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PAPER HOUSE: THE REVOLUTION, THE DISAPPEARED
AND THE HISTORICITY OF LEBANON

by

ELSA SAADE

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in the Middle Eastern Studies Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts, The City University of New York

2020

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Paper House: The Revolution, the Disappeared, and the Historicity of Lebanon

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Elsa Saade

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in the Middle Eastern Studies program in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Masters of Arts.

Date

Professor Samira Haj

Date

Professor Simon Davis

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Acknowledgments:

Even though this is far from being a book, and is only a master's thesis, I'd like to take this chance to acknowledge those who have supported me on my path to self-reflection and research, like I've never done before. This work is firstly dedicated to my parents Jihad and Claude, who have supported me despite the converging views we've had about politics and history over the years. They have re-visited their pasts and shared them with me not so long ago, despite the echoing silences around them and the extreme violence it could inflict on them while revisiting their memory terrains.

I would like to acknowledge the immense gratitude I have for Professor Samira Haj, whose work influenced my academic foundation and critical thinking. Without her guidance, I would not have been able to academically express myself or written my thesis as I have today. I was honored to have worked under her supervision this past semester. In that light, I'd also like to name the professors who have influenced me throughout the past two years at CUNY Graduate Center, and who I will be forever grateful for: Professor Simon Davis, Professor Shariah Taleghani, Professor Lale Can, Professor Anissa Helie, and Professor Dina Le Gall.

As this thesis encompasses a lot of my years' reflections I'll mention my gratitude to Rami, my partner in life, who believed in me every step of the way and listened to the several versions of this thesis until the very last one. Kerem, whose very existence made me fall in love with the field of history and the many stories I got to know through his eyes. Mohamad, who made me believe in my ability to co-join my activism with academia, and to never feel afraid to ask and challenge myself. Walid, Hassan and Hala who were the first chosen family I had when I transformed into a critical being in Lebanon. Golabi, Dima and Ami for the appreciation of the smallest but most important instances in life, capturing experience, and making life colorful in the grayest of days. Maryam Al-Khawaja who was the definition of resilience and a source of inspiration and solidarity for me over the years. Poppy, Khalifa and Mariam for being my first feminist family in New York and opening my eyes to the diversity of feminist struggles. Ida for the endless story telling journeys we shared and constant solidarity we showed each other when faced with our challenging existence in fields and spaces rampant with misogyny and patriarchy. Dayna for having taken the streets in Beirut so ferociously, but also for having me feel like I was with her on those streets, while I was miles away. Martin for having listened to my stories from Lebanon and then shared stories from Argentina (over Ramen in the midst of Los Angeles), which made me want to write about this more ferociously. And finally, my Urgent Action Fund family, who has adopted me in the last year and helped me survive through the toughest times of my immigrant life.

Finally, and most importantly, I thank the Lebanese revolutionaries who have broken much of what needed to be broken, the families of the disappeared who have shown resilience at its best, and particularly Wadad Halwani who is a big inspiration to me. Her voice broke through it all.

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Introduction:

Strolling in Beirut after 80 days from the day the revolution had started, after I had left it for a year, I could see how the space had changed. Concrete walls that had been empty, turned into an open air museum of graffiti art ranging from a drawing of a martyr's face, to a caricature of the corrupt and slogans of the revolution, to a statement like "Ali loves Rita" sprayed on a corner of the street by an aspiring amateur. I could see how civilians' experience of space changed, reclaiming *previously* empty public spaces, making them into their homes, living in them as an expression of revolt against the system of corruption and oppression they had lived through, for thirty years. I discovered an old cinema that would normally have been surrounded by internal security forces and high fences, now populated by a couple of mattresses and a graffiti that said "I promise on your life mama, I'm not leaving this place, even if you'd disapprove of me". I walked up to "the egg" or "the dome", an old egg-shaped brutalist design, built in the late 60s, destined to be an opera house or a cinema interrupted by the Lebanese civil war and kept off limits for years. I spoke with strangers about their demands, asked them why they keep on revolting after 70 days of relentless protest, and got to know their shy histories. They spoke of different ways of revolting through their purchasing power, closing roads, archiving, organizing, using violence or committing to non-violent protest, and I could see the multitude of revolution tactics, a multitude of experiences.

I could not set one standard and write one story that would sum up all the experiences of revolutionaries in Beirut. But I could sense a break from the old "order of time", a type of *presentism* tied to a silenced past and an achingly hopeful future. As I write, I'll note that Lebanon's revolution has been livid on the streets of Beirut, Saida, Jounieh, Tripoli and many

more cities for over 200 days. We've lost six civilians, and due to the economic crackdown of private banks (inducing capital controls) and the Lebanese Central Bank's unwillingness to stop the inflation of local currency, many have crouched into the lower classes. What was most interesting to me though is how this prospective break from the past in the now open air museum of experience and color, entangled itself with the visual break I discovered in Ghassan Halwani's film *Erased – Ascent of the Invisible* (Halwani G. , 2018). Without specifying the location, Halwani visits a wall in Beirut with a cutter in hand. He starts peeling off layers of posters from the wall until he goes around five centimeters deep. And slowly, without commentary, we can see older layers under the multitude of posters glued over them for years. He keeps digging until we can see a black and white print which I suppose is from the 80s stating: "We love Beirut. And if they assassinated her, it is in our memory that she lives on." The second frame from that wall, was the unpeeling of more layers leading up to the face of a man, side by side with other faces of men who had been put together up on the walls of Beirut: A tactic adopted by families of the disappeared as a plea to find them. The walls of Beirut in both those instances, illustrated the way generations of Lebanese civilians demand the articulation of a fragmented past by acting and demanding from the present. What are two hundred days of revolution compared to almost five thousand four hundred and seventy-five days of civil war though? Francois Hartog would probably state: "the present dictates". (Hartog, 2015)

In Hartog's discussion of time, we could understand historical time as part of being in the world and *experiencing* it, and how that relates to future anticipation or no future anticipation depending on the regime of historicity we are in. The regime of historicity sheds light on the temporality - either past, present, or future – around which the order of time is structured and

experienced at various junctures in history. Futurism, as Hartog argues, contains an order of time that places particular demands on the present to sacrifice itself for the future (pg. 13). While *presentism* contains an order of time in which the present takes precedence and is omnipresent.

Today's omnipresent COVID-19 outbreak really serves as an oddly poignant illustration of Hartog's point of time determined by "things that are no longer and [...] things that are not yet". With news coming out of Hart Island, New York, displaying satellite imagery of mass graves being dug for over 5,000 COVID-19 dead-ridden bodies, the city's sirens break through the silence of public spaces as people confine themselves at home. (Yuan, 2020) Death surrounds us. And our fate is not as known as we would have liked it to be. And while I am sad for those lives that we lose daily, my heart feels content that today, we've all touched uncertainty somehow. In Lebanon, the mothers of the disappeared have lived through that type of uncertainty for over thirty years. Even though, the civil war had supposedly ended in 1990, Beirut got rebuilt and a general public discourse of "healing by not revisiting the past" became the mainstream discourse, suppressing past experiences and memories, stacking posters over posters for years on end. The families' spatial experience of Beirut however, was still attached to the moment their loved ones disappeared and the possibility of their walking on mass graves of other families' disappeared. The past could still find its way into the present with a material absence of a body that can still be alive or that is dead and unrecognized.

On Ghassan Halwani's family register, his father's name still remains unremoved. Officially, as per the state's records, Adnan is recognized as a right-holding present citizen, while his body is effectively nowhere to be found. Adnan Halwani was supposedly being taken for a five-minute

chit-chat on the 24th of September 1982. These five minutes, turned to thirty-eight years of waiting for him to come back. Wadad Halwani, Adnan's partner, initially told her young kids Ghassan and Ziad that their father was traveling. She wrote them letters from their father, and promised his return soon, illustrative of the faith Wadad had in the return of Adnan (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2014). But Adnan never came back, deeming Wadad's experience of the civil war's outcomes eminent, where the past could make a constant claim of her present. Since Adnan's disappearance, and after having heard about several other disappearances she went to a local radio station and asked (live on radio) whoever has had a person disappear in their family to meet her at a specific time by the Mosque of Abdel Nasser in Corniche El Mazraa, which was near the school she taught in. The next day, she goes to the meeting place expecting the small group she was eagerly waiting to meet. She describes the scene as follows: "What I saw was amazingly scary. The two, three or four women I expected to attend, turned out in the hundreds, some accompanied by a number of children. The meeting square was full. The place was packed with people who did not know each other. Did these women answer my call in order to simply get to know each other? Certainly not, it was not a time for socializing or entertainment, nor did the streets really allow it. They had come to know what has happened to them." The women marched towards the council of ministers building, each in her turn lamenting the disappearance of a son/daughter, a brother, a husband, and more up until they were met with a group of armed soldiers who had been ordered to stop the "commotion". After a struggle to stay, a media outpour and a representative from the government "coming down" to speak with the women, their journey of meeting with leaders of militias, presidents and many more started, asking for the truth. And their get together became a daily one eventually, which has not stopped till today. (Halwani W. , 2014) It was only after

thirty-six years of sit-ins in Beirut, constant campaigning and protest, that in November 2018, the parliament passed a law on the missing and disappeared, enabling “the formation of a national commission with a mandate to investigate individual cases of disappearances, locate and exhume mass graves, and enable a tracing process” which might lead to the closure of some cases (Maalouf, 2019). On an informal phone call with Wadad – head of the committee of the families of the disappeared in Lebanon – she exclaimed: “I believe our cause was the womb of the October 17 revolution. Our tent gave birth to the many tents in Downtown Beirut today, and it remains in *Gebran’s Garden* facing the UNESCWA building.” Many protests and stands of solidarity started from the tent, and several grassroots discussions were around the tent in October. However, the tent was torn and empty when I visited in December, a statement Wadad answered with: “Elsa they’re tired. Many of them have died. Emm Ahmad, if you remember her the one with the bent back and the blue boxes of Gitanes cigarettes? She’s so old she can barely walk!” That tent is still surrounded with banners of pictures and the number 17,000 indicating the iconographic series of faces that had disappeared over fifteen years. Very rightly so, Wadad also questions: “if the cause of the disappeared had been heard and answered, would there have been a need for revolution?”. In other words, would there have been a need for the past to loom around the present silently as much as it has?

