The London School of Economics and Political Science

Lebanese youth: Memory and identity

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Céline Righi

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis explores the interface between collective memory, history and construction of identity in the sensitive socio-cultural and historical contexts of post-war societies. The issue of a sectarian culture of memory, a gap between private and public memory and divisive identity politics related to the Lebanese Civil War provides a case study. Focussing on young Lebanese, the thesis examines their relationship with remembering and forgetting the past and how it shapes their construction of identity. Theoretically, the thesis presents a dynamic scrutiny of the concept of collective memory, understood as historically shaped, culturally represented and informed through narratives. Making the case for the potential role of memory in breaking the cycle of conflicting memories and finding new forms of consensus, I complement the literature on memory and identity with Castoriadis's concept of 'instituting imaginary' as opening up to a space for autonomy. The empirical research involves thirty-six young Lebanese people from different religious communities and socio-demographic profiles. The participants were assigned to view a photography and video exhibition, held in Beirut, in which artists displayed works about their personal experiences of the civil war and history, and also focused on the nude body - two thematics publicly disregarded in Lebanon. Five focus-group discussions were conducted after the participants' exposure to the exhibition and these were complemented by twenty-four in-depth individual interviews. An analysis of the dynamics of the groups and a typological approach to the individual interviews were employed. The key findings of the thesis are that the emotional charge of the exhibit triggered young Lebanese (mainly women studying humanities) to explore the issue of truth and suffering as a critical response to the Lebanese ethos of fate, the banality of violence, and the taboo of narratives of the war. In contrast, hostile reactions to seeing personal artwork on memory as well as history, and on nude bodies in a public space, led other young Lebanese to repress war memories and demonize the sectarian other. Finally, this thesis discusses the sphere of intimacy mediated by aesthetic experiences in public spaces as constituting a symbolic and imaginary 'space' for the unravelling of cultural and ideological issues from the process of identity construction.

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Introduction

The growing body of ethnological and anthropological literature on memory over the last decade has not only expanded the concept of memory but enriched – and maybe complicated – the task of social science researchers. Memory is disseminated through every stratum of society. One finds 'mnemonic traces' in textbooks, urban landscapes, artworks, films, novels, commodities, streets, graffiti, customs, traditions, memorials, rituals and so on. Along with a public and state-sanctioned collective memory, multiple, multi-vocal and, inevitably, contested or mutually conflicting facets of memory cast these in a new light. Counter-memory, counter-narratives or minorities' memories compete with master narratives of the past; they are at the heart of researchers' attempts to uncover the dynamic process of memory

formation and its interplay with national history, social and personal memory, and also to give justice to the "forgotten of history" (Haas & Jodelet, 2000, p. 132).

Memory in post-war Lebanon is no exception to this rule. Memory is a "lumpy concept" argues Haugbolle (2010, p. 83), while looking at contending sectarian strategies of memorialization of the civil war. Emerging research on Lebanese memory since the beginning of 2000s – offering an anthropological snapshot of memory from below as opposed to a top-down analysis – has changed the view of the way post-war Lebanese society gets to grips with the most devastating military conflict of its modern history: the civil war (1975-1990). The usual assumption of 'collective amnesia' (Khalaf, 1993) has shifted to an interpretation which describes a "surfeit of war memory; embedded and normalised through daily narratives and urban imaginaries (sites, spaces, absences)" (Larkin, 2012, p. 3). If what post-war Lebanon *suffers* is not a deficit of memory, then the problem is not so much memory recovery as the gap between a state-sanctioned policy of amnesia and the private memories of communities and families, replete with hurtful stories and trauma, feelings of victimisation, hatred and revenge (Haugbolle, 2005). This thesis aims to make sense of this gap by offering a psychosocial diagnosis of the way post-war Lebanese society deals with its past. There is a need to understand how the next generation of Lebanese negotiate the ongoing contestation of their history, and how this impacts on their identity formation, their search for meaning and the compromise between remembering and forgetfulness.

Lebanese youth (*shabab*, or the 'post-war generation'), is distinguished by its lack of personal recollection of the civil war. Nonetheless, they are depository of their elders' "maligned heritage" (Kahalf, 1993 p. 321); they have to make sense of this while their identity construction is at a crossroads, and they are driven towards individual achievement and future aspirations. The last major research to date on Lebanese youth and memory in post-war Lebanon explored how a specific post-war generation, between the ages of fifteen and twenty-two, engaged in everyday processes of social transmission, and how they reconstructed, transformed and erased residuals of war memory (Larkin, 2012). This thesis expands Larkin's research in two ways and, more generally, the existing body of research on post-war memory

in Lebanon (Westmoreland, 2008; Volk, 2010; Fricke, 2005; Makdisi, 2006; Chrabieh, 2007; Haugbolle, 2010).

Theoretically, this thesis offers a social-psychological approach to the concept of memory, in particular collective memory and its interplay with culture, narrative, history and forgetting. Namely, I explore how the working of collective memory informs a group's sense of belonging to a national history and shapes a collective identity. Furthermore, my interest in the ways in which individuals and communities use symbolic resources to construct their identity in societies facing historical discontinuities, cultural and political complexities, brings me to explore the *potential* of collective memory in sensitive socio-historical contexts. How can collective memory help facilitate new forms of consensus between individuals and within groups subjected to ideological discourses and politics of divisive identity? To that end, I complete the review of literature on collective memory by focussing on the notion of imagination. In particular, I explore a critical approach to imagination developed by Cornelius Castoriadis: that the imagination conveys a political and critical dimension; it entails the capacity to challenge the power of the institutional elites and established discourses in societies. In fact, Castoriadis's notion of the imaginary is tied up to the political project[1] of autonomy, which, in an absolute sense, means that humans are engaged in lucid deliberation in relation to others aiming towards the creation of societies. I found that Castoriadis's notion of the imaginary, which he terms "radical social instituting imaginary" (1975) is a rich conceptual tool to shed light on the way young Lebanese negotiate war memory and contested narratives of the past, and, in so doing, may – or may not – identify themselves with a renewed model of collective identity.

Empirically, this thesis suggests a novel way to look at the relationship between Lebanese youth, memory and construction of identity. Young Lebanese people ranging from seventeen to twenty-five years old were invited to discuss (in focus groups and individual interviews)

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[1]Castoriadis draws on the concept of autonomy from the birth of the model of democracy in ancient Greece. For the philosopher, the creation *at once* in a given time of the exercise of politics (i.e., the production of democratic institutions) and of philosophy (i.e., the self-reflective activity and unlimited interrogation) sets the concept an of autonomous society. Yet it must be clarified that for Castoriadis, the striving of communities towards autonomy is rarely found in the historical development of our societies. This is why, for the philosopher, autonomy can exist only as a *project*: an ever-presently restaged project whose primary condition or rule is, as will be developed in the theory chapter of this thesis, explicitly drawn from the capacity for self-alteration.

their past history, present situation and future, through their experience of seeing works of art in a museum. Their thoughts, impressions, ambivalent discourses and silences provided a wealth of material to explore the psychosocial dynamics that emerged from their encounter with the artworks, and their relationship with collective memory, remembering and forgetting in post-war Lebanon. As a laboratory for the research, my choice was *Closer*, a show of visual contemporary art displayed between January and April 2009 for the opening of the Beirut Art Center (BAC), the first contemporary museum of visual art in Beirut. Briefly, *Closer* deals with memory of the Lebanese Civil War, with history, and with intimacy, yet exploring the themes in a particular way. In an interview, Sandra Dagher, co-director of the BAC, said that when selecting artists for the exhibition, the BAC focused on those who were searching for intimacy in their pieces and collections in order to contrast their work with that of mainstream Lebanese artists in the recent past who tended to focus on the civil war from a general, collective perspective. "The whole concept", Dagher said, "was to show the artistic process of an artist who uses private experiences and makes them public" ("Beirut Art Center opens in a splash," 2009). *Closer* not only involved the viewers in the artists' lived experiences of wartime and their personal reflections upon history at large, but also brought representation of nude bodies to the public space of the BAC.

Finally, this thesis challenges a cautious methodological choice made by previous researches studying post-war memory and Lebanese youth in particular. Most research into the opinions of young Lebanese relies on questionnaires and individual interviews, such as Larkin's (2012) research which was based on 100 interviews. Reviewing Haugbolle (2010)'s extensive work based on interviews, newspapers, television programs, films, novels and graffiti, Taniela (2010) notes the restricted focus of the analysis on two homogeneous neighbourhoods, "when including religious mixed neighbourhoods, such as Ras Beirut or Hamra would have exposed more complicated representations of the past" (Taniela, 2010). This research remedies this imbalance by not only conducting focus groups that mix Greek Orthodox Christians, Maronites, Sunnis, Shiites and Druze, but also by giving voice to young Lebanese from deprived areas such as Dahieyh, the stronghold of Hezbollah and well known as an area that particularly suffered during the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 1 offers a brief overview of the post-war Lebanon context, by first presenting the history of the Lebanese Civil War. Second, I give an account of the way the Lebanese society has dealt with the question of remembering its traumatic past. I then present the current political situation in Lebanon, the post-Cedar Revolution (2005), which marked the deepening of sectarian tensions between the Sunni and Shiite communities. I conclude this contextual chapter, by presenting the Lebanese confessional political system based on power-sharing formula between the main religious communities (Maronite Christian, Shi'a Muslim and Sunni Muslim) and the issue of communal coexistence. **Chapter 2** presents the conceptual framework of the thesis. In this theoretical chapter I begin by conceptualising the social meaning of memory (Barlett, 1932, 1960; Halbwachs, 1925/1992, 1980). I then present the approaches that emphasise the pragmatics of speaking (Middleton & Edwards, 1990) and look at collective memory as social thought (Jodelet, 1992). I then explore the relation between memory and narratives and the importance of narrative for constructing identity and sustaining the identity of groups (Namer, 1987 and Ricoeur, 1985, 1990/1992). The final section of this part is dedicated to unfolding the issues raised by the scrutiny of collective memory in the context of conflict and post-war societies. In particular, this is done through studying the cases of America after the Vietnam War (Sturken, 1991, 1997), the Macedonian conflict (Kalampalikis, 2007), and the inhabitants of Vichy dealing with the French collaborationist historical period (Haas, 2002). In addition, the chapter draws on Cornelius Castoriadis's concept of 'instituting imaginary', which is intrinsically connected to

his political project of autonomy. I look at three different and complementary conceptual elements of Castoriadis's theory. Firstly, it is suggested that unfamiliar encounters with contemporary works of art can be grasped by Castoriadis's account of the radical experience of otherness, altering individuals'/viewers' sense of self. In turn, individuals are provided with a space of sublimation and involve into the making of social-historical societies. Secondly, the subject/other relation, especially the subject-reflexive stance in his or her relation with the other, understood as a prerequisite for autonomy, paves the way to examine encounters with artwork within the context of the issue of co-existing with the other in post-war societies. Thirdly, drawing an analogy between Castoriadis's hermeneutic account of an imaginary creation in terms of shift of meaning and the figure of the metaphor, this chapter argues for the potential of art experience to operate the displacement of meanings; namely, it offers metaphorical resources for Lebanese individuals to challenge representations of history fraught with symbolic and ideological struggles.

Following this theoretical discussion, **chapter 3** presents the research design and methodological approach used in this research. It begins by operationalising the conceptual framework developed in chapter 1 and formulates the specific research aims. I present the three methods used: 1) exposure to the *Closer* exhibition and observation, 2) focus-group discussions, and 3) individual interviews, including the reasons behind my choices, and their implementation during my fieldwork in Spring 2009. Given the politically sensitive issue of this research and the cultural and religious complexity of Lebanese society, particular attention is paid to explaining the decisions that guided the sampling strategies (targeting 36 young Lebanese participants) and the segmentation of the groups. The analysis of the empirical material collected from the observations, focus-group discussions and individual interviews conducted with the same participants, is detailed. Emphasis is placed on the choice to analyse group interaction and group dynamics. Regarding the individual interviews, the choice of using psycho-analytical tools (defence mechanisms) combined with the identification of the participants' modes of 'reading' and making sense of the artwork (metonymic vs. metaphoric reading) is explained. Finally, the presentation of the findings of the individual interviews, following a typological approach, is introduced.

Chapter 4, a shorter and more descriptive chapter, is dedicated to the *Closer* exhibition and the nine works of art selected to constitute the methodological basis of this research. This chapter introduces the reader to the different themes, aesthetic features and material aspects of the artwork and contextualises it by presenting the artists and their prominent works to date. The description of the artwork and of the artists, falls into three broad categories: 'collective histories through personal stories' include two works of art related to the Lebanese Civil War (*Saida June 6, 1982* by Akram Zaatari; *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* by Tony Chakar). In the second category is artwork revolving around the 'artist's narratives in the presence of one or several members of his family', also evoking the war or the demise of communism in Eastern Europe. The third category, dedicated to 'artists at the centre of the piece', includes two works of art containing nudity (*Birthday Suit* by Lisa Steele; *Self-Portraits* by Antoine D'Agata), and two works of art created by a Lebanese woman and woman of Palestinian origin: *Body pArts* by Lina Saneh and *So Much I Want to Say* by Mona Hatoum.

The empirical part of this thesis consists of **chapters 5**, **6** and **7**. They present the findings that arose from the analysis of the material gathered from the focus-group discussions and the individual interviews. **Chapter 5** concentrates on the results of the five focus-group discussions and reveals various dynamics across the groups, highlighting sharp differences between groups that were made up of participants who were tied by a strong sense of belonging to the same cultural and religious background and groups that were more heterogeneous in terms of participants' cultural and religious backgrounds and their fields of study. In the former, norms of dismissal and rejection of the theme of memory of wars and of the nude body aimed to protect the groups' identity; in the latter, disagreement and clashes over the signification of the artwork in the post-war Lebanese context polarised the groups. Another other result is that, strikingly, the interactions in the polarised groups became calmer as the group members elaborated on the artists' stories of longing for an absent father, or of a mother sharing her disillusioned political ideals with her son, suggesting a need for frank speaking (Foucault, 1982-1983). **Chapter 6** begins the analysis of the 24 individual interviews and presents the two first forms of engagement (Exemplars 1 and 2) of the Lebanese young people with the exhibition and its themes and artistic registers, in relation to their positions

of identity regarding the issue of memory and the sectarian other in post-war Lebanon. The rhetoric of Exemplar 1 is dominated by taboos related to the issues of memory and of the sectarian other's narratives of war, and perceptions of offensive displays of the body and intimacy in the artwork. This rhetoric goes along with discourses of forgetfulness of the past. In Exemplar 2, the findings point to an experience of *Closer* based on literal and concrete readings of the themes in the artwork, which reinforces the participants' positions of identity dominated by their belonging to an ethos of self-redemptive sacrifice and martyrdom. **Chapter 7** continues the analysis of the individual interviews, by presenting the last form of engagement (Exemplar 3) of the Lebanese young adults with *Closer*. Standing out from the two previous exemplars, the findings in Exemplar 3 point to the young people's experience of intimacy, and their sheer involvement in the artists' lived experience of war time, as meaningful resources, even if the experience is intrusive at times. It enables them to tackle with the banality of violence in Lebanese society, the language of fear of the other spread throughout the news media, and identities splintered into sectarian affiliations. An important finding is the discourse of empowerment voiced by Lebanese women, identifying themselves with the artists' thought-provoking positions against a male-dominated society and state law. Final remarks conclude chapters 5 and 6 by emphasising the discrepancies between the discourses of the young Lebanese in the individual interviews and the positions they had taken up in the groups.

The final chapter of this thesis, **chapter 8**, brings together the conceptual framework developed in chapter 1 and the three empirical chapters. The chapter opens with a summary of the results reviewed relating to two notions that are present throughout the empirical material: suffering and truth. After the general discussion of the main findings, a conclusion of the thesis is offered.

Post-war Lebanon context: a brief overview

1.1 1975–1990: The Lebanese Civil War

In the period 1975–1990, Lebanon experienced a brutal and devastating civil war. Juxtaposed with the tension and power struggles between the Muslim and Christian communities, the regional rivalries (Israelo-Palestinian conflict), the ideological shifts in adjacent regimes (Islamists, Pan-Arabic) and foreign interventions (Syria) deepened sources of hostility and constituted the breaking point for the conflict in 1975. After a short break in the fighting in 1976 due to Arab League mediation and Syrian intervention, Palestinian-Lebanese strife continued. During the course of the fighting, alliances shifted rapidly and unpredictably. By the end of the war, nearly every party had allied with and subsequently betrayed every other party at least once. The 1980s were especially bleak: much of Beirut lay in ruins as a result of the 1976 Karantina massacre carried out by Lebanese Christian militias. A number of atrocities and terrorist acts were committed by the Lebanese Christian Phalange as well as by Palestinians and Israelis, all of whom participated in the war. These included the Damour massacre (1976) in which Palestinians massacred the Christian inhabitants (around 600 people, mostly children and women) of a coastal town twenty miles south of Beirut, and the Sabra and Chatila Massacre (1982) where Christian forces massacred around 3,000 Palestinian civilians and refugees over three days. By the time of the Ta'if Agreement in 1990, Israel held a security zone in southern Lebanon as a buffer to prevent

attacks on northern Israel from first the PLO and then Hezbollah. The Israeli Army withdrew in 2000. Syria itself, which had controlled the rest of the country, did not withdraw its troops until 2005, when it was forced out by the joint pressure created by Lebanese protest and powerful diplomatic intervention from the United States and the United Nations in the aftermath of the assassination of Rafik Hariri. During these years of war, all forms of violence overwhelmed every level of everyday life. Civilians particularly suffered from kidnapping, random bombings, mass killings and numerous assassinations. Overall, 144,240 people died during the war, 197,506 were wounded, and 17,415 disappeared.

1.2 Duty to remember and right to forget

> "We should not forget the war, but we should also not become its prisoners, nor should we impose it on the new generation. Today's youth have the right to forget and we have a right to remember".

Ghasam Salame's plea in the journal *al-Nahar*, written shortly after the long conflict of the civil war came to an end, well illustrates the dilemmatic question that every society faced with a traumatic past has to deal with when engaging in processes of reconciliation. In the aftermath, primarily concerned with its socio-economic recovery, Lebanese society turned towards the *mustaqbal*, the future, and shied away from any political and cultural initiatives for war remembrances. Reconstruction was seen as a new phase of conquest. The erection in 1995 of a new, flamboyant area in the centre of Beirut (Solidere[1]) thanks to massive foreign financial investment is probably the best illustration of the political and economic endeavour to reconnect with a prosperous Lebanon. Therefore, forgetting the 1975–1990 civil war has been a salient policy in post-war Lebanon. The idea was that redemption could only be achieved through a policy of war-amnesia and that this was the most appropriate solution to protect the country. One of the main state pillars for implementing this policy was the general amnesty law that was passed on 28 March 1991 (Law No. 84/91). This law essentially pardoned all war crimes prior to its enactment in the name of reconciliation. These included

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[1] Solidere is the acronym for Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction du Centre Ville de Beyrouth.

"crimes against humanity and those which seriously infringe human dignity" (Haugbolle, 2005, p.193). The basis of this law was drawn from the well-known dictum 'no victor, no vanquished' (*la ghalib wa la maghloub*), which became the official discourse of 'redemption through oblivion and amnesia'. The formula, by which no single party in Lebanon was able to claim victory or made to bear the responsibility for massacres, was meant to prevent sectarian retaliation.

The effects of this general amnesty are displayed when analysing the Lebanese education system, especially when one looks at history textbooks: The Republic of Lebanon is said to have been founded in 1943, yet its official history ends in 1946. As a result, students in Lebanese schools are taught about their remote past (the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Greeks, the Ottomans) but nothing related to independent Lebanon's modern tragedies and triumphs. In particular, schools are prevented from teaching about Lebanon's most devastating tragedy: the civil war. The fundamental reason for this evident occultation of a crucial part of Lebanese history is that the officials cannot agree on a unified historical narrative; there is simply no consensus over the question of who won and who was defeated. Whether for or against remembering, all Lebanese citizens must admit that any discussion of the war and its lingering memories must have political consequences. It would seem that the biggest impediment to the establishment of a national dialogue is the conflicting historical narratives that exist within the different Lebanese communities. Maronite Christians, Shiites, Sunni Muslims, Druzes all share a potential for antagonism through narrative insofar as there is a lack of consensus regarding both the origins and consequences of the war (Khalaf, 1993). Hence, speaking publicly of the Lebanese Civil War is a highly sensitive issue, which inevitably conveys a maligned heritage and re-surfaces within the sectarian political struggles.

Nonetheless, a recent body of research and literature on civil war memory highlights the role of different groups along with the state-sanctioned policy of amnesia, tackling the assumption of a general 'collective amnesia' (Khalaf, 1993). Relying on newspapers, television programs, novels, graffiti and interviews with people in the street, Sune Haugbolle (2005, 2010) provides a dynamic analysis of the multifaceted and counter-hegemonic memory cultures which challenge the state's efforts to publicly refrain dealing with past remembrances.

Similarly, in his article *Don't Mention the War?* Barak (2007) emphasised the different actors - civil society groups, intellectuals and artists -who are involved in a remembering process. By the end of the 90s, some civil society groups had begun to mark the anniversary of the war's outbreak, April 13, in an unofficial manner by exhibiting artworks and publishing articles that explicitly addressed the topic of the civil war. In particular, the post-2005 period witnessed an increasing number of public discussions and memory campaigns developed by individuals and collectives (dialogue groups, NGO networks) as well as artistic representations of civil war memories (Tanielan, 2010). Contemporary Lebanese artists have elaborated a unique language to deal with their conflicting past. For many, a distinctive trait is their artistic engagement with historical documentation (Zolghadr, 2008). Walid Raad's Atlas Group aims to serve as a visual repository for the Lebanese war. In a similar venture, the Fondation Arabe pour l'Image, created in 1996 in Beirut by Zaatari aims to collect photographic archives in the Middle East. Specifically, artists tend to display a mixture of fact and fiction in their works, creating composite images by using archive material.

Yet, in spite of intellectual and artistic attempts to "look the beast in the eye" (Haugbolle, 2005), there is in post-war Lebanon a pervasive culture of forgetfulness. Haugbolle (2010) points to the problem of truth in post-war Lebanese society, in which "amnesty was given without a process of truth-telling[2]" (p. 194). The author also notes the complications involved when truth-telling is taken over by 'memory-makers' from civil society, outside a sanctioned, national space. Even if, since the Independence Intifada in 2005, leftists, intellectuals and memory-makers in Beirut stand at the forefront of exploring memories and of speaking the truth, 'truth' still remains the vehicle for sectarian political movements to legitimize their ideological discourses (Tanielan, 2010). In fact, "oblivion and amnesia are not redemption" claims Jean Makdisi (2006, p, 201). This is because the amnsesty allowed some of the Lebanon's most notorious warlords to escape justice and return as officially recognised politicians[3]. The last recent amnesty was granted in June 2005 to Samir Geagea,

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[2]Truth-telling is now largely associated with the establishment of truth commissions in transitional societies (South America, Africa and Eastern Europe) to restore the dignity of victims, and it helps to promote social cohesion in societies where violence and fear have undermined solidarity (Phelps, 2004).

[3]The leaders of the Amal movement, Nabih Berri, and Elie Hobeqa, who both committed genocide against the Palestinians in refugee camps, became Chairman of Parliament and Minister for Social Affairs and the Handicapped,

Leader of the Lebanese Forces militia, who was involved in numerous atrocities during the war. According to Wadad Halawani (2011) it was unacceptable that the warlords became responsible for peace-building process, since their presence promoted a culture of impunity.

The problem with amnesty laws promulgated by the Lebanese state on 26 August 1991 is not only that of forgetting the truth by hiding one's crimes, they also deprive the Lebanese people of a symbolic anchorage upon which they can make sense of the conflict and mourn their traumatic past. For Loraux (1998), in essence, amnesty laws turn out to be a "formal, civic-minded eradication of grief" (p.98). Naturally, in order to engage in a collective process of grief, individuals and communities need an object of grief[4].

The first basic problem when dealing with remembrance in post-war Lebanon is *what* to remember. As previously stated, there is no consensus in Lebanese society or among historians about the root causes of the war (Khalaf, 1993). Worse still, the very nature of the violence of the Lebanese Civil War renders the signification of war a difficult, even impossible, task. The loss of norms, with militias at the vanguard of the violence, transformed Lebanon as a whole and Beirut in particular, into a place of chaos. The civil war was a "messy war" (Haugbolle, 2010) which tore apart not only communities that had formerly had alliances, but also clans and families. "The friend of the morning could be the executioner of the evening" says Mansel (2011, p. 326). This problem is demonstrated when looking at the generational divide between those who lived the war and those who are too young to remember. The generations who have memories of hardship are often consumed with suffering and guilt, "personal feelings of meaningless and discontinuity" (Haugbolle, 2005, p.194).

In times of conflict aftermath, commemorations are instruments that can unify a society around them. In her analysis of the culture and politics of commemorations, Volk[5]

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and Minister of Electricity and Water in the post-Civil War period, respectively. Walid Jumblatt, who publicly admitted executing all his prisoners, is also a prominent leader of the Druze community.

[4]Freud defines mourning (*Trauer*) as the process of grief over the loss of a loved object (e.g.; a cherished person, country, ideal).

[5]In *Memorials and Martyrs in Modern Lebanon*, Volk (2010) studied Lebanese mnemonic practices and ritual spaces in the Shouf Mountains and the south of Lebanon, as well as the way in which narratives of martyrs endorsed different significations for the religious communities.

(2010) points out a gap between intimate mourning strategies, such as the way communities commemorate martyrs across Lebanon, and the scarcity of more official memorial sites and commemorative acts. Pointing to the lack of ritual and memorial commemoration, leaving feelings of shame and betrayal unresolved issues, Seidman (2012) depicts the post-civil war period as an area of "affective loss". Haugbolle (2005) also asserts that the recent decades of state-sponsored forgetfulness have prevented Lebanese people from building up collective symbols to tie their memories together. For instance, Rafik Hariri's ambitious reconstruction project in central Beirut from 1992 to 2004 has been much criticised for his tabula rasa approach to urban planning (Makdisi & Silverstein, 2006); Solidère, the private Lebanese company founded by Hariri, systematically razed the war-damaged urban fabric of the historical centre of Beirut to recreate a city-centre area with fashion boutiques, exclusive restaurants and designer outlets. The re-created downtown area in Beirut illustrates the projection towards the future at the expense of preserving the heritage of local histories and communal narratives that enable collective processes of mourning for the past and herein it becomes difficult to envisage the future without a "culturally constructed social response to the loss" (Homans, 2000, p.27).

Lastly, in the absence of symbols tying people together, and in the presence of an overload of enduring memories of inter- and intra-communal violence pervading the private sphere, the younger generation is left with nostalgic images and symbols that belonged to their families during the wartime years. As Haugbolle (2005) notes, "all Beirut's younger inhabitants have tended to recycle the symbols of the wartime period to express their cultural, religious, and political beliefs. Therefore, one cannot escape the changing posters, flags, and graffiti while travelling through the streets" (p.193). Similarly, the war generation reacted to traumatic experiences by establishing nostalgic visual forms to refashion the country's imagination in a way that is represented by 'happy' and 'sanitised' memories of the pre-war period. The image of Lebanon as the "Switzerland of the Middle East" or the "Paris of the region" is demonstrated in the many postcards, calendars, advertisements and other visual forms that tend to display the city of Beirut in its former 'pre-war glory'. However, while such romanticised images of pre-war Lebanon serve as a source of national pride and comfort

for the older generation who seek to overcome feelings of meaningless, these images have little to offer in terms of visions for the future. As Makdisi (2006) argues "the danger [...] in taking the place of historical narrative, makes the task or even the possibility of historical understanding, let alone reconciliation, that much more remote. In being frozen in visual form, history threatens to become an aesthetic object, a commodity, a spectacle, a fetish, rather than a narrative, a process, a struggle" (Makdisi, 2006, p.206).

1.3 The post-2005 situation

1.3.1 The Cedar Revolution: opposing political and ideological movements

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's assassination on 14 February 2005 marks a turning point in post-war Lebanon's history. In the days following Hariri's murder, thousands of Lebanese converged on Martyr's Square in central Beirut to protest against the Syrian control of the Lebanese political system and demand the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanese soil. Though there had been minor protests against Syrian sovereignty in the past, they had had little effect. Yet, the emotional impact of Hariri's murder, Lebanese grief and sorrow were such that the mass mobilisations and anger against Syria were unstoppable. Under pressure from both Lebanon and the international community (including Saudi Arabia), Syria withdrew its military personnel from Lebanon, ending a presence of thirty years.

The Cedar Revolution, also called the Independence Intifada, was seen as a new beginning for Lebanon, marking not only the end of Syrian presence, but also the introduction of political reform and democratic change. However, soon after, the hope placed in the Cedar Revolution was brushed away by the deepening of sectarian tension and the emergence of a fault line between two ideologically opposed Lebanese political movements. "The notion that interfaith solidarity in the face of injustice [Hariri's murder] could redeem the nation from its 1975–90 sectarian civil war quickly caught on" notes Seigneurie (2011, p.149). The civil war's former division between Muslims and Christians gave away to the Sunni-Shia split which has since become the major political rift in the post-2005 period. On one side

is the Sunni-Christian-Druze coalition, known initially as the anti-Syrian opposition and later called the March 14 Alliance[6], which is aligned with the US-Saudi alliance. March 14 was adamant it would establish the truth about Hariri's death and establish Lebanese political freedom and independence from Syria. On the other side, the Hezbollah-led 8 March Alliance[7] praised Syria for stabilising the country. Supported by the Iran-Syria axis, they warned against US and occidental interference in Lebanese affairs. Although the March 14 and March 8 political movements both engaged in rhetoric of unity, patriotism and cosmopolitanism (Larkin, 2012, Seigneurie, 2011), their ideological antagonisms led to several political deadlocks and caused periodic outbursts of street-based political violence.

It is the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War, known in Lebanon as the July war, that demonstrates the outcome of the shift between sectarian and regional power balance (Najem, 2012). The July war also saw Hezbollah positioning itself as the Shiite community's dominant leader. Hezbollah's cross-border attack on an Israeli patrol led to Israel's military retaliation, which is believed to have killed at least 1,300 Lebanese people and 165 Israelis, and severely damaged Lebanese civil infrastructure. Amnesty International (2006) reported the widespread destruction of apartments, houses, electricity and water services, which suggested a policy of punishing both the Lebanese government and the civilian population sympathetic to Hezbollah. After a 34-day military conflict in Lebanon, northern Israel and the Golan Heights, the United Nations brokered a ceasefire on 11 August 2006. Yet, in spite of the devastation of parts of southern Lebanon and Hezbollah's headquarters, Hezbollah claimed a "divine victory" (Knusden & Kerr, 2012) and enjoyed a growing popularity across the Arab World, praised as symbol of the resistance against Israel and the larger United States alliance.

Furthermore, the 'blocking third' principle of ministerial posts granted Hezbollah a minority veto when they joined Saad Hariri's new cabinet after 2007. Yet, as Knusden and Kerr (2012) explain, instead of a new power-sharing mechanism, Hezbollah's minority veto should be "better understood as power politics, using the threat of force (demonstration,

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[6]March 14 Alliance (anti-Syrian, Western leaning alliance) comprises Sunni Saad Hariri's Future Movement, Druze Walid Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party and Christian Maronite Samir Geagea's Lebanese Force.

[7]March 8 Alliance (pro-Syrian coalition) is led by Hezbollah, the Amal Movement associated with the Shia community and Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement mainly supported by Christian community. March 8 Alliance is critical of US interference and Saudi influence in the region.

sit-ins, strikes) to pressure the majority into complying with the minority demand" (Knusden & Kerr, 2012, p.6). In May 2008, Beirut was paralysed by Hezbollah gunmen clashing with supporters of Fouad Siniora's government. The Lebanese University was a theatre for sectarian fighting between politically active students, supporters of the March 8 and March 14 Alliances. In early 2007, a violent conflict which broke out in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp near Tripoli saw Syria accused of conspiring to destabilise the 14 March government of Fouad Siniora that led the country at the time. A fifteen-week siege of the camp and the militant Islamist group (Fatah al Islam) was seen as the largest post-civil war battle and was perceived as a sign of the deep crisis between pro-Syrian and pro-government forces.

The political-ideological fault line that came into stark prominence after the Cedar Revolution is overlapped with two opposite discourses. A culture of elegiac humanism develops after the events of Spring 2005 and opposes Hezbollah's culture of martyrdom and of redemptive self-sacrifice (Seigneurie, 2011). On the one hand, Hezbollah, the 'party of God', has been developing the culture of martyrdom since its inception in 1976. Engaged in the Shiite resistance against Israel, Hezbollah's discourse of self-redemptive sacrifice, based on the values of suffering and resilience, uses a culturally communication strategy; disseminating symbols, images and language that construct and sustain communal support (Khatib, Matar and Alshaer, 2014). On the other hand, a humanistic discourse accompanies the rise of the human rights movement and movements for autonomy which started to line up in 2004 and are associated with the democratic Centre and political Left. Seigneurie identifies an "elegiac humanist" aesthetic trend in a number of novels and films that deal with a particular way of scrutinizing memory that is akin to a work of mourning; they share a "memory narrative, amenable to a critical approach" (Seigneurie, 2011, p.37). However, as the author notes, the discourse of elegiac humanism is a small voice in confessionalised Lebanese society and seldom tips the balance away from sectarian indentitarianism.

1.3.2 Political power-sharing and coexistence

The current Lebanese system is based on a power-sharing formula, consensus and compromise, which derives from the founding 1943 National Pact and the war-ending 1990 Ta'if

Agreement. The 1943 'pact of coexistence' was an agreement between the leaders of the largest Maronite Christian and Sunni Muslim communities to guarantee a confessional balance as well as the independence from France. Scholars are in disagreement about the National Pact: whether it helped define Lebanese national unity and coexistence (Abdul-Husn, 1998) or rather was precarious, not capable of adapting to demographic changes and socio-economic shifts (Picard, 1996). The Ta'if Agreement of 1990 introduced Christian–Muslim parity in parliament; designating a political troika of a Maronite president, a Sunni Prime Minister and a strengthened role for the Shiite speaker of the house. Although the Ta'if Agreement's main principle was meant to ensure the "mutual coexistence" of Lebanon's different sects and abolish political sectarianism, the power-sharing formula still attracts considerable criticism. Makdisi asserts that the confessional system remains an "obstacle to democracy" (2000, p.174). However, if the Ta'if Agreement was supposed to introduce equitable representation for Christians and Muslims in Parliament, in reality it reproduced the sectarian system. By adding modifications to the balance of power, the Accord was in fact contradictory and ambiguous argues Traboulsi (2007).

The term 'sect' literally denotes a 'religious community' or 'confessional affiliation'. It can be understood as both a political orientation and a social identity. Sectarianism has therefore been used to explain both the nature of Lebanon's political power-sharing arrangement and the social reality of communal belonging. Lebanon's unique religious heritage, with eighteen distinct religious sects (four Muslim, thirteen Christian and one Jewish), that once lived in a "haven of refuge" (Picard, 1996) now represents a complex social-cultural puzzle, which defies political and institutional attempts to keep away the spectre of destructive fragmentation. Cynically, 'Lebanonization' entered the dictionary as meaning heightened sectarian polarisation and is regularly used to designate other countries torn apart by intractable sectarian conflicts (e.g.; Iraq). Khalaf (2012) also warns of the *retribalisation* of society, as the Lebanese seek shelter in 'fractious communities', which, instead of engaging in processes of remembrance, display consumerist and kitsch attitudes in accordance with the cultural ethos of laissez-faire brought by economic liberalism and political clientelism.

Memory, identity and the imaginary

In this chapter, I first explore the role of collective memory in the understanding of how identity and collective identities are formed. I do so by situating collective memory within the wider theoretical debate about social and cultural memory and discussing its engagement with forgetting, history, narratives and culture. The review of studies of collective and social memory contributes to responding to answering the following questions. What is the explicit role and potential of collective memory in sensitive socio-historical contexts? How can collective memory help facilitate new forms of consensus between individuals and within groups outside of the politics of divisive identity?

The growing scholarly interest in memory studies in the social sciences has spawned a multitude of concepts of memory *itself*. The vocabulary includes 'collective memory', 'social memory', 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory' among others; the large number of terms runs the risk of weakening the definition of the concept. However, I found it was important to examine some of these terms in order to capture the key dynamics that one must consider when understanding the importance of remembering and forgetting in post-war contexts. Within sensitive socio-historical contexts, issues relating to memory begin to assume critical dimensions when related to contested spaces, competing narratives of the past and efforts by a country to reconstruct a new national identity. This is particularly the case when one faces the question of how much, and which parts, of the past should be remembered or forgotten. Should we consider forgetfulness as a form of denial that must

be worked through, or as part of the redemption of a nation and the reconstruction of a collective identity? This theory chapter makes the case for understanding the concept of collective memory as a dynamic integration of different processes that are historically shaped, culturally represented and continuously informed through narratives.

Finally, I draw on Castorioadis's conceptualisation of the role of the imagination in opening up to autonomy and creative forms of societies to expand my scrutiny of collective memory, by making the case for the potential role of memory as to break the cycle of conflicting memories and divisive sectarian identities. By using Castoriadis's concept of 'radical social instituting imaginary[1]' first coined in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975), this theoretical part explores how experiences of encountering works of art can be a space, whereby viewers not only make sense of the artwork as personal and imaginative enhancement, but also tap into these experience resources to assert themselves as autonomous individuals in culturally and historically shifting societies. In the context of post-war Lebanon, this means asking the question: How does encountering visual artwork help Lebanese young adults to break free of the civil war's "maligned heritage"? (Khalaf, 1993, p. 321)

2.1 Towards a social meaning of memory

In this section, I first present the seminal works of Barlett (1932, 1960) and Halbwachs (1925/1992, 1980). These works mark a turn regarding scholarly discourses on memory, largely clinical and psychological, which tended to focus on the individual and internal nature of cognitive activity[2]. The scrutiny of the two scholars' work helps to establish the importance of memory in the working and preservation of group identity. It will be shown through Barlett and Halbwachs that collective memory is a dialectic process: that of the present shaping the past, and the legacy of the past enduring in the present. It must be

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[1]In using the term 'instituting imaginary' rather than 'imagination', Castoriadis emphasises the difference between common connotations of imagination as only connected with images or invention and his understanding of an imaginary connected with his political project of autonomy. The term 'instituting' refers to the creative dimension of society: the capacity to "bring into being new forms embodying specific principles" (Klooger, 2009, p. 27).

[2]See, for example, Henri Bergson's concept of 'lived experience' developed in *Matter and Memory* (1911) and Sigmund Freud's approach to memory, located in the individual's unconscious: a repository of all past experiences.

noted that throughout this section, one departs from an understanding of a rather individual memory shaped by the collective (Barlett and Halbwachs) and evolves towards the collective production of memory through communicative practices (Middletown & Edwards, 1990). Finally, Denise Jodelet (1992) calls for relating collective memory to social thought within a social representation approach, which opens up perspectives to anchor and investigate collective memory in more complex societal contexts. She also offers a distinctive definition of collective and social memory.

2.1.1 The pioneering works of Barlett and Halbwachs.

Frederic Barlett deliberately avoids using the word 'memory' in order to move away from the general belief that memories are stored somewhere in the head and can be literally retrieved when appropriate occasions arise. For Barlett, the process of remembering is *determined* by outside social influences (i.e. traditions, customs, and cultural and social conventions to which individuals belong and remember). Remembering is an active reconstruction of the past under the influence of the present, which responds to the need to adjust to social conventions that influence individuals' activity of remembering. With the concept of 'conventionalization', Barlett shows how the activity of remembering is primarily that of striving to adapt to usages, patterns, values and stereotypes of the group to which the individual belongs. To set out his new approach to memory, Barlett uses the method of the repeated reproduction, whereby subjects recall a foreign folk tale at increasing time intervals (e.g., after twenty minutes, a week, several months). Barlett finds, for instance, that inexplicable elements introduced from outside of the story are rationalised and the narrative structure is reorganised while the participants repeat it. It accounts, according to Barlett, for the individual's functional adaptation to the world and to his or her life in the present day.

Importantly, Barlett shows that the process of reconstructing past memories under the influence of the present is associated with the imaginative and thinking process. "Remembering is [...] an imaginative reconstruction or construction, built out of the relation of our attitude towards a whole active mass of organised past reactions or experience, and to a little outstanding detail which commonly appears in image or in language form" (Bartlett,

1932, p. 213). Everyday remembering involves what Barlett calls an "effort after meaning" (1932, p. 213). It is a mental and symbolic activity. When individuals remember, they strive to connect something that is presented with something that is not; and in order to refer to something that is absent, individuals create images of the actions and experiences they lived in the past. Therefore, in Barlett's work the activity of remembering is akin to that of imagining and is not a straightforward journey. "It was common to find to the struggle to get somewhere, the varying play of doubt, hesitation, satisfaction and the like, and the eventual building up of the complete story", says Barlett (1932, p. 176). The fruitful outcome of Barlett's approach to remembering as constructing meaning is that the act of remembering has in itself a social psychological function; it is a way for individuals to orientate themselves and make sense of their actions in the present. As Barlett argues, "in the great majority of instances of remembering, the past is being used to help to interpret the present, and is for that purpose reconstructed" (1960, p. 67).

Echoing Barlett's psychological study of remembering, Maurice Halbwachs's (1992/1925) landmark studies *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Memoire* (translated in English: *On Collective Memory*) introduce from a sociological perspective the idea that the memories of each individual are inscribed within 'social frameworks'. Individuals cannot remember outside of the context of their social groups. Their memories of the past depend on their relationship with the different community frameworks that mark their experiences (e.g., family, social class, schools, church, profession). Halbwachs argues that "there is thus no point in seeking where memories are preserved in my brain or in some nook of my mind to which I alone have access: for they are recalled by me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any given time give the means to reconstruct them" (1925/1992, p. 38). This means that, most notably, a person's identity can only be achieved through his or her membership to social groups mediated by religious, ethnic, ideological, class or national characteristics.

The language and discourse of a given community, as well as space and time in which this community is anchored, offer to the individuals the frame through which they remember. "Beliefs, representations and institutional practices are carried by the language and rituals of the community", asserts Halbwachs (1925/1992, p. 46) and are at the very heart of the

structure of memory. Similarly, spatial and temporal frames provide the support through which communities remember and around which individuals co-identify. Studying the memory of Christians in *The Legendary Topography of the Gospel in the Holy Land* (1941/1992) Halbwachs focuses on the way in which specific spaces are associated with the use of rituals and publicly available commemorative symbols. The sociologist notes how scenes found on a stained-glass church window, such as the path of suffering followed by the Christ on his way to Golgotha, are symbols of unity for Christians. As much as the memory of the spatial places in the Holy Land (e.g., Golgotha, Oliver Mount) best express the identity of the group formed by the Christians, the founding events of Easter, Ascension and Christmas set a time frame specific to believers. It inscribes the group's particular way of living through time. We see here how Halbwachs ties the memory of individuals to the group, and the latter to the macro sphere of tradition. Memory provides a sense of belonging and of permanence to the group. Jovchelovitch (2007) points out that through remembering, groups become able to recognise a shared history. Similarly, in *La memoire: ses aspects sociaux et collectifs*, Haas and Jodelet (2000) underline how much the role of the spatial frame in Halbwachs's approach to memory provides not only a sense of coherence, but of safety to the group; any change to this frame is described as a threat to the group's identity.

2.1.2 Collective memory as communicative practice

In the English psychological school, social constructionists David Middleton and Derek Edwards expand upon Halbwachs's development on the social meaning of memory. For the authors, memory is collective insofar it is collectively produced as a joint activity of remembering. Memory is "constituted by, and constructed within, symbolical social practices and the symbolic significance of a material world", assert Middleton and Edwards (1990, p. 7). For the scholars, the 'joint recall'; that is, the activity of remembering together, is a product that goes beyond the sum of the participants' individual perspectives. There are no memories of the past outside of the social context of the communicative practices that cause them to exist.

Remembering together is examined as an act of communication. Most pointedly, Middleton and Edwards see the intersubjective relation between individuals as the 'material' that creates a shared context within which the collective memory is continuously reworked. In order to examine how individuals reconstruct events, reminiscences or stories together, the scholars push forward Barlett's method of the repeated story by one individual at a time. Instead of looking at how the output of each participant is passed on to another participant, as Barlett's did, they asked participants to recall a movie (*ET*) together that they had recently watched, in a 35-minute conversation. By doing so, they created the conditions for a "social creation of memory" (Middleton & Edwards, 1990, p. 8) emphasising how a shared context impacts on the pragmatics of speaking. It arose from the findings that by using rhetorical figures of speech, such as overt agreements (e.g., "yeah, that's what I remember") and overt requests, and constructing sequential narrative, the participants dispute over the versions of an event and the way it conforms to the social context in which they belong. These rhetorical statements shape the process of collective remembering. The participants' accounts of the story *ET* turned out to be "pragmatically variable versions that are constructed with regard to particular communicative practices" (Middleton & Edwards, 1990, p. 11).

By studying the rhetorical organization of remembering and forgetting, Middleton and Edwards not only explore micro-processes of remembering, but also point out the normative dimension of the activity of remembering. The pragmatic and intersubjective activity of joint recall can be seen as "plausible accounts of who is to blame, or to be excused, acknowledged, praised, honoured, thanked, trusted and so on" say Middleton and Edwards (1990, p. 9). The rhetorical arguments in the remembering conversation highlighted by the scholars are the basis for participants to dispute different versions of events or forestall alternative accounts, while the participants use argument to justify why everyone should accept their version of events. "Remembering events is the production of versions of events, which are acceptable in so far as they succeed over other possible, foreseen, actual versions" (p. 31), assert Middleton and Edwards. For Middleton and Edwards, there is no neutral formation of collective memory, only different and competing versions.

In this regard, Middleton and Edwards illuminate the broader social context and the political and ideological issues that influence how individuals collectively construct reminiscent events. How different versions of events are put forward depends upon the social, political and ideological locations in which the participants evolve. Examining conversational remembering is, therefore, not reduced to a description of social-discursive phenomena; it is "a window on the process of remembering as people actually do it, addressing the concerns of everyday life, including both the ordinary *and* the extraordinary" (1990, p. 42, italics added). Middleton and Edwards understand the cultural and ideological themes worked up, illustrated and commented upon by participants as part of the pragmatics of speaking. Middleton and Edwards's emphasis on ideological and political dimensions expands our understanding of the concept of collective memory and contributes to a refined reading of how societies function. Nonetheless, I find the scholars are cautious about integrating the notion of ideology into their analysis of the process of remembering conversation. Namely, worthy of note is the neutral use of the term 'ideological theme', which slightly undermines the strength of their argument. For instance, how does power struggle come across in the arguments used by the participants? The question of power, at stake in the way some participants succeed in enforcing their versions of events over others, calls for a scrutiny of collective memory that highlights the role of the different actors in its construction. This is proposed by Denise Jodelet and is detailed in the following section.

2.1.3 Memory and social thought

Between a psychological approach to memory understood as the sum of intra-individual processes of remembering and the social constructionist approach of Middleton and Edwards explored in the previous section, Denise Jodelet (1992) calls for a middle path: that of exploring the relationship between social memory and social thought. Social thought refers to the theory of social representations, for which Jodelet (1989/1991) shares with Moscovici (2000) the intellectual paternity. Social representation theory is concerned with explaining how common sense is produced through communicative practices. It is shaped by ideology, belief systems, traditions and myths, and circulates among social groups. In particular, in

social representation theory, making sense of the world is primarily symbolic. In conversations with others we constantly refer to something that is absent from our immediate world, by creating images of the object we are discussing. "The substance, or content, of which [our] representations are made, are symbols", asserts Jovchelovitch, (1995, p. 69). Interestingly, this account of the symbolic function of social representations echoes Barlett's reflexion on remembering as effort after meaning for an object that is absent; that is, as the individuals' engagement in symbolic activity.

For Jodelet, the mental processes involved in the activity of remembering are those that are also at the heart of thinking. Sensation, perception, categorisation and problem-solving entailed in the activity of thinking are processes worth exploring when one studies collective memory. By integrating mental and psychological dimensions to the understanding of memory, Jodelet corrects Middleton and Edwards's constructionist approach; the latter, for Jodelet, pays too much attention to conversation and interlocution between individuals. At the same time, although Jodelet invites us to renew our attention to the mental activity that takes place in the process of remembering, her approach must not be understood as an exclusive focus on intra-individual processes. Rather, Jodelet criticises a pure cognitivist psychological approach to memory for failing to account for the way in which memory plays out as symbolic mediation between subjects, others and the world. The formation of images while reconstructing the past, the affective dimension in the activity of remembering, as well as the identity formation at stake in the reconstruction of the past must be explored through the lens of the relationship between individual/self, other and the world. Jodelet's purpose is to build a bridge between collective memory as produced through the interaction and communication between individuals in social contexts, and the processes that take place through the activity of thinking.

From an empirical perspective, Jodelet suggests applying a detailed scrutiny of the different agents involved in the working of memory: the supports, the contents and how memory is embodied, as well as the contexts in which it is produced. Similarly, Jodelet argues that the processes that take place during the reconstruction of the meaning of past events, the way traces of the past are at work in the process of remembering, should be explored. Broadening

the examination of the working of memory by including the different actors involved and the traces of memory re-worked through language in groups as well as in a given social context brings Jodelet to set a more complex understanding of the working of memory. In this regard, Jodelet comes to distinguish between collective memory and social memory: the former being the memory of groups, and the latter being the memory of society, which provides individuals with social frameworks, tools for mnemonic activity and a framework for the "public memory" (Jodelet, 1992, p. 246). Disentangling social memory from collective memory enables us to raise questions such as how collective memory is socially shaped. How do memories of groups and communities negotiate, challenge or contest social and public memories that meet a particular agenda? Halbwachs's approach to memory is innovative in the way it reflects the plurality and "scattered memories" (Haas & Jodelet, 2000, p. 13) of the collective milieus characterised by different cultural (language, rituals and commemorative symbols), spatial and time frames. Jodelet's contribution to Halbwachs's approach to memory is to unfold social and collective memory and stress their conflicting positions. In doing so, Jodelet recognises that power struggle has a key role, located in between social and collective memories.

In this section we have moved from defining the social meaning of memory to distinguishing between social and collective memory. The question of collective identity – the sense of sameness, shared history and the safety of the group – is intrinsically linked to the formation of collective memory. In the following section, I consider collective memory in the context of the narrative.

2.2 Memory, narrative function and history

A crucial aspect of the working of memory is to look at the relationship between the process of remembering and narrative. A characteristic of collective memory is that it is a "living history" (Halbwachs, 1980) with a fundamental dimension: that of continuity through time. The sociologist argues that collective memory is "a continuous current of thought, of a continuity that is by no means artificial, because it conserves nothing from the past except

the parts which still live, or are capable of living in the conscience of the group" (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 89). Re-worked in the present, the representations of the past furnish to individuals and groups the components they need to project themselves into the future (Haas & Jodelet, 2000). Thus, collective memory can be understood as a form of narrated recollection of remembrances organized around temporal references (Jedlowski, 2001).

Influenced by Halbwacks's approach to language and discourse as "frames" that support individuals' and groups' formations of memory, Namer (1987) concentrates on memory as manifested in narrative practices. Through language and discourse, the primary vectors provided by social context, a narration takes place and is ascribed a particular meaning. In particular, individuals recollect memories in the context of biographical interviews or in autobiographical accounts. Namer's focus on autobiographical narratives in exploring the working of memory is akin to a specific field of empirical research called the 'life histories' methodology. A life history is defined as "any retrospective account by the individual of his [or her] life in a whole part, in written or oral form, that has been elicited or prompted by another person" (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985, p. 2). After falling from favour in the 1950s, the method re-emerged in several fields during the 1980s. These included the oral history movement, which was interested in seeking new historical perspectives from the "bottom-up" (Thompson, 1988); feminist researchers' efforts to recover women's "hidden narratives" (Middleton, 1993); and post-modernists who saw value in destabilising grand narratives and celebrating diverse accounts of social life. However, Jedlowski (2001) warns us not to consider the life history method and individual interviews aiming to document a respondent's life as of scientific value when enquiring about memory. For the author, the concept of life history sheds light, above all, on individuals' subjective experiences through a personal account of their 'life stories'. Indeed, at the heart of individuals' recounting of their past experiences is the way they put forward different facets of their individual and social identity.

When looking at narrative function in relation to the concept of memory, one inevitably arrives at the concept of identity. "The past of each individual, is in some respects, what makes people what they are […]. It is true that identity is made up of memory, but if memory

is narrative, identity is also narrative, and it is also subject to the same multiple narration", asserts Jedlowski (2001, p. 33). The concept of narrative identity is central in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic and philosophy (1984–1988; 1992). The concept best exemplifies the work on the relation between memory, time and identity. "It is by telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity", argues Ricoeur (1985, p. 214).

From Ricoeur's perspective, two poles constitute one's own identity. *Idem*, the pole of sameness, corresponds to innate and acquired attitudes. *Ipse*, the pole of selfhood, involves the engagement of the self with the other; that is, trustworthiness and faithfulness despite the transformations that mark the path of life. For Ricoeur, the historical dimension of identity is therefore deployed around the engagement of the self with the other. The self identifies "with the place from which the other tells his/her story" (Ricoeur, 1990/1992, p. 6). Similarly, giving flesh to his account of the sense of the ethical responsibility of the self towards the other, Ricoeur explains that the self engages with the other's *suffering*. In fact, the self responds to "the obligation placed upon himself [or herself] by the suffering of the other" (Ricoeur, 1990/1992, p. 299). With Ricoeur, taking the perspective of the other involves the possibility of identifying with one of the most fundamental human experiences: suffering. Narrative is not, therefore, only a means to recollect one's own memories of the past, as narrative practice; narratives are an expression of the inter-relationship between self and other, entangled in stories, and constitutive of individuals' identity.

Ricoeur's perspective on narrative identity is fruitful at the collective level. The construction and passing on of narratives within groups has been recognised by many scholars as strengthening the collective identity of the group. Drawing on White's (1987) concept of emplotment – the selection and chronological organisation of past events and symbols into a coherent narrative – Larkin (2012) argues that groups use such a narrative structure to weave historic events, actors and interactions into a unifying story, linking past and present and pointing towards a conclusive ending. Ricoeur also points out human beings' crucial need for such temporal structure and sequential progression towards a conclusive end. "We tell stories because in the last analysis, human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the *necessity* to save the history of the defeated and

the lost", explains Ricoeur (1985, p. 75, italics added). With a rather pessimistic overtone, Ricoeur emphasises an important psycho-social function of narratives; not only to provide groups with a cohesive identity through a shared sense of history, but also to *redeem* that history from historical ruptures and discontinuities. In the context of contemporary warfare, conflicts and civil wars, telling stories engages individuals and groups in a "certain universally human experience of temporality" (White, 1987, p. 169); it may be a way to preserve a sense of historicity[3], which subsumes the identity of individuals and groups.

In this section I looked at how the construction of identity and collective identity is inter-mingled with the needs of individuals and groups to narrate stories of the past. I concluded this section by highlighting how narratives help communities to deal with historical ruptures and preserve a sense of historicity. Sensitive socio-historical contexts require particular attention to the way in which one explores the relation between memory and collective identity; an issue in the transformation of complex historic events into basic plot structures is how the actors put forward particular discourses, ideologies and identities. Personal, family and minority narratives disagree with political and institutions when establishing an official version of history. Furthermore, taboos and silences about undesirable past events marked by the scars of war and conflict, and the impossibility of passing on traumatic remembrances, makes the question of what to remember and what to forget an issue when looking at collective memory. I will explore these issues, and the way in which a post-war society can grant a renewed place to memory – one that soothes collective tensions and creates new symbolic and imaginary forms of engagement for members of society – in the following and final section of this part of the theory chapter.

2.3 Memory and conflict

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[3]Heidegger's philosophy deals extensively with the term historicity: In a fundamental sense, it as a life history, a happening, an unfolding between birth and death and a flowing outward into the future and backwards into the past. Hence, historicity is defined by Heidegger in terms of temporalization or structure of temporality. The social-psychological understanding of historicity is that it is not given or interchangeable, but is a reappropriation of the content of history through different historical periods.

2.3.1 Conflict and history: producing nationhood

Since I touch upon questions pertaining to ideologies and power struggle in relation to memory, it is necessary to explore the interface between memory and history. History shares commonalities with memory, which at times makes it difficult to single out one concept from the other; at the same time there is a need to further clarify the function of these two notions in a given society, and how they are connected. In the following section, I present the ideas of several authors for whom history is not only a field of uncontested meanings defined by historians, but also shaped by how individuals and groups negotiate with culturally and politically sensitive past remembrances.

