

London School of Economics and Political Science

Failure and the politically possible: Space, time and emotion among independent activists in Beirut, Lebanon



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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with how political activists in Lebanon maintain political engagement when at every moment it appears easier for them to give up. Within such an ethnographic context of 'failure', it grapples with how a political subjectivity predicated upon the desire for radically transformative action is produced and maintained. It contends that political subjectivity comes about through political engagement, not prior to it, and contours the experiential basis of political activism in its wake. To account for how activist political subjectivity is maintained, this thesis looks to the key roles played by politicised emotions and diffuse solidary feeling states in making the political and social worlds activists inhabit sensible. It attends, too, to the significance of intense moments of protest in producing and maintaining an activist political subjectivity: in the experience of protest, in its continued circulation after the fact in narrative form, and in the effects it has on the temporality of future action. As such, the thesis makes use of an event-centred methodology to better account for the transformative potential of action.

The distinctive theoretical contributions of this thesis are fourfold: 1) to show how the passionate and experiential dimensions of activism are fundamental rather than epiphenomenal aspects of the political, contributing to the broader interdisciplinary study of mobilisation, activism, and radical politics; 2) to argue ethnographically that affect is not and can never be pre-social – and is as such an anthropological object of analysis – thereby adding to more recent anthropological scholarship on affect; 3) to show how overlapping temporal circuits and senses of self-in-time make activists 'affectable' in particular ways at particular moments, contributing to the growing anthropological literatures on historicity and temporality; and 4) to demonstrate the importance of an event-centred methodology for anthropological engagements with transformative action.

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Note on Arabic transliteration

In this thesis I render Arabic in line with the transliteration system found in the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES). Where I reproduce direct speech I modify the IJMES transliteration system to reproduce the Lebanese vernacular and colloquial pronunciation used by the speaker. Where the word already has an English (or French) language spelling, I employ it rather than transliterate the Arabic.

Often speech was a mixture of English and Arabic, tending more towards one or the other depending on the proclivities of the speaker. In longer quotes I have rendered everything in English even where a mixture of both languages was employed, placing certain Arabic phrases in brackets where necessary. For in text citations, political slogans and terms from the field, I provide English translation and Arabic transliteration. All translations are my own.

1. Introduction

1. Protesting the parliamentary extension on a hot and sticky August evening

'Isn't Beirut strange, Fuad? After twenty years living here it still surprises me how different things are, street to street. Look at Verdun and Zoukak el Blat, the richest neighbourhood next to the poorest. Or here, look at the difference between Zarif and here'. Mansour gestured in front of us as the road to Downtown opened up. In front of us rose one of the West-East overpasses that cut across central Beirut and divide Zarif, the popular neighbourhood we had just left, from Downtown. We were reaching the end of a march protesting the Lebanese parliamentarians' decision to consider extending their parliamentary mandate for a second time in as many years. In June 2013, citing the possibility of violence were polling to have gone ahead, national elections were postponed. A year or so later, and with the Lebanese political class at even more of a deadlock than before, parliamentarians from the majority of the institutional parties were once more momentarily putting aside their differences in the name of self-preservation. This time they would postpone for the entire electoral cycle. As the five hundred of us – independent activists, students, civil society supporters and NGO workers – passed through the neighbourhood we chanted to the passers-by who had stopped to observe us and those above us who had stepped out onto their balconies to see what was going on: 'all of you sitting on your balconies, come join your youth here!'.¹ In the weeks building up to the march, one of the organising NGOs, *al-ḥirāk al-madanī lil-muḥāsaba* (the Civil Movement for Accountability), had asked for photos from supporters holding open their right palm. Onto the palm, they photoshopped the word for no, *lā*, and then shared the photos on social media. As we passed posters of Nabih Berri, Speaker of Parliament, or markers of the Amal movement, of which he is the leader and which is the political party that lays claim on the

¹ *yallī qā'id 'al-bālkōn, tā' lāqū shabābak hon!*

neighbourhood, the marchers held their right palms open in front of them as a sign of refusal.

As the sun went down we chanted up by the barriers blocking our path to parliament: ‘this parliament is our parliament; this square is our square!’, ‘keep on saying, keep on repeating, we won’t accept this extension!’, ‘down with the extension!’, ‘our parliament is a parliament of thieves!’.² Since entering Downtown Mansour had become more and more frustrated with the protest. Now he made a beeline for the barriers blocking our path to parliament and thrust the banner he had been holding into the faces of the security forces. The banner read *diktātūriyyat lubnān al-tawāfuqiyya turaḥḥib bikum* (Welcome to Lebanon’s dictatorship by consent), a slogan that the student groups had agreed upon in meetings earlier in the week. I followed him and asked whether there would be an attempt to break through security lines and enter parliament square, as had occurred at the parliamentary extension protests the year before. Pointedly, he took a long derisive look around at the crowd and told me: ‘not today. What would be the point?’ He began a solitary chant of ‘*tislam yā ‘askar lubnān, ḥāmī al-ḥarāmiyye!*’ (Thank you soldiers of Lebanon, protectors of thieves!), turned to me and explained that that had been one the main chants from last year: ‘but there’s no chance of it this year’. A few weeks earlier, tens of soldiers had been captured by *takfīrī* Syrian rebel forces fighting in the border town of Aarsal.³ The rebels then began releasing videos of the soldiers and threatening the Lebanese state with their execution. This had caused a national scandal and had also precipitated a wideranging propaganda drive in support of the army, a drive that would only become more pervasive in the coming months. In such an environment, anti-army chants felt a particularly risky proposition. Yet seconds later, as if sensing Mansour’s wishes, the main part of the student contingent began their own chants against the military: ‘*askar ‘alā min?*’⁴ Grinning now, Mansour went over to Sari, the student leading the chant, and told him to lead the chant he had remembered,

² ‘*hādha al-majlis majlisnā, hādha al-sāḥa sāḥatnā!*’; ‘*ḍallak qūlū ḍallak ‘īd, mish rāḥ niqbal lil-tamdīd!*’; ‘*yasquṭ al-tamdīd!*’; ‘*majlisnā majlis ḥarāmiyye!*’.

³ A *takfīrī* is a Sunni Muslim who accuses other Muslims of apostasy. Car- and suicide-bombing had been ongoing in areas of the country that were denoted as ‘Shi’ strongholds’ in retaliation for Hizballah’s support for the Syrian regime.

⁴ lit. ‘an army against whom?’, the sense here being ‘Soldiers! Who is your enemy?’.

too. A few older NGO workers came over to stop them and an argument ensued. As the sun finally set I stepped out of the barbed wire cordon with Mansour and we grabbed a shared cab the mile or so back to the start of Hamra street, the main road in west Beirut. In the cab with us were two women of our age, also from the march. The cab driver asked about the march, and what had been happening. One of the women responded 'hay jil jdīd ṭālī' (it's a new generation rising). Better than staying silent, replied the driver. Vacantly, Mansour stared out the window as we moved away from the quickly dispersing crowd.



Figure 1: The protest banner. The bottom right reads 'the Alternative Student Movement'.

At his car, Mansour offered me a lift round to my house at the far end of Hamra, though it would take longer in the car than if we had just walked. His car, bought second hand, has blacked out windows, normally the preserve of the

security forces, the political elite and their families. It frequently causes him hassle at the various checkpoints around the city and on the way up into the mountains. Living outside of Beirut, this was only the second or third time he had driven down since finding himself a couple of hundred metres from the Du Roy hotel when a would-be suicide bomber blew himself up on the third floor a month earlier. When the security forces, tipped off, burst into the room, the suicide bomber detonated himself, blowing a hole in the side of the hotel. Mansour had avoided coming down since. As we wound our way between parked and stationary cars on Makdisi Street, the road parallel to Hamra, we passed the turnings down to the American University of Beirut (AUB), where Mansour was at the time a student and had been involved throughout the year in a protest movement against the raising of tuition fees. We also passed many of the bars and cafés in which we had spent time drinking, eating, and planning political actions. Not hungry, and dejected by the anti-parliamentary extension march, when I suggested we stop somewhere he told me he just wanted to go home. He let me out just after the Syrian Social Nationalist Party's (SSNP) local headquarters, the political party who claim Hamra as their turf. The usual four or five male party members were sitting on plastic garden chairs, smoking, drinking coffee, and laconically having a once-over of every pedestrian who passed by. We agreed to meet up the next week, and I walked back onto Hamra Street, which as always bustled with pedestrians and slow-moving traffic. I walked past more police and army vehicles, stationary on street corners, military police blocking off entire alleys to guard the homes of prominent individuals. I arrived home to find the electricity was still off, though the hum of generators from other apartments told me this even before I tried to turn the light on. I took a candle into the kitchen and made myself a cup of tea.

This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of how political activists produce and maintain the capacity to engage in potentially transformative action in a context where the potential for demobilisation and despair engendered by failure is pervasive. The above description will hopefully have begun to give some sense of the 'failure' through which activists persevered. But it also gives a sense of the recent history of political practice from which activists were able to draw, not least to critique the way things panned out that August day. The past ten years have

seen an uneven rise in independent activism – forms of political action distinct from the twin hegemonic forms of ‘doing politics’ in Lebanon: institutionalised political parties and NGOs. So far, each iteration of this activism has fallen short, often in ways that might appear terminal from the outside. And yet between every protest cycle a sizeable number of persons maintain their engagement and are able to build towards future political opportunities. To give an account of this maintenance of engagement, this thesis turns to the experiential realm of activism to understand how an enduring political subjectivity predicated on the desire for transformative action is produced. It argues that political subjectivity comes about *through* political engagement, not prior to it, and contours the experiential basis of political activism in its wake.

To account for how an activist political subjectivity is maintained this thesis looks to the key roles played by politicised emotions and diffuse solidary feeling states in making the political and social worlds activists inhabit sensible. For what reason did Mansour, Sari, and the other students feel deflated throughout the march? Why was it that anti-Army chants energised and validated the protest action, if only partially? Why, for that matter, were others on the march so vehemently opposed to it? The thesis attends, too, to the significance of the intensity of protest moments in producing and maintaining an activist political subjectivity: in the experience of protest, in its continued circulation after the fact in narrative form, and in the effects it has on the temporality of, and potential for, future protests. It was Mansour’s recollection of the previous parliamentary extension protest, after all, that allowed for a different way of engaging the protest moment, which itself served to charge the atmosphere and altered the rhythm of the protest. Given that activists perform a social ontology in which particular moments have the capacity to rupture the political status quo, I employ an event-centred methodology to better account for the transformative potential of action.

Each chapter that follows will speak to particular aspects of activist experience and relate to academic literatures in anthropology, on the Middle East, and in political science, sociology and geography on their own terms. Whilst coming together as a whole to give an account of the experience of activism in Lebanon, each chapter speaks to individual aspects of that experience: on what basis activists come to understand the political status-quo they oppose (Chapter

2); how their social background and current social practice serve to produce and maintain an activist positionality (Chapter 3); the role of the space of Beirut in their lives, and in particular the deep histories of various neighbourhoods for their sense of belonging (Chapter 4); the cycle of hope, optimism, indignation and rage, despair and, potentially, renewal – both as they were felt and elaborated upon at the time (Chapter 5) and how they were recalled afterwards (Chapter 6); and the distinct activist temporality of rupture (Chapters 7). There are also a set of broader theoretical themes to which each chapter relates even as they pursue their own particular arguments. It is to these that I turn first. They will be approached through the literatures, anthropological and otherwise, from which this thesis draws and to which it contributes. I will then turn to methodological concerns. In particular, I will make the case for an event-centred methodology as better able to account for the transformative potential of social action, and prefigure how such a methodology will play out in this thesis. I then provide a brief historical sketch of political contention in Lebanon as it relates to the instantiation of institutional forms of sectarianism in the Lebanese state, and the various historical responses to it. I close with an outline of chapters.

2. Themes, literatures, approaches

2.ii Political anthropologies of the Middle East

It is important to state from the outset that in discussing political anthropology of the Middle East I am less interested in explicitly ‘political anthropology’, and more interested in how anthropologists of the Middle East have reckoned with ‘politics’ or ‘the political’ in the region more generally. In this regard, there has been an astonishing shift over the last quarter century. From the vantage point of Lila Abu-Lughod’s survey essay of 1989 the anthropology of the Arab world was predominantly interested in areas viewed as ‘exotic, colourful, on the peripheries of the Arab world’. The ‘prestige zones’ of Morocco and then-North Yemen were both rural and ‘away from the central war zones and the political minefield of the conflict over Palestine’ (Abu-Lughod 1989: 179): in other words, such work shied

away from the political wholesale, both as ethnographic object and ethical stance.⁵ Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar's updated survey of the sub-field, *Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies* (2012), tracks the shift from the rural to the urban, and with it the shift to different topics of interest. 'Tribes' drop away as an ethnographic object, discussion of Islam becomes pietistic, responding positively or negatively to Talal Asad's seminal work on Islam as discursive tradition (2009 [1986]), and gender moves from 'harem theory' (Abu-Lughod 1989: 287), underdeveloped and peripheral to feminist theory, to itself a privileged zone of feminist and gender studies critique (Mahmood 2005; Asad et al. 2013).⁶ Meanwhile, the authors identify a number of new metonyms for the sub-field: 'modernities', 'nationalism and the state', 'cultural production and consumption', 'violence', and 'memory/history'.

The sub-field has been particularly active in theorising and investigating the production of subjects, be they modern subjects, political subjects, or ethical/pious subjects. These perspectives, as with most engagements with subjectivity, veer between two conceptualisations of the subject. Either they work through the subjectivation of persons by power-laden structural forces/discourses – modernity, state, and so on. In this form, we find that the subjects produced are resistant, or victims, or suffering – in other words, subjected. Most overt theorising of subjectivity in anthropology has taken this perspective (Ortner 2005; Luhrmann 2006; Biehl et al. 2007). Otherwise, we find investigations of ethical/pious self-formation – here, we find power undertheorised, and the 'political' sidelined in favour of ethics or piety. Here the subject is not subjected, as such, but rather a product of individualised projects of betterment that one is either better or worse at. In either case, authors draw from Foucault – either the Foucault of governmentality and power (1991, 2006), or the Foucault of the technology of the

⁵ As with any such general discussion of trends, there were exceptions even at the time: anthropologists who had been working in the urban Middle East (Gilsenan 1973) or who looked at political conflict head on (Joseph 1978), or who were already engaging in a power-laden discussion of the 'tribal' and 'rural', not least Abu-Lughod herself (1986, 1993). The *privileging* of other topics and concerns, however, is in little doubt.

⁶ It would take too much space to give a fuller account of the back and forth in relation to this work. Two recent polemical exchanges give a sense of what is at stake, as well as the ill-feeling that has been generated. See Gourgouris (2008) and response from Mahmood (2008) in *Public Culture*, and Fadil and Fernando (2015a, 2015b) and response from Schielke (2015a) in *Hau*.

self (1990). In both cases, subjectivity is interior-facing. My own understanding of political subjectivity is somewhat oblique to these discussions, interested as it is with what we might conceive of as the external-facing nature of subjectivity: viscerally felt and maintained, subjectivity here is in fact intersubjective, and neither total subjection nor self-formation is able to transcend its social production. Rather, a political subjectivity allows one to act on the basis of a sense of self *as agentic* but produced through and acting upon only ever partially-pliable materialities, landscapes, feeling states, and wider institutional processes. I will explore what this might mean ethnographically in detail in later chapters, but for now it is important to state that such a perspective opens subjectivity up to a social phenomenological, rather than psychological, reading.

Returning to the anthropology of the Middle East, one clearly underexamined area of the sub-field has been political engagement itself. The privileged zones of research on political engagement, activism, social movements, and so forth have been south and central America and the global North, as I return to in a moment. Where there has been engagement of this sort in the region it has been with pietistic movements. These movements often disavow the political, denying for ideological and exegetical reasons that they are engaging in political activity in the first place (Ismail 2000; Mahmood 2005; Iqtidar 2011). One obvious reason for the paucity of such research, of course, is the potential danger – partly for the researcher, but more pressingly to any potential interlocutors for the research, particularly in contexts of wide-spread state repression. A few exceptions are worth noting. Firstly, the impressive and daring work with Palestinians, whether in the state of Israel, the OPT, or the diaspora in the Middle East, not least in Lebanon (Peteet 1996; Sayigh 1998; Khalili 2007; Allen 2008, 2009). Secondly, work on and with NGO and rights-based organisations. Indeed, as Lori Allen forcefully points out, this had become the pre-eminent form of ‘doing politics’ in the Middle East, replacing a previous party form for disillusioned and browbeaten leftists (Allen 2013).⁷

⁷ Though not exclusively leftists. As Hani, one of my oldest informants, told me, NGO participation was classed as often if not more than it was politically divided – such that ex-members of the Christian exclusivist Right were involved as well. This is corroborated by Anders Hårdig’s research on civil society groups in Lebanon (2011).

In relation to both these exceptions, the Arab revolts of 2010-11 caused a number of epistemological problems: how to explain such an outpouring of overtly and avowedly political engagement – not least insofar as it caught both pietistic and NGO movements on the ground largely unaware?⁸ It is perhaps difficult to recall, in the wake of counter-revolutions, coups, and civil war across the region, but at the time there was both the opening of political possibility and an admission of the inadequacy of certain forms of understanding the Middle East from within anthropology as well as other disciplines. Since then there has been a move back towards indeterminacy, towards the messiness of contestation, and towards ‘the political’ (Deeb & Winegar 2012: 549–550).⁹

Further, there has also been a move towards the intersection of emotions and political subjectivity, firstly, and towards engagement with youth, secondly. It is to these strands in the anthropology of the Middle East that this thesis contributes. My interlocutors were, for the most part, between the ages of 18 and 35. They could and did fit into the concept of *shabāb* (young people), both in relation to age and life-stage (this will be explored further in Chapter 2) – unmarried, with no children, often still living in the natal home or else in university accommodation, if they were employed it was often in precarised or short-term intellectual labour. For such people, the Arab revolutions are a fundamental formative experience for their political subjectivity and sense of political possibility – both insofar as they show that even at the lowest ebb the potential for rupture in seemingly total systems of control and repression exists, and because their legacy continues to be felt in the present. As regards my own fieldwork, this is clearest through the ongoing conflict in Syria, whose effects on Lebanon generally and activists in particular are already evident in the protest action with which this introduction opened.

⁸ Often the former managed to weather the storm awhile and momentarily taste power, not least due to their wide-ranging and entrenched networks. The 2013 coup in Egypt and Ennahda’s loss in Tunisia, however, point to the fact that the organisations have been weakened, if not the networks and support that underlay them. NGOs, meanwhile, have certainly not gone away, and due to their internationalised funding and centrality to the workings of neoliberal state formations in the Middle East they continue. As this thesis will show, belief in their transformative potential is largely gone.

⁹ In particular, Samuli Schielke has forcefully made the case for an attention to practice and indeterminacy in the anthropology of religion and of the Middle East (Schielke 2009, 2015b; Schielke & Debevec (eds) 2012).

This thesis, then, is well-placed to contribute to a Middle East anthropology that is now beginning to grapple seriously with political engagement *qua* the political. Certainly, this does not mean that all is subsumed by the category 'political'. Indeed, this thesis shows how even for persons who stake much of their sense of self on the political, what we are really dealing with is the politicisation of social life, or the political aspects of everyday encounters. As Yael Navaro has recently noted, 'political anthropology' needs to look beyond its standard categories in order to do justice to what is political in the lives and experiences of our interlocutors within their own historical and social contexts (Navaro 2016). Further, in the aftermath of both the anger and optimism of the Arab revolutions – the Egyptian 'day of rage' a particularly apt exemplification of this – and the despair, retrenchment and failures of the period since, my work's interest in analysing the relationship between subjectivity, possibility, affect and emotion in political action is particularly timely and necessary.

2.ii. Political sociology and political science on social movements

Whilst the anthropology of the Middle East is only now beginning to engage with the Arab revolutions and their aftermath – unsurprising given the requirement to engage in long-term fieldwork and our reticence as a discipline to offer immediate reflections – other disciplines have been faster off the mark. This has been in no small part because a theoretical and empirical literature on social movements and political engagement already exists, mostly located at the intersection of political science and political and historical sociology. This literature began as a response to older deviance models of protest and contention. In its earliest days, American political studies treated mass politics of various kinds through the lens of pathology. Methodological individualism led to the psychologising of protestors as badly adapted, with emotional reactions evidencing the irrationality of protestors and as such their placement beyond the pale of liberal democratic politics. Political process theory and its precursors were a direct reaction to these sorts of individual psychological accounts. In their stead, PPT sought to show that activists were in fact acting supremely rationally. They also emphasised the sociological and

structural dimensions of political action in order to de-individualise and de-psychologise activism.¹⁰

Two things ought to be said in relation to this literature. Firstly, it has little to say to the content of social movements – questions of ideology, articulation, disarticulation and dissent fall away (Flacks 2004; Chalcraft 2016, Forthcoming). Secondly, and as many commentators have noted, a project of rationalising contention compelled these authors to occlude the role of emotions in politics. Independently of, but also at times in reaction to, this critique, key theorists in this tradition have accepted the point and attempted to make space for the personal and phenomenological aspects of political activism, and the role of emotions within them: framing this as ‘cognitive liberation’ (McAdam), ‘injustice frames’ (Gamson), or ‘frame alignment’ (Snow and Benson), to list a few prominent examples (Goodwin et al. 2001: 6–9).¹¹ I am in agreement with those within the affective turn in the harder social sciences who suggest that these additions to the core theory are inadequate (Polletta 2004; Thompson & Hoggett 2012). As one of political process theory’s proponents states, ‘we continue to write as though our movement actors (when we actually acknowledge humans in our texts) are Spock-like beings, devoid of passion and other human emotions’ (Benford, quoted in Goodwin et al. 2001: 7). In response, political sociologists and scientists interested in engaging with emotions have gone to a variety of authors and disciplines to find theoretical grounding for their endeavours. If we consider only the contributors to *Passionate Politics* (Goodwin et al. (eds) 2001), the signal text of this turn, then we find the dialogical literary theory of Bakhtin, Volosinov, and Vygotsky (Barker 2001), psychotherapeutic discourses (Whittier 2001), semiotics and cognitive linguistics (Kane 2001), and feminist psychoanalysis (Goodwin & Pfaff 2001). There is no real need to labour the point. Yet it is vital to rehearse the arguments of this type of theorising on political protest because within the wider social science literature its terminology and the assumptions underlying its analyses are still

¹⁰ For a deeper discussion of the historical trajectory that I have here tracked briefly, see any of Goodwin et al. (2001), Goodwin and Jasper (2004a), or Thompson and Hoggett (2012), who all tell much the same story, and from whom my own account is drawn.

¹¹ Whether frame alignment, in particular, ought to be viewed as a response to such a gap is a matter of debate. For the purposes of tracking the critique underpinning the affective turn, it is enough that that is how it has been framed by Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta.

very much in use, even by those who reject the theory itself (Beinin & Vairel (eds) 2013). The importance of an account of emotions in politics can be seen particularly clearly in the case of the Arab revolts and the Middle East over the last few years (Goodwin 2011; Pearlman 2013).¹²

If we return once more to Mansour's experience of the parliamentary extension protest, it would seem particularly counterintuitive to ignore the emotional or affective dimension of contentious forms of political engagement. As the sociologist and activist Richard Flacks has provocatively stated, why is it that the exploration of passionate, intense forms of political action 'seems relatively arid and irrelevant' (2004: 143), not least to people who are themselves engaged in such forms of political action? The protest related above was no aberration: if anything, it was one of the less passionate protest moments that Lebanese independent activists have participated in over the last few years, and to which a number of chapters in this thesis are devoted. But even outside of intense, agonistic moments of protest, political organising, meetings and social interactions between activists were always affectively charged. At times this was an avowed strategy to cultivate appropriate political emotions, but more often than not it was the stuff of social relations, which are never 'dry'. Rather than underplaying, sidelining or intellectualising the passionate and intense dimensions of political activism, we ought to understand how they serve to produce and maintain political activism. An experiential, ethnographic and phenomenological investigation of such political forms is a vital way to do just this.

¹² Though his account of the Iranian revolution does not place emotion front and centre, sociologist Charles Kurzman does pick up on the need to both account for the feel of contention and accept that the predictive logic underlying much of the literature cited above gets us nowhere; for him, willingness to participate in contentious politics 'shift[s] drastically from moment to moment on the basis of amorphous rumours, heightened emotions, and conflicting senses of duty', therefore making 'prediction impossible' (2004: 170).

2.iii. Anthropologies of anarchism, anthropologies of activism

Having fired his broadside at the social movement literature, Flacks calls for a move away from the analysis of mobilisation and towards an analysis of activism (2004: 142). In fact, there is an anthropological literature that has begun to account for the importance of the experience of emotions and affects for contentious forms of political engagement. Anthropological engagements with activism have proliferated over the past fifteen years, motivated in no small part by the growth of activist movements only obliquely related to the standard objects of analysis for previous generations of political anthropologists. Though there is an older, largely transactional literature on political actors in anthropology (Barth 1959, 1981; Leach 1970; Kapferer (ed) 1976), this newer literature on activists, rather than being interested in the putatively rational, calculating micropolitics of interactions between variously powerful individuals, looks to a different set of interests. Where the older literature looked to understand how the political status quo was maintained at a holistic level even as the actors moved amongst and in relation to one another, this newer literature is fundamentally interested in potentially transformative and disruptive forms of political action. For starters, it takes seriously the substantive politics of such actors from within a social and political world that appears at least partially distinct from that of perhaps the majority of other people in the ethnographic context. In other words, it takes political differentiation seriously and as the initial supposition from which analysis can then follow. For anthropologies of activism in this mode, there is something sufficiently different and distinct about activism that makes it worth investigating on its own merits. It is no surprise, then, that the key work in this vein has taken as its object of analysis radical political communities of one sort or another. More often than not, these have been anarchist or filo-anarchist in orientation. There are a number of reasons why this might be the case. The most obvious, perhaps, is an affinity on the part of the anthropologist with the political project of their interlocutors. A more than partial affinity with anarchist forms of practice forms the bedrock of the works of the key writers in this tradition, from David Graeber, Marianne Maeckelbergh and Maple Razsa's work on European and North American direct action networks (Graeber 2009; Maeckelbergh 2009; Razsa & Kurnik 2012; Razsa 2015), to the work of Jeff Juris and Alex Khasnabish on the transnational

capacities of alterglobalisation movements (Juris 2008; Juris & Khasnabish (eds) 2013).

Both Razsa and Juris and Khasnabish have seen a commonality of interest between their projects and those of engaged or advocate anthropologies like those of Charles Hale (2001) or Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995). Where anthropologies of activism often go further is in their at least partial adoption of their interlocutors' para-ethnography (Holmes & Marcus 2006) and native categories to problematise standard conceptions of politics or the political. One effect of this analytical move is to greatly shorten the gap between ethnographer and interlocutor. Juris has called this 'militant ethnography' (2007), where the anthropologist is not merely involved as an advocate for the communities they study, but is a participant on a roughly equal basis with her interlocutors. The researcher 'both seeks to study as well as contribute to social struggle', and anthropological knowledge 'emerges from this participation in activist struggles and in dialogue with movement knowledge production' (Razsa 2015: 14). Another aspect of this affinity is to see anarchism and anthropology – or, at least, contemporary political anthropology – as sister pursuits. In Razsa's words, 'like anthropologists, anarchists understand the political not as a separate sphere, but as permeating every aspect of social life';¹³ going a step further, he proposes that '*fieldwork* in anthropology and *direct action* in contemporary radical politics [are] forms of practice that provide an important corrective to the political and scholarly tendency to treat theory or ideology as somehow more original or transcendent than ordinary practice' (2015: 20). David Graeber, meanwhile, proposes an affinity on the basis of the 'best tradition of ethnography': to 'tease out the implicit logic in a way of life, along with its related myths and rituals, to grasp the sense of a set of practices' (2009: 222); or, 'to try to give the reader the means to imaginatively pass inside a moral and social universe' which might appear radically other in the first instance (2009: 509). What better way to do so than by looking at a political practice so unlike the status quo, which indeed opposes itself to such, and thereby make available to readers different political possibilities (Graeber 2007a)?

¹³ There is a clear debt to feminist consciousness-raising practices in this deconstruction of personal and political spheres.

The potential problems with such a political affinity approach to all fieldwork ought to be clear enough: does this mean that we cannot do fieldwork with those we do not agree with politically? How do we engage in fieldwork where we must move across various groups with divergent political perspectives and practices?¹⁴ Nevertheless, the point stands that such work begins from the desire to understand the radical and revolutionary in contemporary politics. In this regard, this thesis is no different in advocating for the importance of attending to potentially transformative political practice. Ideally, such a perspective places the ethnographer in the position of attending, similarly to her interlocutors, to the potential cracks in the status quo and to place practice front and centre in the production of the political. The political practice of Lebanese independent activists makes this clear, too. As the following chapters will show in detail, so much of political activism in Lebanon is about trying, first, to enact forms of engagement that are able to break with the institutional political status quo and, second, to provide a way to potentially transform it in the future. This has taken the form of a variety of coalitions and mobilisations predicated on protest, but has also taken the form of opening and maintaining alternative social spaces, engaging in long-term relationships of friendship and political engagement with marginalised populations, not least migrant domestic workers, and intellectual and ideological production.

None of this is to portray such activities or those involved as part of a coherent, self-sure or ideologically pure movement. In many ways, independent activism in Lebanon shares clear affinities with the anarchist and horizontalist forms of organising described by many anthropologists in this tradition. A variety of consensus-like forms of decision making have been employed, modified in interesting ways to be more amenable to the particular circumstances, interests, and predispositions of the activists involved. Lebanese activists read and engage widely. The transnational activist networks discussed by Razsa and Juris and Khasnabish are evident in Lebanon, too, in the form of delegations of Indignados from Spain and Brazilian activists coming to skill-share, as well as Syrian

¹⁴ This is a similar argument to that of potentially 'studying up' (Nader 1972), and whether it is possible to work with those we cannot empathise with, or find it difficult to sympathise with (Ho 2009).

anarchists and independent Leftists passing through Beirut on their way away from a Syrian situation in which they see little possibility to act effectively. Many Lebanese activists during study abroad took part in the Occupy movements in the United States and UK, anarchist squats in the Netherlands, student mobilisations, occupations, and strikes across the European continent, to name but a few examples. But independent activists also draw on a deep history of revolutionary leftism in Lebanon, steeped in third-worldism, Arab nationalism and Maoist insurrection. To this trajectory they attempt to emplace themselves in a highly contested form of claim-making that attempts to unseat the institutional inheritors of that tradition, the remnants of the political parties of the Left, that younger activists deem to have betrayed that heritage and be entirely complicit in the institutional political status quo.¹⁵ Further, there is the more recent trajectory of the Arab revolutions and LGBTQI organising across the region. Both of these forms of transnationalism are evident through reciprocal visits, coordination of statements and activities, and the sharing of the different and similar experiences of activism across the region, not least how to remain outside the bind of status quo forms of political practice. All this comes together to form a rather heterogeneous political landscape, informed by a number of leftist trajectories. A partial list of the names of groups, organisations, and movements of the last few years gives a sense of this heterogeneity: the Socialist Forum (*al-muntadā al-ishtirākī*), a Trotskyist vanguardist party, itself quite heterodox and accommodating to horizontalist forms of organising; Bring down the sectarian system! (*isqāṭ al-niẓām al-ṭā'ifī*), the Lebanese chapter of the Arab revolutions, which aped the key chant of that era, (*al-sha'b yurīd*) *isqāṭ al-niẓām* (the people want to bring down the system/regime); the Direct Action Movement (*tayyār al-'amal al-mubāshar*) and *ḥaqqī 'aleyyī* (I must act, lit. 'my right is up to me'), both reactions to the falling apart of *isqāṭ* and which showed their anarchist radical democratic influences clearly; Take Back Parliament!, a reformist movement that attempted to get people outside of the political class elected to parliament;

¹⁵ In this the Lebanese situation is quite different to that which Razsa documents in Croatia and Slovenia, where the state socialist legacy leaves activists unwilling or unable to draw on local historical trajectories (2015: 60).

Nasawiya,¹⁶ an LGBTQI collective and the name of the alternative social space that they ran; the Coop, the collective and social centre which was opened in its wake; #Occupy_AUB, one of the banners and slogans of the 2014-15 tuition fee protests at Lebanon's foremost university. All this ought to give a sense of the incredible wealth of activity and its diversity, as well as the fact of failure and defeat – many of these different forms of engagement were produced as a reaction to a prior form which had not succeeded or fallen apart.

The heterogeneity of activism in Lebanon provokes an important reflection on the current anthropology of activism. Anthropologists of activism have had an interest in autonomous, radically democratic and anti-national/transnational forms of politics, and this interest is intimately tied to the understanding that they have of what activism is. The term itself remains undertheorised in and of itself, and seems more often than not to be coterminous with anarchism, direct action, prefiguration, and radical democracy. This sense of activism as being only that of the radically democratic Left leaves me somewhat cold. After all, an antidemocratic revolutionary still engages in potentially transformative action. Even as contemporary anarchist and left activist communities offer a privileged site in which to think through potentially transformative action, there is no necessary correlation between anarchist practice and activism as a modality of action (though there is a very clear affinity). Each author on anarchist practice states that there is no clear sense in which one might have a form of anarchism that is not at one and the same time activist, given how centrally anarchism is predicated on prefiguring, of being the change you want to see in the world. Yet it cannot cut the other way: we must have a conception of activism that is able to accommodate other forms of political engagement, even and particularly when they are forms that we might find objectionable.

While I share the same forms of affinity with my interlocutors as those of Razsa, Graeber, and so forth, the sheer heterogeneity of Lebanese independent activism requires a certain amount more latitude in relation to activist-like responses to the political status quo than the alterglobalisation movement from which there is, nevertheless, clear and concerted cross-pollination. To this

¹⁶ lit. feminism. Whilst the name would be properly transliterated as *nasawiyya*, the collective itself used the form above. I keep to this below.

literature on activism, then, this thesis will contribute on two counts. Firstly, it will offer an analytical definition of activism with comparative applicability beyond radically democratic forms of political practice, even as such practice remains its ethnographic focus. It is the temporality of activist practice that is, importantly, what differentiates activism from other forms of political action, at least if we have an interest in the term as a potential analytical rather than descriptive and contextually-specific category. The latter stages of this thesis will show this concretely. Such a conceptualisation opens up the potential discussion of activism against criticisms of political close-mindedness whilst also freeing us to come to terms with the particular ways in which radically democratic forms of activism are particularly well-attuned to the social reality of activism.

Secondly, my good (or perhaps bad) luck in arriving to carry out my fieldwork in a period in which failure was in the air – as Mansour’s dejection during the parliamentary protest ought to make clear – helps us move forward and account for the worries anthropologists in this field have had about demobilisation and disappearance. Razsa, for example, worries each time he returns to the field that his interlocutors will be ‘simply burned out, exhausted [from] fighting in conditions that seem to undermine their efforts at every turn’ (2015: 217). At the same time, the ‘volatility’ of such political activism makes participants difficult to represent coherently without overstating their own coherence: ‘dynamic and militant one moment, nearly non-existent another’ (Razsa 2015: 212). As the thesis will make clear, there are a number of things that activists do consciously and unconsciously as part of their practice that maintain activist capacity in the face of defeat and failure. We should look to these moments concertedly, as it is in these inevitable moments of defeat and despair that much capacity-building and maintenance work takes place. Further, by attending to such moments, we gain a better appreciation of the amount of work that goes into maintaining a base level of engagement when the potential to succeed in transformative action seems most unlikely. It will also help us understand the ‘out of nowhere’-ness of explosions of protest and contestation, particularly when they appear already sophisticated in relating to the state, institutional politics, and security forces.

2.iv. Affect

Given the potential for reconceptualising social change, the relationship between structure and agency, and how experience in social life is conceived, it is puzzling that, beyond others working within the sub-field of the anthropology of activism, there has been little cross-fertilisation with other thematic interests in anthropology. To my mind, the relatively recent anthropological engagement with affect is precisely such a thematic interest to which the ethnography of activism is well-placed to contribute. Maple Razsa, whose work already makes important insights in this regard, though less overtly than he might (2015: 99–147), concludes his monograph on political activists in the former Yugoslavia by calling for a ‘subjective turn’ in the sub-field:

If we hope to approach social movements, radical politics, and collective struggle ethnographically – and affirmatively – we must also do justice to the romance. Powerful feelings of camaraderie, commonality, loyalty, solidarity – even love for one another and the collective – are a critical part of radical political experience, born of shared struggle. In some cases, these experiences are at the very emotional centre of individual motivation and inspiration. If scholars cannot convey these emotional stakes, critical reflection will be only cynicism, and blinkered cynicism at that. We must find ways to represent the powerful emotional charge generated when activists transcend social divisions of gender, class, and national belonging, no matter how fleetingly. (Razsa 2015: 213–214)

With this, Razsa is in agreement with a number of critical voices on social movements outside of anthropology. Richard Flacks, as we have seen, is responding to this phenomenological (and ethnographic) imperative to do justice to the experience of ‘passionate politics’, as is the affective turn more generally (Goodwin et al. (eds) 2001).

It should be clear that there is a certain terminological looseness in these calls. The referent might be obvious – the *force* of political engagement – particularly for anyone who has been involved in such forms of political struggle, but the terms used to denote it are fairly wide-ranging: is this a ‘subjective’, ‘emotive’, or ‘affective’ turn? What is the ethnographic object we are trying to get to grips with? Emotion? Affect? Intensity? Feeling? To begin to get a sense of what

is at stake in such terminological difference, I begin by looking at the relationship – or lack of one – between anthropological engagements with emotion and with affect. Stepping back from political activism for a moment, we find a strong history of work on emotions in anthropology. Stretching back to the 1980s and early 1990s this literature argued for the strongly determining nature of discourse (Abu-Lughod 1993; Lutz & Abu-Lughod 1993). In this tradition, emotion talk is seen as performative and brings into being the emotions that it describes. This literature’s emphasis on the constructed nature and cultural specificity of emotion convincingly argued against the essentialisation of feeling, and served to ‘kidnap the emotions from the psychological disciplines, turning them into anthropological objects of study’, in Navaro’s suggestive phrasing (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 24; see also Richard & Rudnycky 2009: 61). The argument for the social construction and cultural specificity of emotions has, generally speaking, been accepted within anthropology. Debate within the sub-field now relates to how best to capture the absolute cultural specificity and nuance of emotions (Beatty 2013), or in further deconstructing our implicit categories of ‘emotion’ (Lutz 2013).

Motivated by the works of Brian Massumi (2002), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003), and Teresa Brennan (2004), ‘affect’ enters the anthropological lexicon with force in the 2000s (Richard & Rudnycky 2009). These authors, Massumi in particular, spurred on by a project of rejecting the discursive turn of which emotion literature in anthropology was an undeniable part, looked to the prediscursive and preconscious ways in which we are constantly affecting and being affected by others and our surroundings. Massumi relies heavily on experimental psychology to claim that we begin to respond affectively to external stimuli faster than it is possible to cognise them (i.e. render them into a discursively coordinated emotion).¹⁷ As such affect comes to be tied to the not-discursive and to the space outside of people’s minds, whether it is their bodies, the environment around them, or objects in their world.¹⁸ Signal texts of the

¹⁷ See Hemmings (2005) and Leys (2011) for a strong critique of this strand in affect theory, and in particular the latter for a discussion of Massumi’s (willful) misconstrual of the results of these experiments.

¹⁸ The touchstone works with which I have been engaging most fully are Navaro-Yashin (2012) and Gordillo (2014), but see also earlier engagements such as Tsing (2005) and Stewart (2007).

affective turn in anthropology (Stewart 2007; Stoler 2008; Navaro-Yashin 2012), then, are opposed to the emotion literature of a previous period, which looked to discourse, to self-fashioning, and to interiority. Yael Navaro makes just this point when she notes that anthropological work on emotion, in the same way as more recent work on subjectivity, 'remain[s] within the human philosophical tradition' which her engagement with affect attempts to overcome: 'if affect does not refer to subjectivity, if it is something that simply cannot be reduced to human interiority, then what is it? And if affect is different from the emotions or feelings, how are we to conceptualize it?' (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 26).

Beyond attempting to displace 'the individualising and psychologising effects [...] of emotion' (Pelkmans 2013), the affective turn in anthropology has had very little to say about emotion. Precisely because this literature externalises the production of feeling and locates it in the environment, or else between the environment and the individual, much of the anthropology of affect has been interested in materiality and space.¹⁹ Though they draw upon the work of bombastic affect theorists, anthropologies of affect serve to produce a more complicated picture of affect. For example, Gaston Gordillo states that affects are 'mediated by socially constituted sensibilities that are not just cultural but [...] habitual' (2014: 22). Further, anthropologists of affect work in landscapes that show signs of ruination throughout (Stoler 2008; Navaro-Yashin 2009), and so place great emphasis on present understandings of the historical processes that have brought that ruination into being. Witness Gordillo's characterisation of his own ethnographic project: 'conceiving of rubble as the lens through which to examine space negatively: by way of the places that were negated to create the geographies of the present' (Gordillo 2014: 11).

As the parliamentary extension protest's movement through the various landscapes of Beirut with their different materialities and histories show, affect and space indelibly mark political activism in Lebanon. As Chapter 3 of this thesis will show, particular *bright landscapes* in the city were crucial to the production of activist political subjectivity. Hamra with its left cosmopolitan history was a paradigmatic site that afforded the possibility for alternative forms of political

¹⁹ Often there is explicit mention of the more established literature on affect in geography (Anderson 2006, 2009; Tolia-Kelly 2006; Thrift 2007).

engagement, even as it served to ghetto-ise such alternative forms, and even as claims were made on the space by other powerful institutional political forces. As the following chapters will show, such contestation always carried the latent possibility of violence, a possibility that has been realised in the recent past. Other sites, like securitised and depopulated Downtown, are spaces where one goes to contest but which are not worth contesting themselves. Finally, the neighbourhood of Mar Mikhael served, during my time in the field, as another site in which activists spent time. Their affective attachment to the neighbourhood, however, was of a different order to that of Hamra. A stronghold of the Christian right-wing, its historical resonances were of a different variety altogether. Some spaces are good to do politics, then, while others preclude alternative forms of political engagement entirely, and others still are complex and mutable in yet other ways.