This thesis will be an attempt to reenact events in relation to the disappeared and the Lebanese civil war, with the help of newspaper cuts, oral history, theories on historical writing, memories, and books on Lebanon. As a prospective historian, I will be tapping into the internal event of thought processes and meaning of the past, as advised by R. G. Collingwood in *The Idea of History*. (Collingwood, 1946) That critical inquiry will only be at the service of understanding

the present from the lens of a self-reflecting inquisitor that has faced many silences in a past she doesn't own as yet. The inquiry will be a dissection of those silences, an attempt at vocalizing quarter rests¹ in the symphony of sediments of time in the history of Lebanon and particularly in the case of the disappeared of the Lebanese civil war. In a nutshell, the questions raised in this humble attempt are going to unearth several non-linear instances unfolding concepts such as absence, grave culture and silence, and finally experience, all tying to the current events of the Lebanese Revolution which was categorized as "unthinkable" until very recently. The first chapter will be looking into the break from the past as of October 17, through Hartog's concept of regimes of historicity, taking into account Foucault's order of things as well as his analysis of Frederick Nietzsche. It will also be based on Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*, and Sune Haugbolle's Gramscian approach of studying the Lebanese civil war's socio-cultural affect. The second chapter will be dissecting the concept of being in time based on Martin Heidegger's findings, absence and its many definitions, and subsequently tending to the case of the disappeared in Lebanon. And finally, in the third chapter, through those concepts and case study, and utilizing Marc Nichanian's *The Historiographic Perversion*, I will delve further into violence of the archive in conversation with cultural production (including literature, film features and art spaces) in which silences were witnessing confined breaks and through which the disappeared were present. I will also be focused on experience and the field of history based on Giorgio Agamben's *Infancy and History* and Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past*.

¹ In music, a quarter note is one note played in one quarter of the duration of a whole note, dictated by the beat indicated by an order of time. In parallel, a quarter rest is a silence of the same duration of a quarter note, and it effectively looks like a round grounded by a bolt in its place . Some quarter notes are subtler than others, we can barely notice them. Some are long enough to be loud and present. When Bach had written his Partita in D minor, one of the hardest pieces of music ever written for a violin, he had set the order of time, he had imagined a sequence. He dictated the formal places in which silence lies. Whoever plays his piece, interprets the silences. And the piece and its silences' meanings diverge depending on the listener, the place in which it is played, the type of violin with which it is played.

Chapter 1: The Confined Break:

For every 13 April, a 17 October – “Lakell 13 Nisen, 17 teshrin” Bachar El-Halabi

_____Memory is not linear, and history should not be re-enacted as such either. The events mentioned in this chapter are not in a chronological order of time, they are in order of a train of thought, based on my own memory of those events and their significance in my own experience of them.

In the first month of the October 17 revolution, we received videos of revolutionaries climbing up electricity poles on the highways all over the country, taking down pictures of political party leaders, breaking their frames and in some cases, setting them on fire. Everyone not partaking in the campaign, watched these unprecedented acts of – what I consider, in the Lebanese context – anarchy, in awe. Those pictures were normally held in high regard, to the extent that one can easily notice the signature at the bottom corners of the picture stating the name of whoever gifted their political leader this public acknowledgment. With the break that the revolution instated, that signature mostly became a source of shame. Of course, some of those frames were fixed and stubbornly placed back on some poles further into the revolution. Certainly, these faces had been in Lebanese mainstream collective memory for too long, to the extent that some got stuck in a Stockholm syndrome, unable to think of the possibilities beyond them. Mahdi Aamel’s constant reminder of “sects are not sects outside the state” comes echoing back. Sectors would not be as entrenched or as existent if it weren’t for their regeneration in the state’s institutions and practices (Aamel, 1986). And of course, the newer elites would not pass on the opportunity to inherit power from those who conquered before them by any means possible. However, in that moment of anarchy, informal borders delineated by the type of face we see on the big banners,

vanished. “Kellon yaani kellon”, *All means all* broke through as the new slogan unnerving the informal borders, disturbing the fragmented sectarian discourse that masked a co-dependent elite. Slogans and chants from Beirut sent messages of solidarity to Tripoli, Jdaideh slogans chanted for Nabatieh, Shouf for Saida, Sour for Beirut, and the chain continued and stretched as the revolution expanded with around 1.2 million bodies on the streets of Lebanon. Even though, this instance sounds insignificant, the history of Lebanon and its malleable invisible borders effectively got infused in every so-called democratic institution, law, cultural norm or memory (and many others), particularly through and after the civil war, deeming the revolution’s events very significant.

We’ve lived forty-five Aprils since 1975, and in the first fifteen of those, modern day Lebanon’s acclaimed 22nd November 1942 borders – delineating an area of 10,452 squared kilometers – changed drastically and variably. The civil war supposedly started on April 13th, when a bus full of Palestinians was stopped and killed by a group of armed men, suspected to be right-wing Phalangist militia combatants. From that moment, Beirut got physically separated into west and east by a demarcation line crowned by snipers on both sides, and of course, militia check points, leaving a legacy of a physically (then psychologically) split Beirut. And similar to the capital, areas around Lebanon took a multitude of shapes and colors, separated by religion, sect or ideology, “protected” by its respective militia.

In 1975, my father and mother were eighteen-year-old adults. My mother was an aspiring heart surgeon, my father an aspiring lawyer. In five years’ time, my mother was a retired nurse mother of a little girl, expecting another little girl, and my father was a Phalangist militant. In his book

War and Memory in Lebanon (2010), Sune Haugbolle outlines a temporal scope of 21st century Lebanon looking at how Lebanese citizens became “intimate strangers” over the course of the war, “molded by the same historical tragedy but at the same time deeply wary of one another”. Through his ethnography of social memory and his close attention to the history of cultural and intellectual life of postwar Lebanon, he makes a case that the more time passes while silences in the history of the Lebanese civil war sustain, the more painful the “awakening” would be. (Haugbolle, 2010)

While the civil war is normally spoken of as a moment, it varied incredibly throughout its unfolding years. But as Michel Foucault has stated:

It is not a matter of locating everything on one level, that of an event, but of realizing that there is actually a whole order of levels of different types of events, differing in amplitude, chronological breadth, and capacity to produce effects. The problem is at once to distinguish among events, to differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, and to reconstitute the lines along which they are connected and engender one another. (Foucault, 1982)

The type of experiences of the civil war varied significantly, depending on where one was when an event out of a million events occurred. There was no official point of reference by which every Lebanese citizen could go back to a narrative in a national history book which included the events of the civil war. It was avoided altogether. Instead, several official history books were created for several regions of Lebanon depending on the sectarian background of students in the

area they lived in. As an illustrative example, teachers from certain Christian schools would deem the formation of Lebanon favorable, also inclined to favor the French mandate. Other teachers deemed Greater Lebanon as a “scrambled French fabrication detached from the Arab hinterland” (Kamal Abouhedid, 2002). What those schools and history books had in common though, was a blanket silence on any years after 1942. The lines along which events, networks and experiences, were not officially connected to one another. And given the lack of a point of reference that the nation could deny or amend or approve of regarding the civil war, the bridging of “intimate strangers” stories was almost impossible facing a public narrative of silence. And the post-war generation inherited those silences unknowingly, until they discovered parts of their families’ histories if they were curious, defiant or privileged enough.

In year 2020, forty-five Aprils after 1975, and after the October 17 revolution, my father (for the first time) spoke of his experiences during the civil war to me. He reminisced and re-evaluated his history with the Phalangist Kataeb party sharing details of certain battles he partook in, and those he would have never. Before the revolutionary break in the previous “order of time”, it had been easier to talk about whatever came before the civil war, our thoughts about the French colonialists or the 19th century peasants’ uprising of Mount Lebanon way before Lebanon became an “independent” nation; never the civil war. The last thing I learned in school about the history of Lebanon was the day Lebanon celebrates its Independence, the day a *National Pact* was born on the eve of 22nd November 1943, marking the official birth of Lebanese exceptionalism. The initially verbal pact would guarantee a democratic confessional system, creating a currently unique structure of government largely influenced by the French mandate. The motive at the time was to force the French mandate out of Lebanon on one hand, and to

ensure a fair representation of recognized sects within the new borders of the Lebanese state. 1943 was not the first moment where one's sect played a role in political development within the land we now call Lebanon, however it was the moment sectarian divides were officially institutionalized within a consociational power structure (Cleveland, 2004). That would have been the extent of Lebanese history as per formal history books, until the moment the revolution broke out, making the unthinkable and painful "awakening" possible. Thus Haugbolle's assumption held ground, until October 17, 2019.

Our last independence day celebration came a month into our revolution. November 22, 2019, turned into a nation's celebration far from the presidential palace and the routine military parade. Lebanese citizens had their own independence day celebration, gathering as shoals of mothers, retired military personnel, diasporas, doctors, lawyers, students, environmentalists, artists, among others in the middle of Beirut. Accordingly, we can clearly observe that the meaning of the memorialized day on which Lebanon became "independent" changed, and so did April 13's (the acclaimed first day of the civil war). The mainstream slogan of "let us not mention it so that we can move on" – that intended to look towards the future linearly as a way to leave the past behind – turned into the new slogan of "for every April 13, an October 17" insistently linking the past to the present.