Marita Sturken (1991, 1997) proposes a refined understanding of history. History is imbued with cultural meanings produced by the creation, production and consumption of cultural products. Texts, films, photographs and commodities related to a particular event constitute a nation's popular culture and contribute to the making of history. As a result, Sturken blurs the distinction between history understood as a field of uncontested meanings defined by historians and collective memory, "an organic, ever transforming social recollection of the past" (Larkin, 2012, p. 13). Along with a primary and official mode of knowledge of past, minority groups' "low ranking knowledge[4]" (Foucault, 1980 quoted in Sturken, 1991) partake in the construction of history. Similarly, Haas and Jodelet (2000) call for historians to take into account the memories of those who are the "forgotten of history" (2000, p. 132), such as women and the poor, in the writing of history. Too often, for ideological reasons, these groups remain outside of the construction of social memory.

Nonetheless, Sturken does not mean that the concepts of collective memory and history are interchangeable. In order to uncover the conflicting dynamics between actors in a society, the author asserts that it is important to look at memory independently of history to capture the political nature of their difference; namely, when "memories are asserted specifically outside of or in response to historical narratives" (1997, p. 5). Particular groups' memories stand out against official and institutional discourse on history. For example, the voices of marginalised

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[4]For instance, Foucault was interested in the "low- ranking knowledge" of the psychiatric patient or the nurse, for instance, rather than that of the medical institution.

veterans of the Vietnam War and Gulf War "disrupt the closure of a particular history" (Sturken, 1997,p. 5) established by the American nation, one that only gives legitimacy to the master narrative of American military power. By pointing to conflicting narratives between a collective memory produced by minority groups clashing with sanctioned narratives and the discourse of institutions and elites, Sturken (1997) accounts for the fracture of a nation's culture.

Revealing the dynamics underpinning the way in which people represent themselves as a nation when exploring collective memory is also a task that Nikos Kalampalikis sets himself through the analysis of the Macedonian conflict. Studying the Greek people's rejection of the use of the name Macedonia for a former province of Yugoslavia, Kalampalikis highlights the function of "historical bricolage" (2007) and the role of the imagination in representing the past. By selecting specific remembrances the Greeks adjust and re-shape versions of their history so as to produce a story that meets their need for a continuous narrative thread. "Every new and unfamiliar element that the present seeks to put in the collective and mental frame – in this instance, the European decision to call former Yugoslavia, 'Macedonian' – puts the memory at risk, and is a threat for the group" (p. 145) explains Kalampalikis. Emphasising narratives at the expense of others helps the Greeks to counterbalance the perceived threat to their identity.

In Kalampalikis's study, an important finding is that the interviewees referred to the glorious figure of Alexander the Great as indubitable and unique. Most pointedly, the interviewees' attachment to the figure of Alexander is associated with a strong feeling of belonging to the Greek nation. Sharabi (2007) claims that: "the formation of the collective identity of a society is particularly depended on the narrative forms of myth, past-oriented stories that recount formative moments of the group's history" (p. 170). Even more fundamental in the sharpening of a strong sense of collective identity is that in Kalampalikis's study, the interviewees ascribe to the narrative of their origin – the mythical Hellenic past – a legitimate status of *truth*. Furthermore, as the author points out, the figure of Alexander lends itself a

status of truth, since it overlaps with the ideal of a culture that meets a "collective aspiration[5]" (Halbwachs, 1941, p. 158). Referring to the name of Alexander becomes the group's "*vérité identitaire*" (Kalampalikis, 2007, p. 145, italics added); this means that members' sense of identity and belonging goes without saying since it is intrinsic to remembering Greece's ancient past. In so doing, as Kalampalikis asserts, the group ascribes to the past a "trans-historic status" that goes beyond the linear historical set of chronological events. Kalampalikis's view on the functional role of myths echoes Ricoeur's view of narratives as way to re-historicise the past, supporting individuals and groups to overcome memory gaps and historical discontinuities.

Key to Kalampalikis's scrutiny of the sharpening of the Greeks' '*vérité identitaire*' is the role of the imaginary in understanding people's attachment to their nation. "Nation[6] is the product and the producer of a social reality in tune with the elements that symbolically and imaginarily form the nation; it is underpinned by the way the group represent the nation to which they belong to" (2007, p. 71), posits Kalampalikis. In perceiving the figure of Alexander the Great as one and indivisible, the Greeks bring "residual imaginary elements" (Kalampalikis, 2007, p. 69) to their representation of the Hellenic past. Similarly, they form an image of the nation-space that exceeds the territory that marks out the group's religious and cultural belonging; Kalampalikis argues that it is a national *topos*, a kind of metaphor. The imaginary dimension subsumes the territory's boundary and provides a nation with its own spatial distinctiveness. Here, Kalampalikis echoes Benedict Anderson's (1991) depiction of the "imagined community". For Anderson, the possibility that a people will unify as a nation is based on a number of shared images among these people and their associated significations. For instance, the sentiment of deep, horizontal "comradeship" and "fraternity" (Anderson, 1991, p. 12) between the nation's members, regardless of the inequality between them, are imagined elements of commitment to national life.

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[5]Kalampalikis draws on Halbwachs's idea that for a group to engage with truth, there must be a foundational event or a seminal figure that marks the experience of the group in a given historical time.

[6]"La nation est le produit et le producteur d'une réalité sociale en phase avec ses formations symboliques et imaginaires et soutenue par ses représentations" (Kalampalikis, 2007, p. 71).

2.3.2 Memory void and the right to forget

The previous section explored the way in which a people operates an "historical bricolage" (Kalampalikis, 2007) by selectively remembering stories in order to sustain a continuous narrative thread and reappropriate a sense of historicity. It is a truism to assert that when a group selectively remembers past narratives, it disregards others. Yet, in the context of embarrassing or traumatic past events, the issue of forgetting is complex and lends itself to several interpretations. In the present section, I offer different perspectives on the relationship between collective memory and the process of forgetting. I first present forgetting as a collective defence mechanism to repress past shameful events. I then turn to a recent trend in social sciences that recognises forgetfulness as part of a healing process and "memory work". Central to the movement of rehabilitating forgetfulness is the role of silence in the working of collective memory, especially its function regarding the construction of identity. Silence either bears the weighted meaning of taboo, or can be considered as part of 'memory work'. In the latter case, silence is granted an almost ethical value, which contributes to redeeming a group's identity.

Valerie Haas (2002) explores the collective memory, or rather a *void* of memory, of the inhabitants of Vichy: a city in the centre of France that hosted the ministries of Marechal Petain's government, actively involved in collaboration with the Nazi regime during World War II. Haas focuses on the way in which Vichy's institutions and inhabitants attempt to silence this shameful period of French contemporary history by erasing from the urban space all signs that return the people to a sentiment of national dishonour. Many Vichyssois avoid using the name Vichy, while few of them even suggest finding a new name for their city. Similarly, Haas notes the absence of museums relating to the collaborationist period, as well as the authorities' project to create a new landscape for the city. Another symbolic effort to curtail Vichy's shameful past was made when the authorities brought forward the figure of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte in their local history, as the emperor of the Second French Empire had visited Vichy as he travelled through France. In so doing, the Vichyssois replace

a shameful past with a "glorious *imaginary*[7] history" (Haas, 2002, p65). Just as the Greek value the figure of Alexander the Great in representing themselves as part of a nation, the figure of Napoleon III allows the inhabitants of Vichy to co-identify themselves with the representation of a magnificent past; it redeems a collective identity caught up in a mixture of silence, shame and a desire to present an appealing image of their city.

However, Haas notes that the authorities' attempt to replace shameful memories with a glorious one does not completely silence undesirable collective remembrances. Many of Vichy's inhabitants remember in detail the places where each ministry of French collaborationist government was settled. This illustrates Irwin-Zarecka's (1994) idea of 'sites of displacement' of memory: a term best suited to that of 'memory void' since, although "we set out to listen to historical silences, we are forced to listen to a great deal of noise" (1994, p. 118). Furthermore, the persistent remembrances of the inhabitants influence the construction of collective identity. As Haas summarises, the inhabitants are caught up between the authorities' instruction to forget and their own "incapacity" (Haas, 2002, p. 68) to forget. By "incapacity to forget", Haas is not describing inhabitants' lack of ability to overcome reprehensible past remembrances. Rather, she is underlining the awkward character of institutional strategies to clear a history of its shameful past; lingering remembrances ingrained in the collective memory do not easily comply with public undertakings to sanitise memory.

In this regard, how can we find a way to recognise forgetfulness as a positive process without denying people's vivid memories? Haas proposes to consider silence and forgetting as part of the growing process of identity construction. "Silence is not emptiness or the negative side of memory", asserts Haas (2002, p. 68). In doing so, she distinguishes between taboos and silence understood as a "right to forget". Worthy of note is Haas's shift from "right to forget" to "*work* of forgetting" as if people are actively involved in the process of forgetting. Instead of two opposing processes, remembering and forgetting are complementary. The question then becomes: how can we move from associating silence with taboo or deliberate erasure of the past to associating it with a fruitful forgetting process? For Haas, the "work

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[7]In fact, Napoleon's presence in Vichy was minor and subject to criticism. Haas explains that in 1853, the inhabitants rejected Napoleon's dictatorship.

of forgetting" is part of the "duty of memory" (2002, p. 68), which relates to the process of 'memory work'. Memory work has recently received increasing interest in the literature. Jedlowski (2001) relates the notion to the concept of 'reappraising' [*Aufarbeitung*] the past, which means a conscious confrontation with the most negative aspects of the past, giving rise to a process through which the individual assumes responsibility for his or her past history.

Haas's approach to memory and forgetting mainly echoes that of Ricoeur, whose last book's title pulls together the concepts of history, memory *and* forgetting, which sees forgetting as a process of its own, not merely the downside of memory. In *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000/2004), Ricoeur examines the tension between historical discourse's capacity of "representing the past faithfully" (p. 229) (i.e., how historians establish the truth and accuracy of their narratives) and the possibility of a 'happy' forgetting; the latter is meant to correct the "abuses of memory" by ideological encroachment or by the compulsion to reenact memories blocked by a shameful past. Like Haas, Ricoeur links 'happy' forgetting and 'memory work'. Happy forgetting comes into being in the context of an active and ethical involvement of the people with their remembrances of past events, even if they are embarrassing or painful to face. The potential for happy forgetting hinges on communities' capacity to engage in 'memory work'; that is, to invest in the past historically and ethically. By this, Ricoeur means that people and nations are committed to the *transmission* and renewal of a shared past.

2.3.3 Memory work: transmission and unveiling the repressed past

"A group cannot forget what it has not received" asserts Haas (2002, p69). Echoing Ricoeur, for whom the question of transmission is central when societies engage in 'memory work', Haas argues that silenced memories at the collective level go hand in hand with a lack of transmission between generations. In her study, Haas points to a generational gap between those who witnessed the Vichy-French collaborationist period and those who have no recollection of it. As a result, the "work of forgetting" cannot be achieved as long as a hiatus remains in the passing on of memories, blocked by the fear of dealing with a reprehensible past. What effects, mixed or embarrassing collective feelings are associated with the remembrances

of an undesirable period in such a way that it must be repressed? Here, I suggest, in line with Jodelet's call for scrutinising the different actors involved and the "traces" of memory, that we should explore the role of the inhabitants during this period. To grapple with the issue of transmission, one must question the inhabitants' interaction with the French collaborationist government. Specifically, it is worth looking at the way the inhabitants lived in – literally embodied – a space occupied by the collaborationists on Vichy's soil. It may be found that the former generation experienced itself as both witnessing *and* complicit in the undesirable presence of the collaborationist government in their city. In fact, silence may seal the memories in, because the former generation experiences deep embarrassment in somehow dealing with feelings of guilt.

Therefore, central to the issue of transmission is the twofold question of trust and truth: how truthful are the remembrances passed on? To what extent can the young generation rely on a trustful relationship with the elders while the latter recount their memories? For Ricoeur, a transmission of memories that rests on a relationship based on trust and truth constitutes a step towards an ethical involvement in 'memory work'. Indeed, the philosopher asserts that 'memory work' results from the duty to represent the past *faithfully*. Importantly, like in Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity, representing the past faithfully binds self and other, groups and communities, through their capacity to imagine "the *suffering* of others, before examining our own" (1990/1992, p. 10, italics added). Furthermore, from the perspective of a young generation that does not have any recollection of the embarrassing events, being confident that they can trust the elder generation's narrative is paramount. If the young generation are deprived of public knowledge that would allow them to make sense of the past, their need to rely on their elders' "frank speaking" (Foucault, 1982–1983) is even more important. Foucault's concept of frank speaking is inherited from Arsitotle's concept of free speaking [*Parrhesia*]. It refers to a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his or her personal relationship to truth through frankness instead of persuasion. The transmission of uneasy memories is delicate, and, given the discrepancy between social discourses and public attempts to shut off these memories, requires frankness: an ethical involvement of the self with the passing on of memories.

Yet, looking at the process of transmission, frankness and ethical involvement in passing on remembrances can do little if memories of hardship are held back. To bring about 'memory work' and get to grips with the silence in relation to Vichy's collaborationist period, Haas proposes to "unveil the repressed and let hardship experiences be spoken[8]" (Haas, 2002, p. 69). Here, Haas's call for "unveiling the repressed" can be aptly understood in terms of 'working-through' and 'mourning': two concepts that account for the work of uncovering difficult remembrances of hardship that often take the form of a compulsion to repeat the trauma (Freud, 1914, 1923; Laplanche, 1999). In the following, I present the use of 'working-through' and 'mourning' from the perspective of cultural memories studies examines the potential of cultural practices to support collective healing processes.

Working-through and mourning traumatic collective events through artistic practices

How can we face and work through what has been unspoken for a long time? How can groups unveil repressed remembrances, subject to collective embarrassment and unarticulated with public discourses that follow specific ideological agendas? In line with emerging interdisciplinary bodies of research on memory, a number of scholars heed the role of artistic practices to foster mourning processes and healing in the context of collective traumatic events. Artistic and cultural practices (e.g., rituals, photos, mementos, songs and lamentations) are understood as specific sites of memory embodiment. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra (2000) extends the clinical concepts of 'acting out' and 'working-through' to social entities by analysing collective responses to the Holocaust. In opposition to historical myth-making or "dehistoricized nostalgia" – the social outcomes of the clinical 'acting out' – the author advocates for the role of cultural practices as ways to work through traumas by enabling mourning, historicization and 'memory work' help people deal with their past (Saunders, 2005, p. 17).

LaCapra's argument is well illustrated by studies, such as those exploring how collective performances (e.g., drama and song) are helping people in Iraq and South Africa to overcome memories of grief and hardship (Kimberly Wedeven Segall, p. 20), and those researching how

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[8] *"Soulever cet interdit et laisser se verbaliser les maux (ou les mots) de cette communauté "* (Haas, 2002, p. 69).

cultural practices combining traditional lamentations and modern photography encourage commemorative acts (Holst-Warhaft, 1992). Saunders (2005) asserts that by involving artistic means of expression rather than using only discursive strategies for narrating their own story, people tap into the "emotional force" (Saunders, 2005, p. 20) of traditional lamentations, drama or photographs, as well as into the aesthetic-symbolic resources of the artistic medium, while scrutinizing the interrelation between the work of mourning and memory. For the author, "the embodied practices of dance, song, lamentation and dramatic re-enactment may offer a sense of environmental control, empowerment, or communality unachievable through language alone" (p. 22), which move people forward from the cathartic effect of recounting pain.

2.3.4 Bodies as traces of memories

Lastly, along with the involvement of artistic and cultural practices in the processes of healing and unveiling a repressed past, Sturken's (1991) argument on the very presence of the body as a way to confront difficult past history is worth exploring. Studying – among images, memorials, photographs, films and commodities – how the bodies of Vietnam War veterans literally *embody* the cultural memory of the American nation, Sturken emphasises the presence or absence of injured bodies in the process of healing the wound of a traumatic past. For the author, the bodies of the surviving veterans constitute an unquestionable trace of memory. They resist any attempt to erase the past under social, cultural and political constraints. "The bodies of the surviving veterans [...] provide a perceptible site for a continual remembering of the war's effect", argues Sturken (1991, p. 133). At the same time, societies often have an ambiguous relationship with the bodies of those who were caught up in conflicts, which precisely reveals the problematic nature of remembering. Pointing to the common metaphor of the body for the army – commonly called a single body – Sturken points out that, in fact, the army that took part in the Vietnam War was "a body" of mistaken identities and a confusion of allies and enemy; that is, a fragmented body, which highlights the Americans' complex relationship with the Vietnam War. As shown previously, Americans are adamant about preserving a strong and masculine image of their nation associated with US military

power, which cannot bear the representation of its army as weakened by internal divisions; nor can the representation of a powerful army bear the awkward presence of survivors who are stigmatised because of their physical injuries. As Sturken explains, the need to heal a nation's wound is often at the expense the presence of individual injured bodies, notwithstanding they are also involved in this healing process.

Furthermore, by its physical presence, the wounded bodies of survivors inevitably represent the fragmented body associated with an impossibility of healing at the collective level of a nation. For Sturken, "in war, the tiny, fragile, human body is always subject to dismemberment, to a kind of "anti-memory" (1991, p. 132). Expanding her line of reasoning based on the bodily metaphor, the author carries on by saying that "remembering is to make a body complete" (1991, p. 132). Here, my contention is that a symbolisation process must be at play in order to overcome the harsh confrontation with the wounded body that inevitably conveys the image of the dismembered body. In other words, I advocate that to "make a body complete" – that is, to enable bodies to be *sites* for 'memory work' and national healing – we must support the symbolisation processes of the presence of survivors' bodies. The need for symbolisation is even more salient when one is faced with the absence of individual bodies, either because the survivors are no longer alive, or because individuals were abducted during the war.

Commemorative acts, especially in the case of mourning for and remembering people who have disappeared, are part of the symbolisation process and the construction of personal and cultural memory. For instance, as Sturken explains, names inscribed on memorial walls act as surrogates for the bodies, since the memorial "conceptualises the dead as behind the space in the wall" (Sturken, 1997, p. 132). Imagination is naturally a dimension that nurtures a process of symbolisation rather than actual confrontation with bodies. "Imagination comes across in the way people represent the past, reconstruct this past through the present, withdraw or forget painful events, as much as in the possibility to project in the future, where the non-real, what is beyond, takes over rational and concrete life", asserts Kalampalikis (2007, p. 72). The dimension of the "non-real" of the imagination taking over rational, real life may help individuals and communities to overcome unsettling perceptions of bodies

that impede the remembering process, *without* denying the presence of the individuals who witnessed a traumatic past.

2.4 The potential of the imaginary

Philosopher and social theorist Cornelius Castoriadis[9] (1922–1997) combines a psychoanalytic and socio-historical perspective to understand the conditions and obstacles for the transformation of societies and institutions, recognising the imaginative and creative capacities of human beings in their dealing with the world. Against the deterministic approach, which attributes primacy to the structure of society over individuals, and represented by Marx's material functionalism and Foucault's structuralism, the philosopher brings to the fore the "scandal of imagination" (Castoriadis, 1978/1997, p. 321). For Castoriadis, imagination is not merely a pure activity in our mind associated with dreams, fantasy and unreal objects (Sartre, 1940); neither should it be understood as a specular image, subject to fascination and seduction (Lacan, 1936). Rather, imagination, rooted in individuals' psyche, is at the core of Castoriadis's ontological, psychoanalytical and cultural account of the functioning of societies. The notion (i.e., the capacity to create 'forms', to posit that which is not, to see in something that which is not there) partakes of the collective and social self-transformation through the political project that Castoriadis calls 'autonomy'. By this, he means that people are involved in self-reflection and deliberative self-creation of societies[10]. To assert themselves as individuals striving towards autonomy, people must confront the existing order: the already established structure of society (Kloogler, 2009).

In the following sections, I look at Castoriadis's radical approach to art experience from the very existence of a 'radical imagination'; that is, the philosopher's psychoanalytical account

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[9]Castoriadis's work has been acclaimed as one of the most profound, original and systematic of the last half-century (Habermas, 1985/1987; Morin, 1997; Elliott, 2002), but he has remained largely unknown outside France (Kenway & Fabey, 2009). Focusing on the philosopher's concept of 'instituting imaginary' and exploring the way in which the concept is combined with the political project of autonomy, this thesis cannot entirely do justice to Castoriadis's wide breadth of knowledge deployed not only in philosophy, social theory and psychoanalysis, but also in economics.

[10]Castoriadis (1994) defines autonomy as "the state in which 'someone' – singular subject or collectivity – is explicitly, and, as far as possible, lucidly (and not blindly) author of its own laws. This implies that this 'someone' instaurates a new relation with this 'law', which signifies, among other things, that this singular or collective 'someone' can modify that law, knowing that it is doing so" (p. 151).

of the imagination located in the psyche's domain. As this section will show, involving the radical imagination, understood by Castoriadis as both disruptive and transformative, is a prerequisite for individuals to exert themselves as autonomous subjects in their societies. Then, I spell out Castoriadis's understanding of art experience from his perspective of the relation between self and other (i.e., art experience is "self-othering"), conceiving autonomy as the subject's capacity to engage in a reflexive relationship with the other. Furthering my scrutiny of Castoriadis's concept of 'instituting imaginary' and political project of autonomy to account for an emancipating experience of art, the philosopher's account on the relation between subject and other will also be examined in relation to his notion of the 'politics of sublimation', which is a crucial aspect in the post-war Lebanese context of deepened sectarian tensions. Finally, a last section is dedicated to exploring the concept of 'instituting imaginary' from Castoriadis's epistemology of meaning, understanding art experience as a shift, or displacement, of meaning, which will be related to the figure of the metaphor. Using Paul Ricoeur's notion of truth incorporated in the metaphor, I will draw a connection with visual contemporary Lebanese artists' strategies, perceived as metaphoric works to address the problematic nature of speaking the truth in the post-war context.

2.4.1 Radical imagination: the power of calling societies into question

Castoriadis ascribes a central place to art along with his investigation of the creative possibilities of imagination explored in his work *Crossroads at the Labyrinth* (1984). Yet, ironically enough, the philosopher's essays dedicated to contemporary art and culture were only pulled together in a recent posthumous publication, *Fenêtre sur le Chaos* (2007). The title is evocative of the ontological level at which Castoriadis positions his approach to art. Non-rational or non-marketable art, the only art world Castoriadis affords an epistemological interest, compels viewers and audiences to "stare into the abyss and chaos" (Castoriadis, 1984, p. 57). With these two dramatic words, Castoriadis does not mean that human beings will throw themselves into an incommensurable and groundless world. In Castoriadis's

psychoanalytically-infused ontology, 'abyss' and 'chaos' refer to the realm of the magmas[11] located in the domain of the 'radical imagination'. The radical imagination is the elementary reality that accounts for the work of the psyche; one that generates a "spontaneous and unmasterable flux of representations, affects and desires" (Castoriadis, 1978/1997, p. 356). Criticising the idea that solely cognitive processes and rationality govern and explain the functioning of societies, Castoriadis ascribes the primacy to the phantasmatic and grants to the imagination its pivotal role as bearer of desires. Yet, with Castoriadis, the experience of confronting an artistic-aesthetic medium that compels viewers to immerse themselves in the phantasmatic domain of desire, affect and drive, does not constitute an end in itself.

Importantly for the philosopher, desires and drives "have to be brought *not only* to consciousness but to *expression* and *existence*" (Castoriadis, 1975/1987, p. 104, italics added): a crucial statement that accounts for the radical character of the experience of viewing works of art, and brings us to the core of the relationship between art experience and the project of autonomy[12]. Staring at the abyss and chaos is not only a matter of connecting to one's own desires, unveiling one's own fantasies hidden in remote childhood; it calls into question the way the self relates to the world and to the other. The bringing forth of 'radical imagination' – bearer of desire, drives and affects – is, for the philosopher, the catalyst by which viewers break away from the determinist logic of the social order, the mere reproduction of what already exists (which Castoriadis calls the "ensemblistic-identitarian logic") and what makes up heteronomous societies.

Literally, the word "heteronomous" means that for such societies, their laws or institutions (Greek: *nomoi*) have their origin outside of society and have been given to society by an 'other' (*heteros*). While the rule of God used to govern traditionalised societies, in the present time, the laws of nature, of biology or, more specifically, the laws of specific social institutions like the economy govern capitalist societies. For Castoriadis, the real power of the 'other' – of the

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[11]Castoriadis introduces the concept of magma: a mode of being in which indeterminacy is never absent. By using the metaphor of boiling "masses" that force their ways to the surface, Castoriadis stresses that entities, ideas, and forms are constantly being created.

[12]To set his concept of autonomy at the internal level, Castoriadis draws on psychoanalysis. He departs from Freud's therapeutic maxim "where Id is, there Ego shall be" in that he turns it on its head to claim: "Where Ego is, Id must spring forth" (1975/1987, p. 104).

kings, chiefs or elites – in heteronomous societies rests on the fact that the governing elites posit models or principles "derived from a source which transcends themselves" (Kloogler, 2009, p. 19). This appears as "metacontingency" (Kurosawa, 2000, p. 154) of meaning and precludes any creative processes in the socio-historical formations; such inherent beliefs or intangible principles impinge upon individuals' capacities and "quash the process of calling the existing institution into question: it locks in, as a matter of fact, it is closure" (Castoriadis, 1978/1997, p. 314).

Against the dominant tendencies of societies towards heteronomy, Castoriadis sets his emancipatory project of autonomy, the capacity "to go beyond closure" (1978/1997, p. 310); it is "opening", states the philosopher. The radical experience of confronting to the abyss and chaos, and the bursting forth of desires and affects, contributes to challenging the representations that overshadow individuals' capacity to set their own significations. Most pointedly, the artistic-aesthetic experience is radical in the way in which it leads individuals (i.e., by immersing them in a 'radical imagination') to exert an "altering thrust[13]"; one that shatters the representational-cognitive closure of the established institutions taken as extra sources of meaning. Art and the domain of culture are therefore the ingredients ('ferments') of the self-alteration of society. However, worthy of note is that the idea of "altering thrust" should not be confused with pure *tabula rasa* of the existing order, but rather as the individuals' deployment of reflexivity and critical reasoning, thinking for instance that "our Gods are perhaps false gods, our laws are perhaps unjust" (Castoriadis, 1978/1997, p. 311).

Castoriadis's idea of the radical nature of viewers' experience when they engage with an artistic medium finds an echo in Rancière's (2008) argument of an aesthetic of rupture, as the philosopher investigates contemporary visual art and the relation between aesthetics and politics. Rancière claims that engaging with installations in today's art exhibitions disrupts viewers' accustomed "modes of seeing, doing and being" (Rancière, 2008, p. 50). For instance, the discrepancy between listening to the sounds of an artwork while the artwork's diffracted images are projected on to a wall stirs up effects of estrangement in the viewers and produces what Rancière calls the "*dissension* of a certain body of experience" (p. 49, italics added). For

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[13] Joas (2002) notes how Castoriadis's notion of "altering thrust" is close to his ontological notion of chaos.

the philosopher, confronting new contextual staging in contemporary art is an unpredictable experience, which produces a particular "regime of sensoriality" (Rancière, 2008, p. 48). Importantly for Rancière, viewers' experience of rupture with familiar conditions of visibility has clear political implications, because it has the potential to "shatter the self-evidence of the existing natural order that predestines individuals and groups" (Rancière, 2008, p. 53). Video, photomontages and installations invite the viewers to take up "new forms of individualities" and become subject-political actors in the space of the centre. Rancière and Castoriadis ascribe to the unpredictable character of the experience of art the power to exert a transformative political force. Yet the similarity ends here. With Castoriadis, as we will examine in the following section, the political potential of a disruptive and transformative experience of art, as to propel individuals to progress towards autonomy, is complemented by the philosopher's reflexion on the relation between the subject and other.

Confronting radical other (ness) and sublimation

I have presented Castoriadis's account of art experience rooted in the notion of 'radical imagination', which, as the source of the psyche's affects, drives and desire, makes up the foundation upon which individuals tap resources to call into question the power of the 'other'. A comparison with Rancière's notion of aesthetic of rupture, a political anchor that leads the viewers to become subject-political actors, was also presented. Furthering Castoriadis's account of the experience of art at the deep level of the 'radical imagination', the present section looks at the experience of confronting an artistic medium as the emergence of otherness, understood at the same time as meaningful and transformative. Art is also, for Castoriadis, "self-othering"; that is, it fosters individuals'/viewers' reassessment of their relation to themselves. The philosopher's account of the disturbing experience of self-otherness while being involved in art is then followed by Castoriadis's political perspective on the concept of sublimation.

Gourgouris (2010) shows how Castoriadis's significance of art entails the very idea that art alters[14] our sense of self and illustrates his argument by reminding us of the well-known artist John Cage's phrase: "Art is self-alteration" (p. 14). Not to be confused with a confrontation of the self with alterity – alterity is externally produced – Gourgouris insists that alteration is internally produced and can also be grasped as the emergence of otherness, the encounter with "othering oneself", or "self-othering" (p. 13). Much in the same way, in his attempt to clarify Castoriadis's idea that genuine creations do not bring about difference but confront the radical other, Wallace (2000) provides this illustration: "This is otherness we experience when we fall in love or see a powerful painting for the first time" (p. 111). Foremost, Gourgouris (2010) reminds us that what we understand in the catastrophic outcome of a sense of self that is altered by the emergence of otherness and triggered by our investment into works of art is that this disruptive process goes hand in hand[15] with a self-transformative force. How can we grasp such an antithetic idea (i.e., self-alteration emerging as an emancipatory force)? In fact, as Gourgouris (2010) asserts, the notion of self-alteration is, in Castoriadis's work, entwined with the concept of sublimation.

Though the concept of sublimation has been much debated and is difficult to circumscribe (Laplanche, 1980), it can be summarised as a process that diverts the flow of instinctual energy from its immediate sexual aim and subordinates it to socially and culturally valued objects, such as religion, science and art. Sexual curiosity can be "diverted (sublimated) in the direction of art", writes Freud in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905/1953, p. 156). With a slight different understanding of sublimation, Castoriadis argues that "the pleasure of fantasy informs *every* aspect of human existence" (p. 14), which is a condition for explaining how individuals progress towards autonomy, as explored in the previous section. Sublimation is:

> The process by which the psyche is forced to replace its 'own' or 'private objects'
> of cathexis (including its own 'image' of itself) by objects which exist and which

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[14]In doing so, Castoriadis goes against the conception of art depicted by Gourgouris (2010) as "redemption or self-actualization" (p. 14) that prevails in Zitoun's (2006) idea of expansion of the self as the outcome of an imaginary experience.

[15]In his article, Gourgouris (2010) points to Castoriadis's frequent use in his writings of the antagonistic terms destruction, alteration and creation side by side.

have worth in and through their social institution, and our of these to create itself 'causes', 'means' or 'supports' of pleasure. (Castoriadis, 1975/1987, p. 312)

Sublimation partakes of the process of socialisation, or "transformation" (Koogler, 2009, p. 131) of the psyche's drive. Importantly, it consists of "establishing an intersection between the private world and the public world" (Koogler, 2009, p. 130). Gourgouris's (2010) use of the expression "politics of sublimation" (p. 5) positions Castoriadis's perspective on sublimation as a matter of politics. The radical experience of confronting art, understood as politics of sublimation, is one that "enables an encounter with the other as *difference* instead as existential threat to the self" (Gourgouris, 2010, p. 16). In Castoriadis's perspective, sublimation supports the subject's capacity to reflect upon his relation to the other, and to recognise the otherness in oneself.

2.4.2 The subject reflexive relation to the other

How, then, does the experience of art encounters from the perspective of the emergence of otherness and the politics of sublimation make sense within Castoriadis' political project of autonomy? To respond to this question, I focus in the present section on Castoriadis's account of the relation between the subject[16]/other at stake in the realisation of individual autonomy. Here, light is thrown not on the self, but on the subject/other link and the *reflexive* bond that ties them up. Furthermore, taking into consideration Castoriadis's caveat on the subject's failure to "cultivate" a reflexive stance on to his or her relation to the other[17], I look at the flip side of Castoriadis's notion of 'instituting imaginary': alienation.

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[16]Whilst, so far I have used the term 'self' (e.g., self-alteration), in this section I use the term 'subject', since this term conveys, from Castoriadis's perspective, a political overtone, which relates to the project of autonomy. As Gourgouris (2010) stipulates, "the subject-formation is a political matter" (p. 7). Interestingly, in the philosopher's account of individual autonomy, the individual is the 'singular subject' whose realisation as autonomous subject is at stake.

[17]Introducing in this section the question of the subject/other relation, a distinction must be made between the 'other' and the other in the subject/other relation. As previously mentioned, the 'other' with single quotes relates to all entities and institutions (e.g., kings, chiefs, elites) in societies and the power with which these entities and institutions legitimate their status to rule societies. In the subject/other relation, the other refers to the tradition of continental philosophy of the concept of the constitutive other, and designates that which is other than the concept being considered. Put simply, it means a person other than oneself.

Subject/other reflexive relation and autonomy vs. alienation

I shall first make clear that Castoriadis's conception of individual autonomy is intrinsically social because, as the philosopher states, "the problem of autonomy is identified with the problem of the relation of one subject to another or to others" (1975/1987, p. 108). Castoriadis's inclusive notion of autonomy (i.e., as individual as well as social) traces back to his conception of the subject, who is never separated from the other (i.e., the social-historical enclosed in the other). Rather, the philosopher understands the presence of the other as a condition for the subject to come into being autonomous, because at stake in the realisation of the autonomous subject is his or her capacity to exert a reflexive stance on his or her relation with the other. From Castoriadis's perspective, the reflexive subject is the one who succeeds in establishing "another relation between the discourse of the other and the subject's discourse" (Castoriadis, 1975/1987, p. 104). Herein, I will insist that reflexivity is more than a mere "cultivation of the self" (Kurosawa, 2000, p. 147). It can be aptly understood as the cultivation of the *interplay* between the other (i.e., the social-historical and instituted), and the unalterable imaginative capacity of the subject (i.e., the instituting stemming from the psyche and 'radical imagination'). Arnason (1989) describes this interplay as a "conscious activation of the difference between the instituted and the instituting" (p. 26). For Castoriadis, to exert one's individual autonomy or freedom is not to supersede the other's discourse by enacting fantasy of sovereignty, but to appreciate the in-between space that separates what is given from what is new, so one we can inhabit this space and "affirm our capacity to begin anew without denying what is given" (Zerilli, 2002, p. 545).

Castoriadis also envisions a flip side in the subject/other relation at stake in autonomy (i.e., the subject's reflexive stance upon his or her relation to the other without taking over the other's discourse), called alienation[18]. The philosopher admonishes against the subject's tendency to divert his or her fantasy, desire and drives away from their 'instituting' objective. When the products of the 'radical imagination' (i.e., desire, drives and affects)

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[18]Castoriadis (1975/1987) posits that "alienation occurs when the imaginary moment in the institution become autonomous and predominates, which leads to the institution's becoming autonomous and predominating with respect to society. [...] when society lives it relations with its institutions in the mode of the imaginary, it does not recognize in the imaginary of institutions something that is its own product" (p. 132).

are used as "absolute and complete" (Koogler, 2012, p. 326), the imagination exerts on to the other's instituted discourse another form of "meta-contingent" (Kurosawa, 2000) or inherent belief. In short, alienation's *tour de force* is that it occurs through the disguise of the creative dimension of the imaginary. Thompson (1982) explores the dissimulatory dimension of the imaginary in Castoriadis's work, which the author relates to the notion of ideology. "It is by means of a specific form of the imaginary that ideology carries out its task of dissimulating the social division" (1982, p. 674), argues Thompson. Whether "what is imaginarily dissimulated in Castoriadis' sense is not the social division but the creative imaginary itself" (Thompson, 1982, p. 674), what retains our attention is the emphasis on the "dissimulating discourse" of the 'other' – the chiefs, kings or elites in Castoriadis's depiction of the heteronomous tendencies of societies. Therefore, and interestingly, the dissimulating discourse of the imaginary is not only the privilege of the 'other' (i.e., the elites' instituted forms of laws).

Having examined Castoriadis's account of art experience rooted in the philosopher's psychoanalytically-infused ontology of 'radical imagination' – its altering and transformative power – and explored how individuals striving towards autonomy implies a reconfiguration of the self/other relation as *reflexive*, further light can now be shed on our phenomena under study by exploring Castoriadis's view on the creation of meaning. The scrutiny of the philosopher's understanding of art experience as a shift or displacement of meaning is the purpose of the final section dedicated to Castoriadis's work on the imagination in order to conceptualise a space of autonomy in relation to contemporary visual art.

2.4.3 Imaginary as a shift of meaning: the question of truth

This section begins with Castoriadis's account of art experience conceived as a shift of meaning that is set within his innovative epistemology, which posits the fundamental indeterminacy of meaning. The figure of speech, the metaphor, is then explored to draw an analogy with Castoriadis's account of art experience. In particular, Ricoeur's (1975/1977) hermeneutical notion of metaphoric experience helps us to explore the potential of the metaphor, opening up to both the imaginary and the ethical-political notion of truth: a notion which is crucially

at stake in the history-writing of the Lebanese Civil War. I finally illustrate my contention by looking at Lebanese artists' strategies of using documentary techniques that, by blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality, disrupt the viewer's familiar representations of their history and bypass the political and ideological agendas that impinge upon the possibility of speaking the truth in Lebanon.

Metaphor and truth

In order to secure the idea that a 'radical imagination' bursts forth and novelty can emerge as 'instituting' in the socio-historical world, Castoriadis undoes the linguistic tie between signified and signifier that prevails in Saussure's tradition[19] in language studies. For Castoriadis, the radical nature of viewers' experience of alteration and otherness in relation to art is not only explained at the ontological and psychoanalytical level (i.e., the 'radical imagination') but is completed by his epistemology of meaning. The radical character of art experience rests on the potential of an artistic medium to bring about a shift - or displacement – of meaning. Such displacement takes place when "available symbols are invested with other significations than their 'normal' signification", asserts Castoriadis (1975/1987, p. 127). By so doing, the philosopher stands against an understanding of art experience that states that viewers' capacity to imagine and form new dimensions of thought is always tied to a given, pre-established referent (De Rosa, 1995; Ullan, 1995; Zittoun, 2006). In contrast, Castoriadis believes that viewers' experiences of art ensue a shift of meaning and opens up the unpredictable nature of confronting an artistic medium, putting at stake viewers' capacity to invest in an imaginary dimension.

In my view, Castoriadis's notion of the displacement of meaning in reference to art experience has a close connection with the notion of metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. Metaphor, therefore, ruptures the ordinary and fluent reading of a phrase. In

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[19]Castoriadis vigorously criticises Saussure's linguistic that posits the basic equation: a signified refers to a signifier. Against what he pejoratively calls "the structuralist and semiotic ideology" (1984, p. 122), Castoriadis claims that language produces a "continuous emergence of linguistic signified other than those already recorded" (Castoriadis, 1975/1987, p. 345).

Charles Baudelaire's (1861/1954) example "Nature is a temple", there is, between "Nature" – the source domain[20] – and "a temple" – the target domain – a semantic distance, which the reader fills in by building up connections, so to produce new meanings and images. Metaphors are linguistic phenomena that open up a space between two distant domains, and images are their psychological reflection (Liakopoulos, 2000). Fiction and poetry are dedicated homes of metaphor, as iconic images suspend the reader's primary reference to reality. Envisioning nature as a temple in reading Baudelaire's first stanza of *The Flowers of Evil* (1861/1954), one ceases to refer to nature as a biological environment and its primary reference to reality, letting our imagination wander into archetypes of ancient Greece.

Most research is carried out on how cognitive and mental operations take place while individuals make use of metaphors (e.g., Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) notion of conceptual blending). In this thesis, I pay attention to Turner's (1974) anthropological and Ricoeur's (1975/1977) hermeneutic elaborations on metaphor both focus on the imaginative leap entailed in metaphoric experience. Their examination, in my view, sheds light on Castoriadis's notion of the shift of meaning. Turner argues that the metaphor is, at "its simplest, a way of proceeding from the known to the unknown" (1974, p. 25) and emphasises the unpredictable character of the metaphor. Resonating with Castoriadis's ontological lexicon on the 'radical imagination', Turner goes on to stipulate that "metaphor is our means of effecting instantaneous fusion of two separated realms of experience into an illuminating, iconic, encapsulating image" (Turner, 1974, p. 26).

Along with a semiotic and semantic level of study of the metaphor, Ricoeur (1975/1977) adds a final and interesting dimension: the hermeneutical level, in which the philosopher examines "the reference of the metaphorical statement as the power to 'redescribe' reality" (p. 7). Venturing to account for the vitality of language (note that the French original title of the volume is *La métaphore vive*[21]), Ricoeur explores metaphor as a space for linguistic transformation (Martinengo, 2010). To do so, the philosopher posits a level of truth in

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[20]Lakoff and Johnson (1999) employ the lexicon of 'source' and 'target' domains to account for the operation of mapping one domain to another.
[21]The English translation, The Rule of Metaphor (1975/1977), does not convey exactly the meaning of Ricoeur's original work in French. Literally, *La métaphore vive* means "the animated metaphor".

metaphor, which, though it does not refer directly to realty (i.e., remains anchored to the linguistic domain), brings about a renewed relation of the reader to this reality. Enckell (2010), commenting on Ricoeur's endeavour to grant to metaphor the potential to shape our relation to the world, spells out the notion of 'truth':

> The truth of metaphor is not actuality but possibility. The world of fiction is real as potential. This possibility is dependent on the metaphor. Only through the fictional or metaphorical construction does a new possibility to be in the world become actualised. This is the truth of experience: in the metaphor and only there, does it become possible to see the world in a new way. (Enckell, 2010, p. 1101)

Interestingly, Ricoeur's claim that metaphor has the potential to recast our relation to reality echoes the endeavours of the post-war generation of Lebanese artists to shake up the viewers' relation to reality in order to compel them to critically assess the very conditions of production of this reality. Explaining her intention in the use of video performances and installations as artistic vocabulary, Mona Hatoum, an artist of Palestinian origin exhibited in *Closer*, says:

> In a very general sense, I want to create a situation where reality itself becomes a questionable point, where they [the viewers] have to reassess their assumptions and their relationships to things around them [...]. I want the work to complicate these positions and offer an ambiguity and ambivalence rather than concrete and sure answers. (Antoni, 1998)

Namely, in mixing archived images of the Lebanese Civil War with fiction, Lebanese artists create the conditions for viewers to take up new affective, emotional and imaginative stances on the history of the war. Instead of statistics, chronologies, detailed biographies of religious and political leaders or detailed accounts of political factions' roles during the war, the Lebanese post-war generation of artists draw viewers into imaginary narratives that merge real and fictitious stories of martyrs, hostages and photographers. Studying the post-war Lebanese visual art scene, Rogers (2006) analyses the artists' works as "a *metaphor* for Lebanon's current political, social and cultural situation" (italics added). Metaphoric, aesthetic accounts

of the issue of memory deflects the artists from the contentious question of establishing a historical veracity that offers a cause and effect perspective on the civil ar. By mixing up archive and fiction, the Lebanese artists disencumber the question of truth from the difficult task of providing a historiography of past events; a task that a committee of historians[22] repeatedly failed to set, as no unified representation of history was satisfactory enough to conciliate the conflicting positions of the different sectarian political movements.

2.4.4 Truth and metaphor: redeeming memory

In this section I explore further the comparison between the strategies of post-war Lebanese artists, which, seen as metaphoric work, help to bypass the problematic question of establishing truth in narrating the civil war, and Ricoeur's (1975/1977) level of 'truth' in the metaphor. To do so, I draw on Enwezor's (2008) refined definition of truth, understood as "authenticity". I then show how Enwezor's definition of truth brings about a dimension of experimental documentary in contemporary art that is at once poetic-metaphoric and political. Finally, I point to Castoriadis's sense of a *tension* necessary entailed in viewers' experience of art as a shift of meaning. This tension revealed in Castoriadis's account of the metaphoric experience of art is precisely what also ascribes a political dimension to the metaphor.

Based on his analysis of *Documenta 11* (1998/2002) – a series of film installations that used the documentary form as the dominant aesthetic language – Enwezor (2008) shows how experimental documentary disrupts the way people are accustomed to make sense of media documentaries and opens up a "*vérité*/documentary space" (p. 97). Generally, documentaries in the news media bring viewers to vicariously experience the commiseration of the subject's pain (Kyriakidou, 2011), based on historical records of factual evidence and presented as truth. In brief, truth is imputed to the documentary format for the simple reason that documentary shows reality and reality is truth. In contrast, Enwezor demonstrates that artists who use a documentary format in their practices deconstruct the syllogistic form of reasoning

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[22]Resulting from the failure for historians to agree on a common written narrative of the civil war, the national curriculum concluded Lebanon's history in 1946.

based on the premise that truth is real. Mixing up archives and fiction, drawing on fictional figures through which the post-war generation of Lebanese artists often work, blurs the line between "reality and simulated reality" (Enwezor, 2008, p. 96). Such shifting relation with reality (i.e., what is already known and the record of factual evidence) confronts viewers with "the *conditionalities* of truth as process of exploring, probing, a search for truth, or shall we say, veracity[23]" (p. 97, italics added). In other words, experimental documentaries stretch the boundaries of the notion of truth, no longer reduced to the equation that truth means establishing evidence. For instance, Enzewor shows that the way in which Lebanese artist Walid Raad[24] and the Atlas Group use documentary fiction in *Missing Lebanese Wars* (1999) ventures to penetrate "the *larger* truth of the conflict" (Enzewor, 2008, p. 101, italics added); that is, a truth that bypasses sectarian competition over the control of speaking the truth.

How does Enzewor's scrutiny of how experimental documentaries trigger viewers to engage with a "*larger* truth" relate to Ricoeur's notion of truth in metaphor? In experimental documentary, claims Enzewor, artistic strategies that blur the boundaries between fiction and reality draw the viewers into a poetic experience as much as an aesthetic one. For instance, Walid Raad's historical fiction of the historian Dr Fakhouri in *Missing Lebanese Wars* (1999) incorporates documentary stylistics and creates a "mode of allegorical doubling" (Westmoreland, 2008, p. 214); this is meant to open up a semantic and imaginary distance between the signifier and the signified: a distance – the hallmark of metaphor – that supports viewers to rid themselves of their "alienation from the historical record" (Westmoreland, 2008, p. 211).

Furthermore, when Enzewor (2008) advocates that experimental documentaries propel viewers to recast their relation to truth as a "process of exploring, probing and search of truth", the author ascribes to the viewers a new role; viewers are compelled to re-signify and

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[23] The author borrows the French definition – *vérité* – which refers to lifelikeness, a trueness of life or authenticity.

[24] *Missing Lebanese Wars* (1999) displays the notebooks of Dr. Fakhouri, a fictitious historian of the civil war. These notebooks exhibit pages showing clippings from *Al-Nahar*, a Lebanese newspaper and, strikingly, of racehorses coming to the finish line with handwritten notes and calculations on each. Here, the artists make an analogy between the key Lebanese historians of the war and "avid gamblers" who meet "every Sunday at the race track" (Abdallah, Z., Awada, F., Raad, W. 1999, p. 1) The rigorous portrayals of the horse-races are an allegory of the question of the "possibilities and limits of writing Lebanese Civil War history" (p. 1). Established by artist Walid Raad, The Atlas Group Archive is an imaginary foundation whose aim is to research, document, study and produce audio, visual and literary artefacts that shed light on the contemporary history of Lebanon.

reassess the simplistic representational formulas of Lebanese history. Interestingly, the idea of the subject's interpretative stance is, for Castoriadis, what singles out the political dimension encompassed in the notion of a shift of meaning, as presented earlier in relation to art experience. The unpredictable and indeterminate feature of the shift of meaning, or, shall we also say, the metaphoric experience of art, allows viewers to choose among multiple signifiers, which is what Joas (2002) depicts as the experience of the articulation between "what has already been said and what has to be said" (p. 507). Accordingly, Joas goes on to point to the intrinsic tension that ensues as the subject's sense-making activity takes place between established meanings (i.e., "sedimentation of older articulation") and new experiences.

Returning to Enzewor's (2008) account of the ways in which the poetic-metaphoric feature of experimental artistic strategies propels viewers to explore the truth as a search for authenticity and not merely as endorsing a witnessing stance, I argue that such a renewed relation to the truth entails a tension that instantiates the political dimension of the metaphoric work of visual contemporary artists. Resonating with this argument, Westmoreland (2008), who explores experimental documentary in post-war Lebanon as revelatory of a crisis of representation, asserts that "making sense becomes a politically charged eruption of affective confusion" (p. 214). At stake is the possibility for viewers to disentangle their representations of the past from political and ideological agendas, which force Lebanese people to comply with simplified confessional narratives fraught with stories of conspiracy (i.e., the other community always being the perpetrators of violence).

In this section, I have used Castoriadis's concept of shift of meaning to explore the way in which, at a hermeneutic level, art experience can prove transformative for viewers, opening up a metaphoric space. Illustrating my contention with Lebanese artists' documentary stylistics, I have shown how artists' strategies draw viewers into such metaphoric spaces, fostering their take up of an 'interpretative' stance vis-à-vis the problematic question of truth in post-war Lebanon.

With Castoriadis's level of shift of meaning and Ricoeur's hermeneutic scrutiny of the metaphor, I draw towards the end of my theoretical investigation of Castoriadis's extensive concept of 'instituting imaginary'. This part has highlighted three interrelated levels of the

concept of 'instituting imaginary' (the level of the 'radical imagination' and self-alteration, the level of the subject/other relation, and the hermeneutic level). Finally, bringing Enzewor's (2008) scrutiny of the documentary mode in art to bear on Castoriadis's concept of 'instituting imaginary', I advocate that the transformative potential of a space for autonomy in relation to complex issues in societies resides in his political dimension harnessed with a poetic one. Studying the ways in which post-war Lebanese artists disrupt the production of historical evidence in Lebanon, Westmoreland (2009, 2008) argues that the imaginary stories elicited by such artistic strategies "halt the short circuit of the representational mimesis" (Westmoreland, 2009, p. 42) because they "draw attention to unconscious fantasies and their Freudian potential to *heal*" (Westmoreland, 2008, p. 211, italics added).

Conclusion

To account for the "lumpy concept" (Haugbolle, 2010, p. 83) of memory in post-war Lebanon, I have suggested that there is a need for a theoretical approach that opens up the dynamic scrutiny of collective memory interconnected with identity construction to Castoriadis's approach: Referring to the imaginary, interrogating the subject/other reflexive relation, looking at the power of imagination to call societies into question and highlighting the role of the metaphor. In this conclusion, I bring salient elements of the theory chapter to the fore and present the detailed research questions that guided the methodology.

The theoretical enquiry of the notion of collective memory started by examining the social dimension of memory and its key role in group formation, sense of belonging and cohesion through time. It ended up its journey by exploring the concept of 'memory work'; a concept which adds an ethical dimension to the scrutiny of memory, involving individuals and groups becoming actively engaged with reappraising and taking responsibility for past war misdeeds. According to Ricoeur (1990/1992), an individual's engagement with 'memory work' is related to the human capacity to take the perspective of the *suffering* of the other. Sturken's (1991) approach to memory and the processes of remembering and healing for a nation faced with a traumatic past gives flesh to Ricoeur's idea of taking the perspective of the suffering

other. The very presence of the survivors' injured bodies may be seen as a way to bring groups and nations in touch with something common to all human beings: suffering. As a result, it invites people to take the perspective of the other, and co-identify around a shared (emotional and affective) involvement with suffering. Yet Sturken also argues that instead of involving a possible a 'memory work' (or in Sturken's term, a remembering-healing process) representations of dis-membered bodies often impede collective healing processes. Haas (2002) brought to light how communities, faced with the burden of a shameful past, strive to refashion a historical narrative that rekindles a collective pride. Kalampalikis (2007) points out that imagination plays a key in role in the way groups and nations operate this 'historical bricolage'. But, as Haas shows, such communities (her discussion considers the inhabitants of Vichy) are caught up between lingering personal and community remembrances and institutional strategies to erase memories of contentious historical periods. In this way, the problem of unveiling repressed remembrances, 'memory work', engaging with the suffering of the other, theoretically seems like the snake biting its own tail.

Therefore, by unfolding the notion of the imaginary from Castoriadis' ontological, hermeneutic and political perspective, this thesis has attempted to open new room for reflecting upon the interplay between memory, identity construction and history. A key element is the understanding of the imaginary as triggering a *shift* of meaning. Such shifts of meaning, explored in relation to the metaphor, brought about the question of engagement with *truth*, illustrated by the Lebanese artists' discourses which bypass ideologically biased narratives of post-war Lebanon. Interestingly, this thesis has shown that truth is also central if the young generation are to rely on transmission of war memories from their elders (See section 2.3.3). Therefore, the potential of the imaginary, understood as a shift of meaning, may have some role to play in the way people reappraise their past and find a compromise between remembering and forgetfulness – not by sustaining taboos or collective amnesia, but as "work of forgetting" (Haas, 2002, p. 69), that may transform the moral and societal injunction to a "*dut*y of memory" (Haas, 2002) into a collective healing process of 'memory work'.

The conclusion of the theory chapter raises several research questions which the empirical part will investigate:

– How are imaginary elements (Kalampalikis, 2007) brought into discourses to support a particular historical narrative thread and sustain a sense of group belonging?

– How do individuals and groups engage in a shared emotional involvement with the suffering of the other (in this instance, the other religious sect)? How does this impact on particular attitudes towards what to remember and what to forget?

– Does tapping into imaginary elements nurture or impede the capacity of individuals and groups' capacity to reappraise past misdeeds and take the perspective of the other's suffering?

– Does engaging in a critical scrutiny of the past, reinforce the group's sense of belonging? Can it nurture the construction of a renewed model of collective identity?

These questions move us on to the following chapter, in which I present the methodology and the overall research design of the project.

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Methodology

The target of the current research is to explore how the next generation negotiate the conflicting narratives of their past history, and how it impacts on their identity construction, their search for meaning and compromise between remembering and forgetfulness. In this chapter, I present the research strategies and the three methods used to collect data: 1) exposure of young Lebanese ranging from 17 to 25 years old to the *Closer* exhibition at the Beirut Art Center and observation, 2) focus-groups 3) individual interviews. I present the role of the exhibition *Closer* as a quasi-experimental technique, and, in so doing, I point out the specicity of the present method used. Finally, a reflexive section on my role as female European researcher in a Middle Eastern country and an outline of analysis is presented.

3.1   Research strategies

Because the research concentrates on the Lebanese' relationship to the highly sensitive issues of memory of the war, and contentious issue of remembering, and, aims to uncover complex, and ambivalent dynamics of identity, this research is wholly qualitative in scope. The research uses qualitative techniques (observation, focus-group discussions and individual semi-structured interviews) to explore the phenomena under study, and will be presented in detail in the following sections.

3.1.1 Looking at the identity construction of the young Lebanese

In this thesis, my focus is on Lebanese young people ranging from 17 to 25 years of age. Adolescence and early adulthood is "a critical period in which individuals form and reform their cultural, social and political identity" (Erikson, 1959, p. 76). Central to young adults' concerns are questions pertaining to values, ideals, intimate relationships with their peers, their social lives, and what often results in new positioning in small groups (i.e., family and friends) as well as wider groups and institutions such as religion, politics and nation (Harb, 2010). Therefore, examining this age group gives us a glimpse into the future cultural, social and political dynamics of a society. In Lebanon, more than any other social group, Lebanese youth – also termed the post-war generation – face challenges of identity construction. They endorse the hopes of their parents' generation in the redeeming of parochial identities and in the heritage of the conflict-ridden history of the civil war. The post-war generation is often seen as a generation of peace-makers more connected to a globalised and cosmopolitan world (Jeha, 2008; Khalaf, 1993). Largely represented during the popular Spring 2005 uprisings (Chemaly, 2009), increasing numbers of young Lebanese citizens are politically active through their involvement in civil society organisations (Baladi & Sadaki, 2007). Namely, they are engaged in rejecting political sectarianism at the level of the state, and fostering democratic consciousness so as to face up to civil-war misdeeds. However, studies also reveal "the alarming trend of social and territorial enclaves among youth and the distrust and resentment powered by inter-communal stereotyping" (Heinrich Böll Stiftung report, 2009, p. iii) and indicate a "readiness for sectarian strife that transcends gender or sectarian differences" (Harb, 2010, p. 17). This age group prefers to live in neighbourhoods with homogenous religious groups as a guarantee of security. (Heinrich Böll Stiftung report, 2009, Hanf, 2003, Yassin, 2012). The Heinrich Böll Stiftung report revealed that, indicative of an underlying state of fear in the collective imaginary of the Lebanese youth, many respondents perceived that if they went into a region containing a majority of the opposite sect, they would "be harassed, beaten or even shot" (Heinrich Böll Stiftung report, 2009, p. 18). Feelings of fear are based on inter-communal stereotyping directed towards the sectarian other. Heinrich Böll Stiftung report (2009) concludes that there is reinforcement of narratives and myths

that demonize and dehumanize the other. Among the expressions used by the participants in the focus groups to depict the members of other communities, were: "dirty", "fanatic", "full of hatred", "terrorist", "have no God" and "self-centred". These examples echo Hanf's (2007) large-scale study on Lebanese opinions and attitudes on co-existence, which points to the prevalence of feelings of distrust in Lebanese society more than 30 years after the civil war officially resumed: 94 per cent of the respondents declared that they only trust close relatives, whereas 74 per cent trust their intimate friends.