Beyond space and materiality, though, affect has a set of connotations worth considering here: force, intensity, viscosity. It is to these that those critical voices in movement studies and the anthropology of activism refer and which they wish to better conceptualise. Over a year after the parliamentary extension protest Mansour mentioned to me how terrified he had been throughout the portion of the march in which we walked through the 'enemy' territory of Zarif. As we discussed the pro-Palestine activism he had been involved in since coming to study in the United Kingdom, he began to compare the intensities of activist politics in Lebanon and the UK. Of the latter, and in contradistinction to the former, he stated: 'there's no weight [to it]. No fear in it'. Contentious forms of political engagement are charged, intense, visceral. Their force is central to enabling particular forms of political engagement, and they make certain actions, ideologies, alliances, tactics and strategies meaningful to particularly located people in particular ways. Once an intense political moment has been experienced it serves, as in Mansour's case above, to contour how one engages with political experience and horizons of possibility afterwards. In so doing, the affective develops an afterlife, continuing to have an effect long after the moment in which it was felt.

The experience of political activism in Lebanon was replete with moments of intensity of one form or another. More often than not these took the form of intense, often violent, engagements with opposing political forces, which my interlocutors invariably referred to as *mashākil* (fights, sing. *mashkal*), even when

their opponents were state security forces.²⁰ As this thesis will show, such intense moments were absolutely central to the production and maintenance of an activist political subjectivity. They continued to circulate afterwards in narrative form as stories, jokes, and insults. The affectively inculcated knowledge that came out of those moments of intensity still serve to contour the various red lines for activist practice up to the present. By accounting for intense moments in political activism, as well as the ways those moments endure in activist daily practice, this thesis is uniquely placed to provide an account of the relationship between affect as intense feeling and avowed action – in other words, political activism. Further, by providing a phenomenological and experiential account of the spaces of activism in Beirut, this thesis provides a critical anthropology of affect – one that speaks back to bombastic affect theorists who see affect as a panacea for the world’s political ills. Affect is neither free-floating nor pre-discursive, and is not a way to be liberated from one’s social reality. Through careful attention to the fraught and contentious ways in which activists make affective claims on certain spaces in the city, and in the ways that those spaces always at least partially escape those claims, this thesis calls for a critical anthropology of affect. Further, it provides a fine-grained account of the fraught co-constitution of (political) subjectivity and the structure of feeling of political engagement *through* historical, material, and affective space.

3. Practice, events, method

The importance of particular moments of intensity for political activism requires a methodology that is open to the potential for transformation. Given that activism is predicated on the belief that one’s actions are potentially able to change the world one cannot do justice to activist practice without a way to reckon with that

²⁰ More properly in Lebanese vernacular *mashkal* refers to an altercation. In the context of the *mashākil* I go on to discuss in this thesis, however, the referents were always physical altercations.

potential. It is with this possibility in mind that Maple Razsa has called for an affirmative anthropology:

Given the continuing crisis of the political imagination, in which, despite years of persistent economic crisis, it seems so difficult to imagine alternatives [...] scholars, if they truly wish to contribute politically, must move beyond the critique of neoliberalism and toward the affirmation of political alternatives. (Razsa 2015: 27)

For Razsa, this is a political and ethical stance. But it is at the same time a methodological question: how can we best account for the potential for transformation in social life, and how can we best make this possibility legible and available to readers of ethnographic texts?

Recently, Bruce Kapferer has outlined what he calls ‘an anthropology of generic moments’ (2015). He begins by stating that events are normally conceived of in anthropology either ‘(1) as exemplifications or illustrations [...] of more general ethnographic descriptive or theoretical assertions, or (2) as happenings or occasions, slices of life, that establish a conundrum or problematic that the presentation of an ethnography and its analysis will solve or otherwise explain’ (2015: 1). Whilst not breaking with ‘event-as-case approaches’, Kapferer calls for a reorientation:

The aim is toward the exploration of the event as a singularity of forces in which critical dimensions of socio-cultural existence reveal new potentials of the ongoing formation of socio-cultural realities. The approach to the event discussed here is one that goes beyond conventional perspectives of the event as representational of the social or of society and, instead, as a moment or moments of immanence and the affirmation and realisation of potential. (2015: 1–2)

The call, then, is to begin by accounting for the potential for rupture, change, or transformation when coming to terms with what our interlocutors do. There are, of course, affinities with a strand of ‘post-structuralists, especially of a post-Nietzschean Deleuzian persuasion’ (2015: 2), in Kapferer’s words, who espouse a vitalist philosophy of constant becoming in the world. But Kapferer also traces a longer genealogy for an event methodology within anthropology, from the heterodox structural-functionalism of Max Gluckman and the Manchester School

(‘situational analysis’) through to the critical structuralism of Marshall Sahlins (‘structure of the conjuncture’). In each case practice becomes the key site through which to understand the transformative potential of any particular moment (2015: 9, 14–15, 16–17).

Of course, by accounting for potential we must not be tricked into seeing *only* becoming. In the Lebanese activist context of failure, potentiality was always butting up against what felt like the absolute impossibility of change – a political stasis in which things felt like they might fall apart at any minute and yet the situation would never change. One need only think of the juxtaposition of car and suicide bombings, a political class cancelling an entire electoral cycle – in so doing rendering themselves unconstitutional – and a protest march that no one had any faith in, with which this introduction began. The Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, writing about the Palestinian situation in Lebanon during the 1982 Israeli invasion, described it as ‘cement transiency’ (Darwish 1995). That feeling of static crisis endures. On one level, people in Lebanon know this is not the case, or it is so only ever partially. A lot has happened to the Lebanese and the various recognised and occluded populations on Lebanese soil since 1982. Further, the current political status quo is perhaps ten years old, stretching back to the post-Syrian withdrawal division of institutional political life between the March 8th and March 14th blocs. In any case, one could make excellent arguments for more fundamental change since then: the Israeli war of 2006, the civil conflict of 2008, and the civil war across the border in Syria have each further altered the political situation in Lebanon. Yet the experience of stasis endures. *‘ādī* (it is normal), a phrase that neatly encapsulates and domesticates any number of outraged conversations shared in Lebanon amongst friends and family whenever impunity was exercised by powerful figures in the country. Cancelling parliamentary elections? *‘ādī*. Beating a civil servant for not giving you preferential treatment? *‘ādī*. Offering advice to an enemy state, to bomb only non-Christian areas of Lebanon, next time hostilities open? For those who already expected such behaviour, *‘ādī*. This is not to reassert an orientalist trope of passive Arabs – thoroughly blown out of the water by the Arab revolts of 2010-11, in any case – but it is to give a sense of the feeling of inability to do anything about such outrages. As the 2015 trash protests show – and with which this thesis closes – there are certain limits beyond which

non-activists are also compelled to act, and an *‘ādī* discourse of cynical detachment was not constant or capable of defusing all outrage.

What marks activists out, nevertheless, is precisely the fact that on some level, even when they also partake of an *‘ādī* perspective, a social ontology of potential transformation endures: it imbues their political subjectivity and affords them the capacity for political activism. Social ontology here denotes simply what activists understand the nature of social reality to be. Specifically, that they implicitly (and often explicitly) understand social reality as mutable and punctuated by potential spaces and times of rupture and transformation. The ethnographic narrative of this thesis follows on from this social ontology. It pays particular attention to the multiple event-like moments of political activist experience. It is influenced by Kapferer’s methodological conceptualisation of generic moments and also makes use of a modified version of Alain Badiou’s conception of ‘the event’ as a radical transformative moment that is only ever understood as such post hoc (2003, 2011). In truth, however, my methodology is fundamentally influenced by my interlocutors. I came to reading Badiou and the anthropology of the event only once I had left the field. Kapferer’s essay, meanwhile, gave a version of anthropological history with which to make a genealogical claim from within the discipline, but only served to offer ballast to ideas that were already evident from my own fieldnotes. This is because activists themselves *already* reckon with social reality in terms of potentially transformative moments, moments that can become event-like in their aftermath insofar as they continue to circulate as meaningful. How could it be otherwise if one conceives of one’s social action as potentially transformative of the world? A vast theoretical and practical literature already exists on such moments amongst activists: how to bring them about, how to make the best of them when they arrive, and so on. ‘Situationism’ was precisely such a political ideology, predicated on ‘the creation of “situations” where one could subvert the logic of the Spectacle and recapture one’s own imaginative powers’ (Graeber 2009: 527). Contemporary anarchist practice, meanwhile, is predicated on ‘the realisation that we are, effectively, already in a situation of permanent revolution. Freedom becomes the struggle itself’ (Graeber 2009: 527). As the later chapters in this thesis will show, my independent activist interlocutors have come upon their own nuanced

temporality of rupture to provide a practical schema for action in everyday and exceptional moments. This schema has been arrived at through previous political engagements – and it is for this reason that it is so compelling and strongly maintained as part of activist political subjectivity.

As is the experience of almost all anthropologists in the field, I followed what my interlocutors were doing. I followed their practice and the rhythms of their lives. I allowed their experience to dictate what I did in the field and how I approached the project of coming to terms with the endurance of political activism in Lebanon. My intention before arriving to begin fieldwork had been to become involved in the Take Back Parliament campaign. I would join and make myself helpful as and when I could, getting to know those involved in that campaign and snowball from there. I would attend whichever political meetings it was deemed acceptable for me to attend. I would participate in the various political actions my interlocutors were involved in. This initial plan was quickly thrown out the window after the first parliamentary extension, which took place immediately before I went to the field. By the time I arrived Take Back Parliament was, a scant few optimistic participants aside, fundamentally over. My first weeks in the field were, therefore, both anxious and frustrating as I tried to use now defunct phone numbers and email addresses to get in touch with potential interlocutors. Yet this period did not last long. Beirut has many sites of leisure, consumption and social interaction patronised by precisely those I wanted to get to know. Further, though Take Back Parliament was gone, there were a number of other initiatives that endured. It was to these and new initiatives that the dejected and burnt out participants in Take Back Parliament went to sustain themselves and build once more. These various spaces and political initiatives are the material that I present and discuss in the following chapters.

As to my methods, I was able to do much as I had hoped before arriving: I spent as much time as possible in the various activist social and leisure spaces, took part in meetings when that was deemed appropriate, helped maintain and run parts of those political initiatives, took part in reading groups and consciousness raising activities, participated in protests and direct actions. Most important, however, were the myriad conversations and reflections on prior political practice and signal moments of intense protest. The atmosphere of failure

in the early months of my fieldwork allowed me to begin understanding the various parameters of political activism in Lebanon, not least because the desire to reflect and work anew was shared wholeheartedly by those activists who had not become completely demoralised and demobilised by the previous intense period of political activity. It was in and through these moments that the importance of potentially transformative events and, perhaps ironically, political practice became evident and could not be ignored. In the jokes, reminiscences and mutual understandings. In the rage and indignation at others in the social field – NGOs and institutional political parties foremost amongst them. In the love and joy of in-group solidarity. And in the absolute, categorical, embodied knowledge of the difficulties posed by one's positionality as an activist of relative privilege desirous of a mass form of political engagement.

In relation to positionality, it is important to explain how I related to my interlocutors and how I was able to gain the kind of access that I did. My own affinity with the subjects of this thesis ought to be in little doubt by this point. This affinity was based on my own involvement in equivalent forms of activism in the UK, stretching back to my first years of university. This is a similar trajectory to almost all anthropologists who work on activism and is hardly surprising, given that much activism of this sort can be secretive, by requirement often, at times by paranoia – though too many examples of surveillance and bad faith abound, in Lebanon and across the world, to chalk this up solely as paranoia.²¹ My own activist history certainly afforded me access and rapport far quicker than might otherwise have been the case, and certainly more than an ethnographer either inimical or apathetic to activist activity would have achieved. I was told as much on any number of occasions by close friends in the field. More than one interlocutor pointed out that had it not been clear what my politics were, then, as with so many researchers who come to Lebanon to carry out research on 'civil society', I would have been fobbed off as quickly as possible. My own Lebanese extraction was also important, perhaps more so for my interlocutors than for myself. My interest in

²¹ The ongoing court cases and revelations in relation to police infiltration and spying on left wing and green activists in the UK – to the point of engaging in romantic relationships and having children with activists – ought to give a sense of this (Lubbers 2012; Lewis & Evans 2014).

going to the Middle East to carry out research had been longstanding, and I undertook a degree in Arabic for precisely this reason, having been born and mostly resident in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, my Lebanese identity made it such that my interlocutors felt that I 'got' the Lebanese political situation, both the status quo that they deemed deficient, but also the activist impulse to transform it. I was told over and over again that it was pointless trying to get a Westerner to understand, and often not worth the bother, in any case. Whether this is in fact true or not, it coloured my experience of and capacity to undertake fieldwork on activism in Lebanon.

4. Historical context

Whilst this thesis might not be historical anthropology, it is certainly an anthropology of historicity, in the vein of Charles Stewart and Eric Hirsch's definition of 'the ongoing social production of accounts of pasts and futures' (2005: 262). In Lebanon the past is everywhere, fraught and unresolved. It is in the materiality of the city itself. For activists who are constantly attempting to emplace themselves in particular left trajectories, even as they try to displace others from them, the past cannot but be in the present, if never particularly neatly. As such, I do not subscribe to separating out the ethnographic present from the history that makes sense of it. Throughout the chapters the 'present' of my time in the field is always intermingled with the immediate past of activist practice and the longer *durée* of oppositional political history in Lebanon – what I call *living history* and *mythic past*, respectively, in Chapter 7. Nevertheless, there are a few important historical markers that it is important for the reader to know before beginning to discuss activist experience in Lebanon. In order to grasp both the political status quo against which they are reacting as well as the historical resources and trajectories that my interlocutors were able to draw on I offer here a brief history of the sectarian political system and the history of leftist opposition and contestation of it.

The most important point to stress about sectarianism in Lebanon is that it is a recent phenomenon. The same is also true of Lebanon as an entity. The republic of Lebanon formally came into existence in 1943. The borders for this new state were delineated for the first time in 1920, with the French – who in the aftermath of the First World War came to control Lebanon and Syria by mandate – administratively connecting Mount Lebanon with the cities on the coast, the Beqaa Valley to the east, and the agrarian plains to the south. The Mountain had historically been the only geographical entity recognised by the title ‘Lebanon’. This had also been true administratively; under the Ottomans the cities of the coast were under the command of separate governors, while Mount Lebanon had its own administrative forms. In 1920 the French Mandate authorities established Greater Lebanon on the borders along which Lebanon presently exists, producing a constitution in 1926, and in 1943 the country was granted independence. The sectarian political division of representation was cemented in the new parliamentary system, based on a 1932 census, which divided parliament 6:5 in favour of Christians.²² The National Pact, an unwritten document agreed upon by the Sunni and Maronite leaderships, cemented the division of political posts between sects. It is only with this history in mind, and particularly the terms upon which the Republic of Lebanon was founded, that we can try to understand opposition to this political system.

The standard narrative proposed by its defenders is that the ‘consociational’ system of government allowed for sectarian rivalries to play out non-violently through parliament (Binder (ed) 1966; Hudson 1988). Lebanon provided financial services for the oil-rich countries in its vicinity. This, alongside its canton-like demographics and its mountain landscape gave rise to the appellation of ‘Lebanon, Switzerland of the East’ (Traboulsi 2007: 92). Its relative freedom of the press made it a literary hub. As time progressed, factors external to the consociational system began to put pressure on it. Arab nationalist sentiments, and particularly the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon after 1967, were instrumental in the outbreak of civil war. So too was the underrepresentation of the Shia within the consociational system, finally put right at the end of the civil

²² See Maktabi (1999) for a discussion of how the census was manipulated to exclude non-Christians.

war with the re-equilibration of parliamentary seats and divestment of power from the Maronite President. Once the system that had held sectarian animosities in check fell apart those tensions turned violent.

Yet even from its creation as a state a large minority in Lebanon disagreed with its existence as a polity. Two coups, one in 1949 and another in 1961, were attempted by the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) in the name of Greater Syria. Arab nationalist sentiment continued to increase throughout the period, particularly after the rise of President Nasser in Egypt and, in a more leftist formulation, after the *naksa* (setback) in 1967, also known as the Six Day War. From then on, the importance of the Palestinian liberation struggle in Lebanese politics is difficult to overstate. Mass demonstrations followed the death, in 1968, of Khalil Jamal, the first Lebanese martyr in the Palestinian liberation struggle, as well as after the Israeli raid on Beirut Airport at the end of that year, the Israeli assassination of three PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) targets in 1973, and after each instance of fighting between the PLO and the Lebanese Army (El Khazen 2003: 129–184).

Simultaneously, the four main Lebanese universities saw large-scale student strikes throughout the 1970s, with the Lebanese University (LU) caught in a cycle of almost perpetual strikes from 1968 until the outbreak of civil war. Fawwaz Traboulsi, now a sociologist but at the time participant, has called this foment ‘a radical questioning of Lebanese and Arab societies’ (Traboulsi 2007: 169). An example of the radical nature of the student protest movement is evident in the fact that then-President Franjiyeh considered shutting the LU for the academic year 1972 for fear of the student unrest causing ‘a revolutionary situation’ (Traboulsi 2007: 170). At the time ‘22 percent [of students] at SJU [Saint-Joseph University], 29 percent at AUB [the American University of Beirut], and 50 percent at LU said that what was needed was a revolution rather than reform’ and that ‘11 percent of the students at SJU, 12 percent at AUB, and 28 percent at LU considered themselves leftists who “recommend the use of violence, if necessary”’ (Barakat 1977: 122). The trade union movement also became more radicalised. The threat of a general strike was used by the General Workers Union of Lebanon (GWUL) from 1970, who finally called the general strike in 1973. Strikes and demonstrations occurred in most all parts of rural Lebanon from 1968 onwards,

and a massive strike at the Ghandour chocolate factory was put down by a lockout and large-scale police violence against striking workers (Traboulsi 2007:165-169).

New political groups came into existence from the splintering of the Arab National Movement after 1967 and became involved in each of the Palestinian, student, and trade union struggles: on the Palestinian side the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and its own splinter groups, and on the Lebanese side the Organisation for Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL). Meanwhile, the already extant leftist parties were radicalised by all these events: both Iraqi and Syrian Ba‘th parties, the various Nasserist parties, as well as the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and the Progressive Socialist Party of Kamal Joumblatt (PSP). All these groups were to come together to form the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) in June 1973, and were to become the belligerents on one side of the two-year war of 1975-76. After the 1972 elections it became clear to this coalition that any further advances would require the abolition of sectarian quotas in parliament. In many ways the two-year war can be seen as an attempt to force this change. In Traboulsi’s words: ‘as revolution was not made ‘from above’, it was to be made, in the most vicious and destructive manner, ‘from below’ (2007: 173). The transitional reform programme produced by the LNM during the civil war, which called for the complete ‘deconfessionalisation’ of the electoral, civil, and military apparatuses of the Lebanese state, shows the integration of antisectarianism with the whole range of leftist ideologies involved in this period (El Khazen 2000: 309-313). The words of Kamal Joumblatt, leader of the LNM in this period and subsequently assassinated in 1977, perhaps best sum up the feelings of political possibility and reckless bravado: ‘the adventure was worth the try...’ (quoted in Traboulsi 2007: 187).

The end of the civil war came in part due to a final round of infighting among the Christian forces and in part thanks to public nonviolent opposition to each sectarian militia’s policing of its own space. Yet the end of the war brought no judgment, no truth and reconciliation committee, but rather a general amnesty that meant the majority of the political class were those same militia leaders that had risen to prominence during the war years. The official policy was one of intentional amnesia for fear of the civil war’s re-eruption (Makdisi & Silverstein (eds) 2006; Volk 2008; Haugbolle 2010). By this point the revolutionary ideologies

with which opposition to the sectarian status quo had previously been coupled were waning significantly. Though there were many voices for remembrance and justice coming from beyond the ranks of the political class, there remained a general state of amnesia under the neoliberal premiership of Rafic Hariri (Makdisi 2006; Baumann 2012). Following the assassination of Hariri in 2005, the Israeli war of 2006, and the cold war in Lebanon between America, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states on one side, and Iran and Syria on the other, a sectarian reading of the parliamentary political situation became harder to ignore.

In particular, since 2005 institutional politics in Lebanon has been split between two parliamentary blocs: March 8th and March 14th. Following Hariri's assassination, calls for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanese territory intensified. Two demonstrations took place. The first, held on March 8th, was in support of the Syrian presence in Lebanon. The second, held on March 14th, was in support of its withdrawal. This withdrawal happened soon after, and by April 26th all Syrian troops had retreated. Both rallies numbered in the hundreds of thousands, showing how large-scale popular engagement was on both sides (Fattah 2005, Sharp 2006). Two new parliamentary blocs grew out of these demonstrations, naming themselves after the date of their respective demonstration. By 2005 anti- and non-sectarian parties had grown incredibly weak. The dominant parties each had a sectarian base, and any appeal outside of this base was minimal.²³ The March 14th coalition included the Christian Maronite parties, the Lebanese Forces and the Phalanges (*katā'ib*, rendered Kataeb), as well as the Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), and the Sunni Future Movement, now headed by Rafic Hariri's son, Saad. The main members of the March 8th coalition were Hizballah and Amal, the two Shi'i parties, and Michel Aoun's Christian Free Patriotic Movement,²⁴ as well as the major remnants of the various anti- and non-sectarian parties.²⁵ Many on both

²³ The exception to this is Hizballah, who had enjoyed, particularly after Israeli withdrawal from the south of Lebanon in 2000, widespread popular support in their role as the resistance to Israeli aggression.

²⁴ Aoun had been Prime Minister at the end of the civil war, and declared a 'liberation war' against Syrian occupation, which precipitated the end of the Civil War. He was forced into exile, to France, to avoid Syrian retribution.

²⁵ Except the Democratic Left (*al-yasār al-dīmūqrāṭī*), that is. By 2006, however, this group had become a cipher, though it played an important role in the history of independent activism. I will return to this in Chapter 6.

sides of the divide have been only too happy to stoke sectarian tensions and speak in terms of their own sect's best interests.²⁶

The subsumption of what remained of the historic parties of the Left into these two coalitions has produced a historic gap between a younger generations of activists, the subjects of this ethnography, and potential allies from older generations. The effects of this generational gap will become clear over the course of the following chapters. The pre-eminent form of political engagement since the 1990s has been NGO employment, or else NGO-like campaigns aimed at certain forms of recognition in the eyes of the state. Whilst the hegemony of NGO forms is less evident in the Global North (though by no means absent), elsewhere in the world this is not the case. As Lori Allen has compellingly shown, belief in the capacity for NGOs and rights-based campaigns to effect change is now at a low ebb, even as other potential forms of political engagement do not seem forthcoming (Allen 2013). It is in this environment that the following account of political activism begins.

Finally, it is important to briefly discuss 'sectarianism' in the Lebanese context, given its centrality to the political status quo that my interlocutors seek to change. We ought to draw an analytic distinction between sectarianism as a form of identification – that is, of sectarianism as structure of feeling – and political sectarianism – that is, 'the legal, bureaucratic, and historical architecture of both Lebanese state and Lebanese citizens' (Mikdashi 2011). To begin with the former, 'sect' has a set of connotations that tie it to a group of people understood either by themselves or those around them to constitute a group. It follows that sectarianism is to act or be understood to act by others or oneself through affiliation to that group. Sectarianism in this mode is a form of identification.

Another mode of sectarianism is brought to light by what the state and political system require of you as a Lebanese citizen; that is, its institutional mode. The Lebanese constitution of 1926 was drafted under French Mandate control. The three articles pertaining to sectarian divisions were article 9 on freedom of belief, article 10 on confessional schooling, and article 95 on the abolition of political

²⁶ Witness the words of Michel Aoun, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, on the deadlock over the electoral law: 'We Christians already rejected the 1960 Law, so did the Muslims, so now they want us to go back to a 1960 Law in disguise' (Kossayfi 2013).

sectarianism. This constitution was modified by the Ta'if Accord of 1989, which augured the beginning of the end of the civil war. Articles 9 and 10 remained unchanged: the former 'guarantees that the personal status and religious interests of the population, to whatever religious sect they belong, is respected'; the latter that 'education is free insofar as it [...] does not interfere with the dignity of any of the religions', and also that 'there shall be no violation of the right of religious communities to have their own schools'. Article 95 was modified. First, the balance of Christian and Muslim seats in parliament was altered from 6:5 to parity. Secondly, the 'principle of confessional representation' was abolished except for top tier posts. Thirdly, the first elected parliament after Ta'if was tasked with creating a National Committee to 'propose the means to ensure the abolition of confessionalism' and 'supervise the execution of the transitional plan' (all ICL 1994). This never materialised.

Apologists for the confessional system argue that it is 'a reflection of the country's plural political culture' (El Khazen 2000: 389) and that 'the abolition of the confessional system would have undermined the very basis of democracy in the country' (El Khazen 2000: 24). In other words, that it is a reflection of and curb on sectarianism in wider Lebanese society. In contrast, oppositional and revisionist analyses (Barakat 1977; Makdisi 2000; Mikdashi 2011) show how political sectarianism is itself productive of sectarianism as a wider structure of feeling in Lebanese society. The opening two chapters of this thesis will look in detail at the experience of the sectarian system on the part of those who attempt to oppose the interpersonal networks of sectarian patronage and privilege, compulsion and intimidation, and the institutional forms of political subjection.

5. Outline of chapters

In Chapter 2 I begin by providing a description of the institutional political status quo against which my interlocutors orient their political engagement. I do so through a consideration of the political year cycle at an important site for both institutional and oppositional politics: the American University of Beirut. University politics acts as a(n imperfect) model for national politics, variously

upholding the Lebanese status quo and showing the potential spaces for a politics-otherwise to break through the cracks. In this, it serves too as a model of the horizons of political possibility for independent activism in Lebanon outright – in the hopes and despairs it activates, in the (often slender) possibilities for oppositional politics and in the foreclosing of those possibilities more often than not. The politics-otherwise of student activists comes to provide a set of limiting affinities/principled stances against institutional politics: independence, secularity, and leftism. Here I begin to ask questions that I return to throughout the thesis: How do independent activists relate to their social, political and material environment? On what basis is an activist political subjectivity able to distinguish itself from the institutional political field in Lebanon? What is the relationship between the seeming inability to break through the status quo and the continued production of a politics-otherwise?

Chapter 3 turns from what institutional politics feels like for independent activists to who those independent activists are. Here I unpack the production of personhood and subjectivity as related but distinct processes. Independent activists have twin biographical narratives of movement and transformation, foundational for their secular, cosmopolitan personhood and embodied in their social and consumption practices in/of the city. However, they are not the only ones in the social field with a secular cosmopolitan personhood, making it insufficient for understanding activist distinction. Rather, it is engaging in political practice that makes activists aware of the problematic nature of their secular cosmopolitanism, resulting in the production of a political subjectivity containing a positional critique of their own ways of being. In this chapter I begin in earnest to evidence the importance of the experience of political practice in marking out activist political subjectivity.

Chapter 4 argues for the socially-embedded ways in which Lebanese independent activists affect and are affected by the material space of Beirut. It begins by looking at the materiality of the city in the form of barriers, barbed wire, and the totalised space of control which all Lebanese must deal with, but which activists go out of their way to be engaged by. I then turn to the political and historical resonances of particular bright landscapes of the city, and activists' conscious and non-conscious material practices in making themselves 'a part of'

the city and its valorised pasts. In this chapter, then, I show the fraught co-constitution of political subjectivity and the structure of feeling of political engagement *through* historical, material, and affective space. By way of paradigmatic moments of contestation in or over certain sites, this chapter begins to show how *mashākil* (fights) come to viscerally differentiate activists from others in their social field.

Chapter 5 turns to one particular movement cycle, organising towards upcoming parliamentary elections, and one particular group active within it, Take Back Parliament. I excavate the process through which members were politicised. In particular, I look to the production of an emotional habitus that valorised particular sorts of emotional elaboration on underlying feelings of hope, rage, and indignation differently for independent activists and NGOs. This came to a head during the protests against the parliamentary extension, at which emotional habituses radically diverged over how to engage with security forces. In this chapter I make the argument for moments of visceral political engagement being foundational to the production of political subjectivity. What is produced through these forceful moments is an *affectively inculcated knowledge* of difference which serves to define and motivate independent activist political subjectivity in its wake.

Building upon this material, Chapter 6 turns to how this feeling of difference was maintained, and in particular how it was fundamental in providing a sense of political possibility in the aftermath of failure. To maintain this feeling of difference, in-group narratives of visceral moments of political engagement remained in constant circulation, bolstering and affirming the resonances and meanings attached to them by and for those who had experienced them. This chapter begins to provide a temporal frame and weight to affect and emotion, showing their social lives in the form of affectively inculcated knowledge as morals to the stories activists tell themselves.

Finally, Chapter 7 turns to the temporal and historical aspects of independent activist political subjectivity. In relation to activist historicity I draw a distinction between mythic past and living history: the former is drawn upon piecemeal, the latter forms a part of the activist biographical history which contours all political engagements. Within the latter, the recent political engagements and the affectively inculcated knowledge that comes out of them

serve to radically reorient activist temporalities, and this is foundationally important for the sorts of tactics, strategies, and alliances that can be countenanced from then on. I show how the mobilisations that I have tracked throughout the thesis have produced a temporality of rupture. This temporality, in turn, provides independent activists with a rhythm of political action that allows them to believe that their actions are potentially capable of transforming the world.

2. Politics-otherwise and politics-as-usual: the Lebanese political status quo in the university

'Independent politics [in the university] is a joke [...] in here is no different to outside'
Hizballah student organiser

'Student activism comes from independent activists, not from parties or NGOs [...] in [the university] we are protected, the other side of the road, no.' Sari

1. Introduction

Activists, as persons who intend to transform the world with their action, do so because they view the way things are as deficient. In the Lebanese context political life feels at once static and volatile. It is pervaded by a sense of anxious abeyance that appears to forestall the possibility of transformative change whilst concomitantly feeling completely unstable. This sense of mutable stasis is pervaded by history: by the current alliances between political parties, the personality politics of political leaders and, in the background, a *longue durée* of unresolved conflicts whose markers are there to see – known, but sublimated day to day. They are in the material landscape, in the verbal lacunae of many in an older generation when they speak to their children about their life histories, in the failing infrastructure, in the disappearance of substantive politics from political discourse, and in the quirks and contingencies of present political alliances. The anti-politics of institutional politics in Lebanon, steeped in a fragmented historical record and a forestalling present, compel a younger generation to be inventive in their interventions and, in the absence of institutional political backers, piece together historical antecedents from their own intersubjective networks, with little to no authorised archive or repertoire upon which to fall back.

This opening chapter, then, addresses the Lebanese political status quo in which independent activism arises and against which it positions itself. Through a sustained engagement with university space in Lebanon as an important site of

political formation, I show how opposition to the status quo interacts with political institutions and, ultimately, how it attempts to refuse them. Universities in Lebanon are an important site through which to engage with the Lebanese political status quo and potential opposition to it. Firstly, for many independent activists the university is the privileged site in which they begin to engage in activism. Secondly, universities are closely integrated with the institutional political structure of the country. Thirdly, protest waves and institutional political parties of national and historical importance began and were fostered within university walls. Much of this is true of a number of national contexts, and makes the university a worthy site of analytic engagement for anyone interested in the production of national political subjectivities, particularly in the Global South (Dong 1987; Kumar 2012; Martelli & Parkar 2016).

In this chapter, however, I look to be a little more specific. Rather than engaging with 'the university' in general as a historic site of political engagement, I look more specifically to the particular ways in which the university is a place in which a political status quo and a politics otherwise play out through/against one another in contemporary Lebanon. As such, there are two further reasons for a deep engagement with the university as political site in Lebanon. Firstly, in the current political climate the various institutional political parties, or *aḥzāb* (sing. *ḥizb*), treat student elections as a plebiscite to determine whom is in the ascendancy in any given year. This was a constant point of discussion for students and was borne out in the mainstream media coverage afforded each year to student elections. Secondly, national political actors take a direct interest and are constantly willing to intervene in university politics. For these reasons, it is an accepted commonplace that university politics acts as both a microcosm of, and proving ground for, national institutional politics. As such, to understand the contours and characteristics of this politics offers a privileged space to understand the landscape within which oppositional politics arises.

To evidence this landscape I look to two archetypal moments in the Lebanese experience of student politics: elections and protests. Elections appear as the epitome of the Lebanese political status quo: the political habitus of student organisers, the predetermined deals and alliances, the strong man (*qabāḍāy*) behaviour of (male) student party members, corruption and the power of

unofficial lines of communication, the political sectarianism of demography and sloganeering. All of the above would appear to foreclose the possibility of anything other than the national status quo arising within such a context. And yet an electoral strategy has been the bedrock of oppositional student activism since the civil war, and has (and continues to be) met with relative success. Nevertheless, the terms of electoral politics continue to be dictated by the *aḥzāb* under the rubric of the political status quo. Protests, meanwhile, appear to non-*aḥzāb* organisers to afford a political field within which they can engage successfully and whose internal constitution is not dictated by the political and administrative institutions those protests oppose, even whilst they remain its external referent. And yet the markers of the Lebanese political status quo, as activists discovered, cannot so easily be kept out of student organising, particularly in a mass student movement that by necessity had to involve student political party organisers.

Given that both elite institutional political actors and oppositional student activists see university politics as a key national political site, then, what is the precise nature of the relationship of university politics to the Lebanese political status quo? The epigraphs that open this chapter reflect two possible perspectives present in the field. Is the university isomorphic to the outside world, thereby foreclosing the possibility of an oppositional politics outright? Or is it a potentially 'other' space offering a level of protection, within which it might be possible to foster a potentially transformative politics in reaction to the pervasive political status quo? These two ideas of the university are twin projects constantly in play and alive in the structures and possibilities of student politics. In both elections and protests, the potential space for opposition to the Lebanese status quo exists. And whilst the former space would appear more inimical to such opposition than the latter, in both the tensions of potential hope and despair, success and failure, hang in the balance.

In this chapter I concentrate on one year-cycle of elections and protests at the American University of Beirut, seen as the most prestigious university academically and politically and where the most vibrant oppositional politics could be found. AUB does not exist in a vacuum from other universities, particularly those in Beirut: there is greater or lesser interaction between students at the various universities across Beirut, and in many cases the same pressures of the

Lebanese political status quo are brought to bear elsewhere, albeit with their own specificities. I was able to corroborate much overlap in experiences from fieldwork conducted at other universities and with students from other universities in different ethnographic settings. As such, I turn to examples from other universities as and when appropriate. Ultimately, the cycle of elections and protests as a microcosm of the Lebanese political status quo serves, too, as a microcosm of the horizons of political possibility for independent activism in Lebanon outright: in the hopes and despairs it activates, in the (often slender) possibilities for oppositional politics, and in the foreclosing of those possibilities more often than not.

A brief note before moving on. When discussing university politics as a microcosm of the Lebanese political status quo, what is at stake is the way that such an emic conception contours how that space is experienced and in what ways it motivates what various actors understand to be possible. AUB is not isomorphic, demographically or otherwise, to Lebanon as a whole. In particular, the constant rise in tuition fees since the end of the civil war has changed its demography, most pressingly in relation to class, to the point that AUB – and with it the other private, fee-paying institutions – is now an elite institution benefitting from and contributing to social mobility only marginally if at all. As the following chapter on the social positionality of independent activists will discuss in more detail, to be in a position to engage in the forms of activism discussed in this thesis one has to have already gone through transformations and translocations that are only possible from a position of relative privilege, and which instantiate further forms of privilege. This is also true of the experience of attending – and engaging in politics at – a university in Lebanon. That the university is not isomorphic to the country as a whole, however, does not invalidate the fact that political actors, both oppositional and *ḥizbī*, understand there to be a very strong relationship between doing politics at a university and a national level. Quite how to understand that relationship, and how it relates to the potential for a politics otherwise beyond university walls, is the subject of what follows.

I begin, in 2.i, with the university electoral cycle. There, I show Lebanese national political culture's investment in its outcome as well as the ways in which student party organisers embody the wider political habitus of the *aḥzāb* beyond

university walls (2.ii). It is in the election moment that student politics appears to be and is treated as most equivalent to the Lebanese political status quo. Having discussed the equivalences within and beyond the university (2.iii) it will become clear that, in fact, AUB does appear to afford a space for a politics-otherwise, tied in part to a particular activist history to which the various independent groups, with their reactions to the elections, draw upon piecemeal and divergently (2.iv). Even in the most isomorphic moment, then, alternative spaces are potentially available. In turning next to the tuition fee protests at AUB (3) we see both the opening of independent and oppositional possibility and its ultimate foreclosing due to forces and occurrences all too recognisably attributable to the Lebanese political status quo. I begin by discussing the impressive militancy and political inventiveness built upon a non-party student solidarity driven by independent and oppositional activists (3.i). I then turn to the spectres of the Lebanese political status quo that that militancy elicited and how the policing of the protests was suffused by the wider political structure and culture (3.ii). Here, then, we appear to find a reversal of the imaginary of the university, wherein the possibility of a politics-otherwise is dashed by the realisation that, indeed, things are exactly the same inside and outside its walls. In the final section, then, and to offer a counterpoint, I turn to the contours of oppositional activism (4). Through the process of engagement in the yearly cycle of student politics a particular nexus of identifications for oppositional politics arises: independence, secularity, and leftism. These arise through the practice of interacting with and defying the political landscape in the university. The oppositional groups introduced below do in different moments emphasise certain elements of the nexus over others, dependent on their interrelationships and the ways they might wish to position themselves. Yet as a whole they oppose those elements of the Lebanese political status quo that student activists find deficient and that they wish to transform. They are, ultimately, a stance taken in relation to that status quo, and are rendered continually meaningful through a dialectical relationship of difference with it.

In conclusion (5), I return to what a year in the life of student politics tells us about the landscape of Lebanese politics on a national stage. I suggest not only that the university does indeed afford space for a politics-otherwise, but so too, in its own connected but not identical ways, does Beirut. The city is a concatenation

of materialities, imaginaries, histories, and patternings of social life that both broaden the horizons of possibility for the particularly located persons who ultimately become independent activists, and also come to structure the particular forms of political engagement that they might desire and be able to fulfil (or not). Student politics also closely resemble politics on a national stage affectively and temporally. 'Really feeling it', as one friend put it, provides a motivating force and framing for political possibility built upon prior experience that contours how independent activists – and, in their own way, those militating for institutional parties – act. The annual cycle of elections and the more ad hoc cycle of protests waves, meanwhile, afford an initial experience of the temporal feel of political engagement in Lebanon. Echoes of this feel will be seen in the later discussions of the dialectical living history of independent activism and in the activist temporality of rupture in Chapter 7. All this is to say that the questions of the potential for a politics-otherwise and the possibility of transformative action introduced in this chapter in relation to student activism hold for independent activism on a national stage, too. How far is it possible to instantiate a politics-otherwise? In what sorts of spaces can one conceive its possibility? Against what backdrop and within which parameters? I raise these questions in what follows and return to them throughout the rest of this thesis.

2. Electoral politics in the university

2.i. All eyes on the student councils

The university's central role in Lebanese public life, as well as its centrality to the modern history of the country, is difficult to overstate. Barring the Lebanese University, which is state run and whose main language of instruction is Arabic, the rest of the country's 48 universities are private entities, often teaching in English or French alongside or to the exclusion of Arabic.¹ The most high profile of

¹ The Ministry of Education and Higher Education currently lists 35 private universities, 9 institutes, and 3 religious institutes on its website, as well as the public Lebanese University (MEHE n.d.)

these are the Lebanese University, with campuses across the country but whose main hub is situated in the southern suburbs of Beirut, the French language Université St Joseph, opened by Jesuit missionaries in 1875, and situated in the eastern neighbourhood of Achrafieh, the English language Lebanese American University (1924), situated on the southern edge of Hamra in the west of the city, and the American University of Beirut, on the northern edge of Hamra and overlooking the sea.

Opened as the Syrian Protestant College in 1865 by American missionaries, the American University of Beirut is regarded as one of the best universities in the Middle East and has also been a seminal space for the history of the region. A large number of the political, business, and artistic elites in Lebanon, and more widely in the region, attended the university. At the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century protests were held to allow women to enrol and study. A number of political organisations were founded there, from the Syrian Social Nationalist Party to the precursors of various Arab nationalist and third world liberationist and Palestinian nationalist organisations. It was a greatly radicalised student body here that promoted the newly formed Lebanese University as a national, public, and Arabic-language university, and it was at AUB that a near constant two year student strike preceded the Lebanese civil war and brought the university to a standstill.² During the civil war, the university served as a safe haven from the conflict, until the assassination of its then-President, Malcolm Kerr, and the destruction of one of its buildings by a bomb. In the aftermath of the civil war student demographics began to change as tuition fees continued to increase and bursaries became more concretely tied to certain organisations, in particular political parties. In the early 2000s, it was the relative safety of university campuses that allowed for the anti-Syrian Free Patriotic Movement of ex-President Michel Aoun, in self-imposed exile in Paris during the Syrian hegemony in Lebanon, to protest and begin organising (Härdig 2011: 165–167).

² Betty Anderson's history of the university (2011) delves in depth into each of these political moments. For more on the early history of the university, see Makdisi (2007). For a contemporary account of the radicalisation of the student body in the late 1960s and early 1970s, see Barakat (1977).

With the ultimate division of institutional political life after 2005 between March 8th and March 14th student elections came to represent this division also, at AUB and elsewhere. As such, the yearly student elections came to be seen by spectators and participants alike as a form of plebiscite on the waxing and waning fortunes of the political players on the national stage. In each election cycle the majority of national media outlets will report on the build-up, election nights, results, and repercussions, in terms reflective of national political coverage.³ This has recently become even more important in the aftermath of parliamentary elections being postponed and ultimately cancelled. AUB was deemed particularly important in this regard as it did not appear to be ‘owned’ by any particular group or side the way that many other universities did, though the elections at LAU, SJU, and LU were also mined for what they might say about the wider fortunes of the various institutional political actors. Indeed, in the campaigning period the student elections at the largest universities become headline news, reported on by a number of news channels as well as respected newspapers, and so giving an indication of the seriousness with which these events were taken on the national stage.