What happened in that moment, echoes some of Walter Benjamin's observations of what he calls "the tradition of the oppressed" as an attempt to learn that "the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule." Once we realize the entrenched well-established systems of normalized sectarian institutions, the reasoning behind the inability of Lebanese mothers to

naturalize their children because they are not married to a Lebanese man, or the immigration of several Lebanese generations resulting in routine brain drain and the fact that we memorialize our first day of a civil war instead of the proclaimed last, we would realize that our lives as a post-civil war generation, are a series of oppressive tides and not exceptional fleeting moments of oppression. And once we embody this understanding, we realize our responsibility to “bring about a real state of emergency” (Benjamin, 1969) by breaking the oppressor’s produced assumption of what the historical norm is or what it should be. It is then, that we are a step closer to struggle more consciously and on more equal grounds against our oppressor. However, realizing the historical norm should come hand in hand with realizing “what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted”. It is realizing the affect of that historical norm which is a source of production of pleasure, knowledge, discourse. “It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.” (Foucault, 1982)

In that light, in a short article published on the grassroots social media platform Megaphone News, scholar and journalist Fadi Bardawil, delineates how important our revolution’s founding of the state of emergency as the rule, shifted the way we will remember April 13, 1975 as of October 17, 2019. And without verbally realizing it, Bardawil could have easily been having a conversation with Francois Hartog and Reinhart Koselleck. Building upon Koselleck’s concepts of spaces of experience and horizons of expectation, Hartog’s concept of regimes of historicity is a tool used to understand moments of a crisis of time, when the linear correlation of the past, present, and future, is no longer “self-evident”. Hartog asks:

[...] are we dealing with a past which has been forgotten or which is too insistently recalled? A future which has almost disappeared from our horizon or which hangs over us as an imminent threat? Does our present no sooner arrive than it is consumed, or is it almost static and unending, eternal even? (Hartog, 2015)

If we look closer at Lebanon, we can see that for years, the dominant Lebanese regime of historicity protected the “promised future” at the expense of healing or facing some while reviving other parts of the past. War-torn Beirut, quickly got rebuilt, obliterating signs of war or mass graves and replacing an older “magnificent” Beirut, with a new, more modern and aspirational one; effectively, Beirut’s reconstruction was premature and in denial of a past that was not as glorious as portrayed in Rafik Hariri’s rebuilding of Downtown Beirut. Re-built based on a contract with *Solidaire*, old quiosques, old houses, fish markets and tramway lines were obliterated, and instead a big city landscape grandeur with new buildings that kept an external old architecture and markets with international modern merchandise, stood “in glory”. However, despite those efforts, we could still see Beirut’s architectural space, interacting with its unresolved past when some of the buildings that were targeted during the civil war kept traces of bomb shells or bullet holes, contrasting quite oddly with the new image of Beirut. Beirut’s architecture made of it “an emblematic city”, a site caught in between “amnesia and the duty to remember”. (Hartog, 2015) At the moment of “renovation”, nationalism and modernity obviously took precedence over healing and justice. The political elites quickly rushed to introduce and pass an imposed amnesty law in 1990, under the pretext of “forgiving and forgetting”. That which allowed the faces of militia men to resurface on the highways of

Lebanon in the 21st century, not in their militant attire, rather in business suits or religious dress without any sign of remorse, ‘in the service of the masses’. The new generation of elites today, learned well from their predecessors paralleling the introduction of an amnesty law in 2020, in an attempt to avoid atoning for their crimes of corruption and despotism under the pretext of bailing out those who have been in jail un-sentenced for years. Perhaps the masses would negotiate and forget the state’s inability to save its people when fires erupted early in October burning down their homes and their loved ones. Perhaps they would forget the economic crash that lead much of the country’s citizens into the lower classes (average reporting states over 50% increase of the lower class strata). Or perhaps the masses would forget how inefficient the discourse of “co-existence” in power sharing formulas has been, while stencils, graffiti and posters before October 17th still carried the symbols of sectarian political parties around Beirut’s spatial divisions; delineating a solid presence of a looming past of violence and exposing the need for sectarian communities to still delineate borders within which they had “control”.

Normally, fear of the past would be abused into preserving sectarianism and power sharing formulas of the elite, under the pretext of protecting Lebanese citizens from “further violence” if the state and state institutions were destroyed. This was a discourse which utilized people’s tragic experiences of the civil war, to effectively sustain what is framed as the base for “co-existence” of more than seventeen sects. However, when the recent revolution vocalized the discontinuity of that particular discourse, it showed an overlap of two kinds of regimes of historicity: conditions of possibility which have allowed people on the streets to publicly question the mainstream historical discourse and demand the downfall of the sectarian regime,

while still grappling with their own spaces of experience as communities based on their coming out of the civil war and their inheritance of its particular discourses.

Based on that new realm, Fadi Bardawil dismantled the official 13 April narrative, pointing out its inconsistencies with events that unfolded after it. He re-evaluated the narrative's categorizing of its regime of historicity and pointed out how it molded itself over and over again to avoid accountability of the known unnamed. The discourse around the past was one of "anonymizing the perpetrator", "blaming the foreigner" and "insisting on the inevitability of participating in the war for self defense and survival". The discourse around the present was one of "banishing sectarianism" and "restoring the legacy of the founding fathers to reproduce political legitimacy". With those statements in mind, and if we follow Frederick Nietzsche's chain of thought coupled with Foucault's analysis, we can clearly see how false it is to think that war exhausts itself to the extent that it renounces violence and submits to the rule of law. "On the contrary, the law is a calculated and relentless pleasure, delight in the promised blood, which permits the perpetual instigation of new domination and the staging of meticulously repeated scenes of violence." (Foucault, Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, 1978) which we have seen repeatedly in Lebanon's contemporary violent list of events including the Qana Massacre of 1996, and the assassination of journalist Samir Qassir along many other prominent figures. Even though, the discourse around the future, as Bardawil continues to point out, was one of "learning from history" and "the dream of a country", a modern and grand country. (Bardawil, 2020)

Those outlined headlines effectively broke when the streets of Lebanon reached the pain threshold, chanting relentlessly: "Ento lharb el ahlyye w nahna lthawra lshaa'byye", which

translates to “you are the civil war, and we are the people’s revolution”. The state’s regime of historicity was contested and was proven to exist alongside multiple other temporalities—the previous regime of historicity was merely the dominant discourse. When a colorful picture of an old woman dancing with the Lebanese flag in the protests was shared next to the picture of a woman screaming in agony during the Lebanese civil war, we could see the stark contrast and the need to tackle that temporal collision of memorialized instances and the need to break from the neo-liberally oriented sacrifice of experience. The regime of historicity witnessed a clear shift, reclaimed by a current dominant discourse by popular vote.

“All means all” was not only targeted at the political elite and the system, but was also used to illustrate that the protesters were one front against the oppressor, and the priorities were equal despite their diversity. LGBTQI folks were on the frontlines of the protests, proudly calling against patriarchy, stenciling “Louteh mesh msabbe” (Gay is not an insult) on the walls surrounding the protesters. Migrant workers and allies carried banners against the Kafala (guardianship) system with quotes such as: “Corona is not the virus, Kafala is”. Families of the disappeared used their tent as the godmother of all other revolutionary tents that sprouted around Gebran’s Garden. The list goes on, sedimenting a multitude of re-surfacing causes held under the chant of “the people want the fall of the system”. With that shift, come various possibilities today, and an immense responsibility to push for unfolding silences in the past. With that shift, the possibility of denying the various spectrum of experience from erupting through the non-inclusive civil war narrative, is close to null. Today’s events, have definitely not surfaced by accident; they are very illustrative of the need to open Pandora’s box and challenge the historical narrative of the imposed past that does not encompass the vast quilt of separated memories and

different experiences of it. “[...] the state, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the state can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations” as per Foucault. Making the concrete “nature of power” visible, along with the prospect that analysis of power “would prove fruitful in accounting for all that had hitherto remained outside the field of political analysis”.

Accordingly, the image of my mother holding a Lebanese flag and being one body of the several bodies creating a physical human chain from South to North, hand in hand, becomes significant. The Lebanese diaspora breaking from their silence, protesting in more than thirty cities around the world, echoing the leaderless revolution in Lebanon, becomes significant. The LGBTQI community breaking the fear, being on the frontlines becomes significant. The tent of the disappeared and their relentless efforts in their fight to the right to know, to break the silence once and for all, becomes even more significant.

Chapter 2: The Paper House of Absence

_____ *“Your Absence has gone through me*

Like a thread through a needle.

Everything I do is stitched with its color” (Merwin, 1993)

I remember very vividly when my father took us to our village Meyrouba (Mount Lebanon) to visit my grandparents’ graves. He found the church, and went down a narrow staircase leading to a small room guarded by a black iron gate. I looked inside, and I could see two rows of six boxes. I asked my father “where are Jeddo Aziz and Teta Laure?”, which he answered me by saying “just pray for their souls baba”. When I grew older, I asked him if we could go visit again, and to my surprise, he tells me that their bodies had been thrown into a well a long time ago. Meyrouba did not have its own graves. It only had this one room in which all its dead would lie until their body decomposed, and then they’re thrown into the well.

