create.

4. EVERYDAY ACTIVISM

In this last section, I will shed light on instances of urban activism bleeding into seemingly mundane places, where non-professional activism takes place, intertwined with everyday times and rhythms. I do this through my observations of an open-air private parking lot in Ashrafieh. The open-air parking lot is an instance of the appropriation of space that also contributes to thinking about space and place in Beirut beyond the public/private divide. This case study will be complemented with observations about 'the Egg'.

* * *

In Ashrafieh, a private, open-air parking lot was situated right in front of the building where I resided for a month and a half in the spring of 2018. The parking lot is situated in the middle of a residential area, surrounded by buildings, as shown on the pictures below. It has a slight

incongruity to it: it is a low structure surrounded by high structures, but it also looks like a remnant unbuilt plot, a forgotten plot, in a city where every centimetre of land seems to be the subject of real-estate speculation. The parking lot is not a free space though: people can only park their cars there for a fee. There is a guard and barriers at the entrance of the plot. The parking lot is freely and easily accessible by foot. The ground is a mix of sand and stones, which makes it a better surface to walk and run on than concrete.

For a month and a half, I observed people using the parking lot as an imagined public space, a space of encounter, of leisure and play. I sat on my balcony and looked down at the parking lot, at the movements there throughout the day, at the cars, the people and the dogs. Among the parked cars, early in the morning when the weather was still fresh enough, some people walked in circles on the parking for their daily exercise. Children used the parking lot as a playground – they rode their bikes there, some parents played hide and seek with their children, hiding behind the parked cars. People ran and jogged, and some others played racket sports. Every day, I saw different people walking their dogs. There was also a man who came to the parking lot every afternoon, pushing another man in a wheelchair. They stayed on the parking lot for maybe ten minutes – the carer would be doing things on his phone, they did not speak to each other or engage with each other, and off they went again. A taxi office was situated next door, and taxi drivers had their cars parked on the parking lot. Frequently, taxi drivers spent time washing and cleaning the inside and outside of their cars. One afternoon, a man laid his praying mat in one corner of the parking lot and prayed there. I used the parking lot on a few occasions, to be picked up and dropped off by taxi drivers, but also to play and unwind one evening. The parking lot was the only space in the neighbourhood where I could be outdoors, exercise and have fun without having to pay a fee.

FIG. 26 A parking lot in Ashrafieh (source: HMA)

FIG. 27 Man on a wheelchair and his carer on their daily visit to the parking lot (source: HMA)

FIG. 28 Man praying in a corner of the parking lot (source: HMA)

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FIG. 29 Racket sports, bikes, dogs, walkers and drivers in the parking lot (source: HMA)

I understand the uses of Ashrafieh's parking as acts of everyday activism, that are to be understood in the context outlined throughout the thesis, in which I stressed the violence of the lack of public spaces, the lack of possibilities to walk, to use the city freely, and the lack of parks. People use the parking lot as their playground, a place of encounter and leisure, confirming the idea laid out in chapter two that certain places that are meant to be private are sometimes used and reclaimed as public, showing how people, in their uses of the city, re-frame what is public and what is private.

Monroe also mentions private balconies as public spaces in Beirut (2016: 18-21); while Abir studies the creation of informal football pitches around Beirut[94] by children and teenagers, and Barakat showed how shopping malls in Beirut are experienced as public spaces (2012)[95]. These examples are a reminder that the city should be designed for and by its users,

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[94] See the 2014-2016 Project 'Informal Football Fields, an Alternative Use of Urban Space': https://publicworksstudio.com/en/projects/informal-football-fields-alternative-use-urban-space

[95] But these cannot be thought of as 'public spaces' for they are exclusionary by nature: in Beirut, there are security guards at the entrance of shopping malls, controlling the flow of people who come in and out; and shopping malls

which echoes Abir when she told me that we need to think about spaces and places in Beirut beyond a public/private divide; the 'prohibited spaces' of Beirut have uses beyond what urban planners, architects and city officials have wanted to make of them. Abir argues that

> 'shared spaces in Beirut are constantly produced and sustained through individual as well as communal efforts of diverse publics. These shared spaces are defined by their users' social practices of gathering and recreation, beyond the areas allocated by the state as "public". Restricting the discussion on public space within notions of state and citizenship in Lebanon not only freezes activism in the struggle for "state building", but also traps policies and future visions for urban planning within a strictly propertied understanding of the city, turning dwellers and everyday users of space into passive agents with no claims over the city' (Jadaliyya 2016)

The idea that places should not be considered public or private based on their legal status but based on people's uses of them is a crucial element of Beiruti urban activists' approach to their rights to the city and to reclaiming space, and has in turn shaped my understanding and approach to the spaces of the city and to 'urban activism' as also encompassing everyday acts of reclaiming the city, beyond professionalised activism.

This is also exemplified in the various uses of 'the Egg' in central Beirut. It is still in its war-ravaged state, isolated in a neighbourhood that has been fully appropriated and modified by Solidere. There hasn't been any architectural intervention per se on the building, although it bears the traces of time passing, and the traces of decisions made in relation to the openness/closedness of the site as fences have been erected around it. 'The Egg' looks abandoned but it is not: every time a new project of destruction or appropriation of the space comes forth, activists launch a petition and revive the 'Save the Egg' campaign, that has been going on for more than ten years now. 'The Egg' remains in that constant state of physical and temporal precarity: it is not 'saved' in the way that Beit Beirut has secured a future, it is constantly at risk of being destroyed and replaced by a new structure. Relationships to 'the Egg' have evolved with time, too: it has been used as an exhibition site and hosted rave parties in the 1990s, and more recently, as a protest space. It also exists in a landscape of constant, fast-paced urban changes, and in contrast with the modern structures of the Solidere-constructed neighbourhood it is in.