2.ii. ‘The worst of Lebanese politics’: AUB elections

Beyond merely communicating the relative strength of institutional actors on the national stage, these elections were also a proving ground and training exercise for how to do politics. The AUB elections of 2013 were a case in point. Campaigning officially ran for a week in early November. In this period the main thoroughfare for the upper campus was lined with booths for each group vying for elections, though the names on the booths did not immediately appear political: Communications Club, Youth Club, Civic Welfare Club, Social Club. Officially the university does not allow the political parties to campaign, fearing conflict and

³ To give a flavour of the coverage witness these article titles from my time in the field: ‘LAU: Byblos [campus] goes to the Lebanese Forces and Beirut [campus] goes to March 8th’ (Mahdi 2013a), ‘LAU elections, the parties are optimistic and the alternative movement fields candidates’ (Badreddine 2013), ‘The March 8th and Progressive Socialist Party coalition win the AUB elections’ (Mahdi 2013b), and ‘USJ student elections make no attempt to disguise political parties’ (Trojanovic 2013).

playing to the imaginary of the university as a safe haven sealed off from the country's woes. To get round this each party maintains a front, known and transparent to all, in the form of a university-sanctioned club. Very few organisers sat inside the booths. Rather, the thoroughfare was a mess of people, with passers-by being stopped by organisers wearing colour-coordinated vests or t-shirts: getting in the way, joking, chatting, cajoling, holding on to hands, arms, and shoulders, shouting boisterously at one another. There was method to these interventions – I did not get stopped once despite walking up and down the thoroughfare a dozen or more times up until election day, and it was telling how some organisers would stop certain people and ignore others entirely. Small coloured cards were being handed out by organisers, the ground covered in dropped and discarded copies. Each card had a set of names on them: a party list.

Wandering through the crowd one day that week, I ran into a friendly face: Hussain, whom I had first met a few weeks earlier at a meeting for one of the oppositional groups on campus, No Frontiers. Hussain was doubly removed from the electioneering. Firstly, as a non-Lebanese national he had no horse in the election race on a national level. Secondly, his group, No Frontiers, had the day before announced that they were boycotting the elections. Nevertheless, he maintained strong social links with individuals in a variety of camps, in part due to his ex-presidency of his national cultural club. He was standing in the queue for coffee with Jo, a student who had been writing articles for national press about student elections across Beirut. We got a coffee and walked the few paces to the main seating area in the upper campus, the quad, just to the side of the main thoroughfare. Those in coordinated clothing were evident here, too, as we sat on a wall to the side. Immediately a large man came over, shoved Jo and then grabbed him round the shoulders, mock-aggressively. Hussain told him jokingly that he had gotten bigger. To this the man grabbed his crotch, leered, and jiggled. Jo got his attention again to make him read the article he had written the day before, while Hussain explained to me within earshot that he was the coordinator for the March 8th side, and that he was a member of Amal (Lebanon Mission Club). A young woman came over to the group, and Jo asked her why she wasn't standing as an independent. Once again the tone was joking, but she appeared to take the question seriously and replied that 'if I run as an independent I gain nothing from

it after university (*mannū bistafīd ba‘d al-jāmi‘a*). Hussain asked her who she was for again, and she answered that she was Aouni, matter of factly.⁴ ‘So Freedom Club?’ he continued, to which she nodded. Once she had moved away, I asked Hussain and Jo how they knew who corresponded to each club. Hussain shrugged, ‘*ma‘lūm* (it’s known/you just know)’, and Jo showed me a page in his notebook where he had listed the correspondence between club and party. The March 8th coordinator gave the paper back to Jo and told him the article was good.

Election day came at the end of the week. The other oppositional group, Secular Club, had unlike No Frontiers decided to run candidates. Their campaigning had involved videos and photos shared on social media highlighting the behaviour of the *aḥzāb* on campus (AUB Secular Club 2013), talking about substantive university issues, and stating that they were different (Ayoub 2013). Police vehicles were stationed up and down Bliss Street, in front of the main entrance, with ten or so police officers congregated outside. Unlike most days, when it is possible to wander in without university security batting an eyelid, identity cards were being asked for and examined assiduously. Unlike earlier in the week, now party organisers were more frantic and scattergun in their approaches to other students. To vote your university card had to be up to date, and I saw organisers from both sides pull people in the direction of the ID office. Inside a March 14th organiser in a red vest stood in the queue talking to people and distributing more electoral list cards. The main thoroughfare had been cleared of booths, but organisers in red (March 14th) and green (March 8th) tabards were still stopping people as they walked past. Off to the side Secular Club members were chatting together, all wearing white t-shirts with Campus Choice written across the chest. The area leading into West Hall, where voting would take place later and in front of which results would be announced, was lined with ‘do not cross’ tape, forming a walkway. As I walked by a girl forcefully dragged her friend away from an organiser, and shouted ‘let’s get out of here!’, in an exasperated tone.

I found Hussain and Jo sitting with others in the shade of the quad, and between coffee runs and chatting with those around us we sat and watched tabard-clad organisers rush this way and that. At one point a Secular Club member

⁴ The adjective used for members of the Free Patriotic Movement (*al-tayyār al-waṭani al-ḥurr*), General and ex-President Michel Aoun’s party, and members of March 8th.

came up to our group to ask whether one particular person had voted yet. He answered yes. The SC organiser asked for his name, and then surname, before saying 'yeah yeah, I know you', and walking away. Later, we saw organisers from both sides run past us and down towards lower campus: a fight had broken out between the two sides at the Business School. We walked across the quad and craned our necks to see whether we could see the fight without descending the steps ourselves, with no luck. Hussain told me he was sure it must have been the Engineering School, both sides there were very '*mut'aṣṣibīn*' (fanatical/zealous). In fact, the fight had been at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, where a March 8th organiser had ripped the candidate list from someone's hand. This had started a fight because the two sides had agreed beforehand that, this year, they would not do that. Hassan, another NF member who was sitting with us, told us that the March 8th side had put one of the real independent candidates on their candidate lists, as they were not running anyone against March 14th for that faculty and wanted to keep the other side out. Apparently, the independent was furious, and was going to release a statement in the morning dissociating himself.

As the sun went down, we began to hear chanting from in front of West Hall. On the way across Hassan turned to me and told me to 'get ready to see the worst of Lebanese politics'. As we arrived Hussain was stopped by a member of the Progressive Socialist Party (Communications Club), who shoved him very hard, making him stagger backwards, and aggressively asked him whether he had voted. Though the actions appeared the same mock aggressive ones of a few days earlier, the joking tone disappeared entirely when Hussain told him he had not, looking very uncomfortable as he did so. In front of West Hall a partition had been erected, with a large screen between the sides. We had come onto the March 8th side of the divide. Secular Club were once again off in a corner by themselves. There were twin exits from West Hall, one on either side of the divide. The noise of shouting and chants was already deafening.

A Hizballah organiser (Cultural Club of the South) came to chat to Hussain, and said that 'the whole independent thing is a joke', as it was based on the illusion that everything from outside stopped at the AUB gates, and that that was simply not true: 'in here is no different to outside'. Hassan replied that being independent in AUB did not mean not taking a stance on outside affairs, but that at AUB he

voted for who would be best. The Hizballah organiser then said that it was obvious that if March 8th and March 14th put forward two equally good candidates, that you would vote for whichever bloc you preferred outside of AUB. Throughout this discussion, numerous men came and went greeting the organiser, asking questions, and reporting back to him. We heard the March 8th side chant '*ja'ja', ja'ja', irja' 'al-ḥabis'* (Geagea, Geagea, go back to prison).⁵ Hassan commented that the March 14th side would always chant about *abū bahā'*, Saad Hariri's teknonym, the leader of the Future Movement and key player on that side of the institutional political divide. The first results coming through were going to the March 8th side and were welcomed with huge cheers, and when a seat went to the other side there was a chorus of boos. Hussain marvelled at people's facial expressions: 'happy, sad, they really feel it'. To the side SC tried to outdo March 8th by chanting 'se-cu-lar' in English over and over again, and then a little later in Arabic, too (*'il-mā-nī*). Meanwhile, the *aḥzāb* chants became more and more inflammatory: '*allāh, sūriyyā, bashshār ū bas'* (God, Syria, Bashar and that's it), evidencing their side's strong support for the Syrian regime across the border. They also chanted support for *abū hādī*, Hizballah leader Hasan Nasrallah's teknonym. And then, finally, they began chanting '*shī'a, shī'a, shī'a'* over and over again. The Aounis (Freedom Club) arrived to join the March 8th side from lower campus as a bloc, all dressed in orange t-shirts, their party colours. This continued through until very late evening. March 8th 'won' over March 14th with eight of eighteen seats; the Secular Club received three seats and, ultimately, a member of SC would be elected president of AUB's student council, the USFC. On leaving AUB by the Main Gate onto Bliss I saw a group of ten non-student SSNP members (Civic Welfare Club) standing in a bloc with 2 by 3 metre flags, waiting to celebrate with the student members.

2.iii Student elections as political sectarian proving ground

The electoral cycle in AUB evidences many of the ways in which politics is done in Lebanon nationally. From the reactions of oppositional groups like Secular Club

⁵ The leader of the Lebanese Forces and March 14th leader, only militia leader to have been imprisoned for his actions during the civil war, released after 2005 and the Syrian withdrawal.

and No Frontiers alongside the general student body who want to simply ignore politics, we see these patterns of behaviour viewed and commented upon negatively. On the part of the *aḥzāb* participants, however, we also see the productive ways in which such practices instantiate political networks, both in the moment and with a view to a time after university. Clear both in the manner of electioneering and the celebratory chants on election night is the role of political sectarianism. In the build-up to the elections there was a clear and sensible purpose to the soliciting (and not) of particular students as they passed by organisers. The system worked on the basis of already being known, of having your social status mapped out: any number of your confessional identity, your geographical background, your political allegiances and those of your parents and wider kin.⁶ An organiser for the Freedom Club (Free Patriotic Movement), say, knew not to bother trying to convince someone they knew to be from the southern suburbs of Dahiye and whose mother worked in one of Hizballah's charitable foundations. Mapping of this type is a commonplace at a national level. Regardless of the contemporary demographic makeup of any site in Lebanon, to vote one must return to the village in which one's family is registered, regardless of whether one resides there, was born there, or indeed has ever been there for any reason beyond voting.⁷ Party organisers, then, can have a keen sense of the political sectarian make up of any particular seat they may contest, alongside the contacts and networks to cajole, coerce, or bribe potential voters. A friend, whose family are Sunni and resident in Beirut far from their voting site, related in a mixed gathering how they would receive phone calls and visits in the lead up to every election from representatives of the Future Movement. When I asked how they knew where and who her family were, I received blank expressions from everyone around the table:

⁶ I will return to this form of sectarian interpellation in the next chapter as part of the home networks that independent activists attempt to extricate themselves from.

⁷ Marc Abélès' has written on the importance of the local for national politics in France (1991, 2006). On Lebanon, Michelle Obeid's work on Aarsal is useful for understanding what elections look like in peripheral zones of the country (2006: 232–259, 2010). Michael Gilson also picks up on the relevance of kinship ties alongside sect in electioneering variously throughout his monograph of the northern and peripheral Akkar region of Lebanon in the early 1970s (1996). Here I am interested less in the relationship between local and national politics per se, but rather in how the habitus of political sectarianism so produced can be seen in university elections where, electorally speaking, such a local-national relationship is not relevant.

'ma'lūm' (it's known). The clubs, as proxies for their respective political parties, functioned with the same political sectarian prerogatives, strategies and knowledge. Political sectarianism was evident too in coalition building. At AUB over the last few years coalition building has fairly accurately corresponded to the coalitions at a national level: March 8th and March 14th.⁸ Working within the limits of a political sectarian logic – and knowing that one cannot depend on votes beyond one's sect – coalitions allow for a cumulative building-up of a majority. At a national electoral level this is required by the fact that each of the 128 seats in parliament must be filled by members of a particular sect. This does not translate down to the student union at AUB, but the logic is transposed. The electoral list cards also correspond to national electoral strategies. Each card handed out did not simply list candidates from that club/party, but rather all those within the coalition of clubs/parties running together: preferred candidates and a whole list for someone to tick through and vote for. This corresponds very closely to the electoral lists put together at the national level for municipal elections (Obeid 2006: 234–237, 248–255).

Beyond electoral strategy, the equivalences with the national political field could also be seen in the discursive and physical interactions between the various clubs/*aḥzāb*. The fight that broke out on lower campus turned on a broken promise agreed upon prior to electioneering by the leaders of each club. Two elements were particularly telling: firstly, that whole coalitions on either side mobilised to go down and be involved in the fight and, secondly, that this was seen as standard practice, clear in the lackadaisical manner in which we moved across to view the fight. It was expected that scuffles would break out between sides both at AUB and at other universities during elections. Indeed, this expectation was reflected in media coverage. During the cycle of student elections discussed above, fights broke out at LAU and at USJ. The fights at the latter, in particular, were the subject of media coverage in print and visual media for days (Abou Jaoude & Trojanovic 2013; Mahdi 2013c). This has been a yearly occurrence in recent times.

⁸ The place of certain parties, such as the Progressive Socialist party (PSP), is up for debate and corresponded to the weathervane nature of the party's leader, Walid Joumblatt: originally part of March 14th, he left and became a third bloc, but had in this moment moved towards March 8th. It was for this reason that the PSP club were on the March 8th side of the election night screen at AUB.

At each university, further, election day saw contingents of military and police stationed at the gates, as well as extra ATVs positioned around the campuses. On a national level, fights (*mashākil*) were both feared and expected in ‘mixed’ areas, or between one neighbourhood and another, and such fights were never far from the public imagination.⁹ Though fights also happened outside of election time there was a particular fear that elections brought such violence out. Violence, conceived as such, was portrayed as a constant latent possibility at the heart of politics in Lebanon (Mikdashi 2012). Indeed, this was one reason given by parliamentarians for extending their own mandate six months earlier on the national stage – that the state feared being unable to control the violence that elections would release.

That institutional elites used the fear of violence for their own benefit was an accepted truth amongst my interlocutors. Further, violent events continued to occur in Lebanon that had nothing to do with popular political mobilisation, not least the suicide and car bombings perpetrated against civilians in putatively Shia areas of the country by members and sympathisers of Jabhat al-Nusrah, Ahrar al-Sham, and ISIS. There can be no doubting, though, that many in Lebanon, including many of my activist interlocutors, were worried by outbreaks of violence that could be read in sectarian terms. In particular, the degeneration of the Syrian conflict into civil war had made this worry all the clearer. Fadia, a long-time activist from whom we will hear a number of times throughout this thesis, had this to say on the fear of (sectarian) violence and its effect on political practice:

What the Syrian revolution did for sure [it]created this fear of revolutionary discourse. Now if you ask any Lebanese person for a revolution they will hide. And rightfully so, it’s a bit scary right now. But I think it has postponed the prospect of uprisings [...] for a long time.

Though she was speaking specifically of the potential for transformative change in the country at large, her comments give a good sense of how a genuine worry about sectarian violence was available to be used by elites for their own ends. It was hard to combat because, in and of itself, that worry was not a fabrication. That said, conflicts of one sort or another happened all the time. Here I make a heuristic

⁹ The clashes in the Tariq El Jdide neighbourhood in Beirut (Mikdashi 2012) and the months-long conflict between the Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen neighbourhoods of Tripoli were then-current examples of political sectarian violence.

distinction between violence (*'unf*) and fights (*mashākil*). As later chapters will attest to, conflict and confrontation were seen by almost all my interlocutors as generative of political subjectivity and political possibility. Indeed, a number of fights that involved independent activists proved to be enduringly important for how they enabled political engagement in their aftermath, rather than fear of conflict foreclosing further action. All this is to say that violence, and fear of violence in particular, was a site of contestation in the field. As it related to what could be read as inter-sectarian violence, it was powerful. In relation to fights and agonistic or contentious forms of political engagement, it was far less so. This did not mean that such a discourse was absent from those events. As the discussion of student protest below will show, it was invoked to mollify the fervour of political engagement. How far it was accepted by those involved in the protests, or by onlookers, was another matter.

Chanting and celebrations also reflected the wider habitus of political action in Lebanon. The chants from AUB election night were precisely those of March 8th and March 14th interactions at a national level, and reflected both the personality politics interactions of party leaders, steeped in history (Geagea go back to prison), positions on geostrategic issues (God, Syria, Bashar and nothing else), or (somewhat knowingly and playfully) sectarianism (Shia, Shia, Shia). Loud, public celebration is another evident way in which student politics is reflective of and inscribed into national logics of doing politics. As related above, non-student members of the SSNP were already waiting outside AUB main gate with flags ready to celebrate loudly and publically. A few days later LAU held its elections, and there too the March 8th side won the Beirut campus.¹⁰ A number of non-student supporters waited outside and then together with student party members drove around the area honking, blasting music and party anthems, hanging out of car windows and waving party flags.

Further, on the ground leadership was reflective of the wider historical and contemporary situation within party cadres, and in many ways top *aḥzāb* organisers during elections fulfilled the historical role of the *qabāḍāy*, or strong man. The *qabāḍāyāt* were, in Michael Johnson's words, 'strong-arm leaders of the

¹⁰ LAU's other campus, overlooking the city of Byblos (Jbeil) up the coast, went to March 14th.

‘street’, urban quarter or village, who had emerged from the ‘common people’ after using force to establish their claims to leadership’ (Johnson 2001: 28). Rather than the party elites, or *zu‘amā’* (sing. *za‘īm*), an *qabāḍāy* made sure to carry out party business, use the political sectarian logics of interpellation discussed above on a direct and face-to-face level to drum up support or compel behaviour and, if required, fight for the party.¹¹

Even beyond the *qabāḍāyāt* comparison, masculine political sectarian posturing as standard political practice was evident throughout personal interactions during the election period. In this sense, spending time with Hussain was a useful vantage point to witness both the joking and jovial side of these interactions (headlocks, penis grabs, and so on) and the intimidating side (pushing and shoving). In her work on working class masculinity in Cairo, Farha Ghannam has examined in great detail how fights are not always a matter of real discord and seldom escalate (2013: 107–132). A very similar pattern is evident in the Lebanese context discussed here (and not restricted to the working class), and as in her fieldsite the point is to understand the spectrum upon which action and intentionality of this sort is placed. There was really very little difference between the shove a few days earlier and the shove on the night of the elections, and yet the message and feeling imparted were very different.¹² The shove, during the particularly heightened intensity of election night – as against the more jovial atmosphere in the days leading up to it – was productive of a different affect for Hussain, one of genuine discomfort and worry: in such a heightened environment, the rules of the game look different.

¹¹ For Johnson, this particular bundle of honour and masculinity – evidenced by *qabāḍāyāt* in particular though not exclusively – was, ‘freed from structural constraints’ (2001: 61), a primary factor in the escalation of confessional violence during the civil war.

¹² I take on board David Graeber’s point that the communicative side of violence is surely not its most important aspect (2009: 515–520, 2016: 102). In this instance, though, where the actions were the same to all intents and purposes, it was the communication – and affect rendered by it – that were particularly compelling.

2.iv No possible space of dissent? Oppositional election strategies

It was all of the above that oppositional informants like Hussain were referring to when they called the student elections ‘the worst of Lebanese politics’. So what of oppositional groups, how did they react and interact with this seeming instantiation of the Lebanese political status quo? It is here that I return to the idea of the university as a potential project of politics—otherwise even as it appears to manifest isomorphically the fabric of the national body politic. The divergent reactions of the two oppositional groups then-active on campus show this divide well. At the time of the AUB student elections discussed above there were two active oppositional groups: No Frontiers and the Secular Club.¹³ No Frontiers called itself a ‘leftist, independent, pluralist and progressive student organisation’ (No Frontiers 2012). Founded in 1997 in opposition to another duality in Lebanese politics, ‘the twin Israeli and Syrian occupations’ (Nahla 2015), No Frontiers had always seen itself as rejecting the institutional political commonplaces by giving a substantive political choice in student elections, raising awareness of social and political issues through meetings and events, and engaging in protest within and beyond the university. The group was never an affiliated university club, remaining unofficial, but the leadership of the Human Rights Club until very recently had often been made up of members of NF. Alumni of the group have become academics, journalists, and many remained active in independent activist circles beyond university. Though for much of its history its membership had been Lebanese, in recent years it had become more international. The Secular Club, meanwhile, began as a breakaway from NF in 2008, and calls itself ‘an independent student organisation that presents secular, democratic, and pluralist values inherently opposed to the current politico-sectarian status quo [and] seeks to

¹³ Whilst I was in the field AUB had the most vibrant oppositional political scene, and this has historically been the case. SC and NF were joined later by the Red Oak Club, a leftist group discussed in more detail below. The Lebanese American University had the Alternative Student Movement, a relatively recent group that to some extent built on the experience of a previous group from the mid-2000s called simply Pablo Neruda. Oppositional students I met from USJ and the Lebanese University were isolated and bemoaned the inability, or perhaps impossibility, of such oppositional groups where they were, and so concentrated on activism beyond university walls. Since returning from the field space appears to have been opened up for oppositional politics, against repression and intimidation, at the Lebanese University.

provide an environment conducive to social change both inside and outside AUB' (AUB Secular Club 2016). Its membership is almost entirely Lebanese.

It is enlightening to look at both groups' reactions to the student elections discussed above for what light they shed on the twin imaginaries of the university as political site at play in this chapter. If student elections are seen as isomorphic to how politics is done at a national level ('the worst of Lebanese politics') then not getting involved in them at all makes sense – there is nothing to be gained from it. Though No Frontiers had been created to organise around student elections, by the time I arrived in the field it was a different organisation. Far smaller than before, its international flavour had made it less amenable to navigating the election game and far less savvy on Lebanese political and social questions. On the eve of the elections, the members of the organisation called a boycott, which they explained in these terms:

This [decision] is not coming from a position of apathy, but rather from the all too familiar knowledge and experience that working within the formal parameters set forth by the administration simply does not work in improving the real lives of our students. The system of student governance is not a true representation of democracy and is in fact a tool of the administration's to sedate the student voice. The dean of student affairs openly allows the participation of non-elected student political party members in his own decisions on how student elections will take place each year [...] Of course, all of these revelations are widely known and have proven time and again to allow students to make a mockery of democracy. The administration exploits and counts on the external tensions of the greater Lebanese political sphere to nullify any possible real space of student dissent. (No Frontiers 2013)

This position highlighted what current members of the organisation saw as institutional student politics' isomorphism to Lebanese politics more widely: corruption, sham democracy, the ad hoc and non-transparent nature of decision making, and the influence of *aḥzāb* on proceedings. Ex-members of NF with whom I spoke at the time and later – all Lebanese – dismayed at this boycott. They agreed with the diagnosis presented above, but where current members of NF saw institutional student politics as foreclosing any 'real space of student dissent', former members saw that isomorphism as a tendency in the structuring of dissent within which there was still the possibility of independent and oppositional action,

as well as the need to offer something beyond what passes for standard Lebanese politics. In doing so, they were expressing the alternative imaginary of the university as political site: a privileged space in which it might be possible for a politics-otherwise to succeed. This was true even for the archetypal Lebanese status quo moment of elections, in no small part because it made an alternative way of being political available to students, new and old. In the words of Hosni, a former NF member: 'the boycott led to our failure to recruit new people because elections were the [most] important method of radicalisation we had' (Nahla 2015).

It was just such an idea that had motivated earlier generations in NF, and it was this idea that motivated the Secular Club. Agreeing with the majority of NF's criticisms of the university, their criticism and campaigning during the election period was turned towards *aḥzāb* politics and behaviour. They released a video of student organisers from March 8th and March 14th lining up to shout and chant at each other. At the end of the video, a title card appears stating: 'we've had enough of them...how about you?' (AUB Secular Club, 2013a). In their face-to-face discussions, in election material, their contention was that 'sect and partisan affiliation should not enter the equation when choosing your representative, simply because these two factors are in no way relatable to student interests or needs' (AUB Secular Club 2013b). In couching their critique in these terms, SC were clearly stating that the way political life is carried out within and beyond the university is deficient, and that within the confines of the university the possibility for a different politics, one in which substantive concerns are dealt with, in which office is sought to do good, and in which there is no one else beyond the university pulling strings, are key. The connotative point being, of course, that the *aḥzāb* are not equipped to do so. It was precisely this point that so annoyed the Hizballah organiser to the point of deriding the independent project and stating that 'in here is no different to outside', thereby restating the isomorphism of the university to Lebanon's national political culture. Yet, the SC's success at the ballot – getting candidates elected on substantive platforms, explicitly stating their difference and disdain for the *aḥzāb* way of doing things, and thereby the Lebanese political

status quo – offers evidence that perhaps things are different within the university.¹⁴

3. Protest in the university: politics-otherwise?

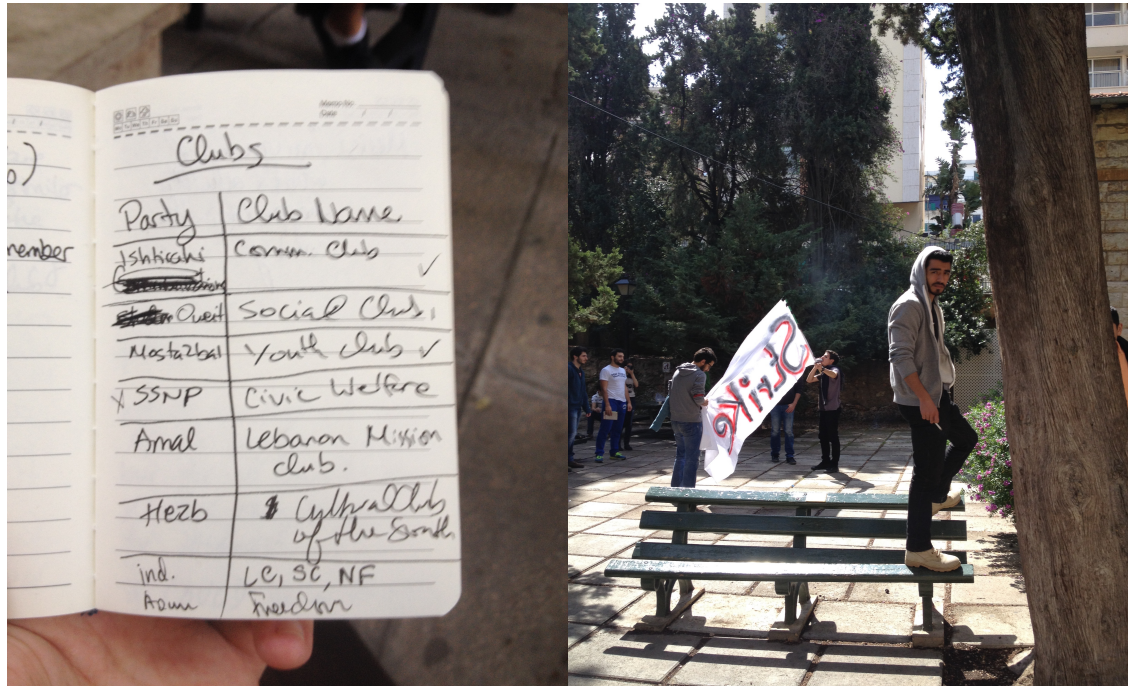


Figure 2: Political status quo and politics-otherwise. Jo's notebook listing the correspondence between student club and political party; a moment during the student strike

3.i. Gearing up for action

In a moment such as a student election, then, many of the wider archetypes of Lebanese political culture were clear to see, and its political habitus could be and was transposed from elections on a national level. But what about that other archetype of student politics worldwide, protest? Given that tuition fee protests in recent years have never been sanctioned by political parties, such a realm of action would seem to move beyond the Lebanese political status quo. This was certainly

¹⁴ Indeed, but for some interesting gerrymandering of election rules the SC would have been the largest bloc in the USFC in 2015-16.

the case for the post-election Stop the Tuition Fee Increase protests at AUB. Therein, student party members were involved in organising, constantly butting up against outside expectations from party control and coercion, as well as the likelihood that their own backers were in fact undermining the protests at the top level of discussions with the administration. At the same time, though, this was a form of politics to which oppositional groups were very amenable and, indeed, had competencies and desires well beyond those of their party member counterparts. It was in a protest space such as this that the imaginary of the university affording the possibility of a politics-otherwise came to the fore. As we shall see, however, Lebanese institutional political culture made itself felt in the protest movement, too. Where elections appeared to afford a space for politics-otherwise despite the overdetermined terms of engagement, protests began auspiciously outside the archetypal zone of the Lebanese political status quo only to feel the force of that reality come to bear upon them.

Tuition fees at AUB had been rising year on year with no breakdown of why such rises were required or where the money went.¹⁵ Even at the time of the elections in early November, members of NF and SC knew that a rise would be proposed in the new year, and plans were already afoot to oppose this. NF members, some of whom were at that point on student council, began by muckraking and finding documentation about costs, monies, and expenditures. Once the new president of student council was confirmed as a member of the Secular Club, a Stop the Tuition Fee Increase (STFI) Committee was formed, a small coordinating group for the protests. The majority of the committee were members of SC, with a select few student organisers from some of the political parties. Members of NF, who had been foundational in the planning stages of the opposition to tuition fee increases continued to be involved in planning from outside the committee. Together they began to publicise the increase, show from the data they had collected that it was not required, do publicity stunts, hold town hall meetings and, once it became clear the administration would not budge, organise protests. The

¹⁵ Indispensable to understanding the tuition fee saga at AUB (and LAU), as well as the concomitant scandals over personal information leaks and internet privacy at AUB, was the muckraking of Hussein Mahdi for *al-Akhbar* newspaper. His reporting caused embarrassment for the university administration and acted as a key resource for student protestors, too.

largest action was a day-long student strike, which marked a high point in militancy and cooperation between independent and *aḥzāb* students.

3.ii 'All out!': the tuition fee strike

The parameters of the strike were clear: no classes were to be held on the day, and at midday a student march was to take place. In response some sympathetic faculty rearranged or cancelled teaching. Others, hostile, set tests that would count towards final grades on the day, and through emails and face to face encounters attempted to cajole and coerce students into not observing the strike.

Nevertheless, the strike was remarkably well adhered to, and from the first teaching slot at eight in the morning everything on campus was eerily quiet. When I arrived at one of the four picket lines that had been organised,¹⁶ I saw around fifteen to twenty people milling around outside one of the central teaching buildings. For a few minutes sirens could be heard from inside and to the back of the buildings, and soon enough more protestors started appearing with megaphones aloft, all set on siren to disrupt the few classes that were going ahead. Those with sirens were almost exclusively men, and most were either organisers from Secular Club or else student organisers from the political parties, many of the latter covering their faces. I stood with Mansour, one of the then-current Lebanese members of No Frontiers, and we discussed the protest. I remarked on how university security were hanging back and not getting involved (something which continued throughout the protests). He replied that they would not, even though there was an office maintained by the Internal Security Forces on campus, as the last time they did was in 1974 when they came in and only inflamed things. As we sat, two different high-level members of the university administration came to chat with student organisers, without any note of animosity. One, the Dean of Student Affairs, remained throughout the protest and continued a tactic of placation that he had been using since the outbreak of protest a few weeks earlier. He would chat with student leaders, allow himself to be the butt of chants and jokes, but be a

¹⁶ These were either called *maḥāwir* in Arabic or checkpoints in English, but no one actually called them pickets or picket lines.

constant presence and position himself as a sympathetic ear for students in contrast to others in the administration.

The sirens soon intermingled with shouting coming from the building: '*fallū?*', '*eh, fallū. 108 fallat? la? okay yalla shabāb, la-108!*' ('are they all out?', 'yeah they're out. Is 108 out? No? okay guys, to 108!'). Within ten minutes the remaining classes had been abandoned: students left the building, followed by a number of flustered and exasperated professors, and the organisers turned their sirens off for the moment and joked and chatted outside. I mentioned to Mansour that the tactics were fairly militant. Misunderstanding, and thinking I was speaking about the party members in their ranks, he responded 'of course they are, they learnt from the militias, right?'. The two of us went to the Main Gate to hand out leaflets. We met with an overwhelmingly positive response from the students and also from members of university support staff.¹⁷ A group of *darak* (gendarmerie) were loitering at the front and their sergeant came over. The leaflets were in English, and the sergeant asked Mansour to translate for him. He then asked precisely where on campus the pickets were located, whether the dispute had been resolved yet, whether the university offer was still a 6% increase. Mansour replied to each of these questions, and the sergeant left telling us to 'keep it peaceful' (*salmī*).

The process of calling out any remaining classes continued through the day, starting again each hour on the hour, finding any classes and making as much noise as possible until the professor gave up. With each hour that passed more and more students became involved in the calling out process, the atmosphere became more jovial and boisterous, and the chants and shouting, rather than punctuating moments of noise to compel class closures, became a constant and rolling set of chants, shouts, jokes, and siren sounds. As well as the four pickets at the main teaching buildings across campus, roving bands of students formed to be called upon to come to any particular building where there were still classes being held, or where more noise was required. At the height of this phase of the call outs there were between 150 and 200 students directly involved in the noise protest. Nearing the rally time of midday, the call outs transformed into a roving march now

¹⁷ As one of the cleaners pointed out to us, the tuition fee increases affected them, too – working at AUB meant concession rates to send one's children to the American Community School.

numbering in the hundreds. Reaching the front of the university where more students were waiting, protestors stood and listened to a speech from the head of the Student Council and the spokesperson from the STFI Committee. They then unfurled more banners and attached them to various parts of the university architecture, chanted, danced and, took the opportunity for a number of photo ops from the national media that had come to cover the protest.

3.iii Party spectres and the reassertion of the status quo

Clear in this action was an impressive level of militancy and student solidarity, with an equally impressive coordination of resources and tactical acumen. In this stage of the protest movement the influence of oppositional groups like the Secular Club, No Frontiers, and a new group calling itself the Red Oak Club was clear in the organisation of the protests, as members of those groups were front and centre in the STFI Committee, as elected and unelected members of Student Council, and as protest leaders on actions such as the strike. This protest, then, was an archetypal politics-otherwise moment and appeared to mark out the university as a different sort of space from that of Lebanese politics more widely, given that such a protest could take place without interference from security forces. This could be seen, too, in the chants and placards that drew inspiration from either non-Lebanese protest and struggles or else from oppositional and anti-establishment Lebanese protests of recent years: 'shame on you!', a chant with wide currency in English-language protest movements around the world, and in particular use in recent years in the UK against university authorities, politicians, scabs, and police; 'we won't pay!', a student protest chant in both the US and the UK; 'Occupy AUB', drawing on the worldwide occupy movement; '#AUB_Spring', drawing both on (mostly English language) tropes of the Arab revolutions of 2010-11 – the Arab Spring – and the idea of the determinant role of social media within them; '*al-ṭālib yurīd isqāṭ al-qarār!*' (The student wants to bring down the decision!), here drawing on the Arabic language trope of the Middle East-wide chant of '*al-sha'b yurīd isqāṭ al-nizām!*' (The people want to bring down the regime/system!), as well as its Lebanese offshoot, '*isqāṭ al-nizām al-ṭā'ifi!*' (Bring down the sectarian system!).

Yet even in an otherwise space such as this, the spectre of the Lebanese political status quo was never far from view. This was clearest in relation to the fear of violence. Throughout the strike, there was little particular animosity to scabbing students, though the same could not be said in relation to some professors. The animosity of some faculty members often revolved around the spectre of student violence. The following exchange was fairly archetypal of how professors and students interacted on the day. To gather as many students as possible for the midday rally, protestors marched through each of the main faculty buildings. In the Business School, in particular, pockets of protestors were stopped on multiple occasions by angry professors. On one such occasion a female professor came out of her office and shouted ‘your fellow students are not the enemy!’. The body of the march continued on, though around ten stayed to argue, joined by another young male professor. She continued: ‘you have to think who is your enemy, who is your target? It is the administration’. A discussion of students having been coerced into attending class ensued until a much older, senior professor joined from behind and intoned: ‘*ḥabībī* you have no right. You have no right. You are not OSB [Business School] students. You are disturbing our teachers. You are *ibn ‘ā’ila*,¹⁸ you have been *muhazzab*, civilised up until now. *Mā fīkun tajburnā* (you can’t make us). We are *majbūrīn* (required) to do the classes’. A protestor replied that the engineering school had cancelled all of its classes and the older professor erupted, barely letting the student finish his sentence: ‘you have no right on our teachers!’. The situation was quickly defused by another protestor who explained that right now they were trying to get as many people to the rally, about to begin, as possible, and that we were coming through here just to gather people. The female professor then said that last time it turned violent and everyone turned against it. A protestor replied that ‘we are trying our best’. The younger woman and man said that ‘we are with you’, the older professor nodded gruffly and smiled in an obviously forced manner as we left. At another point during the march we passed an American professor informing other members of staff that ‘they’re really aggressive, they’re calling people out’, before warning

¹⁸ Literally ‘son of the family’, the phrase implies having been well brought up and is connotative of not bringing undue attention on one’s family through one’s behaviour and attitude in public.

them to cancel their classes: 'don't underestimate them'. The *darak* sergeant's imperative to keep things *salmī* (peaceful), though an attempt to unnerve me and Mansour, was itself also playing on the fear of violence and the commonplace that protest cannot but become 'violent' within a Lebanese context. Students themselves took exceedingly little notice of this violence talk, but its appearance as a discursive strategy brought what was expected of student protest into line with expectations of contentious political action on a national level.

Beyond violence, however, it was the various facets of the *aḥzāb* that kept appearing, both in terms of the political habitus of students and in their power to compel and coerce behaviour. Mansour's behaviour was particularly enlightening during the protest: a member of an oppositional group, No Frontiers, through many other conversations I learnt of his distaste for the parties, in no small part instilled in him by his father, a former militiaman during the civil war before fleeing to the United States. During the protest, his thoughts kept wandering towards the various archetypes of Lebanese institutional political parties. His mishearing of my question about militancy as one about militias was a case in point. Later, as the chanting and shouting became more boisterous and aggressive, I asked him whether this was all that dissimilar from party behaviour outside the university. He smiled and nodded assent. As we kept walking he began to hum the tune of a chant, eventually trying to remember its particular phrasing. He gave it a whirl once or twice before stopping and explaining that it was based on '20,000 rockets', a comment Hassan Nasrallah famously had made about Hizballah's capacity to retaliate against Israel. Sheepishly, he added: 'I don't know why it came into my head'. He was by no means the only one affected in this way. Amongst other oppositional student organisers of the protest there was a playfulness to the soliciting of Lebanese party protest tropes, but it remained a solicitation nonetheless. The Dean of Student Affairs, still following the protest around even in its final stages, stepped into the crowd to talk to some Secular Club members who were leading chants of 'shame on you!' directed at the library building. After a few moments of smiling and chatting, the SC members with the Dean still amidst them began to chant '*allāh ma'k yā 'amīd!*' (God be with you Dean!), a formulation often used by the parties to praise their leaders. The majority joined in with the chant, to much laughter from protestors and visible discomfort on the part of the Dean. A

little later, another member of SC began to lead a prayer through the megaphone, to a more muted response from the wider protest. In each of the above cases there was a playful engagement with the archetypes of Lebanese politics that was not preplanned but rather seemed to well up from the shared understanding of what would be expected from an equivalent march outside the university were it to have been sanctioned by an institutional party. The playfulness subverted those expectations but also allowed for their expression. Much as in the parliamentary extension protest recounted in the introduction to this thesis, the particular feeling of intensity in the protest moment was tied to certain ways of acting and thinking, an embodied political memory that in later chapters I term affectively inculcated knowledge. In the intense moments of political action that I discuss from Chapter 3 onwards this knowledge is tied to activist knowledge of difference from others in their social field. During the tuition fee protest, however, it was *aḥzāb* forms of politics that were brought out, seemingly involuntarily.

Crucially, though, this was not a party-sanctioned protest. This was clear enough from the anxieties and worries of party members in relation to their involvement. During student elections party organisers had been ubiquitous, colour coordinated, being reported to and giving orders: the centre of student political life. Yet those who participated in the protest covered their faces when calling classes out. Later, as we walked along as part of the march a friend walking with Mansour and me was told very sternly by a protestor wearing a scarf over his face that he was not allowed to take photos. When we asked him what he was talking about, that no such prohibition existed, he repeated himself, pulled the camera our friend was holding down to his side and rushed off to the front of the march. Once he had left Mansour explained that ‘it’s understandable. He’s a party representative and won’t want his involvement getting to people outside. You can get into a lot of shit for that.’

Though the protest was viewed as a success and impressively militant both by those involved and by the press reaction, it turned out to be the high watermark for the movement. As the protests and the decision dragged on politics—otherwise fell to the side, as Secular Club and No Frontiers organisers were sidelined. In its stead, the role of *aḥzāb* politics, evident in a minor key during the student strike, became the dominant force. Oppositional students had been spending weeks

telling themselves to be wary of the parties doing deals with the administration, had been warned by previous generations of students that something like that may come to pass, and had been suspicious of their erstwhile political party allies amongst the students who might be coerced or bought off. Divide and rule and the infighting archetypal of Lebanese politics also came to the fore at later protests. A camp city and occupation of the entrance area to AUB was marked by such issues from the beginning, and its dissolution marked the end of student militancy over tuition fees. One incident at the camp city was a cardinal example of such infighting. A fight broke out between two students, eventually calmed down by the intervention of Sari, one of the Secular Club organisers. The fight had arisen because one, a Lebanese Forces member, was angry that the water bottles being given out in the encampment had orange bottle lids, the colours of the Free Patriotic Movement, the party of the person with whom he had gotten into a fight. It required the intercession of an 'independent' person to explain that the brand of water bottle just happened to have an orange lid to diffuse the situation. I had been talking to Sari as the fight began, and when he came back over he looked genuinely shocked at the fact that such a fight had happened. Planning meetings also evidenced these tensions, in particular the macho *qabāḍāy* behaviours already encountered during the elections. Sari recounted to me, once the protests had ended, how a student organiser from Amal had threatened him in front of a busy meeting, cursing him and calling him '*yā akh sharmūṭa*' (brother of a whore).

External party hierarchies quickly began to put pressure on students at the same time as they discussed and negotiated the fee increase with the administration. Coercion did not come merely from the worry of repercussion for student party organisers. Regular students whose funding to attend university was dependent on political parties or organisations connected to them, officially or otherwise, voiced their fears of repercussions at town hall meetings in public and in private conversations. Ultimately, it was through the intervention of political party representatives that the administration enacted a 3% increase for current students and a 6% increase for incoming students, creating another matrix of divide and rule between new and returning students. In fact, it was 'known' amongst the protestors, though not reported, that two parties, Amal and the Lebanese Forces – one from each side of the institutional divide – had gone to the

university administration with a proposal to head off the protests before they began. Of course, this meant that parties had been negotiating throughout, cutting their own student members out of the loop. The deal, which was widely attributed to party agreement with the administration, was imposed upon students, as the University Student Faculty Council Committee student representative had refused to agree it. The tuition increase came into force.¹⁹

4. The nexus of independent activism

So far we have seen the ways in which the university is experienced on the ground as a microcosm of the Lebanese political status quo. Either it is viewed isomorphically, wherein there is no difference between political reality inside the university and outside of it, or else it is seen as a space within which the Lebanese political status quo is both present and a potential threat, but where a space exists to foster a politics-otherwise. In this final section I turn to those active in oppositional student groups to show how the experiences of both the elections and the student protests instantiated the three mainstays of activist positioning in the university: independence, secularism, and Leftism.