I still don’t know where the well is. But what I do know from stories I’m told, is that Jeddo Aziz had the kindest soul, and he died because of a weak heart. My dad would always remind us of how Jeddo Aziz’s heart became weaker after his son’s battle in Sannine. A battle my father was very proud of. The only battle he spoke of that I remember from my childhood. “We were supposed to rest on the top of a mountain after a battle against the Syrians” my father told me, “and the moment we arrived, bombs of phosphorous rained on us. They were waiting for us up there”. My father lost his men on that day. And only him and one of his men were able to survive, by throwing themselves down the mountain, rolling until they reached the mountain’s

base. News of the attack and deaths travelled to Nahr El Mawt, where my grandfather lived and where my father started his militant journey. And that's when my grandfather's health started deteriorating. It was only last year, that the story materialized beyond these personal details.

A fellow researcher and I searched through series of small newspaper clips from Al Safir archives. We were looking through the month of April 1981, and while I was in complete denial of my connection to these headlines, the 27th of April arrived with a headline on the front page stating "Maa'raket Sannine" (The Battle of Sannine). At that moment I could see how my father's story, materialized in the bigger context of the Lebanese civil war. A battle he led, was big and worthy of a front page mentioning. But was my father a hero? Or a traitor? For a while I was very distrustful of everything I heard. Did my father take part in the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre? Did he stand on check points and kill whoever was not Christian? My father answered me: "I never killed a civilian. And I left everything in 1981 when I saw how many men they were willing to sacrifice for the bigger picture".

The past and the present are in constant conversation, "offering themselves to one another" in their multiple layers of absence and presence. With that realization, the philosophical questions around *Time* and *Being* resurface, as both concepts which are intertwined very closely with our perception of those layers, which reminds us of Heidegger's 1927 writings. Heidegger, amongst other theorists (like Agamben and Nietzsche) based his theory on the Hegelian notion of a negative present: where the future negates the present as it is always in the process of becoming, utterly breaking it from the past. In *On Time and Being*, he specifically expresses that "Everything has its time. But Being is not a thing, is not in time." It cannot be confined to the

linear empty temporality within the notion of homogeneous progressive standards related to the modern age's historical "standards". Yet Being as presencing remains determined as presence by time, by what is temporal", and time "remains constant in its passing away without being something temporal like the beings in time" (Heidegger, 1996). What we can effectively draw from Heidegger, is that absence and presence (of experiences) are the ones in conversation with the past (not the future). They would be the concepts by which we can assess the discourse of "being in time".

To materialize these concepts, as this chapter unfolds, I will be pursuing the issue of absence by addressing the case study of the disappeared during the civil war and its discourse's resurgence during the recent revolution. I will be delving into types of absences and how those are presented into the past and the present, as well as how they underline the fractured nature of the conversation between them. This section, is informed by the work of Mikkel Bille, Frida Hastrup, and Tim Flohr Sorensen in their co-edited volume, *An Anthropology of Absence*. Hereafter, we will look into types of absences that are material, immaterial and those that can be both in their temporality. Of course, absence can be as material as death, or as material as losing one body part. There has been a lot of research on *phantom pain* which is "a sensuous experience of something that is materially absent". For instance, many who have had severed limbs were still able to have a sensuous experience of it. This would be the smallest example of how a physical absence has obvious effects on a person's physical experiences of pain or longing. On the other end of the spectrum, we can highlight the experience of paralysis or numbness, whereby a person cannot have a sensuous experience of a body part which is materially present. Absence then can be both material and immaterial in nature; it can be something that is present

but that we don't see or feel or it can be something that is not physically present but that we can still experience or feel.

The types of absences that we will delve into are divided into three categories: (1) Embodiment: the relationship between a missing body and life (2) Temporality: The impact of past events on the future and (3) Materialized remembrance: The enactment of memory and its preservation. And given that the most proven material presence of absence in the case of Lebanese history post-civil war, is the case of the disappeared, I'll be weaving the experiences I've come across in conversation with their silenced archives and their testimonies through art and oral history (particularly from Ghassan Halwani's groundbreaking experimental essay film) as I delve further into this chapter's types of absences outlined in *An Anthropology of Absence*. (Bille, Hastrup, & Sorensen, 2010)

Since this chapter will highlight a lot more details as it evolves, I'll mention briefly now, that the families of the disappeared constitute a large multilayered diverse community. Their memories, like many other Lebanese civilians, have been denied entry into the grand meta-narrative of a linear progressive Lebanese history, which stubbornly holds on to a mainstream rigid discourse of the past and 'its connection to the future'. The experience of the families of the disappeared however has also been trapped in the very demise that brought about their state of limbo, the state's initial denial of the moment their loved ones disappeared during the civil war. Their demand has changed in its nuances as time passed. While the demand in the beginning of the journey was mainly for the disappeared to return, it shifted to the right to know where the "17,000" disappeared are as the moment of disappearance grew farther into the past. Are they in

Syrian prisons? Are they in Israeli prisons? Or are they buried somewhere that can be identified, to return the bodies to the awaiting families? The families till today, demand the right to know. Some disappeared could come back, and others could be interred underground with buildings of Beirut built over them; that which only re-enforces the need of the families to break the state's narrative and materialize the silence as best they can, showcasing the presence of relations of power beyond the state's narrative of past to future.

In order to dissect the state of limbo in which these families have been living, we will start our analysis with the most material type of absence; the relationship between the physical bodies of the disappeared, and their awaiting families: 'the embodiment of absence'. The main landscape of absence in this realm is material and surrounds questions of how a missing person's body (or the body of a person who is kidnapped/disappeared or dead) is treated morally and physically, and how that treatment affects those who are waiting for them. What is known most about death in Lebanon, is that bodies get buried differently based on sect practices. The common value regardless of sect, is that of the burial and its importance as a communal performance of grievance. My father might not have a place to come back to and find my grandparents' decomposed bodies, however he goes back to the place in which they were first buried as a point of reference to the moment he had to say goodbye.

Lebanon is not the only country that needs to face the violence of its past and the overlooked value of burial rituals during and after the civil war. Stories from the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) for instance, were initially suppressed until the excavation of body remains happened in the early 2000s. Leila Renshaw had accompanied families of killed civilians in Spain on their

journey to exhume their loved ones from mass graves into more fitting places of burial after more than sixty years. What she observed, was that the mass grave was the core visiting ground compared to the new organized cemeteries. The families had embodied the absence of their loved ones and identified with the space of the mass grave more than the space where the skeletons had been moved. Renshaw explains that the mass grave held stronger significance in relation to the time and conditions of the killing act. This illustrates how monumental the moment of loss can be, and how significant the place in which the body was buried, closer to the moment of death is.

In the case of Lebanon, the locations of many mass graves are known, and families of the disappeared are bound to assume where their loved ones could have been buried, if they were killed, and not kidnapped to a prison in Syria or a prison in Israel. From the archive of the families of the disappeared – which included both news clips and oral testimonies – we know that there are six mass graves in Beirut alone, that are not all officially disclosed of by the state: The Ring Area, The Martyrs' Cemetery (Hursh Beirut), The English Cemetery (Tohwita), Mar Metr Cemetery (Achrafiyeh), Golf Club (Ouzai), BO18 Nightclub and its vicinity (Quarantina) and the Normandie Dump, 5th dock and its surrounding waters (Beirut Port Area). And in my search through newspaper clips, I could easily find many headlines about mass graves even outside of Beirut. One of the news clips that stood out and that Ghassan Halwani also showcases in his film *Erased*, was the following: “Majdel Anjar: While forensics reveal that unearthed bones are 20 years old, the Public Prosecutor decrees that the said bones are historic, most of them date back to the 17th century.” The Public Prosecutor and his surrounding state apparatus, had denied the classification of several found bodies as remains of those killed during the civil

war on several occasions. That, at first account, transforms the mass graves from potential sites of processing grief, tied to the killing act and loss, to sites of further violence.

Many remains were found by farmers who dug to culture the land, or by those who planned architectural sites and dug to build for instance. And the generations who had experienced the war, living in the areas surrounding those pieces of land, knew of the battles that had happened around those areas, or knew of militant check points that had been lodged there at some point. So when bodies were found, villagers knew the recent history surrounding the area during the civil war; they would expect the finding of remains from that time. However, and while forensic experts would confirm fresher remains, the Public Prosecutor's office would deny any proximity of those remains to the present. In Scene 18 of the movie *Erased*, Halwani screens a video of a woman presenting that: "The Chbaniyeh village in Baabda district was on the verge of joining the list of villages that is witnessing the discovery of mass graves" (We will gradually understand why she used the term 'on the verge of'). She says that they are suspecting those bodies date back to the time of the civil war. We then see a man walking on a land he's tending to saying: "I think it's 27! [...] every time I dug, I found a bag filled with bones. I started counting what I was seeing with my own eyes, trying to understand. I told the priest of the monastery that owns the land, and he told (qalli – "q") me to rebury them saying this might have been a Syrian base." The fact that the 27 bodies were in bags is important in this story, especially that when state security was called in, they dug more and found many more skeletons. Their findings were that "They found [...] animal bones: goats, sheep, a mix." The video at some point showed a hand raising a bone – that is obviously human – and the man holding it screamed: "Animal bone!". The finding of human bodies was deemed a rumor. As the video audio keeps

playing, we can see Halwani flipping the pages of a book with images of the anatomy of the human body. He flips the pages attentively, reaching the pages on which the anatomy of the animal body was showcased, delineating the stark difference between both. The 27 bodies that the old man initially found were thrown in the landfill in the middle of the Nahr (sports court).

There are countless videos and recordings of the way bodies and mass graves were treated, similar to the video claiming human remains to be animal ones. And the archived audio that shook me the most was that of a Lebanese official in January 2000, claiming that the number “17,000” – which families of the disappeared were claiming – was “an imaginary number and is imprecise” on national radio. The Committee of Inquiry for the Investigation of the Fate of All the Kidnapped and Missing, presided by a retired army general and composed of other parts of the Lebanese security apparatus (such as the General State Security, Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces) stated:

“They claim there are 17,000 missing people, and they ask where they are. Our investigation came up with a count of 2046, and we therefore ascertain that this is the real number.”