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are usually high-end places of consumption, which naturally excludes those who cannot afford such shopping, or at least those who the guards decide cannot.
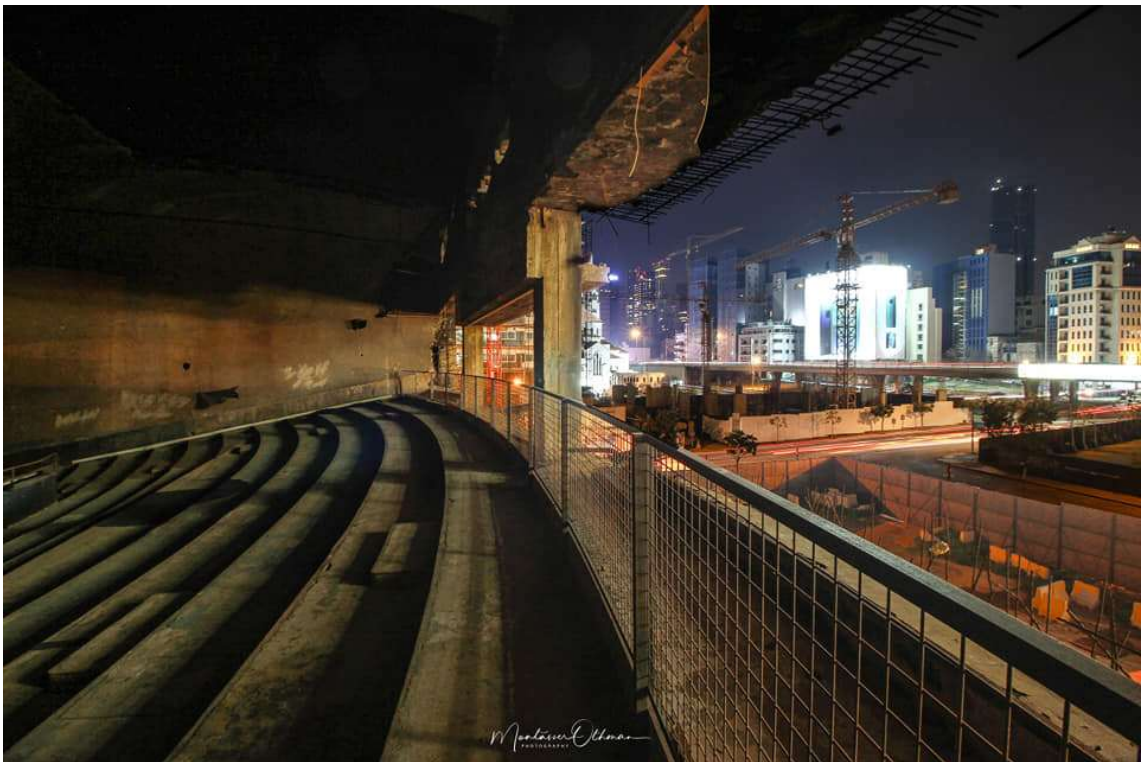
FIG. 30 Four pictures of the Egg (source: Montasser Othman,
https://www.facebook.com/monti.cristo/posts/10161918321025352?__tn__=-R)

'The Egg' has not changed position but the world around it has changed strikingly. 'The Egg' is still solidly anchored in downtown Beirut, it is a landmark, a testimony to the fact that traces of the past remain and are made even more important when they exist in isolation. 'The Egg' is an example of how the few buildings that have been untouched in downtown Beirut (among others: the Murr Tower, the Holiday Inn, the Saint Georges Hotel) have gained in importance, value and interest within Lebanese civil society, mainly because of their rarity, their stark difference with their surroundings, and the symbolism they have gained with time as traces of a past that need protecting.

As I initially wrote these lines in November 2019, Lebanese people had been in the streets of Beirut for more than a month, demanding the fall of the government. They had completely taken over the streets of Beirut, bypassing fences, security, doors and signs. 'The Egg' had played a central role since the beginning of the protests: used as an agora to host citizen meetings, lectures, screenings, gatherings and visited by hundreds of people on a daily basis. It has been reclaimed as a public space and radically used as such (Daou 2019). Youth have climbed on top of it with Lebanese flags, banners, and signs. 'The Egg' was being reimagined and reinvented, given new meanings and uses. It is still, it is solid, it is there, not moving, despite the speed and frenzy of the changes around it. As a protest space, 'The Egg' is important, because it is both a symbol of failed urban planning in Beirut (Springer 2013) and a symbol of the absence of public spaces where the Lebanese can meet, gather and organise. The *thawra*'s use and reclaiming of 'The Egg' is thus a contestation against both the political apparatus and their real-estate allies.

FIG. 31 The Egg during the thawra (source: Adam Rasmi, https://watchdogsgazette.com/culture/beirut-reborn/)

5. CONCLUSION

In the 1990s, Beirut's official reconstruction projects involved rejecting and denying traces of the (violent) past by destroying them physically. Solidere's monopoly over what was worth preserving and destroying was described by Habib as their ability to 'control message', 'toss people aside' and just 'take the whole city' without facing significant resistance or ever being held accountable for the damage that their destructive reconstruction involved. By contrast, Habib says that 'every square meter is contested today', describing how urban activists are not letting damage to their city go uncontested anymore. This chapter contributed, with the two previous ones, to showing that this contestation takes various shapes, and that the imagination is central to it. I shed light on Mona's fight and struggle to preserve Beit Beirut, and the challenges around the building's traces of the past and their significance, but also the worries about what stories of the city will be told in the future, in relation to Beit Beirut and other traces of the past. Beiruti activists and dwellers show that the struggles over meanings and symbols are never a settled issue. Beit Beirut showed an instance of Lebanese urban activists trying to reclaim control over what is seen as worth preserving, bettering and celebrating in relation to their city and the environment more generally. Traces of war and violence such as bullet holes, ruins and elements of damaged buildings are not immune to those reflections – and Mona's project to save Beit Beirut and make a museum of memory out

of it is an illustration of that. I also illustrated other forms of contestation: everyday acts of activism through the reappropriation of spaces such as a parking lot or 'the Egg', reappropriation that blurs the private/public dichotomy, and stamps people's demands and needs on the city. I also shed light on the importance of the interpretation of the landscape and traces of the past within it, and how this is also fully part of urban activists' contestation of the ways in which their urban environment is thought, shaped, built, destroyed and changed.

This chapter highlighted the importance of the imagination and of visions, dreams and hopes in the processes of creating alternative timespaces: Mona had dreams, visions and hopes for Beit Beirut in the 1990s, which drove her activism throughout those years. Marc imagines ghosts and haunting around him; Beiruti dwellers imagine a parking lot as a place for leisure, prayer, exercising, meeting and playing; Antoine imagines the various layers of history blending into contemporary timespaces to create a sort of equilibrium. They all 'fill' Beiruti streets with the forests of their desires and goals.' (de Certeau 1988: xxi). Thinking with and through the idea of heterotopia as defined by Foucault has helped to think about the presence of different timespaces in any given context and how the urban spaces described in this chapter form, in different ways, 'a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.' (Foucault 1984)

Urban activists in the city thus create imaginary timespaces, they move towards an idealised version of the city, or one that at least is theirs. This chapter showed how different people work towards imagining timespaces in different ways and in different parts of the city. The non-professional acts of activism, the reinterpretations of the urban landscape and the professionalised activism have in common precarious imaginaries, that are fragile processes in the making. As Abdul-Halim told me during our conversation in May 2018: 'I mean, you know, when money talks, heritage shuts up. When money is thin and rare, we, heritage activists, have a say. I guess this is the most defining dynamic in Lebanon'. But money is not the only defining dynamic of their activism, as we have seen elsewhere in this thesis: emotions, time, rhythms and memory organise this activism, always in relation to the wider local, regional and international contexts. Contestation takes different forms and shapes but remains ongoing.

I would like to end this final chapter with Marc's defiant words, presenting resilient buildings in Beirut as evidence of Solidere's failure to eliminate the past: 'but actually they just transform it into something that is even more intriguing and very loud.'