To be independent resonates because it allows one to argue that whatever substantive political positions one takes, they are being taken because one genuinely believes in them. As the Secular Club's election video states: 'independent candidates are the guarantee that there will be no conflict of interest between student needs and the strategic interests of the party' (AUB Secular Club 2013b). This was echoed by Sari when he told me that student party organisers 'are not activists, they are like employees of the party', giving the sense that they simply do what they are told. 'Independence' was vehemently defended by the

¹⁹ It should be stated that, although my interlocutors all saw this as a defeat, gaining any concession on the imposition of tuition fee increases is an astonishing success when looked at in relation to the majority of such mobilisations across the globe. Where independent activists saw elite interference as a betrayal of the movement, one could very easily read it, from another perspective, as successful mediation on the part of patrons within a clientelistic structure.

oppositional groups on campus. During earlier elections party organisers had spread rumours of individuals outside the university pulling No Frontiers' strings, claims the group felt the need to deny in the clearest terms (No Frontiers 2012). More recently, Secular Club mounted a similar defence against such accusations by the *aḥzāb* in the 2015-16 election cycle in relation to the group's involvement in the nationwide trash protests. In both cases, the need to defend oneself from accusations of dependence is powerful because 'independence' marks out oppositional groups completely from the *aḥzāb*. To be independent, then, becomes a mark of pride because it opens a space apart from the Lebanese political status quo from which to begin considering a politics-otherwise. It is perhaps the clearest possible marker of politics-otherwise one can mobilise in a context where the political status quo is so concretely tied to the structures, power and behaviour of the *aḥzāb*.

Secularity in this contextually-specific iteration is not simply about either the relegation of religion to the private sphere or about a teleologising project of modernity (though it might also be one or the other or both). Rather, as a stance in relation to the Lebanese political status quo, its common language sense has come to mean 'non-sectarian'. Socially, it is instantiated in the fact of your chosen interpersonal relations and networks being based upon matrices other than confessional background. This will be the subject of the following chapter, in particular the twin processes of becoming cosmopolitan and becoming secular, where more will be said about local senses of the secular. For now, though, it is important to reiterate that to be secular as a capacity is already the marker of relative privilege along class, regional, and educational lines. The heterodox confessional make-up of the Secular Club, No Frontiers and, at LAU, the Alternative Student Movement, were already the product of a secular stance. For the purposes of the present discussion secularity denotes a radical break from every aspect of the political sectarianism evident during the election cycle.

Leftism, meanwhile, relates to the particular historical trajectories within which oppositional activists produce themselves. The history of AUB as a politically radical space with a long and impressive history of protest and dissent matters greatly to oppositional groups. In the lead up to the protests both the Secular Club and the Red Oak Club – a new group whose name is styled on the

historical moniker of the Lebanese Communist Party, the red oak (*al-sindyāne al-ḥamrā*) – organised viewings and discussions of the film *74* (Rafei & Rafei 2012), about the two-year student strike in the 1970s. Discussing the wider political foment of those protests in detail – third worldism, insurrectionary violence, Palestinian and Left Arab nationalism – the goals for both was to show that protest was already part of the history of the university. In Sari’s words, ‘we had the history going back to 1974 to draw upon [...] to show the general population of students that protest over fees is an AUB tradition. It’s a normal thing’. Many oppositional organisers, at AUB and elsewhere, were supremely interested in this history, which they often had to piece back together themselves from conversations with others their own age, films like *74*, academic books and pamphlets. When I met Ramzi for the first time, a founder of the Alternative Student Movement at LAU and then key organiser in the Secular Club at AUB, we spent twenty minutes comparing notes on the radical history of the university in Lebanon, giving each other reading lists to follow up on. Regarding oneself as a Leftist meant tapping into a deeper history that resonated clearly within the university space but also nationally. To inscribe oneself within that trajectory was to give historical heft and substantive depth to one’s politics. As Shireen, another member of the Secular Club, said in relation to the *aḥzāb*, ‘they have no political culture, they exist for two weeks at election time and that’s it’. Indeed, the Secular Club holds bi-weekly cultural meetings and monthly political meetings, the express goal of which are to produce a solidary group that can sustain itself as active, principled, and effective electorally and ‘on the streets’. This was meant both metaphorically in the form of the university space, but also literally outside of the university walls.²⁰

With each group, the emphasis may be one or more of secular, independent, and leftist over the other(s), dependent on group interrelations in any given moment and the particular slant of an organisation’s politics. Staying within AUB, the Red Oak Club emphasise Leftism foremost because of their specific attachment

²⁰ Conceived as such, the political education within the Secular Club is quite complementary to the liberal political education for which Martha Nussbaum has recently advocated (2015). Indeed, of the three AUB oppositional groups, the SC was the most characteristically liberal.

to the Lebanese Communist Party, and in order to differentiate themselves from the Secular Club. Yet secularity and non-sectarianism are also a part of the LCP heritage.²¹ Further, whilst a connection to an outside party might appear to invalidate concerns over independence, in fact the relative independence of action had always been a point of contention between the ROC and the LCP, and as of 2016 the group had broken ties with the party. The Secular Club, meanwhile, emphasise secularity and independence over Leftism, to the point that whilst I was in the field group members were cagey about naming its politics, though they would admit that its flavouring was clearly of the Left. Since 2014, however, and particularly as independent activism and protest in Lebanon has become radicalised further, the group is now more comfortable discussing its leftist orientation. No Frontiers, though no longer active, in its heyday laid equal emphasis on independence and Leftism, understanding secularism as ultimately being a product of that twin stance. In some respects, it was the relative emphasis given to secularity that caused the split that produced the Secular Club. In each case, however emphasis may be placed, all three elements remain meaningful because they are stances in relation to the contemporary Lebanese political landscape: orientations against the current political status quo. They are rendered meaningful through the interplay with the *aḥzāb*, with infrastructural collapse, with political sectarianism, and with a non-functioning polity.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to give a sense of how the Lebanese political status quo appears to those who find fault in it and act to transform it. My contention has been that the university is one important analytic space through

²¹ The centrality of secularism to both reformist and revolutionary Lefts active in Lebanon, though always as one part of a total project of transformation, can be seen in the manifestos and communications of parties and cells. The manifestos of the Organisation for Communist Action in Lebanon (OCAL) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) can be found in the appendices of El Khazen (2000), while the history of the Left in the period up until the outbreak of civil war can be found in Bardawil (2010).

which to get to grips with the Lebanese political landscape. Such a perspective is borne out mediatically and at the level of political elites by how much stock is placed in the student elections as a plebiscite on national political favour. On the ground there is constant interplay and flux between two political imaginaries of the university: it is either experienced as isomorphic to the national stage – ‘in here is no different to outside’ – or else as a privileged site in which a politics-otherwise might germinate – ‘here we are protected, the other side of the road, no’. Somewhat ironically, perhaps, in attending to elections and protest it is the former – where the structure and process is most akin to the Lebanese political status quo – that a modicum of success appears guaranteed for oppositional politics. In the latter, meanwhile, the status quo ultimately asserts itself with force. Certainly, insofar as there was much at stake in terms of finance, governance, decision making and power, it is no surprise that my interlocutors deemed the protest unsuccessful. Yet what felt particularly demoralising for oppositional student activists was the extent to which the protest was not able to account for the *aḥzāb* within their own ranks. Through engaging in the yearly cycle of elections and protests the importance of independence, secularity, and Leftism as stances to take in opposition to the political status quo comes to be reaffirmed, though this reaffirmation ought not be taken for granted.

Finally, I want to return to the ethnographic question running through the discussion above and how it relates to the activism at a national level which I turn to discuss in the rest of this thesis. Motivating both statements reproduced as the introductory epigraphs to this chapter is the relationship between the university and the national stage. Either it is the same, and therefore anything other than the political status quo is absurd, or it is a special place by way of not being *quite* the same as the national stage. I want to contend that both statements are, in fact, valid – at least insofar as the point of discussion is the possibility of a politics-otherwise and of activism as potentially transformative action in Lebanon. The university, and AUB in particular, does afford space for an independent and oppositional politics to arise. Yet even there it requires a lot of work to sustain, and its existence is hardly guaranteed. At first it cannot rely on an already existing infrastructure or on a constituency already aware and attuned to it, quite unlike the institutional

political parties. But this is also true for independent activism beyond the university.

On the level of activist engagement, out there is not so different from in here, as it were. All the oppositional student groups are involved in struggle on the national stage. In every one of the political actions, engagements, and movements that I discuss in the rest of this thesis, students from the Secular Club, No Frontiers, the Red Oak Club, and the Alternative Student Movement participated. Further, many older independent activists were members of oppositional groups when at university, and that experience helped shape their activism. Finally, the nexus of independence, secularism, and Leftism as a response to the political status quo in the university holds for activism on the national stage, too. Where in the university the nexus might appear the height of a liberal political education, operating as something like Habermasian civil society (Habermas 1992), the practice of agonistic political engagement beyond university walls has the capacity to make it other than this. Indeed, the ethnographic-historical narrative of the following chapters relates precisely the dialectical process through which independent activists have come to learn, violently and despairingly, the value of each element of that nexus.

None of this is to say that the university is not a particular sort of site both for independent activists and the wider Lebanese public. Indeed, in each of the chapters that follow I contextualise to the greatest extent the particular materialities, histories, and trajectories of independent activism in Lebanon. The various universities are part of this circuit to different extents and in varying ways, which I will note as they arise over the course of this thesis. Nevertheless, it is paramount to note that 1) the Lebanese political status quo is not experienced by activists all that differently within the university and beyond its walls, and that 2) for this precise reason, independent activism *can* sustain itself beyond university walls. That it is easy to build and retain activist mobilisation is certainly not the case, and yet sustained political engagement does occur. It is to the various spatial, temporal, affective and experiential processes through which this engagement is produced and maintained that I turn to in the remaining chapters of this thesis. I begin in the next chapter with the role played by Beirut as a particularly-

experienced imaginary of the city as cosmopolitan possibility in the production of secular personhood and activist political subjectivity.

3. 'Coming to Beirut' and 'becoming secular': personhood and positional critique within the secular cosmopolitan generation

1. Introduction

For many independent activists, there were two necessary prior movements to their politicisation, a transformation and a translocation: 'becoming secular' and 'coming to Beirut'. These tropes cropped up over and over again whenever talk turned to recalling the earliest memories of critical self-awareness. In this chapter I investigate some of the narratives of becoming secular and coming to Beirut that were shared with me by my interlocutors. As the twin phrases imply, core to activists' life histories are spatial mobility and relative disaggregation from previous circuits of sociality and obligation. In turn, this novel personhood is reflected through their present patterns of socialisation and consumption in particular spaces and neighbourhoods across the city. From activists' own narratives – alongside their spatial, social, and consumption practices – we begin to get a sense of the sociological group of which they are a part. Within this group, roughly three 'units' (Mannheim 1952: 302) can be distinguished: 1) the completely apolitical, uninterested and uninvolved with social action in the widest sense, 2) NGO people, and 3) activists themselves. In what follows I argue that they can fruitfully be thought of as a generation, in the sense of a corporate whole whose sense of self has been produced in the crucible of a particular convergence of objective social factors and subjective desires, dispositions and comportment (LiPuma 2000; Bourdieu 2009). These objective and subjective elements are sufficiently distinct from those that shape both others from within their own age-set and, crucially, from those that shape their parents that – both on the part of the analyst and, crucially, on the part of those who make up the generation – there is enough relative external distance and internal cohesion to speak of the generation as a recognisable social fact. I refer to them as the *secular cosmopolitan generation* to reflect both the transformation of becoming secular and the translocation of

coming to Beirut. As the previous chapter began to show, secular was a term constantly in use to reference oneself, in both English and Arabic. Cosmopolitan was not, but I use it here to index the experience of the city as a space in which heterogeneous social relations were able to flourish in what was experienced as an open and multivalent urban landscape – at least relative to the spaces that secular cosmopolitans had been transformed and translocated away from.¹

But secular cosmopolitanism was not restricted to activists; they shared consumption practices and leisure behaviour across the city with both NGOs and apoliticals. Many politicals themselves work for NGOs.² NGO offices and activist spaces are located in the same parts of the city. Apoliticals, too, work and engage off and on with various projects set up by both politicals and NGOs. The commonality between activists, NGOs and apoliticals leaves open the question of what it is that actually differentiates independent activists/politicals from both the NGOs and their general apolitical backdrop. The twin narratives of ‘coming to Beirut’ and ‘becoming secular’ are necessary to activist personhood, yes, but they are necessary too to the personhood of the wider generation of Beirutis of which they are a part. These narratives alone are not sufficient to differentiate their identity, behaviour, or thought qua activists from those around them. On what basis, then, do independent activists distinguish themselves from others in their generation?

I begin this chapter (section 2) by describing the objective and subjective elements that factor into the transformation and translocation of secular cosmopolitans – the contours of domestic and social life, familial extraction, relative class position and spatial dispersion in particular parts of the city. I do so as part of a wider consideration of what ‘generation’ as an analytic concept offers to an account of historical change. I then move to the narratives of ‘coming to Beirut’ and ‘becoming secular’ that I was given by secular cosmopolitans (2.iii.).

¹ It is also the term used by others who have written about Beirut and social interaction within it (Khuri 1975; Kassir 2010).

² *Politicals* gets nearest to the ways in which independent activists described themselves, given that they mostly referred to themselves as ‘those who do politics/political things’ (*yallī by‘āmalū siyāsa*). This was often explicitly stated in contradistinction to ‘NGOs’ as the archetype of disavowing the political even as one engages in it. Throughout this thesis I use the terms mostly interchangeably, preferring whichever is least cumbersome and makes the most sense within context.

These narratives flesh out the objective and subjective commonalities of the generation but emplace them within the biographical trajectories of particular individuals, revealing the time-depth of these factors and how they come to be arranged meaningfully within personal biographies. Seen this way, the university and certain areas of the city loom large as sites within which transformation and translocation are brought together and made meaningful.

Having laid out what is common to the secular cosmopolitan generation, I then turn to some further narratives of 'coming to Beirut' and 'becoming secular' (section 3). In these narratives, however, it is the speaker's critical self-reflection on their transformation and translocation that looms large. Herein, it is Beirut politicals'/independent activists' awareness that their own secularity and cosmopolitanism may be a block to effective political action in a form they would desire that serves to distinguish them from the others in their generation. To this end, I find David Scott's (2014) emphasis on the centrality of actors' *subjective* orientation towards the objectivisable processes that produced them invaluable for conceptualising political differentiation. This is particularly the case where, as in Lebanon, the differences between oneself and the social field might appear far less if one were to take into account only objective social factors.

In later chapters I will show that the incredibly forthright demarcation that activists make between themselves and NGOs is the product of the fallout of their shared engagements over recent years, that in moments of contestation with state and elite forces boundary lines come to be produced between the two sides and, further, that the affective and emotive dimensions of these moments of intensity come to index divergent temporalities, political strategies, and tactical cooperation. My preliminary contention in this chapter is that independent activists begin to differentiate themselves from others in their generation through critical self-reflection on their own subject position, specifically how it functions as a block to engaging in substantive political organising in the form that they would like. I will call this self-reflection their *positional critique*. As the reflective activist narratives in section 3 make clear, this positional critique is brought about *through* political practice. In this, my activist interlocutors in Lebanon exhibited the 'reflexive and transformative' social ontology that Maple Razsa found to be so central to 'anarchist practices' (2015, 200; order reversed):

when my anarchist interlocutors engaged in direct action, they inevitably engaged in a process of becoming [...] one cannot fight neo-Nazi youth, squat a community centre, and face off against the police at protests without being transformed by the experience [...] my collaborators' activism centred on cultivating themselves as different kinds of subjects, as much as it was directed toward macropolitical change. (Razsa 2015: 203)

It is the act of political engagement that has the capacity to be transformative. Potentially transformative of social reality, of course, but transformative too of one's own subjectivity in fundamental and lasting ways. Critical self-reflection can alter the subject's relationship to the world and to itself but cannot undo what it has already become. Independent activists are secular and cosmopolitan: it is what they make of this fact that subjectively differentiates them from other secular cosmopolitans. This differentiation is 'durably installed' through practice (Bourdieu 2009: 78).

To this end, in what follows I make a heuristic distinction between *personhood* and *political subjectivity*. Personhood denotes what is experienced as the relatively latent and passive constitution of being. Political subjectivity, meanwhile, denotes the active and engaged sense of self that motivates political action.³ Independent activists in Lebanon are secular and cosmopolitan persons. Their capacity to act politically is a product of their having become secular cosmopolitans. But the changes they would like to see in the world, how to go about changing it, and who to change it with differ enough to transform them into different political subjects from others within the secular cosmopolitan generation. The experience of political engagement is central to this transformation. The chapters that follow each deal with particular political events in the moment and in their aftermath to excavate the particular 'processes of becoming' that independent activists in Lebanon have gone through over the last ten years, and, further, how these processes have endowed activists with the capacity to endure.

To conclude (section 4), I tease out some of the implications of this chapter's discussion of generations, subjective orientation and transformative

³ The distinction that I make here is similar to that between *social being* and *social consciousness* posited by E.P. Thompson in his seminal *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968).

practice as they relate to the wider thesis and to the chapters that follow. In particular, I stress once again that intragenerational positional critique is only a first step into exploring how activists come to understand themselves in contradistinction to those around them. Already embedded in the anxieties over one's own personhood we find evidence for why activism is seemingly so hard and, perhaps, reasons for why activist engagement may endure at a low level even in the unlikeliest moments.

2. Vectors of secular cosmopolitanism

2.i. Generations, age-sets, and life cycles

The idea of a 'generation' appears to presuppose a number of cognate terms. Age, and age-sets in particular, are a well-worn concern in the anthropological literature. This was particularly the case within a structural-functional anthropology that looked to such age stratification as part of the developmental cycle of any particular society (Goody (ed) 1958). As in the case of Evans-Pritchard's discussion of the Nuer (1950), there might be a stronger or weaker sense of corporate solidarity within the age-set but, functionally, as individuals moved through their lives they came to occupy particular statuses and positions as social persons: son/daughter, father/mother, elder and so on. The key elements of such thinking were twofold: firstly, that generations were distinguished by 'age-classes separated by natural properties' (Bourdieu in [and translated by] LiPuma 2000, 72) and, secondly, that the movement of one generation through a particular life cycle was mapped out, accepted by the members of that generation, and (relatively) stable. It is not necessary to rehash here the established historical critique of such formulations,⁴ but suffice it to say that there is some truth to such developmental cycle thinking, particularly insofar as certain life trajectories (get a job, have kids, get married, buy a house, and so on) are generally accepted within a particular social context. But the moment we accept, firstly, that social reality is far

⁴ But, in relation to this, see Eric Wolf (1982) or Johannes Fabian (1983),

more complex than any such ideal-type and, secondly, that people, intractably embedded in processes of historical change, will differ in how they come to be objectively and subjectively produced, how they experience these processes, the dispositions and comportment that these processes engender, and the desires and aspirations that they inculcate – once we accept these social realities, then the question of what makes a category of persons, and what that might mean in any particular context, becomes salient.

Within the context of the secular cosmopolitan generation that is the subject of this chapter, another cognate term to consider might be youth. Thinking again in terms of the developmental cycle, a group of persons, roughly within the same age-set, might be viewed as passing through the same transitional phase before becoming fully socialised adults with the roles and responsibilities that they contextually entail. Much like age-set, there is some truth too to thinking of elements of secular cosmopolitanism as part of a transitional phase in people's lives. But again, this tells us little about the content of that generation, what it looks like, how it feels, what it entails.

To think rather in terms of generations opens the discussion out from narrow concerns with biological age, and forces the analyst's gaze onto what in particular makes any set of people as they are, through the specific historical and social factors that produce them, and the desires, dispositions, and comportment that they share. As such, age-set and youth become two contingent factors that go into producing a generation in a particular historical moment and in relation to other generations, but only as one of a number of interconnecting factors. This compels us to look beyond them for what might come to distinguish and differentiate one generation from another. I begin my discussion of the social field of the secular cosmopolitan generation of which my interlocutors are a part by exploring their domestic life and social circuits – the stuff of social relations, in other words. But in doing so I am also indexing the ways in which these differ from those of their families and what might be expected of those who had already set up a household of their own, in the form of marriage and children. Age-set and youth remain factors, but only insofar as they serve to index a potential way in which this generation might be seen as liminal within the expected domestic cycle, or certainly the cycle expected by their families.

My independent activist interlocutors came from across the country, and there was no apparent preponderance of persons from any one confessional group over others. That being said, they all resided in Beirut, and their social, work (and political) lives revolved around the city. If they were from outside Beirut then they would go home to see their families, but their social lives were and remained in Beirut. Their friendship groups were also confessionally mixed, but with little self-consciousness. Indeed, it is this admixture which is partly indexed by ‘coming to Beirut’ and ‘becoming secular’. Almost everyone I got to know was somewhere between 18 and their mid-30s, none were married and none had children. Indeed, when I broached this subject I was often told that getting married or having children was a sort of ‘activist death’. Take this exchange, between myself, Sari and Shadi, both alumni of the Secular Club in their early twenties and late twenties/early thirties, respectively. Sari had just been telling me that his generation (*jīlī*) had, through political practice, come to new techniques and new discourses but lacked leadership (a fairly standard argument amongst activists about themselves). Thinking about the oldest members of his generation, I asked:

Fuad: But from this generation, who is it that keeps doing politics after marriage or children?

Sari: No one.

Shadi: Most are not here. The activists in the Democratic Left,⁵ for example, they hit 28, got married, had children, [and/or] left the country – politics is absolutely behind them (*al-siyāsa*, *wallā*, *‘ala ḡahrūn*).

Sari spoke a little more about the dereliction of political duty by the generation above his, those in their forties and fifties, before Shadi cut him off to say: ‘that is such a good question. Trying to create a sustainable political project is a gamble on your personal life (*al-ḥayāt al-shakḥīyya*)’. Almost by necessity, then – if one wishes to move through the expected developmental cycle – one could or would not continue being an activist.⁶

⁵ *al-yaṣār al-dīmūqrāṭī*, or Democratic Left, was a movement-cum-party bringing together leftists (or former leftists) who opposed the Syrian presence on Lebanese soil. Beginning in the mid-2000s, it was able to mobilise many younger people who ultimately felt betrayed as it became a ‘shop’ (*dukkān*) for the leaders of the March 14th coalition in the wake of the assassination of its most prominent founder, Samir Kassir.

⁶ Though not married, a number of my interlocutors were in long-term, stable relationships. There were also individuals on the sidelines of activist social networks, such

Almost all my interlocutors had studied up to or were going through tertiary education, and were bilingual if not trilingual between English, French, and Arabic. Many were engaged in precarious intellectual labour in the form of NGO or research assistant work writing reports, but others worked in the tech industry or in one form or another of professional white-collar labour. The majority came from a contextually broad middle class, in which families were financially comfortable and able to help pay their children's way through one of the private universities without too much dependence on political parties. The family might have had recourse to *wasta*, or connections, but in no way to the level of being integrated into the country's elites. Between high level of education, bi- or trilinguality, relative class position, and diasporic family connections, many of my interlocutors had spent some time living abroad, either working or engaging in further study. For those who had not left or who had come back, the pull and possibility of expatriation was constantly there as an option, albeit a tough one to secure if one only carried a Lebanese passport.⁷

The rough generational grouping of 18-35 is important, too, for what it says about personal memory. Almost none of my interlocutors have personal recollections of the civil war, which ended in 1990, and few more have much memory of the political life of the country before the assassination of ex-prime minister Rafic Hariri in 2005, which made car bombs, institutional political stalemate and hardened political sectarianism even further a social reality. I will talk in much more detail about the implications of the limits on personal memory as regards political practice in chapter 7. For now, it is enough to emphasise that these are all salient elements of independent activist backgrounds, yes, but they are also the salient elements of the backgrounds of a much larger demographic of which activists are a part.

From this description of the objective social factors that produce secular cosmopolitans, it is clear that age-set and adolescence do indeed play important roles in delimiting possible members of a generation – but we see too the other

as sympathetic lawyers, whose technical competence brought them electively and at particular times into the orbit of independent activists.

⁷ Shadi's comment that activists 'left the country' indexes expatriation as another form of activist death, but this was commonplace for secular cosmopolitans more generally, whether politically engaged or not.

factors that are crucial to understanding this particular generation in context and in contradistinction to other generations in Lebanon. It is these that allowed Sari to talk about 'my generation' (*jīlī*) as those people who had been subjected to particular processes of subject formation that had endowed them with political competencies, in his example, but more generally with particular desires, dispositions and comportment. It is also these contingencies that give analytic force to the concept of *generations*. In Edward LiPuma's words:

the relative emergence of a generation – its relative distance from other generations – is always the result of both a set of transformations in the objective structure of social life that, in turn, unfuses new modes of knowledge, desire, and dispositions into an age class. (2000: 71)

Yet the defining element of a generation is not the age class, but the transformations that render certain people and not others within an age class, and indeed beyond it, part of a generation. Thus LiPuma quotes Bourdieu approvingly when he states that

generation-based conflicts do not oppose age-classes separated by natural properties. They oppose habitus produced by different conditions of existence which, in imposing different visions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, motivate one group to experience as natural or reasonable practice and aspirations that the other group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa. (quoted in LiPuma 2000: 72)

This is a sentiment to which the foundational theorist of generations, Karl Mannheim, is in full agreement.⁸ In David Scott's words, for Mannheim 'the unity of a generation consists of a similarity of location of a number of individuals in a social whole – individuals of *roughly* the same biological age, it is true, but who collectively share a range of formative historical experience (of wars, for example, or revolutions) that tends to orient them around, and predispose them toward, a certain style of response in thought and action' (Scott 2014: 164–165). A generation then, is a particular set of persons who have been subjected to similar objective social processes that have produced a roughly shared set of desires,

⁸ Joel Robbins, in a review of LiPuma's book, remarks on how odd it is that he does not cite Mannheim, and considers this 'an index of how little generation has been established as a topic in anthropology' (2002: 732).

dispositions and comportments. It is to these that I now turn in the form of the domestic, social and spatial realities of secular cosmopolitans in Beirut.

2.ii. The circuits of secular cosmopolitan life

On one of my return visits to the field I caught up with a good friend, Lara, who wanted to show me her new flat. I knew that she had had a flat of her own a few years earlier, but in that instance had decided to return to living in her family home, spurred on by the cost of renting and her parents often daily protestations of being rejected and incomprehension at her wanting to live apart from them.⁹ This new apartment was on a side street just up from the American University of Beirut, where she was engaged in postgraduate study. At the same time, she was continuing to teach English across the city for a variety of NGO and grass roots projects, and to a variety of audiences: Lebanese lower middle class women, Sudanese men and women, migrant domestic workers from across the world. She did not consider herself an activist, however, and we had discussed many times her dissatisfaction with others for radicalising and politicising what she mostly saw as service provision.

Her new place was more or less what I had come to expect of the apartments that my friends and interlocutors lived in when they rented: furnished comfortably, but with many of the fittings either worse for wear, or visibly – often haphazardly – repaired; kitchens and bathrooms functional but nothing more, poor water pressure and buzzing electrical fittings. The flat was everything she needed, though, and had an ample balcony to spend time on during the long summer. The previous night we had met to first catch up in Ta Marbouta, the restaurant bar where we normally met whenever we discussed English teaching planning, or just to gossip and talk about our lives. This time we stopped at one of the main takeaway joints on the strip in front of the main entrance to AUB so she could get some dinner. It was close to midnight, finals were on the horizon, and as usual it

⁹ This itself was complicated by the fact that her father had resided and worked abroad for decades. The constant phone conversations in which he asked her to move back, though, show that it was the idea of the natal household, rather than the reality of shared accommodation, that mattered.

was bustling with students getting late night dinner on their way out of or into the library. With the sound (and smell) of cars passing by, honking, shouting, laughing and chattering, we sat on a wall as she ate her food, and we talked once again about what she would end up doing. She wanted to keep teaching English and enjoyed it, but knew that no one teaching job was going to be sufficient for her to do so. On a daily basis she was already going from one side of the city in the morning to the other in the afternoon to teach at a different centre, and month on month the opportunity to teach might dry up, depending on funding, the availability of teachers (and students), there being a space to teach in, or whether a project would be renewed at all.

Lara's situation is not atypical of the people I came to know well during my time in the field, and her social position reflects a number of the objective social factors that are relevant to the biographical narratives I turn to in section 2.iii.. Perhaps the most obvious is the interface of individual living, rent and privilege. Of the perhaps forty interlocutors whom I got to know very well,¹⁰ around half were living in their natal household. Of the others, those who were students lived in the student accommodation provided by LAU and AUB, or in a shared apartment. Renters no longer studying at university resided in a mix of house shares and individual accommodation. In both cases, the majority of private renters' natal homes were outside of Beirut, or at least at enough of a distance that a desire to live more centrally for work could be countenanced. Renting a one-person apartment when one's own natal home was within travelling distance, as in the case of Lara, was a rarer domestic situation, but by no means out of the ordinary within the social networks of secular cosmopolitan Beirutis. As with Lara's parents' protestations at her individual living, though, what family networks thought of this was a different matter. Where the need to rent in the city was based on geographical distance from the natal household then there was little problem, but when this was not the case then the individual's families met the decision with incomprehension and attempted to reverse it. Where the rent was being paid by

¹⁰ Here I mean those with whom I struck up a relationship beyond a single conversation at a protest, meeting, or in a café, and therefore was in a position to get to know more about their domestic situation.

the individual, and sometimes even where parents were themselves subsidising the rent, families imposed no harder sanction on their children.

These are all markers of (relative) privilege. There are all manner of renting and living arrangements evident in Beirut, running along a number of interrelated class, nationality/refugee status, gender, and wealth lines. Going only on the basis of others whom I got to know during my time in the field, one could be living in the upstairs attic of the grocer's shop in which one worked, or living on site or near to the construction zone in which one was employed along with a number of other men, or trying to rent at whatever possible rate for one's dislocated family (Gustafsson 2016). Those, for the most part, were the living arrangements of Egyptian and Sudanese male migrant domestic workers, or of Syrian refugee families. The vast majority of female migrant domestic workers of various nationalities lived in the residences of their bosses, often with no more private space than a small room, often annexed to the kitchen (if they got that space at all). All these sorts of living arrangements are based upon something akin to an existential need for shelter and a position of deprivation that does not follow for my interlocutors, as they would be the first to admit. Then there are the (mostly) Lebanese families who are on 'old rent' contracts, fixed at the end of the civil war, or those with enough money or no choice other than to live in a 'new rent'. This is to say nothing of those who can afford to buy an apartment in one of the new skyscrapers on the waterfront or which are being built across the city (often resident abroad or foreign nationals themselves).

It is for these reasons that I raise the point of relative privilege. My interlocutors were hardly the most financially secure persons in the city. Far from it. But between their own incomes and whatever money their families might give them they were able to live socially and publicly, buying coffee, alcohol, and food out of the home whenever they so desired and, for a good number, renting an apartment. They did not live in the nicest apartments, perhaps, and made do with things that were non-ideal (lack of running water), but they were able to pick and choose. The desire to, and reality of, living apart from one's family are also markers of relative privilege. Firstly, in so far as that distance posits another circuit of chosen social relations to which one may disaggregate in favour of, and in which one may feel more comfortable. Secondly, though, because that first circuit of

social relations, whether it be familial or sectarian, is neither required nor has the ability to dissuade or coerce one from disaggregating. To 'come to Beirut' and to 'become secular' are, more often than not, already markers of relative privilege. This will become clearer in section 3 when I return to activists' positional critique. For now, it is enough to grasp the relative looseness and 'opt-outtability' of the network of familial and social relations from which independent activists disaggregate themselves. The vast majority of those activists I came to know well were not estranged from their families. A number of those who lived at home wanted to move out, but others were not uncomfortable in their natal households, their consumption, leisure, and social patterns outside of the domestic circuit enough disaggregation for their tastes. Though family or societal pressures of various sorts were not absent, they were not determinant in the particular course of activists' lives, nor were they only ever felt as coercive or delimiting, as long as the possibility of taking part in alternative social relations and in a different social field were not completely precluded.

For those who do live outside the natal household, the way they inhabit and put their apartments to use is also different to the Lebanese norm.¹¹ Entertaining, sitting, visiting, and the attendant spatialisation of the home between public and private spaces are not common features of their domestic life.¹² The vast majority of socialising takes place in cafés, restaurants, and bars. Thus social life is public and tied to patterns of consumption. There were a number of sites that groups of interlocutors treated as their own front room. The Secular Club, for example, have a café that they have adopted as their own, in which they study and have meetings, yes, but also where they relax, socialise, and simply hang out when at a loose end.¹³ There are a number of such spaces across the city in the neighbourhoods where

¹¹ There is a longstanding literature on hospitality and visiting in the Middle East, much of it dealing with either rural or peripheral sites, rather than metropolitan centres. See Meneley (1996) and Shryock (2008, 2012). For recent engagements with hospitality in anthropology, see the JRAI special issue, *The Return to Hospitality* (Candea & da Col (eds) 2012).

¹² Though, architecturally speaking, it may still be the case that the flat is divided spatially this way.

¹³ There is, of course, a general sociological trend to hanging out, or sitting in public, prevalent in the Middle East historically and contemporarily (Wedeen 2008: 103–147) This is almost always gendered male. For my interlocutors, and for the secular and cosmopolitan generation, this is both matter of factly and avowedly refuted by mixed gatherings of both men and women together in public.

independent activists spend their time. In a telling exchange, a friend saw that some other mutual acquaintances had broadcast that they were coming over to the neighbourhood in which he was hanging out, in his usual coffee shop. His response to them was *'mayylō'*, a colloquial term that means 'come on by',¹⁴ and is otherwise used to tell a relative or acquaintance to come by *the house* to visit. The coffee shop, here, but so too the bar or the restaurant, served this visiting purpose, and presupposes a sense of ownership akin to a domestic space.¹⁵



Figure 3: Map of Lebanon, Beirut in shaded area. Line within shaded area designates the Beirut municipality.

¹⁴ lit. 'lean (this way)'

¹⁵ See Sawalha (2010) for a discussion of coffee shops before, during, and after the civil war. In many ways, the forms of public hanging out I am discussing here are merely the continuation of this in the present day, often in the same sites across the city.



Figure 4: map of central Beirut, with the main neighbourhoods of secular cosmopolitan consumption and political activism highlighted. I turn to these in detail in the next chapter.

As to the particular neighbourhoods, there is a mixture of factors that underlie which areas of the city secular cosmopolitans hang out in. Partly, it has to do with the areas of town that have historically been cosmopolitan and home to the city's nightlife: Hamra in the west of the city and Achrafieh in the east, two historically important neighbourhoods, the centres of public life in either side of the city and, not uncoincidentally, the seats of the three main private foreign language universities. Another element in secular cosmopolitan spatial distribution across the city is the recent gentrification wave that has overtaken parts of the city. While building, demolishing, buying up public land, and so on – standard hallmarks of gentrification in the mode I am discussing – carry on across the city, there are particular areas of the city that people themselves understand as going through gentrification. This is quite clearly tied to the proliferation of bars, clubs, and cafés – bars, clubs, and cafés that cater for a particular clientele of 18-35 year olds with disposable income. The generally-accepted trajectory of this gentrification wave has been, since the mid-2000s, Gemmayze to Hamra to Mar Mikhael and, most recently, Badaro. The reasons why people moved into each of these areas in turn was the relative low cost of rent in comparison to the previous 'it' area of town, and rent inflation is one of the main catalysts for the acceleration of the gentrification wave, pushing current bar owners to move on, or enticing new

owners looking for a site in which rent is more amenable. In the next chapter I look to Hamra and Mar Mikhael in particular, the two sites in which my interlocutors spent most of their time. For now it is enough to say that the pattern of gentrification is transparently tied to the secular cosmopolitan generation as the clientele that can and will spend money. The same relatively low rents that draw bar, café, and restaurant owners to a site also draw those looking for apartments to rent. The Nasawiya café, the social centre run by the collective of the same name, opened in Mar Mikhael because of the low rent, and many of those involved in that space also lived in the area. It is telling that after four years in the same space the rents were increased to the point at which it was no longer possible for them to stay. A new space was opened in Achrafieh, the first 'it' space after the civil war and now, ironically – or completing the cycle of gentrification, if one wishes – the cheapest and most amenable space in which to rent centrally as a collective. Mar Mikhael, in particular, has garnered public and international interest seemingly for how neatly it mirrors a particular positively viewed form of gentrification, in which artists and 'creatives' make use of the space alongside and as part of an 'ethical' capitalism and regime of consumption.¹⁶

Within each of these domestic, social and spatial dimensions, then, there are desires, dispositions, and comportment that are common to secular cosmopolitans. There are particular sites in the city in which secular cosmopolitans reside, if they rent, and live their social lives, whether they rent there or come in from elsewhere. Within them, they have social and friendship networks that do not rely on kin, regional or sectarian affiliation and in which social life is carried out in public and organised around particular sites of consumption. They have the relative privilege to feel as if their relations and lifestyle are of their own choosing, but with not so much material or symbolic privilege to make spending time in the highest of elite consumption spaces, like the shoreside nightclubs and high-end private beaches or the expensive Downtown nightlife, plausible or desirable. There are, of course, modulations and variations along this theme. One does not have to pass a 'secularity' test to order a drink in Mar Mikhael, and I remember one particularly uncomfortable and interminable conversation with an apologist for Christian

¹⁶ For this reason it has received coverage from general interest publications, NGOs and academic authors (Rahhal 2015; Krijnen & De Beukelaer 2015; Krijnen 2016).

exceptionalism in an activist-frequented bar in Hamra. But there is enough of a shared understanding of the social fact of a secular cosmopolitan generation that Sari could speak of *jīlī*, or a protestor could respond to an inquisitive taxi driver that ‘a new generation is rising’ (*jīl jdīd ṭāli*), as we saw in the thesis introduction.

2.iii. Stories of coming to Beirut and becoming secular

Having discussed the objective factors that produce secular cosmopolitans and their desires, dispositions and comportment, I turn now to the individual narratives of transformation and translocation that render these elements meaningful and contentful. In particular, what comes through in moving from the synchronic and synthesising perspective given above to the diachronic and subjective perspective below is the causal force given to ‘coming to Beirut’ and ‘becoming secular’ as the forms through which objective social factors come to produce particular desires, dispositions, and comportment. In Chapter 2 we saw the central place that the universities play in the institutional political life of Lebanon. We also saw that it was there that an independent opposition to institutional politics historically arises. In activist narratives, the university is foundationally important. For many of them it was the reason that they ‘came to Beirut’ in the first instance. LAU, AUB, and USJ are the best universities in the country and, if one’s family has the financial means to allow it, attending one of these three private universities is highly valued. Indeed, this was such a commonplace that when friends described their life trajectory the act of coming to attend university in Beirut was almost always rushed past to discuss what happened at university – coming to Beirut to study was a no-brainer, not worthy of any special comment. Majid, who had been a very active member of No Frontiers whilst studying at AUB in the mid-2000s, glossed over the translocation to university matter of factly as we discussed his early political thoughts:

My Arabic teacher at school had been very provocative [politically] in class, and it was good. And then after school I went to AUB, and I went to AUB knowing what I wanted and immediately when I got there I started looking for political groups, though I didn’t know any of them.

Amongst current university students, Hassan told a similar story of coming to LAU: 'When I was in final year of high school *isqāṭ al-nizām al-ṭā'ifī* was happening and it was getting to my city and I thought it was a cool thing. Then I went to university and I started reading Marxist literature, and got into my politics courses, and then I found out about the ASM (Alternative Student Movement)'. Carine, meanwhile, a then member of the Secular Club in AUB when we spoke, said that 'when I was close to graduating from school [elite] politics was all like this, directionless and substanceless. And then I went to AUB and there was the Secular Club [...] and I felt like hey great I want to be in this.'

In each case what is clear is, firstly, a restless feeling – having been provoked by a teacher, seen a protest movement from the outside, frustration with the state of things in one's home space – and, secondly, the movement of coming to the university as a particular place in which it would be possible to find something else, even if one did not know exactly what before getting there. In other words, a subjective desire for something else or more, or a frustration with life at home, merges with the (objectivised) pull of university attendance in the city to offer the opportunity to produce them as the persons they now are. In these narratives translocation and transformation are closely intertwined – it is movement that allowed Majid, Hassan and Carine to find an opportunity to explore their frustrations with their home space and discover what other ways of being there might be. This is clear if we look at how they describe what they found at university. Having known exactly what he wanted when he arrived at AUB, Majid joined No Frontiers in the first few weeks of university:

NF was a different experience, I was actively involved in decision making, I was involved in the cultural committee, every week I went to meetings, it felt like something real (*ḥassaytuh shī ḥaqīqī*) [...] my thinking expanded (*kawwan fikrī aktar*).

Hassan joined the Alternative Student Movement at LAU at its high point 'because I thought it would be good to start working on student activism because I wanted to from the second I started studying politics'. Carine, meanwhile, gave the fullest account of what joining the Secular Club in AUB meant to her:

I felt that the community feeling that it provided us with was great, and this was something that I hadn't felt anywhere else. Whoever you are talking to you know that you will be comfortable with this person because we are already in this club together, it was already a baseline from which you can engage with other people without having to think, "okay can I not say this or that so I don't offend them or reveal something about myself which they can use against me". [Back home] everyone talked politics in a very confrontational way (*bi-ṭarīqa 'adā'iyya*). This was a huge change.