Accordingly, thousands of disappeared were even denied entry into the “real” official state count. The state’s contradictory statements became more apparent, when an expert of the state’s choosing came up with a report that some of the remains that were found, scattered across the country, were too stacked up on top of each other, and in some instances were “difficult to identify” because of their rate of decomposition given some militias had poured chemical

substances on the bodies, such as lime. And he ends his statement with the closure the state wanted to impose as per Law No. 434:

“Therefore, the Official commission considers: That all the kidnapped and disappeared persons that have been missing for 10 or more years, are considered dead. [...] Therefore, it calls upon their relatives to refer to their designated religious courts to proclaim and legalize these deaths.” (Halwani G. , 2018)

The state practically added a further layer of immoral violence to the bodies of those who died in battle or at checkpoints. It defined the process of “healing”, assuming they were giving the families “a chance” to proclaim their disappeared dead while there was still a possibility of them being alive, or while there was still a chance to at least capture their loved one’s place of burial. Whoever kept on demanding their right to know the ‘truth’, was eventually told not to “re-open wounds and threaten the civil peace (Al-Selm Al Ahli)” (Younes, 2017). I’ve personally heard that statement too many times, when I shared my research topic with anyone around me.

But what those hadn’t realized was that the wound was still open. There are tens of thousands of objects that those who disappeared left behind around their families’ homes; their eyeglasses, their combs, their cigarette holder boxes, their toothbrushes, their old watches and of course their pictures. Their objects, coupled with the way their possible bodies were treated by the state, is the most sounding contradiction of the state’s grand narrative of closure. What of those families who still have the same house with the same key in case their loved ones come back? What of

those who know their loved ones' bodies could be in that particular mass grave around the BO18 nightclub, on which younger generations now dance and drink?

These questions, tie us into the concept of temporality of absence, where the landscape shifts towards the immaterial. This type of absence, adds another layer to the fleshliness of the body and ties us to the present's multilayered temporality. It focuses on how a body's absence in the past impacts the now; how it is yet to be positioned and clearly defined in history, today. There is a less material dimension to the palimpsest of having to declare the disappeared dead to 'move on'. The disappeared were not official martyrs because they were not really dead, and those who were proclaimed officially dead had to be authorized to be found, then proclaimed dead martyrs of the civil war. When the perpetrator was a foreigner for instance, unofficial authorization to find the bodies was given easier. For example, fighters of the Lebanese National Resistance and Palestinian fighters were found quickly, given that their death was at the hands of the Israeli army. Another poignant example is that of thirteen Lebanese army officers' bodies who were exhumed in 2005, when the perpetrators in that case – the Syrian Regime – was no longer present on Lebanese soil. And whoever's death implicated the sectarian lords of the Lebanese authorities, would not be "found" yet. This is illustrative of how much the past can make claims on the present; it can instill fear in the perpetrator, when there might be a possibility of being held accountable, even without the material presence of remains or dead bodies. And it can fuel the current revolution's demands in connecting the experiences of the civil war and the case of the families of the disappeared to the present. Both effectively took center-stage in the recent revolt, breaking the discourse of 'futuraity' through the resurfacing of multilayered absences and remembrances.

The revolution's break from the state discourse – as we have seen in Chapter 1 – is a result of a sedimented build up of experiences that deemed the discourse of a 'grand modern future' incompetent, on many occasions. No matter how much the state had tried to silence the fragmented experiences of those who disappeared and their families, the disappeared bodies and names (coupled with their families' commitment to vocalizing the past and its open wounds in practice) repeatedly sounded the silence. For instance, the cases of the disappeared who hadn't been claimed dead by their families, made it materially possible for the past to make claims of the present even in their absence. The case of Christine and Richard Salem's disappearance is one that still looms in the present very vocally. They were both kidnapped on their way home from Hamra to Saqiet El Janzir, on the 17th of August, 1985. Their mother Odette, who was one of the mothers who never left the families' sit-in and who was extremely vocal in her demands to know where her kids are, passed away in 2009. She had lived in the rented family house all her life (Halwani W. , *The Last Picture... While Crossing*, 2009). When she passed, the landlord tried to reclaim the house, but the court ruled against him, since there was no proof of Christine and Richard's death. They could still return home after thirty-two years of disappearance. Ghassan and Wadad Halwani both gave a tribute to them in their films. Given their closeness to Odette they were able to reveal that the landlord had filed a case to prove that Richard and Christine are dead. However, while their parents' names were crossed out in the civil registry (proclaiming them dead), Richard and Christine's names are not. They are still officially alive, making a claim on the present, even in the formal day to day proceedings. They also have a home. Ghassan Halwani ends his feature film with this quote: "The Civil Registry of the Lebanese State will be left burdened with thousands of disappeared people who do not die. Thousands of Immortals (Abadyyin) (Halwani G. , 2018) who are alive not because they are

materially alive (whether they are or not is not the question in this case) but because their disappearance still affects the system that has denied their very state of being; because it has affected those beings who are living with a memory of them. The names of the disappeared join the bodies of Lebanese revolutionaries in their demand to break the silence in both their absence and presence.

At this point, the focus on absence should shift to the enactment of memory and its preservation which can be both material and immaterial. How do we presence someone who has passed away or who has disappeared? How do we commemorate them or act upon their memory? And how does the state selectively do both? In the next part of this chapter we will look into (1) Photographs and (2) Place, and the ways they memorialize absence.

Photographs can be studied as means to keep loved ones alive in spaces where they are no longer present.² For example, Odette had pictures of her loved ones all over the house, keeping her company, promising her to return, signifying a deathly absence. But photographs have also confined the disappeared into one collective icon that added another dimension of disappearance of the story of one, to the benefit of the collective. The way the story and pictures of the disappeared came to be effectively utilized in the years leading up to the revolt and during the revolution, somehow eliminated the multilayered experiences within the major story, in order to represent it as a unified collective act. That one story got summarized in one grid of pictures and experiences that transcended sectarian and national features of it, but also sacrificing the

² Photography can materialize “the impalpable” and give “tangible shape to light”, thereby positioning photography as a paradoxical technology: suspending the solid on the one hand and materializing the intangible on the other.” Photographs normally bend the concept of a place in a “negotiation of remembrance”, a loom of memories which can make a household feel like home or make life more bearable, or quite the opposite. (Bille, Hastrup, & Sorensen, 2010)

preciseness and richness of personal experience in some way. For instance, I could not summarize the multitude of experiences of revolutionaries in Beirut, because to each person their perception, their way of revolting and their own past, however and given there was one strong call for the fall of the system, when I write about the revolution and its unified slogan, I summarize it into a moment, blurring the faces for the sake of getting a point through. A similar practice was enforced on the disappeared. They were largely summarized into the number 17,000 and into a grid of pictures living side by side in exhibitions, in the tent of the families of the disappeared, in our visual memory. They became known together, and not as separate bodies, separate stories or separate entities, especially to whoever did not have a missing person to claim. Those could not name more than ten names, but once they saw the faces altogether, they would be able to decipher that those were the disappeared from the civil war. Many in the newer generations, who were not around the walls of Beirut to see the distributed faces edited to fit on one poster, did not even know that they inherited thousands of brutal stories of disappearances, deeming it necessary for those grids to resurface and become part of the more recent cultural visual memory. Halwani summarized this state as follows:

I realized that these persons have ceased to be the persons we once knew. Instead they became an arrangement of symbols that do not complete their meaning unless they're all combined. This arrangement gave birth to an icon. And for them to become this icon, the disappeared had to die, all at once and at the same instant.

(Halwani G. , 2018)

This situation is bound to lead us to question the nature of writing history. How do memory and remembrance get sacrificed in the process of writing “objective” history? What is silenced in the interest of outlining ‘facticity’ and ‘truth’? And would that be effective history at the service of life? The disappeared essentially embody different narratives, representative of the Lebanese society at the point of their disappearance. Which in effect, is a time that is very different than the present time we find ourselves in today. Thus, our imagination of that past today really serves the significance of the case in the present. And in the case of the grid of photographs which now functions as the icon of the disappeared, we can see how the multitude of experiences was collectivized for the sake of transcending the chains of the state’s discourse today, which has relied on sectarian divide and the need to move on and forget.

However, we must still attribute importance to the names behind those pictures, the families they left behind, the place of their disappearance and the possible reason why they became the disappeared in order to presence the past. Some of them disappeared in battles, but a majority of them were civilians who were stopped at check-points or who were kidnapped as a revengeful act resulting from another kidnapping “on the other side”, amongst others. It is very important that their photograph – which is mostly a formal state passport picture – be animated, so we can rematerialize it beyond the collective and beyond the state’s standards of an official picture. This is one of the ways we can recover a time when those individuals were alive and understand that they existed, they spoke, they loved, they laughed. They had a life which was taken away from them, mostly arbitrarily, and their perpetrators remain untagged to their disappearance,

keeping the individual disappearance silent and confined. Keeping the responsibility of the disappearance solely tied to the present of generations of families of the disappeared inheriting the struggle to fight for those who were animated in real life, around them.

The families of the disappeared have also touched upon that type of silence. Wadad Halwani constantly mentions how the media (mostly state owned) would film the pain of the women who have been waiting for the disappeared, portraying the collective of the families as victims only. The families have been asked to share the stories about the pictures they carry too many times, but very few outcomes lead to the will to act and break the silence. Their presence in the public space, was perceived as a “transgression” of their normative gender role which would have normally been confined in the private space; women who have lost their guardians. But their presence inherently re-defined them from women with lost guardians, borrowing public space, to women activists who “earned” their public stature (perhaps until their guardian came back). A mother has the right to find her son, even if it meant she had to partake in a demonstration, and that was a small albeit mention-worthy challenge to the patriarchy (Malin, 1994).