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Conclusion

1. Introduction

3rd October 2020. Tomorrow, it will be two months since the port of Beirut exploded, taking with it hundreds of people, tens of thousands of homes, and countless non-human animals, windows, objects, pictures and memories – leaving the city shattered. I am in Brussels. I am meeting a woman who self-identifies as Belgian-Lebanese, as I am going to be the discussant at a talk on her newly published book. We're sitting in a café, and I am about to start discussing the event, when she asks me:

'Where were you on the 4th August?'

In Brussels.

She goes on: 'How have you been doing since then?'

As I begin to articulate my answer, and say a few words, she bursts into tears.

She's incapable of speaking and needs tissues, and I have no idea what to do. I am wearing a mask, we are supposed to remain at a 1.5m distance, and I don't even know her. I want to hug her, to tell her it's all going to be ok, but I can't hug her, and I can't tell her it's all going to be ok.

She says: 'You're the first Lebanese person I've seen since it happened'.

I tell her that I am sorry, that if I had known, I'd have met with her sooner. She looks inconsolable.

We talk about Beirut, and about our pain. She says that she sees the explosion as an opportunity for all the Lebanese to mourn together, for once. She sees the explosion as a potentially unifying event, especially for the middle class, though we agree that the two extremes, the poorest and richest, will likely feel less difference between their lives pre and post-explosion.

Another woman, the co-founder of the café, joins us to talk about the presentation. We tell her, as she sits down, that we've been talking about Beirut instead. The look on her face changes, and she looks down and says 'I'm sorry' – not sorry to interrupt or to arrive at the 'wrong' time, but 'sorry' as if she was presenting her condolences to us, a 'sorry…for your loss'.

We probably were, and still are, mourning, and unable to find closure yet.

Later, as we were the two of us again, we spoke about Beirut again, and about the places in the city that are changing or have changed irrevocably – before, during and after the explosion. She asks me a question in a serious tone:

'Do you think they will also take Dalieh away from us?'

I don't have an answer to this, but I say that I wouldn't be surprised if 'they' managed to do so.

She looks at me as if I could predict or influence the future of Dalieh: 'But Dalieh is ours, Dalieh houses the memories of most people in this city, everyone goes to Dalieh. I have so many memories in Dalieh.'

She was so worried and concerned that Dalieh could disappear.

This encounter naturally took me back to my research. Or is it my research that invited itself to this encounter? It was all there: the emotions in relation to Beirut, the mourning, the worry, fears, memories, attachment to the city, and hope – for a future where people might connect better with each other through sharing the same pain.

* * *

In this thesis, I presented an exploration of Beiruti urban activists' narratives of place, space, time and memory. My purpose was to expand the current understanding and knowledge of the multiple and varied relationships to time and space in Beirut. This conclusion will be guided by the overall research question posed in the introduction:

> 'how do urban activists' narratives inform our understanding of past, present and future struggles in the reshaping and reclaiming of space, place, the city, time and the past in post-1990 Beirut?'

In the course of my readings, and my contacts and conversations with urban activists in Beirut, I became interested in the different motivations of urban activists for their engagement in activism – these were often inspired by a particular narrative around the city and its past, and what they sought to create in the future. I also noticed that themes of rhythmicities were

present in these conversations, which led me to consider what role rhythms play in their relationships with the city. Furthermore, I noted that urban activists recount a series of different temporalities in their narratives. Therefore, my initial line of investigation led to further questions that guided my three analysis chapters: what can one learn from looking at rhythms in relation to the city (chapter six)? What are urban activists' rationales for their engagement in activism and which narratives of the past shape these (chapters five and seven)? What kind of temporalities are urban activists invested in (chapters five and six)? These further questions helped me to address my principal question because they shed light on important aspects of the narratives that I have collected, and because they aid my understanding of the timespaces and urban struggles of Beirut.

More specifically, in chapters one and two, I introduced dominant discourses on memory and time on the one hand, and on Beirut on the other hand. They served a double purpose: introducing the wider context influencing the narratives of urban activists about their city and the past, and introducing the literature and context that my thesis speaks to. The narratives of urban activists coexist with the discourses described, are influenced by them, and sometimes partly reproduce them – but they also question them, condemn them, modify them and re-claim them. In the first chapter, I argue that works on memory in Lebanon have tended to provide a limited perspective on memory and time: one that approaches time as linear or cyclical, and memory as purely war-centric. This context has led scholars of Lebanon to speak of 'amnesia', and has also encouraged a rich and diverse intellectual, artistic and mediatic production around 'war memory' that, I argue, is limiting in the following ways: firstly, they are based on the idea that 'the war' is unfinished until it is 'resolved'; secondly, they insist on the duty to remember, while ignoring the possibility of a need to forget; thirdly, these works are dominated by an attention to trauma and violence; fourthly, they focus on a sectarian analysis of memory; and fifthly, they assume that the Lebanese state can and will be able to play a role in 'dealing with the past', whereas it has not shown any sign of being disposed to do so. In chapter two, I explored four themes that I had identified as dominating both narratives and experiences of Beirut: sectarianism, violence, nostalgia and exoticism. I also identify the limitations of such discourses: they are underpinned by a sectarian understanding of place/space and the city, which is misleading and reiterates invisible borders and divisions, while not taking into account different types of violence beyond war and armed conflict. Furthermore, nostalgic accounts of Beirut often erase entire periods of the past and the present. Finally, exotic accounts of Beirut focus on dichotomies, such as slum city/jewel-like city or war city/party city; these dichotomies do not represent the heterogeneity and nuances of the city.

In chapter three, I argue that an attention to 'Timespace' (May and Thrift 2001) – a study of time and place together – the two being inextricable and inevitably shaped and transformed by each other – is a way to confront and challenge the limits identified in chapters one and two. I clarify my approach to studying time, memory, space and place: one that encompassed the fluidity and ever-changing nature of time and space, and that remained open to finding them in unexpected places, beyond the dichotomies associated with them in Beirut. The implications of this approach for memory and urban studies can be seen by contrasting it with the limitations identified in the previous chapters: accepting the fluidity of time, memory and space challenges the notion of a fixed 'past' that can or should be remembered in a particular way in particular places, as well as resisting dominant narratives about the city that do not allow for the possibility and reality of change. In chapter four I present my methodological choices, giving an overview of my ethnography-inspired methods and the details of my fieldwork – who I spoke to, when, where, how and why. The second part of this chapter sets out the details of my conversations; as well as the details of narrative and thematic analysis and their ethics. Together with the analyses presented in the final three chapters, chapters one to four provided an understanding of the fact that urban activists' journeys, and their struggles, are shaped by specific relationships with time, memory, space and place.