3.1.2 Decisions for sampling strategy

In this thesis, my focus is on Lebanese young people ranging from 17 to 25 years of age. Focusing on the population of the Lebanese young people, I aimed to develop a sample for the research that accounts for the complexity of the Lebanese youth's relation to the issue of co-existing with the sectarian other and of remembrance of the war, and that sheds light on the contradictory dynamics that characterise Lebanese society in the post-civil-war period (Salamé, 2004; Barak, 2007; Traboulsi, 2003). The scholars point out that social and cultural dynamism and engagement with individual choice come up against loyalties to traditional forms of society. Social structures in Lebanese society are still deeply attached to conservative cultural traditions that espouse patriarchal behaviour (Saadeh, 1993; Khalaf, 1993; Hunsberger, 1999) and which dominate within the sects. Whether or not an increased number of young Lebanese people are willing to take charge of their destiny as individuals, most of them are not totally immune to allegiance to the norms and laws of the sects and religious communities. Sharabi (1988) has shown that individuals who exhibit patriarchal attributes and allegiance to norms are more likely to present high levels of religious belonging and are more disposed to conservative behaviour than any other.

In drawing a sample that seeks to encapsulate the social-cultural complexities of Lebanese society and conflicting positions of identity in which young Lebanese are caught up regarding the issues of remembering vs. forgetting and co-existing with vs. rejecting the sectarian other, I aimed to capture the "variation and variety in the phenomenon under study" (Flick, 2007, p. 27). The research is based on a convenience sampling process utilising 36 young Lebanese

nationals between 17 and 25 years old. The research sample involved Lebanese high-school and university students from seven different educational institutes[1] in Beirut and its suburbs – a mix of public and private, secular and religious and French, English and Arabic speaking. Although the research participants were all residents of Beirut and its suburbs, the region of their family origin accounts for a geographical spread of the sample. The participants came from five different governorates[2] – the north, Mount Lebanon, Beirut, Nabatiye and the south. The participants were non-fluent with contemporary art. The interview sample also sought to represent a variety of fields of study (humanities and applied, natural and social sciences) and a variety of socio-economic and religious backgrounds. Finally, the interview sample reflected the difference between apolitical and politically engaged Lebanese youth with few participants affiliated to political parties and coalitions (March 14 Alliance, March 8 Alliance, Free Patriotic Movement and Amal movement).

3.1.3 Exposure to works of art: a quasi-experimental technique

The peculiar nature of this research lies in its position: wholly qualitative in scope, while at the same time using a research setting that can be described as quasi-experimental. In this section, I seek to clarify the nature of the specific methodology – exposure of young Lebanese people to visual artwork – by relating it to strategies of data gathering that also use material and artefacts (pictures, films and radio broadcasts) as prompt for interviews and group discussions. By pointing to the limits of comparing the present method to other similar research methods and the theoretical approaches underpinning them, I mark out the hybrid nature of exposing young Lebanese to works of art in the uncontrolled environment of a museum.

Exposure to works of art has been used extensively in the field of art psychology and empirical studies on aesthetics in order to examine the cognitive processes at the heart of individuals' perceptions of the physicality of an art object (e.g., its forms, colour and materials).

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[1] These are Saint Joseph University, the American University of Beirut, The Lebanese University, Beirut Arab University, the Lebanese American University, Sagesse University and the Shoreline School.

[2] Lebanon is divided into six administrative governorates (*Muhafazahs*) that form the Lebanese Republic: North, Mount Lebanon, Beirut, Nabatiye, South and the Beqaa.

Photographs, paintings and other visual artefacts are rated by interviewees according to the degree of emotional arousal or liking that they elicit in the viewers. This results in an array of aesthetic judgments, affective and cognitive components that allow for an appraisal of the individuals' experience of art. Joy and Sherry's (2003) study on how imagination is embodied in the bodily, cognitive and emotional perception of viewers and how it informs their aesthetic experience presents some similarity with this research. The authors chose to conduct their study in the specific cultural context of a museum. They accompanied or simply followed groups of participants through the exhibits, took observational notes of the interviewees' spatial movements, and then interviewed them. Whether or not the use of visual material or exposing it to participants in a museum has close similarities with the present study, the focus of the present research is not a critical enquiry of art experience; it aims to capture how concepts of collective memory and history play out in young Lebanese people's discourses and shape their construction of identity; as such, it differs from a purely cognitive approach to the experience of art.

The use of artefacts to explore collective remembering traces back to Barlett's experimental study. Among the different methods used to show that the process of remembering is "influenced by factors that are social in origin" (Barlett, 1932, p. 95) (e.g., traditions, customs and social conventions), Barlett draws on sign material and picture material. Barlett selects a sample of picture representations to which the scholar applies the method of serial reproduction[3]. Using picture signs, a very basic semantic unit, as part of a detailed procedure, Barlett points out their function "as standing for themselves, or as conveying something" (1932, p. 96). There is a common feature between the use of artwork in our study and Barlett's use of picture signs: they are both symbolic.

Echoing the specific socio-historical context of this research, Igartua and Páez (1997) draw on Barlett's experiment and use visual material (films) to explore how societies remember traumatic political events. The authors consider cultural artefacts to be symbolic rituals of commemorations that allow social memory to have an external, cognitive and affective frames. The analysis of the contents of a number of films that relate to the Spanish Civil War

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[3] See section 2.1.1 of the theory chapter, which describes Barlett's method of 'serial reproduction'.

empirically shows that exposure to these films has a "de-dramatisation and relativity content which congruently affect the beliefs and attitudes towards the Civil War" (Igartua and Páez, 1997, p. 79).

However, Barlett, like Igartua and Páez (1997), scrutinise remembering processes that exclusively relate to symbolic devices (i.e., pictures-signs with Barlett and films with Igartua and Paez). In our research, the focus is on the interviewees' reflexion upon collective memory and remembering, connecting their own personal narratives with public discourses on memory. Moreover, what artwork brings about in the research setting that the basic unit of picture signs does not is the artists' worldview (e.g., ideological, religious, cultural) conveyed in the work of art. In summary, using artwork in this research involves the participants in a three-way relationship, which is not the focus in Barlett's and Igartua and Páez's experiments; it allows viewers to relate to the art object (Object) and the world (Alter) conveyed by the artistic discourse to which he or she (Self) relates.

Seeking to account for the use of artwork as a prompt to elicit opinions and thoughts on the phonomena under study leads us to consider Merton and Kendall's (1946, 1987) focused interview technique and Lahlou's (2014) notion of 'installation'. Born from a collaboration with Paul Lazerfeld on radio research and subsequent questions relating to communication and propaganda analysis, Merton's technique of the focused interview involves participants in a "*particular concrete situation*" (Merton & Kendall, 1946, p. 541) of seeing a film, hearing a radio broadcast, reading an article or reading a book before responding to an interview conducted by the researcher. One of the most convenient aspects of this technique is that it enables the researcher to control "the aspects of the situational experience leading to the observed outcomes" (Merton, 1987, p. 557). By controlling the stimulating prompt in the interview process (i.e., choosing a particular film) the researcher can identify *what* the number of reactions (e.g., "unpleasant", "anxiety provoking" or "stimulating") relate to. Merton's idea of providing a controlled interview situation that best equips the researcher to formulate a hypothesis and interpretation echoes Lahlou's notion of 'installation'. Proposed as a theoretical and ecological model for facilitating the interpretation of complex socio-cultural phenomena, 'installation' is conceived by Lahlou as an assemblage of "phonomena

(objects, patterns...) in space and time, to frame and construct the way we experience the situation" (Lahlou, 2014). Like the focused interview, "the installation carries its own momentum", explains Lahlou; it induces the participant to act in a specific way, according to the participant's involvement in a particular physical setting, his or her own interpretative systems, and the influence of the social fabric and others on the participants' way of behaving in the presence of these others. In summary, these different layers that limit individuals' behaviours afford to researchers the tools for disentangling the different factors involved in individuals' behaviours.

Lahlou's 'installation' theory and Merton's focused interview technique offer some insight for positioning the method used in the present research. Yet this research differs in a few points from the work of both scholars: a difference that primarily lies in the theoretical orientation of this thesis. Firstly, the characteristics of the physical environment of the space of the exhibition (e.g., a wide and white open space) and the way in which the artwork is displayed within this space will funnel the participants' reactions. Secondly, the artwork chosen carries a number of semiotic units, which can be understood as "iconographic stimulus that transmit a cluster of symbolic contents" (De Rosa, 1995, p. 130) to the participants. These "pre-established referents" (Ullan, 1995, p. 119) encourage the participants' own interpretative systems to see the artist's worldview. However, the theoretical approach of this thesis, by building a bridge between a scrutiny of the construction of collective memory and identity and the role of the imaginary, sublimation and metaphor, as a *displacement* of meaning, does not fully align with the behaviourist paradigm that underpins Lahlou's 'installation' theory. Nor do the discourses of the contemporary visual artists I have chosen meet the idea of providing a safe and controlled research setting that orientates the participants. Indeed, these artists aim to "rupture the expectations about narratives, images and subjectivities [...] and halt the short circuit of representational mimesis" (Westmoreland, 2007, p. 42).

Notwithstanding these differences, referring to Merton and Lahlou's approaches provides me with models for practical decisions regarding the research design used in this research. The decision to put the young Lebanese people into groups to view the exhibition, gathering them at a particular time, was made to enable me to assess how the dynamics and power

relations within each group could shape the interview process. Similarly, the observation technique aims to investigate how the physical environment of the research setting affects the participants' behaviour, and how viewing artwork in the presence of others (see Lahlou's layer of "societal control") affects their own interaction with the object of study; that is, exploring participants' relationship to remembering and forgetting the past and their collective identity. Finally, I note that the visual artists' discourses in the chosen exhibition make a point to free themselves from any pre-defined interpretative framework; therefore, they do not lend themselves to any categorisation. Nonetheless, I have chosen to present a brief analysis of the artwork according to a specific coding process, in order to best equip the reader to follow the empirical analytical chapters of the thesis. By adopting the aforementioned strategic choices, I hope to position the methodology of exposing young Lebanese people to artwork exploring collective memory beyond the debate that puts a purely behaviourist approach in opposition to a solely qualitative one that does not consider individuals' subjectivity to be capable of fitting in with any quantitative approach.

3.2 Research design

The study has a mixed-method research design, combining (i) exposure of five groups of young Lebanese to selected visual contemporary artworks in a 'natural setting' – a museum of art – with participant observation, (ii) five focus-group discussions and (iii) 24 individual interviews with the focus-group participants.

Above all, the decision to combine focus groups with individual interviews involving the same participants as a data-gathering technique rests upon the nature of the object of study. There is no more relevant technique to explore young Lebanese people's relationship to collective memory and their national history than recreating, within the social arena of group discussions, the conditions for studying the way in which memory is communicated, negotiated, contested and traversed by collective beliefs. Moreover, as stated in the previous section, I have chosen to gather the participants in groups to view the exhibition, rather than inviting them to wander in the space one by one in their own time. In doing so, I

want to explore how the presence of others will shape their experience of interacting with the artwork. It seems a slightly artificial choice of methodology, yet I purport to create a sense of collective experience of seeing the artworks, which they could refer back to. My concern is to allow them to refer to a similar experience, which a similar time frame could provide. In addition, as seen in the theory chapter, collective memory is a dynamic process insofar that it is constantly challenged by counter-memories and narratives and is affected by how individuals relate to the past and reinterpret it (Larkin, 2012). Therefore, when studying how the problem of remembering and forgetting the past and constructing collective identity in post-war Lebanon is explored by young Lebanese people, one should look at how personal experiences and residues of family narratives passed on to individuals interfere with the formation of a collective discourse on memory. It must also be noted that no other research on youth in post-war Lebanon (Baladi & Sarkis, 2007; Harb, 2010) or relating to post-memory (Chrabieh, 2007; Larkin, 2012) have combined the two techniques (Chrabieh, 2007; Larkin, 2012). By using a combination of focus-group discussions and individual interviews this thesis aims to account for the complex and dynamic aspect of collective memory, developed in the theory chapter.

3.2.1 Selecting the Beirut Art Center as a contextual environment for the data collection

My aim was to conduct the research in the 'natural' setting of a museum of art that offered the conditions for the reception of visual contemporary art. The purpose of the Beirut Art Center is to serve as a catalyst for the realisation of contemporary art projects and for interaction between local and international cultural players. The BAC accommodates what Rancière (2008) calls "alternative modes of circulation of information and forms of political discussion which tend to stand in opposition to dominant modes of information and discussion on common affairs" (p. 48).

Table 1: Research tools and research objectives

Research tools	Research objectives
i. Exposure to an exhibition of visual contemporary art in a natural setting	Generate a situation where participants experience viewing contemporary art.
ii. Participant observations	Grasp participants' behaviour as cues of their experiences of viewing *Closer*.
iii. Focus-group discussions	Identify collective meanings and group dynamics elicited by the experience of viewing the artworks. Establish specific issues related to remembrance of the civil war, conflicting narratives of the war and to co-existence with the sectarian other arising in the groups' discussions about their experiences of viewing *Closer*.
iv. Individual interviews	Emphasise personal experiences, past remembrances and future expectations in relation to the experience of viewing the artworks. Identify discrepancies with the collective meanings developed in the focus-group discussions.

The BAC was built in 2008 in a former factory located in the Jisr el Wati area, by the side of the Beirut River, outside of the city centre. It is an independent, stand-alone building with 1,500 square metres of space divided across two floors. Its walls are painted white. Along with its main exhibition space, the BAC includes a screening and performance room, an auditorium (where the focus-group discussions were conducted), a multimedia library and a bookshop. BAC organises regular activities, such as lectures, concerts, performances, video projections and workshops. The Beirut Art Center is exclusively funded by private donors.

Closer exhibited the work of eleven[4] artists and included five works by Lebanese national artists of the post-war generation (Mona Hatoum, Tony Chakar, Akram Zaatari, Cynthia Zaven and Linah Saneh). Apart from the Lebanese artists, one was French (Antoine d'Agata), one was Albanian (Anri Sala), one was an Iraqi resident of Britain (Jananne Al-Ani), two were American (Lisa Steele and Jill Magid) and one was a Palestinian resident of America (Emily Jacir). Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the artworks. A map of the exhibition in appendix 1 enables us to visualise the spatial setting in which the artworks were staged.

3.2.2 Participant observations

Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting chosen for study" (p. 79). Kawulich (2005) also states that participant observation is a process that enables researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in a natural setting through observing and participating in those activities. In using participant observation I attempt to identify non-verbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with who, grasp how participants communicate with each other, and check how much time is spent on various activities (Schmuck, 1997). DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) also suggest that participant observation can increase the validity of the study, as observation may help the researcher have a better understanding of the context and phenomenon under study. Because focus-group discussions and individual interviews are verbal means for the participants to recount their experience of the artworks, I aim to use observation as another source of information for exploring the phenomena under study.

3.2.3 Focus groups: a challenging data-collection technique in post-2005 Lebanon

Since the time when their main use was as market-research tools (Greenbaum, 1998), focus groups have gained prominence among analysis researchers to stress group dynamics, bringing to the fore the idea that meanings are socially constructed within groups. Focus groups offer

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[4]This research is based on nine out of the eleven artworks shown in the *Closer* exhibition. For technical reasons, it was not possible to view the works of Jill Magid (United States) or Cynthia Zaven (Lebanon) at the time of my fieldwork in the BAC.

an insight into the "synergistic effect" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990) between group members, as this research tool emphasises interactions, reactions, disagreements and tensions. It allows for multiple perspectives to be discussed, exchanged and counter-claimed and provide the social arena wherein to explore critical interactional dynamics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). My choice to use focus groups lies within this perspective.

In using focus groups as a data-collection technique in the post-war Lebanese context, I go against the grain of a research tendency that points to the drawback of group settings in Lebanon (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2009). It is argued that the official ethos of *kulluna lil-watan*[5] – harmony between communities – prevails in the social arena of groups of young Lebanese adults and, therefore, hinders the participants from discussing politically sensitive topics. In groups, the participants may conceal sectarian resentment and distrust behind discourses that value being with the other as an experience of diversity. Most research on Lebanese youth[6] is based on questionnaires and individual interviews. Only two recent studies have used focus groups to explore the dynamics of communal tensions among young Lebanese (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2009) and the way in which Lebanese young adults perceive social and spatial boundaries in their everyday life and construct symbolic barriers between themselves and other communities (Yassin, 2012).

My choice to use focus groups also lies in the fact that this research does not look at Lebanese youth in relation to topics as controversial as memory, history and the sectarian other *per se*, yet examines the ways in which making sense of critically engaged artworks and discussing this experience in a group setting mediates the young Lebanese adults' relationship to politically and ideologically sensitive issues. My aim is, therefore, to explore whether and how group discussions related to critical artworks exhibited in an artistic space can play out as

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[5] *Kulluna lil-watan* is the Lebanese National Anthem, adopted on 12 July 1927, seven years after the proclamation of the state of Greater Lebanon during the French mandate.

[6] In 2007 the Lebanese civic association Spring Hints launched a nationwide questionnaire with university students to examine Lebanese young people's opinions on confessionalism and power-sharing (Baladi & Sarkis, 2007). Harb (2010) conducted questionnaires with 1,200 Lebanese youths aged between 18 and 25 years old to survey their attitudes towards inter-sectarian relations, and inter-faith marriages. Chrabieh (2007) conducted individual interviews with Lebanese young people aged between 25 and 35 years old, and supplemented it with an analysis of electronic material, to scrutinize the perceptions of young Lebanese adults of war memories and peace-building. Finally, Larkin (2012) conducted 100 individual interviews with Lebanese youths aged between 15 and 22 years old to study the way in which Lebanese young people make sense of war narratives that precede their births and project Lebanon's future.

a "key democratic space" (Giroux 2001; Henaff & Strong, 2001), for it endorses an apolitical and non-sectarian character. Barrett (2003) points out that the collective interpretation in which groups of viewers engage with regard to images and contemporary works of art offers to learn about a community of interpreters. Although group settings in post-war Lebanon is challenging, in this research I will be attentive to the ways in which young Lebanese are capable or not of sharing their interpretations and co-constructing a collective meaning out of their encounter with the artworks; it will be indicative of the potential of critical contemporary art for renewing troubled relationships to the past and breaking sectarian boundaries.

Finally, I am aware that using focus-group discussions to capture participants' interpretation of their experience of viewing contemporary artworks may be a source of embarrassment for participants. Not only, as Hogg (1969) asserts, might the experience of art be difficult to accurately verbalise, but the participants might not be willing to recount their reception of art in front of others. Therefore, the focus-group technique is combined with individual interviews and participant observations.

Segmentation of the groups

The process of segmentation of groups was both controlled and opportunistic. It was opportunistic because it is difficult to constitute and recruit specific groups differentiated by religious characteristics in a society in which enquiring about the other's religious beliefs is highly sensitive, particularly in the post-2005 period. Many young Lebanese in my sample recounted how they were weary of taxi drivers, shoppers or even friends trying to work out their religious group before engaging in conversation. In line with the aforementioned contradictory social and cultural dynamics throughout Lebanese society, I aimed to develop a group segmentation that enabled a "comparative potential of the study" (Flick, 2007, p. 28). This was a factor that ensured, for me, a good quality of research. The Heinrich Böll Stiftung report (2009) and Yassin's (2012) study conducted focus-group interviews only with homogeneous youth groups belonging to the same sect in order to avoid "the difficulty participants in mixed groups may have in providing with their views of other

sectarian communities" (Yassin, 2012, p. 204). On the contrary, I decided to create not only homogeneous groups belonging to the same sect, but also heterogeneous groups belonging to different sects and various social and cultural references (see appendix 2). I wanted to tackle the following questions.

– How does encountering critically engaged visual works of art play out in groups in which all members tend to comply with the sect's norms and ideological references with regard to the issue of the collective memory? –

– How did encountering unfamiliar works of art play out in groups in which different cultures of references, attitudes towards sects' norms and attitudes towards the issue of memory and the sectarian other are represented?

Firstly, I constituted three groups (Groups 1, 2 and 3) in which the group members shared similar values and concerns and their cultural reference was dominated by their religious groups. I chose three natural groups; they were "self-referential and characterised by a common project and an awareness of the group's history, i.e. a collective memory" (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999, p. 175). I targeted three 'sites' (Flick, 2007) where religious belonging is the system of reference of the groups and where their socio-economic background was middle or low. They were: a group of Christians involved in the Sin el Fil Maronite Church in north Beirut; a group of Shiites studying in a high school and living in the south suburb of Dahiyeh; and a group of Sunnis committed to youth activities in the Islamic association Makassed, located in West Beirut.

Secondly, I constituted two more groups (Groups 4 and 5), in which the groups' members were not tied by a particular culture of reference and belonged to different religious groups. The participants were a mix of Christians and Muslims. The groups were selected from two 'sites' in two of the top private universities in Beirut (the American University of Beirut and St Joseph University); these universities are both known for hosting students' associations that strive for secularism and deconfessionalism of Lebanese institutions (Baladi & Sarkis, 2007). Contrary to the three groups mentioned earlier, I expected these groups to have more diverse representation of the contradictory tendencies over the issues of memory and the

sectarian other. It must be noted that I also targeted two campuses (Hadath and Fanar) of the public Lebanese University[7] to constitute a sixth group. I recruited seven participants through a gate-keeper. However, five of the young Lebanese cancelled a day before their visit to the Beirut Art Center. Eventually, I conducted the visit with two male participants, who I interviewed individually after their exposure to *Closer*. I counted them in the interview sample.

Group 1   Group 1 was located in Sinn el Fil, a suburb north of Beirut in the main district of Mont Lebanon, where, essentially, Maronite Christians live. Participants of Group 1 were all active in the Maronite Christian Church of Sin el Fil. The Maronites of the Sin el Fil area are either middle class or relatively lower class, and have displayed fear of non-Christian challenges to the overall Maronite political advantage during the civil war and in its aftermath (Harris, 2006). In line with this, the Maronite Christians of Sin el Fil have been more likely to gravitate towards Christian right-wing organisations with paramilitary offshoots such as Kata'ib and Lebanese Forces' political parties. Group 1 comprised 8 participants (6 males and 2 females) aged between 18 and 25 years old. The participants were studying in the field of applied and natural sciences and came from a middle and upper-class socio-economic background. They all spoke French and the group discussion was conducted in French.

Group 2   Dahiyeh, where Group 2 was selected, is one of the most deprived Shiite Muslim areas in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Dahiyeh is the Beirut stronghold of the Shiite Islamist group, Hezbollah. Prior to the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict, it was a residential area as well as a commercial area with shopping centres and individual shops. In 2006 the area suffered massively during the Israeli-Hezbollah War, as most of the destruction took place in residential areas, damaging civilian infrastructure on a large scale (Amnesty International, 2006)[8]. The participants were selected from the Shoreline School Academy, which aims to

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[7]In May 2008, as Beirut was paralysed by Hezbollah gunmen clashing with supporters of Fouad Siniora's government, the Lebanese University was a theatre of sectarian fighting between politically active students: supporters of the March 8 and March 14 Alliances.

[8]Amnesty International (2006) reported the widespread destruction of apartments, houses, electricity and water services, which suggests a policy of punishing the Lebanese government and the civilian population sympathetic to Hezbollah, as was the case in Dahiyeh.

provide a safe environment for education support. Group 2 comprised 9 participants (6 males and 3 females) aged between 17 and 23 years old. They were studying in the field of applied sciences and came from a lower-class socio-economic background. A few of them spoke only Arabic, and the group discussion was conducted in English and Arabic with the presence of an Arabic/English interpreter.

Group 3   The Philanthropic Islamic Sunni Association of Beirut, called the Makassed Association, provided a 'site' for selecting Sunni Muslim participants. Since its creation in 1878, the aims of the association have been the development of its community based on Islamic religious principles. The association is located in Western Beirut's centre and all the participants recruited from Makassed were actively involved in the religious youth activities. Group 3 comprised 5 participants (1 male and 4 females) aged between 17 and 19 years old. They were in the field of applied sciences and came from middle-class socio-economic background. They all spoke English and the group discussion was conducted in English.

Group 4   Participants in Group 4 were selected from the American University of Beirut (AUB). AUB, founded in 1866, is English-speaking and is placed at the top of the scale of universities in Lebanon (El-Amine & Faour, 1998). Most of the students in the group were from an upper-class socio-economic background. It has been reported that in the recent years "AUB is witnessing a strong reprisal of the Secular and non-sectarian independent movements, which attracted the attention of the Lebanese media" (Baladi & Sarkis, 2007, p. 34). AUB's secular student movements[9] and clubs have been pioneering in launching many campaigns and activities concentrating on the importance of non-sectarian politics. Group 4 comprised 6 participants (2 males and 4 females) aged between 17 and 21 years old. The participants were a mix of Christian Greek Orthodox from the north, Sunni Muslims from the south and Shiites from the south, with one participant politically affiliated to the Amal[10]

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[9]The two major secular organisations in AUB are the Secular Club and No Frontiers. In the 2007 elections, the alliance of the Secular Club and No Frontiers won the majority of seats in the Faculty of Health Sciences and all graduate seats in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, which reflected their strength in the university.

[10]The Amal Movement, which means 'hope' in English, is a Lebanese political party associated with Lebanon's Shi'a community. It was founded as the "Movement of the Dispossessed" in 1974 by Imam Musa al-Sadr. Amal is currently in an alliance that includes the Free Patriotic Movement, Hezbollah, and the Progressive Socialist Party.

movement. The participants were studying in the field of applied, natural and social sciences and came from middle and upper-class socio-economic backgrounds. The participants spoke English and the group discussion was conducted in English.

Group 5   St Joseph University (SJU is ranked second after AUB) on the scale of top universities in Lebanon (El-Amine & Faour, 1998). SJU was founded by the Jesuits in 1875 and its students speak mostly French. The SJU group participants were unexpectedly all female, after two male participants cancelled at the last minute. They all spoke French and the group discussion was conducted in French. Group 5 comprised 8 participants aged between 20 and 23 years old. They were all studying in the field of the humanities, French literature and cultural tourism. They came from middle and upper-class socio-economic backgrounds. They were a mix of Greek Orthodox and Maronite from the north, Christian Orthodox from Tripoli, Druze from the Chouf and Shiite from Nabatieh (in the south). Most of them were adamant about marking their distance from any political parties or sects.

3.2.4   Individual interviews

While focus groups provided a social arena for the participants to share, negotiate and disagree regarding the role that contemporary art can play regarding post-war Lebanese history and issues of collective memory and identity, individual interviews were conducted to enable the same participants to express in more depth their experiences of viewing the artworks, as well as the opinions and thoughts they might have concealed during the group discussions. As Haugbolle (2005) notes: "extreme sensitivities surrounding the memory of the war run high in any public discussion" (p. 202). I assumed that the one-to-one setting of individual interviews would provide a freer and safer environment for the participants, not only to elaborate on ideological and political issues regarding their history but also to unfold "residues of memories of past and narrative under construction" (Gaskell, 2000, p. 42). Individual interviews offer less constrained time-space for the interviewees to draw associations between their past experiences and the artworks, and allow the participants to elaborate on their experience in encountering unusual contemporary works of art. As stated

previously, individual interviews were conducted to increase the validity of the research and to provide a safeguard for the exploration of the phenomena under study, because the focus groups might have generated censorship among the participants.

3.3 Data collection

I used three distinct techniques for generating the data. Firstly, participant observation was used to collect the data while the young Lebanese adults were visiting the exhibition, *Closer*. Secondly, focus-group discussions were conducted straight after the exhibition. Thirdly, individual semi-structured interviews with the same participants were conducted between 3 and 6 days after the exhibition and the focus-group discussions.

The fieldwork was conducted between March and April 2009 and lasted for six weeks. At that time, a political and civil climate of uncertainty prevailed among the Lebanese population. The parliamentary elections were to be held on 7 June 2009 and, for the first time since the civil war, the general belief was that Hezbollah would win the parliamentary elections. As reported in early June 2009 by Wählisch (2009), "whether a crisis will immediately take hold after the elections is not yet definite, but given past experiences it is not completely unlikely" (p. 54). The regions of Tripoli in the North of Lebanon, Baabda in the mountain region, Jezzine in the south and Zahle in the Bakaa area were considered to be at risk of political and confessional conflicts. In any case, the upcoming elections were perceived as a challenging test for Lebanon; at stake was the stability of Lebanon's democratic institutions. It is in the context of suspicion among the communities; namely, fear from the Christians and heightened tensions between the 8 and 14 March political alliances, that the data were collected.

Table 2: Methods of data collection

Groups	N	Observations	N	Focus-group discussions	N	Individual interviews
Group 1	7	Visiting the *Closer* exhibition	7	Sharing impressions and views of the *Closer* exhibition and relating it to today's Lebanon, the civil war, and questions of remembrance of the war.	3	Drawing on personal thoughts and past experiences to make sense of the *Closer* exhibition and relating it to the past history of Lebanon (parents' transmission of their experience of the war) and the question of living with others' communities. Projecting into the future in Lebanon, future expectations and seeing the future in the exhibition. Feedback on the focus groups.
Group 2	8		8		3	
Group 3	5		5		3	
Group 4	6		6		5	
Group 5	8		8		8	
Group 6 cancelled: 2 interviewees	2		0		2	
Total:	36		34		24	

3.3.1 Exposing the groups to the *Closer* exhibition at the Beirut Art Center: set-up and observations

The participants were contacted through two ways. For Groups 1, 2 and 3, a non-government organisation (NGO) gate-keeper enabled me to approach the religious communities in Sin el Fil (Maronite Christian students), Makassed (Sunni Muslim students) and Dahiyeh (Shiite Muslim students). For Group 4 (AUB students) and Group 5 (SJU students), a lecturer spoke about the project to his students at the universities. Those who were interested gave their e-mail address and I contacted them. They were all given an introductory letter explaining the purpose of the research, the names of the artists and a short outline of the *Closer* exhibition (see appendix 3). I came to the universities or the participants' local communities (for Groups 1, 2 and 4) to present the research to the students prior to the exhibition day. Anonymity was

guaranteed and I explained that the interviews would be recorded. The students' participation was on a voluntary basis, and water and juice were provided in the room after the focus-group discussions. The participants were able to talk to each other informally while they had these refreshments. After confirming their interest, however, a few students cancelled their participation in the research.

On the day of the visit, I accompanied the participants of Groups 2 and 4 by minibus to the Beirut Art Center. Participants of Groups 1, 3 and 5 made their own way to the centre. Once each group arrived at the Beirut Art Center, they were received by me – for the groups I did not accompany – and the curator (Sandra Dagher). I first reminded the participants of the purpose of the research and, in order to put them at ease, I insisted on the fact that they could move around the exhibition space at their convenience; they were given no orders for the visit and a broad time length for the visit was assigned (between 45 and 90 minutes). Then, the curator provided the participants with a brief introduction[11] to *Closer*. She explained her choices in selecting the artworks, and gave a description of the artists, their works and the context in which these artworks were made. At the end of the exhibition, the curator also answered questions from the participants to clarify their understanding.

I let the groups wander through the exhibition. I performed a practice of participant observation, which consisted of following them through the exhibits, noting how they used the space and time and observing the ways in which they approached the artworks. I was also attentive to how the participants interacted with each other while they were wandering through the centre. I adopted the observer stance (Kawulich, 2005), as I was not member of the group being studied. My observation activities were known to the groups.

Data from practices of observation were recorded through notes. The data gathered through the observational process was used as an aid to the analysis and interpretation of the focus-group discussions and interviews. It offered a valuable backdrop to my research, providing a

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[11]Based on experimental research, Conliffe (1999) states that knowledge of causal explanations related to the context in which the art is made is needed to enhance novices' percipience of artwork in galleries. Similarly, Russel (2003) shows that providing extensive information about a painting, such as the artist's biography and the context of the work, has a great effect on the appraised understanding and emotion. Explanations of *Closer* were important because the participants in the current research were all non-fluent with visual contemporary art.

deeper understanding of the participants' experience of encountering contemporary works of art in relation to their history.

3.3.2 Setting the focus-group discussions

All the focus groups were conducted immediately after the students had finished visiting the exhibition and took place in the auditorium of the centre. The seats were arranged in a circle, and the recorder was placed on a chair behind us. Here, again, I explained the topic and the anonymity of the research process. I said a few words about the exploratory nature of the research; I was not expecting any correct answers. A consent form was read and signed. For Groups 2 and 4, a Lebanese student in psychology from the American University of Beirut assisted me as a facilitator of the group discussions. As some Group 2 participants were not fluent in English or French (my native language), the facilitator had to translate a few exchanges from Arabic into English. The length of the discussions was between 50 minutes and one-and-a-quarter hours. All were audio-recorded digitally. After the focus-group discussions, I asked each participant to fill in a two-pages questionnaire (see appendix 4) that covered the demographic, social and economic background of the participants, their university and discipline of study, their religious and political affiliation, their extra-curricular activities, their expectations for the future and how frequently they travel abroad.

Overall the participants seemed to be interested in the topic; the idea of contributing to a research project and of discovering an unusual field of knowledge and culture in Lebanon – contemporary visual art – were perceived in the first instance as appealing. The group discussions were conducted immediately after the participants' exposure, which enabled me to gather the data in real time, by following the processes in the making (Zittoun, 2006). I agree with Zittoun, who states that this technique allows for preserving the richness of the data, as a great deal of emotion permeated the group discussions. However, I acknowledge

that viewing the *Closer* exhibition made a few[12] participants uneasy about elaborating on their impressions, feelings and opinions straight after their exposure to the artworks.

The particular context of the focus groups; that is, eliciting at times emotional responses in asking the participants to recount their experience of *Closer* and relating it to sensitive issues, informed my role as researcher-moderator. I sought to encourage the young Lebanese to participate and actively interact with each other, but a great deal of my attention was focused on containing the group dynamics, seeking to handle tensions arising between few members of the groups.

I designed a schedule for the focus groups that was flexibly used as a guide to the areas I wanted to cover (the topic guide can be found in appendix 5). These areas were as follows.

– Participants' impressions and reactions to viewing the artworks of *Closer*.

– How their encounter with *Closer* elicited reflections upon today's Lebanon.

– How they perceived their past during the civil war, their view on how the war should be remembered and their perception of the present days in Lebanon.

3.3.3 Individual interviews

Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis among the young Lebanese who participated in the focus-group discussions. It was explained at an early stage of the selection process that individual interviews with the participants would be conducted soon after the focus groups as part of the whole research. Of the 36 participants in the focus groups, 24 young Lebanese agreed to be interviewed individually. I understood that a number of the students were not able to dedicate more time to this research. I also perceived there was resistance to meeting individually with me. It must be mentioned here that conducting fieldwork in Lebanon was, at times, difficult. Among the greatest challenges to conducting qualitative research in the Middle East, Clark (2006) reports that the political climate affects the researchers' choice of interview techniques. For instance, one reason why in Group 2 only four young

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[12]Two participants (one from Group 3 and one from Group 5) expressed concern about the lack of time between the moment of their exposure to *Closer* and the discussions.

Lebanese were interviewed is that I was personally intimidated by a Hezbollah agent while I was conducting the interviews in Dahieyh. I then did not feel in a position to be able to continue the interview process.

The interviews were prompted by stimulus material; at the beginning of the discussions I proposed that the participants should look at the pictures of the artworks so that they could recall their experience of the exhibition (See the topic guide of the individual interviews in appendix 6). The interviews were conducted between 6 days and 1 week after the focus groups. I encouraged the participants to recount their personal stories and memories as well as to give their feedback on the focus groups (e.g., how did they feel during the discussions? did they feel upset by other participants' opinions?)

Investigating the dimension of the future in the individual interviews

Although the questions covered with the participants were similar to those in the focus groups, I wanted to tackle another dimension in the individual interviews; I wanted to grasp the way the participants imagine the future in Lebanon, their expectations for the future as young Lebanese actors in their society, and finally which image of the future (optimistic or pessimistic) they thought the *Closer* exhibition revealed.

My choice of questioning the participants on this last dimension stems from my attempt to conceptualise art experience as space for autonomy; be it deployed in relation to the individual subject reflecting upon the other's discourse (Castoriadis), the individual striving to overcome resistances set against his or her memories, or the individual who becomes immersed in a mourning process of his or her relationship to the past (Freud and others). The notion of autonomy is set within the temporal dimension that stretches from the past, goes through the present and towards the future. Even though my concern is to explore the relationship of the young Lebanese to the issue of memory and to the sectarian other through their experience of encountering art, I am bound to take into account their perception of the future. This choice also aligns with Angvik and von Borries (Eds.) (1997), who drew on

the notion of historical consciousness, which includes the past, present and future, to study the European youth perception of history.

3.4 My role as a European woman studying a politically sensitive issue in a Middle East country

In this section, I reflect upon my position as a female researcher and outsider to Lebanese society, enquiring into the politically and historically sensitive issue of memory and collective identity in a post-war society. Reflexivity entails the researcher being aware of his effect on the process and outcomes of research based on the premise that "knowledge cannot be separated from the knower" (Steedman, 1991, p. 53) and that, "in the social sciences, there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself", as argued by Denzin (1994, p. 86). In carrying out qualitative research, it is impossible to remain *outside* our subject matter; our presence, in whatever form, will have some kind of effect.

Although my aim was, as moderator-researcher of the groups, to adopt a position of neutrality, I was percieved as holding different roles. I also acknowldege that I was not affectively involved in the same way with each group. My position as a European woman, outside the regional rivalries of the Middle East (i.e.; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) and of the Lebanese political game, helped to gain some groups' and participants' confidence and facilitated the discussions; with some other participants and groups, it did not. Though I lack distance and there may be entangling explanatory variables related to my investment with the groups and the participants, I suggest that my emotional engagment with the participants and the way they interracted with me results from a combination of gender, language, and field of study. I also must account for a personal tendency to sympathise with others' experience of suffering. For Georges Devereux (1967) a reflexive account of the research process does not merely cast light on the core of the research – the data – but the subjectivity of the observer in the study of human behaviour should itself be treated as a source of data. More pointedly, the researcher's anxieties, defensive manoeuvres, are part of strategies, and decisions in making sense of the data. As such, for Devereux, reflecting

upon one's own "counter-transference[13] is a crucial tool that allows for shedding light on the possible distortions" (Devereux, 1967, p. 15). In the following, I show how particular dynamics betwwen *me* as researcher-moderator and the groups' members revealed power issues and influenced the process of conducting the groups and the production of the data.

The groups which were the most difficult to conduct were Group 1 (Maronites from Sin el Fil church studying applied sciences) and Group 2 (Shiite Muslims from Dahiyeh studying applied sciences). Although there were a few women in each of the groups, it quickly seemed to me that the groups were male-dominated. In particular, two men naturally assumed the role of leader in each group, which I experienced as competing with my own position of moderator. The best illustration of this occurred when the leader of Group 2 took over the lead of the focus group guide by reversing the moderator-interviewee role. He started to question me, challenging my role as a European researcher in a country that was engulfed by war. Even though it is difficult to disentangle the factor of gender (a woman) and geopopolitic proximity (coming from a European country), the male Shiite's perceptible enjoyment when confronting me in front of his peers belies Clark's (2006) statement that, in Middle East countries "Western women enjoy the advantages of being a 'third gender' [...]. They are often seen as less threatening" (p. 421). Deep down, it was probably gratifying for a young male Shiite to get the better of in the social arena of a group, a European researcher, percieved as ideologically aligned with the Western US-Saudi alliance. I was irritated by his disruptive attitude. Although I did not let him carry on, by swiftly taking back the lead of the questions, what unsettled me most was his suspicion about my genuine motivation to enquire about memory and the history of the civil war. I was caught up in uneasy feelings, almost identifying myself as a *voyeur* of a country's difficulties, remembering some Lebanese artists' criticism about occidental tendencies towards a simplistic view and interest in war-related topics; Is "war sexy?" suggested ironically a Lebanese journalist (Gilbert, 2009).

However, aware that exploring the thoughts of young Lebanese about memory and collective identity was a sensitive area, I was always concerned not to push the discussion about

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[13]Countertransference is a key process in psychoanalysis. It is defined as redirection of the analyst's feelings toward the anlysand, or, more generally, as the analyst's emotional entanglement with the analysand's behaviour.

the history of their conflicting narratives too far. In so doing, I put into practice – although not consciously – the ethical imperative of research ("do not harm"), which is, as Wood (2006) states, "intensified in conflict zones by political polarisation" (p. 373). My discomfort with the Shiite group from Dahieyh can also be explained by the challenge of conducting qualitative research with participants who spoke a different language to me (Williamson et al., 2011); a number of them only spoke Arabic, whilst others expressed themselves in English. Even though an English/Arabic interpreter greatly facilitated the cross-language discussion, when summarising all that participants said, my attention was constantly divided between not leaving out information from participants and handling the group's tendency to drift from the focus of the study.

Two groups, although conducted in English, sometimes used a little Arabic. In Group 3 (a homogeneous group of Sunni Muslims studying applied sciences) and Group 4 (mixed religious background and field of study), there were a few particular moments of tension between the participants, and statements revealing conflicting ideological positions related to remembering the war were voiced in Arabic. A consequence of the groups switching from English into Arabic when disputing how and whether the civil war should be remembered is that I experienced my role of moderator as being relegated to an *outside* position, at distance from the group dynamics. It reminded me that, as a European researcher, I may always lack the *insider*'s perspective which would enable me to capture subtle details and thoroughly understand the issue of memory in post-war Lebanon. A way to moderate these heightened moments was to refocus the discussion back to the participants' perception of the artworks. A deeper reading brings me to suggest that I felt myself drawn to an ambivalent position: sympathysing with the participants who were challenged by the rest of the group, and, at the same time, close to those who stood for challenging their peers' justification for forgetting the past war, arguing that it could [in the worst case] lead to recurring warfare.

The language factor is obviously not the main variable explaining some of the difficulties between me and the group members. The participants in Group 1 (Maronite Christians from the Sin el Fil church) all expressed themselves in French, my mother tongue. However, as mentioned above, the contrast between the leading position of one male participant (and

other participants repeating his views) and two women who remained quiet in spite of my probes aimed at triggering a balanced discussion, caused me some discomfort. It was clear that the group's negative reactions to the artists' personal account of the war, and the exhibition of nude and intimate bodies, were obstacles to the flow of the discussion. Paying attention again to my role as moderator, I realise that I did not much investigate the group's initial rejection of *Closer*. Group 1's discussion lasted less than one hour and was the shortest interview of the sample. As much as I did not feel at ease with enquiring about the war, I realise that I held myself back when it came to exploring *why* body-related artworks sparked fury among the participants. I shall acknowledge that I probably identified myself as the cause of the group's discontent since I exposed them to taboos. My possible feelings of guilt towards these young Lebanese was amplified by their recounting their families' memories of hardship.

Undoubtedly, I was the most comfortable with Group 5 (eight women from mixed religious backgrounds stuying humanities). The group's specificity – all female – allowed for more introspection about the group's involvement with the themes of the artworks, especially with intimacy. I also assume that the participants perceived my position as a female European woman and researcher, not only as non-threatening (Clark, 2006) but also as a model of individualism and emancipation, things which a number of them called for. Another important factor facilitating the identification between me and the group members was their homogeneous background in a field of study similar to mine: study of humanities certainly opened the participants up to artistic practices and symbolic representations. However, as will be shown in the empirical analysis, the eight women did not reacted homogeneously to the themes of memory, war, history and intimacy in *Closer*. This is demonstrated by the way one group member shifted from French to English when she expressed cathartic feelings related to the Lebanese denial of their traumatic past. "I had tears in my eyes" said the young Orthodox Christian at the beginning of the discussion. Here, I surmise that using the English language, enabled her to stand out from a few of her peers, who banalised the exhibit of war in *Closer*.

3.5 Data analysis

In exploring how Lebanese young adults tap psycho-social resources into their encounter with contemporary visual artwork in order to construct an identity outside of conflicting representations of the past and politics of paranoia and fear of the sectarian other, my aim was to "make sense of the phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). Therefore, the analytical paradigm of this research is interpretative and hermeneutic. In this instance, young Lebanese are invited to bring meanings to, or, shall we say, make sense of, their encounter with visual works of art. By this, I mean they engage in interpretation, which Barrett (2003) defines as the following: "to interpret is to make sense. It is to see something as *representing* something. [...] It responds to the question: does it change my view of the world? "(Barrett, 2003, p. 7) In his seminal *Ways of Seeing*, Berger (1977) states that "we never look at one thing: we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves" (p. 9). It is by considering the subjectivity and desires that the participants bring to bear on a visual artefact (i.e., photograph, video or installation) that I understand the process of encountering works of art.

With that in mind, two steps in the analytical process have been used to yield the data from the empirical material: I first concentrated on the five focus-group discussions, which I analysed using two complementary approaches to group dynamics and thematic analysis. Secondly, I examined the 24 individual interviews using a typological approach.

3.5.1 Focusing on group dynamics

The first phase of analysis focused on the five focus-group interviews conducted straight after each group had visited the *Closer* exhibition. In accordance with my choice to have homogeneous groups belonging to the same sect and heterogeneous groups belonging to different sects and various social and cultural references, I aimed to examine how group members' withdrawals, tensions and conflicts crystallised around the group's engagement with the artworks. My focus on the ways in which conflicts and tensions emerge and are

handled by the groups directed my analytical choice of group interaction and its key area of group dynamics. Farnsworth and Boon (2010) point out that group discussions are not limited to participants' verbal behaviour and involve more complex processes, mobilising "latent identifications and common experiences between groups members" (2010, p. 610). More pointedly, Anzieu (1999) defines the group as "the home of two kinds of structural conflict; conflicts between the individual and the group, conflicts between the group and society" (1999, p. 320). In line with Anzieu's perspective, my concern was to pay attention to what it means when group members diverge, clash, or conform with each other and converge to a norm in discussing their experiences of viewing *Closer*. I sought to understand the following.

    – How processes at play in the group discussions revealed cultural, communal and political dynamics prevailing in the public sphere in the post-2005 Lebanese Cedar Revolution.

    – Whether the discussions revolving around the key themes of memory and intimacy in the artworks highlighted specific group dynamics; that is, whether processes of censorship and dissimulation relating to memory and sectarian issues were reinforced or whether dynamics were indicative of alternative discourses and helped group members to transcend cultural, political and religious divides.

In addition to looking at group dynamics, I performed a thematic analysis following Attride-Stirling's (2001) and Braun and Clarke's (2006) stages for organising themes in order to draw meaningful patterns from the focus groups. Consistency in the analysis was also achieved by following Howarth's (2002) systematic steps for identifying and examining key themes alongside the description of 10 criteria[14]. I also paid attention to the recurrence of the artworks quoted in the course of the discussions; for instance, I asked: how many times are the artworks quoted in each group? The participants' reading of the artworks; that is, the

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[14]Howarth (2002) establishes the criteria of *frequency* with which a theme appears, *extensiveness* of a theme, apparent *intensity* and emotion with which it is expressed, *evaluation* as positive or negative, *perceived validity* as to be seen as 'true' or 'false', *associated themes, contradictions, absence, group dynamics*, and *moderator* as to mark the impact of the researcher's presence.

type of descriptions and how detailed the descriptions were, was also carefully reported (see appendix 7).

Combining the two analytical approaches of group dynamics and thematic analysis enabled me to throw light on relations between content and rhetoric *and* specific group dynamics.

3.5.2 Individual analysis: from thematic analysis to the construction of typology

The second phase of analysis focused on the 24 individual interviews conducted after the focus groups. The main research objectives were as follows.

– Identify patterns of involvement with the *Closer* exhibition and related themes that account for ways of making sense of critically engaged artworks.

– Find explanatory relations between the way in which the participants invest positively, or dismiss the exhibition and its key themes (memory of the civil war, history and intimate body) and the participants' positions of identity[15] in relation to the issues of memory and of the sectarian other.

– Identify individual comments that are discrepant with the way the same individuals positioned themselves within the groups and establish the discrepancy with collective meanings elaborated in the focus-group discussions.

Looking for explanatory relations between the specific engagement of the young Lebanese adults with the artworks and the way in which these young adults related their impressions, thoughts and reactions to *Closer* in relation to the issue of memory of war and co-existing with the sectarian other in post-war Lebanon led me to engage in a more complex analytical approach than only thematic analysis. Even though I align with Coffey and Atkinson (1996), who state that the use of coding and sorting and the identification of themes is "an important, even indispensable part of the qualitative research process" (p. 45), this is not an end in

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[15]In setting the adjective 'position of' alongside the word 'identity' in the terminology 'position of identity' I align with Parker's (1997) twofold concept of identity. The author acknowledges the individual's agency and desire as capable to shape historical processes, cultural structures, power and ideologies in the production of 'complex subjectivities'. At the same time, Parker (1997) also understands individuals' agency and desire as being shaped by operations of social structures and discourses.

itself. One must get beyond the descriptive level of analysis in order to discover explanatory relations (Gibbs, 2007).

After 'de-contextualising' my data set into units of meaning (Tesch, 1990) and looking at the emerging themes and subthemes following Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic analysis, I started to categorise and compare the data. The 24 interview transcripts were summarised using the following key categories as a structure.

– Overall impression on *Closer*.

– Themes and different registers[16] of the artworks related to the participants' positive experience of encountering *Closer*.

– Themes and different registers of the artworks related to the participants' negative experience of encountering *Closer*.

– Participants' perception and images on their past and the recent period of history (the 2005 Cedar Revolution and the 2006 July War).

– Participants' perception of the issue of co-existing with the sectarian other.-

– Participants' perception of the future in Lebanon, their expectations for the future and the representation of the future in *Closer*.

The summaries included some demographic and socio-economic information as well as information related to the participants' university and discipline of study, their religious and political affiliation, their extra-curricular activities, their expectations for the future and the frequency of travelling abroad. This provided me with invaluable elements to contextualise the interviews and contributed to ensuring accuracy in the operation of categorising the data.

I drew on Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestion of organising the data into tables in order to facilitate the exploration of patterns across the data (see appendix 8). This enabled me to explore questions such as: is there an explanatory relation between the young Lebanese

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[16]This research uses Venn's (2009) terminology of 'register' as the author explores how the aesthetic, affective and ethical registers of a South African artist's contemporary works have the potential to displace identities. This research points to two registers in *Closer*: the aesthetic register related to the participants' sensitivity to the artworks *per se* and the expressive (emotional, affective) register, which, as will arise in the findings, entails an ethical component, opening up to truth and human values.

adults' negative impressions of *Closer* and their perception of the thematic of the memory of war in the artworks? It also became clear that the young Lebanese who invested positively the thematic of memory of war elicited by their encounter with *Closer* were those who favoured a critical position in relation to remembering the civil war; that is, those who were inclined towards a renewed way of remembering the war, distancing themselves from the ethos of collective grievance and willing to endorse, as young Lebanese citizens, responsibility for war misdeeds.

Comparing and categorising the data from the 24 interview transcripts has pointed towards three types of engagement with *Closer* and its artistic registers in relation to three characteristics of young Lebanese identity positions. Defining a typology as "a way to categorise data along a continuum to distinguish between different types of behaviour, beliefs or attitudes" (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011, p. 254), scholars warn social researchers not to force the data into a typology; one of the challenges of organising, comparing or conceptualising the data into a typology is to "have clearly defined categories so that the participants can be categorised into only one type" (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011, p. 255) and do not overlap with another type. Presenting the data from the individual interviews alongside three types – which I termed Exemplar 1, Exemplar 2 and Exemplar 3 – turned out to be a powerful tool to highlight key differences in my research data set. The three exemplars will be introduced at the beginning of the empirical chapter and will explain the forms of engagement with *Closer*, and positions of identity regarding the issues of memory and of the sectarian other.

3.5.3 Scrutiny of psychodynamic processes, and of metaphoric and metonymic readings

Phase two concluded with an analysis that explores the *processes* underpinning the participants' discourses related to the exhibition and to the post-war Lebanese context. To that end, I drew on psycho-analytical tools, which I combined with a scrutiny of the operation of sense-making of the artworks. In particular, I paid attention to the young Lebanese's metaphoric or metonymic readings of the artworks.

Because this research aims to uncover complex identity dynamics of young Lebanese related to highly sensitive issues in post-war Lebanon, as well as investigate how psycho-dynamic concepts of 'leaning on', 'working-through' and 'mourning' can apply to the experience of art as space of autonomy, I drew on analytic devices to identify specific markers (e.g., repetitions of utterances, sudden changes in the direction of speech). The concept of the 'defence mechanism' is relevant to account for rhetorical strategies employed by a number of young Lebanese to warrant their negative reactions to *Closer*, and, in turn, protect their positions of identity from a threatening encounter with the artworks: one that generated anxiety. Occurring for the first time in Freud's (1894) study *The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence*, the term 'defence' describes the ego's struggle against painful or unendurable ideas or affects. It is later on designated by Freud by the term of 'repression'. Alongside several methods[17] of defence, which Anna Freud (1936/1966) enumerates in *The Ego and Defences Mechanisms*, the analysis mainly points towards the mechanisms of rationalisation, cleavage and denial. Rationalisation is a defence mechanism that involves explaining an unacceptable behaviour or feeling in a rational or logical manner, avoiding the true reasons for the behaviour. Cleavage brings individuals to compartmentalise their feelings about self and other, so that integration is not possible. When individuals face contradictions in behaviour, thinking or feeling, they treat disagreement with mild denial or indifference. Lastly, the operation of denial is employed in situations in which it is impossible to escape some painful external impression (Freud, 1936/1966). It is simply a refusal to accept the reality of fact, acting as if a painful event, thought or feeling does not exist. Contrary to cleavage, denial is an unconscious process.

Furthermore, as this thesis ventures to build a bridge between psycho-dynamic concepts that account for processes of identity and a hermeneutical account of the concept of autonomy in terms of shift of meaning or metaphoric experience, I decided to look at the figure of metonymy in the participants' transcripts – the reverse of the metaphor – as correlative of processes of cleavage, rationalisation and denial. In a metonymy, the signified stands for

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[17]According to Anna Freud (1936) the ego taps into ten different methods when facing conflicts with instinctual representatives and affects. They include the following: regression, repression, reaction formation, isolation, undoing, projection, introjections, turning against the self and reversal, and, finally, sublimation or displacement.

another signifier that is directly related to it or closely associated with it in some way. Opposed to the metaphor and the imaginative leap that occurs between one domain and another, the metonymy is characterised by "contiguity" or "closeness" (Jakobson & Halle, 1956, p. 95). A metonymic experience of *Closer* took the form of a literal and concrete[18] reading of the artworks. For instance, a number of young Lebanese took for granted the artists' symbolic twist that aimed precisely to foster critical positioning of the young Lebanese. This was often associated with painful and difficult feelings (e.g., fear, anxiety or embarrassment). This, in turn, triggered mechanisms of cleavage and rationalisation.

Identifying metonymic readings of *Closer* related to defence mechanisms as ways of coping with uneasy experiences of seeing unfamiliar artworks related to memory and intimacy constituted a step[19] in my endeavour to highlight opposite processes (i.e., 'leaning on', 'working-through', 'critical mourning' and 'sublimation') and possible metaphoric experiences. In this analysis, I was attentive to the way in which the participants apply a semantic and symbolic distance to the meaning of the artworks, in particular detaching their interpretation from literal and concrete readings of the artworks. Yet, as argued in the theoretical chapter, metaphor is not only a linguistic trope. As displacement of meaning (Castoriadis, 1975/1987) it opens up to a space of transformation of the individuals' relation to the world; namely, to recast our relation to the truth (Ricoeur, 1975/1977). Therefore, it was my analytical concern to raise the question: what is the *outcome* of the young Lebanese metaphorical reading of the artworks in terms of their capacity to reflect upon the issues of collective memory and sectarian other in post-war Lebanon?

Finally, it was shown that a metaphoric experience is not a smooth process in the operation of sense-making. Joas (2002) pointed towards a tension at play as individuals strive to articulate their new experiences with sedimented and old meanings. This tension intrinsic

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[18] By using the expression *literal* I refer to the discipline of research education which sets different levels of comprehension of a text, from the least to the most sophisticated level of reading. On the first level, the literal one, the readers only engage with facts and details of the text: also termed surface understanding. The word *concrete* probably finds its origin in the expression 'concrete thinking' used in developmental psychology to designate the very level of literal understanding that the infant child generally uses when he begins to interact with the world around him. If an infant is playing with a toy and the toy is suddenly covered with a blanket, the infant is likely to think that the toy is gone.