It is established that visual media attention is vital when it comes to raising the awareness of the public, regarding the type of pain the families have endured, however the way this message has repeatedly been portrayed, frames the way the public reacts. And in most cases, the public felt empathy for “the victims” under the pretext of humanitarian strife, and not the need to fight with “the survivors” under the pretext of a political case. Wadad mentions the following in an interview with researcher Miriam Younes:

“Whoever feels with us, has to act. We don’t want to be victims. [...] we want to know where they are, of course. But we also work for society (as a whole). We(‘re) work(ing) to build a country. The questions we ask are at the center of this undertaking.” (Younes, 2017)

This statement ties back to my conversation with her when she mentioned how the revolution today is very much intertwined with what the families of the disappeared really are, and what they have been doing over the years. Some of these women were killed, some committed suicide and some died of grief. (Halwani W. , *The Last Picture... While Crossing*, 2009) And disappearances took a multitude of shades depending on the time of the civil war ranging from the most haphazard to the most strategic type of kidnapping. However, while indeed, their stories are painful, their resilience and its direct correlation with the need to heal from the civil war and break the silence of the state’s archive is bigger and much more worthy of mentioning. The fact that their stories are so diverse, yet they have been willing to call for their right to know as one entity, is also immense. Not to forget their breaking through differences in the economic, religious and legal related strifes they’ve had to endure, each in her own context, and then the collective gendering of their cause in a patriarchal society, given most of them were women.³

Their stories with absence, solidifies a “hierarchy of suffering” whereby women whose family members had been killed in the war could be considered heroes and martyrs in their sacrifice. In comparison, the women with disappeared family members live in a blurred absence, in limbo, victimized and politically silenced under the emblem of one grid of pictures.

³ The state of women’s rights, has really affected how much a woman would be able to push her case forward, as the personal status law does not authorize her power of attorney over the children in the family or over the household if the partner is declared absent (as opposed to dead). (Comaty, 2019)

Through the three concepts of absence in conversation with Ghassan Halwani's film and other excerpts, we could observe the intersections and tensions between absence and presence and accordingly capture certain experiences in relation to them in the present. Absence is not only a state of being; as we have seen, it has significant effects on people's lives and the development of historical events. It creates "an ambiguous interrelation between what is there and what is not", influencing how people conceptualize themselves and what they engage with. (Bille, Hastrup, & Sorensen, 2010) It influences their perception of time.

Time is not as straightforward as the indication of the time of day. It is not as linear or as rigid. Time-space effectively fluctuates in the sediments of absence and presence, and their relation to the past, present and future. "But where is time? *Is* time all and does it have a place?" Time is not objective, it is spatial and experiential. That is why Heidegger's question here, makes me think of place, and its importance in capturing innuendos.

In her piece *Critical Place Studies and Middle East Histories*, Amy Mills indirectly explores the theme of absence. She approaches absence from a perspective of place and representation, place and interconnection as well as place and memory; our second means of memorialization. Place studies according to Mills, compel us to delve deeper into how societies change beyond the two concepts of modernity and colonialism. How does a place interact with the emotions of a community in said place? How do imaginations of heritage or memories of a civil war get tied into a particular place or nation concept? And how do the interactions between the dead disappeared and alive, urban rural and global, Muslim Jewish and Christian, colonizer bystander and colonized, old elite urban elite and the rest of the population, get materially translated into a

location or get affected by a location? For instance, as per Lucia Volk's study of Memorials and Martyrs in Lebanon, the physical space dedicated to memorials of martyrs in Qana, South of Lebanon, gives significance to subjectivities. The names of the Christian and Muslim 'martyrs' engraved on the stones of that gravesite in Qana, creates an impact on the memories of locals. It unites the living multi-sectarian communities in a memory of collective suffering. This in turn strengthens sentiments of belonging to the Lebanese nation.

Mills' article also rounds up some of Suni Haughbolle's arguments concerning the master narratives overshadowing Lebanese citizens' fractured memories of war when she showcases how places that have witnessed civil strife and convergence of cultural memories, "can break down simplistic partisan narratives of history". Paying attention to what elements of the past were remembered or forgotten (and in what way they are remembered and forgotten), believing that these nuances would shed light on the role of the past in affecting the present as well as the future. For instance, the Lebanese Authorities not only pushed for the disappeared to be proclaimed dead, and distanced themselves from being held responsible for their past, but also proposed that a tribute be made for the families of the disappeared both financially and morally. They proposed paying the family of the disappeared around five million Lebanese pounds (3,000 US dollars on average), and erect a memorial for the disappeared "somewhere" to put the case to a close. They would name the memorial as "Martyrs of the Civil War", elevating the disappeared (who might still be alive) to the rank of a Martyr and not one in limbo.

The architectural plan of the memorial was to be set up on Beirut's Corniche – a "neutral" ground – where the families of the disappeared and Lebanese civilians would be able to

contemplate over times of the past and interact on the premise of healing from the violence of the civil war. While that idea would have been an interesting step forward, the memorial was effectively implemented over the Normandie Dump, 5th dock of the Beirut Port – an acclaimed mass grave now called Beirut Water Front. And today, it is only a dump of concrete with barely any visitors. Furthermore, it hasn't even mentioned the disappeared anywhere on the premise; barely anyone knows that there even is a memorial to start with.

“The monument suggested by the Brigadier General commemorates the disappeared as martyrs of the war. He pronounces them dead and draws an end to the investigations. He leaves them where they are and elevates them morally, to the symbolic rank of Martyrdom, only to go back and drown them to the bottom of their disappearance.” (Halwani G. , 2018)

The memorial was chosen to be implemented over a mass grave that hasn't been opened, and that has witnessed unsolved crimes of the past. This land is in itself a commemorative structure that contains the substance of the crime. The state needed to get rid of the spatial witness: they deformed the place and promised acknowledgment in return. Instead, the place itself is taken over by silence and the sound of waves crashing into concrete absorbing the waves into silence. This is illustrative of the answer families of the disappeared will get when they ask for their right to know, their right to 'truth'.

Chapter 3: The Archive and History

“The veneration of monuments becomes parody; the respect for ancient continuities becomes systematic dissociation; the critique of the injustices of the past by a truth held by men in the present becomes the destruction of the man who maintains knowledge by the injustice proper to the will to knowledge.” (Foucault, Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, 1978)

In our modern world, most of us are officially identified by a piece of paper/card or a page in a passport, with a number, a name, a birthday, a sex, dictating our legal and personal status amongst others. I say most of us because some of us don't have “the privilege” of being identified in the system of nation states such as the Bidoon or those whose citizenship was “taken away” from them. Based on all those factors, we've each touched upon a different set of privileges, a varying degree of access, and a universal generalization based on the most basic information these documents provide. In that light, I call on Judith Butler's concept of the “hierarchy of grief”. In her essay *Violence, Mourning, Politics*, Butler shared the story of a Palestinian family who had asked the *San Fransisco Cronicle* to post an obituary about a family member that had been killed by Israeli troops. That content was deemed offensive by the USA-based newspaper, and the obituary was not published. Her question, based on that example and several others, was: “Who counts as a human? Whose lives count as lives? And finally what makes for a grievable life?” (Butler, 2004; Butler, 2004).

To be able to answer those questions, we will need to ask what is considered to be a “truth” or a “fact”. We will need to realize that, as Foucault never ceases to reiterate, *Truth* is a production, brought into being by the same systems of power that reproduce it and maintain it, extending itself through its effect and affect. Each society embodies a regime’s types of discourse “which it accepts and makes function as true”. It dictates which statements can be considered true or false and on what terms it would be credible. And accordingly, when we realize that truth as we know it, is power, we would be more equipped to detach “the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time” (Foucault, *Truth and Power*, 1982).

This would explain why Marc Nichanian would start his book, *The Historiographic Perversion* with the provoking statement: “Genocide is not a fact because it is the very destruction of the fact, the notion of fact, of the factuality of fact”. His dissection of fact emerges initially from his own personal development, his claimed survival guilt and his theoretical considerations when it comes to the word “genocide”. There are obvious structures of power surrounding what is denoted as the Armenian Genocide, and how it is perceived, both of which surround Nichanian as an Armenian theorist, who has touched upon loss during the *Catastrophe*. And while his theory utilizes the particular case of *the Catastrophe* in conversation with the Holocaust as a political emblematic name, his theory can easily be applied to many of the catastrophes we know. There are particular identities that have been boxed with pretexts of terms and emblematic names that fit into systems of power. And the case of the disappeared is one that ties the fact-book to violence very materially especially given that certain facts were blatantly and irreversibly negated and destroyed as we saw in Chapter 2.

Accordingly, Nichanian questions and critiques the role of both historians and the courts in validating certain facts and, thus, establishing a historical reality far from encompassing all experiences within a certain event or set of events. He asks, “how is it that there can still be for us, after all and fortunately, stable and indubitable facts at the same time as there are facts that have overthrown our very idea of factuality?” (2) Nichanian encourages us to think critically and engage with negation as well as restructure it. Learning from letters, and oral history, the lack of availability of Armenian books and the journey he had to take over a lifetime to unpack his own past, he was capable of unmasking the conditions of possibility leading to particular spaces of experience and particular horizons of expectation in relation to Armenian history as it was archived and remembered or legally constructed. (Nichanian, 2009)

The imminent insistence on *evidence, proof and facts* for a genocide to exist, for it to have been an event, requires the repetition of what Nichanian calls “the sentence of the executioner...: *Prove it, go on and prove it if you can!*” (p.81). And mainstream practice of historical writing normally leads the historian to turn for proof in ‘the archive’. However, the archive to Marc Nichanian, is violence. Again, if we apply Foucault’s theory, the mainstream archive is very much a tool used by the system of truth in which the power regime grows and reasserts itself in. How engaging can an official archive be when we operate in a nation-state system that generally adopts a tactic of “erasure of testimony” (p. 101), the burning of documents and the silencing and reshaping of memories as we have seen not only in the case of the Armenian Catastrophe, but also in the case of the disappeared in Lebanon?