In chapter five, I argue that emotions illuminate urban activists' relationships to the timespaces of Beirut and complexify the discourses that assume either an overwhelming presence of the past in the present, or its absence. Emotions are thus one way in which urban activists' narratives inform our understanding of past, present and future struggles in the reshaping and reclaiming of time and space in Beirut. Emotional life is moulded by the past and by memories; it accumulates experiences and adds them together, so that they become a 'depository' that influences emotional life further; thus, attending to emotions is also attending to memory and the past (Jones and Garde-Hansen 2012). Emotions also tell a story about urban activists' sense of identity and belonging to the city that they inhabit. Under the two themes of absence/loss and nostalgia, emotions presented in this chapter highlighted strong connections with larger-scale issues shaping the city (such as destruction, real-estate developments or social and urban policies) which have intimate, everyday consequences in urban activists' lives (moving house, losing and finding hope, leaving one's neighbourhood, losing one's sense of belonging or bearings, feeling deeply affected by changes in the city or getting involved in activist struggles). Moreover, this chapter shows two of the ways in which the past is particularly present and active in urban activists' lives: through memories of pain and struggles (particularly Moustafa, Abir and Naji) – a past that is heavy and slows people

down – and through inspiration for the future – a past that structures contemporary and future imaginings of Beirut (particularly Abdul-Halim, Abir and the practice of picnicking). Furthermore, the stories and emotions in chapter five also reveal a deep attachment to places of childhood, which was enacted especially by Naji and Abdul-Halim, whose childhood homes and memories of them have ongoing effects in their lives: they shape their activism and understanding of what is deemed worthy of protection and attention, they influence their dreams and projects, they have influenced their career paths and have ultimately shaped their sensitivity to the world around them. Finally, the narratives spoke about a sense of 'not belonging' in Beirut. This matters enormously in the context of this research because it illuminates urban activists' involvement in activist struggles – they feel that they have been and are being deprived of a city that should belong to them, and be designed for their needs – in the absence of this, recourse to activism is a means of reclaiming the city that they want and need.

In chapter six, I argue that an attention to rhythms leads to a better understanding of urban struggles in Beirut. Indeed, urban experiences are inherently rhythmic, and this chapter explores the idea that urban activists in Beirut reclaim the city by reclaiming its time and rhythms. Urban activists are affected by dominant rhythms but also produce rhythms in turn: alternative temporalities that differ from dominant modes of experiencing the city. I focus on three rhythmic themes that coexist and intertwine in the space of Beirut and in activists' narratives: status quo, urgency and impending doom. An attention to status quo highlights the entanglement of social and urban change with accounts of inactivity, lack of change, and pessimism in relation to the perceived stasis of things. The analysis of impending doom highlights the entanglement of fear, worry and violence with temporalities of joy. Finally, urgency was explored as both the urgency of war and violence and the urgency to destroy and rebuild the city, as well as the urgency to produce, consume and be active. This chapter shows that status quo, impending doom and urgency coexist with subtle, fragile and precarious changes, in the ways that people experience the city differently at different times.

Finally, in chapter seven, imagination, dreams and hopes are considered in order to explore the idea that the struggles around preserving Beirut's built heritage inevitably involve contestations over what is worth preserving, and over the meaning of traces of the past. It includes traces of the past both in people's lives and in what they see as inseparable from what the city is or should be. Through an analysis of Beit Beirut, and of cases of reclaiming urban space, I examine the creation of 'Timespaces', a move towards an idealised version of the city, one that belongs to urban activists. I attend to their efforts to continue claiming and

reclaiming what they perceive to be 'theirs' – their city, their spaces, their plans and projects, their needs, voicing at the same time the claims of those who do not have a voice – spaces, buildings, but also sections of the population ignored in urban discussions and decision making processes.

* * *

In the remainder of this concluding chapter, I ask: what are the implications of what has been learned on the understanding of 'Timespace' and urban activism in Beirut, on memory studies and urban studies, particularly in relation to Beirut, but also more widely?

I will respond to these questions in light of the memorial and urban contexts outlined in the first two chapters, the approach to studying 'Timespace' in Beirut that I have outlined in chapter three, the methodological and ethical discussions of chapter four, and the analyses of the final three chapters. The remainder of this chapter comprises four sections. In the next section, I weave the narratives together and suggest three main findings. In section three, I outline the contribution of my thesis to works on Beirut, Lebanon, memory and urban studies. In section four, I suggest possible further research. Finally, I provide some concluding thoughts and return to the 'current', ever-changing Beiruti context described in the introduction to the thesis.

2. BRINGING THE NARRATIVES TOGETHER

In this section I would like to reflect on the three main findings from participants' narratives (chapters five, six and seven) in relation to the contexts presented in the four initial chapters.

Firstly, the dominant structuring of memory, time, space, and experiences in Beirut laid out in chapters one and two, as well as the historical changes undergone in Lebanon inevitably impinge on the timespaces of Beirut, affecting the lives of urban activists, and urban activism itself, as shown in chapters five to seven. In this context though, urban activists have reaffirmed their temporal agencies (Moroşanu and Ringel 2016), showing that the past is not one event, or one period, or one set of events, tidy and organised in one clear order, to be understood and interpreted in one way (Bevernage and Lorenz 2013). Rather, the past is open. The past can go in different directions; its trajectories into the present and the future are not settled. Indeed, urban activists' relationships to 'timespace' in Beirut are complex, diverse and cannot be explained or understood through simple dichotomies. Activists' narratives invite us to understand their experiences of Beirut in relation to complex temporalities, beyond any form of linearity or cyclicity. Through an exploration of emotions (chapter five), rhythms (chapter

six), and imaginary timespaces (chapter seven), I have shown how past, present and future can intertwine in synchronicity or estrangement, connecting and disconnecting differently at different times. As shown in chapter seven, the imagination can allow the harmonious coexistence of various timespaces, for in the imagination, in hopes and dreams, one can set oneself free from the politics of time and memory – in the imagination, one's own temporal agency, conceptions of time and time making (Munn 1992: 942) – can unfold fully, unhindered by temporal, political or spatial constraints. They can then materialise differently in activism, (urban) struggles, dreams, thoughts, conversations, in ways of using and re-claiming the city, for instance through the practices of lobbying, campaigning, protesting, walking in the city, or picnicking, as shown in chapters five to seven.

Secondly, activists' narratives also invite us to understand their present in relation to the future, a future that is – or should be – just as multi-layered, complex, and open as the past. The ever-changing realities that the Lebanese have experienced for the past thirty years give a sense of a 'mainstream neo-liberal enforced presentism' (Ringel 2012) in which accumulation, 'the need for constant adjustment and an acceleration of involuntary change' have been claimed to be the temporal norms, thus 'colonising the near future' (Ringel 2012: 175), making it very difficult to act upon it, let alone the distant future. In his study of a local anarchist group in Germany, Ringel asks a crucial question:

> 'How do we continue to re-problematize the near future that is taken away from our informants as well as us in times of economic constraints and bleak future prospects?' (2012: 186)

This suggests both hope and contemplation, and a focus on concrete practices – these were at the core of his research – as potential ways into that problematisation of the near future (2012: 185). In my research, the re-problematisation of the near future has been done through an attention to narratives, hope(s) and memories. This thesis, through these narratives, begs the questions 'What future is present in the present?', and 'What future is shaping the present?'. Activist narratives, in chapters five to seven, offer a series of responses: a future in which real-estate companies, corruption and greed do not govern urban planning; a future in which natural spaces are protected, enhanced, open and free, rather than exploited and spoiled; a future in which access to the sea is fair, free and safe; a future in which the past can be embraced, present, acknowledged and taught; a future in which the present is not so anxious about the future; a future in which memories of the past, and the past itself, are cherished, nurtured and preserved. Present, past and future are taken back: reinvented, rethought, reclaimed, included in the 'possible', in ways that nurture a *wanted* future.