University, then, offered a place and space in which alternative ways of thinking, acting, and socialising were possible. There is nothing groundbreaking in such an account. But as we saw in the previous chapter, though it may have allowed for the possibility of alternatives, within the university institutional sectarian political logics are at play on the administrative level and in student interactions. Space for a politics otherwise was also not available at every university. We need only look at Karim's account to see this. He began studying at the Jbeil (Byblos) campus of LAU before trying as hard as he could to move to the Hamra campus in Beirut:

I was studying in Jbeil [...] but I had heard about ASM in Beirut and was excited by it, and I wished there could be something in Jbeil [...] At the same time I didn't feel that I had the potential or opportunity to create an ASM in Jbeil, because I felt that the political parties were way too powerful [...] So that motivated me to go to Beirut and at least if I cannot do anything here then I can help the guys there, you know. That was one of the reasons to move, but if I had a choice between going to Jbeil and Beirut, I do love Beirut more than Jbeil.

Here again we see the intertwining of translocation and transformation, but we see too that it is coming to Beirut in particular that matters. Later in the conversation, Karim added that 'a secular wind in Beirut was a huge motivation for me since I felt that [there] we are not completely oppressed as people who do not believe in the system, there are lots of people who are on our side and have lost faith in what's going on and want to improve the situation'. Here we see Beirut and the context-specific sense of secularity – in opposition to the identitarian and political aspects of sectarianism – completely intertwined. It is the universities as part of what defines Beirut as a particular site of possibility in which to be secular which matters. In each of the instances recounted above, coming to Beirut is what allows politicisation to happen in earnest, giving the opportunity to act, think, and

socialise differently. This is something that, as Karim's account makes clear, did not seem possible elsewhere.

Here I have given independent activist narratives of translocation and transformation, but it is important to stress that each of these universities has tens of thousands of students at any one time, only a fraction of whom are actively involved in any of the oppositional groups on campus, or with any of the political parties that they oppose. Carine was clearest in articulating this fact:

If you look at all the people who do political work in the university, in the parties, they are maybe 200 or 300. Everyone else doesn't get involved (*al-bāqī mā khaṣṣuh*). They go to class and go home. Or go to class, go to Latino dance and go home. And I think this is very representative of the people in the country.

The mere fact of attending university and having the option of becoming actively involved in activism clearly does not mean that one *will* do so. Indeed, a number of independent activists I knew well had not been politicised whilst at university but afterwards as an effect of later mobilisations. This was particularly the case if they attended one of the less active university campuses, like USJ, the Jbeil campus of LAU or the LU, but it was true also of those who had attended more active universities. But the *social fact* of a university such as AUB or LAU or USJ was still crucial for them and for the far wider group of persons who attend them: it has the ability to draw together young people from all across the country, forcing the creation of new social relations and making it harder to maintain an isolation from those you might think of as other than yourself. The fact of the university also matters in relation to particular areas of the city, and the character and significance of a neighbourhood like Hamra, flanked on either side by AUB and LAU, is intimately tied to the universities.

Such narratives and trajectories of becoming also go beyond the university as a unique site that allows for thinking and being otherwise and compels new and different social relations regardless. Beirut as a city performs a corollary function in my interlocutors' narratives. As May recounted her early involvements in Take Back Parliament and Nasawiya, it was getting involved in the 'secular' by way of TBP that opened up the city, even though she had spent her entire life there:

May: It was the first time I engaged in this atmosphere (*inkharāṭat hay al-jaww*), the first time I came to Mar Mikhael, the first time I came to Hamra.
Fuad: Really?
May: Yeah, Ain al-Rummaneh is a closed area (*minṭaqa msakkara*). And I started coming here to Nasawiya.

As my interjection in the narrative makes clear I found this quite surprising at the time as, traffic permitting, one can go from one neighbourhood to the other in ten to fifteen minutes. What is particularly interesting about this mapping of new sites with a particular 'atmosphere' (*jaww*) is that these are precisely the spaces of consumption and socialisation for the wider generation of secular cosmopolitans, showing once again how independent activists inhabit the same spaces and engage in similar forms of social life and social networks to the rest of the generation. In the next chapter I will push further with Mar Mikhael and Hamra to show how, in fact, activists do make sharp distinctions between different spaces of consumption that are valent in particular ways for them specifically, and how this is tied to particular personal histories and longer political trajectories. Again, however, these differences matter in relation to the particular activist subjectivity, which is built upon the initial twin transformations of 'coming to Beirut' and 'becoming secular'. The general spaces matter for the wider group from which activists differentiate themselves but out of which they draw themselves. The idea of Beirut that is being produced in this mapping is a particular sort of imaginary. It is as important to think about what it excludes as what it includes. The word May used to narrate her accessing of the secular atmosphere, *inkharāṭa*, means 'to engage in' but comes from the same root as the word for map. Whether intentional or not on her part, the verb gives an excellent sense of the spatial imaginary work being carried out by this transformation and translocation: the space of the city is changed by one's movement through it tied to particular factors that impel transformation, but so too by the attendant desires, dispositions and comportment that the movement produces. And, by definition, any attempt at mapping is partial and selective: it foregrounds and highlights those elements of what is being mapped that are salient and excludes those that are not.

Returning to Carine's narrative of coming to Beirut and becoming secular we find the complete intertwining of the university and the city, and the area of the city with a particular imaginary of secular Beirut:

When I got to uni I was very uninformed on politics. I was formed of the things around me [at home], I didn't know about Left and Right and political theory. I talked to a bunch of leftists, radical leftists [...]. Anyway, I got to know people around Hamra that are active, and in public lectures at AUB I would always see the same faces, at protests [...] always the same people, and I started listening to these people on and off campus, not just Nasawiya, but people like LADE [Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections], the civil society movement, whoever else, and [thought] ah okay there is a whole other life there in civil society. And the goal of Secular Club was to get to know this whole world and do networking, all that.

This is a particular sense of what Hamra is and who counts as part of it. Interestingly, in Carine's account this includes both leftwing activists and civil society, good governance and election monitoring NGOs – the university and a particular site in the city integrated together into the networking circuit of the Secular Club. It does not mention the hawkers, migrant workers, domestic and otherwise, or institutional and elite actors. As the next chapter will show, independent activists are at pains to open their imaginaries of Beirut, and those of others, to the former and are compelled – against their wishes – to account for the latter. But in the narratives of transformation and translocation presented above, they do not figure as salient figures in the mapping-engagement of/in the city. These narratives do help us understand the phenomenological aspects of the processes of generation formation discussed in the previous section, and afford an understanding of how objective social factors and inculcated desires, dispositions, and comportment of secular cosmopolitans cohere within individual biographies, how content and meaning form around each of these processes. We also begin to get a sense of the self-consciousness of secularity and cosmopolitanism in the words of those who have gone through those twin transformations and translocations. In the next section I turn to some other narratives of secularity and cosmopolitanism that begin to differentiate independent activists from the rest of their generation.

3. Positional critique and political subjectivity

We have seen, then, that the objective social factors of independent activists do not differ hugely from those of the rest of the secular cosmopolitan generation of which they are a part. We have seen, too, that their domestic, spatial, and consumption patterns are roughly comparable. Through their narratives of coming to Beirut and becoming secular we have seen the importance attached to the university as a particular space that allowed for alternative possibilities alongside and as part of a particular imaginary of Beirut and the urban fabric as connected through a more or less restricted sense of civil society as a realm of thinking and action beyond or apart from the institutional political parties. The social processes and background (2.ii.) allow us to get a sense of the sort of places activists have come from, and their biographical narratives give a sense of the personal meaning and life story attached to the processes of translocation and transformation that material suggests (2.iii.).

The problem of sufficiency remains, however. Activists may have produced an avowed and knowing narrativisation of such a process as important to their self-representations, and this is a first step towards understanding their differentiation from the wider social field. But this is still not sufficient for grasping how they differentiate themselves from the rest of the secular cosmopolitan generation. To begin to provide an answer to this problem, in the final section of this chapter I look to how independent activists reflect on the sorts of persons they have become through the twin translocation and transformation of 'coming to Beirut' and 'becoming secular'. In particular, I look to their view that the sorts of persons they have become blocks their attempts to engage in a putatively mass grassroots politics that by necessity must appeal beyond the circuit of secular cosmopolitans. It is this double bind which I bring to the fore here: to have become the sorts of people willing and wishing to engage in such politics they have had to go through twin processes that have made it incredibly difficult to go back and speak back to the wider Lebanese population in a politically effective and meaningful manner. This hyperawareness of one's personhood is the independent activist *positional critique*. Activists, as persons who wish to engage in avowed action that they hope will be transformative, are often hyperaware of their

positionality, subjectivity and personhood. Most crucially for the purposes of differentiating themselves from their social field, this hyper-aware positional critique was not shared with the wider secular cosmopolitan generation.¹⁷ To this end I now turn to some critical narratives of ‘coming to Beirut’ and ‘becoming secular’ to show how this hyper-awareness plays out biographically.

3.i. Critical accounts of secular bubbles on the moon

Carine’s account of Hamra as a left/civil society space in the city tied to the university showed the intertwining of the spatialisation of the city with a particular imaginary of what Beirut as secular and cosmopolitan is. Hani was perhaps the oldest of my interlocutors still involved as an independent activist. He had gone from membership of an institutional political party, to avowed NGO and civil society work, and out the other side completely disenchanted by each. He gave a fiercely critical narrative of his coming to Beirut and becoming secular, placing particular emphasis on the idea of the secular ghetto:

Coming to Beirut is a performance. In coming here I became just Hani, and left [my surname] behind, to play at being secular, as the surname told you where I was from. I came post-2005 as a Muslim kid to Achrafieh. We came from denial, our parents not involved, trying to discover who we are without the imposition of narratives. But to the poorer classes, I see no alternative to the sectarian parties [...] Travelling around Lebanon, as I do, it is clear that you cannot impose (*tafruḍ*) secularism. In Beirut we are disconnected, as if we live in the French revolution. In Gemmayze and Hamra there is a left wing rich cantonisation, which itself is a product of neoliberalism, of the concentration of capital. No one is asking the right question. Maybe the rappers coming through now, El Rass,¹⁸ could link together politically, as that could be something someone in Tripoli could

¹⁷ My account of the importance of the conscious appreciation of what would otherwise appear doxic of course owes a great debt to Bourdieu (1990, 2009), as indeed does the prior account of the production of a generation as dependent on a habitus of desires, dispositions, and comportment produced at the intersection of objective and subjective factors, structure and practice.

¹⁸ Indeed, the rap scene, bolstered by the arrival of Syrian emcees fleeing the conflict across the border, is incredibly vibrant. El Rass and Naserdayn al Touffar wrote what became the anthem of the 2015 trash protests (*نحن والزبل جيران* (*The Trash and Us Are Neighbours*) 2015).

have in common with a Beirut. There is a need for grassroots, to go to Bab el-Tabbaneh or Dahiye.¹⁹ Just marching does nothing: politics is a commitment to people's needs. All of this is also a self-criticism. I don't want to judge, but recently I was in Aرسال talking to Syrian refugees, and then in the evening I came back to Hamra and was drinking with a good friend who had his pedigree dog with him, it cost him a lot of money.

[later]

This is the reason I want to know where you're from, because that is what normal countries do, for that reason I am anti a secular discourse, because the old Left have no problem asking this, because they are truly not sectarian. My dad, when he meets another old leftist from another part of the country, asks them where they are from, then 'oh, isn't that where you do the...'. We cannot be outside of history. I want to go back to the Druze, I've been denying that part of my history for seven, eight years [...] My whole life I live the trauma of my dad as a failed leftist. My ex-girlfriend lived the trauma of her salafist, ex-leftist father, my assistant's father refuses to let him join a party. I started to find my sectarian identity at 30, I was in denial and still haven't resolved it, so I am going back to it to find out and of course there is stuff you love about it culturally. Another ex-girlfriend, Orthodox, we had a great time but we never talked about Orthodox or Druze, we were food seculars [laugh]. But [then] she told me about going to church every Sunday and what the religious music meant to her and we compared the similarities to Druze music. And I said 'how, we two modern secular Lebanese, why can't I explain what it means to be a Druze?' Because if we are not sectarian then we should be okay with where we are from.

In such a narrative we have many of the elements to translocation and transformation that I have discussed above. Secularity is presented as movement away from familial and prior social networks imbued with sect, and opposition to political sectarian logics. This predicated a sort of compelled secular cosmopolitanism and selective forgetting of where one is from, alongside different circuits of love and friendship. Commensality and consumption are cardinal to facilitating and producing these social networks ('food seculars'). We see, too, the spatialisation of the city and the ability to be a secular cosmopolitan indexed through privilege: 'leftwing rich cantonisation', 'to the poorer classes I see no

¹⁹ One of the poorest neighbourhoods in Tripoli, site of much political violence, and the southern suburbs of Beirut, respectively.

alternatives'. Over a number of conversations with Hani, it became clear that he spoke hyperbolically and the strength of his attack on his own secular formation needs to be understood in these terms. Nevertheless, the positionality of his critique already points towards the practical political problems with that formation: this secularism cannot be imposed on the country, we are unable to think through where we are from and cannot speak to an older generation, or to the regions where we came from, the political tactics we have, both activists and civil society, produced through this identity, are not fit for purpose.

Fadia, another older activist with a lot of experience and who as such had had the opportunity to reflect back at length on her own formation, produced a similar critique, albeit in more considered tones. During a discussion of her involvement in the *isqāṭ al-nizām al-ṭā'ifī* protests she told me that

the protests were great, [until] the deadly decision to move it to the regions, which killed it, because the Amcheet protest was the worst protest I had ever been in. It was like protesting on the moon. We were so disconnected from the context and where we were. I remember this guy came up in his car [...] and was like 'what are you protesting?' and I said '*isqāṭ al-nizām al-ṭā'ifī* (to bring down the sectarian system), and he said 'which *tā'ifa* (sect)?' and I said not a *tā'ifa*, the *nizām* (regime/system), he's like 'oh but which one do you want to get rid of, and I was like 'no' [laughs]. And then he was like 'okay, which *tā'ifa* are you guys', you know, it was just so out of place.

Here then, we see an early formative realisation that what Fadia had become, a secular cosmopolitan, what had pushed and allowed her to get involved in the protest movement, had also cut her off from the general Lebanese population that the protests, as mass, wished to involve (after all, this was the original reason to move the protests to the regions): 'it was like protesting on the moon'.

Later, we discussed her political involvement in the aftermath of Take Back Parliament's dissolution:

I wanted to connect with people and to join a union and to get in on the teacher's strikes, because the only excitement left at the time was the teachers' protests. They were very interesting battles. I was working on district [level], in my school, and I was able to understand the power of the political parties and how they work. I was sort of in a bubble, in my little secular bubble, you forget how logical the arguments are for the right-

wingers or for the sectarian parties and what a grab they have on everything, on every school, on every hospital, on every parking lot, on every shop, on every bar, they really are kind of like an octopus [...] I learned people's responses to your discourse, because our shortcoming is always that we are in our bubble, one big happy bubble, nobody understands what we say [...] You have to be on the ground and you have to be doing stuff, and you have to gain trust and you have to build movements. Otherwise you can say whatever you want to say, nobody gives a shit.

Where above we have the secular cosmopolitan dislocation from the regions, here we have the dislocation from even the other inhabitants of the city, the ones who do not appear in the narratives of 'coming to Beirut' and 'becoming secular', the 'happy secular bubble' that Fadia describes. In both instances, however, it is *political activism* in particular that compels a realisation of this fact and the objectivisation of one's secular cosmopolitan personhood, precisely because it becomes a block to the sorts of political engagements one would want to be involved in. We also see the positional critique in full force as a call to action when Fadia says that talk is not enough, you have to be on the ground, build trust, build movements. She then articulated this positional critique in the form of a *retranslocation*:

Fadia: I think we need to work at home. The problem is we come and work in Beirut. So I don't work in Hazmieh, because I see it as too – I don't know why I don't work in Hazmieh, why wouldn't I? I go to the church and stand outside and preach secularism or justice or...

Fuad: Is it that in Beirut you know all these other people, you share part of the same secular bubble and you know you can work with them?

Fadia: Sure but maybe not the first time but the third time someone is gonna join. But I think we're scared of working in our sectarian home, the sectarian places [...] it's a very interesting question, how do you navigate the regions which are divided by religious confessions, and have certain cultural values of which religion is a big part, and still be advocating for comprehensive secularism [maybe] mobilise together but each in their region against the *zu'amā'*, against their leader, not the blanket 'we hate you all, you suck' because then the *zu'amā'* can say they are not my constituents [...] we have to break that sort of thing that benefits the system but not fall into particularities, which would be the challenge.

Fuad: And would require people going back?

Fadia: Yeah, it's absolutely necessary.

As a matter of political strategy, then, it is necessary to get back out of the secular bubble, out of the particular imaginary of the city, out of the particular sites in the city. To do so would require new forms of articulating the political desires of independent activists so that they could be commensurable with those of the wider Lebanese population, particularly given the organisational and political ideal: grass roots and mass involvement in a political movement. It is important to note, furthermore, that such an ideal is not shared with the NGO people, and of course is not shared by the apolitical within the secular cosmopolitan generation.

3.ii Towards an analytic of intragenerational politics

The positional critiques of Hani and Fadia, then, are compelled by the desire to act, and fact of acting, politically as independent activists. It is political engagement that first allows for the objectivisation of personhood as a secular cosmopolitan ('like being on the moon') and the concomitant desires, dispositions, and comportment of that generation ('the secular bubble', 'rich, leftwing cantonisation'). Furthermore, their desired forms of political engagement further require the elucidation of a critical awareness of their personhood, and how to work through it (movements not talk, grassroots and returning to the regions, or 'home').²⁰ Here I would like to return to some prior theorisations of generations, and in particular what they have to say regarding their roles in historical, social, and political transformation. Within anthropology both Edward LiPuma (2000) and David Scott (2014) have attempted to theorise generations as transformative agents, the former drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1990, 2009), the latter on the seminal essay on generations by the sociologist Karl Mannheim (1952). As discussed in section 2.i, both authors understand generations as a corporate set of persons who have been produced by way of a particular conjuncture of specific

²⁰ To this end, many friends and interlocutors in Beirut shared an article entitled *Against Activism*, in which the author argued for 'real organising [...] creating collective identity and shared economic power' and 'buil[ding] a base that acts strategically' (Taylor 2016). The article appeared to strike a nerve, ring true, or both, not least as it appears to speak to precisely the concerns engendered by the activist positional critique. Interestingly, the article was similarly read and shared by friends and activists/organisers/what you will in the UK.

objective processes – social, world historical, and so on. For LiPuma, drawing upon Bourdieu, these processes inculcate particular desires, dispositions, and knowledge. Scott is more interested in the temporal dimension of generations, and drawing on Mannheim, is particularly interested in the overlapping in any given moment of any number of generations (*copresence*), but who, having related to particular processes and events on different timescales and through different temporal orientations, do not experience them in the same way (*contemporaneity*).²¹

Both see generations as crucial units for understanding historical change. LiPuma, working with the Maring in Papua New Guinea, draws a very sharp division between the older and younger generations, between those who came of age before colonial rule and those born into the colonial and postcolonial reality of encroaching and encompassing ‘modernity’. Herein, the generation itself – as a class for itself as well as in itself – is rendered politically agentic:

The well-founded construction of a generation is one of the instruments – that is also a weapon – by which the junior generation wrests power from their seniors, and conversely, one of the means by which seniors claim privilege. (LiPuma 2000: 71)

Though I do not doubt that this is how generational relations played out in LiPuma’s ethnographic context, the material I have presented in this chapter shows that this isomorphism of generation interests *qua* class interests simply does not follow in the Lebanese case. I would also expect this to be true in the vast majority of cases of inter- and intra-generational relations. There is too much initial variegation prior to the transformation and translocation that I have described. Even afterwards, when we can think of a secular cosmopolitan generation with shared characteristics, the sense that one’s (political) intentionality intersects isomorphically with those of the generation as a whole is untenable. LiPuma does later open his argument a little to admit for the possibility that this isomorphism is not a necessary element of generations (2000: 83–84). Nevertheless, he still does not theorise how such a ‘relentlessly nonreductionist’ sense of generations would play out.

²¹ I will return to the temporal dimension of Scott’s reading of Mannheim in Chapter 7 for the temporal orientations of Lebanese activists.

Scott (and Mannheim) afford surer ground on which to build such a theorisation. Firstly, the copresence of multiple generations, not just two, in any given location complicates the picture and points to the sheer amount of political will that would be required to transform a generation into a class for itself. Secondly, the emphasis they place on *generation units* and *polar forms*. Whilst initially himself partaking of the same class analogy as LiPuma, Mannheim further complicates the picture:

Even within actual generations, Mannheim introduces a further distinction, between what he calls “generation units”. He argues that people with, say, radically differing political views (for Mannheim, Romantic conservatives as against liberal rationalists) can be thought of as belonging to the same generation yet to two “polar-forms” of the social and intellectual responses to a historical stimulus experienced in common by all. (Scott 2014: 166)

As we will see over the course of the following chapters, more often than not political/independent activists and NGOs, as two units within the secular cosmopolitan generation, serve as such polar forms of response to common historical stimuli. Their differing political views and the space between them is constantly reproduced through their differing responses in shared situations of political and historical importance. Scott’s reformulation of Mannheim is still open to further refinement, insofar as it leaves differing political views as the causal elements in producing the polarisation of responses. The narratives of ‘coming to Beirut’ and ‘becoming secular’ that I have presented here would provide evidence for a broad generational form of personhood being already in place before political differentiation can become salient through engagement in political practice. In this context it is the hyper-awareness of one’s personhood on the part of independent activists *and not other* secular cosmopolitans that provides an index of difference on the level of political subjectivity and practice. It is the objectivisation of activists’ translocation and transformation, in realising the distance between one’s own generation and everyone else, which compels, allows for, and necessitates the positional critiques of Hani and Fadia. What matters is consciousness of one’s own positionality as a unit within a generation, whose political views, tactics, engagement, and so on are mediated through one’s personhood *and* constantly evolving political subjectivity.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that independent activists have a twin biographical narrative of translocation and transformation that is foundational for their secular cosmopolitan personhood. The ability to have gone through such movements is itself a marker of relative privilege, both in the desires it inculcates and the capacity to enact them. It is also tied to a particular generation of people who have been formed by certain historical, socioeconomic and political circumstances. Given that activists are not the only ones in their social field with a secular cosmopolitan personhood, that personhood is, then, not itself sufficient to understand who activists are and what makes them different from those around them. Instead, engaging in political practice makes activists aware of the problematic nature of their secular cosmopolitan personhood. This results in the production of a political subjectivity built upon a positional critique of their own personhood.

A few closing remarks before moving on in the forthcoming chapters to the fine-grained ways in which independent activists produce themselves and are produced as activists independent from and in opposition to those around them. Though forms of political action that might mitigate the problematic elements of secular cosmopolitan personhood are a constant concern, in none of the positional critiques I was presented with was there a sense that one needs to, or indeed could, 'desecularise' or 'decosmopolitanise'. In going back to Hazmieh, Fadia would still speak of secularism, and in going back she would be returning, not undoing the prior translocation, as if she could. Political subjectivity, then, is what the positional critique acts upon, not the personhood produced by the twin translocation and transformation that the narratives of 'coming to Beirut' and 'becoming secular' evidence.

Further, the importance of practice, of the experience of political engagement, to my interlocutors' positional critique of their own personhood allies them to various anarchist, horizontalist, and directly democratic forms of politics. For the purposes of this chapter, it has been enough to get to grips with the fact that independent activists in Lebanon have an implicit understanding of political practice as transformative of themselves as well as the world around them (in

practice, often far more). The critical narratives of Fadia and Hani show this. Anarchist practice goes further, though, by making practice the bedrock of the political itself. Maple Razsa's anarchist interlocutors, for example, 'shifted away from an emphasis on a future utopian and toward a commitment to forms of practice, away from ends and toward means' (2015, 11); David Graeber, meanwhile, sees the 'new ideal' of prefigurative political forms (deeply indebted to feminism) being 'that action is only genuinely revolutionary when the process of production of situations is just as liberating as the situations themselves' (2009: 537). This avowed politicisation of practice is only partially evident in the narratives offered in this chapter, though it will come further to the fore with each chapter that follows. It is enough for now to realise that one does not need to have an avowed theory of practice to be transformed by one's own practice.

Finally, it is important to stress that positional critique is only ever one aspect of independent activist differentiation from their social field and attempts to engage in substantive and effective transformative action. Fadia and Hani's critical accounts are not narratives of becoming, but rather narratives of having become. Or, insofar as such a process never ceases, they have been activists with a positional critique longer than most other independent activists. All this is to say that within a generation one finds different levels of experience and different time-depths to one's initial political engagement: Fadia all the way through the recent history of independent activism; Hani much longer, albeit in different formations; May and Karim back to Take Back Parliament; and Hassan and Carine more recently still. The temporal dimensions of such generational gradations will be explored in detail in Chapter 7. For now it is enough to point out that not everybody is going through a process of politicisation in the same way and at the same time. Further, others within a social field, with more experience and a longer embodied memory, also interact with the younger and less experienced and have a say in how they become activists. One enters a social field, such as the networks of sociality and consumption that make up secular cosmopolitan Beirut, that already exists and that is already demarcated in particular ways – in which some people are already politicals, some others are already NGOs, and so forth. This chapter has attempted to give a sense of this ethnographic reality, in which the political and social interactions of the contemporary moment have time-depths of their own

that go beyond any individual biography even as they impact upon them. With this being understood, it is now possible to begin excavating some of these time-depths, beginning in the next chapter with those that relate most concretely to the material landscape of Beirut itself for independent activists. It is to the affective materiality of the bright landscapes of the city to which I now turn.

4. Security, habitation, proprietorship: claim-making and the materiality of some Beirut landscapes

1. Introduction

Having discussed the forms of politics that my interlocutors oppose and the kinds of people they are, I turn now to the spaces that they inhabit. The city is fundamental to independent activism in Lebanon. Beirut is the site in and through which my interlocutors live their lives and engage in political activity. It is also where their political practices are either contested or disregarded by state and establishment political actors. This is, then, a chapter about activist social practices of living and acting in the city. More fundamentally, though, it is a chapter about the landscape of Beirut itself: its materiality, its space- and place-ness, the ways in which it acts and is acted upon. To discuss the nexus of [action in the city | being opposed in the city | the city itself] as it bears upon independent activists, I will concentrate on the three Beirut neighbourhoods in which my interlocutors spent the majority of their time. Each neighbourhood has already appeared in this thesis. The first, Downtown, is the seat of Parliament. Activists go there to protest, but it holds no appeal for them otherwise. The second is Hamra, the neighbourhood in the western half of the city in which many independent activists live, socialise, and plan political actions. They make claims on Hamra and in so doing perform themselves as part of the neighbourhood. The third is Mar Mikhael, a neighbourhood in the eastern half of Beirut that was the pre-eminent secular cosmopolitan nightlife spot during my time in the field. Though activists inhabited, socialised and organised politically here too, Mar Mikhael's history and capacity to affect and be affected by my interlocutors paled in comparison to Hamra.

Though my discussion will range wider than the frame of my activist interlocutors to give a broader sense of each site, my goal is to work through how these sites are experienced by independent activists: how they make use of space, what forms of practice the site enables and circumscribes, how meaningful each site is, has been, and remains. In particular, I provide an account of the affective

resonances of each site for independent activists. The space of the Beirut landscapes that I discuss is dynamic, if not quite plastic. The landscapes are malleable, though never smoothly or without contestation. They are affected by any number of processes, forces, and actors with their own temporalities, weight, pull, and power. Some of these – securitisation, flyposting, protest, consumption patterns, mobility – I will discuss overtly. Others – bombs and the threat of randomised violence, gentrification and rent-inflation, the weather, day-to-day in- and out-flows of persons – are mentioned obliquely. My intention is not to exhaustively account for every element in the production of space, if indeed such a project were even possible. Rather, it is to highlight how my interlocutors, and their opponents, have affected and been affected by the spaces they inhabit, in the widest sense.

I first return to the parliamentary extension protest with which this thesis began (section 2). This time, however, I draw out the material aspects of the Downtown landscape in order to discuss the capacity of urban space to affect political practices. Urban space, in turn, is affectable by those practices; it is endowed with a material plasticity and temporal dynamism that cannot be sidelined if we wish to account for the capacity to act within it. I then turn to Hamra (section 3) and discuss the valences of its urban landscape: its cosmopolitan history, the materiality of its securitisation (3.i.), and the asymmetric spatial practices of establishment political actors, on the one hand, and independent activists, on the other (3.ii.). Through the description of a moment of confrontation, I discuss how Hamra is a singular space in which independent political activism can be practiced, even as it remains hazardous (3.iii.). The spatiality of Hamra serves to allow for and itself form what kind of political activism is possible and proper. Mar Mikhael (section 4), meanwhile, initially appears as an equivalent space to Hamra, particularly in relation to the secular cosmopolitan networks of sociality and consumption in the city – Hani’s ‘secular ghettos’ (4.i.). A moment of confrontation between activists at the Nasawiya café and an establishment political actor would at first offer further evidence for such an equivalence (4.ii.). And yet the aftermath of that fight (*mashkal*) came to reflect very differently on the neighbourhood; independent activists showed themselves to ultimately have little to no long-term affective attachment to Mar Mikhael.

To account for this affective variation, I turn to recent anthropological engagements with affect (section 5). An ethnographic engagement with affect necessarily problematises the ease with which affect theorists at an abstract level have dissociated the affective from the emotional, on the one hand, and from historical and social determination, on the other. I propose, then, that ethnographic engagement with affect cannot but understand the affective as already inscribed into both social practice and the material landscape. The accounts of the affective resonance of Hamra and Mar Mikhael reveal that the capacity to affect and be affected exceed any particular political project. To explore how the urban is inscribed into these processes of imperfect articulation and attachment, I propose the concept of *bright landscape* as ‘affectively charged point[] of reference in spatial perceptions’ (Gordillo 2014: 187). By this I mean the capacity for landscapes as a whole to be affectively resonant, upon which an open-ended number of projects might be wrought by a variety of individuals and corporate wholes. These projects always leave an excess that produces an affect of irritability that cannot be stemmed. Some landscapes are brighter than others. Hamra is an affectively charged bright landscape in which history, materiality, and spatial practices come together to produce it as worth contesting over in the first place. Downtown is a space in which to contest, but not worth contesting over. Mar Mikhael, meanwhile, resonates only dully and for a short period of time.

In the conclusion (section 6) I draw out what the implications are of such a circumscribed account of affect for political activism. In attempting to engage in transformative action on the world, activists more than most attempt to elaborate what they can and cannot do in any particular space: the horizons of political possibility, in other words. Affects both provide the capacity to act and circumscribe what one might do and how and, indeed, whether one might want to do so in the first place.

2. Downtown: obstructions in a landscape

2.i. The materiality of frustration

In the introduction to this thesis we briefly encountered Mansour during the parliamentary extension protests of 2014 and gained a sense of the frustrations that the protest moment brought out, particularly in relation to the inculcated embodied memory of what ought to be happening. The elicitation of particular forms of behaviour and thought in intense protest moments surfaced once more in the discussion of the tuition fee protest in Chapter 1. Here I would like to return to that first protest, but this time in order to account for the effect that the materiality of the city has on the capacity for political engagement.

The 'No to the parliamentary extension!' march had begun outside the Ministry for the Interior, located on the western edge of the main road that cuts across the city. From there, though, we had turned south almost immediately into the alleyways of Zarif, packed tight with parked cars, peripatetic vegetable stalls and passers-by. People stood to watch and listen as we marched past. More came to the doors of the businesses lining the street. Others still came out onto their balconies either side of the road. Having spent the majority of the march in those tight alleyways, as we left Zarif behind we also left behind any semblance of an audience. Before us was Downtown: United Nations building to the left, an empty parking lot to the right, a row of metal barriers at the southern entrance to parliament square, a scattering of police, then an unbroken line of barbed wire one and a half metres high, and then another row of police. Here, there was no one but us protestors, the security forces – police, army, private contractors, gendarmerie – and the depopulated and securitised landscape of downtown Beirut. Behind the barriers, barbed wire, and security it was possible to make out the square itself, Parliament to one side, cafés and restaurants to the other, catering almost exclusively to rich tourists, if to anyone at all. To the northeast, right on the edge of Downtown, the bars on Uruguay Street would be having better luck on such a balmy late August evening, with plenty of young professionals willing to pay \$20 for a mojito or straight whisky.

Mansour's frustration with the march was borne of its lack of radicalism, particularly in comparison with the previous year's protests that had been far

more confrontational. But his frustration was also borne of the corralling effect that the securitised environment of Downtown had on the march in conjunction with its lack of fervour. This time round that architecture was effective in delimiting the options for action: after all, how can one break through metre-wide spools of barbed wire, fencing, and ranked security forces? As Mansour stated, 'what would be the point' even trying?



Figure 5: Null space, security space. Clockwise from top left: barbed wire in place during a protest; security architecture at rest with security personnel the lone figures in the Downtown landscape; 2-metre concrete barrier walls, newly painted with the Lebanese flag, on the way into Downtown.

2.ii. Space, place, and landscape: some thoughts on barbed wire

What sort of a place is Downtown then? It is worth turning at this point to the anthropological literature on place. Disciplinary engagements with place have been multiple and have often either spoken past one another, or else spoken to completely separate concerns. There has been the voluminous literature on the fieldsite as the place in which we conduct our research. In this tradition there has been much discussion of what kind of a place it is, how many sites one should look at, whether it is in fact a physical place at all (Dirks 2002), or merely an analytic violence that the anthropologist inflicts upon reality, whether it is best abandoned or if it still has value (Marcus 1995; Candea 2007). Very little of this tradition has much to say about the place-ness of the place itself, or of how our interlocutors understand place, given over as it is to our own concerns about what we do as anthropologists.

A parallel tradition in anthropology has taken space and place to be its core concerns, and has attempted to theorise the dynamic interplay between the one and the other (Rodman 1992; Munn 1996; Jiménez 2003; Low & Lawrence-Zuniga (eds) 2003; Low 2009). One line of thinking understands place to be the background upon which persons produce space. Space here is the aggregated work of organisation and phenomenological understanding by the human mind on the physical form of their world, or place. For example, Alberto Corsin Jimenez argues that we should understand space 'as a capacity' of all social relations: 'it is what people do, not where they are' (Jiménez 2003: 140). In his fieldsite the spatial capacity of social relations is in contradistinction to the place of their city of Antofagasta, as his informants annihilate and supplant the desert that surrounds the city (Jiménez 2003: 137). Others, however take the opposite position. For Margaret Rodman, to take one example, it is places that are 'politicised, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions' (Rodman 1992: 641).

Setha Low attempts to resolve the space/place impasse with recourse to 'embodied space', arguing that it is 'the location where human experience and consciousness takes on material and spatial form [and] offers a useful framework for understanding the creation of place through spatial orientation and movement' (Low 2009: 28). Embodiment opens the body up to being the repository of

'metaphors, ideology, and language, as well as behaviors, habits, skills, and spatial orientations' whilst being 'grounded at any one moment in a specific geographical location' (Low 2009: 22): the body is constantly enspaced, then, wherever it happens to be contingently emplaced. Low's theory of space and place would appear to lend itself to an analysis of subjectivity, as it affords space/place a determining effect on the production of one's interiority. Yet precisely because of its emphasis on the production of a subject's interiority through the ways that they come to understand place, it leads us to say little about the actual material place that they inhabit. In Yael Navaro's words, such a 'culturalist' perspective states 'that there is nothing that exceeds the human interpretation of spatial surroundings. No excess. No leftovers. No remains' (2012: 18).

A more enticing perspective on the space/place problematic arises from certain recent scholarship that engages the concept of 'landscape'. This work takes its cue from Tim Ingold's call to 'move beyond the sterile opposition between the naturalistic view of the landscape as a neutral, external backdrop to human activities, and the culturalistic view that every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space' (Ingold 1993: 152).¹ In this formulation, landscape is not the background upon which the drama of human life plays out, or 'landscape as scenery' (Hall 2008: 75). It is, in Thomas Hall's words, 'a world we are physically in and of in ways which cannot be undone or got away from' (Hall 2008: 75).² Anna Willow adds that landscape is also 'deeply historical and temporally dynamic' (Willow 2011: 265): it both changes and remains. Both Willow and Hall's ethnographic material is intriguingly comparable to independent activist experience in Lebanon, as they engage with either marginal(ised) persons or groups who are not in full control of the spaces they inhabit. They both deal with groups who do not feel in complete control of their landscape and look to how they act on, and are acted upon, by it. This, as we shall see, is also the case for independent activists in Beirut.

Let me return now to the parliamentary extension protest. Hall is surely

¹ It also takes its cue from non-representational theory in geography, and its attendance to the nonsubjective and the nonrepresentational, viz. Navaro-Yashin's call to account for the excess, leftovers, and remains of the culturalist perspective (Thrift 2007; Simpson 2011).

² This was, of course, also Henri Lefebvre's argument in *The Production of Space* (1991).

right when he states, contra Jimenéz, that space cannot be separated from the place of the city, that

space is always somewhere – not fixed in the way of a Cartesian surface, but implicated in a world materially experienced. It does not float free of the terrain. The landscapes through and with which we move constitute our encounter and experience of the world [...] agency and structure is shaped – and sometimes painfully – by the structure of that encounter, in the city. (Hall 2008)

As we walked out from the tight alleys of Zarif into the wide space of the overpasses, so we moved from an area of Beirut in which we were seen and heard to one where we were screened and herded, from a landscape of political posters and party insignia, full of passers-by who we wanted to convince to join us – if only rhetorically – to a landscape inhabited by security personnel and securitised architecture – no need for political posters here. As we shifted from one landscape of the city into another, the way in which we experienced the city altered, and the ways in which we tried to act on it, in it, and through it changed too. In Zarif we had been loud, inciting and imploring. In the open space between Zarif and Downtown we spread out and became ragged. We shouted louder to attract the attention of the passing motorists overhead. Some protestors began to dance, taking advantage of the greater amount of space between the marchers. Once amongst the barbed wire and security we finally grew quiet, sensing the futility of calls to others to come join us in a place where there were no others. Instead, the more radicalised amongst us, the student veterans of previous protests here where they had fought with the police, began chanting against the security personnel. Here the NGO worker objected but the students continued.

But no way past the barbed wire. Barbed wire which is such a recognisable part of the securitised landscape of Beirut. Barbed wire that was now placed across the entrances to parliament square every time a protest was called. Erectable in minutes, all it needs to be dragged across the street is a couple of soldiers and a wooden palette to avoid laceration and torn clothing. In the form of the (re)movable barbed wire we have an element of the landscape's materiality which is both historical and dynamic. Historically embedded, as the barbed wire only appeared a year earlier during the night of the first protests against the

parliamentary extension. That day, independent activists had fought with parliamentary police to force their way to the parliament building, and in the evening camped out exactly where Mansour and I found ourselves a year later. That night there had been an attempt to place the barbed wire down between the protest line and the metal barriers. This was stopped by protestors moving forwards and occupying the space directly in front of the barriers. Ultimately, the truck carrying the barbed wire turned around, drove through the square and up to the other side of the metal barriers, and placed it down there. Though a small victory for the protestors then, the landscape of Downtown had changed for the worse and remains that way.

The barbed wire is, then, materially and temporally dynamic too. It is a signal object with which to explicate Henri Lefebvre's point that 'space considered in isolation is an empty abstraction' (1991: 12). We must also attend to what is in the space (materiality) and when it is in it (temporality). The barbed wire can move, and in moving it changes the landscape – some ways of inhabiting the city are altered when it is in use, and the ways in which the city can be acted in, through, and upon are permanently altered by its latent dynamic potential to alter the landscape. But just as a year ago it was not there, it is possible to think of removing it or neutralising it. On the second day of protest the previous year, protestors had used wooden palettes of their own, culled from their signs and banners, to trample over the barbed wire and get through to the next set of metal barriers beyond. But not on that August night. Frustrated, the barbed wire and barriers having defeated us, me and Mansour left dejected.

Downtown is a landscape of and for protest. Its materiality both delimits and is productive of contestation. But it is a space in which one contests, and not over which one contests. Independent activists made no claims on this urban landscape. Downtown does not belong to anyone affectively. It certainly belongs to many people economically: its leisure spaces cater for conspicuous consumers, and all manner of high-end international brands have stores there: Bang and Olufsen, Swarovski, Casper and Gambini, and so on. But even these conspicuous consumers do not reside there, and the common stereotype in Beirut at large is that these stores cater for rich Gulf tourists and few others (Naylor 2015). All the roads leading to parliament square are blocked off with permanent metal arms, movable

metal barriers and, of course, the screen of barbed wire. As such, for all those who come to protest here, and indeed for many ordinary Beirutis, this is a null space;³ even outside of protests it is near impossible to get into the central square. But Downtown is not the only place in which independent activists engage in political activity. They also do so in their leisure and social spaces. I now turn to a discussion of landscape, social and political practice, and affective claim-making in the two main neighbourhoods inhabited by independent activists: Hamra and Mar Mikhael.

3. Hamra: leisure and politics in being at home

3.i. Cosmopolitan Hamra, securitised Hamra

Hamra is one of the historic neighbourhoods of Beirut's western side. North to south, it roughly spans the alleys and side roads between the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Lebanese American University (LAU). East to West runs Hamra Street itself. At very most, excluding the universities themselves, it covers one square kilometre. It is a cosmopolitan space with a history of pre-civil war coffee shops frequented by progressive nationalists and avant-garde poets from across the Arab world. It is also the home of AUB, itself thoroughly integrated into the political and cosmopolitan life of the area. It was at AUB that the Arab National Movement was founded. Many of its members would go on to found and be active in a number of Arab nationalist and socialist formations in the following years: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Organisation of Lebanese Socialists – each of these groups would ultimately take part in the Lebanese civil war (Bardawil 2010). In the years preceding the outbreak of war in 1975 AUB had been rocked by student strikes which had as much, if not more, to do with the Lebanese political situation and the Palestinian cause than with internal disputes (Barakat 1977). The civil war

³ Or, in Lefebvre's terms, a 'dominated space' of 'military architecture, fortifications and ramps' (1991: 164).

divided the city between East and West, with the Green Line cutting directly through Downtown. The western half of the city suffered heavy bombardment and occupation by Israeli forces in 1982. Along with the rest of Beirut there was considerable demographic shift in Hamra, and since the end of the civil war in 1990 it has been figured by many as a 'Muslim' area of the city.⁴ More recently, cafés and bars have opened with a harder or softer claim to being left or independent spaces. Some are owned by progressive and leftwing individuals. Some others are frequented by student radicals. Others still are used as meeting spaces to organise political action. All are frequented by the politically minded and the apathetic for the purposes of going out in the evening, relaxing, and drinking. As one independent leftist puts it: 'an oasis of diversity, progressive politics, and revelry' (Jadaliyya Reports 2011). This claim is always made in contrast to the homogeneity of other areas of the city and the country and their being under the monopolistic control of one particular institutional political actor. Hamra's political openness, then, figured again and again in discussions of where one can do independent politics and where one cannot. I will return to this point below.