[19] Pointing out the problem of distinguishing the metaphor from other similar language tropes, Liakopoulos (2000) suggests defining each metaphor's non-literal antagonists (metonymy, simile, irony and hyperbole) in order to secure a reliable process of metaphor identification.

to the metaphor is also inherent to the processes of identity that account for experiences of art that open up spaces for autonomy. Hereby, I paid attention to distinguish between straightforward utterances of the participants, such as "I liked the artworks, it made me imagine stories" and lines of thought in which it was possible to discern tensions and conflicting and ambivalent attitudes. The latter were indicative of the efforts of the young Lebanese to appropriate symbolic and imaginative experiences of the artworks and re-work their former positions of identity.

The next chapter, dedicated to the *Closer* exhibition, presents the themes and the aesthetic and material aspects of each artwork; it aims to introduce the empirical part of this thesis.

3.5.4 Coding the artwork of *Closer*

As stated in the previous section on the methodological approach of using the artwork installation as a stimulant for exploring the participants' reactions, opinions and thoughts on collective memory and their national history, I now explain my choice of procedures for coding the artwork (see table 3 at the end of chapter 4). In doing so, I aim to provide the reader with a framework to follow the empirical analysis of the focus-group discussion (chapter 5) and the individual interviews (chapters 6 and 7).

With an equally distributed scrutiny of the static and moving images in *Closer* I derived categories from the artwork based on a set of questions relying on a content analysis and a semiotic methodological lens. I drew on the content analysis in order to concentrate on descriptive dimensions of the images so as to ensure a reliable account of the images (Lutz & Collins, 1993). This enabled me to commence with the questions: *who* is (are) the character(s) of the story of the artwork? What is the story of the artwork about? *When/where* does the story of the artwork take place? From semiology, I primarily used the dimension of cultural knowledge. Inherited from Barthes's notion of myth (Barthes, 1973) this dimension is based on connotation in contrast to denotation and offers a higher level of signification. As Penn (2000) states: "This is implicitly referred to by the image" (Penn, 2000, p. 34), underpinning the explicit level of the image. By way of unveiling referent systems such as beliefs, myths and

values, the dimension of cultural knowledge situates images historically, socially and culturally, which aligns with the theoretical approach of this thesis (i.e., understanding collective memory as historically shaped and culturally represented). The question underlined is: *what* do the elements of the story of the artwork connote?

Eventually, I decided to add another dimension to be raised in the coding procedure of *Closer*, though this one has roots neither in content analysis nor in semiology: it is one concerning narrative structure. If a focus on narrative form in moving images seems overt (Chatman, 1978; Todorov, 1977), the use of narrative structure tends to receive little attention when looking at static images (Rose, 2007). As looking at narratives is also at the heart of a conceptual interrogation of collective memory (see section 2.2), I believe it is also necessary to emphasise the question: what is the temporal organisation of the story? In other words, how are ruminations on the past, present and future embodied in the artwork? Below is a summary of the coding questions*:*

1. Who is (are) the character(s) of the story of the artwork?

2. What is the story of the artwork about?

3. When/where does the story of the artwork take place?

4. What do the elements of the story of the artwork connote?

5. How the past, present and future are embodied in the story of the artwork?

The coding process includes all texts (linguistics and typography) and images.

Closer

Introduction

Closer, which opened on 16 January 2009 and ran until 2 April the same year, was the first exhibition held at the Beirut Art Center (BAC). Each collection in the show focused, in various and distinctive ways, on the concept of intimacy. Intimacy, as a concept, in *Closer* ranged from narratives involving the artists' family members to personal stories that reflect on larger historical events; namely, the Lebanese Civil War, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the demise of communism in Eastern Europe. Additionally, some the show's eleven artists, represented themselves at the centre of their pieces, raising questions about the relationship between one's self-image and one's public image. Intimacy in the exhibition is also related to the display of nude bodies in a few of the works of art. Intimacy is conveyed by the physical presence of naked bodies, yet also by the sense of personal privacy with which the artists frame their works. This chapter presents nine works of art from the exhibition that served as material for collecting the data. The chapter is divided into three parts, following the strands around which the curators built the exhibition. The first part presents the artists and works exhibited in *Closer* that focus on the artists' personal stories in order to reflect on collective histories. The second part presents works in which the artists created narratives around the presence of one or a few family members. The third part presents works in which the artists represent themselves at the centre of the piece.

4.1 Collective histories through personal stories

Saida June 6, 1982, Zaatari

Born in Sidon, Lebanon in 1966 and now living and working in Beirut, Akram Zaatari uses film, photography and archival materials to explore post-war Lebanon, often infused with his own personal experiences. In addition, Zaatari frequently explores the technology of image production in the service of power, resistance and memory. In this vein, he has led efforts to oversee the photographic history of the Arab world and co-founded the Arab Image Foundation: a not-for-profit organisation run by a group of artists including Tony Chakar and the BAC's Lamia Joreige, which collects, preserves and studies photographs from the Middle East, North Africa and Arab diaspora communities. Always aware of the subjectivity of photography, Zaatari stresses that the foundation's collection of photographs, selected by the artists in charge, is "not a neutral archive, nor a total one. A newspaper's collection, for example, is an archive because it has all photographs taken by the newspaper's photographers. I like to make this differentiation" (Bodinson, 2007, p. 6). Zaatari attributes his (and the foundation's artists') heightened awareness of the power dynamics involved in their selection process as a result of being brought up during the civil war and the country's subsequent failure to produce an official account of what happened; hence, the artists' interests in counter-narrative or docu-fictional accounts (Cotter, 2006, p. 33). Zaatari represented Lebanon at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013).

Featured in *Closer*, *Saida June 6, 1982* (2002-2006) is a composite digital image of photographs, lambda print (127/250 cm), 45-minute video (1981-1983), personal notebooks and photo albums.

Figure 1: *Saida June 6, 1982* by Akram Zaatri (2002-2006).

The panorama documents Zaatari's experience as a 16-year-old during the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon. From a balcony at his home, Zaatari took photos with his father's Kiev camera on the first day of the invasion during heavy air raids. "As a child," he said, "I used to be fascinated by the site of air raids, and thought of them as the ultimate fireworks: real fireworks: real threats. They were shots of adrenaline. That was how I started taking pictures" (Cotter, 2006, p. 31). The image on view in the piece is a composite of six photographs of blasts that took place during the raid, giving the viewer the sensation of bearing witness to the intensity of the actual explosions. Accompanying the large (127 by 250 cm) print is a looping video that shows Zaatari's camera moving over the print's photographs with an overlaid soundtrack of surrounding explosions.

4 Cotton Underwear for Tony, Chakar

An architect and writer born in Beirut in 1968, Tony Chakar focuses on the civil war throughout his work, which ranges from essay-writing to installation-making to guiding architectural and historical tours of his city. In particular, he is interested in architecture, living conditions and the various tangible and intangible elements that contribute to the making of cities. In his more traditional architectural work, he consistently incorporates literature, philosophy and theory. For his *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* in 2000, he re-envisioned and remapped Beirut through a series of untraditional processes. First, he gave guided tours to students at the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts (Ashkal Alwan) using German philosopher Walter Benjamin's concept of a *flâneur* – an urban man about town who became the subject of scholars, artists and writers in the 20th century – to inspire the way in which they saw the city, encouraging them to walk "without any target, observing and interpreting" (Ashkal Alwan, 2012). He then remapped Beirut, attaching objects to the map of the city, and connecting these locations and objects with the writings of Walter Benjamin, Karl Marx, Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard that reflected on the creation of maps. In another work, *A Retroactive Monument for a Chimerical City* (1999), Chakar created a plastic monument of a woman in gold and placed it along Beirut's Corniche, later reflecting on the Corniche, and again reflecting on the philosopher Benjamin in writing for the piece. Chakar teaches art history and history of architecture at Beirut's Académie Libanaise des Beaux Arts (Alba).

Figure 2: *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* by Tony Chakar (2000).

The installation *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* (2000) comprises a portrait of a man in Lebanese uniform, postcard-size reproductions of the portrait, photos, and snippets of text narrating the artist's absent and dead father. Chakar's father was one of the first Lebanese killed in the civil war: he left the family's home in east Beirut one day to go to west Beirut to shop and was shot by a sniper on what would later be known as the Green Line. In his pocket,

Chakar's father carried a shopping list with a single entry: '4 cotton underwear for Tony'. Chakar's piece named after the same grocery list entry, which appeared in *Closer*, reflects upon his father's status as a martyr, which all victims, regardless of the circumstances of their deaths, became after the war. Chakar asked official Hezbollah portrait painter Ahmad Abdullah to create a portrait of his father using the same iconology as that used for Shi'ite martyrs even though Chakar's father was a Christian. This is a counter-intuitive image that encapsulates the sect-specific ways in which those who are deemed martyrs are remembered here: a Christian soldier memorialised by a Shia portrait. In the installation *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*, Chakar offers photos and text exploring his father's death, considering the way in which he is remembered by his family and by history. Viewers are invited to take away a postcard-sized copy of Abdullah's portrait.

Crossing Surda (A Record of Going to and from Work) Jacir

Palestinian-American artist Emily Jacir grew up in Saudi Arabia, attended high school in Italy, and, since 1999, has divided her time between New York and Ramallah. "When I was growing up," she said, "art was the one place where I could speak" (Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2012). In her work, Jacir uses photography and video to investigate the boundaries between art and life, frequently exploring global mobility and political exile, as well as specifically looking at the impact of Israeli action on Palestinians. Jacir's work also features performance art components, often featuring herself as a subject. In *Where We Come From* (2001-2003), one of Jacir's most well-known pieces, she asked fellow Palestinians: "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" Using her American passport, Jacir travelled to towns and villages that other Palestinians could not access as a result of being prohibited from entering the West Bank or restricted in their movement, and tried to fulfil their wishes, including placing flowers on a mother's grave and going on a date with a young Palestinian girl. Part of Jacir's motivation as an artist, she has said, is to give voice to an often missing, yet critical narrative. "We are probably amongst the most discussed, yet most misrepresented people in the world," she said of Palestinians. "We are

constantly dissected by foreign 'experts'. People have no problem claiming agency to speak on our behalf" (Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2012).

Featured in *Closer*, Jacir's 2003 video installation *Crossing Surda (A Record of Going to and from Work)* is shown through two channels: a 130-minute compilation of raw footage was projected onto a wall and a 30-minute montage of select moments was shown on a video monitor laid on the floor and displayed at an angle to the room.

Figure 3: *Crossing Surda (A Record of Going to and from Work)* by Emily Jacir (2003).

The film, taken in 2002, documented Jacir's daily commute from Ramallah to her work at Birzeit University through the Surda checkpoint. The road connecting the university

and Ramallah had been the last open road connecting not only Ramallah, but also around 30 villages, to Birzeit until the checkpoint was installed in March 2001. Jacir had been caught earlier, on the same commute, filming her feet near the checkpoint, after which Israeli Defense Forces soldiers detained her in the rain for several hours at gunpoint and eventually confiscated her video. In response, Jacir cut a peephole in her purse and spent eight days recording the same commute. The resulting footage is close to a pure documentary showing, filmed from the knee-high perspective of a carried bag. From Jacir's swinging shoulder bag, it is possible to discern Palestinians huddled in the rain at the checkpoint, with tanks, armoured personnel carriers and soldiers standing by. On a couple of sunny days, flashes of Jacir's shadow, and the shifting bag, are visible.

4.2 Narratives around the presence of one or a few close members of the artists' families

A Loving Man, Al-Ani

London-based Jananne Al-Ani, born in Iraq in 1966 to an Iraqi father and Irish mother, routinely uses photography, film and video to explore so-called official accounts of historic events, recollections of absences and losses, as well as the isolation and denial of personal, human experiences in the face of more dominant, collective narratives. Her work often focuses on the Middle East, which she left in 1980 with her mother and sister when the Iran-Iraq war started. Her father remained in Iraq. "My interest in Orientalism," she said in 2000, "was the beginning of a long process of examining my cultural identity which I was brought face to face with in 1991 with the outbreak of the war in the Gulf" (Benoit, n.d.). In her recent *Shadow Sites: Recent Works by Jananne Al-Ani* (2011), for example, she filmed footage of the Jordanian countryside from a plane, showing hints of human life on the ground, but never actually showing people in the looping video installation. The ambiguous images are presented without explanation and were inspired by the imagery of the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Her steady inspiration and footage "presented something terrible

happening on the ground in a way that allowed viewers to remain detached from what they were seeing" (O'Sullivan, 2012).

Featured in *Closer,* Al-Ani's video installation, *A Loving Man* (1996-1999) is a five-channel video installation that lasts 15 minutes.
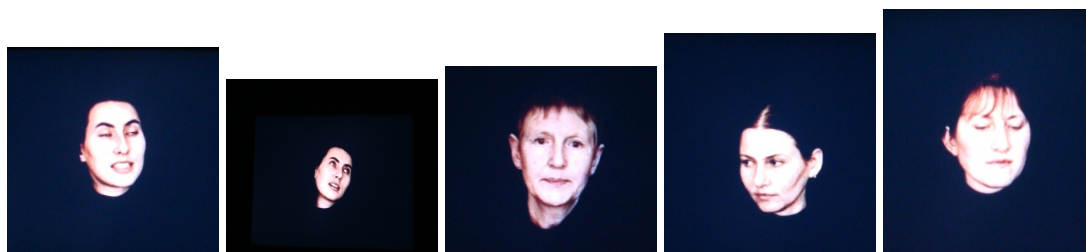
Figure 4: A Loving Man by Jananne Al-Ani (1996-1999).

First presented in 1999 at the Imperial War Museum in London, the installation explores, through family history and storytelling, the experience of feelings of loss and rejection of women separated from their husbands or fathers by cultural differences and war. On a black semi-circular wall, a set of screens is hung up and each screen shows a different member of a family consisting of a mother and her four daughters; they are dressed in black and the screens focus on their faces.

Al-Ani asked her mother and three sisters to write down ten things that they remembered about their father or, in her mother's case, her husband. Al-Ani also participated. Al-Ani then selected and composed a text from these descriptive lists and asked each of her family members to memorise and then recite the text in front of a camera in stark, black clothing. The recitations are reminiscent of a childhood memory game that Al-Ani and her sisters used to play during their early years in Iraq. Each participant repeats the last sentence of the person speaking before them and then adds on a new phrase to the sequence, creating a trance-like ritual. However, periodically, one of the sisters forgets her lines and the members of the chorus lose their composure. Al-Ani keeps these imperfect moments in the final installation, reminding the viewer of the reality that the participants are actually recalling their own memories, not simply playing a game.

Intervista, Sala

Anri Sala, an Albanian artist born in 1974, studied painting at the Albanian Academy of Arts, but went on to focus on video at the Ecole Nationale des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and film direction in Le Fresnoy-Studio National des Arts Contemporains. Sala has continued to work primarily in video during his career, regularly mixing elements of documentary as well as abstraction, and featuring himself as an actor in his pieces. He is interested in the interplay of light, sound and space and subversions of hierarchies. In Sala's 2003 video installation *Dammi I colori* ("Give me the colours"), which brought the artist international recognition, he drove at night time through his town, Tirana, with the town's newly elected mayor, Edi Rama, who was also an artist. With a spotlight on top of Sala's car, illuminating the passing buildings, the 16-minute film documents the changes that Rama has attempted to make in the city and his theories about colour and form, resulting in a renewed understanding of Tirana. "What I call place," he said in 2007, "is where one remembers having been, which is not only made of space, but also of time; it needs to be both, own its proper qualities, whether they are architecture, sounds, or events. Some places have no buildings or dates to be remembered, but they produce their own soundtrack" (Art News, 2007). Sala has represented France at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013).

Featured in *Closer, Intervista* (1998) is a 26-minute video with colour and sound.

Figure 5: *Intervista* by Anri Sala (1998).

Intervista, whose title means "Finding the Words", tells a personal story: in 1997, when he was 22 years old, Sala found a 16-mm newsreel film of the Albanian Communist Party Congress from 1977. In the film, a young leader of the Communist Youth Alliance – who turns out to be Sala's mother – is making a speech and then giving an interview, but the sound on the video is muted. The piece is primarily set at Sala's mother's home as she watches the reel for the first time in 20 years. Sala prompts his mother to remember what she said in her speeches and in an interview on the reel, but she cannot remember. Sala then traces other people who were either in the video, helped to create the video (such as the sound technician and the interviewer), and other members of the communist party who were in prison at the time and were unable to attend the congress. He takes the reel to lip-readers who decode what his mother had said in the interviews and presents them again to her. She does not remember her interview at all, almost going so far as to deny what the lip-readers had found. "How do you feel about deaf-mutes interpreting your past?" Sala asks his mother. "It's an irony of fate" speculates his mother. She expresses her hopes and fears, ideals and disappointments, as the years have gone by, considering the deception and rebellion of her youth.

4.3 The artists at the centre of the piece

So Much I Want to Say, Hatoum

Mona Hatoum, a London-based video and installation artist, was born in 1952 to Palestinian parents in Beirut. Though she was born in Lebanon, Hatoum and her family, like the majority of Palestinians who became exiles in 1948, were never able to obtain Lebanese identity cards; thus, leaving the artist with the sense that she did not belong to the society in which she lived and inspiring a theme of foreignness that has permeated her body of work. Her pieces often have surreal, darkly humorous twists, which seem to be the artist's response to her experience of straddling cultures and identities, but always leave open the possibility for multiple interpretations. "I'm often asked the same question: What in your work comes from your own culture? As if," Hatoum said, "I have a recipe and I can actually isolate the Arab ingredient, the woman ingredient, the Palestinian ingredient. People often expect tidy definitions of otherness, as if identity is something fixed and easily definable" (Antoni, 1998). After an early focus in the 1980s on video and performance pieces that focused on her body, she began to make sculptural installations that refer abstractly to violence and cruelty through unique manipulations of everyday objects. For example, in her 1993 piece *Incommunicado*, she transformed a baby's cradle into a torture device of sorts, replacing the cradle's springs with tightly gridded cheese wire. The title suggests that the infant using the cradle cannot be heard, a metaphor for the political prisoners who are jailed and tortured where no one can hear them (Manchester, 2000).

Featured in *Closer, So Much I Want to Say* (1983) is a 4.40-minute black-and-white video with sound.

Figure 6: *So Much I Want to Say* by Mona Hatoum (1983).

So Much I Want to Say, Hatoum's piece in *Closer*, was one of her early video installations. The piece was made in 1983, shortly after the massacres of Palestinian refugees in the Sabra and Shatila camps in Beirut. The video begins with a blank screen and the clear voice of a woman saying, "So much I want to say". Over the four-and-a-half-minute piece, this voice is repeated over and over again as a series of still images unfold every eight seconds, revealing an up-close shot of Hatoum's face, obscured by male hands. Hatoum's screaming mouth is visible in some of the fixed images, only to be covered again in the next fixed image with the male hands, a weaving order that has the effect of building tension and emotion in the piece. "The macho style," said Hatoum in a 2006 interview, "is an externalised response to the power of domination; but it is also a form of domination turned inward, within the community poised against the presence of women, whose voices are either repressed, or sublimated in the cause of struggle" (Leight, 2006).

Body pArts, Saneh

Lina Saneh, born in Beirut in 1966, is a playwright, actress and director. Early in her career, Saneh often focused on the body in her work, exploring how bodies are changed and affected by war and, in this way, questions the presentation and representation of images in society. In her 2007 performance piece, *Appendix,* which developed into the *Lina Saneh Body pArts Project,* pieces of which were exhibited in *Closer*, she sits in a gallery in silence as her partner, artist Rabih Mroué, stands at a lectern and reads a text or perhaps even a eulogy, seemingly on behalf of Saneh: "I have a problem," the text begins. "I have always wanted to be

cremated when I die. But cremations are prohibited in Lebanon for religious reasons." What becomes clear over the course of the performance is Saneh's plan to circumvent Lebanese laws that ban cremation: she will have surgery and then, one by one, burn her severed limbs. The performance raises questions about the interface between a person's public and private experience of their body as well as the role of the state in governing bodies and the meaning of citizenship.

Featured in *Closer*, *Body pArts* (2007-2008) is an installation comprising an Apple Mac computer locked on Saneh's *Body pArts* project website, a series of texts displayed on a table, and a life-sized outline of Saneh's body painted on the wall.
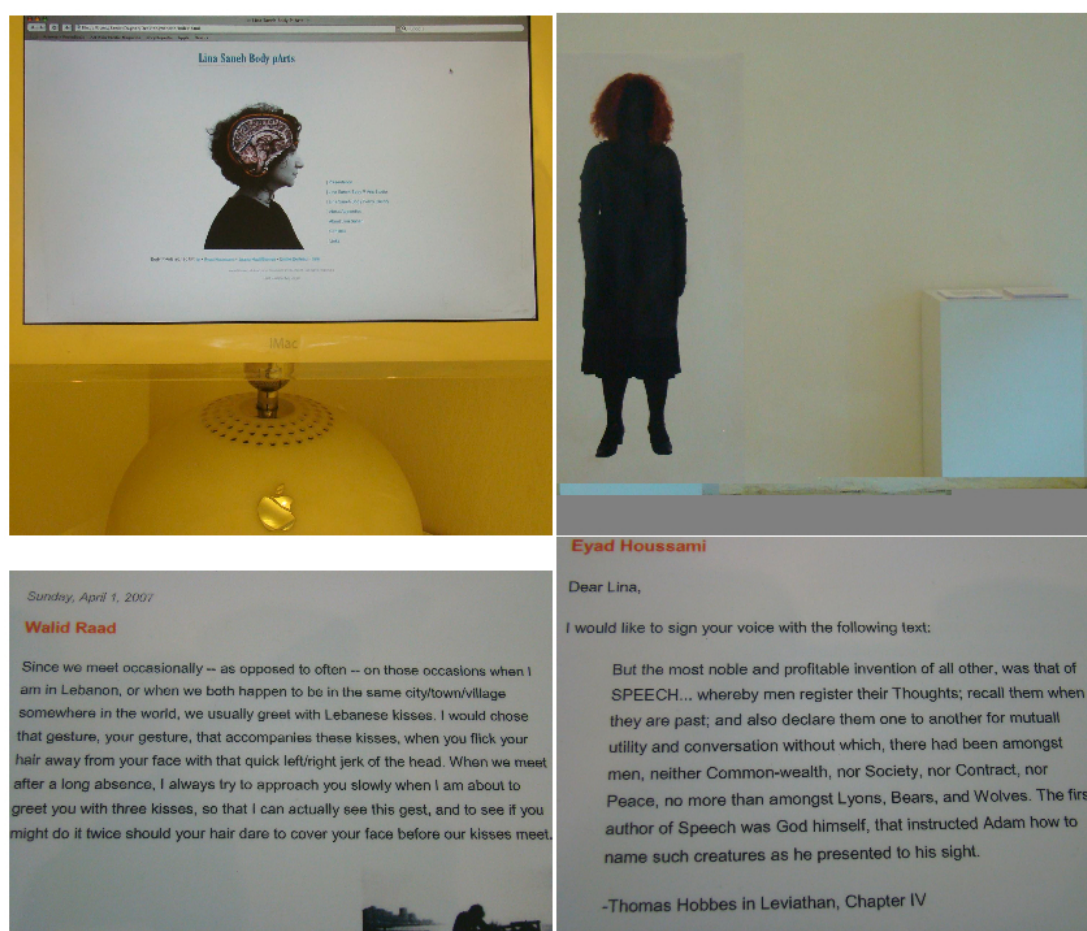
Figure 7: *Body pArts* by Linah Saneh (2007-2008).

In *Closer*, Saneh's *Body pArts* takes the ideas in *Appendix* from the intangible to the tangible: as part of the piece's installation, a computer displays a website[1] that Saneh has set up, offering parts of her body to artists to sign and, thereby, elevate and give the parts life until cremation is legalized in Lebanon. The artists were asked to write the reason for which they chose the particular part of Saneh's body. A number of dedicated texts on Saneh's heart, lungs, liver, skin, but also smile, gave rise to literary and poetic pieces of writing.

Originally, as outlined in *Appendix*, Saneh planned to have surgery to amputate herself and burn her body parts, piece by piece. However, as she outlines on the displayed website, she learned from a lawyer friend "that operations of ablation cannot be carried out without a valid medical reason. That is because the issue falls under the jurisdiction of what is called "medical ethics", which maintains that it is forbidden to amputate any organ that is not ill, even if the patient demands it. It is illegal to conduct experiments on the body or members of a being. And this is how Lina Saneh was forced to change strategy. Her website explains that, based on the examples of famous artists' who had breached these kinds of laws, she decided to change her plans and to turn them into an art project. This was in the spirit of Italian artist Piero Manzoni, who, in the 1960s as a commentary on and exploration of the nature of art, signed the body parts of individuals, calling them art. Along with the website on display, the life-sized outline of Saneh's body is painted on the wall. Aside from her curly red hair, the outline is black, giving the appearance of a charred body that had already been burned. It is impossible to tell whether Saneh is facing or turned away from the viewers.

Birthday Suit, Steele

Lisa Steele, born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1947, emigrated to Canada during the Vietnam War when she was in her early twenties. In the 1970s she began to experiment with video art, and her solo work has ranged from purely conceptual pieces to those that have told quite personal, auto-ethnographic stories (Thorson, 2011). Early on, inspired by American artists Vito Acconci and Mary Kelley, who she discovered in *Avalanche*, the short-lived avant-garde magazine, she experimented with abstract pieces. Her first tape, *Juggling* (1972), shows Steele,

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[1] See http://www.linasaneh-body-p-arts.com/parts_signature.html

in black and white, trying to juggle balls. She seems aware of the camera, sometimes staring straight at it, knowingly, and drifting in and out of the static shot as she chases the balls. Five minutes into the piece, she addresses the camera and says, "I'm gonna have 14 glass balls, slightly filled with a gaseous liquid, slightly heavier than air. It will be sky blue so that, when I juggle them, they will be totally invisible" (Steele, 1972). Steele then inexplicably walks out of the shot and the video ends. In later works she focused on more direct, narrative storytelling, sometimes playing characters, as in *The Balad of Dan Peoples* (1976), in which she plays her grandfather and *Talking Tongues* (1982), in which she performs as a battered wife. Yet all her stories seem to come back to the themes of identity and feminism.

Featured in *Closer, Birthday Suit With Scars and Defects* (1974) is a 13-minute video.

Figure 8: *Birthday Suit With Scars and Defects* by Lisa Steele (1974).

In 1974 Steele filmed *Birthday Suit With Scars and Defects*, in which she presents her naked body to the unblinking gaze of the camera. Over 13 minutes in one unedited black-and-white shot, she partially disrobes. She turns the camera on, walks to the end of the room and removes her clothing. Then she approaches the camera and begins to examine the various scars she has accumulated over her life up to that point; she explores the various unique markings all over her body, explaining how and when they were inflicted in a dead-pan voice. "I decided to do a tape that chronicled my passage through time. I have always been clumsy, tripping, dropping, falling with alarming regularity. This tape accepts the extent of the consequences," she has said (Steele and Tomczak, n.d.). While the camera remains static and the shot unbroken, Steele's story runs over her 27-year history, revealing her upbringing as a tomboy, searching for waterfalls and misbehaving in home-economics

class, and using storytelling "to support the video's overarching feminist political stance in the face of male-dominated audio visual authorship" (Russell, 2002, p. 431).

Self-Portraits, D'Agata

The work of Antoine D'Agata, a French photographer who was born in Marseille in 1961, focuses on addiction, sex, personal obsessions, darkness, prostitution, and other topics often considered taboo. He left France in 1983 and studied at the International Centre of Photography in the early 1990s while working as an intern for the editorial department of Magnum. After a four-year hiatus from photography upon his return to France, he took it up again in 1997 and has since published several books of photography. Since 2005, D'Agata has travelled and worked around the world, choosing not to settle in any one place. His photos, which seem to catch individuals engaging in secret, otherworldly acts, frequently employ nude or semi-nude bodies with blurred faces or other distorted features and limited light sources. "It's not how a photographer looks at the world that is important," D'Agata said. "It's their intimate relationship with it" (Magnum Photography, n.d.).

Featured in *Closer, Self-Portraits* (1991-2008) is a series of 19 black- or sepia-and-white photographs mounted on aluminium.
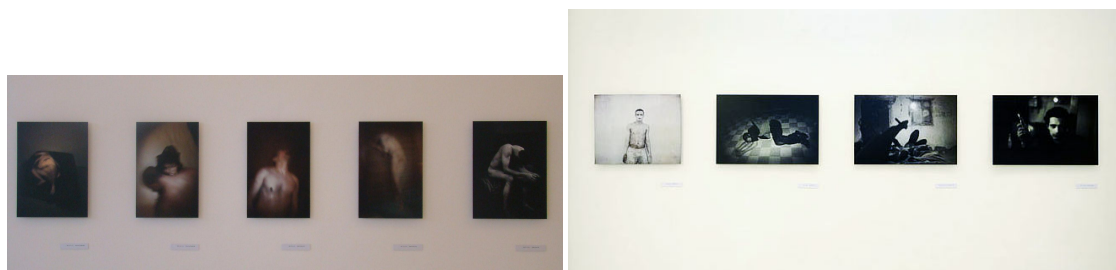
Figure 9: *Self-Portraits* by Antoine D'Agata (1991-2008).

In *Self-Portraits*, D'Agata "urges" – in his own words – other people to photograph him in a total reversal of roles; to show the artist in different places all over the world during the 17-year period. D'Agata is alone in the majority of the photographs, with the exception of three photos in which he is coupled with another. The photographs are highly expressive and

feature nude bodies with the artist's characteristic blurring. "The sense of losing sight of the subject may seem like a paradox in a documentary genre where I try to impose my subjective point of view, in an autobiography born from travels and from wandering," said D'Agata of the piece. "But the emotional strip tease, which lets me enter into the pages of this intimate, photographic diary, seems to carry me inevitably towards this vanishing point."

Table 3: Artworks of *Closer*: codes

The artworks	Who is/are the character(s)?	What is it about?	1. When? 2. Where?	What is connoted? (Cultural Knowledge)	What is the temporal organization? (Narrative Structure)
A Loving Man (Al Ani)	5 women and 1 man: 1 mother, her 4 daughters and the absent father.	Talk, Absence, Grieve, Remembrance, Family, Love, War.	Not given	War	Present and past. Repetition. No temporal closure.
4 cotton underwear for Tony (Chakar)	Two men: a son and his father (dead).	Fate, Death, Mourning, Honoring Martyrs, war, religious rituals, Hezbollah, Cedars, City.	1. Lebanese civil war. 2. Beirut.	Hezbollah martyr's celebration, Identity-sectarian struggles, History of Lebanon.	Unaccomplished present. Rupture between past and present. Future without projection.
Self-Portraits (D'Agata)	A man, a couple	Body, male nudity, house interior, physical and psychic plight.	1. 90's and nowadays. 2. Interior, different cities in the world.	Not patent.	Life span, No temporal closure.
So much I want to say (Hatoum)	Woman	Talk, hands on face, physical constraint	Not given	Not patent.	Immediate present. No temporal closure.
Crossing Surda (Jacir)	The mob, soldiers	Palestinian walking, check-point, Israeli military forces, plight.	1. Nowadays. 2. Exterior, Palestinian territories.	Israeli-Palestinian conflict.	Immediate present, no temporal closure.
Intervista (Sala)	A man (son) and a woman (his mother)	Dialogue, videotape, archive images, popular meetings, recollection of the past.	1. Nowadays and flash back 20 years ago. 2. Interior, Albania	Communist ideologies in the 80's and their fall in Eastern Europe.	Past and future. Projection in the future.
Body Parts (Saneh)	Woman	Body, anatomy, cremation.	1. Nowadays 2. Not given	Lebanese religious tenets	Present and future. No temporal closure.
Birthday Suit (Steele)	Woman	Body, female nudity, scars, recollection of past experiences.	1. Many years ago	Not patent.	Past in the present, no temporal closure.
Saida June 6, 1982 (Zaatari)	Male adolescent	Blasts, military vehicles, dullness, daily routine, landscape, war.	1. Lebanese civil war. 2. Exterior, South of Lebanon.	Israeli military invasion in Lebanon.	Present, no temporal closure.

Focus-Group Findings

In this chapter I present the analysis of the data collected from the five focus-group discussions, which I conducted with 34 young Lebanese nationals (aged 17 to 25) after their exposure to the *Closer* exhibition in Spring 2009 at the Beirut Art Centre. The aim was to understand how sectarian competitions over the narratives of the past civil war, taboos of memory of the war and conflicting identities are played out when groups of young Lebanese adults encountered visual and counter-hegemonic works of art. How do particular chosen groups differentiated by religious, cultural and socio-economic background and sex interact and make sense of artwork designed to challenge public discourses on war memories and identity?

The unit of analysis of the focus groups was the spoken utterance. The focus-group interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Attention to tone, silences, speech intervals and laughter (see in appendix 9 the transcription symbols used for the focus groups) were carefully noted as indicators of emotions and tensions evident in the exchanges. Text fragments, including Arabic passages, were translated by a bilingual Arabic/English academic and reintroduced into the full record. Four hundred text fragments were coded from the five focus groups. Before presenting the empirical findings I provide a summary of the socio-demographic characteristics of the groups, and emphasises the similarities and differences within and across the groups (see table 4 below).

Three overarching themes recurred in the group discussions. A prominent theme refers to the groups' impressions of engaging with the war in the exhibition (i.e., the civil war, but also

Table 4: Focus groups: Differences and similarities

	Group 1 N = 8	Group 2 N = 9	Group 3 N = 5	Group 4 N= 6	Group 5 N = 8
1. 'Site' of recruitment	Sin el Fil Maronite Church in Sin el Fil	Shoreline School in Dahieyh	Makassed Islamic Association in Beirut	American University of Beirut	St Joseph University in Beirut
2. Gender	Female: 2 Male: 6	Female : 3 Male : 6	Female: 4 Male: 1	Female: 4 Male: 2	Female: 8 Male: 0
3. Age	18–25	17–23	17–19	17–21	20–23
4. Religious belonging	Maronites Christians	Shiites Muslims	Sunnis Muslims	Christian Greek Orthodox, Sunnis and Shiites	Greek Orthodox, Maronite, Christian Orthodox, Druze and Shiite
5. Socio-economic background	Middle and upper-class	Low	Middle	Middle and upper-class	Middle and upper-class
6. Field of study	Applied and natural sciences	Applied sciences	Applied sciences	Applied, natural and social sciences	Humanities
7. Language	French	English and Arabic	English	English	French
8. Political affiliation	March 14: 1 Free Patriotic Movement: 1	Hezbollah: 2	March 14: 3	Amal: 1	

the Israeli war in July 2006 against Hezbollah and, for some participants, the series of fights on 7 May 2008[1]). The theme of seeing the war in *Closer* was associated with the sensitive question of opening up to the memory and to the polemical history of the civil war in a public space. This highlighted stark differences across the five groups, with Groups 1, 2, and 3 constructing norms of dismissal over representing the war in *Closer*, while Groups 4 and 5 elaborated on their conflicting positions. The second main theme corresponds to the appeal that the family narratives elicited by a few works of art had for a number of participants, emphasising the parents' transmission of their past experiences to their offspring. While this theme was strikingly almost absent in Groups 1 and 2, engaging with family stories in the artwork soothed the interactions and dynamics in Groups 3, 4 and 5, which stood in contrast to the first theme. The third theme regards the groups' impressions about intimacy and the presence of the nude body in the exhibition. The analysis highlighted clear differences across the groups in terms of discourses and reflection associated with involving with the intimate and nude body in *Closer*, and in terms of group dynamics.

This chapter comprises three sections, which are followed by concluding remarks. Furthermore, in order to better grasp the complex and at times subtle dynamics in the groups, commentary on each group is presented separately within each section.

5.1 War, history and memory: censorship and dissensions

A consensus across the five groups was that *Closer* presents characters' intimate stories replete with references to war time. For the groups, the techniques employed by the art installations, along with the addition of sound to the images, render a more realistic picture of the ethos of war. Interestingly, only two works of art refer overtly to the Lebanese Civil War: *Saida June 6, 1982* (by Zaatari), with explicit photographs and sounds of the shelling during the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in 1982; and *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* (by Chakar), which involves the story of the artist's father, a soldier during the Lebanese war who is portrayed

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[1]On 7 May 2008, a series of skirmishes (blocked roads, burning tyres and protests) were caused by a show of force between supporters of the March 8 and March 14 Alliances. These events were catalysed by the government's decision to move against a private telephone network operated by Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut. Eighty-four Lebanese people were killed and 200 were wounded.

as a martyr in the artist's allegorical painting displayed in the centre. The body-related artwork of Antoine D'Agata (*Self-Portraits*), Lisa Steele (*Birthday Suit*) and Lina Saneh (*Body pArts*) nonetheless elicited a rhetoric associated with war, in particular for Groups 1, 2 and 3. Family stories with a nostalgic longing, or in which characters yearn for an absent loved one (*A Loving Man* by Janane Al-Ani and *Intervista* by Anri Sala) also nurtured the groups' engagement with narratives shaped by obstructions caused by war.

5.1.1 Seeing the war and taboo of memory: norms and censorship

Denigrating *Closer* as to represent only "injuries and martyrs" and "unforgettable landscapes" arose as a norm of Groups 1, 2 and 3 in which impressions of fear, sadness, melancholy or even death revealed the groups' disquieting encounter with the artwork. For the three groups the grief of war lingers on in the exhibition, which was mostly reminiscent of the July 2006 War. The three groups discarded almost entirely the artists' lived experiences of war time, which they often termed "the artists' subjectivity", an expression pejoratively connoted in the rhetoric of the three groups. Common to these groups was the belief that exhibiting to an audience one's personal experience of war time is subject to inevitable tensions; hence, personal experience must be confined to the private domain of the family. Furthermore, the recurring reference to the personal pronoun "we" in reference to their society anchored the groups' negative perception of the memory of war in relation to a social order, and a moral function to art, meant by the participants to counter the burdensome images presented in the exhibition.

Group 1 dismissed *Closer* because the exhibition compelled them to confront the depressing reality of today's post-war Lebanon as well as memories of hardship. With a patronising attitude, a male participant often engaged in a monologue at the expense of the other participants, judging that Lebanese people are "not mature enough" to see an exhibition that only conveys a bleak image of their country, Lebanon.

> Jihad: I think that the themes in *Closer* were sadness and predicament and as young Lebanese, I believe we all suffered from these predicaments and sadness.

> We need something that enlightens us, which gives us hope. [Later on] I believe
> it is not the time for this ... memory. This is not something that we should
> exhibit to society. What is the purpose of this exhibition? If the aim is to show
> a subjective feeling, I believe it is not good to exhibit such a sentiment in our
> society.

Nonetheless, a female participant tentatively reflected upon the way *Closer* brought her to face Lebanon's wounded past. "She [Linah Saneh] expressed her predicament; it is positive because it is not easy to express all that we have" timidly voiced Eliane as she alluded to the war's traumatic memories. Yet, after positioning herself in opposition to the group's tendency to avoid confronting the bleak image of their society, Eliane stopped and went into a passive state, effectively shutting down.

The group dismissed the representation of the war because the exhibition solely presented a negative image of post-war Lebanon; however, behind this lurked a more contentious reason. The group deprecated the excess of "subjectivity" of the artists, who, in exhibiting their "personal point of view" were accused of stirring up inter-communal conflict: a taboo in public discourses. For instance, decrying in particular the work of Chakar, *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*, the participants – all Christians – were struck by a single quote in the artist's booklet of texts in which Chakar refers to the national emblem of the cedar tree as a symbol of the hegemony of the Christians during the Second Lebanese Republic. Perceiving themselves as part of *the* group that was the victim of the other religious groups (e.g., Muslims), Group 1 condemned the artist for breaking the post-war "consensus"; one that withdraws any historical references to sectarian rivalries between Christians and Muslims, and that Group 1 deemed to be a necessary condition for ensuring co-existence between the sects.

> Najah: It was shocking for me, because I thought there was a lot of subjectivity,
> like Jihad said earlier.
>
> Jihad: It gives one story when I probably have another story. <u>I want to say
> something</u>. In Lebanon, there is no consensus on Lebanese history, something that

unifies us and which is objective about Lebanese history ... This is the reason why I am saying this now, it is not time for each of us to exhibit one's own story.

While elaborating on the acute confrontation with the presence of nudity and the body in *Closer*, **Group 2** was lacking articulacy and provided a very limited degree of insight into the reasons why the participants perceived the omnipresence of the war in *Closer*. Amidst the overarching chaotic discussion setting of Group 2, one participant's position came across sharply; Jihad unexpectedly shifted the group's discussion away from *Closer* to direct his hostility towards me (as moderator); with a palpable narcissistic enjoyment in reversing the moderator-interviewee role, the participant disregards my endeavour (as researcher) to question the group on the way *Closer* related to Lebanon's history of war. Jihad was obscure as he evoked the taboos of communal hostility triggered by war remembrance, which brought an impression of suspense into the group's atmosphere:

Jihad: Because there is here something that is called distinction. There is here a distinction.

Moderator: Between?

Jihad: Between many (0.4) people. Have you read the newspapers? Have you read the newspaper? What did you read?

Moderator: Are you talking to me personally?

Jihad: Yes, I speak with you. What did you read in your newspapers? In France, Ya'ni[2]. What did you read in relation to the country Lebanon?

Moderator: Why are you asking me this question?

Jihad: Because, we are talking about the war. We are talking now in relation to the war (0.3).

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[2] The Arabic expression Ya'ni means "it means" and was often employed by the participants in the interviews as they developed opinions and ideas.

At the end of the discussion, outraged at my attempt to make the term "distinction[3]" more explicit, Jihad confronted me and halted the group's discussion, in what I understand to be an act of censorship, and, at the same time, a way of imposing himself as the leader of the group.

> Moderator: You said the expression 'distinction'. What did you mean by that?
>
> Jihad: There is a distinction here in Lebanon. I refuse to talk in this situation. Are you happy?

In the group dynamics marked by Jihad's charismatic position, Tarek's inclination towards the way *Closer* points to ideological issues at the heart of the past memories in Lebanon was at odds with the rest of the group. Tarek was the only participant amenable to engage thoroughly with the exhibition. In my field notes from 9 March 2009 relating to Group 2's exposure to *Closer* I note the following:

Almost all participants of Group 2 are aggregated to each other while they approach the artworks; they quickly wander around the museum and laugh most of the time while looking at the artworks. By contrast, one participant lingers in the rooms at his own pace. In particular, he muses upon *Self-Portraits* (D'Agata).

In contrast with the uneven focus of the group's discussion, Tarek perceptively said that seeing images of war and nudity brings suffering to the centre stage of the exhibition, which helps to raise Lebanese awareness of the "profound bad sound about the war". However, Tarek's effort to make sense of *Closer* and get beyond the group's tendency to recoil from the artwork became voiceless when Jihad, the leader of the group, censored Tarek's attempt to deal with war and conflicting memories. Take the extract below:

> Moderator: Do you think this kind of exhibition enables you to think about the future?
>
> Jihad: It is all about destruction. These things cannot be faced. These landscapes are unforgettable.

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[3] In the aforementioned excerpt, Jihad's ambiguous choice of the term 'distinction' is worth noting. It reveals how viewing *Closer* exacerbated the sectarian divides between communities in today's post-war era.

Tarek: The exhibition shows us the future. If right now we make a choice of going to war, this is the future ... the pictures.

Moderator: Does anybody want to elaborate on that?

Jihad: Wait a minute, be careful. Are you talking about the war in Lebanon in particular or in general?

While Groups 1 and 2 ostensibly rejected the artists' lived experience of war time, **Group 3's** negative attitude towards the dimension of memory in *Closer* was more insidious. At first glance, the participants took a dispassionate view of the exhibition and narrowed their criticisms to expressions such as "seeing these artworks is boring". However, the only female participant, who brought a political overtone in her reading of the artwork – she pointed to the contentious issue of remembering the civil war – stood out amongst her peers, who tended to avoid the issue of memory in the discussion.

A first disagreement emerged between Tala and Ibraheem over the interpretation of *Saida June 6, 1982* by Zaatari, as Ibraheem claimed to see only a familiar account of the July 2006 War in Zaatari's work, while Tala made a point about envisioning the more remote civil war. Bringing to the fore questions of remembrance, Tala stood out as she claimed it was necessary to have a publicised remembrance of the war in a public space like the Beirut Art Center. It was certainly essential for Tala to argue that Lebanese suffered more during the civil war than in 2006 because, as she revealed later, it brought into question her parents' personal experience of hardship. But as Tala was continuing, Ibraheem glossed over her endeavour to address the oblivion of the war in her society by concluding that "old stories bring revenge": a statement that implicitly meant that the search for remembrance of the civil war brings about resentment and feelings of retaliation.

Ibraheem: When I saw these photos, I remember 2006, that's what I read. It was my first experience, all of us.

Tala: It was much easier!

((Ibraheem, Zienab and Rasha mumbled Arabic words)).

Tala: It was much easier than the war that happened in 1982. So much easier.

Ibraheem: 2006?

Moderator: Do you think about that war that happened in 1982? The civil war?

Tala: Yes, of course! My parents always talk about stories, about what they had to suffer and the depression they had.

Moderator: Do they talk a lot about it?

Tala: We ask them. They wouldn't. They prefer not too much (0.4). They prefer to just forget.

Moderator: Would you recommend to your parents to come and see this exhibition?

Tala: Maybe if they see this exhibition, they will talk more ((The group laughed)).

Ibraheem: Sometimes when they tell us about the old stories, we are like, we want a revenge or maybe … Sometimes some people think like that. So it may cause another civil war. Such the war that happened last year in 2008, in May.

The fiercest exchanges between Tala and the group ensued when Tala reflected on the feeling of empowerment she experienced as she engaged with *Crossing Surda*, namely Emily Jacir's venture to film the painstaking journey of the Palestinians as they walked through the Surda checkpoint near to Ramallah. Contrasting with the group's general bleak perception of the future and of disempowerment, Tala drew from Jacir's defiant artistic endeavour the sentiment of "hope". But, entering a highly politically sensitive issue, as soon as she pronounced the name "Palestinian" in reference to Jacir's work, and related it to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Tala was immediately halted and told to "shut up!" by another female participant.

5.1.2 Divisive readings of the theme of war: dissension over remembering the past and collective memory

Groups 4 and 5 were criss-crossed by disagreements over different ways of engaging with the representation of the war in *Closer*. This put the spotlight on conflicting positions in Group 4, in which a number of participants claimed the responsibility of the Lebanese people for war misdeeds while others sustained that the Lebanese were the victims of an outside force. Two readings of the dimension of war in *Closer* also competed in Group 5. A few female participants engaged with the other's suffering through their experience of *Closer*, as a way to develop a sense of collective belonging. In contrast, other female participants rejected the idea of suffering; it was seen as a burden that undermined their sense of self. It is worth recalling that both Groups 4 and Group 5 were confessionally mixed groups. Group 4 was the most diverse group, because – in addition to mixed religious belonging – the participants came from middle and upper-class backgrounds and heterogeneous fields of studies, with one participant politically affiliated to the Amal Movement.

Although the majority of the participants in **Group 4** felt enriched by engaging with the artists' lived experiences of war time and were inclined towards the way *Closer* fostered them to face up to their troubled past, two other participants deprecated *Closer*, hardly seeing art at all in the exhibition. Mazen and Christine, who saw only the banality of the war in the realistic perspective of the news media and accounts of injuries, showed a defensive attitude regarding the other participants. Sensitive to the emotions emanating from the artists' personal experiences of war-time, artistic accounts of experiences of loss and hardships; the latter read *Closer* as a space charged with ethical implications. In turn they felt encouraged to critically reflect upon the polemical representations of history. Take the two following extracts, indicative of two polarised readings of *Closer*:

> Alain: All these arts symbolise our struggle, always this idea of struggle, everything we take for granted. It is quite depressing, but a good depressing.

Christine: Who make it them as being art? It's modern art, as we see, because they are in this exhibition. But I can see they are just documentaries. What makes them, what gave them that artistic, or being art? I don't see this as art.

Mazen: Exactly.

[later on]

Christine: Let me tell you something. Foreigners look at them as pieces of art. We look at them as … we <u>live</u> them. It's something that we live; it's history. That's the difference.

Moderator: Is that the same for all of you?

Alain: Not exactly. It has a <u>lot of truth</u> to it. I think, it's much more than history.

Here, it is important to notice that the difference between the two sub-groups of participants does not lie in the nature of the reactions elicited by the exhibition – Alain and his peers also saw the exhibition as "depressing" – but in distinctive ways of making sense of the display of the theme of war. What catalysed the majority of the group's meaningful investment in the theme of war and history was a positive identification with the characters' intimate thoughts and emotions, totally absent from Mazen and Christine's engagement with *Closer*. For instance, feeling very much in tune with Zaatari's account of an adolescent's daily life during the civil war in *Saida June 6, 1982*, most of the participants were able to identify themselves with the adolescent's experience of the war.

Cherine: It is just like a film, but it is done in a way like she said, it steers emotions, so we can relate more to this.

Sadika: You put your own reference into it. It is just you.

As a culmination of the latent tension between the two sub-groups, a conflict that revealed itself in the discussion was the contest over the responsibility Lebanese should *or should not* endorse with regard to the civil war. Alain and others engaged in a rhetoric of blame and shame for the wars in Lebanon: a critical positioning regarding history that Mazen and Christine refused to agree with. This ensued in entrenched positions between Alain and

others, and Mazen and Christine, who, shockingly for the rest of the group, came to justify the idea that wars may resume in Lebanon.

> Moderator: How do you think the war should have been remembered?
>
> Sadika: It's a war: as something bad, of course.
>
> Mazen: Everybody wants to go to war.
>
> Sadika: Eh!
>
> Alain: Because they don't remember.
>
> Mazen: Everybody wants to go to war. Especially the younger generations.
>
> Cherine: Do you want to go to war?
>
> Mazen: Huh … positive, negative side of getting into battle … ((Cherine laughed))
>
> Sadika: Maybe war should be remembered in a way that makes you not want to get into one (…)
>
> Alain: I think our war is shameful. It is not something to be proud of.
>
> Sadika: I am talking about the civil war.
>
> Alain: I don't think so. There are no positive sides to any war, regardless of which.
>
> Christine: I think it depends on which war. The civil war?
>
> Mazen: The civil war is... [Christine: the July War and the 7 May War].
>
> Alain: Why only the civil war? All wars. This is our wars.

Group 5's meaningful involvement in the representation of the war stems from the artists' display of their lived experiences and the exhibit of the intimate body in *Closer*. Yet, two ways of making sense of the dimension of intimacy competed with each other and polarised the group's discussion about the issue of collective memory and its relation to the question of collective identity. A sub-group of participants touched upon the suffering and the repressed feelings of a wounded past; they felt the artists' lived experiences of war time and exhibit of body intimacy brought "intense emotions" to centre stage. For this sub-group the display of

intimacy in relation to the representation of the war reinforced their sense of a shared sorrow, and created a common ground among themselves. Another sub-group of participants, less sensitive to the affective dimension of the intimate body and its link with suffering, made a point of seeing in *Closer* only a way to bypass the ethos that associates suffering with collective grievance. At stake in these divergences of views about engaging with the suffering and intimacy in *Closer* is the contested notion of collective identity in Lebanon, with few participants who conjure up the rise of the individual over the collective.

From the beginning of the discussion there was a sharp contrast in affective involvement between a number of female participants who displayed intense and powerful emotions stirred up by the artists' lived experiences of the war (e.g., Zaatari and Chakar's works related to the civil war), and two other participants who were adamant about seeing only a discreet artistic account of war.

> Rima: I think it's really powerful. Er ... At some point I felt uncomfortable. Er ... I don't know why, because they were things that remind me of everything, er, the war, for example, I had tears in my eyes. Er ... where this artist who had these pictures in 1982 in Saida, though I'm not from there, but I don't know why at some I had tears in my eyes. I think it's the impact of other things I had already seen before. They stir up this weird feeling inside me.

> Michelle: Er ... my impression is that, I don't know if it is a bit of a paradox with what you have all been saying, that everything was done with much delicacy ...

>   [Later on]

> Nathalie: The 16-year-old boy who took pictures of Saida, etc ... and at the same time he was writing his diary, he was writing banalities ... We all had this feeling, the parallel. On one side there is war and at the same time life passes.

> Michelle: There is life, there is boredom. What pushes him to write this is boredom.

> Rima: But! In fact, boredom, it is this thing that makes me a bit ... bizarre. Because ... I don't think there is really boredom when there is a war. It is trying to ... to. It ((she is speaking in English)) it is rejection of reality. He is in denial, because we

say we got bored during the war ... it is a bit, I don't think it is reality. He is <u>too</u> scared. It is not normal [...] It is surely not boring.

[Later on]

Michelle: You spoke of denial in recognising that we are at war, but I did not see how a sort of <u>denial</u> of what is happening could take place, since ... <u>He</u> did not give a damn, OK, it is war, it is his country that suffers ... But he has a desire to live, a desire to continue.

As seen in the aforementioned excerpt, Michelle and Nathalie's focus on the adolescent feeling of "boredom" in times of war sounds provocative to Rima, who saw in Michelle and Nathalie a profound dismissal of Lebanese people who have memories of hardship. By contrast, Rima put forward her cathartic experience of *Saida June 6, 1982* (Zaatari) and interpreted Michelle's focus on war's existential boredom to be symptomatic of their society's denial of the suffering.

At stake in the group's polarised readings of the intimacy in relation to the representation of the war and the theme of memory were two different positions regarding collective identity. First, three Shiite Muslim women from southern Lebanon, who had all spent their childhood exiled during the civil war, were keen to identify with the other's suffering presented in the artwork and develop a sense of "we". For these three women, their disquieting experience of seeing intimacy in *Closer* generated an array of affects, such as fear, phobia and anxiety, which led them to touch, deep down, a common ground of all human beings and develop a sense of sameness. In contrast, Michelle, a Maronite Christian from the north, made a point of standing outside of emotional empathy with her peers and refused to engage with the suffering of the other in the exhibition; she sought to escape from a sense of "we" and exert her individuality at the expense of the collective.

Zeinab: It is a fact that to show that in the end we all have the same worries, we all have the same fears, we all have the same phobias also at the end of the day. No, we have our unity, we have our individuality, but deep down ... we are all the same

and … that you see from the reaction…. You have remarked, we have about … The reactions that we have presented show that we, deep down, we are identical.

Hadil: Same anxieties, yeah …

[Later on]

Michelle: When I heard last time what it was about, that there were artists talking about the war, martyr, the war. At the beginning, I said to myself that frankly I don't want to hear about the war. [Nathalie: It bothers her] ((Nathalie laughed)). I don't want to go to an exhibition where one talks about the war. What is interesting is that they talked about the war, not as a collective curse, something that is thrust upon everybody; it is very personal, it is the experience of an adolescent.

[Later on]

Michelle: In fact the impediments did not fall in the same way for everybody. It is as if, imagine, Lebanon is a human being, it is a body. As if we are paralysed in one arm and one leg but the rest works very well. I don't know, as a group, the Lebanese are a group which cannot, in which there will be many gaps because one part doesn't work, I don't know, the group of those who were protected, who did not really suffer. I think, I don't know about the others, that I am part of those who did not really suffer; I am compelled to live with those who suffered. It is not egoism, but it is a fact. It is how it happened.

As seen in the aforementioned excerpt, Michelle tentatively justified why she did not align with her peers' rhetoric of identifying with the other's suffering through their involvement in the artists' lived experience of war and in the intimacy. Here, it is suggested that Michelle deflected the guilt of not sharing in the other women's empathy with the other's suffering. To do so, she drew on the metaphor of the dismembered body to depict the drawbacks of the Lebanese identity as ineluctably fragmented and the fact that, coming from a Maronite family living in the north, her family was sheltered from traumatic past experiences.

However, one striking moment in the discussion between Michelle and the other women brought them together; they read Steele's intimate display of her scars (*Birthday Suit*) as a

way to involve themselves in multiple stories of suffering, beyond the Lebanese history of suffering.

> Zeinab: I think it is good to show this, because this is what we say of the Lebanese … Eventually, to show us that, for instance [on *Birthday Suit*, Steele] the woman who has got the scars on her body, eventually when she talks about her stories and the context that goes with it … we realise that we went through very similar things. So, it helps us to put in question. We are not the only one, we are not the centre of the world, this is not just our story, my story. We are not mythological people.

> Michelle: This is true, because Lebanese people tend to think that they are the only one who suffered, the only one who have a troubled history, with wars … But no.

In the aforementioned excerpt, Michelle was able to join her peers on a critical reflection of their history, because seeing a universal perspective in Steele's detailed account of her scars enabled them to unleash disencumber the question of suffering from the Lebanese ethnocentric ethos of fate.

Concluding remarks

To conclude the analysis of the interactions and dynamics revolving around the five groups' involvement with the dimension of war, history and memory in *Closer*, I formulate a few assumptions.