This last point leads to my final main finding, which concerns the relationship between the three previous elements with the memory and urban cultures discussed in chapters one and two. How do these elements – complex temporalities, temporal agency, an open past, and an open future – speak to these introductory chapters? Firstly, they offer approaches to 'Timespaces' that do not take cyclical or linear time as the basis for understanding the world; they offer juxtapositions of past, present and future in different ways, at different moments. At the same time, they reject an understanding of the city as a patchwork of different, divided areas. The three analysis chapters have put forward an inclusive approach to timespace in Beirut, an approach that does not start from divisive premises. At no point did my participants mention anyone's sectarian group or a place's 'sectarian' cachet. These conceptualisations are not part of their endeavours. Secondly, the three analysis chapters have also shown how remembering, memory and the past cannot be reduced to remembering war, violence and trauma. It is all, again, 'much more complicated than that': an entanglement of happy memories that haunt the present, making it even more unbearable – e.g. a childhood home, playing, picnicking – with difficult, awful memories that have turned into anecdotes, or have become background context, losing their emotional intensity. I have shown in this thesis how, at the individual level, intimate memories and experiences of seemingly mundane events and places deeply touch participants, move them, and encourage them to act – they stay with them and become part of the story they tell about themselves and their journeys. These memories play in the imagination and in dreams, and these memories of the past turn into hopes for the future: an open and free park, a clean beach or rock, unfenced, a place for play, for sports, for fun, a museum, a picnic, sharing food, toys, animals. They are there, but as precarious hopes, constantly in the making, constantly at risk, just like the city itself. *Nothing* is to be taken for granted, even what feels like a success – the reopening of Horsh Beirut, the stopping of the building of a highway across a neighbourhood, or the heady intensity of the *thawra*. Who knows when the next powerful, rich man and his gang will wipe these fragile victories away? However, the memories, hopes and dreams will remain, although affected – Abdul-Halim, Naji, Antoine, Abir and others showed us how motivation fluctuates in the face of incomprehensible destruction, how hopes become slender and rare, but also how dedication remains, somehow. They demonstrate how, in discontinuities, in ruptures, there still is hope. Resilience is a word that has been used and abused to describe Beirut, Lebanon, and the Lebanese – a resilient city and resilient people, the phoenix that will rise again and again, as shown in chapter two. Urban activists are not resilient – they are fierce. Resilience – although laudable – does not capture the agency, courage, power, resourcefulness, work and effort that is put into 'being change':

'tricking time' in a way that allows for present and future to 'become conjoined in a single moment, rather than as chronologically disjointed' (Porter 2016).

3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

This research and its findings offer three principal contributions to existing knowledge.

Firstly, this thesis contributes to the scholarship on Beirut and more specifically, on ethnographic research interested in Beirut (Sawalha 2010, Naeff 2018, Bou Akar 2018) with its innovative combination of memory studies with research on activists. It illuminates the way in which urban activism can create a sense of belonging to the city beyond a sectarian-focused approach. As Maïla declared in the mid-nineties:

> 'No, I am not the representative of my [religious] community in the civil sphere. I am the representative of my interests, my ideas, of my freedom. Finding again the freedom of the citizen behind the communitarian coat, I think that is the invention of the civil society to come.' (cited in Karam 2006: 17)[96]

My research has contributed to documenting how the civil society that *has* come worked towards such 'invention' – by shedding light on how timespace, rhythm and emotions interact with and weave through memory/memories – of the city, of experiencing the city, of leaving and coming back to it, of the struggles, sectarianism, politics and wars that unfold in the city.

Secondly, my research has contributed to memory studies interested in Lebanon by providing an approach that is not war-focused or trauma-focused. The evidence collected in this research highlights the role that urban activism plays in connecting memory and temporal issues to urban issues in ways not investigated before in Beirut and Lebanon, where previous scholarship, even that interested in memory and ethnography, has typically been approached through the lens of geopolitics, sectarianism or violence (Larkin 2012, Calargé 2017 among others). As I have argued in chapters one to four, institutional aspects of Lebanese society, such as confessionalism/sectarianism, political mismanagement and wrongdoings such as corruption, have been at the centre, starting point and/or end point of analyses on Lebanon, often providing both a context and a response to certain questions, that cannot and will never give the full picture of any given situation. Habib argued this strongly, in my conversation with him and in pieces that he has written (Battah 2020a, 2020b), acknowledging and condemning both sectarianism and corruption, but never limiting his thinking to these elements. For, as he writes, 'It is not corruption, nor sectarianism alone. The answer is much more complicated than

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[96] My translation from the French.

that' (Battah 2020b). An attention to narratives enables an attention to different experiences of time, memory and the city that cannot be fully grasped through an analysis of institutional elements alone. I have chosen not to reach for those frames of analysis in my reading of Beiruti realities and experiences and carefully avoided imposing such specific lenses onto my questions to and conversations with participants. I allowed them to introduce themselves in their own ways and to define their relationships to Beirut through their own perspectives. This thesis illuminates the roles of memory, emotions and time in creating a sense of belonging to a place, which cannot be understood through the prism of dichotomies such as past/present, present/future or forgetting/remembering, nor through the prism of sectarianism alone.

Finally, in terms of developing the knowledge on urban activism in Beirut, this thesis has brought together a series of narratives that contribute to the body of academic work that focuses on activism, but through the experiences of activists rather than through an institutional or group approach. More broadly, it contributes to activism and urban research by including the voices of people who are organising, day in, day out, in the conceptualisations of the past, present and future of Beirut. This thesis offers an alternative analysis to those of the 'Arab Spring' or 'revolutions'. Indeed, the urban activism observed in the context of this thesis shows a precarious form of hope for the betterment of place-making and society. In other words, the urban activism that I have observed is never something that is fully gained, but neither is it an unattainable dream, rather it is a precarious and fragile process in the making. This activism is not necessarily organised and professionalised, and this thesis shows aspects of and considerations around everyday activism often omitted in the literature on activism in Lebanon, which has only recently started paying attention to forms of activism that go beyond sectarianism or political pursuits (Nagle 2020, Karam 2006, Harb 2017). The activism that I have observed is a revolution that is constantly in the making. In short, my approach to activism, between fully gained and unattainable, offers an antidote to despair when dreams are dashed by horrors and defeats.

4. FURTHER RESEARCH

I have identified three ways in which further research could build on and extend this research.

Firstly, further research would benefit from an attention to urban activism taking place outside of Beirut, both in other relatively large Lebanese cities (such as Tripoli or Sidon) and in other 'urbanised' mountain dwellings. In this thesis, I have hinted at the contrasts that I have observed between mountain and city dwellings, and how these contrasts have contributed to my understanding of Beirut, but further analysis of these contrasts would bring out interesting

comparative knowledge outside of a Beirut-centred scholarship, shedding light on areas equally fascinating, ever-changing and challenging as Beirut.