At the same time, Hamra is one of the most securitised landscapes in Beirut. Hamra Street itself is largely free of barriers, sandbags, and anti-tank barriers – the only obstructions to movement are the slow-moving cars that cover the whole street, excepting a few hours in the early morning. The entrances to both universities, meanwhile, are guarded internally by university security and *darak* and externally by soldiers. There are a number of pillboxes dotted around the entrances to LAU, and an ATV parked up one side street. At AUB, the pillbox is surrounded by sandbags and a camouflage mesh hangs on the gate the pillbox buttresses up against. At the eastern entrance to Hamra are the Ministry of Tourism and the Bank of Lebanon. As such, there are anti-tank barriers, soldiers, pillboxes, and two-metre high concrete barriers (painted in the colours of the Lebanese flag whilst I was in the field). To the south, the Interior Ministry entrance has been fitted with a tented structure, ringed by stubby concrete barriers, to

⁴ Witness some of Lara Deeb and Mona Harb's interlocutors from Beirut's southern suburbs telling them they felt more comfortable coming to Hamra rather than cafés on the eastern side of the city because it was a Muslim environment (Harb 2014). Or the number of conversations I had with taxi drivers in which they registered surprise that, being of Christian extraction, I was from Hamra.

check cars entering the complex for explosives. This semi-permanent structure, also erected during my time in the field, sticks out and cuts halfway into one of the busiest roads in Beirut, causing tailbacks well into Hamra itself. Further back is the residence of the Hariri family, who lead the Future Movement and are key stakeholders in the March 14th coalition. It is also ringed by a number of carbomb-detecting tents, alongside the usual pillbox-soldier-anti-tank-ATV arrangement. A number of the area's side streets are also variously guarded, protected, or closed off if persons of interest reside there. Often one comes across an errant set of concrete barriers or metal gates without there seemingly being anything to guard. Here the temporal dimension of the spatial is again invoked: when was there something to guard here? what was it? why is it no longer here? was there ever a reason for it? (There are also non-security related obstacles to mobility: electricity generators placed on pavements, shop owners sitting outside their shops chatting or playing backgammon, outside seating for restaurants (Battah 2015), bollards haphazardly set into the sidewalk to stop cars and scooters from parking, cars and scooters that have somehow managed to get up there anyway, ticket machines for parking, electricity pylons. In Hamra, as with many other neighbourhoods in Beirut, it is almost impossible to walk in a straight line.)

Each of these securitised structures of the landscape affects the ways that people inhabit Hamra. Most obviously, they radically alter the ways in which Hamra dwellers move around (Monroe 2011; Fawaz et al. 2012). If they walk, then they have to constantly step into the street, or round anti-tank barriers, or nod their heads at soldiers as they pass, or walk around an ATV because the soldiers in charge of it have constructed a lean-to between it and a nearby wall and are sitting in its shade. If you drive, then you will have to merge at a moment's notice, or zigzag across a road to avoid anti-tanks and metal barriers, and be sure to slow down, turn down your music and nod at security checkpoints. If you live near particularly securitised sites, such as *qaṣr ḥarīrī*,⁵ then you may have to park outside the securitised zone or else have your car tagged and registered (Fawaz et al. 2012). Awareness and behaviour are also affected. As Fawaz et al. relate, seasoned residents of areas such as Hamra, one of the four securitised 'hot spots'

⁵ Hariri palace, as the family residence was known.

that they identify in Beirut,⁶ can tell whether there is a heightened threat, and what sort it might be by way of a reading of the security landscape: 'by identifying which elements are used, how they are positioned, and what kind of restrictions they impose, city users know whether they are in the location of potential street clashes or trespassing on the security zone of a politician' (Fawaz et al. 2012). We have already seen in the case of Downtown how this security landscape can quickly change and adapt to the situation at hand.

One paradigmatic alteration to behaviour is the restriction on photography. Near the end of my fieldwork I joined one of the older residents of my building for a renters' march along Hamra Street to protest against the mooted cancellation of leases agreed before 1990. Many of the residents of my building were on such 'old rent' contracts, miniscule in comparison to equivalently spacious 'new rents'. Mostly men and women in their forties and above, I stood taking photos of this group of protestors, distinct as they were from my usual network of interlocutors. As I did so a huge army armoured vehicle, twice the width of the cars that lined Hamra Street, made its way through the crowd. As I turned my phone towards it a traffic police officer took my arm and pulled it down: 'Don't take photos of the army. They'll take your phone away.' Feigning innocence, when they passed out of view I asked him if I could take photos again, to which he dismissively waved his hand and jutted his chin up. Most residents of Hamra, far more sensible than I, would have refrained from photography, or at least been far less ostentatious in taking a photo. As Fawaz et al. note, Beirutis effect 'a certain competence to minimise disruptions when they are navigating the system' (2012: 187), but in so doing they produce the normalisation of the security landscape as part of the material structure of their daily lives.

3.ii. Making claims, producing the Hamra landscape

The loosely state-sanctioned materiality of security is not the only structure in and of the neighbourhood's landscape. The SSNP also makes its mark on Hamra

⁶ Downtown is another. See Fawaz et al. (2012) for a mapping of where securitised structures are located and what form they take.

materially and affectively. Beginning in 2008 they began to visually mark the district: their local headquarters on Makdisi Street has many of their flags at its entrance, rising out of concrete-filled barrels and daubed with their slogans. These barrels block parking and access ten metres either side of the road. The walls in this area, and up and down many of the side streets between Hamra and the American University of Beirut, are plastered with their posters. On Hamra Street itself a wreath and placard commemorate Khalid Alwan, a party member who fired the first shots against Israeli troops during the 1982 occupation of Beirut. At the Domtex intersection, near the eastern entrance to Hamra Street, party flags fly over all four street corners. Part of the March 8th coalition and fervent supporters of the Syrian regime (Choufi 2014), it was seen as no coincidence by those living in the area that, after the 2005 withdrawal and normalisation of diplomatic relations between the countries, Makdisi Street was chosen as the seat of the Syrian embassy in Lebanon. It was common knowledge, too, that the parking lot opposite the embassy was run by SSNP members: during the 2008 skirmishes between March 8th and March 14th it was the parking lot attendants who secured the surrounding area, storming into businesses with guns in hand. Each of the establishment political sides engages in these public forms of taking ownership of physical areas of the city, but the SSNP has shown itself particularly ostentatious in this regard.⁷ Their control stretched not only to the public space of the street, but also the bars and shops in the area. The allegiance of the parking lot attendants was not in dispute, but in many conversations with independent activists they made clear to me that they did not trust the barmen in the cafés either: they were SSNP too, or, even if they were not, they would not help out in case of trouble for fear of retaliation.

Independent activists are also engaged in physically marking space. Almost all walls and sides of buildings in Hamra are covered with posters, stencils, or graffiti. In the polysemy of flypostings for cheap Wifi, accommodations for female students, and gigs 'brought to you by Red Bull Lebanon' are, for example,

⁷ Ain el Mreisseh, to the north of Hamra, is covered in Amal paraphernalia, Sassine Square in Achrafieh in eastern Beirut has murals to the Gemayel family (Kataeb, Lebanese Forces), the southern part of Hamra for a number of years after 2005 was covered in photos of Rafic Hariri and his son (Future Movement).

advertisements for Migrant Worker Celebration Day, or glossy and ironic candidacy posters for the constantly-postponed elections. These are put together by civil society groups and NGOs who have a certain cash flow and the material capabilities to produce such posters en masse. Independent activists, meanwhile, preferred graffiti and stencils: 'fight rape!', 'Take Back Parliament!', 'no to the parliamentary extension!', often stencilled in both English and Arabic.

Hamra is, then, a polyvalent landscape that is encountered as materially securitised, aggressively claimed by a political party, and actively marked by independent activists and civil society groups. By its day-to-day habitation and use as a site of leisure, social, and political practices, Hamra is also produced as an 'inscribed space', that is, the various actors of the Hamra landscape "write" in an enduring way their presence on their surroundings' (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga (eds) 2003: 13). Some of these day-to-day spatial practices could perhaps constitute an 'urban kindness' of the sort Hall, drawing on the work of Nigel Thrift, discerns 'whenever we take time to patch or paint those parts of the urban fabric we call our own' (Hall 2008: 73). Witness, for example, that much of the graffiti and stencilling in Hamra is aesthetically pleasing. Indeed, I have not heard complaints about the graffiti or stencils from Hamra residents, which can certainly not be said for the spatial practices of the SSNP. This repeated, continuous, and low-level inscription of spatial practices serves, on one level at least, to make claims on the Hamra landscape. Both the SSNP and the looser and broader community of independent activists engage in these activities. But alongside parallel claim-making the two groups have also clashed overtly. It is to one such paradigmatic case of direct confrontation that I now turn.

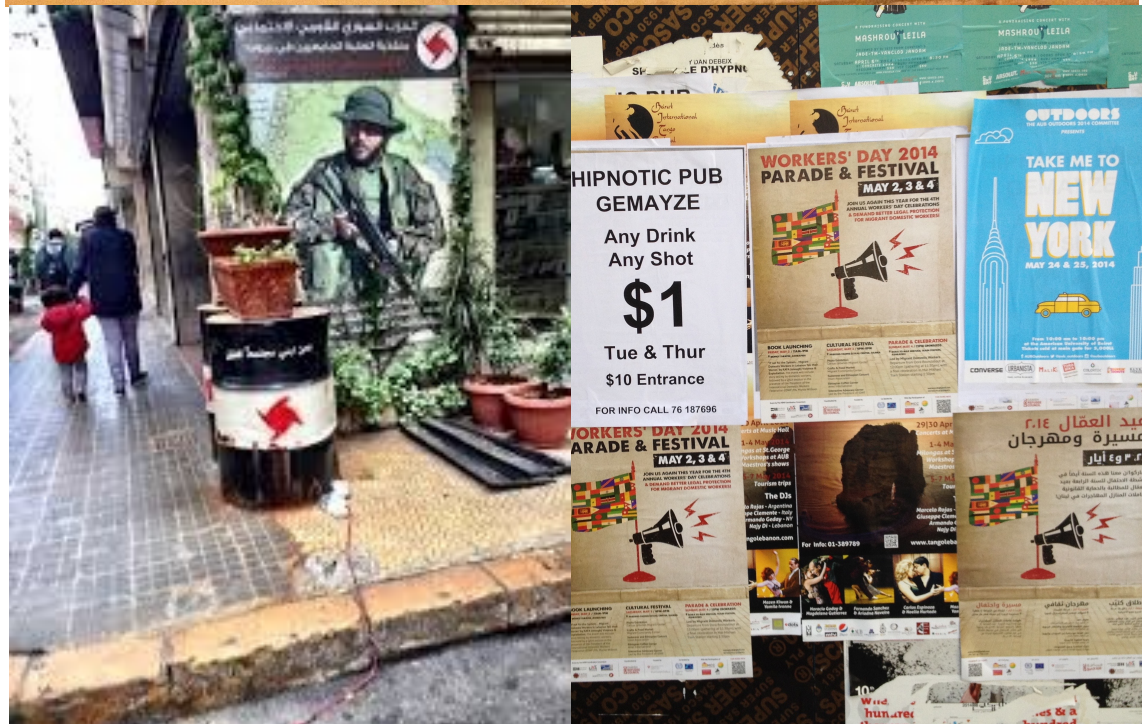


Figure 6: Claiming Hamra. Clockwise from top: activist and NGO graffiti on a Hamra wall; posters for activist concerns side by side with advertisements aimed at secular cosmopolitan consumption; one end of the SSNP headquarters on Makdisi street

3.iii. 'Hamra is not a safe place'/'Hamra is the only place that is ours': fight at the Syrian embassy

August 2nd 2011. A protest is organised in opposition to the Syrian regime's repression of dissent. This is not the first solidarity action since the uprising against the regime across the border began. On previous occasions a time and place were also made public, but this had resulted in supporters of political parties allied to the Syrian regime, in particular the Ba'th and the SSNP, arriving, threatening, and violently intimidating the protestors. This time round the call went out by email and was not shared publicly: 'there will be a protest, share with your contacts but don't tell the media (*mā 'ambitkhabbir al-i'lām*), come to the Syrian embassy at eight in the evening'. But this got leaked – someone had forwarded the call to an untrusted contact, and the plan was now public knowledge. Another call went out: 'whoever still wants to come, come – but they are responsible for their personal safety' (*salāmat al-shakhṣiyya innuh byithammalah*).

At eight in the evening, groups of two and three began congregating on the pavement in front of the Syrian embassy. Across the road is one of the trendier bars, De Prague, and nearby is Dany's – both frequented by many of the protestors. Next to the bar is a large parking lot, whose operators are known to be supporters of the SSNP. It was to be a silent protest, so the participants lit candles and lifted photographs and banners. Within minutes of the protest beginning a counter demonstration of SSNP and Ba'th supporters arrived. They were of roughly equal size and they faced the silent protest from the other side of the road. They began chanting in support of the regime: *bil-rūḥ, bil-dam, nafdīka yā bashshār!* (With our spirit, with our blood, we sacrifice ourselves for you, Bashar!). The response from the protestors: *bil-rūḥ, bil-dam, nafdīka yā sūriyyā!* (With our spirit, with our blood, we sacrifice ourselves for you, Syria!). The protestors on the sidewalk saw that the counterdemonstrators had sticks with them.

As the regime supporters moved closer one of the protestors shouted that one of them had a knife. At that the counterdemonstrators attacked from in front. From the embassy behind others came out to fight, and others still came from the direction of the SSNP headquarters up the road. One protestor was cracked over the head and dropped to the floor bleeding. Others carried him to a car and took

him to the nearby American University Hospital. The SSNP were clearly involved: when we spoke about the attack Majid told me that the man who had beaten him and broken his glasses in front of the embassy had been wearing party paraphernalia around his neck. I remarked that it was stupid to identify oneself, but he replied that that was precisely the point: they wanted them to know who it was that had beaten them and that they could do nothing about it. As they were beaten the protestors were told: 'so you want a revolution, you animal?', 'you want to know what's happening in Syria? Here you go!'. Many tried to run away or find cover but, as Majid related,

De Prague closed its doors, and Dany's closed its doors, everyone closed their doors and stopped anyone from coming in. We ran away. After that *darak* (gendarmerie) arrived, and they split the sides. They didn't arrest anyone, as usual, and they told everyone to go home, go home, go home.

Some protestors ran down to the Hamra police station, where they were turned away and told that the police would not file a report because the regime supporters had 'political cover' (Jadaliyya Reports 2011). Others were chased up onto Hamra Street itself, full as ever with passersby. Ahmad and a female friend ran into Kababji, one of the larger and busier restaurants on that strip of road. They ran through to the back of the restaurant and hid together in one of the bathroom stalls. Eight men came and stood outside the toilet door and taunted them for fifteen minutes before losing interest and leaving. No one from the restaurant intervened.

Majid, already beaten up earlier, regrouped with three or four others a little further up Hamra Street, by the Domtex intersection, where they discussed what to do next: figure out what action to take? go home? get a drink? Five or six men walked up to them from the direction of the fight, and began beating him. He fell to the ground, where they continued punching and kicking him. His friends shouted and screamed to bring attention to the incident, which was hardly hidden in the first place. They were also kept away violently, though the brunt of the attacks were directed at Majid, sprawled on the floor. Other protestors came up and were able to grab him and take him away. He was put in one car and driven further along Hamra and up a side road to Café Younes, yet another protestor hangout, where he was put into a different person's car to avoid being chased. From there

he was finally driven to Makassed hospital, further away from the fight than the American University Hospital to which others had already been taken. Having already lost his glasses, now his eye would not open and his whole face was covered in blood. As he told me later, the whole ride to the hospital he was terrified that he had lost sight in the eye; luckily it had swollen shut but was not permanently damaged. He was discharged the next day after multiple stitches were applied to the cuts on his face. Others were less lucky: a cracked skull, a broken hip.

For the purposes of a discussion of the Hamra landscape, I am here interested in what this violent encounter and its repercussions tell us about the spatial practices of independent activists in their 'home' landscape. Though they still feel a certain proprietorship over Hamra as 'theirs' more than anywhere else in the city, let alone the country, no one there that day could any longer be under the illusion that they were the only ones inhabiting the landscape or able to make claims upon it. The attack that day served to show that it was never *only* their space. In this moment, the ostentatious violence served the purpose of showing them who was in charge of Hamra. As Ahmad put it, recounting how he had hidden in the toilets of Kababji: 'it's funny. You eat, you shop, you go out, work, enjoy yourself in Hamra, and then you realise that it is not your place, you don't belong to it. There is an invisible power that controls it. You wouldn't notice it until a moment like that'. Majid felt this so keenly that he did not return to Hamra at all for months after the attack for fear that he had been marked out. And yet he did eventually come back; indeed, we spoke about the attack as we sat in an *arghileh* (hooka) café just off Hamra Street. As the writer of an eye-witness account from that night has stated:

Hamra is not a safe place for those who are conscientious, progressive, and politically active. But I, and others, will not stop going to visit Hamra, Makdissi, or other parts of Ras Beirut. Our friends and families live there, we go to school there, we work there, we live there, and we frequent bars, restaurants, and cafés there. And we will continue to be politically active there as we are in the rest of this country. (Jadaliyya Reports 2011)

This defiance is laudable, but the last line is worthy of scrutiny, precisely because Hamra is in fact one of the only areas in the city in which one can be politically

active in the mode implied by the author. Whilst discussing the student strike against tuition increases at AUB with Sari, a leading member of the Secular Club, he got onto the topic of the SSNP members I had seen at the university gates on student council election night. They had stood opposite the university main gate, waving 2x3 metre *zawba'a* flags, waiting for the results.⁸ I mentioned the word of mouth reports I'd heard from the LAU elections, that an SSNP member at the university was handed a semi-automatic weapon as he left campus and which he then fired in the air whilst hanging out of a car window. Emphasising how common these intimidatory moments had become, Sari mentioned how the previous year another member of the Secular Club had got into a taxi at the university gate only to be dragged out of it a short distance up the road by SSNP members and threatened. At a previous protest he had held up a banner that equated the Syrian regime's shelling of the Yarmouk Palestinian camp outside of Damascus to the Israeli siege on Gaza.⁹ Yet another mutual friend of ours was bundled into a car as he came out of LAU main gate, and was taken away for a number of hours during which attempts were made to cajole him into supporting one side of the March 8th/March 14th divide once he took up student council office. He refused. As we saw in Chapter 1, the importance of the university gate cannot be overstated in this landscape – on one side of it certain political activity and certain statements are possible and safe, but the moment one returns to the public space of Hamra things are very different.

Given this danger, and in relation to the Syrian embassy protest, I asked Sari how you deal with the latent possibility of violence in political activism. It is worth quoting his response in full:

You keep a low profile, like people who are secular or leftists and live in Dahiye or Tripoli or elsewhere.¹⁰ Totally. It's the same relationship in other places. [But] Hamra is the only place that is ours, us as independents, as left,

⁸ *zawba'a* literally means 'whirlwind', but the party's opponents, who accuse it of being fascist – among them almost all my informants – saw it instead as an inverted swastika.

⁹ Regime sympathisers argued that rebels were firing into the city from there, hence justifying the regime's tactics. The editor-in-chief of al-Akhbar, a leftwing newspaper that had had a civil war of its own over what position to take on events in Syria, caused huge anger amongst my interlocutors for blaming the Palestinians of Yarmouk for being shelled (Al-Amin 2014).

¹⁰ Beirut's southern suburbs and Lebanon's second city, respectively.

as secularists. We feel safe and able to work here regardless, but obviously we have to look after ourselves. You cannot be in a pub and speak against the SSNP in a loud voice, you need to remember that every bartender, more or less, will know you and could cause you problems. To a certain extent Hamra plays the same role for the Left as Sassine Square does for the Christian Right, or Dahiye does for the Shia and Hizballah. Really, Hamra is the place where you can be relaxed, for its heritage also. The presence of the SSNP grows [but] the relationship with Hamra does not change drastically because we don't have another option [laughs]. Where do we go? We stay here. Enemies, yes, but this is the place for activists and the people close to AUB and LAU.

In describing what kind of a site Hamra is for independent activists, Sari drew equivalences between how he and his political and social networks engage with and are a part of the Hamra landscape, mark and are marked by its materiality, and the ways that institutional political parties do so. There are, however, clear asymmetries in terms of tactics, power, and resources. The materialities in the landscape show this most clearly. The SSNP take public space, they produce obstacles, surveillance, and deterrence, and in so doing compel an acceptance of their spatial claims. The community of independent activists, meanwhile, attempt to inscribe this materiality by aesthetic and textual means: graffiti, posters, stencils. They also do so simply by being part of the Hamra landscape through their social, leisure, and political practices. Their emplacement in Hamra has material effects, not least the part they play in the proliferation of bars and cafés in the area.

4. Mar Mikhael: secular cosmopolitan consumption

4.i. Gentrification and comparison

Mar Mikhael is the second neighbourhood moving east from Downtown along the coast (Gemmayze precedes it). To its south is the historically important centre of the Achrafieh district, of which both Mar Mikhael and Gemmayze are considered a part. The Beirut river marks its furthest eastern extension, and on the other bank begins Bourj Hammoud, a neighbourhood founded by Armenian survivors of the

1915 genocide.¹¹ Its central thoroughfare, Rue Armenie, cuts west to east for a mile, and along with the set of parallel roads either side makes up the neighbourhood.¹² Until relatively recently Mar Mikhael had been a residential area of Beirut whose businesses for the most part catered for the residents of the neighbourhood, but starting in 2010-11 it began to pick up as a bar hotspot, the newest in a gentrification chain swinging pendulum-like around the city.

Mar Mikhael's history and political allegiances have generally mirrored those of Achrafieh as a whole.¹³ A constantly majority Christian area, its internal political clashes have often mirrored the contests between various Christian political factions. Precise political allegiances in Mar Mikhael were not as visually apparent as the self-conscious and ostentatious claiming of space practiced by the SSNP in Hamra (or, indeed, by the Gemayel family, the leaders of the Kataeb, in Achrafieh proper). Further, the securitisation of space evident in Hamra, to say nothing of the null space of Downtown, is absent from the neighbourhood. Instead, during my time in the field the prominent public political insignia were a number of large banners slung between balconies overlooking the main roads of Mar Mikhael and Gemmayze in support of the army. Indeed, given that the main Christian political parties were divided between March 14th (the Kataeb, the Lebanese Forces) and March 8th (the Free Patriotic Movement) coalitions, in recent years there has been a fairly clear valorisation of the army in majority Christian areas as an institution that all Christians could get behind. Nevertheless, support for the Gemayel family runs deep in the area, as the Nasawiya café *mashkal* will make clear.

The expansion of bars and cafés in the area marked Mar Mikhael as part of the circuits of sociality and consumption for the secular cosmopolitan generation of which independent activists were a part, as I discussed in Chapter 3. This was visible, firstly, in the crossover of clienteles between Hamra and Mar Mikhael. Indeed, whenever I was invited to spend downtime with an interlocutor it would

¹¹ For more on Bourj Hammoud, see Rando Nucho (2014).

¹² Or at least it does so in relation to commercial Mar Mikhael. See the *Road to Happiness* map put together by *Executive* magazine as a guide to the nightlife of 'Beirut's coolest district' for a visualisation of this imaginary (Redd & Rahhal 2014). Longstanding residents of the area may well reckon its borders differently.

¹³ Early after Lebanese independence, Gemmayze had seen contestation between the SSNP and the Phalanges (Kataeb) (Traboulsi 2007: 114–115).

often be a coin flip as to whether they suggested the former or the latter, particularly if they were not connected to either AUB or LAU. Further, physical space was inscribed in a very similar way to Hamra. The same graffiti artists who had produced murals in Hamra had done so too in Mar Mikhael. The same stencils and political graffiti found on the walls of Hamra could also be found in Mar Mikhael.¹⁴ Finally, the area also housed activist spaces, though fewer than Hamra. The new home of the Migrant Community Centre was up the road in Gemmayze, co-run by two female migrant workers and whose premises also housed the office of the Anti Racism Movement. Most importantly, the Nasawiya café could be found just off of Rue Armenie. Run by the Nasawiya collective as a social centre, it was ‘a non-profit, smoke-free, volunteer-run activist space’. The space housed a library of left, radical, queer and feminist texts. It was also used by a variety of people and organisations other than Nasawiya for political and cultural activities, particularly those who would otherwise not be able to secure a space. The collective and the space had been central to recent independent activist history. Members of the collective had been involved in *isqāṭ*, and had been at the Syrian embassy protest. Take Back Parliament had begun as a call by some Nasawiya members and the café was one of the movement’s main meeting spaces. Many members of the collective and people who used the space had themselves moved to Mar Mikhael for the same reason that the café had opened its doors in 2011: relatively cheap rents and the availability of housing.

Claimed by one particular institutional political party, embedded in the consumption patterns of the secular cosmopolitan generation, materially inscribed by NGOs and independent activists, and housing some activist organisational spaces, the potential equivalences between Mar Mikhael and Hamra are striking. And, just as in Hamra, Mar Mikhael also saw its own case of direct confrontation between activists and an institutional actor claiming ownership over the site.

¹⁴ With the addition of commemorations of the 1915 genocide given the neighbourhood’s proximity to Bourj Hammoud and Armenian population of its own.

4.ii The fight at Nasawiya café

Where the fight at the Syrian embassy protest occurred in the aftermath of *isqāṭ*'s dissolution, the fight at the Nasawiya café occurred during the final stages of the parliamentary extension protests of 2013. These themselves were the culmination of an 18-month long movement cycle. As the following chapter will recount, by that point hope had transformed into rage and indignation: in that moment, relatively high mobilisation across the social and political networks of activists was beginning to merge with a widening sense of despair and, indeed, failure.

It was in this context that on a June evening after one of the later anti-parliamentary extension protests a dozen or so protestors returned to the café and met up with other non-activist friends for a farewell party: a friend active in Nasawiya, Take Back Parliament, and the parliamentary extension protests was leaving the country.¹⁵ Whilst the café's full glass frontage normally looked out onto a relatively empty dead end side street, that evening three tinted-out SUVs were parked in front of the building and blocked access to the street. Those inside the café sat, chatted, joked and reminisced about the events – personal and political – which they had lived together with their departing friend. They were making short videos of one another until a man walked in and brusquely told the group '*yā shabāb, mamnū' al-taṣwīr*' (all of you, no photos) and walked back out. They followed in order to ask why, many still filming, and, noticing the cavalcade of cars outside, realised that it must be a parliamentarian's security detail. Some partygoers asked the bodyguards who they worked for even as others began chanting the slogans they had used earlier that day. The tone was jovial: a number of party-goers even remembered some of the bodyguards chuckling too. But then something changed: as the group began chanting '*shīlū nāyeb, ḥoṭṭuh ḥmār*' (remove the parliamentarian, put a donkey [in his place]) one bodyguard, whether through frustration or particular irritation that his employer had been called a

¹⁵ As with my account of the Syrian embassy *mashkal*, this account is put together from the recollections of my interlocutors who were there as well as the copious social media and blog accounts that they themselves put together. Unfortunately, those blogs are no longer being hosted. For an English-language account of these events, see al-Akhbar (2013).

donkey, pulled out his semi-automatic weapon, pointed it at the party-goers and shouted at them to go inside:

One of them came out of his car with his machine gun. We were *khalas* [that's enough]: it was, 'shit, this guy is serious'. And as a reaction, [...] a sign of us spending a lot of time together as a group – nobody went inside. It wasn't a decision, it wasn't 'okay someone went inside and someone stayed outside': nobody moved. Everybody stayed and said put down your gun. Put down your gun. No, I won't. Yes, you will. And then they started getting very frustrated because we were raising our voices, and they were not getting what they want[ed], [and] nobody's moving. And so the poor things didn't know where they were. It went on and on and then the other guy pulled out a gun. (Fadia)

With these threats and with weapons having been pulled on them, the crowd exploded in anger. The bodyguards pushed them and tried to force them back inside the café. One of the partygoers, May, was sent to the police station a few minutes up the road from the fight. There she had to argue for a long time with the police, before physically dragging one officer over with her who, seeing the severity of the situation, called for back-up. In an attempt to discover the identity of the parliamentarian the partygoers updated statuses on Facebook and tweeted to publicise what was happening and ask other friends and activists to find out. This call also reached a number of activist, NGO and apolitical friends of the partygoers who were in the area anyway: 'everybody *kulluh tjamma*' (came together) because we were in the middle of Mar Mikhael' (Karim). Others were near enough to hear what was going on. As Sari recalled, 'I was in Mar Mikhael [...] I heard people shouting and I saw a girl coming out of Nasawiya café, shouting and being totally afraid and traumatised, and saying '*ambyaḍrubūnā*, '*ambyaḍrubūnā* (they're beating us, they're beating us)'. The bodyguards kept trying to swipe away the phones of those they were attacking. Here, the partygoers were wilfully and knowingly contravening the photography taboo. Antoine was punched and told to stop recording as he held his phone up in the face of one of the bodyguards. Another bodyguard stood on trash cans and began kicking partygoers in the head. Finally, someone replied online that the parliamentarian was Nadim Gemayel, and that he was having dinner around the corner in Bar Tartine, one of the new trendy

eateries. Satisfied in the knowledge of who they were dealing with, the partygoers went back inside.

Gemayel, though, called in to MBC, a TV channel owned by the family of another parliamentarian in his coalition, Michel al-Murr, to say that his convoy had been attacked by thugs from Nasawiya, that they had taken to his car with sticks and stones. At this Gemayel supporters came down to the café and attempted to break in. The gendarmerie, who had finally arrived, stood in front of the entrance as Gemayel supporters pushed on the glass frontage. More than once they were able to get hands through the door and try to snatch people out. The bodyguards and their cars remained where they were, blocking access to the road until Nadim Gemayel had finished dinner. Eventually the army arrived and took over from the gendarmerie, and were able to disperse the Gemayel supporters only after repeatedly firing live rounds into the air. Though the fight itself lasted less than ten minutes, and the pushing and shoving less than five, it was a number of hours before anyone was able to leave. Even then, a number of party-goers asked for escorts to their cars for fear of attack from the Gemayel supporters.

The next morning six people went to the police station to denounce the bodyguards. Those who participated or witnessed the fight the night before and supporters staged a solidarity protest outside the police station. One of the bodyguards was already at the station and had denounced the partygoers. The public prosecutor chose to detain the individuals who had gone inside to file their statements. Outside, the protest merely got angrier as it became clear what had transpired. The bodyguard who had entered the station was blocked from leaving in his car by protestors. Unable to move, he slammed down on the accelerator and ran one protestor over, then immediately reversed at speed and attempted to go up a side alley. He was pursued by protestors, while others carried the woman he had run over into a café nearby. Cornered once again, he got out of his car and pulled his pistol on a protestor who was filming him. Finally, he was led away by the police. Rather than being taken into custody he was allowed to leave again. The individuals who had entered in the late morning were taken back up from the cells around six in the evening and released one by one. Antoine, the last one out, overcome with anger and emotion, screamed to the gathered solidarity protest: '*thawra! thawra! thawra!*' (Revolution! Revolution! Revolution!).

4.iii. Impunity and oblivion

What, then, do this encounter and its repercussions tell us about the spatial practices of independent activists in the Mar Mikhael landscape? Firstly, the equivalence in impunity and political cover on the part of their aggressors both in Mar Mikhael and Hamra is striking. This was evidenced by their interactions with the party-goers, the attack itself, but also their interactions with the state actors during the fight and in its aftermath. When the gendarmerie finally arrived on the scene they were deferential to the bodyguards and dismissive of the party-goers. Karim recalled that ‘the *darak* attitude was to try to humiliate us by questioning why we wouldn’t leave, saying “is your girlfriend inside?”’. At no point did the bodyguards remove themselves from the scene, remaining even after the Gemayel supporters arrived and threatened to break through the glass frontage of the building. This impunity was also evidenced by Nadim Gemayel’s account to the media of his car having been attacked by fifty thugs with sticks and stones; as numerous interlocutors noted to me, ‘where are you going to find sticks and stones in the middle of Mar Mikhael?’. Sari expanded further:

[Gemayel’s account] was impossible because the Christian wind that blows in the area is, I think, not [...] hostile to Nadim Gemayel, there are Kataeb photos and stuff not far away, it’s a pro- not an anti-neighbourhood. This is the first thing. The second thing is that no one is going to hit Nadim Gemayel with sticks in a Christian area. It’s surrealist. The third thing is that Nasawiya is girls, not a group of men [thugs] hitting.

Like the attack at the Syrian embassy, the power of political cover in motivating this sense of impunity is clear. The partygoers who entered the police station the next day to give witness statements were preceded by the bodyguard, who accused them of instigating the fight. It was those covered in bruises who were detained and the bodyguard who was released. Only the anger and tenacity of the solidarity protest outside forced him to re-enter the police station, to then leave from another exit, free again.

Of course, this impunity was predicated on the fact that Mar Mikhael is claimed by the Gemayel family’s political party, the Kataeb. But the partygoers

were also a part of this space. Indeed, one of the clearest elements in this encounter was the speed with which the victims of the attack were able to mobilise their solidary networks from across the secular cosmopolitan generation, NGOs and apolitical alongside independent activists – electronically to find out who the parliamentarian was, bodily by those who were in the area socialising, or who later came from across the city to witness the siege of the building by Gemayel supporters. This network also included the lawyers who headed to the café to offer their expertise: one had represented some of the party-goers in the aftermath of the Syrian embassy protest, amongst other cases, and the other had been involved in Take Back Parliament as a prospective parliamentary candidate. Also, and crucially in the immediacy of the event, there was the instinctive solidarity between the party-goers to refuse the use of arbitrary power. That night and the day after evidenced the process of political radicalisation that had occurred over the previous year or so, and which engaged many people in political action for the first time in relation to the group Take Back Parliament. As the following chapter will show, this engagement taught them hope and excitement, and latterly had taught them anger and rage. Most importantly, it had taught them this together – with one another and through one another, inculcating an emotional habitus that valorised certain emotional responses as politically good. In moments of intensity, such as these fights, activists drew upon repertoires of action and ways of feeling that their emotional habitus made available to them. In relation to Mar Mikhael as a site once more, allies were mobilised so quickly precisely because so many were already there. Many of these, indeed, had also gone immediately from the parliamentary extension protest earlier that day. They congregated to defend their friends, acquaintances and fellow protestors.

Does the Nasawiya café *mashkal* show that Mar Mikhael was worth fighting over? I arrived to begin fieldwork a matter of weeks after the fight. When I began to describe my research project to anyone who would listen the fight was the first thing that people offered as a starting point, particularly with Take Back Parliament no longer active. It was in the café that I spent a lot of time in the first months of fieldwork, and it was there that I began to meet many who would become my interlocutors and friends. But even by that point, Nasawiya café had

become more of a space and less of a collective.¹⁶ Many members of the collective felt the need to move on and attempt something new. A year and a half after the fight the café closed its doors due to rent increases. Many of those involved in the collective moved together to create a new cooperative social centre in Achrafieh. When I returned to Beirut for my first return visit I met up with David and Lamia, two of the first people I had met through the space. We went to Mar Mikhael to grab a drink, and as we drove to find parking passed by the empty space where Nasawiya had been. I got out to take a photo and commented on how I missed the place. They scoffed. David let me know in no uncertain terms that he felt no attachment to the place. Lamia, meanwhile, recalled that her involvement there had become a chore and that she was glad to see the back of it. The lack of attachment they held for the space where they had spent so much of the previous four years took me aback.

Majid's comments about the neighbourhood were even stronger. Recall that it was Majid who had been badly beaten during the Syrian embassy *mashkal*, had been scared to return to Hamra but had eventually gone back. As we drove to Mar Mikhael one evening, long after Nasawiya café had closed its doors, he exclaimed '*ērī mār mikhāyil!*' (Fuck Mar Mikhael!) over and over again as we negotiated the traffic. That he wasn't merely referring to congestion became clear once we had gotten a beer. Leaning on a parked car we watched the flower- and nut-selling children – who previously would have been able to take a nap and get some food in the café – make their rounds of drinkers. As we looked on, Majid told me how much he hated this area of town: 'if I never came back again I wouldn't miss it'. It occurred to me that unlike Hamra, where alongside people of our generation drinking one found pious Muslim families taking an evening stroll, migrant domestic workers shopping and spending leisure time on their Sunday off, and so on, here there was only one sort of person. He agreed emphatically: 'I would miss Hamra if it was gone. Hamra is cosmopolitan. If Mar Mikhael goes, who gives a shit?' Fed up, he insisted that we drive back to Hamra to get another drink. Beers in hand, we walked the side streets of the neighbourhood into the early hours.

¹⁶ The importance of merely having an independent space was not lost on anyone, and more will be said on the importance of maintaining what activist infrastructure was already in place in Chapter 6.

5. Bright landscapes, political affects, irritability

Mar Mikhael and Hamra, then, were not equivalent affective sites for independent activists. Mar Mikhael did not have the historical depth of Hamra. Inscribing oneself on it and belonging to it mattered far less for independent activists, if indeed they mattered at all. It was not a space of the Left, or particularly cosmopolitan, its circuits of sociality and consumption so divorced from its inhabitants. What had drawn activists there was expediency and the contingency of rental price and available space in central Beirut. It had never been about the neighbourhood. No one spoke about Mar Mikhael the way Sari or the anonymous author of the account of the Syrian embassy *mashkal* wrote of Hamra. If Downtown was a space in which one contested, and Hamra one over which one contested, Mar Mikhael was neither. It was a site only fleetingly resonant for independent activists.

It is here that I would like to turn this discussion explicitly to the affective realm, and in particular to the production of political affects in Hamra and Mar Mikhael. Anthropologists such as Ann Laura Stoler (Stoler 2008), Yael Navaro (Navaro-Yashin 2009, 2012) and Gaston Gordillo (Gordillo 2014) have placed great emphasis on material detritus in particular sites and spaces and the affective resonances they produce for and with their informants.¹⁷ These accounts treat affective resonance as contextually bounded, as affect is ‘mediated by socially constituted sensibilities that are not just cultural but [...] habitual’ (Gordillo 2014: 22). In this way, anthropological engagements with the ever-increasing multi- and inter-disciplinary literature on affect have remained free of the tendency to assume affect to be pre-discursive, unmediated, and innately universal (Hemmings 2005; Tolia-Kelly 2006; Leys 2011). Further, in these anthropological accounts affect is temporally situated, produced in the interplay of different pasts with the present. In landscapes that show signs of ruination throughout (Stoler 2008; Navaro-Yashin 2009), these engagements place great emphasis on present understandings of the historical processes that have brought that ruination into

¹⁷ Even Kathleen Stewart’s *Ordinary Affects* (2007), more interested in evoking an affective response than in saying something about affect in particular, provides the reader with account after account set in sites of ruination of the type described by Stoler and Navaro.

being. In particular, 'haunting', as some materially-situated element of the site's past which is no longer there and is therefore present in its absence, becomes a crucial element in the production of affects (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 15; Gordillo 2014: 41).

Irritability (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 21) shows up over and over again in such discussions and is certainly locatable in the Hamra landscape. More often than not it is produced by the securitised materiality and by the spatial practices of the SSNP and other establishment political actors. There are present-absent phantoms here in the form of the dead and displaced from the civil war. This can be said of almost all of Lebanon. There are also absent-present phantoms in Hamra in the form of Syrian and migrant domestic workers. They are undoubtedly present, yet they are figuratively denied presence by many Lebanese.¹⁸ But there is yet another phantom stalking the streets of Hamra: the cosmopolitan history of the Lebanese left. It is because of this history, inscribed in and tied to such institutions as AUB and the cafés and bars of the area, that independent activists come to Hamra. It is worth recalling that landscapes are always historical, informed by 'collective memory and [...] how people's sense of the past influences their sense of place' (Willow 2011: 265). Independent activists see themselves as the rightful inheritors of Hamra, and their social and material practices in this landscape should be understood as speaking to this historical genealogy. And yet the SSNP also see themselves as the rightful inheritors of Hamra. Their founder, Antoun Saadeh, created the party clandestinely while teaching at AUB in the 1930s. The SSNP then veered between one side of the political spectrum and the other, but by the beginning of the civil war found itself firmly on the Left-Palestinian-Progressive side, and fought and died for control of Hamra. They were involved in guerrilla operations against the Israeli occupying forces in Hamra and elsewhere in the

¹⁸ Independent activists, generally speaking, completely refused this logic, and attempted to integrate these absent-present phantoms into their politics. This, if anything, has made it more difficult for them to build mass platforms for political action, precisely because of how much this diverges from the status quo in the country. One cardinal example of this divergence could be seen in the reaction to an article claiming that Hamra was no longer Lebanese because of the influx of Syrians (Hazzoury 2015). The often sarcastic replies were that Hamra has always also been inhabited by Syrians, and that the author is racist and clearly does not know Hamra at all if he thought it was ever 'Lebanese' in the way he describes (Ayoub 2015; Blog Baladi 2015).

country. The plaque to Khalid Alwan commemorates precisely this memory of liberating Hamra from occupation. The clear divergence between the SSNP and independent activists is more recent and has to do with radically divergent positions on the conflict in Syria, as the attack at the Syrian embassy shows.

In discussing the nodes and constellations of rubble in the Argentinian Chaco, Gaston Gordillo makes extensive use of the philosopher Levi Bryant's concept of *bright objects* (Bryant 2012). Objects are bright insofar as they are 'affectively charged points of reference in spatial perceptions' (Gordillo 2014: 187). In the Chaco, such objects might be the bones of *indios* or the ruins of the *haciendas* in which they were forced into indentured labour. In the landscape of Hamra the plaque to Khalid Alwan is one such bright object: it is a reminder of the liberation of Beirut from Israeli invaders, of hope in moments of despair, but also of exclusionary spatial domination. It is a paradigmatic material marker of a tradition of which independent activists feel they are a part, but by an organisation with which they are in conflict: it is no surprise that such an object would be productive of irritability. Following this line of reasoning Hamra itself is a bright landscape: it is precisely such an affective node with a gravitational pull, to stay within Gordillo's lexicon, that is at once material, spatial, and historical. A landscape like Hamra's both has an object-quality of its own and also contains any number of objects rendered relatively bright or dull for particularly emplaced actors. Scaling up from an object to a landscape of objects affords more analytic space for an account of conflicting and/or mutually determining flows of affects, materialities and histories to make themselves felt. These flows might be occluded were we to attend to bright objects in isolation.