1. Central to the aversion of Groups 1, 2 and 3 regarding the thematic of war was their hostility towards the artists' lived experiences. A common feature of the dynamics of these three groups was the emergence of a normative discontent towards the theme of war and history, which did not result from the formation of a consensus between the participants, but from an alignment of positions with the leading figures within the groups. Alternative voices did not succeed in differentiating themselves or bringing about a debate within the groups; Eliane and Tarek's voices were ostracised in their group, while Tala's attempt to name the Palestinian people in the discussion was simply censored.

2. It is suggested that the participants' disquieting encounter with *Closer*, mingling the dimension of war with that of the intimate body, indicates that the core experience of the groups may be one of *anxiety*. Namely, it reveals deep-rooted feelings of threat to the group's identity. Armstrong (2005) and Bion (1964) point out that highly unpleasant experiences in groups are a common signal of intense, unarticulated group dynamics. It is possible to assume that by inclining towards a normative construction of a refusal to recognise the thematic of war, the groups were protecting themselves from anxious feelings. At the societal level, I interpret that these dynamics may have protected the groups' representation of a unified Lebanon, counterbalancing a possible anxiety caused by the image of a fragmented Lebanese identity, elicited by the groups' encounter with the representation of the war in *Closer*.

3. In Groups 4 and 5, two more heterogeneous groups in terms of religious belonging and cultural background, the members openly disagreed over the representation of the war in *Closer*. This pointed out a fault line in the participants' engagement with the theme of memory of the civil war. The polemical issue of responsibility for war misdeeds was at heart of clashes in Group 4. Group 5's divisive ways of making sense of the artists' lived experience of war time in relation to the intimate body highlighted a gap between the eight women regarding a lack of emotional sharing and empathy for the other's suffering rooted in diverse experiences and family stories about the traumatic past.

4. Interestingly, the lack of emotional involvement in the memory of war was counterbalanced on a specific occasion. Worthy of note was that the women shared investment in the universal dimension of Steele's recount of her scars. This brought about a common rhetoric of taking a symbolic distance from the ethos of collective suffering that is perceived by the Lebanese people to be what makes the history of Lebanon so unique.

5.2 Family narratives

The second section sheds light on more consensual dynamics within most of the groups as they elaborated on their involvement in stories unfolded between parents and children and

the paths their lives have taken (*A Loving Man*, Jananne Al-Ani and *Intervista*, Anri Sala). To recall, Al-Ani and Sala's works stand out from the rest of the exhibition because the videos and installations conveyed narratives that sit well outside references to the Lebanese war and to symbols of sectarian divides, and do not contain nudity. These common features confer on *A Loving Man* and *Intervista* a non-confrontational (or at least, less confrontational) status. Disparities nonetheless arose within the groups regarding their involvement with the works of Al-Ani and Sala. While Group 2 did not comment at all on the theme, only one participant in Group 1 elaborated on *A Loving Man* (Al-Ani). Groups 3, 4 and 5 were the groups in which the theme of the family narratives was most discussed and debated amongst the participants.

5.2.1 Scarcity of the theme in the discussions

In **Group 1**, Najah brought forth an unusual discourse in relation to *A Loving Man* (Al-Ani) amidst the dismissive and fearful rhetoric of the other participants. Al-Ani's trick of depicting the five women narrating a story modelled on a children's game captivated Najah's curiosity, as if this participant had come to realise that one story can convey several possible life experiences. Najah's meaningful involvement contradicted Eliane's rhetoric of fear, which was triggered by her unsettling impression of entering a dark room and of seeing "black heads" in Al-Ani's installation:

> Eliane: [on A Loving Man, Al-Ani :] And the women. They talk one after another. I̲t̲ ̲i̲s̲ ̲s̲c̲a̲r̲y̲.
>
> Najah: I̲ ̲l̲i̲k̲e̲d̲ ̲a̲ ̲l̲o̲t̲ ̲t̲h̲i̲s̲ ̲i̲d̲e̲a̲. Everyone has her own way of talking. She is reflecting on that ... what is the same story but different between the experiences of the places. This is the reason why I found this scene t̲h̲e̲ ̲m̲o̲s̲t̲ objective.

In the above excerpt, Najah's last statement, "I found this scene the most objective" deserves attention because, in my view, it denotes the ambivalent and uneasy position of Najah in the group. Early in the discussion, Najah was one of the participants who fustigated most fiercely the artists' pernicious and unacceptable exhibition of their subjective points of view.

It is possible to suggest that, in order to justify his liking for the narrative lines in *A Loving Man*, Najah[4] labelled the scene of the five women's narrative as the "most objective" in order to discursively protect his position of an outsider and align with the group's norm of overall rejection of *Closer*. Indeed, Najah's liking for the multiple experiences and voices explored in *A Loving Man* implicitly points to his curiosity about the subjective register of the artwork, which Najah could not recognise in front of his counterparts.

5.2.2 Consensus around family stories

Group 3's feelings of discomfort in confronting the war and palpable tensions between one participant[5] (Tala) and another participant were soothed when the group reflected on *A Loving Man* (Al-Ani), and *Intervista* (Sala) and invested in the theme of family narratives. The group voiced curiosity about the installations' visual effects and sounds, which helped them to involve themselves more empathetically with the stories.

> Rasha: Wherever we walk [within the exhibition] we hear different sounds. From what we hear, there were the stories behind these sounds. So, when we started watching movies and knew what the sounds were about, we started to understand the whole exhibition.
>
> Ibraheem: And the story at the beginning which is written outside helped us to understand what's happening in their movies.

There was an unusual flow of discussion between almost all participants[6] in the group as they concentrated on the women's facial expressions in *A Loving Man* (Al-Ani). Struck by the darkness upon entering the room and the installation's five screens, the participants expressed that they were able to let their imaginations wander and experience several possible stories.

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[4]Najah stood out from the rest of the group as the only participant who not only identified the theme of war in the exhibition, but also saw the artists' 'personal experience'. Najah was also more sensitive to the aesthetic features of the exhibition than his peers.

[5]Few participants sought to shuffle Tala's sensitive political comments relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

[6]Zeinab almost never spoke in the discussion.

Ibraheem: And the mother and the four daughters. [Zeinab and Rasha: Yes, yes] There is something special. Everything is black ... to let us concentrate on the expression of her faces.

Moderator: what did you have in mind?

Ibraheem: I saw that there is a big difference between one and another.

Rasha: We can imagine a different scenario every time we hear the women talking. And when we hear the women talking we try to imagine a story. And then when you hear another one, you imagine another story with another atmosphere.

Ibraheem: It is about expressions, facial expressions.

Moderator: Did you relate this artwork to something which is familiar in your life, in society?

Rasha: Every time we try to think about a story.

With *Intervista* (1998), Group 3 was gripped by the "originality" of the story about the 22-year-old artist who endeavoured to recover the video soundtrack of his mother's speech, while she had been interviewed during the Albanian Communist Party Congress 20 years ago. Namely, the group voiced a dedicated interest in the son confronting his mother about her experience of what it had been like to live in a country led by a political system caught up in ideology. Interpreting *Intervista* as a representation of individuals struggling with their troubled past history and uncertain future, one participant saw in Sala's work an echo of the Lebanese predicament. Interestingly, Rasha overtly elaborated on the situation in post-war Lebanon, while she was also one of those who refrained from engaging with the war memories as described in the first section of this chapter.

Moderator: You talked about the video, the story of the mother. Why do you relate to the Lebanese society?

Rasha: Because, they lived a civil war. She was talking about the hopes and thought and such things they were talking about at the beginning of the war, and now she saw herself, talking many years ago, she saw herself talking about ridiculous things.

They changed during the war to completely different thought and acts. So, it makes sense, we lived such reality in Lebanon.

[Later on]

Rasha: And at the end she was talking about the fear of the future, the future of her son and the country. Yan'i, we know this feeling, we always have the fear of what is gonna happen, and next and our country, because we live in a continuous war, or tense, tension in Lebanon. So, we are always afraid about our future. She was talking about that an Albanian one. I think we are not living in a more peaceful life in Lebanon. So it makes sense.

5.2.3 Shared curiosity about family narratives; different interpretative outcomes

In Groups 4 and 5 the participants converged around two ways of making sense of *A Loving Man* (Al-Ani) and *Intervista* (Sala). First, the artwork stirred up emotions, and *A Loving Man* conveyed a universal dimension through the dialogue between five women and *Intervista* between a mother and her son. Second, at the heart of *Intervista*'s story is the moving question of the parents' transmission of the past to their offspring. Interestingly however, although evoking *A Loving Man* and *Intervista* gave rise to easier dynamics in the groups, a division between participants recurred in both groups when they extrapolated on the stories and the artists' messages.

For the first time in **Group 4**'s discussion, a shared curiosity arose in the group about *A Loving Man* (Al-Ani) and brought together participants who had argued fiercely over theme of war, history and memory as described in the first section of this chapter. Mazen and Christine, who stood in opposition to the rest of the group when they disregarded the artists' lived experiences of war time, joined the line of talk of another participant, while expounding on *A Loving Man*. All shared how the women's facial expressions in the video installation stirred up their emotions. Furthermore, as they found the women's faces even more salient against the backdrop of the dark room, Mazen, Christine and Swasan engaged in a dialogue about how they were pulled into the narrative of an absent father in the context of war.

Swasan: I want to speak about the children's game; the five women. I thought it was <u>so</u> interesting, even if you don't understand what they're saying. But, OK, maybe I am thinking of it from a psychological point of view. The same paragraph, said by five different women and all from the same social class. Everything is the same, maybe the minor difference is the age. But the words, when they looked, when the mother got frustrated she looks direct at the camera. It was so interesting to see how. OK, as a spectator, many different spectators looking at one painting in one way. But this time this exhibited in different way, this is why it was so interesting. Did they understand what I said?

Moderator: What did you feel, Mazen?

Mazen: Actually, I saw emotions in every woman. I saw different emotions, and I saw different times. The old lady, I saw she was talking about the father during the world war and the young lady talking about the recent war or some personal struggle.

Later on

Christine: The common thing I agree is that they missed their father and the father was loving, but when the last woman spoke, she said: OK he is far away, they can go on. I do not need any more. This makes the circle complete.

Moderator: What do you think about that?

Swasan: I think they complete each other. They all have the same idea.

Yet, as soon as Swasan, Christine and Alain embarked on interpreting *A Loving Man*'s meaning as to what kind of message Al-Ani was trying to convey by representing a mother and her daughters remembering an absent father, divergences of views arose between the participants. There was a dividing line between Christine's pessimistic perception of the women's narratives, replete with resignation and fate, and Alain's reading of the story; Alain understood a message of empowerment, a resource to "alleviate the depression and [by] sharing with others".

Christine: By the way, she is not useful, that girl who spoke. She is just in denial. There's nothing she can do about the fact that she is away from her father. But she has to convince herself that she can go on.

Alain: She has left for a long time!

Christine: Yeah, but there's something which is missing. There's nothing easy.

Alain: There's nothing missing. It was just. There's always this bitterness [Christine: Yeah!], this anger. And at the end "I understand, but I miss you" (0.5).

Moderator: It seems like there is lots of sadness and nostalgia. Is there something optimistic in some artworks you have seen?

Swasan: You can find several things in this. Maybe, when you look at how these people deal with their troubles and so on. The father left for instance, you can find that these people were able to survive.

Regarding *Intervista*, there were also divergent interpretative stances between Christine and Alain, who either envisioned the mourning process of a mother towards her youth and political ideals (Christine), or saw a message of encouragement "to take charge of our existence" (Alain). Notwithstanding, the members of Group 4 came together when they talked about the universal tone of the artwork ("it is caused to every mothers", said Sadika). As a result, Sadika, in line with Mazen and Alain, was able to put the Lebanese Civil War in a perspective that extends the scope of the regional conflict; "it is not just Lebanese or Palestinian", claimed Sadika. This certainly soothed the tensions that had occurred between the group members when reflecting upon the artwork that was directly related to the civil war (e.g., *Saida June 6, 1982*, Zaatari and *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*, Chakar).

Sadika: I think it's Anri Sala. He is Albanian, but if you look at his movie, it is so much, it is caused to every mother, every ... I think everybody here who has ( ) to war, it doesn't matter where you are, Albania or ...

Alain: The same stories, the same photos [Mazen: Yeah, the same] the same sadness and problems about the future. It doesn't matter where you are.

Moderator: Is that for you more universal?

Sadika: Yeah! It is not just the Lebanese, or the Palestinians.

Alain: What is surprising is how the Albanian ... the Lebanese, we are so excited, enthusiastic about a cause. And we end up making things, which are worst. Everybody in the civil war has a cause.

In **Group 5**, *A Loving Man* (Al-Ani) brought a consensus between the participants; most of them felt moved by Al-Ani's artwork. Michelle, who shied away from the other participants' involvement in the other's suffering in making sense of the artists' lived experiences of war time and exhibits of intimacy, was in tune with her peers as they evoked the emotional impact of Al-Ani's artistic twist. In line with Nathalie and Rima, Michelle perceptively pointed out that the use of the children's game enabled them to open up to others' feelings and at the same time extends the perception of the self.

Moderator: Well ... How did you feel personally? Did you feel moved?

Michelle: Yes ... at least by ... particularly by, well ... I don't know how it is called, the video with the dark room with the women.

Moderator: Jananne Al-Ani, *A Loving Man.*

Michelle: *A Loving Man*, this is it. I read it was about a family, about sisters and her mother who talk about the absent father, and I feel deeply moved, how it is made. First, the topic is striking and above all how it is made.

Rima: Their behaviour, because they ... they all say the same thing ... the same ... in fact, it is same paragraph, the same text. And everyone makes a little break when they talk and somewhere you feel each one's reaction during the little break.

Michelle: Be it a little laugh, a little smile and I don't know, for us (0.7). We don't have often the chance to see impressions of everyone at the same time. Here I was watching everywhere and I could see what everybody felt.

Nathalie: Above all, the audio-visual support has a big impact; this is not as if we were watching a still image like that and which you are looking at and can't see anything else. There are several screens, we see a bit everywhere and so on …

Upon engaging with *Intervista* (Sala), while another participant interpreted the artwork through the lens of the troubled Lebanese history, seen as a caveat against any attempts to resume war, Michelle made a point of underlining the universal character of *Intervista*. Michelle enforced her reading of the mother's recollection of her past through the lens of the universal dimension. In particular, Michelle took up Sala's endeavour to unearth his mother's words while she was interviewed 20 years ago as a way to experience her own mother's past experiences.

Michelle: There is a girl who found a video of her mother who took a particular stand during the war. ((Michelle mixed up between girl and boy as she commented on *Intervista*, Sala))

Rima: The Albanian one. [Michelle: <u>This</u> is universal!]

Rima: Here, I made a link with Lebanon when she says "try not to", "try to learn from what we have … euh … what we lived and what we did. And this is history that repeats itself, because it is what we say in Lebanon, but at the same time, we have always the same problems which come back, we have always … this is the youth which is concerned because … this is this (0.3).

 [later on]

Michelle: This is this curiosity from the girl to know what her mother would have said 20 years ago, <u>this is universal.</u> <u>Everywhere</u> in the world I guess that nobody expects to … I don't know. It is difficult to accept that our parents themselves were young, that they were also motivated, engaged so this curiosity … She [Anri Sala] even went to see deaf people to understand what her mother said. I feel it … this is <u>not</u> in relation to the war, with the position of her mother, it is more in relation to this curiosity to know what my mother … could have said 20 years ago. This is what I feel <u>very</u> moving.

Concluding remarks

A Loving Man (Al-Ani) and *Intervista* (Sala) were scarcely commented on in Group 1, and the two works of art were totally avoided in Group 2. I assume that for these two first groups, the theme of war, history and memory was perceived (as shown in the first section) as explosive and threatening to such an extent that it overrode the groups' reading of the exhibition; this may have prevented the groups from opening up to the thematic of the family narratives.

In contrast, easier exchanges of views about *A Loving Man* (Al-Ani) and *Intervista* (Sala) were noticeable in Groups 3, 4 and 5; interestingly, the groups in which tensions were most explicitly at play between the members as they commented on the first theme. Here I formulate three assumptions related to the memory issue in post-war Lebanon, which tentatively explore the reasons as to why Groups 3, 4 and 5 involved themselves meaningfully in particular features of the works of Al-Ani and Sala. I assume that Groups 3, 4 and 5, despite differences of interpretation, found in *Intervista* (Sala) and *A Loving Man* (Al-Ani) spaces for co-identifications that open up to symbolic and imaginative readings. *A Loving Man* and *Intervista* helped the groups to overcome the laden context of a sectarian memory culture and play the role of "narrative mediation" (Lázsló, 2003, p. 176), meeting the participants' need for "frank speaking[7]" (Foucault, 1982–1983) upon which to build up a renewed relationship to the truth.

1. A key finding was the groups' sensitivity to the narrative structure in *A Loving Man* and *Intervista*. Moved by the artistic focus on the relationship between a mother and her four daughters (*A Loving Man*) and a mother and her son (*Intervita*) the participants ascribed a universal overtone to the themes of absence, longing and reflecting on one's past experience that were conveyed in the stories. Prominent in the discussions was the figure of the mother, often depicted as "every" or as "my mother". Here I assume

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[7] Foucault draws on Aristotle's concept of Parrhesia (free-speaking) to set out the idea of a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth through frankness instead of persuasion. I suggest that the Foucauldian idea of frank speaking is well appropriated to account for the post-war Lebanese context in which media and sectarian discourses about the civil war distort historical narratives. What arises clearly in our data is a need of the participants to rely on their parents in order to know their lived experiences, as if the private sphere of the family was the ultimate shelter to preserve the possibility of truth.

that, in pointing to the universal character of the figure of the mother, the participants could co-identify and develop a sense of a unified group.

2. Another important aspect of Groups 3, 4 and 5's engagement with *A Loving Man* and *Intervista* is that the groups were captivated by what it meant when the characters in the artwork search through their past. For instance, what interested Mazen in Group 4 was "what she [the mother] said" when she was part of the Youth Alliance Communist Party (*Intervista*). I suggest that the participants' emphasis on the characters' venture of digging into their parents' past may be interpreted in light of the post-war context and the muddled narratives of the civil war. In these groups, the young Lebanese often expressed how they miss points of historical reference (e.g., the absence of scholarly history books since 1943). The participants lacked symbolic references concerning their history that ensure that history-writing is trustful. The participants' curiosity about the stories containing elements that point to the search for parents' words at times in their past certainly reveals a need for truth-telling or frank speaking (Foucault, 1983).

3. Finally, the artistic twist of the children's game in *A Loving Man* appealed to the participants who felt entitled to take on different narrative positions. A number of participants in Groups 3, 4 and 5 came across the work's video-editing technique as eliciting an unusual and ubiquitous experience of the mother's and four daughters' account of the absent father; they pointed out the possibility of putting themselves into different narrative positions. In the context of the taboos and hidden stories surrounding war memories in post-war Lebanon, it is suggested that engaging with *A Loving Man*, which pulled the participants into multiple narratives, enabled these participants to develop a playful experience. By bringing the participants to experience the unfixed, shifting and wandering narratives, I assume that *A Loving Man* invites the participants to invest in a new locus of narration: a subjective one that counterbalances the laden official narratives of the past, and around which the participants can find a common investment that reunites them.

5.3 The intimate body

In this section I present the final theme, which accounts for the groups' impressions that emerged in relation to the exhibit of the intimate body and nudity in *Closer*, and elicited by the works of Lisa Steele (*Birthday Suit*), Antoine D'Agata (*Self-Portraits*), Mona Hatoum (*So Much I Want to Say*) and Lina Saneh[8] (*Body pArts*). This last section concentrates on the dynamics and rhetoric within specific groups that was generated by the exhibits of the intimate body; that is, which stand outside of the groups' discourses on confronting the war in the exhibition. Distinguishing the theme related to rhetoric on war from one related to the intimate body and nudity may seem artificial, since the first section showed how the groups' involvement with the nudity in *Closer* shaped the group dynamics and rhetoric on the theme of war, memory and history. However, presenting the themes in this way enabled me to highlight features of particular groups. In Groups 1 and 2, there was a significant lack of reference to the nudity and the intimate body per se (i.e., a rhetoric on the body was given by the groups only in relation to justifying seeing the war and disregarding the dimension of memory). In contrast, Group 5 came across the images of nudity and engaged with the intimate body as a rhetoric of *emancipation*, which brought together the female participants in support of the rise of female participation in Lebanon and other Arab countries.

5.3.1 Feelings of estrangement towards the body: norm in the groups

Even though there were no clear verbal indicators evidencing that **Group 2** rejected the experience of seeing nude bodies, the participants' recurring laughter and elusive comments such as "I felt he had a problem with himself" (*Self-Portraits*, D'Agata) or "the old woman, she probably had sexual problems when she was young" (*Body pArts*, Saneh) indicate that the groups experienced great discomfort in confronting nudes.

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[8]It is worth mentioning the specific place of Saneh's artwork in the theme of the body. *Body pArts* does not contain nudity as does *Birthday Suit* (Steele) and *Self-Portrait* (D'Agata). It stages the representation of the artist's own body, related to question pertaining to death and the form of after-life as a metaphor for individual struggle in a sectarian state.

Group 1 and 2 – the two homogeneous groups of Maronite and Shiite participants – deployed undue attention to Saneh's exhibit, *Body pArts*. The groups discarded the artist's strange and pathological personality and Group 1 used an extreme lexicon ("violates") to express the view that *Body pArts* was highly disruptive for the group itself and by and large for their society, which they felt was not yet ready to undergo "the revolt" they had drawn from *Body pArts*. Most outrageous was the artist's endeavour to "write on parts of her body", which may have been traumatic because it compelled the participants to face the materialisation of a dismantled body.

> Rajah: The first time that he saw the woman, all the pictures he has seen, he thought that the woman had a very dangerous psychological state. She was really afraid, she had a high fear.
>
> Translator/Samah: She felt she had depression in the black picture.
>
> ((The participants laughed))
>
> Translator/Mohammed: He is saying that it could not be depression or anything, but it could be her first style and paintings.
>
> Rima: She chose art to expose all the fear she had inside her.
>
> Translator/Samah: Probably, this woman is an old lady, who has seen lots of events in her life, such as the war; probably she has seen her death. It's the narrative of a woman who passed through.
>
>   [Later on]
>
> Translator/Mohammed: The picture depicts the effect of the war on their psychological state of mind. In terms of depression, of how they feel.
>
> Jihad: She talks about sexuality.
>
> Translator/Samah: She is saying that, it is definitely the effect of the war, that's why we see people without hand, she had a distorted sexuality.

Group 3 did not seem to recognise nude characters in *Closer*. Commenting on *Self-Portraits* (D'Agata), Ibraheem and Zeinab concentrated on the detail of a hand placed behind the

character's back, making sense of the artwork through the lens of the traditional precept that "one hand cannot clap", a symbol of solidarity between Lebanese communities. Such an interpretation of *Self-Portraits* evades the physicality of the body and highlights Group 3's interpretative distance from the intimate body. Note in the following extract how even when I (as moderator) sought to encourage Ibraheem to personally engage with the interpretation of *Self-Portraits*, the latter withdrew behind a collective reading of the artwork's significance for Lebanese society.

> Ibraheem: There is a picture that attracted me, with someone lying on the floor and putting his hands like this. It has two different meanings. Maybe he needs another hand to help him or he...
>
> Moderator: And what do you see?
>
> Ibraheem: It has different meanings. I can see two meanings. Maybe he needs another hand to help him, to bind his hand. We say in Lebanon: "One hand [Zeinab: cannot clap]". Do you know that? Do you know that? We need two hand to clap so he needs someone to help him.

5.3.2 Polarised positions

Amidst **Group 3'**s overall aversion to *Body pArts*, Tala's liking for Saneh's work arose at odds with the rest of the group. Even though Tala did not contradict other members of the group when they fustigated the uncanny in Lina Saneh's artwork, the "strangeness" conveyed by the work was precisely what captivated this participant. In recounting, with seeming enjoyment, the chosen elements of Saneh's body (e.g., "the heart", "the chromosome 23"), Tala seems to amplify the group's disturbing impression with regard to Saneh's work. Here, I think that Tala used Saneh's subversive installation to endorse a provocative position amongst her peers: a position of outsider that Tala had already endorsed when she contradicted other participants over the issue of remembrance of the civil war.

> Ibraheem: That's so strange ((The participant laughed)).

Moderator: Did you understand a bit about this artwork? She wanted to be cremated. Did something struck you? (0.4).

Maya: Yes!

Moderator: In a bad way or a good way?

Maya: In both ways.

Ibraheem: The lady who had her body part. It shocked me. It is something so strange.

Maya: It is strange.

Ibraheem: Yeah!

Tala: I like this way ((little laughs)).

Moderator: Did you feel it was artistic or not?

Ibraheem: Maybe it is artistic, but ...

Tala: Strange.

Rasha: Artistic in a mad way.

Tala: I like how the artists picked the all ... to sign. To sign chromosome number 23, ((all interviewees laughed)) the heart.

A divergence of views arose in **Group 4** and revealed misunderstandings between the group members regarding each one's involvement in the theme of the intimate body. A female participant's overt enthusiasm when she recounted her beguiling experience in encountering *Birthday Suit* and *Self-Portraits* took over other members' cautious attitude and puzzlement in front of the intimate body and nudity. Also worthy of note is that none of the group's members commented on *Body pArts* (Saneh) or *So Much I Want to Say* (Hatoum).

From Swasan's point of view, seeing nudity in artwork in the Beirut Art Center brought a sense of openness to new forms of art, while she remembered the cultural trips she once made to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Taking the position of connoisseurship, Swasan assumed authority over other participants' interpretations of *Birthday Suit* and *Self-*

Portraits. The following extract illustrates a significant disparity between Swasan's metaphoric experience of engaging with the scars covering Lisa Steele's nude body and other participants' more concrete and basic interpretation of the artist's video, a level of reading that instilled uneasiness in these participants.

> Christine: I think, they are very striking … because, because, I don't know the word in English, daring, because they are daring, naked people. OK, yeah, most of the pictures and the videos, yeah it's daring, but it's very ( ).
>
> Sadika: [on *Birthday Suit*, Steele] I did not understand the naked woman, she was walking, she was exposing her eyes.
>
> Swasan: The scars? I think it is typical, you know, when you see an old lady, you see the map of her life in her wrinkles.
>
> Christine: She was not old! She is young!
>
> Swasan: I know, but I think it's the same thing than the map of her childhood. Maybe the clumsiness characterised her personality, the style. She saw in her scars the map of her life. I think it was very interesting, boring, but very interesting!
>
> Sadika: Yeah, I felt it was boring, but …
>
> Swasan: Very interesting …
>
> Mazen: I think she was boring.

Much in the same way, Swasan's use of an exuberant lexicon to express her liking for the artistic twist by Antoine D'Agata (i.e., she pointed to the originality of the photograph's reversed role as the one portrayed) competed with that of a male participant who read *Self-Portraits* as the artist's depiction of a personal and existential struggle. Instead of engaging in dialogue with Alain, Swasan laughed at Alain's deeper and critical level of understanding of D'Agata's portraits, and two lines of talk and interpretation overlapped without bringing about any exchange of perspective.

Alain: I thought he hasn't changed much. I think he was stuck in the same struggle over the years, he was still in the trouble during the different stages of life and dealing with them. He hasn't very much.

Swasan: It is very interesting. I don't know the cities he choose to take the pictures. They have significance? I think it's an autobiography that he even didn't write. I thought it was the most interesting thing. I never heard about a photographer that someone else takes his photograph. It is so cool.

Mazen: I think he takes side, he is expressing his biography and pictures.

Christine: He lives his pictures, it is not just photos.

Alain: The only he can get out this loneliness it is through these pictures, in order to control his destiny, the only way to take charge. Otherwise it is awkward.

Swasan: Why did you say, it is awkward?! ((Swasan laughed)).

Alain: As Ya'ni, his struggle.

Swasan: Ah, his struggle ((Swasan laughed)).

5.3.3 Co-identifying around the Lebanese women beyond divergent experiences of seeing the artists' body

Group 5 is the group that commented most on its encounter with the intimate and nude body, and highlighted the differences between its members in making sense of *Birthday Suit* (Steele) and *Self-Portraits* (D'Agata). Namely, reflecting upon what it means for young Lebanese women to feel unsettled in front of nudes was at the heart of Group 5's discussion. However, Group 5 found a common voice in making sense of the work of Mona Hatoum, *So Much I Want to Say*. For most of the participants Hatoum's artwork symbolized the emancipation of women from the masculine domination in Lebanese and Arab society. Finally, worthy of note was that although Group 5 was keen to elaborate on the nudity-related artwork of Lisa Steele (*Birthday Suit*) and D'Agata (*Self-Portraits*), as well as on the artwork of Mona

Hatoum (*So Much I Want to Say*), the group only engaged with *Body pArts* (Lina Saneh) once I prompted them.

Group 5 polarised when the women expounded on their involvement with *Birthday Suit* and *Self-Portraits*. While a sub-group of three Muslim women expressed discomfort in viewing the nudes, two Christian women with a higher socio-economic status and accustomed to viewing contemporary art made a point of dissociating themselves from the rest of the group. Michelle and Nathalie stood off the other Muslim women's rhetoric of feeling intruded upon in their own intimacy, as if engaging with the artwork could mirror their inner selves and strip the women of their privacy.

> Zeinab: Personally, to make the point, to come back to what she said about feeling uncomfortable, euh … I think this is because of painting so much this intimacy, to make a point of showing the people's intimacy, that in the end we say … if I feel uneasy in front of this intimacy, this is in the end because my intimacy is like that. So I had the impression that my intimacy was stripped off like for instance, the woman who is not dressed. At a moment I said to myself, if I feel uncomfortable in front of this, I feel this is because it is my own intimacy. Maybe this is the aim of … but I think that it is a sign as she said yaneh … it is very powerful, if it manages to strike us so much, to make us feel in our intimacy … There is for example, the kiss of the couple [in *Self-Portait*, D'Agata]. At a moment, we say to ourselves, "leave them their intimacy!" ((Zeinab laughed ostensibly)).

> Michelle: Euh, I feel that … this is a bit paradoxical with everything you have said. Everything was done with lots of delicacy and so. First, the theme of the exhibition is *Closer*. So it is an invitation to get into their intimacy, but <u>nevertheless</u> I saw lots of delicacy. So it is an invitation to get into their intimacy, but I saw lots of delicacy in what has been done, be it with the photographs, in the small video, I don't know, for me everything is quite delicate. Everything was there, but …

However, in contrast with her outsider position in Group 5, Michelle joined with the other members of the group in a shared and meaningful interest in *So Much I Want to Say*

(Hatoum). The participants identified with the anonymous woman in the artist's video when a male hand closes over her mouth, from which it is still possible to hear the repeated sentence "So much I want to say". Michelle and the other participants saw in this artwork the symbol of Lebanese and Middle Eastern women's voices repressed by a religious, cultural and patriarchal model. It is interesting that Michelle used for the first time the pronoun "we" to designate herself as part of the group in claiming the rise of Lebanese women's voice.

> Michelle: There is also the small video that says "So Much I Want to Say", which I find really moving. This especially what each one feel, one has a lot to say. We come here and we feel like here that there is something which closes our mouth. Silence. I don't know if I can say that I felt some discomfort with that, I don't think I felt uneasy, but I can't say I felt relieved. This is just that it made sense to me.

> [Later on]

> Zeinab: I think that … it was my way of reacting, one comes at a moment … where we say to ourselves. She repeats it so much, we feel it is like a leitmotiv … she … I don't know, she …

> Michelle: What she tries to tell is, I think it is the situation of someone, first of a woman in the Middle East. This is how I read it, it is the woman who can't tell it all (0.6).

Finally, introducing *Body pArts* by Lina Saneh in Group 5's discussion was the researcher's suggestion. The group engaged with the work of Saneh with perplexity and discomfort as laughter accompanied the women's comments. Along with Michelle's sharp rejection ("I found it <u>very absurd</u> and I didn't understand"), a few members made interpretative efforts to make sense of the presence of the life-size black silhouette by Lina Saneh displayed to the right of the entrance to the centre. Yet, puzzlement in the group became palpable as the participants raised the nagging question as to know whether Saneh's artistic endeavour to sell parts of her body would come true, blurring the boundary between fiction and reality.

> Moderator: Did you read it?

Michelle: She decided to give ... parts of her body, is that right? To sell them, isn't it? But <u>why</u>? It is symbolic, isn't it?

Moderator: ((I explicated Lina Saneh's project)).

Nathalie: I think she is really going to do that (0.3). I don't know.

((Several participants laughed))

Michelle: I think it is to defend her right to cremation, isn't it?

Geraldine: In fact, we wonder where is the limit between art and reality, because, frankly in this exhibition we do not know really where is the limit, we think that everything is possible.

Concluding remarks

The rhetoric and associated dynamics of the groups elicited by the theme of the intimate body and nudity brings about important differences across the groups. Groups 1 and 2 unanimously rejected the theme of the intimate body, which they could only see as evidence of the exhibition's focus on the war at the expense of any other themes. Similar to my assumption in the first section, I assume that the groups' general dynamic, which consists of recoiling from the body-related artwork, is a defensive strategy aimed to eschew any impression of a threat to the groups.

The members of Group 5 elaborated most on their impressions regarding the body-related artwork. Gender and proximity of knowledge between the group members certainly provided a degree of mutual confidence between the eight women when they were experiencing, in front of others, disturbing feelings such as those sparked by *Birthday Suit* (Steele), *Self-Portraits* (D'Agata) and by *Body pArts* (Saneh). Interestingly, apart from a shared understanding of Hatoum's video *So Much I Want to Say* as a symbol of the feminist struggle against male domination in Middle Eastern societies, which they all identified with, the women's involvement in the deeper level of the themes of the intimate body did not enable them to find a common ground. The exhibit of intimacy in the public space of the BAC highlighted

contrasting positions between Maronite women and a group of Shiite Muslim women, who reflected upon their discomfort in feeling intruded on by the exhibit of nudity in *Closer*.

Conclusion of the chapter

This chapter has presented the analysis of the five focus groups. Analysing the discourses, the interaction and dynamics within five groups distinct from each other by homogeneous or heterogeneous characteristics of gender, religious, socio-economic and cultural background highlighted a number of significant points, which are summarised as follows.

1. Two groups that presented a strong form of grouping[9] revolving around religious characteristics (Group 1 committed to the Maronite Church of Sin el Fil in the suburb north of Beirut and Group 2 belonged to the Shiite community, with all participants living in the Hezbollah stronghold of Dahiyeh), a criterion combined with groups' field of study (applied sciences), constructed norms of dismissal of the exhibition, pointing out the subversive artistic account of two taboos in Lebanese society: the exhibit of the war and of the nude body in a public space. The dynamics, revolving around group leaders, precluded the potential for expression of conflicting positions as well as possibilities of critically reflecting upon the memory issue in post-war Lebanon. Furthermore, a striking finding was that the non-confrontational artwork like *A Loving Man* (Al-Ani) and *Intervista* (Sala) was only scarcely commented upon in Group 1, and completely avoided in Group 2. It is assumed that, since the groups were trapped in their hostility with regard to the themes of war, history and memory and of intimate body, they were deprived of the meaningful refuge provided by *A Loving Man* (Al-Ani) and *Intervista* (Sala). Their experience of *Closer* reinforced the groups' norms, aligning with the taboos of nudity and of polemical narratives of war in public debate.

2. Interestingly, another group, which also presented a strong form of grouping (all members of Group 3 were part of the Islamic Sunni Makassed Association in Beirut),

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[9]As explained in the method chapter, a strong form of grouping means that group's members are tied to the group through a common project and awareness of the group's history. In the Lebanese context, the group's members are more likely to present high levels of religious belonging and allegiance to norms.

did not narrow themselves down to a norm of refusal of *Closer*. There were a few attempts to muffle the voice of one group member who was drawn towards the theme of war, history and memory and was adamant to remember her parents' traumatic experience of the war. Yet Tala's provoking engagement with the highly subversive *Body pArts* (Saneh), an artwork that the group discarded, in fact empowered her in the face of her peers.

3. In the heterogeneous group (Group 4), which presented different characteristics of religious belonging, disciplines of study and different degrees of aesthetic knowledge of new forms of art, the group's discussion about experiencing *Closer* revealed divergent interpretations of the themes of war, history and memory and nudity, leading the groups to openly clash over the politically sensitive issue of the remembrance of the war. Encountering *Closer* brought the group members together only around the theme of family narratives, as long as this theme stood well outside the polemical issue of the splintering narratives of the civil war.

4. In the group that presented different characteristics of religious belonging, and different degrees of aesthetic knowledge with new forms of art, but was homogeneous in terms of gender (all women) and field of study (humanities) – a criterion which probably opens them up to critical artwork – two lines of interpretation of the themes of war, history and memory and of the intimate nude body competed against each other in the discussion. Engaging with the artists' lived experiences of war time in Closer revealed conflicting positions of identity between some women, who found in their reading of the other's suffering in the works a basis upon which to develop a sense of collective belonging, and others, who found in the artists' lived experience of war time a way to exert their individual identity over the collective. Nevertheless, it was possible to discern different group dynamics that developed at specific moments in the discussion. There was shared involvement of the group in the universal dimension of the intimate suffering in Birthday Suit (Steele), in the family stories, and particularly in So Much I Want to Say (Hatoum) as a symbol of the women's emancipation. My assumption is that because the group found a common ground around themes other than encountering

the war, their experience of Closer enabled the women in the group to co-identify and co-construct a representation of Lebanese women's identity beyond their conflicting positions regarding the issue of collective memory and personal identity construction. Here a nuanced understanding between Group 4 and Group 5 is worth noting. The reason as to why Group 5 succeeded in transcending their differences by engaging with the body-related artwork and the family narratives may be related to the nature of their conflicting positions over the issue of memory. Disputing the issue of remembrance vs. forgetfulness of the Lebanese war, few participants who were inclined to forget the past expressed only a need to disengage themselves from the ethos of grievance and sorrow, which, in their view, is a burden for the collective attempts to bring the past to light in public debate. In Group 4, the dividing line between those who favoured remembrance of the past and those who didn't ffl and even justified the possibility to resort to violent fighting – lies in more political and ideological reasons. Mazen and Christine, both affiliated to the Amal movement engaged in the resistance against Israel, refused to align with other group members on a critical perspective of the war; namely, that of endorsing the status of victims and perpetrators (i.e., accepting the shameful and futile nature of the Lebanese war as argued by another participant).

6

Individual Interview Findings – Exemplars 1 and 2

This chapter presents the two first types of the participants' engagement with *Closer* and its artistic registers in relation to the participants' identity positions regarding the issue of memory and of co-existing with the sectarian other. They are: Exemplar 1, "Taboo of memory, offensive intimacy and body" and Exemplar 2, "Resilient Lebanon, the cult of martyrdom and repressed feelings of body intimacy". With regards to the aim of this research, Exemplar 1 and Exemplar 2 dispute the idea that by representing the contested issues of memory, history and identity and giving prominence to the intimate body, contemporary artwork brings about resources for identity construction and helps the young Lebanese bypass conflicting narratives of the past and paranoia and fear of the sectarian other. Rather, Exemplars 1 and 2 were constructed from a detailed scrutiny of the participants' unsettled feelings, their visceral rejection or elusion of *Closer*, the way in which the participants criticised, fiercely rejected, or overlooked the artwork, and, in parallel, the way they elaborated on their history of war, envisioned the future in Lebanon and projected themselves in this future. Despite their difference – Exemplar 2 discloses the *paradox* of a seemingly meaningful engagement with *Closer* – the two first exemplars presented in this chapter in fact challenge the idea that critically engaged contemporary art can create a 'space for autonomy'[1].

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[1]It may seem flawed to formulate an assumption over the main research question at the early stage of presenting the empirical chapters, while the analysis has not yet been revealed. However, my choice to begin showing how the exemplars illustrate whether the experience of art could – or not – play out as a space for autonomy is guided by the motivation to guide the reader from the concepts developed in the theory chapter through the material that leads towards the final chapter of this thesis. It does not preclude the examination and discussion of the findings in the final chapter in which I

Chapter 6 is divided into two parts, with each part dedicated to one exemplar. Introducing each part, I present the characteristics that single out one exemplar from the other; each part combines aspects of the participants' engagement with the dimension of the memory and of the intimate body in *Closer*; ways of reading and making sense of the artwork (e.g., literal and concrete understandings of the artwork's meaning) associated with psycho-dynamic processes; positions in relation to remembering the civil war and vis-à-vis the sectarian other within the context of sectarian struggles for recognition of hardship memories; and, finally, positions of the participants regarding the future in Lebanon. Then, each exemplar is presented along with three broad themes on 1) memory and the sectarian other, 2) the artistic project of cremation and selling part of the body, and 3) nudity. Before delving into the analysis of the three exemplars, I present a summary of the socio-economic characteristics of the participants, their field of studies as well as their religious affiliation and commitment.

Characteristics of the participants in the individual interviews

The sample for the twenty-four individual interviews comprises ten male and fourteen female participants who were selected from the five focus groups. Among the recruited participants, the women are slightly older than the men with ten female participants out of fourteen who are between 20 and 22 years old and only three female participants who are between 17 and 19 years old; more male participants are between 17 and 19 years old (five out of ten) and only four male participants are aged between 20 and 22 years old (see table 5). In this sample, most women study humanities (eight out of fourteen) whilst only two study social sciences and three applied sciences. Most of the men study applied and natural sciences (four out of ten study each). See table 6. Furthermore, the majority of the women come from a high socio-economic background, whilst more male participants come from low and middle socio-economic backgrounds (see table 7).

In terms of proximity to their religious background, all the ten participants who say they belong to a Christian religious community (five are Maronite, three are Greek Orthodox and

will tentatively respond to the initial research question and will propose in the conclusion a psycho-social diagnosis for the current situation in post-war Lebanon.

two did not give details) described themselves in the questionnaires as feeling committed to their religious community (see table 8).[2] In contrast, among the fourteen participants who belong to Muslim communities (four are Sunnis, six are Shiites, one is Druze and three do not give details), most of them do not feel committed to their religious community. Finally, in terms of political leanings, five participants declared they are close to a political coalition or party. Three are close to the 14 March movement led by Saad Harriri, one feels committed to the Free Patriotic Movement of General Aoun, and one describes himself/herself as belonging to Amal.

Table 5: Socioeconomic characteristics of the participants

Slice of ages	Male	Female	
17 – 19	5	3	8
20 – 22	4	10	14
23 – 25	1	1	1
	10	14	N = 24

Table 6: Gender and field of study

	Male	Female
Applied sciences	5	4
Natural sciences	4	0
Social sciences	1	2
Humanities		8
	10	14

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[2] In the questionnaire, I asked whether the participants identified themselves with a religious community. The question was formulated in way that not only determined if they were affiliated to a religious community, but also allowed me to assess to what extent the participant position themselves regarding the religious community they belong to. A number of respondents stated they did not feel close to the religious community they belong to, and thus they marked out their identity as being distinct from membership of a religious community.

Table 7: Gender and socioeconomic status (SES)

Gender SES	Male	Female	
Low SES	3	1	4
Middle SES	5	2	7
High SES	2	11	13
	10	14	N = 24

Table 8: Religious affiliation and commitment to the religious community

		Religious affiliation	Religious commitment
Christians N = 10	Not precise	2	2
	Maronite	5	5
	Greek Orthodox	3	3
Muslims N = 14	Not precise	3	3
	Sunnite	4	1
	Shiite	6	1
	Druze	1	1
		N = 24	N = 16

6.1 Taboo of memory, offensive intimacy and body

Characteristics of Exemplar 1

This exemplar comprises three participants (Charbel, Eliane and Najah – all part of Group 1) who dismissed the exhibition. *Closer* brought forth the taboo of hurtful memories of the civil war and of the recent July 2006 War, the taboo of the sectarian other's narratives, and finally the taboo of transgressing the religious practice of burying the body after death. Engaging with artwork containing nudity (*Birthday Suit*, Steele; *Self-Portraits*, D'Agata) only sharpened the participants' impression of confronting a dreary depiction of today's Lebanon in *Closer*. Lack of understanding, bitterness and animosity dominated the participants' rhetoric on the works of Akram Zaatari (*Saida June 6, 1982*), Tony Chakar (*4 Cotton Underwear for*

Tony) and Lina Saneh (*Body pArts*). The concrete and literal readings of the artwork in the exhibition rendered the participants' unsettling impressions even more salient (e.g., a few of them expressed that they were scared by the display of Lina Saneh's silhouette, as if the artist were physically present in the room).

Characteristic of Exemplar 1 is that, while the participants perceived and rejected the gloomy representation of the wars and the exhibit of narratives of the sectarian other in *Closer*, they called for turning their backs on their troubled history. They were adamant about solely focusing on the Lebanese convivial social ethos upon which they had built a sense of pride. Yet, the positive image of the country that the participants gave was countered by their bleak comments on Lebanon's future. The contradiction in their statements indicates their need to be sheltered from identifying with the history of Lebanon as represented in *Closer*.

Finally, although Exemplar 1's rhetoric of dismissal on seeing *Closer* aligned with the discussion in Group 1, one participant (Najah) elaborated on his meaningful involvement in the works of art containing nudity and stood apart from the view he previously held in the group discussion. In the individual interview, Najah explored his intimate engagement with *Birthday Suit* (Steele) and *Self-Portraits* (D'Agata).

6.1.1 Rejecting the dimension of memory of war and of the sectarian other's narratives.

For the participants of Exemplar 1, all the artwork in *Closer* elicited laden and unsettling impressions of suffering. With a palpable discomfort in engaging with the staging of the exhibited artwork, the participants felt compelled to confront weighted memories and a gloomy portrait of today's Lebanon through their reading of Zaatari's work (*Saida June 6, 1982*) and of body-related artwork such as *Body pArts* (Saneh) and *Self-Portraits (*D'Agata). It is likely that the participants' dismissal of the dimension of history in *Closer* was also stirred up by their encounter with *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* (Chakar): a story that the participants condemned for igniting communal and sectarian passions, as the artist alludes to Christian supremacy.

Suffering and forgetfulness of the civil war

The participants were particularly gripped by *Saida June 6, 1982* (Zaatari), listening, through headphones on the wall near a video of shelling, to sounds of an Israeli airplane upon a hilltop in southern Lebanon. For the participants, the nagging presence of these sounds was vividly reminiscent of the July 2006 War, a memory they wanted to lock away.

> Charbel: This is not good.
>
> Moderator: To listen? To see?
>
> Charbel: In particular, as we lived through in 2006 the war in Lebanon, it wasn't nice.
>
> Moderator: For you, does that bring back something painful?
>
> Charbel: In 2006, it was very shocking for us. Every night we used to hear lots of noisy sounds, yes it was very...

Along with such artefacts and archival material from the war in the exhibition, the participants' disturbing impression of suffering was heightened by their reading of the artwork's characters as "distressed and tired persons" (Charbel). Saneh's impressive, dark silhouette, displayed at the entrance of the Beirut Art Center and the fuzzy pictures of D'Agata's male body in *Self-Portraits* mingled with the participants' disturbing impressions of the artwork installation staging. This gave rise to a rhetoric that associated death, war and fear. These dreary images took over the participants' involvement in the works of art. The participants swiftly dismissed the exhibition without reflecting upon the meanings of the artwork, nor on the way it affected them.

> Eliane [on Body pArts, Lina Saneh :] This lady! First, when we arrived, I said to my friend, I think that ((laughs)) the lady was facing me, I'm afraid of her ((laughs)).
>
> > [Later on]
>
> Eliane: I believe it is the war. I think to justify the link with the war, all artworks talk about death.

While they felt that *Closer* only portrayed images of death, war and suffering, and drew them back into "negative remembrances"(Najah), all participants of Exemplar 1 were adamant that the Lebanese people need to forget their history. The participants emphasised that they wanted to move beyond the memories of the war generation and, instead, put forward the "way of life of Lebanese" (Charbel), well known for their sense of conviviality and their social and family gatherings. Take the three comments:

Najah: Why keeping negative remembrances? Our problem is what we lived through. We <u>don't know how to forget the lived experiences.</u>

Charbel: We <u>don't want to remember</u>, we want to leave in peace.

Eliane: They meant it was a predicament ... and they expressed these feelings. And we understood we need to stop the war. We are going to stop. Khalas! We are going to live peacefully in the world.

As seen in the aforementioned excerpt, even though Eliane and Charbel displayed sheer confidence that political turmoil and social unrest in Lebanon would end in the future, it is worth noting that over the course of the interview, the same participants came to articulate a bleaker perception of their future.

Moderator: Do the artists say something about collective identity in Lebanon? Do you think they say something about what it is to be Lebanese?

Charbel: Yes, but it is wrong. The Lebanese people are not like that (0.4). Despite the atmosphere in which we live in. Everything is negative, everything is depressing. But the Lebanese people have always hope.

As seen in the aforementioned excerpt, characteristic of Exemplar 1 is a twofold discourse between a stubborn confidence in Lebanon's convivial social ethos and a more pessimistic image of their country. As Charbel says, "Everything is negative, everything is depressing". A good illustration of their doubts about a promising future is their willingness to emigrate abroad after their study. I assume that Exemplar 1's insistence in countering *Closer*'s gloomy depiction of the current state of Lebanon mirrors the participants' own lack of trust in their

country; that is, the capacity of Lebanese to find solace with the difficult memories of the past and challenge the image of Lebanon caught up in unremitting communal and regional conflicts.

Nonetheless, and unexpectedly, a male Maronite Christian participant revealed a different position over the course of the interview that seemed to contradict his inclination in the focus group towards forgetfulness of the past. A shift occurred in Najah's discourse from dismissing being able to see the war in *Closer* and thus confronting memories of the past, to mulling over people's need to preserve their memories. As Najah focused on the adolescent's notebook in *Saida June 6, 1982* (Zaatari), the participant pondered:

> Najah: It is a good idea to write memories, what one has lived, what one has seen (0.5).

Najah's thought disputed the claims he had stated earlier ("we don't know how to forget"), and it is suggested that the feature of Zaatari's notebook, providing a snapshot of what it was like for a young adolescent to keep sheltered during times of war, enabled Najah to invest positively in a war-related artwork. Akram Zaatri's recollection of casually watching the French Open tennis competition on television, and his recording of banal feelings of boredom during the Israeli shelling of southern Lebanon, may have helped Najah to bypass the emotional and meaning-laden tone of remembering the war in Lebanon.

Taboo of conflicting narratives of war

One participant's animosity towards *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* ran high as he commented on Chakar's artwork. As soon as Charbel gazed at the portrait of the artist's Christian father, a soldier in Lebanese uniform, he stressed the polemical tone of *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*. A single piece of the booklet of texts in the installation, which the artist calls the "First Republic[3], the republic of Christian hegemony in Lebanon", stirred up hostility in Charbel. Behind his passionate rejection of the portrait lay deep resentments rooted in his family's

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[3] The First Republic marks the end of the French mandate when Lebanon gained its independence in 1943 and lasts till the Civil War broke out in 1975.

narratives of the civil war. At stake for Charbel seems to be the need for recognition of his family's memories of suffering. Take the following:

> Charbel: No, it is <u>unfair</u> that the Christians have dominated. Foremost ... <u>my family has lived this</u>... this war and she is Christian and <u>they are ... on the contrary</u>. I didn't like it at all.
>
> [Later on]
>
> Moderator: What would be the other point of view?
>
> Charbel: But it is completely wrong! Maybe he was in an area where Christians were ... But everybody knows in Lebanon that Lebanon was divided in two. One part for the Christians and another for the Muslims. But after 2005 ... Christians and Muslims, they were divided. For my family above all, they were killed by the Druzes, by the Muslims, there is plenty of persons in my family who were killed in my family. <u>So it is wrong</u>!

For Charbel, Chakar's claim that the Christians dominated the First Republic in Lebanon denies the Christians' suffering at the hand of members of other sects during the war. Specifically, Charbel was concerned with the Druze Muslims' violence against the Christians, the religious group of which Charbel's family was part. However, it is striking to note that although the influence of the Christian elites on political power and economic, cultural and social life during the First Republic before the civil war is acknowledged by scholars (Najem, 2012), Charbel is adamant in denying this historical fact[4].

In a more elusive way, another participant, Najah, voiced his dislike and lack of under-standing of Chakar's work. Speculating that behind Najah's dislike of *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* lurked more contentious reasons, I prompted him to tell me what it meant for him, a young Maronite Christian, that an artist asks a painter from the opposite religious group – Shi'a Muslim in this case – to portray the artist's father as if he was a Shiite martyr.

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[4]Although a system of power-sharing was supposed to ensure a balance between the different sects at the beginning of the First Republic, the Maronite Christians maintained their influence on the confessional system, with leading Christian families such as the Chamoun and the Gemayel (Najem, 2012).

Najah: I don't find it moving because….he doesn't show his feelings, his father's feelings. He recounts a story, sometimes there are details which are not important, sometimes it is about problems in Lebanon.

Moderator: I see. And … and what do you think that Chakar recounts going to see an official Shiite painter to make a portrait of his dead father? What do you think of that?

Najah: Hum (0.6).

  [Later on]

Najah: This story I did not like much, I didn't understand much what he wanted to transmit. I did not know. I did not seek to know, because … I did not like to know (0.4). The story entails things which are problematic in Lebanon.

  [Later on]

Najah: Yes … he pointed to a certain problem in Lebanon … a certain problem and even (0.3).

Worthy of note in Najah's comments are his discursive shifts from "I didn't understand much" and "I didn't know" to "I did not seek to know" and "I didn't like to know", and finally pointing to "a certain problem in Lebanon". His elusive attitude towards *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* indicates that centre stage in Najah's dismissal of Chakar's work is the taboo question of the sectarian other and polemical narratives of the war exhibited in a public space.

6.1.2 Outrage of cremation and artist's eccentric personality

Moving on in the discussion to *Body pArts*, Saneh's artwork sparked an outburst of indignation among the participants. One participant was averse, not to Saneh's artwork, but to the artist herself, who became the object of the participant's outright refusal:

Charbel: Euh ... Crazy! She is not euh ... I believe she is not a ... a human being. From the point of view she talks and what she wants to do, I ... I am against her. I refuse <u>totally</u>.

Moderator: Do you find it revolting?

Charbel: Yes, a lot [later on]. There are limits, eventually. I am opposed.

  [Later on]

Charbel: Such a crazy woman she is.

Labelled the "burnt woman", Lina Saneh's figure triggered the participants' curiosity about why the character in the work is insane. It is worth noting that the participants in Exemplar 1 focused on giving explanations for the artist's outrageous act only, rather than elaborating on the meaning of *Body pArts*.

Najah: She burnt herself to show ... to say that "I want to be burnt and when we are burnt we become black".

Moderator: Yeah. So, what does that mean for you, that she wants to turn herself as a work of art? I mean in the context of art.

Najah: It is for me ... it is a bit silly. Do you know why? Because (0.6). One gets in peace in life with these things. One doesn't say to the others that I did something. We can be present in the memory of people then ... I think people will remember of us. This is the reason why I think she has lived a certain problem in her life with her familial entourage, she did <u>not</u> accept herself.

Moderator: yes.

Najah: This is the reason why she did not manage to accept herself and this is reason why she is now doing this image ... to get this stage of stability.

Moderator: Stability?

Najah: Psychic stability.

Najah did not follow my prompt when I encouraged him to elaborate on Saneh's artistic register ("I mean in the context of art", moderator). Instead, Najah dwelt upon Saneh's motive for choosing cremation. Here I assume that the processes of rationalisation were operating as Najah deployed his rhetoric around Saneh's family problems and her need for psychological stability. Such a rationalised reading of *Body pArts* holds Najah back from confronting Saneh's work, eminently hostile in his eyes. Yet, reducing *Body pArts* to a pathological manifestation of the artist prevents him from reflecting more deeply upon it as artwork. Later on in the discussion, Najah recalled that "Saneh is shocking [...] it is a way of life, it is not an easy thing, the way of life, above all Christian religion". Implicitly, he emphasised that Saneh's choice of being cremated is an offence against the value of life as sacred, prominent in the Christian religion to which Najah is devoutly affiliated.

6.1.3 Unexpected subjective experience of the nude body amid dismissive attitudes

In the previous sections, the participants in Exemplar 1 shared resentful reactions towards the representations of war, memory and history in *Closer* – perceived as too bleak and contentious – and a sheer aversion for *Body pArts* (Saneh). Yet, when it came to discussing their impressions of the artworks containing nudity (*Birthday Suit*, Steele; *Self-Portraits*, D'Agata) one participant, Najah, stood out from the two other participants of Exemplar 1 by musing on the relation between body, nudity and intimacy rather than as merely one of war-laden significance.

Eliane and Charbel voiced their lack of understanding of *Birthday Suit* (Steele) and *Self-Portraits* (D'Agata), even more acute considering Charbel's absence in remembering that *Birthday Suit* was exhibited in *Closer*.