Secondly, the themes, questions and scopes of this research could journey to other forms of activism, in Beirut and elsewhere. This thesis has focused solely on urban activists interested in Beirut's environment, landscape, quality of life, public and social spaces. Studying emotions, rhythms, relationships to time and space, and imagination within other activist groups and individuals defending other causes (for instance, LGBTQI+ groups and struggles, feminist groups and women's rights, or migrant workers' support groups) would highlight different relationships to timespace(s), and different insights into how different activists focusing on different struggles or themes might relate to time and space differently.

Finally, a way in which this research could lead to further research is by taking it back to Beirut, in a context that has changed tremendously since the last time I sat down in a café there to speak to an urban activist. Indeed, urban activists' narratives, as well as my own narratives, were used in this research as exemplars of particular relationships to the city and the past, which were valid at the time of the conversation or autobiographical account, and that have to be situated in a constantly changing physical and societal environment. These conversations can be treated 'as social or communicative occasions during which individuals actively construct different versions of reality' (Mihelj 2013: 62).

Beirut has gone through tremendous changes as I have written-up this thesis (October 2019 to October 2020), events which give me a sense that the city that I knew has changed irrevocably to the point where I feel I do not really know it anymore. In October 2019, the *thawra*, the revolution, started in Lebanon, shaking the entire country, its political elite and governance systems. Anti-government protesters took over streets, public spaces and official buildings in various Lebanese cities, demanding the fall of the regime and justice beyond class, sectarian, religious or cultural divides (Majed and Salman 2019), in the midst of a financial, social and economic crisis. Lebanon's PM Saad el Hariri resigned[97], taking the government with him, in the wake of the slogan '*kullun yaani kullun*' (everybody, that means everybody – all have to step down), which was adopted early on in the revolution and which called for all levels of power, all levels of corruption, to be dismantled: the presidency, the parliament and its speaker. However, the new supposedly 'technocratic' government put in place did not receive the support of the streets (Muir 2020). The financial and economic crisis deepened even further, but the street *thawra* slowed down through winter, and even further due to the

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[97] And has been renamed as PM on the 22nd October 2020, a year after the start of the *thawra*. He is the third PM tasked with creating a government this year, but there have been no new elections in that time.

coronavirus lockdown in March 2020. Although activists continued to organise online, there was little room for protests, providing

> 'the government with a political breathing space and an opportunity to show assertive, authoritative leadership. But for the "revolution" it was a disaster—and a godsend for the sectarian leaders it denounced.' (Muir 2020)

By mid-April 2020, the protest camps in Beirut and Tripoli had been destroyed by the army and intelligence services (Muir 2020). Coronavirus relief aid has been sectarian, organised by political parties and religious groups keen to boost their popularity among the population, as Muir wrote in April 2020:

> 'the thawra will have a mountain to climb when the lockdown is finally lifted. Its activists have not been idle. They have been engaged in numerous on-line discussion and planning groups, and in some areas, like the southern city of Sidon, they have been able to help coordinate relief activities.
>
> The momentum they have lost could be hugely boosted by a new wave of angry and impoverished unemployed when the restrictions end—or people might be so overwhelmed by the struggle for daily survival that they will have no time and energy for revolt.'

The context in Lebanon was grim throughout spring and summer 2020, and both 'legal' and 'illegal' emigration has been on the rise (Sewell 2020). On the 4th August 2020, a huge blast at the port of Beirut destroyed entire neighbourhoods of the city, killing hundreds, injuring thousands, and leaving thousands more homeless. The consequences of the blast are still hard to measure, but in the short term, it has led to a worsening of both the coronavirus and the economic crises. Habib reminds us that the Lebanese have been dealing with health hazards, in the intimacy of their homes as well as in the spaces of their cities for a long time:

> 'The widespread and unregulated use of industrial-grade fireworks, at private parties, weddings and even military celebrations, regularly cause devastating fires. The widespread practice of rubbish burning, a direct result of the government's inability to manage a basic municipal service like garbage collection, is yet another cause of fires and toxic air pollution. Other dysfunctions and safety hazards abound: landfills and raw sewage dumped directly into the sea, routine discoveries of rotten food warehouses, appalling conditions at slaughterhouses, lawless and deadly highways with no speed limits or police presence, busy intersections with no traffic signals or even basic street lights.
>
> This is why it is easy for many to believe that the August 4 explosion was caused not by an Israeli air raid on a secret Hezbollah arsenal, but by the endless incompetence of local authorities.' (Battah 2020)

The *thawra*, the coronavirus crisis and the 4th August 2020 port explosion, coupled with a profound economic, social and political crisis will have inevitably shaped narratives, emotions, rhythms and experiences in varying ways. In the ever-changing context of this past year, writing and thinking about Beirut has been challenging. My research, its *raison d'être* and conclusions lay the ground for the kind of conversations and research that need to be happening now, in the context of further, huge changes to the timespaces of Beirut, and their resulting challenges. The insistence of this thesis on paying attention to people's understanding and experiences of the city (chapters one to four) feels ever more pressing, and its findings even more important, in a context where reconstruction, destruction, real-estate greed, competition, and political mismanagement, written about in chapters one and two, are ever more resolute and aggressive, in these transitional and challenging times with great potential to shape and reshape the city. Whose voices are we not hearing in those processes, and what are the demands 'from below' – what city and experiences do the Beirutis want? Those questions, that have shaped this thesis, remain valid and need to be asked relentlessly.

5. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I exchanged messages with one of my participants recently. I replied to the question 'how are you feeling?' with a few comments in relation to general end-of-the-PhD and I-am-heartbroken-for-Beirut struggles. He replied: 'We're all broken like this. With endless fears and all things being called into question. It's not really an easy period'. No, it is not; it is a period of doubts and precarity. On the 4th August 2020, after months, and years, of struggle, and ten months after the beginning of the *thawra*, urgency, status quo and impending doom have never felt so horribly real and juxtaposed. The impending doom: a growing sense that things were getting worse and worse, after the months of *thawra* protests, followed by the coronavirus, as well as economic and financial crises that clearly had been in the making for the past thirty years and before that, throughout the 1975-1990 conflicts. Then the urgency – and emergency – to act quickly, to react to horror. Both urgency and impending doom were coupled with status quo: the absence of surprise at the sheer inability of political elites to govern the country and the city in a way that serves the many, not the few. Status quo: they have failed, again. They have robbed us of our future, again.

Since the 4th August, 'the war' has been an important theme in discussions around Beirut and the explosion. The devastation of 'the war' is compared to that of 'the explosion'. My mother, for instance, said that she has never seen such horror, destruction, ruins and rubble in Beirut, even at the height of conflicts. Now, 'analysts' and journalists have started citing 'the

war' again, to tell the world how bad the situation is in Lebanon, similar or worse to that of the civil war, reminding me of that 'analyst' who had instilled fear in me back in 2016, because back then, he said, the situation was equally as tense as during 'the war'. Is that a threat people use? What purpose does it serve? These questions remain with me.