Given that both independent activists and the SSNP consider themselves the rightful inheritors and proprietors of Hamra's cosmopolitan Left history, the phantasmatic element of their claim-making spatial practices is the way that each side attempts to exclude the other from that history.¹⁹ On one side, the SSNP are fascists. On the other, the independent activists are middle-class youth with no conception of the lives of most Lebanese people, and all they do in Hamra is drink.

¹⁹ By 'phantasmatic' here I follow Navaro in indexing the ideational projects of actors in/on the world as 'a concrete manifestation of social practice' (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 15). As she elaborates, 'the make-believe is real' (2012: 10).

For independent activists much of the irritability produced by the Hamra landscape has precisely to do with the phantom that the SSNP, so ostentatiously present in the landscape, are a part of the historical legacy into which they also insert themselves and which they cannot fully annihilate. Activists cannot fully erase the SSNP from the Hamra landscape and its cosmopolitan Left history: there is always an excess.

This excess is productive of irritability precisely because it cannot be done away with. As Gordillo points out, the 'mandate to forget exists because of the existence of affects and memories that escape it' (2014: 208), and this is true for elite and powerful actors in a landscape as much as it is for those in opposition to them. Complete oblivion would require 'the negation of the negation' (Gordillo 2014: 120). To enact this, though, requires that objects of affective resonance 'lose their capacity to affect' (Gordillo 2014: 193). This is clearly not the case for the bright landscape of Hamra: it is too affectively charged, too contestable. In being unable to consign the SSNP to oblivion because of their material practices in the Hamra landscape rendering their past into the present, though, we see too that the low-level and continuous spatial practices of independent activists also ward against their own annihilation from the Hamra landscape. As such, they keep Hamra a bright landscape through their openness to being affected by it and to affect it. This can lead to – and play out through – overt contestation, as was the case at the Syrian embassy protest. But it need not necessarily do so, and it certainly does not do so at all moments. Just as importantly, these affective resonances are strengthened through the day-to-day inhabiting of a space: eating, drinking, shopping, hanging out, studying, organising. The violent repression of independent activists did not necessarily intend to stop them being *in* the space of Hamra, but rather to stop them being *of* the space of Hamra. To continue to inhabit Hamra as they had done before, and in spite of the repression, was to fundamentally reject the repression's underlying goal.

As to Mar Mikhael, it is clear that on the basis of the capacity to affect and be affected, independent activist attachment here falls some way short. Mar Mikhael's historical trajectory is not one that activists wish to see themselves a part of. Contestation took place there, as the Nasawiya café *mashkal* showed, and the impunity of establishment political actors brought into relief, as it had done at the

Syrian embassy *mashkal*, that it was never only their space. But unlike Hamra, activists already felt that way about the neighbourhood. Whilst it was a consumption site of the secular cosmopolitan generation of which activists were a part, Mar Mikhael did not become an affectively charged political site of any particular brightness for independent activists. Just as the positional critique of secular cosmopolitan personhood allowed activists to understand the need to move beyond their own constitution politically, the positional critique borne of practical political engagement – both in Mar Mikhael and beyond it – allowed them to grasp that just because they drank and hung out there did not mean that it was their (political) space. And as the reflections of David, Lamia and Majid showed once the Nasawiya café had closed its doors, that was fine. The irritability produced through the inability to reconcile the presence of the SSNP and independent activists in Hamra did not hold for Mar Mikhael, not least because there was little to contest over – there, the ‘mandate to forget’ took hold fast because Mar Mikhael lost its capacity to affect independent activists in an astonishingly short time-frame the moment its one cardinal bright object, the Nasawiya café, closed its doors. Indeed, this affective annihilation may have been in the offing from long before. Even though other consumption spaces have opened since in other parts of the city, for now independent activists, as with other secular cosmopolitans, continue spending time in Mar Mikhael. But, as Majid’s literal evocation of annihilation showed, they care little for it.

6. Conclusion

In closing, I would like to draw out what the above account of bright (or not) landscapes offers to the production of activist political subjectivity that this thesis is principally concerned with. Given that political activism must entail a belief that one has the capacity to substantively transform the world, then we need to attend to the capacity to act. And, as Thomas Hall’s discussion of urban landscape highlights so well, one must act somewhere. It has been the contention of this chapter that that somewhere matters; that space is not mere background –

'landscape as scenery' (Hall 2008: 75) – but rather the medium through which action can take place. But just as one enters a social field that pre-exists oneself – as the conclusion to Chapter 3 drew out in relation to the non-contemporaneity of generations – so too does one's capacity to act need to mediate what can be done in a site, how, and why. Not least, it must mediate other actors' capacity to act alongside what the material landscape allows one to do. The affective resonance of any particular site both affords the capacity to act and circumscribes what forms of action might be actualisable through and upon it. The capacity to affect and be affected in any particular site, then, is one side of the coin to figuring the horizons of political possibility for independent activists. This is all too clear in the case of Hamra, which activists understand to be their place in which to engage in political activism. But again, it is not a 'safe place'. Other projects exceed their desires and capabilities. Sometimes, as in Hamra, it is worth fighting on regardless. Sometimes, as in Mar Mikhael, it really isn't.

In giving form to these choices the experience of political practice comes to the fore once more. Hamra is productive of irritability for independent activists in particular ways that others would not be affected by. Mar Mikhael, meanwhile, is dull to activists for what it cannot be in ways that it is bright for an apolitical secular cosmopolitan whose interest is in a leisure site that caters for their secular cosmopolitan desires and little else. The fact of needing to be a particular sort of person to affect and be affected in particular ways by the material landscape may appear commonsensical through ethnographic description, but it bears emphasising and repeating.²⁰ This is because it allows for an important corrective to bombastic accounts of affect, particularly insofar as they deem affect pre-discursive or pre-social. The following chapter will go into further detail on the problematic aspects of such affect theory as it relates to a particular cycle of activist politicisation and political engagement. Further, the experience of affecting and being affected by certain spaces, of having the horizons of political possibility in a space laid out, comes to radically inscribe political subjectivity itself. As Chapter 6 will show, the *mashākil* described here continue to resonate for

²⁰ Amongst anthropologists of affect, Gordillo has been most forthright in enunciating the importance of habitual practice in producing particularly affectable persons (Gordillo 2014).

independent activists, informing both who they are in relation to others in their social field *and* what they can do. Horizons of political possibility relate in a complex manner to both the space of the political and to political subjectivity. As the speed with which any affective attachment to the Mar Mikhael landscape faded shows, temporality matters to affect and can itself be a useful index for both the intensity of affect and the relationship between an affective site and the social, historical, and material reality of its constitution. As the preceding discussion has shown, there are tangible reasons for why Hamra endures as a bright landscape for independent activists while Mar Mikhael faded with speed, even as their social practice and political experience in both appears to differ little.

The point, then, is that the relative affective force of a site, its brightness, is concretely tied to independent activist experiences in the space already allied to 1) the sorts of persons they had become to be inhabiting these spaces, and 2) the already extant reality of that site, constituted by any number of other trajectories, actors, and materialities. Spatially, affect matters as one (important) element in constituting activist political subjectivity as a tangibility in the material environment. From the space of affect, the following chapter turns to the putative 'interiority' of affect – the production of the desires and intentionalities of independent activists.

5. Hope, indignation, and the production of difference between activist and NGO emotional habituses

'There were so many different ideas. Back then there was hope.' Lamia, on planning for parliamentary elections in 2012

'I was so, so angry. The fuckers. I got really depressed after that.' Lamia, after the postponement of parliamentary elections in 2013

1. Introduction

In this chapter I trace the move from hope to indignation amongst independent activists through the Lebanese electoral cycle of 2012-2013. As the quotes above suggest, hope turned into indignation and ultimately produced the despair and burnout to which I turn in Chapter 6. In the lead-up to the 2013 parliamentary elections there had been an upswing of grassroots political activity and NGO mobilisation. Recollections from members of Take Back Parliament (TBP), the most prominent new campaign to come out of this efflorescence of activity, provide evidence for the mood of hope and optimism in the air. In this first moment of the electoral cycle there was a confluence between the structures of feeling of independent political activists and two distinct wider communities. Firstly, a wider subset of groups, campaigns, and individuals with more liberal aspirations, which my informants consistently referred to as NGOs. Secondly, the wider population of Lebanon. The former allowed those involved to think of one another as working in the same direction, if not always in the same groups or agreeing on goals, targets, tactics, or strategy. The latter was based on a shared commonplace that a desire for reform, accountability, and substantive political solutions to the country's problems was also held by a majority of Lebanese people. For that moment there appeared to be the potential for a political project that transcended the secular cosmopolitan constitution of both independent activists and NGOs. These explicit and implicit understandings of fellow feeling

themselves built hope for activists and spurred them on, motivating months and months of long meetings, policy paper writing, media work and street canvassing.

By the time of the elections' postponement in June 2013, hope had receded and indignation had taken centre stage. This indignation was both verbalised and embodied by activists rather differently from NGOs. Where hope brought together, indignation divided concretely. Whilst on one level this transformation in affective states is a possible index and proof of failure – insofar as activists felt that their actions had the capacity to bring about a positive transformation – the divergent manifestations of this affect also served to clarify what the tangible differences between activists and NGOs were for those involved. The underlying affective state for all the participants of the *lā lil-tamdīd* (no to the [parliamentary] extension) protests, which occurred in the aftermath of the parliamentary extension, was to all intents and purposes the same. The difference between activists and NGOs came from which emotions were politically valorised and that therefore enabled particular physical and verbal strategies for manifesting that affective state. In the case of the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests, for activists it enabled and valorised shouting, screaming, confrontation with security forces, and aggressive physical movement. The non-participation and attempts to block these products of activists' emotional habitus on the part of the NGOs became an important element in the production of activist political subjectivity and motivates much of their animosity to NGO-style politics to the present day.

The affective resonances of this moment produced new red lines and new knowledge for independent activists to add to the red lines concerning establishment political parties engendered by *isqāṭ al-nizām al-ṭā'ifī* (bring down the sectarian system) and its aftermath a number of years before. The role of such *affectively inculcated knowledge* – of distinction between activists and NGOs – is all the more important to the production of a particular activist political subjectivity because on a day-to-day level, as members of a secular cosmopolitan generation with apparently equivalent professional, social, leisure and consumption practices, the dividing line between these two groups is far from clear. It is during moments of intensity, such as the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest, that the distinctions between the two groups are made manifest and carry great affective force, and it is through this force that they become a durably installed part of activist political subjectivity.

In making this argument, I am allying my project with those scholars of political activism who have sought to provide an account of the force of the political. Most widely, I am here including those within the affective turn in studies of political contention and mobilisation who since the turn of the millennium have sought to provide a corrective to rational action or goal-oriented accounts. More specifically, I draw from and build upon the work of scholars of activism who have placed force and intensity centre stage in accounting for how people become and remain political activists – people who manifest a sometimes radically other sense of themselves and their capacity to act to what would otherwise be the norm. Richard Flacks, writing in critical dialogue with both political process theory and the affective turn in political sociology, has called for just such a reorientation towards

how activists themselves define social reality and define themselves; how they are socially linked and organised; and how they have been shaped by social origin, cultural tradition, and history. (Flacks 2004: 144)

This reorientation underlies my interest in the political subjectivity and horizons of political possibility of independent activists in Lebanon. It also motivates what Maple Razsa, concluding his ethnography of anarchists in the former Yugoslavia, has called a ‘subjective turn’ on the part of activists themselves, ‘in which one of activists’ goals is the production of new political subjectivities and new ways of life’ (Razsa 2015, 20). For Flacks the move is an analytic one, while Razsa is making a case for new forms of activism that place greater emphasis on self-fashioning. In either case, though, there is a clear reorientation towards the constitution of activist persons. Where such a move might appear to interiorise our accounts of activism, however, the work of the sociologist Deborah Gould (2001, 2004, 2009, 2015) is immensely helpful in placing emotion and affect together in a theorisation of the process by which particular forms of being- and acting-in-the-world come to be valorised and made meaningful for activists in ways that they are not by other social actors. In doing so, she opens a space within which to construct an account of the subjective that is not interior-facing but, rather, constantly negotiated beyond the subject itself. Whilst drawing in spirit on the wider literature in the affective turn, Gould’s work is an important starting point for my own account of

the force of events, like the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest, which produce affectively inculcated knowledge.

The next chapter will look to how such moments of intensity are made to endure as part of independent activist political subjectivity. In this chapter, I look first to how my interlocutors became, through a long-term and intense process of socialisation and politicisation, capable of valorising and acting upon their feelings in divergent ways from others in their social field. In other words, I track how a particular *emotional habitus* (Gould 2009) came to be inculcated (if only partially) into independent activists. After a brief discussion of the relationship between affects, emotions, and the political (section 2), I reconstruct Take Back Parliament (section 3) and the early atmosphere of hope which both animated the movement and was further cultivated through its activities. I then move to the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest and how ‘NGOs’ and ‘politicals’ emoted their sense of indignation in fundamentally divergent ways (section 4). I next turn to what an affective account of intense forms of political engagement offers to both the literature on political activism and to theorisations of affect (section 5). In particular, I make the case, building upon the ethnographic material presented in this and the previous chapter, for an analytic of the affective dimension of the political rather than a normative politics of affect. In closing (section 6), I offer some further reflections on hope as it was experienced by independent activists – as affect, as emotion, and as promise for the future even as the present was suffused with an atmosphere of political despair.

On the note of hope and despair, a brief comment on the character of affect. Much of the evidence I use in this chapter is taken from informal conversations amongst activists – often over a beer or something harder after an event or political action – or from informal interviews carried out throughout my time in the field. In both cases, my informants were looking back to moments of hope and indignation from a moment in which the prevailing mood was one of despair. This being the case, it is vital to keep alive the (ethnographic) fact that even in despair there is hope, particularly for people who go out of their way to engage in a political activism that seems to have no obvious victory point in its near future. Otherwise it is difficult to understand why one would not simply disengage. This is a consideration I pick up more forcefully in Chapter 6. For now it is enough to

stress that the moment of despair makes discussions of moments of hope all the more resonant: reminding oneself and others of a moment of hope is all the more valuable in moments of seeming hopelessness.

2. Politics, emotions, affects

In the previous chapter I began to suggest that anthropological engagements with affect and space contained an important corrective to bombastic affect theory. I further made the point, through the discussion of independent activist experience of sites in the city, that if we want to understand how particular people become affectable and able to affect in the ways that they do we must attend to how their experiences make them so. Experience is transformative. This chapter turns from the exteriority of affect – affect between the subject and the object (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 24) – to how it relates to the interior – affect as it pertains to the political subject. In the production of political subjectivity, affect and emotion must be viewed together. This is because both underlying feeling states *and* political emotions, valorised by certain political actors and made a part of their political project (feminist rage, the Love and Rage Project (Graeber 2009: 241–244), the day of anger) come together to produce the political. As the introduction to this thesis began to discuss, anthropological engagements with affect have almost completely averred emotion in their accounts. The literature accepts the Deleuzian distinction between affect and emotion, where the former is ‘bodily meaning’ and the latter ‘social interpretation’ (Deleuze 1998: 114–125; see also Hemmings 2005: 552). The spatial emphasis in the anthropological accounts discussed in the previous chapter would appear to offer ballast to such a division – if we are talking about the material environment around us, after all, then how can we speak of ‘emotion’? This is a pity, as I will show below, precisely because affect and emotion *are* caught up together – in political projects, certainly, but in social life more generally.

Where the anthropology of affect is clear in its distinction between affect and emotion, this is not the case for investigations of the importance of feeling in

political life. Recent years have seen an uptick in attempts to account for what has variously been called the affective, emotional or subjective aspect of politics, in particular as it relates to activism, mobilisation and contestation.¹ In the thesis introduction I briefly discussed the language problem evident in these accounts, namely, that there is little clarity over what terminology is referring to in particular. While the literature within the affective turn in the social sciences has understood the need to account for the force of political engagement, as a whole there has been a distinct looseness in coming to terms with precisely what we are dealing with. It is the contention of this thesis that a critical and ethnographic engagement with affect provides us with the tools to better comprehend the experience of intense forms of political engagement. But to do so we must be clearer on what the various components of the force of political engagement are and how they interact. Of all those working in this area, Deborah Gould's research on the militant anti-AIDS activism of ACT UP in the United States has done the most so far to combine emotion and affect into a coherent analytical project.

Firstly, she delineates clearly what she means by 'affect', itself a rare commodity in the literature.² Affect refers to the 'nonconscious and unnamed, but nevertheless registered, experiences of bodily energy and intensity that arise in response to stimuli impinging on the body' (Gould 2009: 19). Emotion, meanwhile, refers to that part of affect which 'gets actualised or concretised in the flow of living':

Where affect is unfixed, unstructured, noncoherent, and nonlinguistic, an emotion is one's personal expression of what one is feeling in a given moment, an expression that is structured by social convention, by culture. (Gould 2009: 20)

In other words, in any moment we feel things first and then we try to cognise and verbalise what we feel, in whole or in part. In doing so, we attempt to 'capture'

¹ As mentioned in the thesis introduction, for a comprehensive history of these attempts see any of the edited volumes *Passionate Politics* (Goodwin et al. (eds) 2001), *Rethinking Social Movements* (Goodwin & Jasper (eds) 2004), and *Politics and Emotions* (Thompson & Hoggett (eds) 2012), as well as the review essay by James Jasper (2011).

² Feminist theorist Clare Hemmings, for example, speaks of her 'frustration at seeing affect mentioned or celebrated but rarely fully explained as either critical tool or object' (2005: 551).

what we feel, to give it a name and bound it in ways which are salient and meaningful to us. This is 'never an exact representation of our affective experience' (Gould 2009: 20), and by being approximate it is also transformative.

The anthropologist and historian William Reddy's discussion of *emotives* is a clear influence on Gould's description of the interplay of affect and emotion (Reddy 1997a, 1997b, 2001). Reddy worries that the emphasis on the productiveness of discourse in the anthropology of emotion rejects the possibility of any underlying referent for emotions.³ Arguing that the literature conceives of emotive language as performative – in that it brings into being that to which it refers (the emotion) – Reddy coins the noun emotive to describe emotion talk. An emotive has a referent outside of itself (the emotion it attempts to describe), but it can never adequately and completely describe the underlying emotion that motivates it. In being corralled by language, as it were, the underlying emotion is itself acted upon because it now has a discursive ballast attached to it. With time, and continuous repetition of particular ways of discussing particular emotions, the underlying emotions may themselves change:

Emotives are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions. There is an "inner" dimension to emotion, but it is never merely "represented" by statements or action. It is the necessary (relative) failure of all efforts to represent feeling that makes for (and sets limits on) our plasticity. (Reddy 1997a: 331)

Though Reddy's terms – emotive for the emotion statement and emotion for the underlying referent of that statement – are somewhat confusing, I would contend following Gould (2009: 37–40), that the underlying feeling states that act as referents for emotives are *affects* – the nonverbal, perhaps nonconscious moods and feelings that we either attempt to put into language or don't. Let us with Gould, then, call feeling state affect, and the verbalisation of it emotion. This also allows for a linguistic overlap with affective accounts that will hopefully pre-empt terminological misunderstanding.

³ See the thesis introduction for a discussion of the discursive legacy of the anthropology of emotions.

There are two features of the theorisation that I want to emphasise at this juncture. Firstly, emotions can never fully capture affect. I discussed in Chapter 4 how the irritability of Hamra exists precisely because it is not possible to capture in independent activist discourses the leftist history of the SSNP. It exists as an excess that haunts the bright landscape of Hamra. Secondly, underlying affective feeling states are themselves potentially alterable, though perhaps slowly and always requiring much repetition of emotional styles (Gammerl 2012). The (partial and potential) mutability of affect is particularly crucial, as the account of the politicisation of TBP activists and the intensity of the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests will show. It is here that an intriguing meeting point exists between affective and emotional accounts, as emotional style appears to contain aspects of underlying feeling state and signification that interact through social practice over time. That this overlap exists is evident in the fact that authors in both literatures are wont to cite Raymond Williams' 'structure of feeling' – even as they often do not clarify their own usage of the phrase beyond its clear suggestive value (Williams 1977: 129–135).

The importance of accounting for the always imperfect translation of affects into emotions is that the way we feel about things – about ourselves, those around us, the world we live in, what is right and wrong – matters greatly in motivating us, in providing us with the capacity to act and, as we shall see, in circumscribing our horizons of action. There is nothing innate about any of this. Particular affects must be inculcated and socialised in order for them to resonate in particular ways. Chapter 3 began to attend to this by providing an account of the twin transformations that produce the secular cosmopolitan generation and the further primacy of the experience of political engagement in making possible the positional critique that allows independent activists to gain critical distance from their own personhood. Chapter 4 provided an account of how this transformative distinction played out in and through particular sites in the city. This chapter provides an account of the production of political subjectivity across a movement cycle. We need, then, to attend to the ways that persons become the kinds of persons who are affectable and able to affect the world in particular ways.

If such an account is to do justice to the complex transformative process that political practice entails, then it must look to the conscious and the

nonconscious, the discursive and the non-discursive, affect *and* emotion. To grasp the ways that affects and emotions interact for particular persons in particular social settings, Gould posits the idea of an *emotional habitus*, building on aspects of Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory (Bourdieu 1990, 2009). A social group's emotional habitus is their 'collective and only partly conscious emotional dispositions, that is, members' embodied, axiomatic inclinations toward certain feelings and ways of emoting' (Gould 2009: 32). This is an immensely valuable formulation for any attempt to understand the experience of political activism. In the first instance, by locating the interplay of affect and emotions in the realm of practice we gain a way to discuss the two as dynamically part of social life: they are social and they are socialised (Gould 2009: 35). As she states, the habitus concept allows us to explore 'why and how specific feelings become widespread within a collectivity and why and how they sometimes change' (footnote 10, Gould 2012: 111). The crucial element of this for a discussion of hope to indignation to despair amongst independent activists in Lebanon is the way that the emotional habitus maps emotion and affect onto a spectrum of consciousness to nonconsciousness. In doing so it forces us to pay direct attention to potentially transformative moments when the unconscious becomes conscious, when the taken for granted becomes a matter of debate. To moments of conflict, in other words. It is to these that an event-centred methodology of political activism must be attuned: it is in such moments that the potential for political transformations inheres and it is in these moments that those involved in the action have the opportunity to themselves transform in enduring ways.

But precisely because these transformations come to be wrought in enduring ways onto people who have become who they are through political engagement, we must also account for the strength of norms and dispositions – precisely because an activist emotional habitus must also become naturalised into daily practice if it is to endure. As such, we are compelled to pay attention, too, to the periods of time between moments of overt conflict, to the ways in which particular affective states come to be valorised and how particular emotions, the practices they facilitate and the ideas that they enable, are inculcated over time through constant emotion work. This is especially true in discussing the norms and dispositions of fringe communities within a wider social whole, who reject

prevailing ways of acting and being in the world. The more intense the setting – as social and political movements tend to be, particularly those with strong prefigurative aspects – the more discernible both slow and fast transformations between affects and emotions are.

In laying out how the nonconscious becomes conscious I do not intend to suggest that affect can be turned completely into emotion. But it is to say that the emotion work undertaken by actors is both conscious and nonconscious, at the time that they engage in it and on later reflection. Certain utterances, feelings, events, resonate in moments of hope in ways that they do not in moments of indignation or despair, and one can be affected by certain things at certain times in ways one would not otherwise and at other times. How far one is ever aware of this as an actor on the ground is always a matter of empirical investigation. This is the subject of this and the following chapter, concerning hope/indignation and despair/failure, respectively. In the next section I reconstruct from activist accounts the initial period of hope as it was then and as those involved remember it after the fact, before turning to how the prevailing mood of hope became one of indignation.

3. Hope, optimism, and the atmospheres of Take Back Parliament

As the first of the two epigraphs that opened this chapter shows, early on there was great optimism surrounding what might be possible over the eighteen months or so up to the parliamentary elections. There were reasons to feel hopeful that were specific to Take Back Parliament and these I document below. But importantly, as the epigraph attests to once more, there was also a more widespread fellow feeling which brought TBP together with other groups, campaigns, and NGOs. Further, there was also a presupposition on the part of those active at the time that this feeling was held too by a population at large, if not the population at large. I begin with the internal dynamics of TBP, and return afterwards to fellow feeling, other groups, and the wider population.

3.i Hope resonating within TBP

Take Back Parliament began as a call, posted online across a number of fora, to form a secular political movement that also boasted a comprehensive platform of substantive policies.⁴ Fadia, who wrote the original call, envisioned the overarching agenda of TBP to reflect: ‘1. independence from the regime, 2. comprehensive secularism, 3. socio-economic justice’. As such, it dovetailed perfectly with the independence-secularity-leftism nexus first encountered in Chapter 2 amongst university-based groups like the Secular Club, No Frontiers, and the Alternative Student Movement. In opposition to the division between March 8th and March 14th blocs in parliament, the idea was to stand candidates for the elections scheduled for the summer of 2013 who both agreed to this steer and who were from outside of the clique of politicians. In the aftermath of *isqāṭ al-niḡām al-ṭā’ifī*, a number of groups were formed by those who had had their first taste of political engagement through the long marches and longer meetings that were the backbone of that coalition’s activity. Both dissatisfied by the precedent and wishing to build on their involvement in independent activism, they looked to different formations that might work. As David remarked to me over tea in Ta Marbouta, ‘after the failure of *isqāṭ*, there was an openness to strategies which were not just refusal’. Take Back Parliament’s was one such strategy. Some of the core organisers of TBP were members of Nasawiya, and members of *ḥaqqī ‘aleyyī* (I must act), another of the post-*isqāṭ* groups, also lent their support. Members of *al-muntadā al-ishtirākī* (the socialist forum), though not involved in TBP, were very close to its organisers, and the Anti Racism Movement crossed over in terms of membership in some or all of the above. Individuals involved in the above groups, if not the groups as a whole, had all been involved in *isqāṭ*. One abiding lesson they took from that campaign had been the impossibility of working with the established political parties. An NGO, Beyond Reform and Development, also became heavily involved in TBP.⁵

⁴ Though the TBP website, vote2013.org, is no longer online, there it was possible to find links to each policy paper produced for the group. The Wikipedia page about TBP gives a grid showing what policy papers had been produced.

⁵ An NGO committed, in their own words, to ‘modernizing systems and services of governmental institutions, providing decision makers with evidence-based policy

Take Back Parliament, then, had clear ties to the immediate past of activism in Lebanon. But, much like *isqāṭ* before it, it also managed to engage individuals who had never been involved in politics of any sort before. Mostly in their early twenties, these people gained a political education and ‘sentimental education’ through participation in TBP (Geertz 1973). In what follows I report on the recollections of four of the individuals who I spoke to in great detail about their experiences in TBP: Karim, Antoine, May, and Nadia.⁶ Karim, the youngest at eighteen when he became involved, had previously documented the nastiness of the LAU student elections on his blog but had not actively engaged. May had volunteered for a variety of NGOs, but stressed to me that this was as work experience: ‘it wasn’t really activism, I didn’t take it seriously’. All four had never before been involved in any activism. This was representative, in that those who became involved in TBP had not become disillusioned by involvement with particular established parties; they had simply not seen any point in politics before then. TBP, though, was able to motivate them in a way that nothing had before. When she first came across TBP Nadia ‘thought it was a brilliant idea’. From this earliest moment Karim recollected that the mix of established activists and new recruits was ‘really exciting’. May, meanwhile, had thought that ‘politics meant the parties. And then I saw TBP and realised that it was politics, and I saw that actually we have the capacity to do more’. The effect of this expansion in political horizons through political engagement was to change dispositions regarding their personal and social environments: ‘I started reading more, following the news more, being a bit more critical’ (Nadia); ‘I became stronger. Same thing at home. I started arguing and talking politics at home. Even with my extended family, when before I would have stayed quiet, you know, because I was a girl [...] I started challenging their opinions. And that was a big change’ (May).

Very early on, in the winter of 2012, a retreat was organised up in the mountains outside of the city and for three days members of TBP got to know one another and each others’ politics:

solutions, and reinforcing civil society leadership and participation across the MENA region’ (Beyond Reform and Development n.d.).

⁶ We already met Karim, Antoine, and May, of course, embroiled in the Nasawiya café fight in the previous chapter.

There were very good group dynamics. We were excited to be meeting all these new people and wanted to get to know them [...] We were going in each other's cars, so it was nice. I think that was a major motivator for everyone, this team that we had [...]. I think the facilitator was really good. Often some people might get demotivated, some people might get dominated by other team members. We used to have lots of breaks. It was a very good weekend and it set us off on a good run. (Karim)

The unity and fellow feeling that was garnered from this retreat was translated into a flurry of activity and a structured division of labour. An ex-pat team was created for interested people outside of Lebanon, reflecting both the sense of out migration as activist death that Sari and Shadi enunciated in Chapter 2 and, importantly, the desire on the part of migrants to still be involved in Lebanese independent activism. The ex-pat team shared expertise and took part in meetings via Skype. A communications team looked after TBP's online profile and dealt with media work as and when it came up. An outreach team was sent out of Beirut to other centres in Lebanon: Saida, Jbeil, Tripoli. A group made a reciprocal visit from Tripoli to the Nasawiya café, which was often used as a meeting space for TBP given overlaps in membership. These trips were motivated by the activist positional critique of the secular ghettos and were a clear response to the Beirut-centrism of independent activism. In the longer term, the idea was to build relationships and networks that went beyond the secular cosmopolitan generation resident in Beirut. Various members of TBP volunteered to write policy papers either on their own or in small groups, spending a lot of time doing so, to then come back to the whole group. This was an attempt to give shape to the potentially inchoate sense of opposition to the Lebanese institutional political status quo.

Looking back on the first six months of TBP Fadia mused that 'there was a sense of idealism with it, like a sense of strange optimism that was very nice about it. And we gathered hundreds of people so quickly, and there was some excitement'. A heterodox form of consensus decision making was also employed in this early period, and for as long as it worked it also contributed to (re)producing a sense of fellow feeling amongst participants: 'working by consensus meant that we didn't have to vote and have friction. That was the main reason' (Antoine). One method used to keep in check people's excitement in consensus contexts was the use of a fine system to police members' interrupting one another. Member

exuberance was thus honed and directed in subtle and overt forms of inculcating dispositions. Feelings of excitement in engaging in meaningful political action are no surprise to anyone who has been involved in such action, but it is worth emphasising again and again because of how often it remains devalued in the wider literature on political mobilisation.⁷ Contrastingly, the literature on activism in particular has been much better at understanding the importance of affective bonds in such political intentional communities (Gould 2009: 181–212; Ringel 2014; Razsa 2015: 99–147). As Deborah Gould has stated for her involvement in ACT UP, the ‘swirl’ of ‘protest actions and meetings allowed us to reinvent ourselves, to carve out a place where we could be angry, oppositional, defiant, hopeful, sexual, and happy, a place where we could engage in collective projects of world-making’ (Gould 2009: 210). This is the early TBP atmosphere as described by and gleaned from discussions with members.

3.ii Hope resonating further afield

Alongside these internal TBP dynamics, built on fellow feelings of hope and optimism and contributing to their (re)production, there was reason to believe that these feelings were shared by other groups and persons becoming politically engaged in the lead-up to the elections. *Badeel* (lit. ‘alternative’) were also in the business of facilitating candidacies for the elections. Where TBP’s plan had been to produce a political programme and recruit candidates on the basis of their agreement with it, *Badeel* had aimed to find independent candidates already intending to stand and whose politics they were broadly in agreement with, and help them get elected. The Socialist Forum were advocating a blank vote campaign as a rejection of institutional politics, as indeed they had done in previous rounds of elections. The fellow feeling here, despite the distinct strategies, was based on a rejection of established political actors and the Lebanese institutional political status quo. A number of NGOs were also active with their own projects in the run-up to the elections: the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, the Civil

⁷ Once again, this is the point of criticism at the heart of the affective turn against political process theory.

Campaign for Electoral Reform, *min ajl al-jumhūriyya* (For the sake of the republic). Though they did not reject established political actors, their calls for transparency and accountability were shared by TBP and were core points of principle. Meanwhile, the outreach to other urban centres showed some interest outside of Beirut in independent political organising. Given the overwhelming Beirut-centrism of independent activism, finding mutual interest and fellow feeling beyond the city offered great cause for optimism.

On top of there being a flurry of activity that was aimed towards roughly similar goals, these various groups also had moments of direct interaction and of cooperation. When TBP travelled to Saida Badeel went with them. There had also been a roundtable at Babel Theatre in Hamra in which spokespeople from TBP, the Socialist Forum, Beyond Reform and Development, CCER and LADE discussed what would be the best strategy for the elections. This event was brought up over and over again when I solicited people's recollections of the earliest period of political organising on the elections. Lamia, who had not been involved in TBP but was a core member of Nasawiya, took on a wistful air as she juxtaposed what things felt like in that moment to what they had felt like just one year earlier: 'it had been such a great night. It had been really shitty weather but still the audience was packed out. Then we'd had so much hope, you know?'

There was also a perception within TBP that the desire for change, of tiredness with the political status quo and with sectarian political leaders, were all held to a sizeable degree in society at large. As a presupposition it lay, consciously and otherwise, behind many of the dispositions, tactics and rhetorical strategies put into action by the movement. Whilst sometimes overtly stated, far more often it operated below the level of direct address. For example, a highly valorised element of TBP was 'street work': engaging the general public – in the sense of people beyond the networks that those involved would normally be able to activate – about political alternatives. This ranged from going to main thoroughfares of Beirut, such as Hamra, and simply talking to people as they passed, to a 'mock vote' held in locations around Ras Beirut, where passers-by were asked to vote for various candidates and engaged with about the TBP

initiative and what they thought about the electoral process.⁸ For Antoine, ‘talking to people was really the biggest positive part of the whole experience, [it] pushed people to keep going because we were getting a positive reaction’. The Facebook page was also receiving thousands of ‘likes’ and plenty of positive reaction from commenters. Eventually, TBP also began to get mainstream press attention that, when they received it, was almost across the board of a positive nature (Alabaster 2012; Wernvik 2013). This all gave those involved the feeling that they were tapping into shared feelings of disappointment with the system as it was, further reinforcing the hope felt by those involved.

The importance of thinking that one’s perspective was held by a general public at an affective level can best be exemplified by one taxi driver anecdote that was repeated to me, unsolicited, by many members of TBP I spoke to. Nadia’s version runs thus: ‘it’s no small thing when you get into a shared taxi and the driver says to you ‘have you heard that there’s this group of people who are working to take back the parliament?’’. That’s something’. Karim’s version runs:

There was this taxi driver, I don’t know if I told you about that. A friend of mine was taking a ride with him and she was telling him about TBP, and he didn’t know anything about it, and she was telling him why we need to have this movement and corruption and everything, and he was agreeing with her. Then another time another TBP member got into the same cab by random and the taxi driver started talking about TBP, ‘you know there is this group and they are doing this and that and they are doing something nice and we should support them’. ‘Oh is it TBP? Oh yeah, yeah’ [laughs].

The retelling of such narratives and how they have become common currency within independent activist circles will be taken up in the next chapter as part of a discussion of storytelling and activist endurance. For now I want to comment on the emotion work that this story is doing. As an emotive, the story is attempting to report and engage an underlying feeling state. In both of the above instances, the anecdote was related to me after lengthy discussion of the downfall and failure of

⁸ It is interesting to note, in relation to the previous chapter’s discussion of where one can do what politics, that this street work did not venture into ‘closed’ neighbourhoods in Beirut. Rather, it took place either in sites usually frequented by the secular cosmopolitan generation – Hamra and Mar Mikhael – or else sites where there was substantial in- and out-flows of people – like the promenade along the seafront.

TBP and rhetorical musings on the futility of having tried anything at all. The story registers and attempts to recover some of the hopeful mood from that first period of organising. It serves the vital role of rehearsing the affective resonance of hope to retain the possibility of compelling oneself and others to get engaged once more, and perceive a possibility of worthwhile involvement in the future. Much of this emotion work is not happening overtly in the story. It is perhaps not being done consciously at all. Nevertheless, a framing of the affective state that the story brings back to the attention of the listener and the speaker guides the meaning attached to the feeling state – that hope is possible once more: the moral of the story, in other words. This is not a given on an affective level, but is a cultivated emotional disposition on the part of the listener and the speaker. The story itself serves to do the work of cultivating and reinforcing that moral and makes it available to be put to use at a later stage.

Deborah Gould calls on us to be wary of any *a priori* and commonsensical judgments about the ‘necessary relationship between a specific emotion [...] and a given response’, such as “‘hope is necessary for movements’”, “‘despair is depoliticising’”, and “‘anger leads people to the streets’”. Our task ought to be to work out ‘how relationships between feelings and action work in practice’ (Gould 2012: 96). The role of anger alongside indignation will be discussed below, and the depoliticising nature of despair will be questioned in the following chapter. But for the early days of TBP hope *did* play a key role in motivating engagement. There was a clear upswing of mobilisation in the second half of 2012 and first months of 2013. Though the goals, tactics, and targets varied across groups, an underlying affect of hope compelled a large number of people to believe that worthwhile political engagements could be enacted around the parliamentary elections of 2013. Within TBP there were conscious attempts and nonconscious mechanisms through which a particular emotional habitus might have come together. We can see the conscious side of this in the mountain retreat in late 2012. The nonconscious elements can be seen in the ‘strange optimism’ that Fadia spoke of. It can be seen, too, in the consensus meetings and the need to temper but not eradicate enthusiasm through swear box systems, to not devalorise it but hone it to the right space. This honing of ‘right’ emotional response has been noted, too, by Deborah Gould in the context of valorising anger and occluding grief within ACT

UP (2009: 55–120), and by Maple Razsa in the form of the watching of ‘riot porn’ amongst anarchist activists in the lead in to direct actions (2015: 132–147). Whilst the stakes were not as high as in the former or the content as intense as the latter, the coding evident in TBP meetings – of inculcating right behaviour and right feeling – is an aspect of activist organising that ought to resonate with anyone who has spent a substantial amount of time in such a setting. As the following section will show, this emotional habitus did not hold for everyone in TBP, and as the underlying motivating affective state began to change, the centre did not hold. Nevertheless, the force of hope in motivating and (re)producing political possibilities in this early period is clear and, as the taxi driver anecdotes evidence, was still a part of activist narratives even after that hope seemed to have drained away.

4. The downturn: ‘NGOs’, ‘politicals’, and diverging emotional habituses

4.i Hope receding

Around March 2013, things changed radically within TBP. Fadia left, along with a small number of other core and founding members, stating that they no longer believed that anything good could come from engaging with the electoral process. For the newly politicised within TBP, this was devastating. Nadia recalls her reaction: ‘I was definitely demoralised. Back then I didn’t think that working on elections was a problem. So I was demoralised because I felt that people give up easily. I didn’t understand it politically, the change in political thought. I couldn’t handle it’. Karim felt that ‘it was a changing point. It didn’t fail after, but it was different. The meetings were not as constructive and they were not as motivating’. This split had been brewing and reflected the broad and non-specific nature of TBP’s overall steer. Looking back, more than one ex-member pointed out to me that it was more than possible to be secular and right-wing, or to have good social

policies but horrible economic ones.⁹ This was reflected most clearly in the policy papers. As individuals went away to work on them divergences came to the fore. Antoine recalled that they ‘would get a paper which was really leaning towards the left, and one that was really liberal, and one that was really right. So papers were all over the place’. The consensus system that had been employed up to that point had maintained feelings of hope and optimism by occluding division, but the consensus showed itself to be false: ‘many times I felt that we would reach a consensus on an issue, but people would not be convinced and they would bring it up the next time and the next time. Which meant that there wasn’t really a consensus’. It became clearer and clearer that ‘we were about to have two completely different TBP groups doing different things’ (all Antoine). As the elections approached those who had left returned to TBP, but aware of the stark divisions called for the group to become an umbrella organisation under which various smaller groups would do their own actions.¹⁰

Considerations of this proposal took a back seat as the election date approached and the various parliamentarians began to discuss the possibility of extending their own mandate. In justification, they cited the poor security situation in the country as well as the fact that no new electoral law had been agreed upon.¹¹ In the murkiness of whether this would happen, TBP became aware that they might be able to fill all 128 parliamentary constituencies with candidates just before the deadline. If before then no institutional political party had put forward a nomination, then TBP candidates would be the only ones that could be voted for. This animated all parts of TBP in a rush to get 128 candidates for the deadline. In retrospect, all those I spoke to parsed this rush as being fuelled by desperation, though at the time they pushed on regardless. Antoine again: ‘I do admit that [...]

⁹ A similar point was made to me about the university-based political groups. The Secular Club’s early reticence in stating its leftist roots made for some at-times strange mixtures of contradictory political positions at the level of the group’s base, if not amongst its most active participants and elected officials.

¹⁰ In so doing, the late history of TBP appeared to mimic, or perhaps unconsciously parody, the diversity of tactics of the alter-globalisation movement (Razsa 2015: 112–14).

¹¹ One proposal, the Orthodox Gathering Law, appeared to many to be beyond parody. The proposed law would have turned the whole of Lebanon into one electoral district in which each Lebanese citizen could vote only for members of their own sect. For how the law would have worked, see Qifa Nabki (2011). For its possible unconstitutionality, see Moulahazat (2013).

we got kind of excited that we were going to do something there, but it was just, you know “Oh my God! Oh my God! we’re gonna do something!”, but, you know, that was not the plan, and it did actually divert attention and our focus’. This experience, too, showed the lack of a coherent political focus to the group and the goal of getting independents elected to parliament. Fadia, having left and come back, recalled this period with a sense of sardonic amusement, wondering aloud at what had been going through their heads at the time: ‘we had these surreal discussions about districts and voting patterns, and “this woman is not radical enough”, and “we suspect this man is March 14”. It’s as if we really believed we were part of it’.