> Charbel: ((Charbel is paging through the booklet of pictures and comes across *Birthday Suit*)) I don't remember. Did we see that?
>
> Moderator: Yes, it was in the exhibition.
>
> Eliane: These pictures were <u>very shocking</u>. ((Eliane is reading.)) What is the topic of these pictures?

Moderator: The artist is taken in pictures by someone else every single year of his life in a different city. It lasted 17 years, between 1991 and 2008. These are pictures of himself. Don't people see these kind of pictures in Lebanon?

Eliane: Rarely.

Moderator: Why is this shocking?

Eliane: It is subjective. Every person has his own feeling.

Eliane confined her reading of *Self-Portraits* to her shattering experience of seeing "very shocking" pictures without comprehending their subject. It is suggested that D'Agata's account of the male nude in such an intimate and unusually expressive display prevented Eliane from making sense of the explanations of the photographs I provided her with during the interview. Rather, the nudity in D'Agata's work halted her engagement and progress towards making sense of *Self-Portraits*.

In contrast, Najah expressed sensitiveness towards Steele and D'Agata's works. In his reading of *Birthday Suit* and *Self-Portraits,* he was particularly attentive to seeing the nude body as a site for personal and intimate experiment ("lived experiences"), a way through which one gets to know oneself better. In contrast with the other participants' discourses in Exemplar 1, seeing the nude body is not associated with sexuality or offensive topics, but rather gives rise to a rhetoric of fantasy and auto-eroticism.

Najah [On Self-Portraits, D'Agata :] He showed photos of lived experiences. Pictures ... that every person lives during the day, circumstances ... that they lived. He is living things, trying ... to know better. [Later on] He found that in the nude position he could express himself most, he can do tactile sensations with himself.

Najah: [On *Birthday Suit*, Steele] Here, she is setting up a montage ... tactile ... she is trying to touch her body to know what she lived. Through the ... the sight of her body. The scars are sometimes scars of a certain experience, a certain situation, a certain problem, hum.

Najah understands D'Agata's twist of the blurred images of the male character as a way to experiment with bodily sensations and expand one's own subjectivity. Even more important for Najah is that this experience retains a sense of secrecy. It is assumed that the participant disclosed his experience of fantasizing fuzzy pictures of the nude body – even though exhibited in public – because the character's intimate experience in *Self-Portait* remains a private one.

> Najah [On Self-Portraits, D'Agata :] What I did like most, is that he doesn't say what he discovered, what he ... at the end. He kept his own experience for himself. [Later on] Even here, the picture is not clear. I liked these things, that he did not show his face ... in a clear way.

Strikingly, Najah's interest in the naked and wounded body in *Birthday Suit*, and the male nude in *Self-Portraits*, both perceived as opportunity to explore one's subjective life, contradicts the line of thinking he underscored when he was part of Group 1's discussion. In the discussion about these works, Najah, aligned with the group and disparaged[5] the artists' display of their subjective experiences, even emphasising the pathological character of D'Agata. I suggest that the one-to-one setting of the individual interview enabled Najah to stand outside the judgment and dynamic of denigration of *Closer* that prevailed in Group 1; it offered Najah a safer space to reflect upon one's intimate life, a topic even more taboo for a male participant to mention in front of his peers in Lebanon.

6.2 Resilient Lebanon, the cult of martyrdom and repressed feelings of body intimacy

Characteristics of Exemplar 2

This exemplar comprises five participants (Mohammed-Ali and Yassine from Group 2, Ibraheem and Tala from Group 3, and Mazen from Group 4). The paradox of Exemplar 2's

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[5]In Group 1's discussion Najah said: "It was shocking for me, because I found there is a lot of subjectivity, as Jihad said earlier [Later on]. Sometimes they try to express themselves in an incorrect way. Huh ... And at the beginning, there's the one who puts the photos of himself ((Najah talks about *Self-Portrait*, D'Agata)). Yes, I felt he has a problem with himself." Later on, Najah voiced while he indicated D'Agata's work: "I'm not against subjectivity, but not the subjectivity that goes into the pathological case of the person".

involvement in *Closer* is that the participants seemed to find meaningful the impression of sadness and suffering that suffused the overall exhibition. Alien to the subjective, intimate and aesthetic features of the artwork, Exemplar 2 taps into its reading of the war-related artwork (*Saida June 6, 1982*, Zaatari; *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*, Chakar and *Crossing Surda*, Jacir) mingled with that of the body and nude-related artworks (*Self-Portraits*, Steele and *Birthday Suit*, D'Agata in particular), the image of suffering of the Lebanese in the face of an outside force (Israel). Their reading of the exhibition strikingly resonates with the ethos of martyrdom discourse and patriotism, a rhetoric widely spread since the 1980s by the Shiite Islamic Movement, Hezbollah, to prove its commitment to the Palestinian cause. Notwithstanding, like in Exemplar 1, the participants of this exemplar apply a concrete and literal reading to all the works of *Closer*, and put themselves constantly at distance from the personally engaging features of the artwork.

6.2.1 Witnessing the suffering of the Lebanese and resisting the outside other

Amid a general atmosphere of apathy that prevailed in all of the Exemplar 2's interviews, the participants displayed greater interest in the works of Zaatari (*Saida June 6, 1982*), Jacir (*Crossing Surda*) and Chakar (*4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*). For Exemplar 2, the three works of art are devoid of artistic and aesthetic value, giving the participants an overall impression of sadness in *Closer*, but are appealing to them because the works bear witness to the Lebanese people's plight. The participants' engagement with the two works of art is narrowed to a discussion of familiar images of turmoil – watching television documentaries about the July 2006 War, or remembering childhood memories when Israel occupied the south of Lebanon in the 1980s. With seemingly detached attention from the artwork itself, the participants took the opportunity to perceive work that closely refers to war or conflict to voice a discourse on Lebanese suffering, pain and the destruction of their country.

> Mohammed-Ali [on Saida June 6, 1982, Zaatari :] This is the picture of the war in Lebanon.
>
> Moderator: Yes, which war?

Mohammed-Ali: The Lebanese War ... 1982, when Israel invaded Lebanon, the airplanes bombed Lebanon. [Later on] I said to you that there is always sadness. The first time I saw it. There is sadness, always, destruction [on *A Loving Man*, Al-Ani] the four girls with black clothes ... always sadness.

Moderator: This is maybe not what you want to see.

Mohammed-Ali: No, it doesn't matter. The artists want to express what happened in Lebanon, how the war was in Lebanon.

Moderator: Is it different from what you see usually?

Yassine: No, it is not different. As I told you, I like this theme. I didn't find something different.

Moderator: Does that bring you to new thoughts from what you usually see? What did come to your mind? (0.5)

Moderator: I'm going to show you the pictures. Here are Akram Zaatari's pictures. What did come to your mind?

Yassine: These are... I like ... I like. I don't like these pictures, but I like everything in general, this theme. And I like to figure out what happened. As I told you, I like to figure out what happened in the past.

Moderator [on Crossing Surda, Jacir :] What does it mean for you?

Mazen: It shows how life was before the ... because I used to go to the south and, there was in my village so I can relate to it and how ...

Moderator: The struggle?

Mazen: Yes the struggle, everything.

   [Later on]

Moderator: What does that mean for you that the artist shows that kind of ... topic, of subject?

Mazen: I know it shows to people the daily struggle of our lives.

In the aforementioned excerpts, the participants' experience of the artwork as gloomy *but* essential images of post-war Lebanon ("There is always sadness [ ] but it doesn't matter, artists want to express Lebanon's past" said Mohammed-Ali) contrasts with Exemplar 1's dismissive reading[6] of the war-related artworks. Even though the participants evoke sadness and hardship when they engage with images of shelling and destruction (*Saida June 6, 1982*, Zaatari) and of Palestinian people's restricted lives (*Crossing Surda*, Jacir), they assign a legitimate role to such laden impression: representing evidence of the "struggle of the [Lebanese and Palestinian] people's daily life" (Mazen). Most participants of Exemplar 2 are Shiite Muslims (two participants lived in Dahiyeh) a religious group that has appropriated Hezbollah's commemorative strategies and discourse of self-redemptive sacrifice (Seigneurie, 2011). Engaged in fighting against Israel[7] in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the 1980s, Hezbollah draws on the ethos of self-redemptive sacrifice: a symbol of resistance against Israel based on the values of suffering and resilience. Here, I surmise that, in reading *Saida June 6, 1982* (Zaatari) and *Crossing Surda* (Jacir) as evidence of the Lebanese people's hardship, the participants of Exemplar 2 identify with the image of victims of the outside others (implicitly naming Israel). Yassine used a militant language as he recalled how "the Resistance" has taught him Lebanon's history of war, pointing out that the Resistance has been shielding Lebanese people from outside invaders – implicitly naming the Israeli army. "No one can enter and invade this country to destroy it," asserted Yassine. Whilst Exemplar 1 is elusive in evoking sectarian conflicting memories, in this exemplar, the participants conspicuously stated "when Israel invaded Lebanon" to depict the Israeli-Hezbollah War in July 2006.

Worthy of note was the participants' impressions of close intimacy with the Lebanese suffering when they drew on Zaatari's panoramic image of the war in order to recount their memories of watching media documentaries on the July 2006 War. Except Mazen,

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[6]In Exemplar 1, the participants' perception of sadness, also triggered by their encounter with nudity and dark characters in the artwork, precluded the participants from engaging with the works of Zaatari and Jacir. The participants condemned the artists' works on the ground of bringing forth memories of hardship and conflicting narratives of the wars.

[7]Yassine used a militant language as he recalled how "the Resistance" has taught him Lebanon's history of war, pointing out that the Resistance has been shielding Lebanese people from outside invaders – implicitly naming the Israeli army. "No one can enter and invade this country to destroy it," asserted Yassine. Whilst Exemplar 1 is elusive in evoking sectarian conflicting memories, in this exemplar, the participants conspicuously stated "when Israel invaded Lebanon" to depict the Israeli-Hezbollah War in July 2006.

who recounted his childhood memories of the Israeli occupation of his village in southern Lebanon in the 1980s and vividly remembered the Israeli bombing during Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996, none of Exemplar 2's participants actually witnessed combat. Yet, I found puzzling their animated recollections of watching damaged houses or wounded people on the television news:

> Moderator [on Saida June 6, 1982, Zaatari :] Do you find these pictures moving?
>
> Yassine: Yes, because … these pictures are what we get used to … they are such as the month I lived. My feelings in the past, my feelings while seeing these pictures, are very simple, because I saw these pictures. In the previous war, I didn't see these pictures, but during this war, I saw these pictures, on television. With my own eyes I saw it. We used to live in the mountain, but downtown, when Beirut was destroyed, with my own eyes I saw it, directly.

Yassine repeated the expression "I saw these photographs on television, with my own eyes I saw" and "I saw with my own eyes", a pleonasm that anchors Yassine's mediated experience of Lebanese suffering in reality; that is, it enforces the impression that Yassine witnessed the pain that Lebanese people underwent during the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War. Scholars point out that audio-visual techniques (e.g., an overabundance of images, details and atmosphere of sounds) compel viewers to conflate their sense of real *and* mediated experiences of images of destruction (Kyriakidou, 2011). Whether or not Yassine's vicarious experience of suffering exemplifies the effects of the media on people's experience, I believe that Yassine's insistence in voicing such intimacy with the July war's damages is worth interpreting in line of the ethos of self-sacrifice and the way it binds identity to national pride. In Hezbollah's discourse, the emphasis on images of wounded women and children as well on destruction took particular prominence in the July 2006 War and catalysed a sense of united and resilient Lebanon in the face of the Israeli Army. Here, Yassine certainly conveys a sense of pride in claiming to stand in close intimacy to the suffering of others; in so doing, he abides with the Shiite movement's ethos of self-sacrifice and, in turn, builds a positive sense of identity.

Finally, commenting on Emily Jacir's video installation (*Crossing Surda*), which was very close to documentary mode, the participants did not only read the artist's testimony of the Palestinian grim daily commute through the Surda checkpoint as a way to establish facts on the ground; most participants of Exemplar 2 voiced how *Crossing Surda* provided them with a sense of defiance. They were struck by Jacir's deceptive trickery as the artist disregarded the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) soldiers' ban of filming and photographing a checkpoint; Jacir concealed her camera in her shoulder bag, cut a hole in the bag and spent eight days repeatedly filming her commute through Ramallah to Birzeit University. The participants felt a sense of being complicit with the artist's individual act of bravery, resisting against the collective outside other (i.e., Emily Jacir against the Israeli Defence Forces).

> Tala [On Crossing Surda, Jacir :] It is interesting and it shows how the woman was. How she just wanted to pass on, but she had experience during the invasion. When I was watching the video, I thought it was a bit boring ... walking for two kilometres. But after knowing the story, it was boring but interesting. It has some kind of ... It aims ... that is to give us hope and never give up.
>
> Moderator: Yes ... You said, it is quite, everything is quite dark for you and ...
>
> Ibraheem: No it's ...
>
> Moderator: Neutral, neutral you said
>
> Ibraheem: Neutral (0.2)?
>
> Moderator: Is there something optimistic for you in this?
>
> Ibraheem: Optimistic?
>
> Moderator: In some of the artworks?
>
> Ibraheem: Maybe the, the story of Emily ...
>
> Moderator: Ah OK ...
>
> Ibraheem: And she did something that was illegal to try to ... maybe to break the rules?

Though Jacir's video doesn't elicit much appeal in itself ("it is boring," asserted Tala) the artist's outrageous and defying act ("breaking the rules," stated Ibraheem) elicited the participants' meaningful investment in the artwork, namely bringing a sense of empowerment to them.

Additionally, just as Yassine voiced in the above excerpt "I like to figure out what happened" or Mohammed-Ali claimed "the artists want to express [...] how was war in Lebanon", recurring concerns about the *how* of the civil war arose in the participants' discourses. The participants' attachment to seeing *Saida June 6, 1982* and *Crossing Surda* as furnishing historical clues mirrors Haugbolle's (2010) claim that one way in which young Lebanese handle their "muddled knowledge" of the civil war is to search for "*how* the events took place" (p. 83). Here, I surmise that the participants used Zaatari and Jacir's work to fill in the vacuum of meaning left by splintered narratives of the past imbued by sectarian memory culture and a state-refrained public memory. In this exemplar, most of the participants conspicuously voiced their desire to know their past and depicted how they engaged with or confronted their parents to be told about lived experiences of the war. Talking about the *Closer* exhibition; namely, using Chakar's postcard representing his father in the Lebanese army uniform (in *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*) gave rise to dialogues between participants and their parents about the civil war.

Yassine: Yes, I saw and I took home a postcard.

Moderator: Did you show it to your family?

Yassine: Yes, to my father. I explained what I saw. My father likes this theme. He likes the war. Sometimes, I sit down with him and he recounts. He was already born when the war happened. He explains to me what happened in the past. He was living with my grandmother. He explains things that I like and we are sat down for hours, 2 or 3 hours. When he is on leave, we sit down and we talk about the theme and he explains to me a lot of things, how he used to live with his father, what he was doing during this time, things like that.

Moderator: Ah ... And when you show this to him, what does he say?

Yassine: He asked me: who said that? And me, I forgot. I forgot, I don't know.

6.2.2 Pride in martyrdom and loyalty to the country

The way in which the participants of Exemplar 2 engaged meaningfully with a few works of art exhibited in *Closer* by drawing on the ethos of self-redemptive sacrifice is well illustrated by the participants' involvement in the representation of the martyr in *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* (Chakar). Upon making sense of the artist's installation, the participants pointed only to the iconic painting of the artist's father, as a martyr, commissioned to an official Hezbollah painter.

Loyalty to the nation and *honour* are two prominent values that the participants routinely underscored while they read Chakar's portrait of his father as a martyr. Again, their interpretation bears striking resemblance to the Shiite resistance movement's discourse and commemorative strategies of martyrdom. In concentrating on the father's heroic deed of sacrificing himself for the sake of his nation, as they mused upon *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*, the participants displayed a palpable sense of gratification and pride, accompanied at times by emotional feelings.

Moderator: Did you like this painting?

Mohammed-Ali: Yes, it is the image of his father who died the war and became a martyr. ((Mohammed-Ali read quietly)).

Moderator: Do you remember the story that struck you most?

Mohammed-Ali: Yes, this is this story ((Mohammed points to *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*)).

Moderator: Is it for you a story that does reflect what happens in this society?

Mohammed-Ali: Yes, there are here lots of people who are martyrs. As he lost his father and … The Resistance found him. The Resistance found his father and they asked the grandchild to see him. He saved his father who is a martyr. His father was dead.

Mazen: The picture represented a lot, you can, I can see from the picture that someone died for Lebanon because of the cedar and this ...

Moderator: What do you mean?

Mazen: The Cedars and yes Lebanon ... And a guy wearing a uniform with a cedar on, you know it is somebody who is a Lebanese and this is the cedar medal, its only, its mainly give ... it's an honour given to people who have died for their country, or done good for their country, it's not, it's not much given to people who are still alive.

Moderator: You talked about the story of Tony Chakar, of his father. What does that mean for you, this image?

Tala: This image? A person who had ( ) so hard for his country. But eventually died, passed away for his country, defending his country.

Moderator: And ... what is the general meaning for you?

Tala: It gives us an example of people who never give up their country such as this and how their children see them. Here, all the story, it is like he is proud of what he did. The son is proud of his father and wants all of us to know this.

However, also of note is the critical scrutiny that a few participants applied to *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*, pointing to discrepancies between Chakar's portrait of his father and official representations of martyrs' fighters. One participant was keen to point out the unusual representation of the white pigeon painted on the left-hand side of the soldier's face, and with the black colour used in the backdrop of the portrait. For another participant, the presence of the cedar tree painted next to the soldier's medal, as well as the fact that Chakar uses a Christian name "Tony" in the artwork's title, entailed a polemical overtone. Mazen – a Shiite participant affiliated to Amal's Islamic party – disparaged Chakar's artistic choices, seen as exclusive to the Christian religious group and as perpetuating a sectarian divisive culture.

Yassine: But I think the picture is wrong.

Moderator: Ah?

Yassine: First, the black colour takes over the rest ... everywhere. He is dead, but he put a pigeon ((Yassine laughed)) and the black colour and the cedars. Why the cedars? Is that a memory?

Moderator: Why do you think it is wrong?

Yassine: Not everything is wrong. There are few things which are wrong. Like the pigeon.

Moderator: How should it be?

Yassine: From what I think, I think that the pigeon is wrong, and why the black colour?

Moderator: Isn't it usually black?

Yassine: It is black. He [the artist] paints with the black colour to express the soldier's death.

Moderator: But ... which colour is it normally?

Yassine: Blue.

Mazen: If you want ... here you see the cedar, the cedar is the, the symbol of all of the Lebanese, you don't see what, you don't see a cedar with a cross or a cedar with the mountains or anything. [Later on] I know but ... if it was up to me I wouldn't call it *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* I would have called it *4 Cotton Underwear* for a name that's used by all different sects in Lebanon, because this emphasises a certain sect in Lebanon. It also makes a certain division even though it ... and my point of view contradicts Tony's view with the cedars.

Moderator: Tony is ... what kind of name is that?

Mazen: It's a Christian name.

Moderator: Ah, OK.

Mazen: It's <u>used</u> in … my name is used by everyone, I would have called it *4 Cotton Underwear for Mazen* or … *4 Cotton Underwear for Raheem*, a name that doesn't represent a sect, or a religion.

The participants' excessive concern about some of the pictorial features of the portrait of Chakar's father reveals a lack of symbolic and meaningful involvement in the artistic twist displayed in *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*; indeed, Chakar seemingly aligns himself with Hezbollah's commemorative strategy of martyrdom[8] when he celebrates his father's death as a martyr, *but* also stands by a patriotic ethos because he adds few pictorial elements that are alien to the official representation of the martyr. Reviewing *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*, Quilty (2009) underscores that such a twist aims to "both emulate and critique" (2009) the discourse of patriotism and martyrdom. Yet Yassine and Mazen were puzzled when they viewed the pigeon, the black colour and the cedars in the backdrop of the martyr's portrait and, as a result, dismissed the artwork. Their reaction illustrates a metonymic[9] reading of *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* and its implications in terms of position of identity. Here, worthy of note is the "contiguity" (Jakobson & Halle, 1956) – the distinguishing feature of metonymy – between the participants' reading of the martyr's representation in the artwork and Hezbollah's official discourse of martyrdom to which Chakar alludes in the post-2005 context. Such a narrow reading of *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* prevents Mazen and Yassine from relating meaningfully to Chakar's artistic twist, and, in the meantime, reinforces their identification with the image of a patriotic country.

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[8]Although in post-war Lebanon the culture of martyrdom is peculiar to the Christians, Volk's (2010) historical enquiry of the signification of the martyr over the Modern period in Lebanon and its usage in different religious communities argues that, in fact, martyrdom used to be "a unifying trope of remembrance of the dead" ensuring cohesion to the groups and communities. "During the French rule mandate, Christian and Muslims died by the side of each other and were standing together at the heart of commemoration," points out Volk (2010, p. 62). The cult of the martyr was not a divisive trope between the religious communities as is now the case in the post-2005 period, and as it arises in Mazen and Yassine's puzzlement in relating the image of the martyr in *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* to a Christian artist.

[9]As defined in the methodology chapter, metonymy is characterised by the "contiguity" and "closeness" (Jackobson and Halle, 1956, p. 95) of two sematic domains. In this study, Mazen and Yassine applied to *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* a contiguous reading between Chakar's subjective appropriation of martyrdom and the official discourse that Chakar refers to in post-2005 Lebanon, as if the signified (Hezbollah's ethos) was standing for the signifier (Chakar's work).

6.2.3 Seeing *Body pArts* but recoiling from the fragmented body

Though the participants in Exemplar 2 came across *Body pArts* (Saneh) with less acrimony than those in Exemplar 1 – they did not fustigate with fury the artist's work for example – they lacked meaningful investment with Saneh's work, primarily handled with defensive readings of *Body pArts*. Namely, the participants referred to the prohibition of cremation in Lebanon and constantly drew on the rational view that Saneh's artistic project to get her body signed by other artists could not be realised, and was solely a discursive strategy of the artist.

While engaging with *Body pArts*, Mohammed-Ali and Yassine called forth the law that bans Lebanese people from being cremated as the primary reason to disregard Saneh's work. Yet, while they referred explicitly to societal prohibition, even reading *Body pArts* along with India's religious rules instead of those of their own country, the participants did not become personally involved in *Body pArts*.

> Mohammed-Ali: She wants to be cremated when she dies, but it is not permitted. It is only permitted in India. But, I don't know why one wants to burn her. She wants to leave part of her body.
>
> Moderator: In fact the idea is that the artist wants to be cremated, when she dies.
>
> Yassine: Yeah, yeah. This is in India.
>
> Moderator: In India?
>
> Yassine: Yes, but I didn't find … It is not in Lebanon. This way of thinking is not in our society. She … I understood that when she dies, she wants to give her hand, her feet.
>
> Moderator: Yes (0.2).
>
> Yassine: It is forbidden, isn't it?
>
> Moderator: What do you think?
>
> Yassine: I think it is forbidden.

Upon making sense of the gist of Saneh's artwork (i.e., having different parts of her body signed) a few participants, puzzled by the way in which Saneh blurred the line between reality and fiction, furnished lengthy explanations to cast *Body pArts* to the fictive realm.

Moderator: Do you remember this one?

Mohammed-Ali: Yes, Lina Saneh. She wants to leave a part of her body's members in order that people don't forget her.

Moderator: Ah? What did that work elicit in you?

Mohammed-Ali: ((The participant laughed)) She doesn't want us to forget her. She wants to leave her hand, for example, or her foot, or something like that from her body in order that we do not forget her.

Moderator: Yeah. (0.3) How do you react to her message?

Mohammed-Ali: It is only words ... we cannot say. We cannot (0.2). It is only words.

As seen in the aforementioned excerpt, Mohammed-Ali foresees Saneh's personal motives for taking herself apart and selling parts of her body, which he interprets as a means to counter forgetfulness. Here, I assume that in focusing on the different parts of the body as memories of Saneh's existence, Mohammed-Ali grants to the artist an afterlife existence; therefore, refrains from thinking about the ultimate end of death. Namely, the participant's recurring expression "it is only words...we cannot say" arises as a defence against the idea that the artist's venture to find buyers for her signed body parts on the internet could eventually lead to the disassembly of her body after her death. But it is also possible to surmise that, in pointing to Saneh's insistence to "sell her hand, her feet or something of her body so she is not forgotten", said Mohammed-Ali, the participant only perceived images of wounded bodies, seen as evidence of the trauma inflicted on the Lebanese people. Mohammed-Ali, who had already deployed a discourse on self-redemptive sacrifice while he engaged with the war-related artworks of *Saida June 6, 1982* (Zaatari) and *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*

(Chakar), might take up his reading of a dismembered body in Saneh's work as another clue to bear witness to the suffering of the Lebanese.

Saneh's work was nonetheless appealing for Tala, who emphasised the "weird" feature of the artist's work; in particular, the very fact that other artists found interest in Saneh's proposition of signing parts of her body. As mentioned earlier, in Group 3's discussion, Tala was the only participant who conspicuously expressed her attraction to Saneh's signed body.

Moderator: before showing you the pictures of the exhibition, do you remember something about the exhibition? What do you remember?

Tala: The one that most attracted me was the one who had her body part signed by the artists. She wanted to be cremated, and also the woman who had the camera and the room when we entered and we had five people on the screen talking about the same story.

[Later on]

Moderator: This one seemed to be your favourite ((laughs)). Why did you like it?

Tala: It's weird! After I read also what the artist wanted to sign. Some of them have chosen chromosome number 21, and the heart and the lungs. How can you sign them? It's kind of weird ( ).

Moderator: And for you what does that mean, that the artist wants friends and others sign part of her body?

Tala: It's weird!

In repeatedly underlining the eccentric character of Saneh's artistic proposition ("it is weird!") as what attracted her, without much pondering the work's meaning, Tala pointed out Saneh's subversive artistic act. As seen previously[10], Tala is one of the participants who identified with Jacir's defying act of filming a Palestinian checkpoint despite the Israeli army's ban, in *Crossing Surda*. I assume that here, Saneh's endeavour to involve other artists in signing and buying different parts of her body also elicits in Tala a sense of empowerment:

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[10]See section 6.2.1, *Witnessing the suffering of the Lebanese and resisting the outside other*.

she identifies herself with the artist's subversiveness as a model for individual assertiveness. However, Tala's immediate interrogation, "how can we sign them?" indicates the participant's need to rationalise her reading of *Body pArts* by curtailing the work within the virtual and hypothetical domain; I suggest that this is a defence against the thinking that dismembering the body after death actually takes place in reality. Tala's empowering identification with Saneh's work, therefore, rests upon a process of cleavage between the participant's investment in Saneh's subversive act itself, and her recoiling from the deeper signification of *Body pArts*.

6.2.4 Seeing everything but nudity

Exemplar 2 barely engaged with the works of Steele and D'Agata: the only works exhibiting female (Steele) and male (D'Agata) nude bodies, which, for the participants, mainly contributed to the exhibition's gloomy and pervasive impression of sadness. Yet the scarcity of comments does not mean the participants merely overlooked *Birthday Suit* and *Self-Portraits*.

While reading the interviews again and paying attention to the short length of comments regarding Steele and D'Agata's work in Exemplar 2, what struck me as a researcher was not so much the participants' quasi-mute expressions but my own lack of motivational probes to investigate further why there was no room for reflection upon *Birthday Suit* and *Self-Portraits*. Why was it that when Yassine shut down in silence after acknowledging he was struck by seeing the video of the lady with her scars (*Birthday Suit*) that I continued on and questioned him about another artwork? Why did I not prompt Mazen to explore the reason behind his impression that "there is nothing there" when evoking D'Agata's portraits of himself? Exemplar 2's construal of their encounter with *Closer* is imbued with discourses of witnessing the suffering of Lebanese people, personal stories of hardship faced during their childhoods (e.g., Mazen's humiliating remembrances in south Lebanon and Tala's moving story of her Palestinian relatives) and depictions of wounded people seen on television during the July 2006 War. All these stories charged the interviews with an emotionally laden tone. Moreover, because I felt at times a perceptible hostility towards me as a researcher enquiring about politically sensitive and provoking issues, I preferred to follow the flow of the participants'

narrative, trying to be aware of their defensive attitudes and their need for silence, rather than probing further.

After engaging with *Birthday Suit* (Steele) and *Self-Portraits* (D'Agata) a few participants in Exemplar 2 focused on the artist's display of their nude bodies, which gave rise to rhetoric on immorality and mutilated bodies: a discourse, which, in my view, illustrates the "collapse of nudity into nakedness and sexuality" (Cover, 2003, p. 67).

> Yassine [On Birthday Suit, Steele :] This is the film of the lady who peeled off her skin.
>
> Moderator: Did that struck you?
>
> Yassine: <u>Yes</u>! ((Yassine shut down in a long silence)).
>
> Moderator [On Birthday Suit, Steele :] Did you feel uneasy? What did you think of that?
>
> Mohammed-Ali: There is a ( ) sadness. Always, she does things she doesn't want to do.
>
> Moderator: In Lebanon, don't they show what is sad?
>
> Mohammed-Ali: No, we have always sadness. But these images (0.3)
>
> ((Mohammed-Ali is staring at the pictures))
>
> Mohammed-Ali: There is the image of sadness, I don't know what these images are. A young man who is doing things ... uncomfortable (0.5).
>
> Moderator: For you, what does that say about the society in Lebanon?
>
> Mohammed-Ali: No, nobody talks.

In seeing "a women who peels off her skin" in *Birthday Suit*, Yassine's reading of the artwork focused on the signification of Steele's video to a naked and mutilated body which forestalls any meaningful engagement with the artistic register of *Birthday Suit*. In his seminal *Nudity*, Clark (1956) sets out that artistic representation has the ability to render the naked as nude and, therefore, prevent our relation to nude representation from encroachment by the sexual.

On the contrary, Exemplar 2's reading of the nude-related artworks exemplifies the slippage between seeing nude and seeing naked bodies, with the impure and sexual that was seemingly thrust upon the participant's relationship with the works.

In addition, just as Mohammed-Ali and Yassine shy away from elaborating on their encounter with *Birthday Suit* and *Self-Portraits* ("Nobody talks," asserted Mohammed-Ali), worthy of notice is the acuteness of other participants' defensive attitudes, which culminates with Mazen literally denying the presence of D'Agata's *Self-Portraits* under his gaze:

> Moderator: Do you find that this exhibition had general feelings? Or did you just … Did you feel bored or felt touched. I remember you talked about one artwork.
>
> Mazen [On Self-Portraits, D'Agata :] Sometimes I … more … when I, when I was seeing the man who took the photographs of himself or … or … pieces, different pieces that ( ) event, I didn't feel, I felt it was nothing there**.**

Mazen reverses the negation he used alongside his own impression ("I *didn't* feel"), which he then used to qualify, or rather disqualify, D'Agata's work from his gaze: "I felt it was *nothing* there". I surmise that by doing so, Mazen protects his sense of self from the threatening and probably intrusive view of D'Agata's nude body. This finding echoes Cover's (2003) argument that seeing nakedness merged with sexuality "hits the very stability of the self as subject" (p. 63).

Another participant drew on a detail of *Self-Portraits* – the character's hand placed behind his back – to bring forth a sense of hope and optimism, which counterbalances his reading that D'Agata's work mainly conveys bleakness and gloomy feelings.

> Ibraheem [On Self-Portraits, D'Agata :] From this picture, I see two meanings, the first meaning that … he needs help because of the crossing of his hands, or you can understand another thing that he is always lonely and he is close to himself and can't share his hand with someone else because …
>
>   [Later on]

Ibraheem: Maybe this ... I know, I know a lot of people around the world are ... they suffer ... suffer from depression, stress, hard work and ... a lot of problems. So I liked what he showed but it was better to divide, to divide this picture into two parts, one part is for depression and stress and the other is for ... it's for the opposite feeling, happy, having fun ... yes.

Moderator: To show the other side of human beings?

Ibraheem: I don't ... Yes, yes but, and I don't think that ... I don't think that he lives all his life sad and having nothing and have nothing to do other than being depressed and you know ... Every one of us has a funny part of his life or having fun with friends.

Worthy of note in the aforementioned excerpt is Ibraheem's call for a split in making sense of *Self-Portraits* between seeing "depression and stress" and "feeling happy, having fun" Like Mazen, who ended up denying the presence of *Self-Portraits* under his gaze, here I assume that Ibraheem prevents his reading of *Self-Portraits* – bleak and depressing – from undermining his own self and sense of optimism, which, as Ibraheem emphasised, is a universal part of everyone.

7

Individual Interview Findings – Exemplar 3

This chapter presents the third and last type of participant engagement with *Closer* and its artistic registers in relation to the participants' identity positions regarding the issue of memory and of co-existing with the sectarian other. Exemplar 3, "The opportunity of intimacy, critical positions over history and the other, alternative identities", provides an opposing picture to that of Exemplars 1 and 2. The participants' impressions, their sheer level of involvement in the artwork, their way of applying a symbolic distance to the works' thought-provoking themes, and the meaningful connections they made between the artwork and sensitive issues in post-war Lebanon, converged towards the view that Exemplar 3 illustrates the possibility that unfamiliar encounters with critically engaged artwork can bring about psycho-social resources for young Lebanese. The task of this chapter is to show *how* experience of encountering works of art may offer the psycho-social conditions for young Lebanese to disentangle themselves from conflicting relationships to their past history and to the other, and find alternative ways to construct their identity in the future. Which ambivalent and/or uneasy experiences do the participants of Exemplar 3 go through in order to make sense of the artwork, for themselves and in relation to the post-war Lebanese context? It is a complex, meaningful journey, which the quote below, made by a young Shiite woman, aptly summarises:

"I was a bit intrigued to see these pictures of bombed Beirut (*Saida June 6, 1982*,

Zaatari) and then pictures of couples kissing each other (*Self-Portraits*, D'Agata).

I didn't see the link. This is only later that I managed to see a link."

This chapter 7, entirely dedicated to presenting Exemplar 3, follows the presentation of the previous chapter 6. I first introduce the exemplar's characteristics in order to grasp its distinctive features. I then present the analysis of the empirical material under three broad themes: 1) facing with history, taking on body intimacy as a common denominator to transcend sectarian boundaries, and critics of the language of the ideology, 2) the project of cremation and selling part of the body as a way to emancipate the individual, and 3) seeing in the nude body a space for intimate freedom.

The opportunity of intimacy, critical positions over history and the other, alternative identities

Characteristics of Exemplar 3

The final exemplar of the typology comprises 14 participants: Cherine, Swasan, Sadika and Alain from Group 4; all eight women from Group 5 – Farah, Michelle, Rima, Hadil, Sabine, Nathalie, Geraldine and Zeinab; and finally Ali and Firas, two male participants from Group 6 – the Lebanese University – who were interviewed notwithstanding the group's last-minute cancellation. The participants of Exemplar 3 found a meaningful investment in *Closer*, which fostered them to criticise and challenge the ideological and communal power struggles that sweep through post-war Lebanese society, implicitly naming the current tensions between the March 14 and March 8 movements. They came across an aesthetic and expressive register of the artists' lived experiences of war time and of the nude bodies in *Closer* – though nudity appeared to be disquieting for some participants. This cast a new light on their history, tackled the image of suffering as collective grievance, and encouraged the participants to move beyond competitive discourses over the narratives of the war. Moreover, a number of participants – mainly young Lebanese women – made sense of the female and male body in

the exhibition not only as a way to tackle the issue of collective memory in post-war Lebanon, but as a support to emancipate themselves from coercive traditions in relation to women's freedom in intimate relationships and sexuality. They pondered over their uneasiness in front of nudity and explored the "dark side of intimacy" (Rima). As a result of their enriched engagement with intimate and nude bodies in a public space, a number of women ascribed an optimistic overtone to *Closer*, which counterbalances their overall pessimistic view of the future in Lebanon. Likely, a common thread amongst them was their willingness to take charge of their destiny in the near future and play a role in Lebanese society.

7.1 Opening up to memories of the past

Exemplar 3 came across an expressive and metaphoric register in *Closer* that supported the participants to engage with a wider sense of history: one that overcomes fragmented and polemical narratives of the war. Involving themselves in the very intimate aspects of the artwork, the participants found a common denominator between human beings beyond sectarian divides and expressed empathy for the other's suffering, which led them to bypass the language of ideology spread in the media.

7.1.1 Facing history

For most of the participants in Exemplar 3, the expressive features of the artwork – the artists' lived experience of the wars combined with the exhibit of the nude body and disclosure of the artists' intimacy – put *suffering* at the forefront of the artists' message; this compelled the viewers to come to terms with the "tragic" nature of Lebanese history. *Closer* tackles dominant discourses that evoke suffering as a collective fate placed upon the Lebanese people and ingrained in the collective representations by the popular percept that history in Lebanon "repeats itself" or is "a cycle of wars". The participants confronted the artist's expressive gestures and nudity in *Self-Portrait* (D'Agata) and the woman's scarred flesh in *Birthday Suit* (Steele) and voiced a rhetoric of touching upon 'the roots of suffering' and 'humanisation of the wars'.

Moderator: Do you think that here one talks about memory? In your society.

Sabine: One has to say things as they are. Things are not said.

Moderator: How do you think the artists in this exhibition say things? How do they say things?

Sabine: Clearly. They say, they say "It hurts us. It was tragic. <u>Look at what I had!</u> Look at what happened with me."

Farah [on Self-Portraits, D'Agata :] In fact, it really touched me, because it reminded me the painter. What is his name? I forgot …

Moderator: Francis Bacon.

Farah: Here, Francis Bacon! It really reminded me Francis Bacon and <u>I really saw the suffering of people.</u> I really saw their intimacy. I saw much more the suffering of the man. As Lebanese, I am somebody who is suffering. In Lebanon, no one is not suffering. We suffer in Lebanon.

As seen in the aforementioned excerpt, Farah elaborated on the human being's suffering ("the man") as revelatory of her own condition as a Lebanese woman. Contrary to Exemplars 1 and 2, Farah does not identify in a straightforward way with the Lebanese suffering while seeing nudity in the artwork, but followed an aesthetic *detour*; she read *Self-Portraits* as an echo of Bacon's painting, which propelled her to reflect upon the universal nature of suffering.

Much in the same way, Hadil, another female participant, evoked her empathetic engagement with the suffering of victims of wars, as she drew upon two apparently distant topics in the artwork: the woman's scars in *Birthday Suit* (Steele) and the image of shelling in *Saida June 6, 1982* (Zaatari). As a result of her involvement in viewing the intimate scarred body of Lisa Steele, Hadil reflected upon suffering as re-humanising the victims of the wars, who are generally portrayed in a banal way in the news media.

Hadil [on Saida June 6, 1982, Zaatari :] The fact that he filmed it, that there are pictures of a building being blasted, I said to myself that there was a link between

this image and the ... [On *Birthday Suit,* Steele] the picture of a woman who was stripped, because I said to myself that finally bombing the house of this person is violating her intimacy, shattering all that is most intimate. This is the reason why I felt a bit uncomfortable.

Worthy of note is Hadil's leap of imagination between the image of damage from the bombing of houses during the Israeli invasion of south Lebanon in 1982 (*Saida June 6, 1982*) to an image of a woman's nudity (*Birthday Suit*). This accounts for Hadil's metaphoric experience, which generated the unsettling feelings. At the same time, such a shocking metaphor – the image of rape ("bombing a [person]'s house is violating her intimacy") – encouraged Hadil to make sense of the war as a profound and disruptive act in the private sphere of human intimacy.

Fundamentally, and specific to Exemplar 3, engaging with the intimacy in *Closer* brought a number of participants to explore their own relationship with their past and the passing of time as part of the wider dimension of history. The expressive and aesthetic register of the artwork and the participants' metaphoric experience of seeing nudity in *Closer* elicited a more complex array of feelings attached to the past, such as "nostalgia and sadness". In this exemplar, suffering did not bring the participants back solely to media portrayal of war-wounded people, such as was the case in Exemplars 1 and 2. Here, the participants' engagement with suffering was mediated by an aestheticised relation with the past.

Rima: Hey, the *Birthday Suit*. This means that everyone carries his/her own ... Hey! It is the *Birthday Suit*. <u>It is the history[1]</u> <u>on her body!</u> Yes, it is the history, but it is also a bit like she says, it is the *Birthday Suit*. It is the suit that she wore when she ... when she was born and ... everything that comes with it, it is what makes her as a person differently than everybody else. It is her own identity. Then, over her life, this is what comes as scars, what marks her. We all have a memory about, Ya'ni ... When I think of myself, I look at it, I already have lots of scars, so I

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[1]Rima's interview was conducted in French. In the utterance "c'est l'histoire sur son corps", the word "histoire" lends itself to two English translations: history and story. I translated the utterance with the word "history" as Rima used it in the sense of an impersonal statement in contrast to the rest of the text fragment in which she used several personal pronouns such as "I", "me" and "her".

remember well where ... this is as she says, where it was done and how and why and all of this. It is marked on my body.

Moderator: For you, what does make these artworks powerful?

Alain: I think the only way for somebody to transcend his own condition is by expressing it artistically, capturing it or dealing with ... Speaking openly ...

Moderator: For you, does that bring a pessimist or optimist feeling?

Alain: It gave me a feeling of ... well, this feeling of nostalgia and loss and ... you feel, when you remember the past, when you look at your own diary when ... you get this sadness ... You have a taste of the bitterness that you feel. You always look back at the past as something that was so great and the present as something that is so hard ... and the good moments which had passed. [Later on] This is something pessimism but that you like, which <u>appeals</u> to you more or less. I look at myself, I am standing at my exams. I study for the French and the Lebanese bachelor degree and there is lots of stress. [Later on] The past doesn't look so bad after all ... This is something of nostalgia, this is something that I like, even though there is a lot of nostalgia and feelings (0.5).

Noticeable in Rima and Alain's excerpts is the way in which both participants used *Closer* to recollect and reflect upon their past experiences. Rima emphasised her metaphoric appropriation of Lisa Steele's exhibit of her scars as a special outfit representing the "history on the body". Because Rima and Alain engaged with the aesthetic and expressive register of the artworks they dared to explore their own "scars" (Rima) or feelings of sadness, nostalgia and loss (Alain). The participants' appropriation at a metaphoric level of the nude-related works in *Closer* that were otherwise disturbing enabled them to engage in a reflexive process similar to that of critical mourning, which eventually granted a positive tone to the exhibition ("The past doesn't look so bad after all," pondered Alain).

7.1.2 Body intimacy as a common denominator to transcend sectarian boundaries

Reflecting upon Lisa Steele's story (*Birthday Suit*) ingrained in her body, other participants developed a sense of touching upon a common denominator with human beings; the woman stripped of her clothes and exhibiting her scars was read as a metaphor of humans' existential wounds. "Each of us has a wound," said Firas, as he mused upon *Birthday Suit*. The participants identified themselves with the woman's story irrespective of any sectarian denominations. It is suggested here that in co-identifying with the artist's story, the participants developed a sense of sharing the same story with all of humanity, which may support them to break the process of identification with community and compliance with the culture of the religious groups.

> Swasan [On Birthday Suit, Steele :] I think this one also gives optimism in the society. If people look at her as a woman who also has a life story regardless of her colour, her religion, everything ... She fell down like you fell down when you were a kid, for example. She is still human, she still lives the same things as you do. She might have, she had a lot of funny stories, how she fell down, I don't know for a person who ... personally, I am very clumsy and I laugh at people when they fall down because I fall down all the time and I think she was very cute to speak about these things, a person who let's say, impacts the story, raises the story whatever. They hear the story they can relate to her, they don't just see her as a white woman for example, or in Lebanon they don't just see her as a Christian woman, they will see her as a woman who fell down, like they fell down when they were little; they find other common things between them.

The sense of belonging to a same story was also elicited from the participants' involvement in Saneh's dark silhouette, which the viewers could gaze upon at the entrance of the art centre. Initially, the participants felt unsettled as they struggled to understand whether Saneh was standing with her back to them, or facing them but with her face shown without distinctive features (e.g., not seeing the lips, the mouth or the eyes). Nonetheless, the participants made sense of their puzzlement over this as that it was the artist's purpose to give a sense of

universalism. For Farah and Zeinab, *Body pArts* brought them to identify with Saneh's story as revelatory of the stories of every *other*.

> Farah: First of all, the woman, one looks at her and one doesn't see her face. I think that first of all she can go back to something that each spectator can identify and swap his human face with her face. [Later on] Frankly, I was very sad in viewing the image, because once one looks at … a person without expression in her face and with eyes, without mouth, what does exist in this person? Why is she without face? In the end one understands that this character represents everybody … and it echoes human condition, realising that everybody looks like this character.

> Zeinab: I had the impression that this woman could be everybody, it could be every woman and well … I don't know this effect of the back. We have the impression she is on the right, I don't know if … At least, this is what I felt (0.3). It did not shoke me, but well … I had impression that the aim was to say "in the end we all have the same story".

Importantly, the rhetoric of identifying with the artist's story as a common ground between human beings came up as a critical response to sectarian divides between the Lebanese. In this exemplar, most participants bemoaned the lack of spontaneous exchanges they had with their peers, even friends. They feel it is difficult to forge relationships with other young Lebanese because embarrassing questions over their religious belonging always arise insidiously in the discussions.

> Sabine: Why do always people need to ask you, "which religious confession are you?"

> Moderator: Is it what other people ask you?

> Sabine: Yes. Everybody ask this to anyone.

> Moderator: Do young Lebanese ask this between them?

> Sabine: Yes! Sure! Some other girls in my class.

> Moderator: What do you reply to them?

Sabine: I smile, I laugh. They say "from which confession are you?" Yes, yes! But now, I am in another stage as I would like to tell them off. "Why do they always have this need to know from which confession is the other in front of you?"

7.1.3 Empathy for the other's suffering

For a large number of participants in this exemplar, Tony Chakar's story of his father killed in the civil war resonated with the participants' own personal family stories of the war. Elaborating on how the artist's father was tragically murdered on the Green Line, the participants talked about their emotions and empathy for the other's suffering. This brought them to stand outside of the polemical overtone of Chakar's artwork, which relates to the representation of martyrdom[2]. The participants' empathy[3] for the other's suffering was also associated with a rhetoric of tackling the issue of collective memory with an underlying critique of the fragmented narratives of past.

Hadil: It really touched me. This story really touched me because he talks about his father and since I live far from my parents, I said to myself "it could be me, it could have been my father, it could have been my uncle".

Swasan: If they see like, they see what. Of course they will become better. Really because when they hear about the, for example a boy's recollection of the day his father died, they will find how stupid for example the war can be because this boy lost his father and many like him lost their fathers. Maybe this ... this one for ... Maybe they will see the bigger picture.

Cherine: It is personal, but beyond it talks about the other through themselves.

Since the participants focused on what the father's murder meant in terms of a human tragedy and could identify with the artist's fate as a common denominator with the other ("it could be me or the other") they bypassed the representation of the sectarian other perceived as threat.

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[2]Note that Chakar's painting of his father as a martyr is precisely what stirred up an intense outcry in Exemplar 1.

[3]Zittoun (2006) defines the process of empathy as to experience oneself in another position, which enables "various positions within the architecture of the self" (p. 62).

7.1.4 Critique of the language of ideology and of the fear of the other

Correlated to the participants' empathy for the suffering other was the call in Exemplar 3 for a united Lebanon. The participants saw in Chakar's unlikely painting of his father as a Christian martyr, a symbolic twist that opened a vista for criticising the way in which Hezbollah appropriate the celebration of martyrs at the expense of other religious communities. Here, for the participants, Chakar succeeds in creating a sense of belonging amongst Lebanese people from all sects, since the artist disentangles the representation of martyrdom from that of the Shiite party; that is, the participants' reading of *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* bypassed the sectarian divisions based on symbolic barriers.

> Alain: In particular, I enjoy this picture because … this struggle in the Lebanese war was mainly about religion, but, well … it was between the Muslims and Christians, it was a big war. So I was intrigued by the fact that the father of this artist, the artist was a Christian, he took the picture of his father and … in order to make this painting, despite … I think there was this antagonism between them, but he respected their view of the martyrs.

> Moderator: What would you say about his undertaking?

> Alain: Perhaps, it's, well, an attempt to unify, to show respect, huh … huh … <u>to unify</u> the name of the martyr. We are not unified by religion and ideology and plans for our country; at least we are unified by our love to the father who died for it … so (0.6).

> Geraldine: I found very interesting what he tried to do. It is beautiful, I don't know. He defined him as martyr, isn't? It is like it was to put in question this issue of martyr.

> Moderator: What does that show for you?

> Geraldine: It shows two contradictory things. Now, in Lebanon everybody can be martyr. It becomes trendy. But, it interests me a lot because our martyrs are not only martyrs from today. There are many people who die for Lebanon. We must

not forget them. Second, who gives a definition of whom is a martyr? For instance, I don't know any martyrs from Hezbollah. Finally, what does Hezbollah looks for through his martyrs? Why it doesn't want me to share with him celebration of his martyrs? Because, I would like to recognise Hezbollah's martyr without being influenced by this movement. [later on] I think, Tony Chakar tries to open him up, I don't want to speak on behalf of him, but he seeks to opens him up to Hezbollah. Doing a first step, a first initiative, because one needs somebody to start. If Hezbollah is not going to do the first step, I will do it. But at the same time, it is … again, as in Lina Saneh, it is something of transgressing, to make a link, making a link between things which are fragmented.

Sabine: This image is symbolic. The fact that he went to Hezbollah's painter, for that. It is the message that one needs to unify, one needs to get ally. Because, it is not possible that this country, that everybody, everyone follows an external force. [Later on] Everybody needs to ally with the resistance. Because, it is not because it has got a religious aspect that it is not good, or because resistance is terrorist.

In the last aforementioned excerpt, Sabine's reading of the artist who commissioned a Hezbollah painter to represent his father along with the martyr's tradition, as a call for unity between the sects, endorses a more political overtone. For Sabine, *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* throws a light on the Palestinian issue as a human tragedy, and around which Lebanese people should unify themselves beyond ideological struggles.

As much as Sabine criticised the language of propaganda that associates Hezbollah's Party of God with "terrorism", Firas claimed that Chakar's symbol of the cedar tree in the painting represents the language of *truth*: an antidote against the dominant discourses in post-war society. Firas engaged in a long critique condemning how political parties, religious groups and the media use putative neutral language to designate the other's sect in order to pacify the communal passions, yet actually spread hatred and fear of the sectarian other.

Firas: Tony Chakar, he talked about a personal experience, but it is a collective experience. He expressed it clearly, but in the Lebanese communities, it does

not happen, because there are taboos. There are always lies. One doesn't say the truth. One says something, but reality is something else. Media plays a major role. Because in the media something is said to avoid shocking people, because (laugh) in the Lebanese conception, one says that it encourages people ... it cultivates hate. When one talks about confession in a real way, this means one doesn't talk about hate between the people, but hate is everywhere in our society. [Later on] For example, ((Firas takes a big breath)) I don't know how to explain how they say, they encourage people, they cultivate hate but in a way which is not direct, in an indirect manner; that is, they tell symbols which are accepted in the public but are pointed towards a specific community so that community ... in order to make a propaganda against the other. [...] For instance, instead of saying the Sunnites, they say well ... they say "people from Beirut". Generally the "people from Beirut" are Sunnites, but one does not say the Sunnites ((Firas laughed)). It is also said "people from the south" instead of the Shiites.

Moderator: I understand ... What do you think Chakar brings about with his work?

Firas: He says things explicitly. What I like is that he talks explicitly of things, without censoring himself. For instance, the meaning of the cedars in the Christian community is Lebanon. It is the symbol in Lebanon that we can find on the flag. Christian people are always attached to this symbol. Not the Muslims! Because, when it was created, it was ... ((Firas laughed)) a need for the Christian community.

Because Firas situated Chakar's improbable martyr painting in the historical context of the Second Republic at the time of the Christian hegemony, the participant took on the artist's work as a symbolic resource. As Firas claimed, *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* debunks the imaginary construction of the sectarian other spread in the media. As mentioned in Exemplar 2, Chakar operates a displacement of the usual representation of martyrs and introduces a metaphoric dimension in his work. Opposite to the way in which the participants of Exemplar 2 reacted to Chakar's artistic twist, Firas read the unlikely addition of the cedars in the martyr's representation as the *truth* or the "explicit" as opposed to the "implicit"; the

latter is the language of propaganda, made up of "legends" and "wrong beliefs", and upon which the political parties build up their power.

7.2 Emancipating the individual against religious traditions

A number of female participants came across the works of the Lebanese women artist Lina Saneh as radically subversive. *Body pArts* claimed the triumph of the individual over the collective anonymous and the power of the state, as Swasan, Nathalie, Geraldine and Zeinab uttered with enthusiasm.

The fact that Lina Saneh deploys such realism to grapple with the issue of death and cremation, one of the most prominent taboos in the Lebanese society, struck the young women. Not seen as merely subversive or offensive, *Body pArts* was read as an innovative and revolutionary way to bypass the burden of religious and family traditions which influence people's will about what happens to the body after death.

> Swasan: It is not very popular here ... It is very rare for people that they want to be cremated. I have never heard of someone who wants to be cremated. I used to say I would like to be cremated.
>
> Moderator: Ah, you said?
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> Swasan: I always used to say I would like to be cremated but my parents say no, they say: "It is taboo because it is not our religion". We are Greek Orthodox Christians. It is not very popular in Lebanon at all.
>
> Moderator: And you put the idea out of your mind?
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> Swasan: Of course, because I think I am too young to even think of ...
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> Moderator: Sure.
>
> Swasan: But it is very interesting how she displays her opinion, you know, because I can always make protests or make arguments, but Saneh actually attracts people's attention. [later on] I never really thought about cremation in this way. I talked

about it to my mum and then I put it out of my mind. And look at what this woman did! She answered many questions, because I like to hear stories of people who did something different from what their parents wanted.

Geraldine: I saw the realisation of what she presented as piece of theatre and it made me feel, wow! Suddenly, it was a reality. It was impressive.

Moderator: It was impressive in which way? Did that slightly shock you? What kind of feeling did you have when you saw the realisation?

Geraldine: In fact, it did not shock me. I felt relieved. I said to me that somewhere, through art, one could make things possible, what seems to us impossible in our everyday life in Lebanon, really there are lots of obstacles. I don't know, Saneh's idea … it wouldn't have come to my mind. I don't know, I feel it is something which would be … I don't know. I feel it is revolutionary ((Geraldine laughed)) with regards to Lebanese context, because it is above all the religious here which have the last words. I don't know, it made me relieved. I understand it is symbolic, what she did.

Geraldine had already attended the performance piece, *Appendix*, by Lina Saneh (2007), which dealt with the issues of afterlife and cremation. As such, familiar with Saneh's artistic work, Geraldine was excited to follow how the artist developed her idea on cremation sketched out in the theatre performance, as if it was coming true in *Body pArts*'s practical project. Strikingly, while Geraldine and Swasan pointed out how Saneh's artwork provided so many concrete details, both participants made sense of *Body pArts* as a symbolic message; they did not apply a literal reading of Saneh's project of selling parts of her body, but took up the work as a metaphor of the individual's capacity to break the power of the community. I interpret that thinking about *Body pArts* on a symbolic level enabled the young women to imagine and put themselves in the place of Saneh, who challenges the power of traditional institutions (e.g., the family and the religion). At the same time, engaging with the artwork on a symbolic level probably protected the participants from the unsettling experience of engaging with issues of death, the afterlife, and of the fragmented body. Finally, I also

suggest that the power of Geraldine's metaphoric experience with *Body pArts* rests upon the artwork's performative potential; the participant does not just appropriate Saneh's project at a cognitive level. Gripped by *Body pArts*, Geraldine expressed sheer enjoyment and feelings of being moved, such as expanding her own position of self and identity ("I felt *relieved*," said Geraldine while she concluded that "through art, one could make things possible").

Furthermore, because Saneh's work consists of relating each part of her body to literary and poetic texts fragments, for Geraldine an aesthetic dimension suffuses every fragment of the artist's body, which in turn confers to the body an overall unity.

> Geraldine: I found there is really the respect of the individual through the respect of her body, as organic entity. Because, well, I don't know, the fact that it is transposed into art, it almost gives a sacred dimension. "I, as man, as human value, I am, I have an artistic value. I am at the same level of art. You cannot touch me". It is like one claims one intimacy and so on.

In line with the participants' critique of the weight of religious traditions over individuals, for Geraldine *Body pArts'* tour de force is that as well as bypassing the religious taboos of cremation, the artwork affords a "sacred dimension" to the human being. In other words, *Body pArts* succeeds in shifting the "sacred dimension" usually attached to entities that supersede human beings (i.e., religion), to the individual itself.