The year 2000 – as we’ve previously seen – was a turning point for the cause of the disappeared. After a long silence from the government denying any validity to the families of the disappeared’s claims, the state publicly confessed that war crimes happened and mass graves covered the whole country. They disclosed only four names of four mass graves out of hundreds, and promised to investigate the reported cases of the disappeared further. The outcome as we saw, was a partial reporting of death of those who disappeared, and only a couple of thousand investigations which led almost nowhere. While the government had concluded that no one was being held hostage in Syria, for instance, five months after the announcement, Bashar Al Asad (the new authoritarian president of the Syrian Arab Republic (2000)) offered the return of tens of Lebanese disappeared as a “sign of good fate”. The archive lied again, albeit terribly. In 2014, subsequently, the State’s Consultative Council had ruled that families should receive a copy of the full file of the investigations carried out by the official committee in 2000, without "any derogations, restrictions or exceptions" (The Legal Agenda, 2014). It stressed the right of the families of the missing to know the fate of their relatives, pointing out that the delay in implementation is a continuation of the torture of these parents. The families effectively received a small report with barely any efficient information. And finally in 2018, a landmark law was passed that will enable a national commission to be set up, to untangle the mystery of those who were never found by exhuming mass graves, and use the collected DNA samples from the families of the disappeared to identify them.

However, none of the ‘efforts’ above have really been able to close the wound left behind by the disappeared’s state of being. And we’ve seen how previous commissions have partially documented and partially solved the cases for various political reasons. The absence of any

evidence in the state archives is even more striking considering that the state had already acknowledged the existence of several mass graves. In the absence of archival evidence, as Nichanian points out, we need to focus instead on testimony as an alternative to facts and archives. There is a presumed objectivity of the archival document, and the modes in which historiographic work engages with testimony; that which contends with the value of *witnessing* as objective truth. In contrast, Nichanian explores the possibility of monumentalizing testimony through art, for example. What was of his concern was the means by which either option – document or monument – operated in the space of visibility. For it is the will of testimony to render an event visible in the civilized world, a space that is out of bounds for both survivors and executioners of the act. Survivors call on it to witness, while executioners (in the spirit of the historiographic perversion) deny that such acts were ever committed. According to Nichanian, the civilized world is bound to the logic of the executioner, making ‘genocide not a fact’ as there must be both an interrogation of the event and a reflection on the need to “call to witness”. That the civilized world has forgotten or not seen these atrocities also index the paradoxes of the desire to show that which will not appear (93-97). The survivor thus has to bear the burden of witness and “fabricate all by himself, the scene, the gaze and the event” (97). Based on that observation, who writes for the disappeared whose fates haven’t entirely been known yet?

After the civil war, many films and novels made their way into the Lebanese cultural scene, with particular attention to the disappeared, showcasing the already open wounds from the past and memorializing experience far from the archive. These works of art, encompassed many more experiences of the Lebanese civil war in comparison to the grand state narrative of Lebanese history. I personally found characters in novels that I could most definitely see my father and

mother's experiences in, much more than I could find them in state archives, if ever. I could also find many more details and experiences from the war and about the disappeared in individual testimonies and films in Lebanese pop culture, much more than any of the state's numbers and documentation. However even in those spaces, I could see how the regime of power in the Lebanese context affected the extent of its self-censorship which decreased over time.

In the years following the extreme intercommunal violence and after the 1990 Ta'if agreement was signed, instating the concept of 'mutual coexistence', any mentioning of the war would be frowned upon and discouraged. Elias Khoury however, was one of the few who partially broke the initial silence with his fictional war stories. His popularity had not gotten to its apogee yet when he published his early 1990s three (now well know) books: *White Masks* (1992), *City Gates* (1993), and *The Kingdom of Strangers* (1993). *White Masks* centers around the disappearance of a civil servant, and a journalists' investigation around the case for instance. In the fictional novel, a journalist investigates the murder of Khalil Ahmad Jaber who had been arrested by a left-wing militia and beaten to death by thugs (a case that many of the disappeared might have have actually faced). In due time, even though the investigation unravels the truth to the journalist, he decides to turn a blind eye. In order to probably protect himself from having to place the blame on the criminals, he proceeds into investigating with the entire neighborhood anyway. Publicly, the process of the investigation becomes overly complicated and leading nowhere. The victim at some point gets quoted in remembrance, saying: "It's a huge eraser, and it doesn't just erase what's written on the walls, it'll wipe everything out... all I'll have to do is put it like this, against the wall and boom, the wall itself will disappear". Khoury deliberately leads us into the maze to recognize how silencing or "erasing" the truth can get enforced by

corruption, selective memory and hollow excuses, similar to the case of the disappeared and the way the state dealt with their cases. He exposes the dishonest and constructed discourse of blame which points fingers anywhere but in the right direction. In the process, accountability for the murder of the dead man could not be attained, the neighborhood is to carry the blame of the death, and the pundits actually responsible for the murder remain untouchable. Their sins erased, and the whole wall pinning pictures of the victims figuratively erased as well (Khoury, 2010).

On another end, Jean Khalil Chamoun and May Masri – two renown Lebanese and Palestinian directors respectively – also broke the silence more vocally, through one of their documentaries in the early 90s: *Suspended Dreams* (1992). The documentary (which features Wadad Halwani) weaves the stories of four characters, to showcase the intersection at which a multitude of dreams “suspended”; the moment when wounds opened and were kept open. Rambo and Nabil for instance, had targeted each other’s homes during the civil war, and then became friends and colleagues in fixing torn down buildings after it ended. They remain distrustful in their private spaces, but in public they listen to Fairouz and break bread together. Rafic, an actor and playwright, walks over torn down cultural spaces speaking about the war and the “lies” surrounding it, speaking truth in his script. And the most striking part of the documentary was the constant appearance of Wadad between the scenes, driving in her car, speaking about Adnan and talking about her constant search for ‘truth’. Wadad, alone, speaks of the cases of the disappeared, and serves as the symbol of silences that need to be broken, seeping in between the stories of militants Rambo and Nabil as well as artist and playwright Rafik. (Ali Ahmad, Halwani, Rambo, & Nabil, 1992).

These two examples of art, amongst others, can essentially be considered as sources of testimony and witnessing. They become powerful fragmented sources of historical knowledge as a will to power, especially with the dominance of silence and violence in the official archive, especially when it comes to the case of the disappeared. Books, films, exhibitions (and more), have effectively served as monuments, gradually filling the gaps in the past with grassroots culturally-led Lebanese archives. As fragmented as these sites of cultural memory are, they were almost all the families of the disappeared had. And even though they used their collection of testimonies and memories mostly to advocate the state into action (since most action could only be done with the state's authorization alone), and even though their stories were adapted and mostly kept out of the archive, it was important that their presence be felt through whatever means possible.

Moreover, of course in addition to the above, once a people questions the proclaimed historical reality of their nation, with their exposure to the diverse pieces defying it (as diverse as they are), the people would be able to start asking questions such as: Why was there a public discourse of “no victor, no vanquished”, when there clearly was a victor and a vanquished? Why are certain discourses completely absent and subsequently have these absences been able to tell us anything about Lebanon's present? Why are some memories visible and others kept below the surface of the public sphere? Is this absence fortified by the need for homogenizing the discourse of nationalism? Is it strengthened by self censorship for the sake of reinforcing collective solidarity? Or do the stories shared in the public space, reveal boundaries of what's represented and what's forgotten based on the need to get over certain collective traumas in parallel to institutional practices of segregation? And finally, does the state archive really answer any of those questions alone? And we'll realize that we will need to find a balance between “time and

narrative, moving from the truth of history to the faithfulness of memory” (as Hartog mentions in reference to Paul Ricoeur’s *Memory, History and Forgetting*) while utilizing both. We’ll realize the potential ability of testimony and its monumental significance as a means to liberate ourselves from the historiographical obsession with factuality and make way for experience.

Giorgio Agamben, a theorist that I’ve grown fond of and who was referred to throughout Nichanian’s book, begins his *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience* with the argument that experience is no longer accessible to us. One of the few self-certainties of modern man is the inability to have and communicate experience. It is this non-translatibility of experience that makes everyday existence intolerable. In the present, experience is derived from authority “and no one seems to wield sufficient authority to guarantee the truth of an experience” (14). Agamben’s *Infancy and History* looks at the notion of the absence of memory (lack/denial) as one that is still located in the history as a process, a history of events, a history of before and after, which he thinks we need to destroy in order to realize a history of experience. History is about experience, and experience is not about knowledge or collecting information about what happened. Experience is how to memorialize and bring out the affects and effects of certain occurrences. Agamben in a way sews the thread through the several theories we’ve come across, by encompassing the need for a historian to re-enact an event (based on R. G. Collingwood), to understand the temporality around which orders of time are structured (based on Francois Hartog), to go beyond an archive by questioning the facticity of fact (based on Marc Nichanian), all to really tap into the meaning of experience and how to restore its significance in the history of our modern time.