The explosion now serves as a temporal reference. People situate things in the near past as 'pre' or 'post' explosion. The explosion, in the past two months, has become a point of rupture. Urban activists have been incredibly busy since then, for instance organising under a new coalition to protect and rebuild heritage buildings affected by the blast, the 'Beirut Heritage Initiative'. The initiative also includes representatives of the municipality and governorate of Beirut, and other political officials, and is based on strong transparency ethics. Such hybrid coalitions, grouping official representatives and urban activists, as well as international NGOs, will be interesting to follow. I know that Save Beirut Heritage (Antoine, Naji and Joanna) have been involved in it, as has Abdul-Halim. Public Works Studio (Abir, among others) have been busy raising awareness on the subject of tenants and owners' rights, in the face of greedy investors who have used the blast as an opportunity to buy off desperate people at a cheap price. What their work is leading to, nobody knows for sure, but, as Porter wrote in the context of Yemen, 'if we accept, however, that being revolutionary is defined as living in the face of the regime, then we should remain open to the possibility that the revolution continues' (2016: 69). Not only does the *thawra* continue, but so do the discreet, everyday, research-based, emotive, rhythmic, imaginative, activist revolution(s) that this thesis has shed light on. The themes explored in this thesis have offered building blocks for understanding the ever-changing circumstances in which those processes take place, and in which emotions, hopes, dreams, complex temporalities and rhythms unfold. The themes of my thesis open perspectives on those experiences, and create connections through the sharing of narratives – between people, between people and their environment, the imagination and the urban landscape, between past, present and future. As shown with the encounter narrated at the start of this section, those connections made within the thesis are and will remain observable outside of it as well.

* * *

Accad wrote a short piece, published in 2002: 'Beirut, the city that moves me'. That phrase has never left my thoughts since I read it for the first time, years ago, and has never rang so true as it does now. Accad wrote 'My heart palpitates with emotion for this country […]' and further:

> 'Beirut, to me, means family, adolescence, youth, craziness, life and death, mixed with the tragic destiny of a land to which I feel attracted as to a magnet. So much

is happening all the time in Lebanon. My heart is both heavy and light from all its wounds, slowly healing yet reopening with the slightest movement of wings, with any aggressiveness, with every harsh word, with each painful image, with each utterance of unassailable dogma, with all the memories this country holds for me. Why have I always been driven to return to this tormented land? I plunge into my past and interrogate it.' (2002:85)

Beirut moves me, but not me alone – it moves my participants, my family, and thousands, maybe millions of others. Others I do not know but am able to connect with through our attachment to and pain for Beirut, even when away from it, in Brussels or elsewhere. An imagined community. Beiruti urban activists are at the heart of this imagined community – connecting, organising, researching, defending, lobbying, demanding, protesting, creating, imagining, denouncing – they are moved by, and move for, Beirut.

TABLE OF FIGURES

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE INFORMATION SHEET

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University of Brighton

Helene Marie Abiraad
Participation Information Sheet

Title of Study: Locating narratives of memory in place-focused activism in post-war Beirut: illuminating the past influence on present-day place-related struggles.

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Before you decide I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you.
I will go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have. This should take about ten minutes. Talk to others about the study if you wish, and ask me if there is anything that is not clear. You will be given time to think about whether you wish to take part before making a decision, and may take this sheet away with you.

Purpose of the research:
The purpose of this research is to understand how activists' memories shape their involvement in civil society groups and the claims they make concerning public space. This research will involve observing and interviewing members of civil society groups. The research will be carried out by Helene Marie Abiraad.

Why you have been invited to participate:
You are invited to take part in this research because of your involvement in social activism concerning public space and place. Other activists will be invited to participate, from various civil society groups.

Do you have to take part?
Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

What is expected from you?
Participating in this research will involve discussing and sharing your experience in civil society groups with the researcher, who will also ask questions. You can always choose not to answer without giving a reason. You may be recorded, so the researcher will be able to transcribe the interviews and use their contents in the research. The recordings and notes taken during discussions and interviews will only be accessible to and used by the researcher herself.

Will my taking part in the study/project be kept confidential?
No identifiable data will be included in the research. Participants' names will be changed. Interviewees who want their name known and voice heard have this option. All data will be saved on a password-protected laptop. The lead researcher is the only person who will have access to the non-anonymised data.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?
Participants may withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without incurring consequences from doing so. Should you withdraw from the study, the data collected up to that point may be used by the researcher for the purposes described in the information sheet, unless you expressly request otherwise.

What will happen to the results of the project?
The results of this research will be published in my PhD thesis and may also be published in papers in academic journals. These works will be available online and electronic versions may also be provided to research participants upon request.

Who is organising and funding the research?
This research is organised by the lead researcher, Helene Marie Abiraad, together with her PhD supervisors at the University of Brighton and it is funded by the United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Council.

What if there is a problem?
If you have any concerns or complaints, they may be addressed to me directly or to the University of Brighton via the contact details given below.

Contact details
Lead researcher:
Helene Marie Abiraad
h.abiraad@brighton.ac.uk
+447961912528

University contact person:
Professor Darren Newbury
Director of Postgraduate Research Studies
College of Arts and Humanities
University of Brighton
d.m.newbury@brighton.ac.uk
+441273600900

Ethics approval:
This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Brighton Research Ethics Committee.

Appendix B: Sample Consent Form

✳

University of Brighton

Participant consent form
Researcher: Helene Marie Abiraad, PhD Candidate
Research title: Locating narratives of memory in place-focused activism in post-war Beirut: illuminating the past influence on present-day place-related struggles.

	Please initial or tick box
I agree to take part in this research which is to understand the importance of memory in place-related social activism.	
The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the study and the possible risks involved.	
I have read the information sheet and I understand the principles, procedures and possible risks involved.	
I am aware that I may be invited to answer questions.	
I agree to the researcher taking photographs/making audio/video recordings during the project.	
I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will normally be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.	
I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without incurring consequences from doing so.	
I agree that should I withdraw from the study, the data collected up to that point may be used by the researcher for the purposes described in the information sheet, unless the participant expressly requests otherwise.	
I agree that data collected may subsequently be archived and used by other bona fide researchers.	

Name ....
Signed .... Date ....

APPENDIX C: (URBAN) ACTIVIST GROUPS, NGOS AND INITIATIVES

Some information on urban activist and environmental groups in Lebanon is included here. It is not a comprehensive list. The details presented here serve as a reference in the specific context of this research and aim to give an overview of the diversity of past and current projects and struggles undertaken in Lebanon.