7.3 Affording a space of intimate freedom for the Lebanese

The work of Mona Hatoum, *So Much I Want to Say*, led a number of female participants to denounce the patriarchal and authoritarian power in Lebanon and in Middle East societies generally. For these participants, Hatoum's convincing message about propelling women to speak out in the public and private spheres stemmed from their straightforward understanding of the title *So Much I Want to Say* and from their visceral experience of interacting with the artist's video. *So Much I Want to Say* is literally a universal call for the liberation of women's voices.

Michelle: This one remained for long in my head. This is a woman, she is Lebanese. This video represents … whatever every woman has got in her head: would like to say. With the hands … to prevent her from talking.

Farah: The title is in itself expressive "So Much I Want to Say", hum, finally, I believe that everyone among us has so many things to say and, hum, it depends on the environment.

Zeinab: I believe that was my reaction that you arrive at a moment … when you say … we have the impression that it is a leitmotiv … I do not know, she gets on our nerves, we had enough, finally we tell her "Say!" "Say! Come out" ((Zeinab laughed)) and I believe that … it is one of the reactions we were looking for. Finally, she said, we all have this wish. I have so much to say. Well, yes, she says. What impedes us in the end?

In the above excerpt, Zeinab recounts a sheer sensation of being overwhelmed and literally hurt by the repetitive sentence "So much I want to say" muttered by Hatoum's mouth, which was covered by male hands. As a result, Zeinab's quasi-anthropomorphic experience – the artwork had come to life and knocked the participant – empowered her as to recast representations of Lebanese women as voiceless.

7.3.1 Exhibiting nudity in public spaces

Upon reflecting on how to empower women in a society that still abides by a patriarchal model, the nudity-related artworks of Lisa Steele and Antoine D'Agata took prominence in Exemplar 3's interviews; for the participants, *Birthday Suit* and *Self-Portraits* challenged the tendency of Lebanese people to refrain from exerting their intimate freedom in public spaces. The participants who seized the opportunity to make sense of the exhibit of nude bodies and intimacy as a way in which to assert their individual and emancipated identity – especially the Muslims women – were those who most expressed a need to free themselves from a male-dominated society and projected more positive images of the future. Nevertheless, it is likely that, at times, a number of male and female participants associated the intimacy

revealed by the two works of art with sexual connotations that showed "trivial and tough things", which caused uneasiness and discomfort.

A Druze female participant identified with Lisa Steele's body stripped of its clothes and formed an unthinkable image: that of feeling free to walk naked on a beach in Lebanon.

> Geraldine: I saw a woman and I remember, it gave me, heck, a feeling of well-being to get naked, just like that, without the fear of the sight of the other. So, I dream I could go to a beach where could, even walk out naked without seeing the sight of critics or shocked sights, and so on. I don't know.

While Geraldine was at ease with the representation of the nudity, two other Shiite Muslim women developed more complex and ambivalent feelings; nonetheless, their first impressions of reluctance while engaging with the intimate body turned out to be enriching experiences because, for the participants, the exhibit of intimacy in *Closer* resonated as the feminine revolt, enabling them to assert their own desires and personal emancipation.

> Zeinab [On Self-Portraits, D'Agata :] The kiss made me uncomfortable, because, I think I told you last time, because, I don't know, ah. I liked it, but it made me uncomfortable, because as I told you, it is the intimacy, Ya'ni. This is this ... yes, exactly. This attempt to always show the hidden face, well, the hidden face of the things. Well, you know in Lebanon, just between us, because you raised the question, you know, it is forbidden by the law to kiss each other in the street. So, to do it, one needs to hide. [Later on] This is the reason why, I put this picture in the group of the photos which try to disclose the intimacy. In fact, no, it didn't make me uncomfortable. This is just, I considered that it was just an attempt to show another, well, another part of intimacy, another face. But, no, it is OK. It is not going to make me uncomfortable.

Worthy of note is Zeinab's discursive shift between the moment she voiced her discomfort in engaging with D'Agata's photo representing the artist coupled with another, and, later on, when Zeinab stepped back from her initial embarrassment. After reflecting upon the fact that the rights of couples to physically display their relationship is restricted in Lebanon,

the young woman reiterated her point that "It is not going to make me uncomfortable". Here, I interpret Zeinab's reversed feelings towards the display of intimacy in *Self-Portraits* as indicative of her capacity to take up an emancipated position of identity, challenging the societal taboos about men and women kissing in public spaces.

Another illustration of the way in which Shiite women developed an enriched meaning out of their ambivalent feelings towards intimacy in *Closer* is Hadil's ambivalent rhetoric of intrusion; feeling her own intimacy intruded upon while engaging with *Self-Portraits*, Hadil voiced how she secretly desired to show such images to the gaze of others.

> Hadil [On Self-Portait, D'Agata :] It surprised me a bit to see that kind of pictures, because it was too much intimacy of the people at the forefront. I really had the impression I was violating the intimacy, it was frankly a scene of voyeurism. But as my nature is … I am rather someone who hides, I don't like one knows much about me, I said to myself since I don't like people to see my intimacy how can I dare to do that? At the same time, I said to myself it is maybe a way to get freed, to open up to others, because as I think back about it, I understood this in the Arabic world context. Maybe these artists, these occidentals who came in the Arab world they were a bit surprised by the fact that people here want to hide, not to disclose, not kissing each other in streets, kisses are bad. I said to myself, it is maybe a way to say "you are like that" and "we are like that" a way to invite us in fact. So I said to myself it is rather nice from them, maybe I took as shocking, peculiar and surprising at the first sight. But in a way, it is a good way to shake people, because it is annoying to be in a society where people are so narrow-minded: "don't do this, don't do that". [Later on] Yes, above all I think we all have deep inside use the phantasm to take such pictures and to show them off to people. But the problem is that we always say to ourselves "What are people going to say about us? What are people going to think about us?" We don't dare to do that.

In a long reflexive process, Hadil made sense of her reluctance to see the intimacy exhibited in D'Agata's work in the context of the cultural difference between Western societies and

Middle Eastern societies, which tend to confine people's relationship to the private sphere. But, musing over her need to keep her intimacy away from the other's gaze, Hadil questioned the Middle Eastern values to which she recognised she belonged. Hadil's discursive path is indicative of a process of working through her discomfort when faced with the intimate body, because she eventually challenged her representation of the Lebanese traditions that impose societal strictures on people's intimacy. A good illustration of this is how Hadil depicted D'Agata's work by using the sexually and pejorative expression "a scene of voyeurism", then came to acknowledge that exhibiting one's intimacy in such ways as in *Self-Portraits* may be a "phantasm" that in fact meets a basic human need.

Engaging with the nude-related works of art *Birthday Suit* and *Self-Portraits* not only threw light on a number of Muslims women's desire to assert their individual intimate freedom over society's taboos, but also elicited a critique of male-dominated Lebanese society from the point of view of a Shiite male participant. Criticising the stereotype of the strong and wealthy Lebanese man, Firas read D'Agata's work, particularly the picture of the nude artist sitting down with his upper body bent forward and his arms resting upon his knees, as replete with feelings of violence and guilt. Rather than disregarding D'Agata's work for bringing forth shocking and sexually connoted images, Firas saw in *Self-Portraits* – in line with the exhibition's general overtone – the symbol of male's vulnerability and failure: an unthinkable image in Lebanese society.

> Firas [On Self-Portraits, D'Agata :] This, I think, it is related to violence. It shows the violence on the body. Well … Because I think I've never been abused by someone else who acted violently on me, I think if I had a history of violence, it would be moving. The pictures mirror the violence, well … and also the guilt. I think that he did masturbate himself and he is looking at his body with disgust. But (0.5).

> ((Later on, Firas was criticising the conflicting position in which Lebanese young women are caught up: between their traditions of allegiance and their willingness to embrace modernism)).

Moderator: Is it easier for a boy? A Lebanese boy?

Firas: Not at all. Because, the young Lebanese do not manage to be a modern man and get detached from the legend of the sexually strong man; that is, the sexuality which is related to the genital organ. He always want to preserve an image well … inherited from the man. But in life, reality is different. He lives a big paradox. But it is never said and each man – you can find it everywhere – he says that he is a Don Juan, but in reality he has wounds ((Firas laughed)). Instead of talking in a simple manner, no he prefers lying and saying that he is a Don Juan (0.9).

Contrary to other male participants in Exemplar 3 whose engagement with nude bodies in *Closer* was halted by uneasy feelings or even disgust, Firas transcended his discomfort because the exhibition echoed his personal combat against political, religious and cultural categorisations. Prior to elaborating on the exhibition's pictures, Firas presented himself as an atheist, recently disillusioned by the communist political party to which he had belonged. Feeling marginalised from his peers and criticising how other young Lebanese adults represent relationships between women and men through the romanticised stories of "Cinderella" and "Don Juan" – for the young women and men, respectively – Firas certainly experienced the artist's exhibit of his "wounds" as an alternative to an identity based on the stereotype of the Lebanese man; Firas found a renewed model of identity that acknowledges one's intimacy and subjectivity.

Conclusion of Chapters 6 and 7

In concluding chapters 6 and 7, which presented the findings of the individual interviews categorised into three types of engagement with *Closer*, I would like to emphasise and interpret the discrepancies that arose between the ways in which the young Lebanese people voiced their experiences of *Closer* within the groups and in a one-to-one individual interview setting. This was one of the research objectives for conducting individual interviews, as mentioned in the methodology chapter.

1. There is one striking instance in the findings in which a male Maronite Christian (Exemplar 1) seized the opportunity in the individual interview setting to delve into the dimension of the intimate body in *Closer*, although he complied with the group dynamics of a fierce dismissal of the intimate body. He read the body-related artwork (*Self-Portraits*, D'Agata) as a space for individual and intimate experiment. Without undermining this finding, worthy of note is the significance of the outcome of the male participant's opening up to the body in contrast to some of the female participants who voiced their powerful engagement with the intimate body (Exemplar 3); for the latter, their experience propelled them to challenge the power of male-dominated society and of the state, and empowered them as individual actors in the Lebanese public sphere. In contrast, for the male Maronite Christian participant, his meaningful experience of seeing nudity stemmed from its eminently private nature, even though it was exhibited publicly.

2. Regarding the dimension of memory in *Closer*, a few points are worth stressing. The individual interview was an opportunity for the three male Shiite participants (Exemplar 2) to deploy the views they had concealed in the group setting[4]. They elaborated at length on witnessing war damage in *Closer* (namely, the July 2006 War). The two male Shiites expressed they were adamant about knowing the history of the Lebanese Civil War, questioning their parents about their lived experiences during the war. Their curiosity arose as a surprise to me (the moderator) because these participants had not opposed the group leader's censorship upon evoking the civil war[5] in the discussion. Yet, this gap between individual interviews and group discussion must be cautiously interpreted. As pointed out in Exemplar 2, of which these Shiite men were part, seeing the war in *Closer* entrenched the participants' positions of identity in the ideological divide in post-war Lebanon; it reinforced the participants' perception of Lebanese

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[4]The three male participants are Yassine and Mohammed-Ali in Group 2 and Mazen in Group 4; although the dynamic of Group 4 enabled the expression of divergent positions, Mazen, in stark disagreement with his peers regarding the Lebanese responsibility for war misdeeds, withdrew from the group's enthusiasm and curiosity for *Closer*.

[5]See chapter 5, section 5.1.1: *Seeing the war and taboos of memory: norms and censorship*. In Group 2, I mentioned the case of Jihad, who overtly disregarded my research and the way in which *Closer* represents the war, and censored any possible alternative views on the issue of memory in post-war Lebanon.

people as victims of regional conspiracies rather than opening them up to a *critical* perspective on memory and history.

3. By contrast, another instance in the data supports the idea that the individual interview setting opened up a space for critically exploring memory, notwithstanding the fact that it was set as a taboo in the group. The male Maronite Christian participant mentioned above (Exemplar 1) was one of the most vehement opponents in engaging with the artists' lived experiences of war time in *Closer* and criticised any artistic attempt to dig into Lebanon's past. However, although in the individual interview he still stated that he was prone to forgetfulness of the civil war, he came to express on one specific occasion his empathy for Zaatari's (*Saida June 6, 1982*) endeavour to keep a record of his war-time memories in a personal notebook ("It is a good idea to write memories, what one has lived, what one has seen," said Najah, unexpectedly). Interestingly, Najah's shifting positions relating to war memories goes along with his shifting position towards body intimacy – mentioned above regarding D'Agata's *Self-Portraits* – while in the group he and another participant led the charge against the artwork's subjective display of nudity. This raises the question: Did opening up to intimacy and the nude body foster Najah to open up, by the same token, to another Lebanese taboo: the memory of the war?

This tentative approach to link up two dimensions of *Closer* (intimacy and nude body and memory) rests upon the assumption that engaging with intimacy in the exhibition might play out as a psycho-social resource to put in motion renewed identities that transcend the memory issue of conflicting narratives of the past in post-2005 Lebanon. The next and final chapter of my thesis is dedicated to bringing together the empirical material and conceptual framework. It will take on and theoretically investigate this assumption, which has developed over the course of the analysis.

Collective memory and identity: Empirical and theoretical contribution

A key theoretical development of this thesis was the construction of a conceptual framework to study how young Lebanese people's relationship to remembering and forgetting the past shapes their construction of identity, from the perspective of defining new ways of forming collective identity. To that end, I proposed a scrutiny of the concept of collective memory and its relation to identity construction, which accounts for the complexity of the socio-historical context of Lebanese society. I made the case for the potential role of memory in breaking the cycle of conflicting memories and divisive sectarian identities, and finding new forms of consensus; I finalised this with Castoriadis's concept of 'instituting imaginary' as a way of opening up to a space for autonomy. I used a very particular methodology and research site to create an ephemeral space in which to explore collective memory through unfamiliar artistic discourses on memory. In doing so, this thesis has contributed to highlighting key areas that may determine the potential and limitations for recreating memories and re-imagining a future in Lebanon.

The analysis of the group dynamics of five focus groups of young Lebanese adults involved in the visual contemporary art exhibition *Closer*, held at the Beirut Art Center, followed by a typological approach of 24 individual interviews conducted after the focus groups, provided rich qualitative material, from which I identified a number of themes and key findings.

The findings of the focus groups and of three exemplars (i.e., forms of engagement with the exhibition in relation to positions of identity towards the issue of memory of the wars, of a sectarian other and towards the future in Lebanon) were presented along with three overarching themes: 1) war, history and memory; 2) intimacy and nude figures, and 3) family narratives. It arose that the young Lebanese adults' investment in the artwork related to the display of the artists' bodies and nude figures in *Closer* (*Birthday Suit*, Steele; *Self-Portraits*, D'Agata; *Body pArts*, Saneh) shaped to a great extent their involvement in the theme of war, history and memory.

Exploring how, for the young Lebanese, the artists' lived experiences of collective histories and the display of the nude figure informed their engagement with the dimension of memory and history is the basis upon which I will discuss the concepts that I developed in the theory chapter. In the following section, I summarise the research findings along with two main notions – suffering and truth – which are pivotal in emphasising key differences in the ways in which the young Lebanese relation to intimacy and nudity in artwork shaped their relation to memory and history.

8.1 Summary of the key empirical findings

In this research, the notion of suffering, associated with the subject's pain (Radley, 2002), draws a connection between the intimate exhibit of nude figures displaying scars, wounds or a distorted blurred male body, and the collective level of suffering perceived as a remnant of the protracted cycle of violence undergone by the Lebanese during the civil war and recurring with the July 2006 War. Similarly, the notion of truth – seeing the truth about the human cost of war – was expressed in relation to the exhibit of nude figures. Truth, in the empirical analysis, was also related to speaking the truth in relation to the parents' remembrances of the Lebanese Civil War. Here, the discourses were conveyed by the participants' engagement with Jannane Al-Ani and Anri Sala's stories about an absent father and a mother recovering the memory of her past in the Albanian Communist Party. In this section I present several ways in which the young Lebanese engaged with suffering and truth, in relation to different

criteria. This brings about implications for discussing the issue of collective memory and the construction of identity for young Lebanese in a sensitive socio-historical context.

Before presenting the key findings I shall make a caveat. In research using qualitative methods, such as the present study, researchers must be cautious about inferring generalisations from an empirical analysis based on the demographic criteria according to which participants are selected. In this research, the small number of focus groups and interviews used for the analysis does not allow for safe conclusions to be drawn about the differences among the various groups and interviewees. Moreover, Lebanese society is complex and the communal and socio-economic dimensions are difficult to disentangle (Harris, 2006). Presenting the Shiite Muslims as being concentrated in the lower socio-economic strata and associated with specific discourses, or the Christians as being more represented in the middle and upper strata and conveying radically different views, would not do justice to the complexity of the phenomena under study. Rather, this may somehow perpetuate – even reify – sectarian divides.

Notwithstanding this, a few points can be made in relation to the issue of the variability of discourses and levels of engagement among the interviewees and groups regarding the *Closer* exhibition. In particular, from the empirical analysis it arose that the differences between participants in the individual interviews and in the focus groups were the result of a *combination* of their proximity to the culture of reference of their religious group, their involvement in political parties and political coalitions, their field of study and their gender. The core of this discussion proposes some assumptions that constitute explanatory factors for the variability of styles of engagement and discourses related to the issues of suffering and truth in dealing with memory and identity in the exhibiton.

8.1.1 Engaging with intimacy in relation to collective memory: different perceptions of suffering and truth

A clear distinction in participants' engagement with suffering and truth emerged based on a combination of their proximity to the culture of reference of their religious group, their

involvement in political parties and political coalitions, their field of study, and their gender. As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, participants who were close to their religious community (Maronites from the Sin el Fil church, Sunnis from the Makassed Association, and Shiites from Dahiyeh) or were actively involved in the Amal political party or the political alliances of 8 March and 14 March, and who studied applied science, saw the suffering in *Closer* as representing the protracted violence that had torn Lebanon apart in the past and currently threatens the country's stability. Their engagement with suffering stemmed from mixing perceptions of war-related artwork – reminiscent of images of the July 2006 War in the news – with perceptions of body-related artwork that evoked mutilated bodies or sexualised offensive behaviour. Among this group, two sub-groups arose. The Maronites from the Sin el Fil church identified themselves with those who are suffering. They expressed bitterness towards the exhibition, which unveiled repressed memories of hardship, and questioned the splintered nature of the sectarian culture of memory. For this sub-group, the question of truth has no *raison d'être* as an object of artistic scrutiny, since the issue of sectarian culture of memory is not amenable to a clean break from the past. The Sunni and Shiite Muslims, some of them who were affiliated to political parties and coalitions and who studied applied sciences, had a vicarious and seemingly rewarding experience of seeing suffering, as if they were watching media documentaries. For these participants, the artwork spoke the truth because the representation of wars in *Closer* was similar to the 'reality' that these young Lebanese had experienced in the news media. In this case, truth is *conflated* with bearing witness to wounded bodies and war damage in *Closer*.

As discussed in chapters 4 and 6, the participants who asserted their individuality outside of the cultural reference of their religious group (Maronite Christian, Greek Orthodox, Sunni and Shiite Muslim, Druze), studied natural, social sciences and humanities, were not affiliated to a political party or coalition, and were mostly women, perceived the suffering and sadness in *Closer* in a way that led them to reflect on the universal suffering of others. Recognising the human stories of individuals in the artwork stemmed from participants' involvement in the expressive register of these works: the intimate portrayal of the way in which the people depicted in the artwork experience war time (e.g., *Saida June 6, 1982*, Zaatari) and the display

of nudity in a public space (e.g., *Birthday Suit*, Steele and *Self-Portraits*, D'Agata). These young Lebanese were not repelled by the characters' nudity. Although a number of them expressed discomfort, they reflected upon the wounds, scars and pain experienced by the characters depicted in the artwork: what I called an 'aestheticised relation' to suffering and past memories.

In the next section, I discuss the above findings through the lens of the theoretical framework developed in chapter 2.

8.2 Discussion

I first examine the discourse of collective victimisation of young Lebanese (see Exemplar 1 and 2) associated with a dismissal of *Closer*'s scrutiny of memory and intimacy. Pointing to two different outcomes in terms of sense of identity belonging (reinforcement vs. threat of the group's identity), I attempt to provide explanatory factors for understanding the variability of the discourses, which associate *Closer* to the proof of being the victimised other. I draw on this finding to discuss Kalampalikis's (2007) interrelated notions of 'historical bricolage' and 'group's *vérité identitaire*', and suggest borrowing Castoriadis's notion of 'alienating imaginary'. Second, carrying on with discourses of young Lebanese who overtly, or insidiously, criticised seeing the war and intimacy in *Closer*, I seek to interpret the rejection, or denial, by young Lebanese of the nude figures in the exhibition – in this instance, not seen as nudes but as naked and injured bodies. Drawing on Sturken's (1991) emphasis on war veterans' presence and their injured bodies within processes of remembering and of collective healing of a nation, I propose an interpretation that ties the impossibility for young Lebanese to relate to nude figures in *Closer* to their attachment to an image of a male-dominated society. I suggest that this defensive reading of the nude figures guards them from the treat of the perception of a fragmented group's identity.

Third, revealing some shared involvement in artworks' stories between young Lebanese who were divided in the focus groups when exploring war memory in *Closer*, I move on to discuss the psycho-social function of narratives (Ricoeur, 1990/1992, 1985; Namer, 1987).

I do so within the wider scrutiny of the relationship between memory and history, and question the possibility to retrieve a sense of historicity, whilst memory still represents a collective taboo. Fourth, I turn to discuss the main venture of this thesis; that is, offering a dynamic scrutiny of memory and grasping the potential of memory in breaking the cycle of conflicting memories. To that end, I discuss a primary finding of the thesis by linking Castoriadis's account of the 'instituting imaginary' as a *shift* of meaning, and definition of sublimation, with Ricoeur's approach to the process of 'memory work'. Finally, among the young Lebanese who illustrated the possibility to involve in a 'memory work', I focused on a sub-group (mainly female, Druze and Shiites studying humanities), whose rhetoric of freeing themselves from a male-dominated model of society combined with their sublimated investment into nude figures and thematic of war in *Closer*. This brings me to discuss the conditions for opening up to collective process of remembering the past; namely, relating to Kalampalikis's (2007) notion of 'historical bricolage' I highlight the role of individuals and groups' "collective aspiration" (Halbwachs, 1941) in nurturing an imaginative investment in the reappraisal of the past. Here, the sub-group of "collective aspiration" of young Lebanese met the display of intimacy and nude figures in the space of the exhibition.

8.2.1 The problem of collective victimisation and 'alienating imaginary'

Perceiving *Closer* as a representation of war-torn Lebanon produced a discourse of collective victimisation replete with images such as "death", "violence", "sadness" and "fear". The Maronites from Sin el Fil church, the Shiites from Dahieyh and one Shiite male participant affiliated to Amal, all studying applied science, identified themselves with the image of suffering conveyed in the exhibition. On the one hand, the aforementioned Maronites endorsed, as a group, the status of victims of the other sect. On the other hand, the aforementioned Shiite participants identified themselves with the suffering of the Lebanese people caused by the war against the outside enemy, Israel.

In the case of the Maronites close to their religious group, engaging with *Closer* was associated with disclosure of the repressed past, especially the disclosure of the conflicting nature of their collective memory. These young Lebanese could perceive the exhibition only

as a space cluttered with symbols of sectarian culture of memory (best illustrated by their hostile reaction to *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*, Chakar). The recounting of the artists' personal stories and lived experiences of the war were seen as jeopardising their parents' own narratives of suffering. Interviewees' perception of the artwork entrenched them in memories of hardship for their own religious community and in feelings of victimisation from the other sect. The rhetoric of the 'fear of the other' ("Hezbollah", whispered a female participant in Group 1) was a recurring point in the group discussion. Furthermore, the participants experienced the display of nude figures and intimacy as highly offensive. Dreary images in D'Agata and Steele's nude artwork evoked sexualised behaviour. For the Maronites from Sin el Fil, the artwork was fraught with bleakness and heightened the participants' identification with the ones who were suffering.

The Shiites from Dahieyh and the Shiite male participant affiliated to Amal saw the artists' lived experiences of war and the display of intimate nude figures as evidence of war damage and wounded bodies; it gave these young Lebanese a vicarious experience of suffering, as if they were watching media documentaries. Interestingly, even though the vivid lexicon of "violence", "death" and "sadness" suffused the aforementioned Shiites' discourses – similar to the case of the Maronites from Sin el Fil – *Closer* turned out to be less threatening for the aforementioned Shiite participants than for the Maronites from Sin el Fil.

I formulated a few interpretations in order to grasp the variability of the discourses between the Maronites from Sin el Fil and the Shiites from Dahieyh and the Shiite male participant affiliated to Amal with regard to the intensity of their dismissal of the themes of war, memory and suffering associated with the display of nude figures. My assumption is that the difference in the discourse of collective victimisation between the two sub-groups lies in their commitment *or* not to an ideology prevents them from facing the repressed memories of the civil war, and certainly accepting a shared responsibility for war misdeeds. I assume that the commitment to an ideological discourse directed towards resistance to a force outside of Lebanon diverted the participants from "looking the beast in the eye" (Haugbolle, 2005). For the aforementioned Shiites, seeing the Lebanese suffering in *Closer* as if they were witnessing injured Lebanese civilians in a media documentary was a source of positive identification

with the ethos of self-redemptive sacrifice (Seigneurie, 2011): the hallmark of the ideological discourse of Hezbollah engaged in resistance against the outside other, Israel. This reinforces, for these participants, a sense of belonging to a collective identity based on the image of a resilient Lebanon. They often made sense of the artwork through the lens of the ethos of martyrdom. I assume that the "contiguity" (Jackobson & Halle, 1956) between these young Lebanese's perception of the artwork with the ideological discourse on martyrdom – a distinguishing feature of metonymy – provided a straightforward interpretative toolkit, which functions as a powerful defence mechanism.

On the contrary, I surmise that the Maronites from the Sin el Fil church recoiled from the artwork so forcefully because they do not comply, like the Shiites from Dahieyh and the Shiite male participant affiliated to Amal, with an ideological discourse that diverts the sense of suffering from a pessimistic perception of bleakness to a positive one associated with national pride. Over the last few decades, the Maronite community, which had enjoyed political dominance at times under the authority of the French Mandate, experienced the decline of its political influence. The Syrian influence over State instutions, which grew from after the civil war until the Cedar Revolution (2005), was accompanied by the marginalisation of the Maronite community from the political process (Najem, 2012). Demographically, the Maronite community represents just over 20 percent of Lebanon's population. Belonging to the Christians, who now represent just under 35 percent of Lebanon's registered population compared to 51 percent in 1932 (when the last national census was conducted), the Maronites nurture concerns about becoming a minority group in comparison to the growing number of Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Therefore, in the socio-historical context of weakening of their sense of group identity, in this study the Maronites from Sin el Fil church lack a ready-made interpretative toolkit for engaging with *Closer* in a way that would counter the encroachment of the taboo of collective memory on seeing artwork portraying the war. Instead, this artwork was experienced by these young Lebanese as highly threatening.

The discourses of collective victimisation presented above, and the implications in terms of protecting group identity from the threat of unveiling an undesirable past, supports Kalampalikis's (2007) argument that "residual imaginary elements" of a group's representation

of its past reinforce the group's '*vérité identitaire*'. For Kalampalikis, groups and communities selectively remember their past, and draw on myths and imagination to protect the group's collective identity from the threat of new and unfamiliar elements. In turn, the group draws from these historical readjustments a compelling sense of identity. As mentioned previously, the Shiites' metonymic reading of *Closer* (i.e., the "contiguity" between the meanings of the artwork and the ideological discourses of self-redemptive sacrifice and martyrdom) support the group's '*vérité identitaire*'; that is, resisting the outside other and getting a sense of national pride. On the contrary, for the Maronites from the Sin el Fil church, *Closer*'s critical exploration of collective memory breaks the narrative thread and challenges the group's 'historical bricolage' (i.e., forgetting the past civil war) so that the Maronites' '*vérité identitaire*', already weakened in the current socio-historical context of collective victimisation, is experienced as highly threatened by the exhibition.

Here, several questions arise and may further Kalampalikis's (2007) approach to the relationship between 'historical bricolage', 'residual imaginary elements' and collective identity. How do ideological discourses suffuse imaginary residual elements and the process of reshaping historical narratives in such a way that it prevents the groups from exploring collective memory? Fundamentally, to what extent is 'historical bricolage' incompatible with a 'memory work'? Underlying these questions is my suggestion that when the imaginary contributes to the reshaping of history, this not only fails to protect the group from feeling threatened, but also perpetuates the group's tendency to perceive itself as threatened by unfamiliar elements. Groups attempt to avoid this threat by, in turn, tapping into this imaginary. Here, I advocate that the imaginary residual elements not only bring about a compelling sense of a group's '*vérité identitaire*' but also lead to an identitarian closure. A vicious circle formed by the construction of historical readjustments and the group's '*vérité identitaire*' ensues, particularly in times of conflict and contemporary warfare. In this study, the case of the Maronites from Sin el Fil illustrates well that the threat to their group's sense of identity is such that the group falls back on identity. Therefore, it seems relevant to conceptualise the specificity of an imaginary pervaded by ideology.

Castoriadis conceptualises the reversal of the creative process of the imaginary, called the alienation, and its striking resemblance to ideology; As seen in the theory chapter, Castoriadis points out the dissimulatory dimension of the imaginary, in particular the "dissimulating discourse " of the 'other' – the chiefs, or elites. In the case of post2005 Cedar Revolution, March 14 and March 8 Alliance, claim for engaging "with a modern cosmopolitan world and employing contemporary cultural forms" (Seigneurie, 2011, p. 145), whilst both political coalitions fuel a mutual rhetoric which pathologizes the sectarian other (Khalaf, 2012; Seidman, 2012). As Khalaf (2012) notes, spreading such a level of demonization of the sectarian other in political gathering discourses and through the media, *masks* the disputes over divisible issues (e.g., confessional power-sharing) that trace back to embittered loss of material status and a long history of frustration and disparities between the communities[1]. The regression into the spread of fears, hatred or apparent indifference is, in line with Castoriadis's approach on an alienation, the hallmark of ideology disguised as an 'alienating imaginary'; it dissimulates the tensions over the social, cultural and economic disparities between the communities. Based on the issue of the splintered narratives of the civil war that entrap communal relations in Lebanon, it is likely that the rhetoric of the 'other' as symbolic enemy also dissimulates the Lebanese subject's refusal to recognise him or herself as the historical other, the one who was both victim *and* perpetrator during the civil war (Haugbolle, 2010). In Castoriadis's terms, each political movement's attempt to demonize the other reveals, in fact, the subject's incapacity to reflect upon his or her own difference from the other.

In this section, I focused on discourses of collective victimisation and tentatively explained the variabilities of reactions to *Closer* associated with these discourses. I assumed that the Shiites from Dahieyh and the Shiite male participant affiliated to Amal succeeded in maintaining a more positive sense of group identity through their engagement with the themes of war, memory and history; seeing *Closer* enhanced their sense of national pride and identification with a resilient Lebanon. However, taking a compelling sense of '*vérité*

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[1]Under the French Mandate (1920–1943), the opening of Lebanon to the West and modernity, as well as access to media, and the diffusion of mass culture, has not been equally achieved among the communities (Beydoun, 1993). In particular, in the early 1970s the sense of relative deprivation became more acute among the Shi'a community.

identitaire' based on self-redemptive sacrifice from engaging with the exhibition must not be understood as a meaningful engagement with the artists' critical scrutiny of collective memory in Lebanon. Most pointedly, the empirical analysis showed that the aforementioned Shiites' reinforcement of a sense of belonging to a resistant Lebanon occurs at the expense of investing in the intimacy and nude figure *per se*; as much as most Maronites from Sin el Fil were infuriated about the exhibition of nudity in *Closer*, the Shiites literally denied the presence of nudes unless they saw the bodies as proof of civilians injured in the war. The next section will discuss this finding.

8.2.2 The hiatus between seeing nude figures and identification with a male-dominated image of Lebanon

Most of the Maronites close to the Sin el Fil church, the Sunnis from the Makassed Association and the Shiites from Dahiyeh (who were mostly men in the sample) saw in the exhibition of intimate and nude figures offensive sexual behaviour, mutilated bodies and psychological disorders as evidence of Lebanese suffering during the wars. They were either chocked by the display of the body-related artwork and expressed their lack of understanding, or, more radically, they mentioned not seeing anything at all. A complementary finding is that these young Lebanese refused – or eluded – to critically engage with the issue of memory in Lebanon; that is, to reflect on the conflicting nature of their collective memory, and the issue of remembrance and forgetfulness.

Here, my assumption regarding the intense outcry – or denial – in response to intimate and nude figures in *Closer* voiced by the young Lebanese who also dismissed, or bypassed, the artists' personal lens on memory, draws the following line of reasoning. I suggest that for the Maronites close to the Sin el Fil church, the Sunnis from the Makassed Association and the Shiites from Dahiyeh, seeing intimate and nude figures in *Closer* throws them into the representation of a fragmented collective identity; this fragmented image of identity is conveyed by the artistic scrutiny of memory explored through an unfamiliar way of interrogating memory in Lebanon. I advocate that such acute dismissal – or denial – in seeing the intimate and nude figures in *Closer* finds an explanation in these young Lebanese

people's need to identify with a powerful image of a male-dominated society that guards them from the *threat* of the representation of a fragmented collective identity.

Pointing to the metaphor of the injured body, Sturken (1991, 1997) mentioned that war survivors' injured bodies represent the fragmented body inevitably associated with the impossibility of a nation to heal. Survivors' dismembered bodies stand for the perception of not remembering. Survivors' dismembered bodies, by their very presence an 'anti-memory', preclude the remembering process and collective mourning. This is the reason why, as Sturken notes, the possibility for a nation to heal often occurs at the expense of considering individual survivors' suffering. As presented in the section above, the Maronites close to the Sin el Fil church, the Sunnis from the Makassed Association and the Shiites from Dahiyeh drew a bleak image of Lebanon from their engagement with intimate and nude figures, and uttered discourses of collective victimisation while engaging with the themes of war, memory and history in *Closer*. Thereby, these young Lebanese people, whose sense of collective identity is already entrenched in the representation of a sectarian culture of memory, are more inclined to reject the nude figures in Closer, perceived as injured bodies; these mutilated bodies are symbols of Lebanese war casualties, which may lead the young Lebanese of our sample to re-open their wounded past and preclude any narrative closure.

Similarly, as examined in the theory chapter, Sturken (1991, 2001) has shown how the narratives of minorities can be marginalised when they challenge the way a nation constructs a master narrative, based on glory and pride in their war deeds. The author pointed to the "imposed silence" on female veterans of the Vietnam War, since their discourse is at odds with the image of masculine identity that the Americans have forged to recover from the trauma of the war – interpreted by Sturken as a "site where American masculinity was lost" (1991, p. 131). In *Closer*, all the body and nude-related artwork conveyed an uncannily intimate and fragile human nature under the public gaze (e.g., a woman displaying her scars in *Birthday Suit*, or a distorted and blurred male body in *Self-Portraits*). These works do not comply with the *norm* of beautiful female nudes and powerful male bodies, yet trigger uneasy feelings. I assume that shying away from engaging with the disquieting representation of the

male and female bodies, represented as vulnerable in *Closer*, is a way to protect a sense of belonging to the *norm* of a male-dominated society in post-war Lebanon.

8.2.3 The illusory recourse to narratives and the lack of shared emotional empathy

The empirical analysis of the focus-group discussions revealed an important finding with respect to the scrutiny of the interface between collective memory, history and narratives. In spite of divergent perceptions of the artists' explorations of collective memory in *Closer* and conflicting positions over remembering the civil war, several groups found common ground in engaging with narratives (e.g., stories told by mothers to their sons or daughters and the paths their lives have taken in *A Loving Man*, Al-Ani and *Intervista,* Sala). This finding seems to suggest that a shared involvement in narratives could play out as a psycho-social resource; it could help groups to retrieve a sense of historicity that counterbalances sectarian tensions over the memory of the civil war. This finding brings us to discuss the role and power of narratives in contributing to strengthening groups' cohesive identity, and, central in socio-historical sensitive contexts, the power of narratives to curtail historical discontinuities and competing memories. Fundamentally, the findings of this thesis further the understanding of collective memory *as* "living history" (Halbwachs, 1980) and the role of narratives for the construction and, especially in post-war contexts, the re-shaping of collective identity. If collective memory can be seen as a narrated recollection of remembrances (Jedlowski, 2001) and if emplotment is crucial for groups, it comes naturally to argue that when groups engage in stories and re-emplotment, by the same token this informs the groups' collective memory. Here, I question the psycho-social function of narratives (Ricoeur, 1985, 1990/1992; Namer, 1987; White, 1987). In this study, the question is: can young Lebanese co-identify around a renewed sense of history through their engagement with the theme of narratives, notwithstanding the dissensions sparked when groups relate to memory in the artwork?

In spite of divisive ways of making sense of the war and body-related artwork, and despite the sharpening tensions when several groups dispute over taking responsibility for the civil-war misdeeds, the intensity in the group dynamics soothed when the groups elaborated on the stories of *Intervista* (Sala) and A *Loving Man* (Al-Ani). The group of Sunni Muslims

(Group 3) and the mixed group of Christians, Greek Orthodox, Sunnis and one Shiite who was politically affiliated to the Amal party (Group 4), unified around the unusual and playful experience of touching upon the universal theme of absence and longing (*A Loving Man*, Al-Ani), of a mother reflecting upon her past experiences (*Intervista*, Sala), and of witnessing the son searching for his past (*Intervista*, Sala). They also drew together around experiencing a different locus of narration with Al-Ani's children's game. It is tempting to assume that engaging with the theme of narratives, amidst the hostility relating to the subversive character of the artwork, could endorse a function of "narrative mediation" (László, 2003, p. 73), which could enable young Lebanese people to co-identify and bypass their tensions over the issue of remembering the war. As mentioned in the theory chapter, Ricoeur (2000/2004) claims that the possibility of a 'happy' forgetting in relation to memory hinges on communities' capacity to represent the past faithfully. Following Ricoeur's line of argument, I am tempted to argue that young Lebanese people's involvement in the structure of narratives – namely, touching on a universal dimension – in the artwork could restore a "faithful relation to the past" (Ricoeur, 2000/2004, p. 229) in spite of a lack of trust in historians' capacity to establish the accuracy of an official narrative. By the same token, this could counterbalance the difficulty in exploring memory.

However, this finding must be complemented by another important finding which challenges the positive overtone of assuming that groups that are divided when they explore their collective memory through engaging with *Closer* nonetheless come together around narratives and retrieve a common sense of historicity. Yet, in the empirical analysis, at heart of Group 3 and Group 4's stark dissensions was their divide regarding their engagement with the suffering of the other. Whilst some participants reflected on suffering by taking the perspective of the other suffering, others could not take that perspective because they identified themselves exclusively with Lebanese suffering, fraught with resentment towards the other. It was as if confronting the artwork only heightened the perception of the sectarian other as a symbolic enemy. However, as seen in the theory chapter, for Ricoeur, 'memory work' (i.e., the process of engaging with the past historically and ethically, as people and nations are committed to the transmission and renewal of a shared past) requires "imagining

the suffering of others before re-examining our own" (1990/1992, p. 10). Similarly, Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity involves the engagement of the self with the stories of others, especially with the other's *suffering*. The self responds to "the obligation placed upon himself by the suffering of the other" (Ricoeur, 1990/1992, p. 299). However, the young Lebanese who refused to critically explore collective memory cannot examine the other's suffering for the simple reason that by identifying themselves as the victimised other, they cannot see the story from the other's perspective – they can only see their own. Therefore, although the personal stories in the artwork brought young Lebanese to co-identify due to a shared curiosity about narratives, I assert that, in fact, it does not ease the problem of confronting the other's suffering.

Scarcity of emotional empathy in the groups

Finally, the problem of taking the perspective of the other's suffering in *Closer* will also be related to another main finding from the focus-group discussions: the analysis showed a scarcity of shared emotional resonances among the young Lebanese when reflecting upon the themes of war, history and memory. Surprisingly enough, this was even the case among participants who meaningfully engaged with the artwork. The group of female Lebanese from mixed religious backgrounds and studying humanities (Group 5) displayed a great sensitivity to the artists' personal scrutiny of collective memory and to the nude and intimate body, yet this did not result in shared ways of reflecting upon the issue of memory in post-war Lebanon. Rather, the group dynamics revealed important disparities between the eight women regarding their affective and emotional involvement with the war-related artwork. There were tensions between one Lebanese woman's dramatic experience of Tony Chakar's *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony* ("I had tears in my eyes," said Rima), and that of another Lebanese woman, who did not have any empathy with her counterpart. Using the metaphor of the dismembered body to symbolise the impossibility of the Lebanese coalescing around a shared national sense of belonging, this woman justified her lack of empathy regarding war trauma by citing the absence of shared traumatic experience of the war among the Lebanese; she felt herself and her family were sheltered in the north and spared the bloodshed of the civil war.

Therefore, the impossibility of taking the perspective of the other's suffering also lies in the discrepancy between those who have memories of suffering and those who do not. In particular, this finding draws attention to the vacuum in the collective imagination to project, as Benedict Anderson argues, a sense of deep, horizontal "comradeship" and "fraternity" (Anderson, 1991). It also shows how the pervading presence in public discourses of an "alienating imaginary", which tends to demonise the sectarian other, probably undermines the possibility of collectively imagining a sense of comradeship and taking the perspective of the other's suffering.

To conclude this section, these findings critically challenge the assumption that gathering around narratives helps Lebanese people to recover from divisions around the issue of collective memory in post-war Lebanon. From a theoretical perspective, this questions the psycho-social function of narratives. The possibility of young Lebanese people relying on a renewed sense of history mediated by their engagement with narratives in artwork, even though they are reluctant to face the taboo of memories, is certainly an important psycho-social resource; yet as long as the collective imaginary is still imbued with the image of the other as a symbolic enemy, and does not succeed in overcoming gaps in memories of hardships inherited from the war, the recourse to narratives is limited. Therefore, I contend that in order to appraise the potential of the psycho-social function of narratives, one must seriously consider how the dimension of collective imaginary plays out in the interface between history and memory.

In the analysis of the focus groups, the only time when the eight female Lebanese from mixed religious backgrounds and studying humanities (Group 5) found common ground relating to memory in *Closer* occurred when they mused upon the woman's removal of her clothes in *Birthday Suit* (Steele). The young Lebanese women saw in the intimate and naked body of Lisa Steele a metaphor for the people's memories in which they could find an emotional resonance. It is suggested that co-identifying around a shared emotional bond to be able to collectively explore memory needs to be mediated by an aesthetic-artistic object that stands well outside the boundaries of the representations of war and history – in this

instance, mediated by the intimate body. This finding brings us to the next section of this discussion.

8.2.4 Sublimating discontent in engaging with bodies and the possibility of memory work

In this section I will unfold and discuss a main finding with regard to the young Lebanese who engaged with the artwork in a meaningful and enriching way: a number of young Lebanese tapped into their engagement with an expressive register of the artists' lived experience of war time and the display of nude figures, albeit an uneasy one, as a critical response to sectarian war narratives. In particular, I report a correlation between: 1) involvement in the expressive register of the artwork; 2) discourses on 'the suffering of the universalised other' and aestheticised relations to the past; and 3) discourses on truth. These young Lebanese were mostly women, Maronite Christians, Greek Orthodoxs, Sunni and Shiite Muslims, Druze, not politically affiliated, and coming, for most of them, from a high socio-economic background. They studied natural, social sciences and humanities. Importantly, these young Lebanese are those who incline towards remembering the past war, criticise the sectarian culture of memory, such as the spread of the fear of the sectarian other in the media.

Engaging with intimacy: metaphoric use of nude figures and access to a space of truth

These young Lebanese who felt meaningfully enriched, even though they expressed discomfort in the face of nudity, linked the uncanny experience of uneasy feelings with vivid issues in post-war Lebanon, such as the violence made banal in the news media and the language of ideology used by each political movement to demonize the sectarian other. As the young Lebanese involved themselves in the emotions stirred up by their experiences of encountering intimacy and nude figures, they felt compelled to touch upon the *roots* of suffering. The young Lebanese made sense of the suffering shown on nude figures, of the scars in *Birthday Suit* (Steele), along with works portraying the artists' lived experience of war (namely *Saida June 6, 1982*, Zaatari), as an elementary space for 'truth telling'; that is, a space whereby the participants could bypass sectarian power struggles between the political actors over control

of speaking the truth about the past. For instance, Lisa Steele's exhibit and the recollection of the scars that the artist accumulated over her life in front of the camera (*Birthday Suit*) brought a number of young Lebanese women to elaborate on the work in the mode of a metaphorical appropriation. For all of them, the metaphorical use was related to the rhetoric of touching upon the roots of human suffering. As already mentioned, Hadil's linking of the women's nudity in *Birthday Suit* with images of bombing in *Saida June 6, 1982* (Zaatari) is a notable illustration of a metaphor: a semantic displacement and meaningful blend between two different domains – the woman's body and the damage of the civil war – which resulted in Hadil's rhetoric of the humanisation of war. Hadil came to realise that bombing shattered "all that is most intimate" in human beings. It is through such a shift of meaning that Hadil evaded the banal portrayal of violence in post-war Lebanon. Similarly, another young female Lebanese participant who mused upon her discomfort in front of the uncanny as conveyed in D'Agata's work, which she compared to the distorted bodies in Francis Bacon's figure paintings, came to elaborate on the "suffering of the man" (Farah). She then related that to Lebanese suffering, as if she eventually realised that Lebanese people have suffered throughout history.

These two examples illustrate how young Lebanese people's rhetoric of touching upon the roots of suffering is literally embodied in their experience of nudity in the artwork, which is meaningfully enriching because it is mediated by a metaphorical relation to nudity. Pointing to D'Agata's bleak and emotionally raw imagery, the young Lebanese linked their engagement with suffering, which they perceived to be ingrained in bodies, with a space from which the truth can be spoken. This finding resonates with Haugbolle's (2010) caveat on the way in which a national cultural production taking charge of memory culture can lead to "blatant misrepresentations" (p. 194) and leaves to one side the complexities of telling the truth in post-war Lebanon. "Perhaps the biggest complication is the fact that memories of victims are not staged in *carno* with their own bodies, histories and voices but transmitted by those who are centrally placed," asserts Haugbolle (p. 194).

Engaging with the 'universalised other' and politics of sublimation

An interesting finding is that the young Lebanese adults' involvement in the roots of suffering, elicited by their meaningful experience of intimacy and nudity in the artwork, brought them to develop a rhetoric of sharing a common denominator with the 'universalised other'. Reflecting upon the universalised as a result of their involvement with the artists' lived experiences of the war and nude figures, enables young Lebanese to reflect upon the other as *different*, not only a threat. This finding supports Castoriadis's concept of 'instituting imaginary' from his perspective of a relation between subject and other based on 'reflexivity', and at the same time relates to what Gourgouris (2010) terms the "politics of sublimation" (p. 5). In the theory chapter, I propounded Castoriadis's account of sublimation. For Castoriadis, the pleasures of fantasy are "means" or "supports" (Castoriadis, 1975/1987, p. 312) upon which it is possible to connect the "private world to the public world" (Klooger, 2009, p. 130). Commenting on the sublimation concept in Castoriadis's work, Gourgouris (2010), has pointed out its political overtone, stressing the renewed relation between the subject and other; the subject reflects upon and engages with the other not as threat but as *difference*.

A complementary finding is that the young Lebanese who engage with the 'universal other' are those who detach themselves from the identification with suffering and distantiate themselves from discourses of collective victimisation. I reported that Farah's experience of confronting D'Agata's blurred images of distorted bodies in *Self-Portraits*, upon which she elaborated on the metaphor of the suffering of man, brought her to identify with the Lebanese people's suffering. Contrary to the young Lebanese who dismissed the dimensions of memory and of intimacy in the artwork as they had a gloomy perception of the exhibition as being about suffering Lebanese, Farah is not trapped in a bleak representation of suffering. This finding brings us to discuss Ricoeur's (2000–2004) concept of 'memory work'. As seen in the theory chapter, Ricoeur roots the concept of 'memory work' in people's capacity to take the perspective of the suffering of the other. Here, the aforementioned young Lebanese made sense of the expressive register of the artworks (i.e., the artist's lived experience of the war combined with intimacy) as a way to find a common denominator between human

beings; they identified themselves with the suffering of the '*universalised* other'. Worthy of note, here, the other does not refer to the sectarian other subjected to suspicion and mistrust. My contention is that, in seeing primarily the suffering of the 'universalised other', rather than the other's suffering of the other sect, the aforementioned Lebanese illustrate Ricoeur's prerequisite for involving in 'memory work'; that is, "imagining the suffering of others, *before* examining our own" (1990/1992, p.10). The symbolic and metaphoric use of these young Lebanese of seeing nude figures and personal recounts of war in *Closer* (see the rhetoric of 'humanisation of the wars'), brings them to involve in an "imaginative proximity" (Seigneurie, 2011, p.20) with the other's suffering. Furthermore, an "imaginative proximity" with the other's suffering, and, by the same token a 'memory work' is possible, because these young Lebanese do not merely perceive negatively and sexually connoted injured bodies in the artworks. Seen through a symbolic and imaginative lens, the nude figures in *Closer* do not threaten the group's sense of belonging of these young Lebanese; rather the nude figures support the young Lebanese to engage with *truth*. Perceiving *Closer* as a space for truth-telling may help the aforementioned Lebanese to restore a faithful relation to the past, therefore to involve in a process of 'memory work'.

8.2.5 Nude figures and desire: challenging the image of a male-dominated society and the taboos of memory

In this section I present and discuss the major finding of the thesis. Among the young Lebanese who meaningfully invested in the expressive register of the artists' lived experiences of war and the intimate and nude figure, a sub-group voiced discourses about fantasizing their relationship to intimacy and nudity in the body-related artwork. The young Lebanese who did so identified themselves as emancipated desiring subjects, challenging the power of a male-dominated society and the taboos of memory. This sub-group of young Lebanese include the Druze and Shiite women studying humanities, one Shiite man reluctant to commit to any religious or political group and studying natural sciences, as well as one Maronite man studying applied sciences.

In front of the male nudes in *Self-Portraits* (D'Agata), especially the image of D'Agata coupled with another, or when the artist's body is bent inwards, these young Lebanese evoked the "phantasm to take such pictures and show them off to people" (Hadil) or the possibility of experimenting with intimate bodily sensations, while keeping a sense of secrecy. Strikingly, the Maronite male participant who was denigrating D'Agata's pathological subjective exhibit in the group discussion (Group 1), deployed a rhetoric of fantasizing about the male nude figure, as if opening up a space to desire was finally possible in the individual interview, although censored by the leader of the group. Likely, "transposed into art," as Geraldine claimed, Saneh's *Body pArts* brought some of these women to imagine the intimate moment of "people kissing each other" (Hadil). In opposition to the young Lebanese who recoiled from Saneh's artwork as depicting a dismantled body, here, these young Lebanese women took up *Body pArts* as a metaphor for the "sacred body" (Geraldine), which confers to the body an overall unity. One sees how the Druze and Shiites women granted a poetic tone to the way in which Lina Saneh displayed pieces of other artists' text on parts of her body (e.g., her smile, lungs, chromosome 23). Such metaphorical involvement in Saneh's work opened up the fantasy and desire of imagining individuals' erotic-intimate freedom.

The case of these few Lebanese young women and men, who, sensitive to the aesthetic-metaphoric dimension of the body-related artwork ("it is symbolic," said Geraldine, of *Body pArts*) explored and fantasized about their encounters with the nude figures, supports Castoriadis's account of the sublimation process as intrinsically associated with the "pleasure of fantasy" (Gourgouris, 2010). More pointedly, as the young Lebanese people's fantasized relation to bodies brought them to explore intimate freedom in a public space, this finding epitomizes Castoriadis's approach to a relation between the sublimation process, desire and empowerment. From Castoriadis's perspective, sublimation is not just about linking a metaphorical experience and desire; it responds to "an interrogation of the political ontology of subjugation and heteronomy, against which the concept of self-alteration emerges as an emancipatory force" (Gourgouris, 2010, p. 5). When linked to individuals' desires and fantasies, the art experience understood as a "(self)-altering force", far from threatening self-identity, supports individuals' capacity to "defy" the laws imposed by the 'other'. In

line with Castoriadis, I understand empowerment as challenging or as "defying" the power of the 'other'. The autonomous subject in Castoriadis's approach is a desiring subject who is able to call into question the other's inherent beliefs. Gourgouris (2010) states that for the philosopher, "the subject-formation is a political matter, as it signifies the inaugural negotiation with power – power of the other, or with power *as* other" (p. 7). Central in the discourse of the Druze and Shiite women studying humanities and the male Shiite, who fantasized about the intimate and nude figures in the artwork is that, at the same time, they envisioned how opening up to nude figures in a public space can subvert their society, which they deemed to be dominated by the male and the collective power of the state. Whether it be a Druze woman who "dreamed that I [she] could walk naked on a beach in Beirut," while relating to *Birthday Suit* (Steele), a Shiite Muslim woman who imagined a couple kissing in *Self-Portraits* (D'Agata) or another Shiite woman who felt she was literally hurt by Hatoum's repetitive sentence "So much I want to say", they all identified with the model of emancipated women, transgressing the restricted public freedom relating to intimacy in Lebanon. In reading Saneh's *Body pArts* as a poetic and artistic work that restores the "sacred dimension" (Geraldine) of the intimate body, the Druze woman felt that Lina Saneh made it possible to tackle the power of the state. Similarly, the young male Shiite, adamant about turning away from his religious community and from any political affiliation, found relief in his engagement with the public display of intimate nude figures because he could identify, as Lebanese, with a sense of self that was otherwise encroached upon by a negative perception of masculine power in society.

Sublimating their visceral and intrusive experience in seeing the nude figures, and relating it to feelings of empowerment in the face of the state and of the male-dominated society, singles out the discourse of this sub-group from the other young women in my sample: a divergence that was particularly brought forth in the focus-group discussion with the eight women. In Group 5, two Maronite Christian women characterised by an upper-class socio-economic background made a point of shying away from their peers' rhetoric on a visceral experience of body-related artwork. Strikingly, there is also a divergence related to exploring collective memory in post-war Lebanon. Whilst the Druze and Shiite women were

adamant about engaging collectively in a process of remembrance so as to explore traumatic and confused memories of the war, the two Maronite women expressed ambivalences; weary of their parents' recollections of the civil war and the overload of grief and sorrow, the two Maronites tended to be inclined towards forgetfulness in relation to the civil war. "We all know that wars are terrible, war is atrocious. But, there is a lot of exaggeration," said one them.

Here, I interpret that the difference between these discourses can be made on the basis of the culture of reference of the religious groups to which the participants belong. In a society that tends to restrict space for intimate freedom (Seidman, 2012), I assume that the Druze and Shiite Muslim women were more in need than the two Maronite women to assert themselves from the culture of reference of their religious groups (i.e.; Druze and Shiite), which is still strongly influenced by traditional and patriarchal models. The two Maronite Christian women said that they often enjoy travelling in Europe and abroad. Close to a more occidental and individualistic culture in which intimate freedom in public spaces has become banal, these two women certainly do not experience seeing nude figures so intensively. In contrast, by revealing themselves as desiring subjects who are able to fantasize about nude figures through a metaphorical involvement in the artwork, the Shiite and Druze women experience *Closer* as the unburdening of the social and cultural censure of a male-dominated society.

A detailed examination of the sub-group that fantasized intimacy and nudity in the body-related artwork brings us to notice a small yet significant difference in discourse between the Druze and Shiite women and the two Maronite and Shiite males. The Druze and Shiite women projected themselves into the future to create a new role for the women in their society. They also perceived the exhibition as picturing an optimistic future for Lebanon, whilst the two males perceived *Closer* as a pessimistic account of Lebanon, for which they envisaged a bleak future. I surmise that the gender difference (optimistic Druze and Shiite women vs. pessimistic Shiite and Maronite males) can be explained on the basis of the feeling of freedom with which they identified with the characters (either a woman's or man's nude figure) in the artwork. Another related factor is the young Lebanese people's capacity to

project themselves as emancipated individuals in Lebanese society. The Druze and Shiite Muslims women explored their visceral experiences and impressions of their own intimacy being intruded upon while fantasizing about the body-related artwork. Engaging with the nude figures in the artwork, these Lebanese women dared to approach "the phenomena of the subject experience" and its most archaic feelings (e.g., experiences of being intruded on oneself or intruding on the other) that go with it. They opened up to "a space where subjectivity is continuously challenged and reconstructed" (Sjöholm, 2004, p. 78) as they recounted their singular experiences of confronting intimate and nude figures. In so doing, they touched upon a space of singularity, whereby they could identify with the individual-subject who is capable to "call into question" (Castoriadis, 1978/1997, p. 314) the power of the male and of the state in post-war Lebanon. The power of 'other' – the power of the state and of male-dominated society in this instance – is "shattered" by the *return* into "affective moments" (Kristeva, 2002, p. 67), which these Lebanese women experienced in engaging with the intimate and the uncanny in the body-related artwork in *Closer*. The Shiite and Maronite males' investment in intimacy and nude figures in *Closer*, albeit bringing them to envisage a new sense of self that counters a male-dominated society, was accompanied by mixed feelings. From the analysis it arose that some defence processes were being employed to deflect the guilt of engaging with D'Agata's male figure (male Shiite) and ensure that nudity remains confined to a private experience even though exhibited in a public space (male Maronite; see the conclusion of chapters 5 and 6). Here, I suggest that for the men to identify with D'Agata's male nude is a more uneasy experience than for the women to identify with Lisa Steele's female nude. This was especially the case with the figures of Lisa Saneh and Mona Hatoum; two female artists whose messages clearly convey a critique of the state and male power and invite the viewer to take up a position of emancipated identity.