Agamben further explains that the constitution of the subject in and through language makes a primary experience in human beings that which comes before the subject (language). A “wordless experience” literally would be “human *infancy* [*in-fancy*], whose boundary would be marked by language” (47). This would make a theory of experience “a theory of in-fancy”: a “pre-subjective psychic substance” as mythical as a pre-linguistic subject. Experience accordingly is something that surpassed understandability in the modern context, when he discusses how it’s been enlightened with knowledge. By universalizing experience as a science, it abstracted itself beyond the capacity of knowing and understanding. He’s not denying experience as something that exists still, but he says it is not translatable because of how it got universalized and how it surpassed its comprehension in some ways. There has been an apparent problem in the representability of experience, particularly through language.

The paradigm between whether language is a gift from God or whether language is constructed by us, gets at the gap that Agamben is trying to show between truth and its representation. If we take language as a gift, we take language to be truth. But the problem then is how to represent this truth. And the early system that we have for representing truth, experience or history is language itself. And the way we use language and represent time in historicity is so determined in the way in which we’ve socially determined our uses of language. Agamben convincingly states:

“The unprecedented violence of human power has its deepest roots in this structure of language. In this sense what is experienced in the *experimentum linguae* is not merely an impossibility of saying: rather, it is an impossibility of

speaking from the basis of a language; it is an experience, via that infancy which dwells in the margin between language and discourse, of the very faculty or power of speech.” (Agamben, 1993)

History is about experience, and experience is illustrated in the way we memorialize and bring out the affects and effects of certain events in order to be in the present through the linguistic and pre-linguistic ways available to us tied to speech and voice, truth and its representation, internal and external experiences, etc... It is in the very absence of dealing with the war collectively, in order to rekindle people’s memories of the war together and heal by creating a new and more relatable national memory of experiences, people resort to nostalgia, which is too far from the current state of being. In many instances, post-war generations inherit only that nostalgia and no knowledge of the intricacies of the civil war itself or significant events before it (beyond independence and the French mandate or Phoenician civilization). More than that, the trauma of war in survivors and the fear mongering practice of the government about the dead and the need to move on, mostly created a gray zone, the disappeared are forced into. Fawaz Traboulsi eloquently describes the disappeared as “the dead living in the depths of the conscience of the living”. And it is my hope that the Lebanese historian be able to accentuate those depths into the surface.

While the archive slaughtered truth, what we were left with was the space where we can give life to material, through art, as a way of accentuating experience beyond the archive. These tactics have introduced discontinuity, depriving “the self of the reassuring stability of life” like the state and its archive want us to believe and abide by. Thus “Effective” history, as per

Nietzsche would not “permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.” And cutting would move the unthinkable to the realm of the thinkable, just like the Lebanese revolution did. At the end of the day factization of the world, is a human activity just like Ian Hacking highlights in his *The Social Construction of What?*. And it is up to the effective historian to honor those who have not been acknowledged in the archive, the narrative, the written mainstream history and the conventional factization of the world.

Conclusion: The Restless Symphony: The Interstice

_____ *“I love you and I wish I could forget you; Forget my soul with you. If it’s lost, I’ll sacrifice it, that is if you have forgotten me. If so, I’ll try to forget you and forget your cruelty only to miss my torment with you and find my tears longing for you. So I go back to you again. [...] If you were to come back, I’d take care of you. I’ll wake up in the night calling out to you. I’ll send you my soul to wake you up. Get up, oh you who’s preoccupied me, and experience the hell I’ve been through. (Hafez, 1991)*

Ghassan Halwani’s film starts with a black and white image, and for six minutes, the image remained, as he entertains a conversation with the photojournalist who had taken that image back in the 80s. Halwani had photoshopped elements out of the picture, but we could see a hat, a shoe and a quote that said “I give my best shots”. After Halwani asks the photojournalist if he recognizes the image, the photojournalist answers with “either there were armed men exchanging fire or there was a pile of dead bodies... Because those kinds of images had similar backgrounds and frames to this one.” Halwani then shows only the photojournalist the full image, which startles him to his core as it apparently showed the kidnapping of a man at the hands of two militants. After Halwani eases his worry telling him no one would see the image, the photojournalist says: “I refuse that anyone should see it, because I know these people today. [...] this period is over, and this photo has implications today. It was shot during the civil war and the war ended. I didn’t pardon them but as you said yourself earlier the case has been closed, and I cannot confront this on my own. It requires the collective.”

However even though we could not see the full picture as an audience, we’ve all seen perpetrators, either in our own homes, in our close circles, or in the most public spaces. Throughout this thesis, we’ve seen different instances where quarter rests dominated the symphony of Lebanese history, at the hands of many perpetrators, through the case of the

disappeared and the way history has been written in the region, undermining the subaltern's voice. But we know how the symphony could sound like without those quarter rests. And if we write history efficiently, history "to the service of life" and not the regime of truth or power, we break the silences.

For years, I collected pictures and posters from the Lebanese civil war. Even though I hadn't lived through it, I could find connections to it through my several constructed identities. I would wait to see my father's face, amongst the men in a battle, I would imagine how my mom tended to the wounded, how my older sisters hid behind three walls to hide from bombs and missiles. By doing so, I probably altered the objects of my search or the events the images captured by my very search through them, and I had no point of reference to correct or challenge me. Nonetheless over time, my home's silences were sown with other homes' silences. And I met others in my generation who had their own imaginations, and who searched for their own truths. We exchanged the subjectivities of our own experiences and launched a search for more answers together, after having weaved our very different backgrounds into a small quilt of the few constructed truths we could get from our own private spaces of observation. And one of the very first moments I found answers, was farthest from state facts and the archive. It was when I first visited the tent of the families of the disappeared and met the women who had been thrust into the realization of the state's structure of power way before I was born. Since then, I could not but question and be critical of every so-called truth, still surrounded by pictures from the Lebanese civil war.

Given the complex nature of Lebanese history and the slow but progressive growth of space for expression, identifying the “memory terrain” as the core, Haugbolle studies the individuals who engaged with the discourse of war in an effort to remember it and commemorate it, and why? He tries to figure out the reasons behind fragmented narratives of memory which were somehow also internalized in the cultural realm:

[t]he [memory] terrain is unable to be fully transparent as it is often a site of intimacy. The gaps and screens setting this terrain apart from contexts of public display make it hard to represent [...], despite the essential role it plays in the creation of public culture. (Haugbolle, 2010)

Haugbolle shows how the absence of the “other” community’s voice in a splintered public life during the war still echoed in the architecture, public representations, cultural material and war narratives in Lebanon. Accordingly, the absence of a unified Lebanese identity, can be traced back to the negotiations between secularism and sectarianism, Lebanonism and Arabism, as well as localism and internationalism throughout the war and even in the years after the war. With all these representations and identities needing to be in negotiation, and given the pluralist government structures, as well as the absence of state-sponsored attempts to amend the lacking “master narrative” on the Lebanese civil war, people molded their memories by “employing various conscious and unconscious strategies of remembering” (p. 10). They mostly identified with whichever is ‘safest’ and ‘most appropriate’ on the short term, until October 2019.

With the rise of the revolution, new photographs made their way onto the walls that surround me.

It took the collective. The collective effectively launched into a critical inquiry at the service of understanding the present from the lens of a self-reflecting community that has faced many silences in a past they didn't own as yet. The inquiry has dissected silences, in an attempt at vocalizing quarter rests and expressed them on the walls of Beirut, illustrating the way generations of Lebanese civilians are to deal with the past and demand from the future today. And in that essence, in a conversation on Nietzsche's take on genealogy, Foucault highlights the following: "The search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself."

The narrative of the Lebanese state had been thought to be consistent with itself until the "unthinkable" pushed through the realm of reality, defying it. And even though the future of this revolution is not clear, one cannot deny the irreversible significant break it has introduced. And while hope is not a form of guarantee, but an "energy strongest in circumstances that are very dark" (Berger, 1972), I will not fall into the trap of hoping through my horizon of expectation. However, what I've materially touched upon most recently, is more than hopeful. After years of silence, I now have recordings of my father's voice, telling me details about the uniform he wore and its colors. The names of people in his close circle who had disappeared. Sharing his willingness to take me to all the places where battles occurred, when I visit Lebanon again, while knowing that my political ideals are on quite the opposite of the spectrum from his. I can stop imagining what the picture would have looked like, and instead listen to a live testimony, as flawed as memory could be. It would be closer to the image itself, presented, rather than the image I had constructed over the years in silence.

“One of nothingness’ responsibilities is to devour stars, one star after the other. The black hole is the visible side of the universe” (Makhlouf, 2016). As gloomy as Makhlouf sounds, I now see opportunity in his poem: it’s in the gaps where we can work on rekindling the silenced voices that can be felt as materially as the name of Adnan remaining on his Family Civil Register even after his families’ names get crossed out. It is in acknowledging the gaps that we try harder and find different ways to honor as many variables into account. Keeping in mind the concept of history and praxis, history in action, we need to realize that we need language through writing or art, we need concepts to critique or delve into for introspection, we needed the laws to realize how dysfunctional they are in instances where they require evidence to prove a catastrophe, and we needed to touch upon the silences and the non-voice to be able to see them in the cacophony of narratives and discourse. But the core of these realizations is that “historical reality” comes “in between, before or after linguistic articulations that target it” (Koselleck, 1893). There are many intersections in the multiplicity of experience that our speech and whatever is in our means, cannot grasp. Thus the importance of looking at the past, present and future holistically, and with that in mind.

The Lebanese revolution opened avenues for the massive exchange of stories amongst those who have been separated by sectarian discourses for thirty years before October 17th 2019. Oral history is presenced today, and the strongest force pushing demands further is the strength and the unity of the revolutionaries in Beirut at the most grassroots level. The ‘awakening’ has been painful but blessed. Ghassan Kanafani once said: “You can’t find the sun in a locked room”, and the sun couldn’t be warmer today.

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