1. BEIRUT URBAN LAB (AUB) (EST. 2018)

It is a 'collaborative and interdisciplinary research space' at the American University of Beirut (AUB), gathering research and expertise from faculty members in Architecture and Design. It represents the 'materialization of [their] common vision for an academic entity that contributes to an ecosystem of change aspiring to just, inclusive and viable cities.' The Lab has a 'policy arm' at the AUB, previously called 'the Social Justice and the City Program' that serves as a bridge between the research done and the general public, with the idea of 'engaging its non-academic publics around salient urban issues with concrete policy proposals and debates.'

https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/About

2. CITY DEBATES (AUB)

It is one of the projects that emerged from the Beirut Urban Lab: 'a yearly conference organized by the graduate programs in Urban Planning and Policy and Urban Design' that 'gathers scholars from around the world around discussions of salient debates in urban studies and planning.'

https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/About

3. AUB NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE (EST. 2007)

The Neighborhood Initiative is the AUB's outreach and engagement programme with its neighbourhood and its neighbours, in Ras Beirut. It is based on the idea of 'engaging with issues of concern' to AUB's neighbours 'through a mix of research, outreach and advocacy activities' that 'respond to priorities of neighbourhood residents from different social and economic backgrounds around themes ranging from the urban environment, community and well-being, to diversity and urban transformations.' They are funded by international bodies. Mona El Hallak, who is very present in my chapter seven, is the current director of the Neighborhood Initiative.

https://aub.edu.lb/Neighborhood/Pages/about.aspx

4. RETRIEVING BEIRUT (EST. 2012)

I believe 'Retrieving Beirut' has not been active since 2018, but it was an initiative by artists and designers, 'that hope[d] to start a conversation about our aspirations and dreams of Beirut for a shared future.' It was an initiative started by the studio Noir Clair whose mission was 'to make a positive impact to society'.

https://www.facebook.com/RetrievingBeirut/

5. DISTRICT D

It was a 'Collaborative founded by a multidisciplinary team of urbanists, designers and architects devoted to designing and implementing tactical urban interventions'. They have collaborated with the AUB Neighborhood Initiative. I believe they have not been active since 2019.

https://www.facebook.com/districtdlab/

6. YOUSTINK MOVEMENT

In the summer of 2015, as rubbish started piling up in the streets of Beirut and beyond, the 'garbage management crisis' led to 'a wave of contentious politics' and an activist movement called 'You Stink' (Kraidy 2016: 19). The movement brought thousands of people into the streets of Beirut, protesting sectarianism and corruption, demanding the resignation of those in power. The protests were the biggest the country had seen in 10 years, and led to an increase in awareness within the population.

https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/how-beiruts-youstink-protests-bloomed-political-movement

7. BEIRUT MADINATI

Beirut Madinati ('Beirut My City') is a secular political movement that emerged out of the 2015 'garbage protests', from the initiative of academics from the AUB mostly. The party's candidates and members constitute a mix of academics, technocrats, and activists. Beirut Madinati ran for the 2016 municipal elections, following truly innovative political initiatives by hosting discussions in public spaces, opening up to citizens, focusing on infrastructure, the environment, and wellbeing in the city at the centre of their work. Although they did not win the municipal elections that year, Beirut Madinati did well in terms of number of votes (up to 60% in East Beirut). In 2017, it won its first election at the Order of Engineers and Architects with the election of Beirut Madinati's candidate, Jad Tabet, at the head of the Order.

https://www.csis.org/npfp/garbage-green-space-rise-beirut-madinati

https://beirutmadinati.com/

8. THE NATIONAL BLOC

The National Bloc is an older political party, historically rooted in the creation of Lebanon. Its particularities are that it stands for secularism, is actively engaged against clientelism, corruption and feudalism, and promotes a greener and fairer Lebanon beyond sectarian dependency. It is actively engaged in urban struggles too.

https://en.nationalbloc.org/history_and_reforms

9. ARCHITECTS FOR CHANGE

It is a non-for-profit collective based in Beirut, that focuses on the 'role of architecture and design in social impact and sustainable development'.

https://www.facebook.com/archforchange/

https://medium.com/architects-for-change/our-story-a4da1f735458

10. OPERATION BIG BLUE ASSOCIATION

The environmental association has been active since the 1990s to preserve, protect and clean Lebanese waters and coastal areas, 'working mainly on conservation of coastal and aquatic biodiversity as well as the integrated and sustainable development of the Lebanese waters.' It is a 'non-sectarian, not for profit and nongovernmental' organisation.

https://www.operationbigblue.org/index.php

11. SAVE THE BISRI VALLEY

The national Campaign to Protect the Bisri Valley started in 2017. It is a civil campaign that opposed the building of a dam in the Bisri Valley, project that was supported by the World Bank. The dam posed serious ecological and safety hazards, would have destroyed hundreds of thousands of trees and wiped over 50 archaeological sites, expropriating 570 hectares of land. The campaign succeeded, in the spring of 2020, to stop the dam project after years of pressuring the World Bank and the Lebanese authorities.

https://beirut-today.com/2019/07/16/bisri-dam/

https://www.facebook.com/savebisri/?pageid=415746692118951&ftentidentifier=1218924515134494&padding=0

12. Lil Madina Initiative

A 'grassroots initiative made of professionals, activists and researchers who work on issues of urbanism in the Greater Saida Region'

https://www.facebook.com/lilmadina

https://lilmadinainitiative.wordpress.com/?fbclid=IwAR3b7bbq-gT6cSNrN6zk6DtpBqkI1rC3U4Zni2Evl-j2x4f1m8kFYLHApG0

13. Beirut Design Week

Established in 2012, the Beirut Design Week is a yearly event that brings together architects, designers, activists, and all sorts of outreach activities, conferences, exhibitions, and so on. Their theme in 2019 was 'Nostalgia and Design'. 'The main goal of the event is to encourage intercultural exchange, design education, social impact, and design entrepreneurship. BDW is initiated and organized by the MENA Design Research Center, a non-profit organization, which focuses on promoting a diverse understanding of design in the region through collaborative multidisciplinary projects and rigorous design research.'

https://www.beirutdesignweek.org/page/29/item/28/What-Is-Beirut-Design-Week/What-Is-Beirut-Design-Week

14. Arab Centre for Architecture

'Founded in 2008 in Beirut, […] the Arab Center for Architecture (Association for the preservation and dissemination of modern Arab built heritage) is a non-profit organization addressing modern urban design, architecture, design, and planning in the Arab world.'

http://www.arab-architecture.org/about

15. Beirut Green Project

Although not active since 2019, the Beirut Green Project, since its creation in 2011, 'dreamed of a greener Beirut' and stood for more greener spaces in the city, the reopening of Horsh Beirut, more public spaces and parks.

https://www.facebook.com/beirutgreenproject

https://beirutgreenproject.wordpress.com/about/

16. APSAD

The Association for Protecting Natural Sites and Old Buildings in Lebanon (APSAD) was created in 1960. It has been active since then, collaborating with other associations and movements.

http://apsad.net/History.aspx

17. Legal Agenda

It is a 'Beirut-based nonprofit research and advocacy organization with offices in Lebanon and Tunisia and correspondents in several other Arab countries. It was established in December 2009 by a group of legal professionals, scholars, and human rights activists who institutionalized their efforts to build a critical and multidisciplinary approach to law and justice in Arab countries with a special focus on political, civil, social, and economic rights.'

https://english.legal-agenda.com/about-us/