Theoretically, focusing on the Druze and Shiite women who inclined towards remembrance of the past, fantasized the nude figures in *Closer* and expressed optimism while identifying with the image of an empowered Lebanese woman casts a new light on the issue of remembering. This finding pushes forward Haas's (2002) interrogation of how to encourage groups and communities to unveil a repressed past by advocating that past remembrances are more

likely to be reflected upon by individuals and groups who are already collectively aspiring to new values and socio-cultural tendencies. Exploring how a group draws on the mythical figures of its history to assert its group's identity, Kalampalikis (2007) emphasised that the process involved in this 'historical bricolage' is not so much related to the group tapping into certain memories, but rather projecting forward their "wishes and collective aspirations"; an approach inherited from Halbwachs (1941, p. 158). Although in my findings the collective wishes of the group are not particularly related to a mythical figure, I argue that the possibility that the Druze and Shiite women are projecting their wishes and aspirations so as to exert themselves as Lebanese women who feel desire is an important factor to consider while exploring the interface between collective identity and the issue of remembering in sensitive socio-historical contexts.

The Shiite and Druze women challenge the taboos of intimacy in *Closer* because, as surmised in the discussion above, they are already in need of freeing themselves from the traditional models of their religious group that stifle intimate freedom; these women collectively aspire to become emancipated and exert themselves as desiring subjects in a public space. My argument is that unveiling one's own fantasies in seeing nude figures and aspiring to a collective project to identify with an empowered Lebanese woman may put in motion the processes of working-through conflicting memories of the Civil War. Studying how a shameful past is removed from the space and landscape of a city, Haas calls for "unveiling the repressed and letting the experience of hardship be spoken" (Haas, 2002, p. 69).

I was cautious in looking at the possibilities of working-through or mourning collective memories of hardship in the context of contemporary warfare. The present finding opens up an avenue to identify a society's key socio-cultural tendency that contributes to tackling memory taboos. I suggest that since the Druze and Shiite women unveiled repressed desire in a male-dominated society by allowing themselves to fantasize the nude figures in *Closer*, they are probably more likely able to unveil repressed taboos relating to the war than others who are pessimistic about Lebanon's future, and who do not envisage themselves as challenging the socio-cultural model of their society. In bringing together two different dimensions – one related to the issue of collective memory and the other related to the sphere of intimacy

– this assumption may sound conceptually dubious. My argument rests upon the notion of "transfer of meaning" (Palmade, 1990), which is characteristic of the Freudian concept of 'leaning on[2]' that operates from the emotional and private *topos* (i.e.; unveiling repressed desire in a public space) to the social *topos* (i.e.; working out the issue of collective memory). I contend that, in sensitive socio-historical contexts it is relevant to identify groups' and communities' instances of "collective aspiration" (Halbwachs, 1941, p. 158) that come from a *topos* which is different than that where repressed memories are engraved.

8.3 Vacuum of intimacy and repressed memory? Diagnosis of post-war Lebanon

I would like to make an assumption on the explosive nature of the combination of the display of artists' personal recollections of their war experiences and the display of intimacy and nude figures in a public space. Throughout this research, I sometimes wondered why the young Lebanese who dismissed the dimension of memory and the exhibition of the intimate and nude figures in *Closer* showed such intense aversion in front of the artwork. Why, in the wake of the Independence Intifada, as Lebanese youth becomes more familiar[3] with public attemptso engage with war memories, did the display of personal experiences of war in *Closer* garner such hostile reactions? What was the nature of the relation between the young Lebanese adults' refusal to invest in the memory of war in *Closer* and their reactions to the display of intimacy and the naked body? I believe that the way in which the dimension of intimacy in the exhibition was so forcefully denigrated does not find explanation only in a coercive culture that is rooted in a traditional model of families, sects and kin; the reason why intimacy in *Closer* sparked an outburst or was simply refused by a number of the young Lebanese may be explained by a tendency to repress the sphere of intimacy in post-war

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[2]Alongside the main signification of "attachment/divergence" or "identification/detachment", Palmade (1990) also defines the Freudian concept of 'leaning on' as a "transfer of meaning", which takes place from one instant to another, or from one object to another, or from the psychical *topos* to the social *topos*.

[3]In the individual interviews, participants from Exemplar 1 who rejected the artwork that brought them back to the taboo of war memory said that they were not alien to seeing images of war, since they had already attended exhibitions at school on the theme of the civil war.

Lebanon as a means of preventing contested memories of violence from re-emerging in the collective and public sphere. Put differently, the repressed intimacy in post-war Lebanon entails a social-psychological function that extends the simple explanation that evoking nudity and the intimate sphere is taboo in Lebanon; it serves to make a barrier to the opening up – or aptly used in this context, the *working through* – of the collective "embarrassment that Lebanese carry with them from the civil war" (Haugbolle, 2005, p. 202). To spell out my assumption, I use Kristeva's understanding of intimacy. Commenting on Kristeva, Keltner (2011) notes that intimacy is "interrogation of active suffering" (p. 66). It is a way to unveil the subject's conflicts, desires and drives through the analytical talking-cure, and also through signifying practices, such as art.

As shown in the discussion chapter, at the heart of the intimate dimension in *Closer* was the bringing forth of the affective and precarious nature of the characters portrayed in the artwork, which compelled a number of young Lebanese to come close to "what is most archaic in it [the intimate space]: its affects, desires and drives" (Sjöholm, 2004, p. 79). All these elements were associated with suffering – the 'universalised other's' suffering, Lebanese suffering, or the sectarian other's suffering. The repressed intimacy in post-war Lebanon may be a defence against the threat that opening up to an '*inner* space' that concerns the subject and a way of becoming (i.e., aggression, love, melancholy, desire, affects and drives) would unleash in terms of a repressed collective embarrassment with regard to a confused knowledge of history. The futile character of the war (Khalaf, 2012) and haphazard violence (Mansel, 2010) that disintegrated cultural, social and even familial ties during the conflict left people with a sense of meaninglessness, which certainly still pervades the Lebanese collective unconscious. I vividly remember, while conducting an individual interview, a young Lebanese man bemoaning the fact that "during the civil war, brothers killed brothers"; an expression that recurred, under another guise, in the data.

As introduced at the beginning of this thesis, Sune Haugbolle, points out a "lacuna between personal memory and collective amnesia" (2005, p. 194). I suggest that the vacuum of meaning between private memories and a state-sanctioned collective memory may be apprehended in the light of the problem of repressed intimacy in post-war Lebanon. When

personal traumatic memories of violence cannot find an echo in a collective memory, they permeate the private sphere of private social institutions, namely, families, leaving no room for the expression and interrogation of affects, drives and desires. Accordingly, post-war Lebanese society, especially the city of Beirut, is often associated with the image of a permissive and libertine popular culture. Yet, behind the hedonistic haven of Beirut, as depicted by authors such as Khalaf (2012) in relation to the capital's nightlife, there lurks "an uneasy ambivalence among Lebanese, even cosmopolitans, regarding the relation between desire, identity and public life" (Seidman, 2012, p. 23). I surmise that Khalaf's (2012) critique of a consumer society appealed to by sensuality, fashion, cosmetics and the cult of physical appearance, and Seidman's (2012) analysis of the underlying obstacles to the young Lebanese people's intimate freedom, may be two sides of the same coin: a tendency to repress the intimate sphere in Lebanese society as a way of eluding a collective discontent with dealing with something as ugly and contested as the civil war.

As this the empirical analysis has shown, encountering works of art that critically engage with memory, history and intimacy, may perpetuates the 'alienating imaginary', demonizing the sectarian other, which reveals itself as the disguised language of ideology. Kaës (1980) states that: "ideology is a knowledge which fails to come into being as history. Coming into being as history and knowledge implies to get exposed to the unexpectedness of desire"[4] (p. 45, my translation). The "unexpectedness of desire" that Kaës (1980) emphasises as a psycho-social component of history that is missing in the ideological language, may be troublesome to acknowledge in a society that has not come to terms yet with the messy character of its past – not only the impossibility of understanding the root causes of the war, but also dealing with the muddled knowledge of who is the suffering other of whom.

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[4]The original sentence, in French, is: "L'idéologie est un savoir qui échoue à devenir histoire...passer dans l'histoire et savoir, c'est s'exposer à l'imprévisible du désir" (Kaës, 1980, p. 45).

Conclusion

To conclude, I point to the main theoretical and empirical implications of this thesis and highlight its contribution to the fields of memory and social psychology.

What the empirical chapters have confirmed – as discussed in this chapter – is the power of the imaginary in defining young Lebanese people's engagement with collective memory and their relation to the other's suffering (opening up vs. recoiling). On a positive note, Lebanese youth opening up to a metaphorical engagement with themes of war, memory, and history and with the intimate body brought them to rehumanise the banality of violence, reflect upon the other as universal and connect (mostly in the cases of the women) with an imaginary made up of fantasy and desire, which propelled them to challenge the image of a male-dominated society and the taboos of memory. On the negative side, confronting personal lived experiences of the war and nude figures, shed light on how a collective imaginary fuels discourses of collective victimisation and heightens the perception of a threat to the group's identity. This finding corroborates Seidman's analysis of the main impediment to redeeming collective memory in post-war Lebanon: the unremitting image of the demonic other. It also empirically complements Larkin's (2012) finding that there was a prevalence and penetration in the Lebanese youth's discourses of narrative plots that contemporise old prejudices and myths and glorify sacrifice, struggle and sect. On a theoretical level, emphasising the role of an 'alienating imaginary' in the group's perception of threat and related strategies of defence against the representation of a fragmented identity supports Kalampalikis's (2007) and Haas and Jodelet's (2000) approach to memory in sensitive socio-historical contexts: the scholars

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argue that at issue in a group's engagement with and shaping of a collective memory is the group's need for protection against the threat of unfamiliar and new memories.

Although as mentioned above, the empirical analysis has confirmed the importance of the Lebanese young people's relation to collective memory for maintaining a cohesive group identity, fundamentally the thesis has contributed to untangling the concepts of memory from that of identity construction. In challenging the usual representations of war and history, collective memory emerged as a "critical and destabilizing force" (Jedlowski, 2001) for the identity construction of the Lebanese youth. As Jedlowski asserts, collective memory shall also be understood as "the depository of traces that may be valid both in defetishizing the existing and in understanding the processes that have led to the present at it is now, and to the criticism of this very present in the name of forgotten desires, aspirations and trauma" (Jedlowski, 2001, p. 36). As shown in the discussion chapter, the young Lebanese people's experience of engaging with artwork that critically explores memory and intimacy was revealing: of their aspirations (mainly for the Druze and Shiite women studying humanities); of anchored memories of hardship; or of ambiguous relations to remembering the past civil war. This propelled them to take up – or not to take up – different positions of identity and envisage a new sense of belonging to the Lebanese nation. Herein, the thesis aligns with Jedlowski's (2001) critique of an approach to memory and identity as mutually inclusive; collective memory does not just serve the construction of a group's identity and its present interests, as has been argued mainly by Halbwachs and Barlett.

One important theoretical implication of disentangling collective memory and identity is to highlight, in the post-war Lebanese context, the construction of identity as a tensional process. By considering tension at the heart of identity construction I understand a growing process that, as shown in the empirical analysis, supported Lebanese youth to overcome the identitarian status quo of being caught up in ambivalent positions between remembering vs. forgetting and between sustaining a discourse of opening up to vs. recoiling from the other, as well as ambivalence about belonging to the Lebanese nation. *Closer* draws on a meaningful experience of involvement in a metaphorical and symbolic engagement with artwork that critically explores collective memory, intimacy and nudity, often at the cost of

feeling unsettled; it compels introspective scrutiny of one's own feelings of intrusion and reflection upon the socio-cultural roots of one's own ambivalences in relation to a collective memory and belonging to a Lebanese nation. In contrast, when discourses of collective victimisation suffused by an 'alienating imaginary' of the fear of the sectarian other and by ideological discourses of martyrdom and self-redemptive sacrifice fall back on identity, there is no tensional process at play. Instead, as it became clear in the findings, defence mechanisms of rationalisation, divide and denial precluded any tension between collective memory and identity: a tension, which, as I suggest, the Maronites close to the Sin el Fil Church, the Shiites from Dahiyeh and the Sunni Muslims close to their religious groups, probably *neutralize*, since it was perceived as the fragmentation of their group's identity and certainly the dislocation of a fragile yet stable 'historical bricolage'.

Finally, designing the conditions for an ephemeral space in which to explore collective memory has also contributed to clarifying the political potential of artistic public spaces in post-war society and how such spaces can support the redeeming of conflicting and traumatic memories and divisive identities. Standing out from other actors in civil society – namely, Lebanon's memory-makers, who are politically engaged with debating memory issues, speaking the truth about the civil war and fostering a truthful inter-sectarian dialogue – the political potential of artistic spaces such the Beirut Art Center does not just lie in giving centre stage to the taboo of the memory of war, history and identity. The political potential of artistic spaces resides in creating the conditions for a tension between identity construction and collective memory, by anticipating and proposing models for identification that challenge the current social, cultural and political order. In *Closer*, the bringing forth of intimacy – a repressed domain in post-war Lebanon – juxtaposed with the exhibition of the artists' lived experiences and private recollections of war, provided a space where a 'radical imagination', as a source of desires and fantasies, could question a collective imaginary ('alienating' in the Lebanese post-war context).

Such an artistic space for exploring collective memory has a political potential because it is compelling while at the same time it *actualises* young people's aspirations "for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and

innovative sites for collaboration, and contestation, in an act of defining the idea of a society itself" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). Last but not least, what the empirical analysis has shown is that creating the conditions for exploring collective memory in a particular research environment was both a methodological tool to prompt discourses on collective memory and identity, while at the same time contributing to the reshaping of the young Lebanese people's relationship to memory and collective identity; that is, it created a unique and ephemeral space which contributes to redefining the role of memory in post-war society.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

Writing this thesis in a limited time frame necessarily entailed a number of theoretical and methodological choices that inevitably shaped the findings of the thesis. Firstly, its conceptual orientation, while exploring the interface between collective memory, history and the construction of identity of the Lebanese youth, emphasised the unfolding of the concept of memory and its subsequent articulation with history rather than presenting an equally shared focus on memory *and* history. This certainly led the discussion towards certain paths and issues, while excluding others. It is also not easy to find a balance between antagonistic approaches to both concepts (Halbwachs, 1925/1992; Nora, 1984–1992) and the spectre of diluting memory in history and vice versa – Bar-Tal (2014) recently argued that collective memory is no more than a social representation of history. Such an equally shared scrutiny of memory *and* history may have been a fruitful enquiry, yet would have proved to be a bold theoretical attempt. Empirically, it would have necessitated a method of triangulation, combining, along with focus-group discussions, the analysis of news coverage by different media and the examination of scholarly books at the heart of numerous intellectual debates about the biased historical account of the civil war. However, such an empirical exploration of the media content and scholarly books was not included in the present research, which privileges a close focus on participants' discourses.

Secondly, the findings pointed to the importance of an 'alienating imaginary' spreading in the discourses of collective victimisation uttered by the young Lebanese who dismissed or simply did not meaningfully engage with the personal artistic account of lived experiences of

the war and of the intimacy and nudity in the artworks. Specifically, it became clear that the ideological discourses of martyrdom and self-redemptive sacrifice, influenced by Hezbollah's discourses of resistance against Israel, constituted, especially for the young Lebanese Shiites from Dahiyeh, an interpretative lens through which they engaged with *Closer* and related to memory in post-war Lebanon. Discourse analysis has long been a dedicated analytical device to look at power relations and identify ideological dimensions in language (Zellig, 1952; Potter & Wetherall, 1987). In this study, using discourse analysis along with thematic analysis could add value to the analysis of the focus-group discussions and individual interviews, particularly in relation to my focus on metonymy and metaphor. Nonetheless, looking at group dynamics, as proposed in the present analysis of the focus groups, offered a powerful tool to highlight leading positions and the way in which alternative voices that could propose counter-narratives and challenge the dominant discourses of forgetfulness were brushed under the carpet. Therefore, I believe that in revealing particular dynamics, such as the deep-rooted feelings of anxiety resulting from the threat to a group's identity (Bion, 1964; Armstrong, 2005) and associated collective imaginary pervaded by ideological discourses, the analysis of group dynamics offers an avenue for connecting identity construction with ideology (Howarth, 2014).

Thirdly and lastly, a major question pertaining to this research lies in the specificity of its method. One original method in this research was to explore the sensitive issue of collective memory in post-war Lebanon through the experience of seeing artwork, which, by bringing forth the taboo of intimacy and personal accounts of the war in the exhibition space, created a unique and ephemeral space for memory and the construction of identity. Psycho-social dynamics (e.g., perception of identity threat, perception of intrusion on one's own intimacy, personal empowerment) revealed how individuals negotiate their belonging to a group's identity, or to a Lebanese national history; this highlighted the tensional processes at the heart of memory construction. However, a question that undoubtedly comes to mind when reflecting on obvious directions to move the research forward is: how can we replicate the implementation of research design that is dependent on exposure to the *Closer* exhibition, which was limited in time (January–April 2009)? Does the ephemeral character of this

research design contradict the criteria of generalisability of research? Generalisability refers to the degree to which research findings are applicable to other populations or samples (Polit & Hungler 1991; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). It involves "the usefulness of one set of findings in explaining other similar situations" (Grbich 1999, p. 66). There is, however, considerable debate over the nature of the knowledge produced by qualitative methods and whether a term such as generalisability, derived from the quantitative paradigm, can have the same meaning when used to judge the rigour of qualitative research design. Some authors doubt that generalisability can be achieved in qualitative research. Denzin (1983) rejects generalisability as a goal: "every instance of social interaction, if thickly described, represents a slice from the life world" (p. 133) and is thus a proper subject matter.

A middle path, which would strengthen the present research while recognising the context-specificity of qualitative research (Wainwright 1997) is proposed by Mays and Pope (2000). The scholars believe that concepts from quantitative research, including generalisability, may need to be "operationalised differently to take into account the distinctive goals of qualitative research" (p. 50). This could involve generalising through aggregation or comparison of independent studies, or meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare 1988), which systematically compares or translates diverse cases in order to draw cross-case conclusions. A focus on design is also advocated as a means of addressing difficulties in generalising (Yin 1999). "The remedy might be to consider a case study, as a unit, to be equivalent to an experiment, as a unit; multiple-case studies may then be considered equivalent to multiple experiments. Under this assumption, the problem of generalising from case studies is no different from the problem of generalising from experiments" (p. 212). At the time of my fieldwork, a scholar at St Joseph University suggested replicating the *Closer* exhibition in a virtual three-dimensional environment, so as to be able to compare both research settings without time constraints, as well as to offer various possibilities for sampling. Probably immersed in the research fatigue of delving into the richness of the qualitative material, I did not pay much attention to the idea of replicating the research as an experiment. Reflecting upon the research process and the potential value of introducing a comparative perspective to the present study, I believe that such a replicative experiment, far from altering the "discovery" (Hamberg, Johannson,

Lindgren & Westman, 1994) and thick description of a "slice from the life world", could constitute an interesting methodological contribution for future research.

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Map of the *Closer* exhibition

MAP OF THE EXHIBITION 'CLOSER'

Body parts; Saneh

FOCUS GROUPS

So much I want to say; Atoum

4 Cotton underwear for Tony; **Chakar**

Intervista; **Sala**

AUDITORIUM

Crossing Surda; **Jacir**

4 Cotton underwear for Tony; **Chakar**

4 Cotton underwear for Tony; **Chakar**

Self-Portraits; **D'Agata**

Birthday Suit; **Steele**

A Loving Man; **Alani**

ENTRANCE

Saida June 6, 1982; **Zaatari**

Missing Links; **Zaven**

4 Cotton underwear for Tony; **Chakar**

4 Cotton underwear for Tony; **Chakar**

BOOKSHOP

STAIRS

ARTWORKS
ENTRANCE
SEATS

2

Introductory letter: Presentation of the research and the *Closer* exhibition

Celine Righi - PhD research project
Institute of Social Psychology
London School of Economics

Contemporary Art and History in Lebanon
Your point of view

Friday 13th March 2009 at 5pm

Take the opportunity to discuss and participate in the present research.

The purpose of this research project is to gather information about how Lebanese young adults make sense of visual contemporary artwork (films, videos, photographs, installations) and relate it to their present, past and future in Lebanon.

You are warmly invited:

1. To **come and visit an exhibition of contemporary artwork** within a group of 10 Lebanese young adults, which will be taking place at the *Beirut Art Center[1]*. The centre is located at Jisr El Wati - Off Corniche an Nahr, Zone 66 Adlieh, Beirut. The exhibition is named *Closer[2]*.

2. To **take part in a group discussion following the exhibition,** which will last for about 2 hours. The group discussion will be run by myself and a research assistant from the American University of Beirut.

You will have the opportunity to question and talk with Sandra Dagher (curator and director of the BAC) alongside the exhibition and the group discussion.

Setting:

- Participation is on a voluntary basis. However, travel expenses will be reimbursed or a bus will pick you up at a meeting point downtown.

- The group-discussion interviews will be recorded and individual responses will be kept confidential.

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[1] Please see http://www.beirutartcenter.org/ for more details.

[2] The artists: **Jananne Al-Ani** *A Loving Man*. **Tony Chakar** *4 Cotton Underwear for Tony*. **Antoine D'Agata** *Self-Portraits 1991-2008*. **Mona Hatoum** *So Much I Want to Say*. **Emily Jacir** *Crossing Surda (a record of going to and from work)*. **Anri Sala** *Intervista*. **Lina Saneh** *Body pArts*. **Lisa Steele** *Birthday Suit - with scars and defects*. **Akram Zaatari** *Saida June 6, 1982*. **Cynthia Zaven** *Missing Links*.

Celine Righi - PhD research project
Institute of Social Psychology
London School of Economics

In order to make appropriate arrangements, please you let me know if:

☐ Yes, I will be taking part in the research
If so, let me know your email contact:
……………………………………………………………………

The session (exhibition, then group discussion) will be run on **Friday 13ᵗʰ March 2009 at 5pm** at the Beirut Art Center. (If you are interested in participating, but are not able to make it on this date, let me know if there is another option that suits you better).

If you want to know more about the research, please write to:
C.Righi@lse.ac.uk

Celine RIGHI
MPhil/PhD candidate
Institute of Social Psychology
London School of Economics (UK)   London, 18/02/09

3

Questionnaire

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Contemporary Art and History in Lebanon

Please complete the following information: your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used by the researcher.

a) Your age:...

b) Gender: Female ☐ Male ☐

c) How many brothers and sisters do you have?
....

d) Where are you from?
Beirut   ☐
Beirut suburb   ☐ Specify...
South   ☐
North   ☐
Chouf   ☐
Bekaa   ☐

e) Do your parents work?
Mother: Yes ☐ No ☐
Father: Yes   ☐ No ☐
If 'Yes', what is their profession?
Mother:..
Father: ....

f) What do you study?...

g) In which school/university do you study?..

h) Where do you see yourself in five years time?

....

i) What do you do during your leisure time?
1) ....
2) ....
3) ....

j) Have you ever lived abroad?
Yes ☐ No ☐
If 'Yes', how long?...

k) How often do you travel abroad?
Never ☐
Once every 5 years ☐
Once a year ☐
Several times a year ☐

l) Is there a religious community that you identify yourself with?
Yes ☐ No ☐
If 'Yes', which one?...

m) Do you feel close to a political party in particular?
Yes ☐ No ☐
If 'Yes', which one?...

n) Why did you decide to take part to this research?
To contribute to research in general ☐
I was interested in the topic ☐

Thank you

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Focus groups topic guide

A) Presenting the research and my role as a moderator in the group.

 – Each participant in the group gives his/her name

B) The exhibition:

General views/appreciations on the artworks of *Closer*:

 – What did you feel after seeing the exhibition? What were your first impressions?
 – Did something struck you in the artwork seen during the exhibition?

C) The exhibition and the themes incorporated:

 – What do you think this exhibition is about? What are the themes you identified?
 – Do you think it says something on Lebanese society? To what extent?

D) Reflecting on the past Lebanese history:

 – How do you see your recent past history? To what extent?
 – What do you think about remembering of the civil war?
 – How the civil war should be remembered?

E) Conclusive questions:

 – Is there anything you would like to add? Do we have cover all aspects you think are important on that matter?

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Individual interviews topic guide

A) Feed-back on the participant's experience in taking part to a group discussion with other young Lebanese

B) Feed-back on the participant's encounter with the *Closer* exhibition:

– What do you remember of the exhibition? Which artwork did struck you most and why?

C) Showing the prompt to the participant:

The participant can look at the images of each artwork and reflect upon his/her experience of viewing *Closer*

D) Reflecting on the past Lebanese history:

– How do you see your recent past history? To what extent?

– What do you think about remembering of the civil war?

– How the civil war should be remembered?

E) Reflecting on the future:

– How do you see the future in Lebanon?

– How do see yourself in the near future?

– Do you think the future is represented in *Closer*? If so, how do you think the future is represented in the artwork?

F) Conclusive questions:

– Is there anything you would like to add? Do we have cover all aspects you think are important on that matter?

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Focus Groups: Participants' descriptions of the artwork exhibited in *Closer*

Name of Artwork	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
A Loving Man (Al-Ani) $N^2 = 7$	N^1 = 1. Woman; sadness.	N = 2. Women talk one after the other.	N = 1. Mother; four daughters.	N = 1. Children's game; social class; father; war.	N = 2. Family; sisters; mother; absence of the father.
4 Cotton Underwear for Tony (Chakar) N = 11	N = 0	N = 3. Lebanese war; Cedars; Hezbollah.	N = 2. Honoring father.	N = 1. Cedars; South; Lebanese flag; sectarian divides; ideologies.	N = 5. Honoring Martyr; Father died; Cedars; Christians.
Self-Portraits (D'Agata) N = 7	N = 1. A man standing in front of a door; no hand/no leg; war.	N = 1. Portraits; psychological problems.	N = 2. No hand; depression.	N = 1. Photographer; autobiography; cities.	N = 2. Kiss between a couple.
So Much I Want to Say (Hatoum) N = 2	N = 0	N = 0	N = 0	N = 0.	N = 2. Accurate (title: "So much…" quoted twice).
Crossing Surda (Jacir) N = 9	N = 0	N = 1. Going to work.	N = 3. A man; going to work.	N = 1. Going to university; "Lots of trouble"; video; woman.	N = 4. Crossing a checkpoint; filming/defying.
Intervista (Sala) N = 5.	N = 0	N = 0	N = 2. Albanian; mother and son; video; inaccurate ("they lived a civil war")	N = 2. Albanian; ideologies; accurate.	N = 1. Albanian; son; his mother; video; accurate.
Body pArts (Saneh) N = 10	N = 3. Black picture; old lady; war; sexuality.	N = 3. Black lady; body; burning; writing on the body.	N = 1. Body parts signed; anatomy.	N = 0	N = 3. Face; darkness; cremation; death; body; dissemination.
Birthday Suit (Steele) N = 4	N = 0	N = 0	N = 0	N = 0	N = 4. Undressed; naked; scars; accurate (title quoted).
Saida June 6, 1982 (Zaatari) N= 10	N = 0	N = 0	N = 3. Photos; war with Israel.	N = 1 Video; the blasts.	N = 7. War; Saida; south bombings; blast; building; young adolescent; daily routine. Accurate (quotation).

1 It indicates the number of times the artwork was quoted in the five groups

2 It indicates the number of times the artwork was quoted in each group (Group 1 in this instance)

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Analysis of individual interviews: Demographic profiles of the participants, attitudes towards *Closer*, and attitudes towards post-war Lebanon

		Attitudes towards *Closer*				Attitudes towards Post-War Lebanon	
Group	Demographic profiles	Memory of war in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Body and nudity in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Future in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Remembering vs. forgetting the civil war: participants' positioning	Sectarian other and identity: participants' positioning	Future in Lebanon: participants' perceptions
Group 1	P 1 Male 19 Maronite Christian March 14 Alliance Middle socio-eco. Biology, Lebanese University	− / Burdened with such a negative image of Lebanon reminds too much of painful memories (e.g. July 2006 war). Biased version of history – just a subjective point of view (e.g. Chakar, the Cedars). Shouldn't show the image of the martyr (in Chakar).	Shocking images (e.g. Saneh). Goes against religious values.	Pessimism	Wants to forget.	Divisions. Absurd complexity of the civil war: "brothers killed brothers".	Expectative – Uncertainty.
	P 2 Female 18 Maronite Christian Free patriotic Movement Upper-class Finance, Sagesse University	− / Burdened with representations of war – images of sadness too dark – all works express death. Reminds of memories that are too painful – Lebanese are weary of the war.	Shocking images (e.g. Antoine D'Agata). Too subjective.	Pessimism	Wants to forget.	Elusive about collective identity. Sees herself as belonging to "my Lebanon", then to a part. But analysis suggests she identifies with a divided Lebanon.	Wants to believe in a future but expects "problems" in the near future. Wants to stop the cycle of war. But analysis suggests she is not convinced.
	P 3 Male 25 Maronite Christian Upper-class Management	− / Biased version of history – just a subjective point of view (e.g. Chakar, the Cedars). Too negative an image of Lebanon. Burdened with representation of war – images of sadness are too dark. Too subjective. + / Sees "lived experience" of people as giving a trace of memory. (e.g. Zaatari's notebook).	Nudity is not shocking (P 3 comments and interprets D'Agata). Goes against Christian religious values ("way of life") (P 3 questions: "Why should intimacy be depicted as sad"?)	Pessimism	Wants to forget ("We don't know how to forget lived experiences"). Generation gap between young people, who want to forget, and elders.	Divisions ("There are things which are a problem in Lebanon"). P 3 believes in the primacy of the respect for human rights. P 3 identifies with the Christian community first because of school attendance.	Uncertainty but P 3 believes in young people's capacity to change. Analysis suggests P 3 tries to convince himself of a positive future.
Group 2	P 4 Male 17 Shiite Muslim (but does not feel committed to his religious community). Low Management, Shoreline school	− / Exhibition burdened with suffering ("sadness was in every picture"). Biased representation of the Cedars' signification (in Chakar – shouldn't be just the signification for one community; the Christians. + / Image of martyr as proof of loyalty towards the country. Claim for resistance against Israel.	Goes against societies' principles. (e.g. Saneh, forbidden in 'this' society) P 4 does not comment on nudity.	Mix of pessimism and positive elements: the story of the martyr (in Chakar).	Wants to forget, to move on. ("We don't want story of war, we want to move on or not to go back.")	Divisions between religious groups and between 14/8 March. "Christians don't like Muslims and vice versa. Everyone hates the other." Israel as cause of the conflicts – Hezbollah shelters the people.	Pessimistic: 2 reasons: 1. Israel as the cause of repetition of war. 2. Greedy politicians.
	P 5 Male 22 Shiite Muslim (but does not feel committed to his religious community). Low Economy, Shoreline school	+ / Omnipresence of representation of war in the exhibition is what P 5 likes very much. Likes theme of resistance and loyalty towards the country represented in Chakar. − / Biased representation of Chakar's picture of the father's martyr (the presence of the pigeons in the image).	Goes against society's principles (e.g. Saneh). P 5 does not comment on nudity.	Pessimism	Wants to remember. Needs to know about the past.	Claims his Lebanese identity.	P 5 is trustful but expresses uncertainty. (Vague answer.)

(continued)

	Demographic profiles	Attitudes towards *Closer*			Attitudes towards Post-War Lebanon		
		Memory of war in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Body and nudity in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Future in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Remembering vs. forgetting the civil war: participants positioning	Sectarian other and identity: participants' positioning	Future in Lebanon: participants' perceptions
	P 6 Male 17 Shiite Muslim Low Management, Shoreline school	-/ Redeeming omnipresence of images associated by P6 with the consequences of war ("these pictures: like alone, scared, bad stuffs show the truth of what could happen if Lebanese keep being selfish"). +/ brings novelty in P6's depressing environment.	Does not comment on nudity. But analysis suggests that for P6 nude pictures reveal Lebanese people's selfishness and disrespectfulness of God.	Pessimism Exhibition is a sort of apocalyptic image as punishment of the Lebanese.	Not clear Analysis suggests that he wishes to forget. ("We need to do the good stuff and bad stuff take it away").	Divisions between Muslims and Christians. Disillusionment and suspicion regarding political leaders/ manipulation. Hezbollah shelters the people.	Bleak and uncertain ("no solution", "you can't imagine what will happen in the future"). ("I have a bad image, nothing good will happen, just war, just people selfish.")
Group 3	P 7 Male 20 Sunni Muslim (but does not feel committed to his religious community). March 14 Alliance Middle Pharmacy, Lebanese University (Hadah campus)	-/ Represents too much the reality of the war in Lebanon. +/ Testifies people's daily struggles – Zaatari shows the reality ("it is like I took such pictures because I was afraid to forget things"). Simple pictures of war. Positive message of resistance ("the Palestinian artist" in Jacir). Sensitive to stories (of Al-Ani, Sala): "I liked the idea he sought to find what the mother was saying". Focus on characters' facial expressions.	P7 struck by strangeness in Saneh ("the artist is half a mind"). Exhibition is burdened with images of human beings and society that are too negative ("lots of people who suffer, lots of problems").	Mix of pessimism with positive elements in Jacir's message of resistance. Could help (by showing the war) to stop feelings of retaliation.	"People need pictures of the civil war." But it is not clear how P7 positions himself. Analysis suggests he prefers to forget.	The analysis suggests a taboo for P7 about talking about the conflicting positions of religious communities.	Future for young people. Analysis suggests P7 sees a bleak future.
	P 8 Female 18 Sunni Muslim (but does not feel committed to her religious community). March 14 Alliance Middle Engineer, Lebanese American University	-/ Representation of war is not much different from reality – weary of seeing pictures of war. ("it was nice but we always see these pictures"). +/ The exhibit shares the experience of war. (e.g. Zaatari) – broadens perspective ("for European maybe"). Sees art in the works because they are loaded with emotional feelings. Testifies Lebanese pain when "Israel attack". P8 liked stories (Sala; Chakar) – it depoliticises the past. Feeling of hope with Palestinian artist (Jacir).	Shocking idea of cremation (in Saneh).	Mix of pessimism with a little optimism in the artists' message of resistance.	Upset with having fragmented memories. // *Analysis suggests P8 is ambivalent:* Wants "to eradicate the past from politics".	Divisions because of too much political involvement. Suspicion towards politicians.	Fear of war recurrence. Hope in the capacity of the young generation to learn from the past.
	P 9 Female 18 Sunni Muslim (but does not feel committed to her religious community), Palestinian origin Middle Computer Science, Beirut American University	-/ Images show only the reality of the war ("It is very familiar. You see it on the TV. Honestly I did not find that much artistic. It is more a bench back into the reality.") +/ Likes theme of resistance and loyalty towards the father/country represented in Chakar – Sees hope in Jacir's message. P9 likes the story of Al-Ani – helps evade ideologies.	P9 likes the provocation from Saneh. P9 is silent on bodies, nudity and intimacy.	Mix of pessimism and optimism Analysis suggests that P9 is not convinced by her own statement "art helps not to lose hope".	Analysis suggests that she is prone to remember.	P9 is silent on internal divisions. Israel is seen as the cause of Lebanese conflict. ("The Israeli came and it changed everything" – "they started invasion.") P9 shows a strong sense of collective belonging.	Ambivalent: Mix of assertiveness/ resilience and feelings of bleakness. ("Something hard to achieve but we can try.")

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Group 4	P 10 Female 20 Maronite Christian Upper-class Business Administration, American University of Beirut (AUB).	-/ P10 does not comment much on war. P10 expected to see theme of war. ("It is a bit of a cliché. I don't know if is good.") + and -/ Striking symbol in Chakar's image of the Hezbollah painter seen by P10 as the crossing of sectarian lines. But seems unrealistic. Gripping disclosure of intimate thoughts in Zaatari's notebook. "I don't think I could do that myself." +/ P10 is moved by the representation of the bond – loyalty – between offspring and parents in Chakar's story of the father/son relationship.	P10 is at ease with seeing nudity. But, P10 doesn't talk much about the woman's body and personal intimacy – doesn't understand D'Agata.	//	Dilemma between forgetting and remembering. Weary of the past's stories of the war but doesn't want to forget. Lack of interest in Lebanese history – learned essentially French history.	Realistic about divisions. ("Unity is an illusion.") Analysis suggests that she does not seem to want reconciliation/ unification. Disengaged from politics but expresses that suffering "is a tragedy". Absurdity of civil war: "brothers killed brothers".	Ambivalent: Optimistic - believes in a resilient Lebanon But says later on "lots of people are pessimistic".
	P 11 Female 20 Greek Orthodox Upper-class Psychology, AUB.	+/ P11 finds it interesting to be reminded of war through the sound of bombings in Zaatari's artwork. ("I could relate it to 2006, we used to always be scared.") Simplicity of the artistic message helps people to relate to the works. Helps see the perspective of the other. (Chakar – subjectivity beyond anonymity of numbers/ de-humanization of war.) P11 likes stories In Al-Ani and relates very personally to them.	Sensitive to disclosure of nudity. At ease with seeing nudes. P11 makes a metaphoric use of Steele's work. It furnishes optimism with creativity. Saneh's idea of cremation actualizes in a public space what P11 had in mind: to be burnt. Comes to reality. = transgression which bypasses usual form of protest. P11 is fascinated by D'Agata and sensitive to the artistic component. ("as we were inside his brain").	Mix of pessimism and optimism Optimism comes from Saneh and Steele [Researcher's remarks: optimism comes only from works on the body and nudity].	// Analysis suggests that she is prone to remember.	Critical of perennial internal struggles between Lebanese. (Absurdity/Pro-Hezb/ Pro-Israel in 2006 as reminiscence of the 1980s. Critical of the political leaders. Relates to the absurdity/complexity of the civil war: "brothers killed brothers". Vividly critical about antagonism in Lebanon between collective thinking/ weight of tradition and individualism. ("In Lebanon you are stuck between the two: Do you want to be modern [...] or do you want to stay traditional and follow old fashioned people?") Reflects her own personal dilemma between strong familial bond and her personal life (e.g. her relationship with a Muslim boy).	Very pessimistic. Change would only happen by education and exposure to groups. Sees the future of Lebanon is war. Hopes that sectarian discriminations will end.
	P 12 Female 20 Sunni Muslims Upper-class Economy, AUB	-/ Not sensitive to Zaatari or Chakar because P12 is weary of representation of her country as a place of war. +/ Sensitive idea that representation of turmoil in Sala brings universality and is not restricted to Lebanon – alleviates feelings of burden. Sala represents the disillusion of parents' existence and the Lebanese denial of suffering. [Researcher's Remarks: Sala allows her to deploy expressions like 'sorrow', 'sadness'...' contrary to Zaatari].	P12 criticises the technique of Steele – she doesn't see it as art. Insensitive to Saneh. P12 sees in D'Agata as a very sad story.	Mix of pessimism and optimism	Wants to remember. P12 associates forgetfulness with denial of the turmoil in Lebanon.	Sees sectarian divisions intrinsically linked to grievances of each community. Sees impossibility of empathy towards the other and misrecognition of the suffering of the other. Propaganda is channeled at different levels (family/ media/ segregated cities). Critical of political leaders' manipulation. = cause of the turmoil. Impossibility to define herself in terms of Lebanese identity.	Pessimistic ("impossible outcome").
	P 13 Male 17 Shiite Amal movement Upper-class Public Administration, AUB	-/ Represents the reality of war in Lebanon too much (e.g. bombings in Zaatari) – it reminds him of vivid personal memories. Facial expressions in Al- Ani trigger scary feelings. Biased version of history – just a subjective point of view (e.g. Chakar, the choice of a Christian name, Tony). +/ Image of martyr as proof of loyalty towards the country – claim for resistance against Israel.	P13 doesn't comment on the body or on intimacy.	Pessimism	Prefers to forget suffering of the civil war. P13 recalls a sort of golden age before the civil war. "If you see before, we were almost strongest country of the region [...] Beirut was the Paris of the East".	Divisions and spatial segregation. "Everybody fight." Prior to the divisions was a relative harmony. "Islamic Christianity should be considered as a blessing".	Image of fate/ repetition of history. High level of uncertainty.

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	P 14 Male 19 Greek Orthodox Upper-class Biology, AUB	+/ Expressive characteristic of *Closer* (emotions/subjectivity) helps make sense of the past. Emotions seen as a channel to bypass ideologies (in Chakar). Expressiveness (emotions) in *Closer* helps accept feelings of sadness and depression. Subjectivity brings to truth and aestheticizes the past. Sensitive to stories (e.g. Al-Ani) that help to connect with feeling of nostalgia.	Shocked by the nudity. ("The scars were tough and they came from a trivial things", in Steele). Does not understand Saneh.	Mix of pessimism and optimism But "it is a good depression". [Researcher's remark: P14 develops a sense of attachment to pessimism].	Wants to remember.	Collective identity overwhelmed by ideology and feudal allegiances to leaders. Critical of ideology and politics. Manipulation of the youths by leaders. Critical of "wrong collectivistic thinking". Claim for a new Lebanese identity freed from collective thinking. "more like a Lebanese achiever".	Very pessimistic. Repetition of the war as necessary for a country like Lebanon.
Group 5	P 15 Female 21 Shiite Muslim Middle French literature, St Joseph University (SJU).	P15 is ambivalent: -/ Feels discomfort and sees the war in the artwork (e.g. fear and death in D'Agata). +/ Exhibit makes the past very close for P15, who thinks it helps people halt the cycle of war and increase tolerance. ("In Lebanon, we always have the impression that there is a thread attached to the past, and that the past comes up again"). Sees history of the war and of the martyr (in Chakar). P15 sees: A way to share intimacy with other people. A common denominator of suffering as a human being/ as a universal value.	Ambivalent: Feels discomfort but thinks it opens up a space for imagination (e.g. D'Agata). Saneh affects P15. She gets sense of anonymity and universalism.	Mix of pessimism and optimism Analysis suggests that seeing war in the exhibit brings pessimism but with a sense of empowerment. "I do find lots of fight".	Wants to remember. Expresses curiosity about her parents' past. Need to know. "We can't forget our roots."	Critic of divisions and segregated spaces. Sees divisions as intrinsic to the civil war's experience of each community.¹ But, feels empathy with Lebanese who suffered because of the war. Claim for human beings. Youths regimented by ideologies. Conflict between generations, but with a form of nostalgia towards strong family ties.	//
	P 16 Female 21 Maronite Christian Upper-class French Literature, SJU	-/ Rejects Chakar's representation of the martyr - is weary of collective representations of war. +/ P16 likes the personal/subjective perspective on past wars (e.g. Zaatari's notebook) – It counters laden collective thinking / culture of suffering and victimization. P16 is very sensitive to Al-Ani's story of the absent father.	Finds delicacy in the images of nudity and body, and is not shocked at all – does not see sexuality, as others do. Reflects on her own identity dilemma in relation to Saneh's representation of *death*. (Which identity reference does she belong to? Western vs. Arabic one?)	Optimism because the exhibit calls for "self-expression".	Ambivalence:Not ready to deal with the past at this moment of her life. Not in the collective manner.	Sees divisions between Lebanese who identify with culture of suffering/ and those who reject it. P16 feels part of the human race, not just Lebanese. Fustigates the illusion of unity/ harmony and discourses on diversity. Wants to "rely on" characteristics of Lebanon (education/ culture/ art) other than war.	Pessimistic, even if not clearly stated. Doubtful about the idea that Lebanese people will not perpetuate a culture of suffering/victimization.
	P 17 Female 22 Orthodox Cristian (but does not feel committed to her religious community). Upper-class Tourism, SJU	+/ *Closer* unveils expression of suffering as linked to the memory of the war – it triggers feeling 'down'. Seen as working-through process (e.g. remembrances of 2006: Zaatari, bombings). P16 is sensitive to the story (Sala) of the mother who does not disavow her initial engagement in her youth. ("The words of the mother.") P16 relates to the uniqueness of the situation of Jacir and perceives a universal feeling of injustice. Gives hope, resistance and represents the transgression.	Discomfort with D'Agata. It counters her representation of the intimacy of a couple. P16 sees aestheticism in Saneh's representation of the body.	Mix of pessimism and optimism Optimism given by Jacir's message of empowerment.	Wants to remember – critical of society's collective denial of the past, of the state of suffering (e.g. partying as a symptom of denial). Empathy towards former generations because they suffered.	Divisions due to diffusion of propaganda at school and in families. Critical of the low-grade symbolic conflict and incorrect stereotypes while at university with her peers. P17 is ambivalent about her own desires for emancipation and her compliance towards former generations – strength of family ties.	Does not see an image of the future. (= uncertainty).

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P 18 Female 20 Shiite Muslim Middle French literature, SJU	+/ Subjective version of the war sanitizes the memory – stands out against propaganda and at a distance from political leaders. Opens up the mind to universal feelings of humanity – it counters xenophobia and egocentrism. Chakar's story of martyrdom represents the crossing over sectarian divisions. Representation of war provides to P18 a sense of belonging to a Lebanese identity (e.g. Zaatari). Jacir's work provides a sense of closeness and proximity to Israeli people.	P18 is ambivalent: important discomfort ("bestial picture"). P18 feels uneasy about the representation of death (in Saneh). Feels reluctant about the photos of D'Agata – combination of death and nudity.	//	Ambivalent: Wants to forget. Weary of images of war but at the same time needs stories of the past war.	P18 criticises the xenophobic attitude of the Lebanese (rejection of the Other). Weary of the Palestinian conflict (calls for more focus on Lebanese issues) but has empathy for those who are suffering. Expresses patriotism/ loyalty towards her country – claims to feel Lebanese. She points to the conflict between young people's desire for emancipation and archaic traditions. [Researcher's remarks: Analysis suggests P18 is ambivalent towards the need for recognition as an individual, and sense of belonging to a Lebanese identity.]	Pessimistic but hopeful. Fear of neighbourhood states. Repetition of the war.
P 19 Female 20 (Religious community not mentioned because doesn't fee close to a religious community). Middle-class French literature, SJU	+/ *Closer* propels the Lebanese to think in terms of human consequences at a collective level beyond mere individual points of view - helps focus on the suffering. P19 uncovers the intrinsic link between identity and the necessity to look at the past. *Closer* represents "the explicit" and helps P19 to get a sense of injustice in relation to the fate of the Palestinian people (in Jacir). Makes her think about the significance of the martyr without rejection (e.g. Chakar) so helps to raise tolerance. P19 gets a sense of resistance/ empowerment. ("I wish I could do that.")	P19 expresses discomfort in front of Steele/Hatoum. Doesn't talk about nudity or the body. Reception of Saneh with uncertain perception of the work.	Pessimism "It shows things as they are."	The need to carry the past. Not explicitly stated but analysis suggests P19 wants to remember.	Vividly critical of the low-grade symbolic struggle – young people's categorisations in their relationships with peers. P19 is prone to see Hezbollah as a real force of resistance, beyond Hezbollah's only definition of ideological instance. P19 rejects confessional/ sectarian/ religious belonging as well as Lebanese belonging. She feels part of the human race, not Lebanese.	Very pessimistic/ disillusioned.
P 20 Female 20 Maronite Christian Upper-class French Literature, SJU	+/ *Closer* is seen as a way to perpetuate the memory of the war. P20 likes the unusual – for Lebanon – individual artistic accounts of the war (e.g. Zaatari, notebook). Expressiveness in the artwork comes from the use of audio-visual techniques. It enhances P20's involvement with stories (e.g. Al-Ani). ("There were lots of sensibility inside.") –/ But analysis suggests that she did not pay attention to artwork that recalled the war. P20 does not mention Chakar.	Intimate expression and exhibition of the body helps to get rid of society's taboos and its narrow functions (e.g. Saneh). But not sensitive to D'Agata.	Optimism Because the exhibition puts the individual centre stage.	Ambivalent: Wants to forget. Weary of the discourses of the war but expresses need to remember in order "to know ".	Ambivalent: Critical of the collective that constrains individual expression. But desire for emancipation.[2] Parents as control freaks. Attachment to Lebanon. Remarks: P20 doesn't comment on sectarian divisions nor political ones.	Ambivalent: Optimistic (trust in young people) and pessimistic (uncertainty about the precarious situation).

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Demographic profiles	Memory of war in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Body and nudity in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Future in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Remembering vs. forgetting the civil war: participants' positioning	Sectarian other and identity: participants' positioning	Future in Lebanon: participants' perceptions
P 21 Female 23 Druze Upper-class French literature, SJU	+/ The exhibition compels the Lebanese to acknowledge that they are suffering. – seen in the expressiveness of the artwork (e.g. Zaatari). P21 compares D'Agata with Bacon. The audio-visual techniques give an impression of perpetuation of the past. P21 evokes the reminiscences of anxieties related to the July 2006 War. P21 likes very much the stories (e.g. Al-Ani, Sala) – help reconstituting fragmented memories. Helps demystify Israel (in Jacir). -/ P21 criticises Chakar's representation of the martyr. It means the segregation of the public space by the use of a symbol that marks the belonging to one community. The image of martyrdom is seen as categorisation, and denegation of the individual.	Ambivalent: values the importance of the body in the public space, but also expresses uneasiness in front of the artwork. P21 sees in Saneh the power of enactment and support for individual empowerment. With Steele, there is freedom for women.	After a first impression of pessimism, she sees more optimism and even feels empowered.	Wants to remember. Vital need to go back to the words of her parents. Importance of individual stories. For P21 Lebanese people should take responsibility for the civil war.	She criticises the idea of globalisation. Critical of the illusion of discourses on diversity and sees the divisions between the sects. Critical of the taboos in everyday conversations (low-grade symbolic struggle). Segregated communicative space. Critical of the impossibility to construct an identity away from groups' belonging (be it religious, family, or clans). Dilemma and identity conflict between her desire to emancipate and her attachment to the country as part of her identity.[3] Towards deconfessionalism.	Mixed feelings, but optimistic about the capacity of individuals. Sees and accepts fragility of the future in Lebanon. Hope for the emancipation of the individual. P21 is quite combative.
P 22 Female 22 Shiite Muslim Middle French literature, SJU	-/ P22 is ambivalent about the use of symbol of the martyr in Chakar's work. Against the cult of martyrdom as undermining the value of existence, but sympathizes with people who need it. Chakar's symbol of the Cedars only reinforces divides between communities. +/ P22 likes very much the story in Sala. Curiosity about parents' deeds during the war. P22 feels she takes part in a collective story with Al-Ani. P22 connects with ethical human principles in Jacir (realises that human principles are ignored in Palestine). P22 sees art as testimony: a mirror of society's struggles.	Ambivalent: Anxiety in viewing representation of death in D'Agata ("decheance", "fall of the character"). Uneasiness in viewing intimacy, as it reflects her own intimacy. Likes Saneh's representation of the body: = universal common denominator counters Lebanese egocentrism. Enables us to see the reality behind the representation. P22 sees in Hatoum the representation of revolution of women in the Middle East.	Rather pessimistic. P22 hints to be rather pessimistic. Doesn't help people to get rid of sectarian behaviour.	Wants to remember. P22 sees remembrance as testimony. Feels the need to unveil the responsibility of parents' position in the civil war.	Critical of sectarian attitudes of the Lebanese, and of two incompatible attitudes: 1. Sense of belonging due to same countries' fate; 2. Disengaged attitudes from experience of war – P22 quotes P16 who represents disengagement.	Pessimistic and uncertain – P22 doesn't see a future. Young people reproduce sectarian segmentation (territorial segregation). But analysis suggests that sense of common fate of Lebanese is for P22 a positive source of identification with Lebanese identity.
P 23 Male 22 Shiite Muslim (but does not feel close to his religious community) Law, Lebanese University	-/ P23 doesn't see artistic dimensions in the representation of the conflict (banal depiction of war by Zaatari) or of the representation of the Palestinian predicament (in Jacir). The exhibit increases sectarian divisions, struggles and conflicts (e.g. because of artificial use of the symbol of the Cedars in Chakar). +/ Was attracted by novelty in displaying ideas. P23 liked the atmosphere of the dark room in Al-Ani.	Negative perception of the body and nudity. Feelings of disgust (Steele's display was too long). P23 talks about the "insane personality" of Saneh.	Pessimism. Critical of the role of *Closer*. = just reflects the confessional divides. Art can't break the power of propaganda. The only positive point is the expression of personal point of view in a Lebanese space.	// Analysis suggests that P23 is prone to remember.	P23 sees divisions. He does not express a need for individualism but claims to live as just a "citizen" more than a Lebanese.	Pessimistic. P23 sees relentless confessional fights (repetition of wars).

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	Attitudes towards *Closer*			Attitudes towards Post-War Lebanon		
Demographic profiles	Memory of war in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Body and nudity in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Future in *Closer*: participants' perceptions	Remembering vs. forgetting the civil war: participants' positioning	Sectarian other and identity: participants' positioning	Future in Lebanon: participants' perceptions
P 24 Male 22 Shiite Muslim (but adamant to state he is atheist) Biology, Lebanese University	-/ Critical of the use of the symbol of the martyr (Chakar). Symbolizes the monopoly of one community over another and reinforces sectarian struggles. Critical of the representation of the father as an icon. Perpetuates "naïve collective thinking about legends" and "false" collective imaginary (doubt as to be victims or perpetrators during the civil war). +/ The disclosure in a public space of a personal experience bypasses ideological thinking (myth). It opens up to the *explicit* and bypasses the implicit. Opens up memory and sanitizes the memory from legends. These works of art in a public space enables articulation between private and collective memory. It is a release. ("The collective memory is always personal, it is always hidden") P 24 sees in Jacir the testimony that the dehumanization of the Palestinian people is a way to bypass ideological thinking ("the truth of the crime being committed"). P 24 reflects on his own experience of disillusionment with the Communist Party through Salà's work. *Closer* helps Lebanese men accept their vulnerability of being Lebanese and being men (critical of the patriarchal model).	Ambivalent: Discomfort in front of D'Agata. (P 24 sees sexual images: "masturbation"). He disagrees with Saneh in how to "represent the conflict of existence". +/ Image about people's suffering found in Steele.	Pessimism	Wants to remember. Needs to open up and sanitize memory from "the legends" (the ideologies). Critical of Lebanese attitudes of denial towards the past. Opening up to memory intrinsically means stopping the war.	Critical of the Lebanese feudal attachment, "organic bonds towards a community". Critical of the spread of hatred in Lebanese society as a low-grade symbolic struggle. Analysis of the origin of the hatred between Muslims and Christians and between Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims.	Very pessimistic. ("Political parties are going to destroy Lebanon.")

Key:

-/ = negative comments in relation to the themes of the exhibition.

+/ = positive comments in relation to the themes of the exhibition.

// = the participant did not comment.

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Transcription symbols

[	C2: quite a [while Mo: [yea	Left brackets indicate the point at which a current speaker's talk is overlapped by another's talk
=	W: that I'm aware of = = Yes. Would you con- firm that	Equal signs, one at the end of a line and one at the beginning, indicate no gap between the two lines
C:		
(0.4)	Yes (0.2) yeah	Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time in silence in tenths of a second
(.)	To get (.) treatment	A dot in parentheses indicates a tiny gap, probably no no more than one-tenth of a second
_	What's up?	Underscoring indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude
::	O:kay?	Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound. The length of the row of colons indicates the length of the prolongation
WORD	I've got ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT	Capitals except at the beginnings of lines, indicate especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk
hhhh	I fell that (0.2) hhh	A row of h's prefixed by a dot indicates an inbreath; without a dot, an outbreath. The length of the row of h's indicates the length of the inbreath or the outbreath
( )	Future risks and ( ) and life ( )	Empty parentheses indicate the transcriber's inability to hear what was said
(word)	Would you see (there) anything positive	Parenthesized words are possible hearings
(( ))	confirm that ((contin-ues))	Double parentheses contain author's descriptions rather than transcriptions
.	That's that.	Indicates a stopping fall in tone
,	one, two	Indicates a continuing intonation
><	>so that's it<	Shows talk, that is noticeably, faster than surrounding talk
?	What do you think?	Indicates a rising intonation

Source: Silverman (2004)