Ultimately, members also reflected on how they actually had not managed to inculcate a shared disposition to political engagement, no matter the conscious attempts at building camaraderie and fellow feeling in the early period of the movement. Fadia again:

It became difficult to control the group, because it was mostly full of new people, and new people fall into the old traps. So they were attending meetings that they were not supposed to attend. We didn’t have a central decision making system where we could say “no you do not participate in this”. And so people were going to trainings by USAID about how you run for elections, or people were going to meetings with Sami Gemayel because he’s cool and because they never thought he would want to meet [with them].¹²

As TBP began to drive itself apart from the inside, the feeling of hope that had driven its members in the early period gave way to an urgent desperation to get something worthwhile done, even as what that might be fundamentally diverged in various members’ minds.¹³

¹² Sami Gemayel is a young right-wing parliamentarian, scion of the Kataeb political dynasty, and brother of the Nadim Gemayel whose bodyguards beat up the Nasawiya café partygoers. However, in this period he had been painting himself as a reformer who understood the need for change.

¹³ For a near contemporary account of TBP’s rise and fall, see Maaroufi (2014).

4.ii Fighting the police, fighting your fellow protestors at the parliamentary extension protest

External events, however, rendered TBP's internal failures irrelevant. On June 1st, 2013, parliamentarians extended their mandate by a year. Suddenly, the rush at the end of TBP's life, as well as the careful and incremental awareness-raising and self-fashioning in its earlier period, became moot. Hope and desperation gave way to rage and indignation. TBP members met with the various student groups – with whom they had already had some dealings and with whom they had a membership crossover – as well as CCER, LADE, and the Lebanese Communist Party, to discuss what to do about the decision. A protest was planned outside parliament for the day of the decision. On the day protestors came together in downtown Beirut and moved towards the blocked off and secured roads up to the entrance to parliament. The security forces appeared to have been caught by surprise: no more officers were manning the barriers than usual, and no extra security had been placed beyond the usual metal barriers. Certainly, the security forces were far outnumbered by the protestors, who themselves numbered between one thousand and two thousand people. There was chanting and a very loud and boisterous attitude for hours at the barriers. Some chants targeted parliament: 'get rid of the MP and put in a donkey!', 'out! out! out!', 'our parliament is a parliament of thieves!'.¹⁴ Other chants targeted the security forces standing in the way: 'soldier, soldier, soldier against whom?'.¹⁵ As parliamentarians arrived for the extension vote their cavalcades were pelted with tomatoes, a tactic named *thawrat al-banadūra*, or the tomato revolution. Given there were only metal barriers and parliamentary police facing them, the front lines began pushing the police and barriers backwards. As the sun beat down, security forces too began to beat protestors with truncheons. The protestors retaliated. A push would come from the lines of protestors further back, impelling those on the front line forwards and into the security forces. As a mass of people, and with the force pushing forwards, retaliating against the security forces became a viable strategy: 'you know when you're packed against the barrier you can't punch from the front. You have to wait for a wave. So the wave comes and you have to push, but if you push alone you're

¹⁴ 'shīlū nāyeb ḥoṭṭuh ḥmār', 'irḥal! irḥal! irḥal!', 'majlisnā majlis ḥarāmiyye', respectively.

¹⁵ 'askar, 'askar, 'askar 'alā mīn?'

gonna get beaten alone' (Fadia). This front line was mostly made up of TBP members and students.

Yet beyond this front line, the protest was not at all unified in what it should accomplish, and a divide quickly became apparent between those intent on fighting with the security forces and breaking through the barriers and those desperate to avoid confrontation. The vast majority of those attempting to defuse the atmosphere were from the NGOs and the moderate elements of TBP. This led to confrontation and fighting within the protest camp at the same time as fighting with the security forces. Fadia recounted to me that one NGO worker came to her on the front line of the protest and told her there were Amal thugs in the parliament waiting for them if they broke through the police lines, and that they would be much more violent than the police.¹⁶ In keeping with the spatialisation of political ownership in Beirut, she remarked to me that this made no sense as Amal guards its areas of town, Chiyah and Zarif, not the parliament building. She read it as a lie. Another NGO person tried a different strategy; Fadia smiled wistfully as she recounted that

this guy came and said "no, no, put the girls in front, they won't beat the girls". And so I started beating him. And then Lina came and started beating him, and then his friend [too]. And then someone from LADE came and started beating Lina and then it became a big *mashkal* (fight). And then the police of course wanted to separate us and we wanted to beat the police. It was horrible, but also fun.

By the time she reached the end of the sentence she was positively beaming, thoroughly enjoying her recollection of that moment.

What was most crucial in deflating the protest was that the moderate wing was in control of the loudspeakers. This from Antoine:

There was a discussion with the police officer responsible and then the people organising this, including people from our side [i.e. TBP], were telling protestors to sit down. And I remember arguing for a long time about this, because it had already been decided, and I thought that was going to kill the momentum of whatever was happening. And people sat down and it really fizzled down, and I mean in my head that was really the

¹⁶ Amal is the political party led by the speaker of the Lebanese parliament, Nabih Berri.

moment things started to fizzle down. People sat on the ground. I wouldn't say they almost succeeded but at some point the police forces were completely confused and lost.

Once people had sat down the fighting dissipated, tents were erected and it was decided to stay the night. Overnight a number of people visited: prospective parliamentarians, musicians, media outlets, and other NGOs who had not participated in the protest. An attempt was made by the radicalised wing to remove the media from the tent encampment, chanting at them: '*al-i'lām jiz' min al-niḡām*' (the media is part of the system). Again, it was NGO members who defused the situation, and the media remained. Overnight the security forces tried to place barbed wire down in front of the metal barriers. Protestors did not allow them to by coming up to the barriers and not allowing the truck through. Eventually the truck went round and to the inside of the barriers, and placed the barbed wire there instead.

The next morning there was yet another argument about whether a call should be made for another protest or whether everyone should go home. This time the moderate wing lost and a call was put out. The media coverage overnight brought new people: 'when the violence was broadcast on TV everybody came down, there was suddenly a thousand extra people there' (Karim).¹⁷ In an organised manner, some of the protestors approached the barbed wire and, using scarfs to cover their hands and with wooden pallets from their placards, dragged and trampled away the barbed wire. They were then able to enter the street. The security forces limited themselves to securing the area in front of them so that the protestors could not continue to the entrance to parliament. They did not attempt to arrest or manhandle any of the protestors on the second day. A number of follow-up protests were called in the weeks afterwards, with fewer numbers and less impact each time.

¹⁷ Mansour, whose nostalgia for this protest opened the thesis introduction, also recalled how important it had been to see images of the violence of security forces in bringing more participants to the protests. The capacity of mediated images of police violence to incite further protests was repeated but on a much larger scale with the trash protests of the summer of 2015, discussed in the conclusion (Chapter 8).



Figure 7: Police and protestors. The security response to the frontlines of the protest. (Photo: Pat Sy)

4.iii Indignation into anger, indignation into worry

What was most readily apparent from recollections of this protest, which photos of the protest also confirm, is that people were *angry*. Indignation has been investigated as a prime motivator of protest in the literature on political mobilisation and contentious politics. Goodwin et al. view it as one of the emotions ‘most relevant to politics’ (2001: 12), adding that protestors often ‘work hard’ to produce ‘moral indignation and outrage’ (2001: 17).¹⁸ In particular, indignation relates to feeling affronted or betrayed, or that something which ought to be yours has been taken from you (Gould 2009: 142–145). Everyone involved in the *lā lil-*

¹⁸ This was effected most literally by the *indignados* in Spain, members of whom had come to Beirut to run a workshop for activists in the period leading up to the (postponed) parliamentary elections.

tamdīd protests felt this indignation. This was true whether they were NGO workers or whether they were the radicalised TBP members or the student blocs. But if both sets of people felt indignant, then why did they manifest their indignation in such divergent ways? To answer this question we must return to the emotional habitus. At the end of TBP's life Fadia felt that the group had not done a good job of inculcating what was and what was not acceptable in terms of political practice, and lamented how the newly recruited fell back into established patterns of politics, in particular NGO forms of politics: lobbying, training sessions, clientelism. Yet many within TBP *did* oppose this way of doing things, and a large part of those were themselves newly politicised through TBP. For them a disposition *had* been successfully inculcated. The emotional element of these dispositions became undeniably apparent during the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests and gave force to the tactical disagreements with other protestors.

In other words, though all those who attended the protest felt indignation, some of them channelled it through particular emotions – anger, primarily – and these emotional responses valorised and facilitated particular actions during the protests, such as breaking barricade lines and fighting with the police. For example, Antoine remembered, he too with a broad smile on his face, that

some people were shouting at the police with such intensity that I really felt their veins were going to pop out. Spirits were [high], people were really tense. There was lots of tension, and people were ready to do anything I think. *Some* people wanted to be as aggressive as possible, even provoke the police as much as possible. *Some* people wanted to storm into parliament. (emphasis added)

Key to this recollection is the 'some'. The intensity of the day was felt by all, but for 'some' it manifested by motivating and making possible certain tactics. If for this 'some' this intensity was liberating and opened up the horizons of political possibility, for those with a different disposition and a distinct emotional habitus it was felt as worry. Things getting out of hand was precisely what they did not want, but precisely what the 'some' were bent on making so. In the protest's aftermath, NGO wariness of the emergent quality of this intensely-felt protest came to be understood by independent activists as key to what it was to be an NGO person. Well over a year after the first *lā lil-tamdīd* protest, David explained the difference

between 'NGOs' and 'politicals' to me as we ate our lunch in a secluded green area of the American University of Beirut, the sounds of traffic coming to us muffled through the trees just quietly enough to allow us to speak without shouting:

The NGOs are unable to deal with how this work is happening because for them, if there is no plan [...] for them it's absolute chaos, whereas the political ones are just "we need to move, we need to move, quickly - there is no time to make strategies, we have to use this energy that is happening while it's here".

These distinctions, and their cardinal contribution to the production of independent activist political subjectivity, are produced through moments of intensity such as the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests, and it is such viscerally inculcated information that I am calling *affectively inculcated knowledge*. Throughout our discussion of the protests Fadia had held a broad smile, revelling in remembering the instances of 'anger and violence', confiding that it was these that made it 'possibly the best protest [she'd] ever been in'. But the smile disappeared and her expression became pained as she continued:

The next day they – LADE – decided '*khalas* [that's enough], the protest's over, we're tired'. And that was the moment. I had a mental breakdown that lasted a year after that protest. And my friends, like someone was crying, like we really, it was a very emotional break because, again, you can theorise all you want about how NGO decisions are donor driven, and we can talk about this and laugh about this and make fun of NGOs but the moment you realise it, the moment it actually hits you – it means they take away your protest. You know what I mean? It means the nights you're sleeping in tents this woman from the USAID is gonna come and visit your tent and take photos of you. When you really understand at an emotional level what these things mean beyond just a theory, *khalas*, you understand that there is absolutely no hope. And you don't want to attack movements like that, but you can't be part of them. You can't. You can't. Because they're useless.

It is in these moments of intensity that the distinctions become clear, as an underlying intensity is registered in varying ways and informs radically distinct actions. Yet once that has happened it also feeds into what one can think possible in the future. It was affectively inculcated knowledge of difference, a sense of deep

alienation from NGOs and their strategies, that was such a strong feature of activist political subjectivity during my time in the field. It was so precisely because of moments like the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest, when the gulf between the two sides could be seen clearly by those involved and could no longer be forgotten.

5. Affective politics and the politics of affect

I want to draw out what the above account of a movement cycle and the production of an emotional habitus adds to the critical engagement with affect theory begun in the previous chapter. As already stated, engagements with affect in anthropology have almost entirely averred emotion. The anthropology of emotion was in many ways the pinnacle of the discursive turn in anthropology and is precisely what affect theory refutes. This is clear if we look at the work of some of the key theorists of affect. Brian Massumi takes as his target the (over)determination of signification in critical thinking, which ‘disavows its own inventiveness as much as possible’ (2002: 12). As William Mazzarella has pointed out, Massumi’s vitalism ‘quivers with the romance of a fundamental opposition between, on the one hand, the productive, the multiple, and the mobile and, on the other, the death-dealing certitudes of formal determination’ (Mazzarella 2009: 293–294). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003), meanwhile, takes as her target ‘the privileging of the epistemological’ in contemporary cultural theory and the constant search for prohibition rather than liberation (Hemmings 2005: 553). Both provide a division of labour: emotions are representational and signifying; affect is non-discursive – if not pre-discursive – and incommensurable. For Massumi and Sedgwick, this decoupling of affect from representational determination is politically liberating. For Massumi, this is because signification is deadening, while affect is unconstrained:

How does a body perform its way out of a definitional framework that is not only responsible for its very "construction," but seems to prescribe every possible signifying and countersignifying move as a selection from a

repertoire or possible permutations on a limited set of predetermined terms? (Massumi 2002: 3)

For Sedgwick (2003), building on the work of the psychologist Silvan Tomkins, affects are liberating because they attach contagiously and willy-nilly, short-circuiting structures of power, norms, and dispositions.¹⁹ Interestingly, even as anthropological engagements with affect cite and draw upon these authors, the political project underlying the bombast of affect theory as a putative paradigm shift falls away.²⁰

Affect theory as a normative political project must carve out a space for itself – and one clear way in which to do so is to categorically differentiate its subject matter. In particular, the putatively liberating ways in which affect is either prior to or capable of transcending signification, structure, power, would make it – to return to our own discipline – ‘irreducible to any anthropology – for example, an anthropology of emotion, or of aesthetic systems – that would seek to explain affect by situating it comparatively within integrated cultural orders’ (Mazzarella 2009: 293).²¹ But it is clear the moment one encounters the actual experiences of social beings that one is affectable in particular ways and not others, as the previous chapter argued, and that emotion as signification must relate – if only imperfectly, certainly – to feeling states for its force, as this chapter argues. Affect theory is correct in stating that the two are not the same even as it goes too far in categorically dissociating the one from the other. They are, rather, in a mutually constitutive relationship.

It is here, then, that I depart from much affect theory by asserting that affect is nondiscursive and nonconscious, yes, but never *prediscursive* or *preconscious*. William Mazzarella’s interpretation of Massumi’s thought comes close to the argument I am making here when he states that ‘from the standpoint of affect, society is inscribed on our nervous system and in our flesh’ (2009: 291, 292). And

¹⁹ See Chapters 3 and 4 in *Touching Feeling* (Sedgwick 2003: 123–152, 153–182) for her contrarian reading of Tomkins (written with Adam Frank) and her elucidation of the liberating project of affect, respectively.

²⁰ Sedgwick is far less cited within anthropology than Massumi, presumably because of her privileging of the psychologist Silvan Tomkins’ model of innate affects – a contention that anthropological training and ethnographic research make particularly difficult to accept.

²¹ The point would stand for any academic discipline, however.

similar to my argument for how a person becomes affectable in particular ways and not others, he adds that the 'affective body [...] preserves the traces of past actions and encounters and brings them into the present as potentials' (Mazzarella 2009: 292). Mazzarella makes a crucial contribution in emphasising that 'from an *analytical* point of view, thinking affect points us toward a terrain that is presubjective without being presocial' (2009: 291).²² Whenever we investigate an affective resonance, it is no surprise that we begin with the affect in order to see what work it ends up doing. But this is always only an analytic decision.

This chapter has tracked hope and indignation (and the following chapter will look at despair) but this has always been in order to show how they resonate and become resonant for independent activists in Lebanon – who are particular sorts of persons attuned in particular ways to the world around them, whether they are aware of it at any given moment or not. If a little or a lot of this is happening below the level of direct awareness, this does not mean that it is prior to in any meaningful sense. Geographer Ben Anderson makes just this point when he states that for the movement from 'affect through feelings to emotions' there is 'no a priori direction or causality' (2006: 737). As such, 'the distinctions do not correspond to a nature-culture division between the indeterminate, unmediated, natural and the determinate, mediated social' (Anderson 2006: 737). Analytical priority, then, does not correspond to ontological priority: *nondiscursive* but not *prediscursive*, *nonconscious* but not *preconscious*. Those who attended the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest felt indignation where others did not. That this distribution of feeling came about is only randomly emergent if one wilfully disregards how the world is experienced by actual socially-, historically-, materially- and politically-emplaced persons. The chapters leading up to here have sought to shed light on why these persons were able to experience the feeling states that they did and to understand what work they were then able to do with those feelings (and, what those feelings did to them). At the same time, those feeling states, the landscapes

²² In a very odd move, Mazzarella attributes the argument for the analytical prior-ness of affect to Massumi. In fact, this is the exact opposite of Massumi's point; his vitalism, his goal of refuting the discursive turn, and his use of a certain subset of experimental psychological data compels him to argue for the *ontological* prior-ness of affect, as a fact rather than a heuristic device (Leys 2011). In Clare Hemmings' pithy phrase, for Massumi 'signification is (passive) death, and ontology is (active) life' (2005: 557).

which produce them, the political projects which are motivated by them, exceed, frustrate, and undo.

So much for bombastic affect theory. The fervour with which affect theorists emphasise affect as normatively good and liberatory is on unsure ground the moment we engage with the experiences of actual social actors. And yet those working on the political within the affective turn have, in their disparate and varying ways, come to the conclusion that there is *something* going on at the level of feeling: that it is vitally important for understanding the political and that we require an account of it. The move here, I think, is from a politics of affect to an analytic of the affective dimensions of the political. The first offers affect as the locus of liberation, as the thing around which to organise progressive politics – in other words, affect as normative political theory. The latter, meanwhile, looks to the affective dimensions of political organising and attempts to account for what role affect plays in the political. It is just such an analytic that Francesca Polletta, echoing Goodwin and Jasper (2004: 25), invokes when she argues that political process theory can describe aspects of emotion work in political movements but cannot explain why this work either resonates (or not) within the movement or with a wider audience (Polletta 2004: 102–104).²³ Such an analytic is required in order for us to ‘represent the powerful emotional charge generated when activists transcend social divisions of gender, class, and national belonging, no matter how fleetingly’ (Razsa 2015: 212–13).

Of course, affect as analytic does not preclude the valorisation of affect, feeling states, emotional responses, and so on by our interlocutors as part of their political practice. The reason why Maple Razsa is so attuned to what he calls ‘the subjective’ in ‘radical political experience’ (Razsa 2015: 212), or why Deborah Gould is interested in the production of an emotional habitus, or why I am so intrigued by the affectively inculcated knowledge that emerges from visceral moments of contestation, is that the forms of political life that we engage with are both intense – and therefore particularly amenable to an affective analytic – *and* because our interlocutors have some conception of the importance of the affective in radical politics. But affect is a medium, not a panacea. As this and the previous

²³ This is also Deborah Gould’s early critique of the then-reigning paradigm of political process theory in social movement literature (Gould 2001, 2009: 121–176).

chapter have shown, the affective informs political projects but is always imperfectly captured by them: it exceeds those projects and can be made use of – again imperfectly – by the opponents of progressive politics, too. Hamra is productive of irritability for independent activists because of the presence of the SSNP, yes. But the continuing inhabitation of the neighbourhood *qua* political site by activists is a source of potential irritability for the SSNP, too. Indignation was only capable of motivating some people – inculcated with a particular emotional habitus – to confront security forces. It motivated others to oppose their actions, others whom independent activists had thought were allies sharing similar political dispositions.

A normative politics of affect, if it is to be of any use, must grasp that affects cut both ways – they are never solely positive. As with so much of political practice, it is what one does (with affect) that matters – the valorisation of certain political emotions over a *longue durèe* of inculcating dispositions which enabled particular responses given certain stimuli, as Deborah Gould has documented and as the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests exemplified. And it is what one makes of the forms of knowing the world that are produced by the experience of intense moments of contestation that matters – how these become important aspects (or not) of one’s political subjectivity moving forwards.

6. Conclusion: typologies of hope

In this chapter I have traced the trajectory, from feelings of hope and optimism to desperation, and finally to indignation and rage, within a protest movement. I have shown how one group in particular, TBP, attempted to cultivate a particular set of political and emotional dispositions. In this, they were only ever partially successful. But that partial success became vital to indexing their response to the parliamentary extension. The intensity of the indignation felt in that moment was enacted emotionally in a mutually antagonistic manner by those with a political emotional habitus and those with an NGO emotional habitus. A year or so is not a short period of time, but to engage with the intensity that members of TBP

engaged with the group speaks volumes for its importance to their political self-fashioning, to the production of their political subjectivity. In making the argument above, the point has not been to argue for the importance of affective and emotional distinctions as the be all and end all of the differences between activists and NGOs. The divergences are located, too, at the levels of targets, tactics, and strategies. And yet affective force is an indelible presence in the moments of distinction between the two, and it is this force that hardens the boundaries far more than could be accounted for by differences in their repertoires alone. As Gould states, 'emotions are integral to a person's sense of herself and to her political subjectivity, [they] shape people's notions of what is politically possible and desirable' (2012: 162). These emotions, produced and reinforced in moments of intense feeling such as the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest, become a central part of the production of independent activist political subjectivity in a way that cannot be accounted for simply on the level of disagreements over strategy, tactics, or targets divorced from affective resonance.

In closing, I would like to turn to hope once more. In his work on the affective resonance of music, Ben Anderson has identified three different types of 'hope':

First, flows of hope that take place as transindividual affectivities which move between bodies; second, hopefulness as a constellation of specific bodily background feelings emergent from the expression of affect; third, actual hopes that emerge through processes of qualification and are distinguished by possessing a determinate object. (Anderson 2006: 741)

We might want to see his first type as the prevailing mood of hope 'in the air' in the earliest moment of TBP. A certain number of people felt, in a very diffuse way, that something could be done and engaged in political endeavours motivated by that feeling. This was felt in a variety of groups with different ideas of what should be done and how to do it, but all motivated by the same diffuse hope in the possibility of something better. This is the second type. The third type – hope with a determinate object – surfaced very little indeed in my conversations and interviews with independent activists, and never when they reminisced with one another about their experiences. When it did it was due to my questioning. As and when I asked, say, 'what did you actually want to get out of TBP?', or, 'what would

have constituted success in your eyes?', I would receive answers like: 'maybe if we could have gotten one person elected out of 128', '1% of the vote across the country would have been a success'. But in retrospect, there was very little agreement over what the concrete goal of TBP had been. Certainly, one reason for this reticence and confusion over instrumental goals – and the hope of whose determinate object those goals would have been – is that, with the elections postponed, reflecting on particular goals seemed impossibly naïve.

But I would argue that there is more to it than that. In the initial moment of hope, people became motivated to join TBP not because of a hope tied to a determinate goal, but because a diffuse hope and optimism engaged them and made activism seem worthwhile in the moment. This diffuse hope is a future-orientation that radically alters one's social present by motivating and allowing one to act, behave and think otherwise. Once engaged in just such a way, TBP members did a lot of emotion work to fashion themselves into persons similarly attuned in order to act together politically. Above I showed some of the ways in which this was effected. Though some of this emotion work was conscious and discursively mediated, much more played out on nonconscious and nondiscursive levels: witness the production of fellow feeling through the sociality of shared car-rides, or the camaraderie of group outreach work. An emotional habitus was cobbled together with much intensity and within a restricted time frame. As the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest showed, the inculcation of a political emotional habitus was only ever partial: witness Fadia's 'old traps' of NGO structures and political sectarianism. And yet for many members of TBP it stuck and was valorised even further through the intensity of difference from the NGOs during the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests, as Fadia's affecting words made clear: 'when you really understand *at an emotional level* what these things mean beyond just a theory, *khalas*, you understand that there is absolutely no hope'.

Thought and feeling are not distinct realms of being. They come together to produce knowledge of the world. In Anderson's words, emotions are 'artful types of corporeal intelligence-in-action' (2006: 737). In the context of the political emotional habitus of some TBP members, the affective force of the knowledge gained about whether the NGOs would be on their side or not, of whether they could be trusted in the future, is what sustains its valence. In moments of despair

and during musings on their own failures, the strength of their knowledge of difference from NGOs became key to conceiving of possible political futures in the face of despair and lack of opportunity. It is to the processes through which this endurance was effected that I now turn.

6. On continuing in moments of despair: failure, narrative and storytelling

1. Introduction: why bother to keep bothering?

In the preceding chapter I tracked the movement from hope to indignation within the political engagements leading up to the (postponed) parliamentary elections of 2013. The period that followed – the period during which I carried out my fieldwork on political activism in Lebanon – was one of retrenchment and of little high-profile political engagement. Instead, there was widely felt despair.

Independent activists wrestled with their own feelings of burnout off the back of an intense eighteen months. They were also forced to contend with questions over what might even constitute viable political action in the context of parliamentary and constitutional life at a standstill and the conflict across the border in Syria continuing to make itself felt. In this atmosphere, when a few months into my fieldwork I began to suggest (only half-) jokingly to my friends and interlocutors that I was doomed to write an ‘ethnography of failure’, not one of them disagreed; many instead found some worth in just such an endeavour, hoping that it might help provide some suggestion of how that failure came about or what to do next.

And yet this atmosphere of failure begged a question: why bother? If nothing seems possible and the best ideas you had have gone up in smoke, why continue at all? To be sure, a good number of those active in TBP fell out of activism after the parliamentary extension protests. But many more did not. Even during this downturn political work continued, albeit at a lower level. Over the next two chapters I will discuss how engagement was maintained and a sense of political possibility was kept alive. In both the affectively inculcated knowledge of difference produced by the falling apart of TBP and the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests figured prominently. In this chapter, I concentrate on how this knowledge allowed activists to continue *through* the atmosphere of failure in the contemporary moment. Much of this work was carried out through the introspections of those who had been involved in the prior failures. I argue that the strategies of recollection, circulation, and reinterpretation of moments of activism served to

maintain people's engagement as activists. When these strategies were allied to an orientation towards future organising it became possible to glimpse a sense of political possibility in spite of and through the senses of failure and despair that animated those recollections in the first place. This (re)orientation towards the future was brought about through the recollection and reembodiment of the failure of the intense but short-term parliamentary election organising that preceded it.

I will return in detail to activist futurity in the following chapter. In this chapter, however, I want to concentrate on the substance of storytelling. The atmosphere of despair that descended upon activists in the aftermath of the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests had the potential to kill off independent activism. As such, the stability and sustainability of activism became cardinal concerns for those persons who remained active. Amongst other strategies and behaviours, many of which I will discuss below, telling stories about prior engagements surfaced as one vital way in which activists (re)produced and (re)imagined themselves as activists in a period of failure. In the absence of abiding institutional structures, such as those of political parties or organisations, it was through interpersonal work that a modicum of participatory identification was retained. Herein, affectively inculcated knowledge was made and remade meaningful to activists through the stories they told and the narratives they produced of their previous political engagements. Revealingly, this circulation of stories carried on regardless of my presence. I was therefore in a position of being able to share in this introspection and circulation without the need to solicit it. My interlocutors were searching for the same sort of answers as I was. This also meant that, often, these recollections had already been made into stories and narratives, already packaged and prepared to make a multitude of memories mean something politically to those who told them and those to whom they were told. Below I reproduce three such narratives to show how recollections of political activities were turned into meaningful stories. These narratives were produced by activists together, not individually: they were shaped through their (re)telling and by their audiences. Here the production of meaning was an intersubjective process. To this effect, this chapter is a turn from what activist testimony can tell us of activist affects in the past – the subject of the

previous chapter – to their effects in the contemporary moment of telling and sharing.

Here, then, I am making a claim for the importance of storytelling in the maintenance of activist political subjectivity. To do so I draw on the work of sociologist Francesca Polletta (2004, 2006) and oral historian Alessandro Portelli (1981, 1991, 1997), who make specific links between the narrative form and political engagement. Their work is important in formulating my argument for the meaning-making potential of both the narrative form and the storytelling act. But I also draw on anthropologists who have written on the role that narrative and storytelling play in the production of subjectivity more broadly. Michael Gilsean, for one, provides an account of ‘narratives as social action’ in north Lebanon that asks who gets to narrate and who gets to be the author of narration (1996: 32). His ethnography showcases an awareness for both contextual and historical location and for the capacity of those involved in the narrative act to improvise (*irtijāl*). In so doing, he provides a template for how to present narratives ethnographically and how to understand their relationship to social reality. Michael Jackson (2002), meanwhile, has written with great insight on the importance of stories for our capacity to make sense of ourselves in the world around us as an intersubjective process. By placing the production of meaning between subjects his formulation is particularly powerful for refuting the putative interiority of subjectivity in the first place. The following account of how my interlocutors maintain their political subjectivity through narrativisations of prior moments of intense political contestation, then, is a further argument for the importance of attending to subjectivity as outward-facing, tied to an inculcated bodily habitus, and capable of inciting action in the world. In Lebanon, such an agentive political subjectivity was of fundamental importance for independent activists negotiating their future in a present permeated by a sense of failure.

This chapter begins, then, by exploring in detail what the atmosphere of failure felt like and entailed for activists in Beirut (2.i). I then turn to the question of how we ought to contend with failure analytically (2.ii), before turning to what this might mean for failure in the Lebanese context (2.iii). I then move from a discussion of the atmosphere of failure to how political engagement was maintained through narrative and storytelling. In section 3 I turn to the ways in

which narratives of three major political events circulated amongst activists (3.i). Each of these has already been encountered in this thesis: the Syrian embassy *mashkal* (fight) (Chapter 4), the Nasawiya café *mashkal* (Chapter 4), and the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest (Chapter 5). Each event went through a process of folklorification (*ṣārū fūlklūr*). I argue that their continued circulation kept alive each story's particular moral for the activists involved. Building upon the literature in anthropology and oral history on narrative and storytelling, I argue (3.ii) that these events become meaningful through the act of telling stories about them, and that the intersubjectivity of storytelling is crucial to understanding its power. Following Michael Jackson (2002), I treat narrative and storytelling as analytically distinguishable elements of the single process of telling a story, wherein narrative relates to the content of the story and storytelling relates to the act of telling it. In closing (section 4) I turn to the crucial role played by the affective inculcation of the morals of these stories. I suggest that the knowledge acquired and continually (re)circulated through them, as well as the ability they have to affect activists' engagements and their political choices, is produced through the affective intensity of how this knowledge came about for the respective activists. In this, as always, the emotional and affective and the intellectual are not intelligibly separate but come together to make these stories meaningful to activists. It is the force of these morals that produce in storytelling a powerful buffer against melting away from political activism and promoting continued engagement in periods of failure, such as that which pertained in Beirut during my time in the field.

2. The presence of failure

2.i Failure in the air

Having arrived to begin fieldwork it did not take long for me to realise that the moment of political intensity I had originally intended to research was well and truly over. Over the course of my first few weeks in Beirut the emails I sent to Take Back Parliament addresses garnered no reply. So too emails to various activist gatekeepers. In that early period there were very few events, protests, or

organising meetings to be found. When I did begin to meet activists and broach my research interests to them I received bemused and sometimes derisive responses: ‘why do you want to do research on that?’, ‘nothing is happening now, anyway’, ‘if only you had been here last year’.

It was in this period that I first met Hisham. He was a member of TBP, one of a few trying to keep the group going even after the parliamentary extension. He would ultimately give up on this attempt, and instead join *al-muntadā al-ishtirākī* (the Socialist Forum) and continue his politicisation. In this first meeting, he introduced me to the spatial and consumption practices of independent activism by organising to meet at Ta Marbouta in Hamra, and he also gave me my first narrativisation of how TBP fell apart. In an attempt at reciprocal empathetic solidarity, I gave him a few examples of protest actions that I had been involved with in the UK and which had not succeeded. In a lull in the conversation I commented that the conversation had gotten depressing very quickly. With a sardonic smile he replied: ‘well, isn’t that just what happens when two activists talk to each other?’.

David and Lamia, who we have met several times already in this thesis, would become two of my closest friends. Their reactions early on to my research project were particularly telling. Walking back up to Hamra from the seafront on a warm end of year afternoon, I laid out to David my initial impressions about activism in Beirut, such as I had them. We had already met a number of times, but now I finally had the opportunity to try and explain what I wanted to research and get whatever help I could from him – I already knew that he had been involved in many projects over the last few years. I told him about my interest in historical memory, and in what kinds of political actions can be done and where, and of how important being ‘secular’ seemed to be to everyone. I then lamented how things seemed to have wound down and that very little was afoot. David consoled me by saying that he thought it was better to be doing research during a lull. ‘Do you really think so?’, I asked, hoping for some crumb of optimism. ‘Yes. Because if you came and only saw last year then you would give a very wrong impression of activism here. It’s not like that at all’. This was not, suffice to say, quite the answer I had hoped for. A few days later I met Lamia for a drink, again in Hamra. During our conversation, as in so many of my conversations with activists early on in

fieldwork, she lamented the lack of political activity. I mentioned to her David's thoughts, that this was a better time to do research. She snorted derisively: 'how can you research activism when there isn't any?'

Of course, if this sense of failure was initially disappointing for me as a researcher, it was far more so for those who had actually gone through the process of having tried and failed. Burnout kept reoccurring in many of my interlocutors' narratives of the end of TBP, the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests, and the Nasawiya *mashkal*.¹ In the aftermath of those events, Fadia told me that she felt that she had had to 'put her life on hold for a year' in order to recover; Karim felt 'that everyone was tired after'. David Graeber has suggested that such burnout within horizontalist or direct action political forms relates to both structures of repression external to the group and problems internal to it. After initial excitement at 'almost infinite horizons', activists often come to feel

a growing exhaustion in the face of state repression, and a growing sense of exasperation as they discover the endless petty troubles, subtle forms of domination, and dilemmas of privilege that still endure. (Graeber 2009: 553)

Though TBP itself was hardly the most anarchist iteration of political activism in the recent history of Lebanese radical politics, a similar pattern to burnout was evident. The intertwining of the personal and political so fundamental to such subjective forms of politics (Razsa 2015), was particularly evident in my interlocutors' recollections. When there is no space to get away from one's political activism, as is the case in such intense forms of political engagement, then the potential for activist exhaustion rises: 'those drawn into the world of horizontal organizing will often find the experience amazing, liberating, transformative [...] six months later, they may just as well quit in disgust' (Graeber 2009: 332).²

Even as political engagements once again began to occur with greater frequency, for many the overarching feeling of despair remained. During the student protests over tuition fees discussed in Chapter 2, there was actually very

¹ When a specific word was used to describe this feeling it was always 'burnout' used in English even when the rest of the conversation was carried out in Arabic. Arabic equivalents, such as *istinzāf* (exhaustion) were hardly ever employed.

² For some personal accounts of burnout, see alicebreckless (2013) and Power (2014).

little sense of despair amongst students directly involved on campuses (or, at least, before they had come to an end). The majority of them had not had to deal first hand with the fallout of *isqāṭ al-nizām al-ṭā'ifi*, and those who had been involved in TBP had gone back to campuses in the new year invigorated rather than drained by it. They turned their minds to student organising. The slightly older generation of activists, however, found themselves in a tricky position. Many of them had been involved in the previous protest against tuition increases at AUB in 2008, and had seen the protest torn apart by pressure from the administration, by the betrayal of student members of establishment political parties, and by threats to grants and bursaries of individual activists (all of which would play out this time around, too). For some this made them derisive towards the new protests – I had many conversations with ex-student activists who told me in no uncertain terms that these protests would fail, because they had already tried it before and it had not worked then. But there was also another view. As I had been attending every part of the student protests that I could, I became a go-between of sorts, informing those from the older generation who had lost touch with university activists what was going on and discussing with those others who were still involved what the protestors could or should be doing. It was during just such a conversation with Fadia that she confided that she felt like she was becoming ‘that old person who says “no, no, no, it won’t work, we tried it five years ago”. And I don’t want to do that’. There was a desire not to shut down the newly politicised, but also not to transfer to them the sense of despair of so many of the more experienced activists.

2.ii Failure as an endpoint?

A sense of failure, then, was ubiquitous for those who had been involved in previous periods of political activism. For some the newer generation needed to be made aware of what had led to it so they would not make the same mistakes. For others, the younger generation needed to be shielded from that sense of failure. Either way, it was a constant concern for independent activists. But what sort of a thing was this failure?

Hirokazu Miyazaki and Annelise Riles have spoken of ‘failure as an endpoint’ (2005). In their account of Japanese traders reaching the limits of their

own market knowledge, failure as an endpoint references 'a moment at which a project is apprehended retrospectively as complete, closed, and in the past' (Miyazaki & Riles 2005: 325). Epistemologically speaking, failure presents itself as the end of knowledge. That way of doing things is done. Amongst Lebanese activists, there had already been a number of failures-as-endpoints in the recent past: working with political parties can no longer be countenanced, engaging with NGOs has but one outcome. For those who experienced *isqāṭ* and the Syrian embassy fight, or the falling apart of TBP and the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest, the possibility of working with parties or NGOs was dead: complete, closed, and in the past. But while the idea of doing those things dies in moments such as the embassy fight or parliamentary extension protest, the people who held those ideas clearly do not: they must continue to try to find ways to muddle along. In the Lebanese case, they did so with the weight of failure impinging on their present. In Miyazaki and Riles' words, it is not 'the failure of knowledge *per se* that is interesting, but rather the way this failure precipitates the "assemblage" of old and new knowledge practices in expected and unexpected manners' (2005: 327).

To draw attention to what it feels like to sense failure in one's day-to-day life I would like to suggest that failure is an atmosphere, one which permeated people's entire thinking on the politically possible. In doing so I am building on the idea of failure as an endpoint, rather than refuting it. This is a shift from a sense of epistemological break, of no longer knowing the world, to a sense of phenomenological continuity, of living with one's failure to know the world. The problematic of endurance in a world potentially hostile to one's presence within it has been explored in recent years by a number of anthropologists drawing on phenomenological approaches, and in particular utilising Martin Heidegger's conceptualisation of *dwelling*: Elizabeth Povinelli has written about the 'will to endure' in late liberalism (2011), and Jarrett Zigon's (2014) discussion of political activism providing the capacity to endure moral breakdown in the context of the war on drugs also points in the same direction.

Here, though, I want to emphasise the experiential dimension of failure and the transmission of affects within it (Brennan 2004). For independent activists, failure is experienced as beyond the subject; it has a certain phenomenological object-quality. For those who felt it weighing upon them, failure was very much

like an atmosphere, in the sense outlined by geographer Ben Anderson. For Anderson, overriding moods that seem to define person's lifeworlds, such as the failure and despair I described above, ought to be thought of as affective atmospheres. His reasons are twofold. Firstly, because as a heuristic it ties well with the sense we already have of the meteorological atmosphere. Like that atmosphere, 'it exerts a force on those that are surrounded by it, and like the air we breathe it provides the very condition of possibility for life' (Anderson 2009: 78). Secondly, because in everyday language we already use atmosphere to mean the sense of a particular scene or of a particular time. Think of how one says that a film captures the atmosphere of a certain decade, for instance. An atmosphere also 'traverses distinctions between peoples, things, and space' (Anderson 2009: 79). Whilst it may emanate from particular bodies, it is experienced as an exteriority that impinges upon the person.

In the Lebanese context, this has allowed activists to speak of failure as a reified thing. It also means that they worried about transmitting that failure to others, of making them aware of its truth when they were oblivious to it. As I described at the end of the previous section, one perspective amongst older activists was that the young must be informed of failure, that it is true and that what they are doing will fail because it can only fail. But the other perspective worried that making younger activists conscious of that failure might itself doom their efforts. Either way, there is an understanding that failure exceeds the particular persons who experience that failure and that it imbues their relationship to each other and the world. Whilst atmosphere here has similarities with the sense of haunting discussed previously in relation to the activist affective landscapes of Beirut, the two refer to different affective processes. Haunting references the present absence of some thing in the landscape. As such, it is out there in the physical world, somewhere, and that somewhere matters greatly in providing it with affective force. Atmosphere, meanwhile, references some part of one's past that imbues one's experience of the contemporary. It has an infectious quality, as all affective states do, but is temporally rather than materially situated. One can continue to feel like a failure whether one is still at the site of that failure or not, though that feeling would most likely be rawer at the site. Further, the worry over the transmission of the feeling of failure highlights its capacity to pass

from subject to subject, transforming them as it does. Where a haunting is experienced as objective, atmospheres are intersubjective.

The atmosphere of failure, then, exerted considerable force on independent activists: it was able to dominate thoughts about how best to act politically and there was also a concordant worry that it might be possible to transfer the sense of failure on to others, like the optimistic student activists who Fadia was wary of speaking to. To those already attuned to being affected by it, it remained a constant presence. But, much like an atmosphere, the presence of failure became the condition of possibility for political activism. Any activism that took place took the form that it did because of that atmosphere. I will turn to some ethnographic examples of post-failure activism in a moment. For now it is important to say that by wanting to shift analytically from failure-as-endpoint to atmospheres of failure, I want to emphasise the emic fact that whatever else is true of failure, one's sensation of it becomes itself the condition of possibility for social action in its aftermath. For this to be the case it is important to recognise that the pastness of that failure cannot but make itself felt in the present. The contemporary importance of past failures is locatable implicitly in Miyazaki and Riles' analysis, as they move to discuss what traders and regulators in Japan chose to do next *because of past failure*. As they state, 'failure as an endpoint and the retreat from knowledge is not permanent' (Miyazaki & Riles 2005: 326). In casting judgment on a failure in the past one is making a claim on the present. This might, of course, be felt as an endpoint, a moment beyond which previous knowledge and ways of understanding the world simply no longer make sense and cannot help one orient oneself. In any case, if one wishes to investigate the aftermath of failure, as is my intention, then the emphasis must be on the present-ness of failure, not its pastness.

With the shift to discussing atmospheres of failure, then, my desire is to emphasise that failure is not a moment of phenomenological break, even as it is certainly one of epistemological break, as Miyazaki and Riles show. The effects of failure are felt only after that failure has taken place. We need to attend to what work an atmosphere of failure does. Failure as an endpoint thinking could often be found in the Lebanese context. Yet failure was also a spur to further deliberation

and social action. In the next section I turn to some of the ways in which the atmosphere of failure was made actionable amongst independent activists.

2.iii What to do about failure

Failure was, in the aftermath of election organising and the parliamentary extension, fairly ubiquitous amongst independent activists. Its presence was formative of the sorts of action that activists saw as possible, worthwhile, and necessary. For some, this meant a move to bolstering analytic thinking about pressing political problems. In this regard, I began to meet many of my key interlocutors and friends at a gender and sexuality reading group organised under the auspices of Nasawiya. The original hope for the organisers had been to bring political thinking on the topic to those who were interested and to radicalise domestic perspectives.³ It also meant a shift to maintaining the material spaces and still-extant organisations as well as possible at that time. So keeping the Nasawiya space open and offering it as an organising space to whoever wanted to use it was deemed as worthwhile in itself, at least for the moment.⁴ The Anti Racism Movement, meanwhile, was able to move to a better space and maintain its activities for migrant workers (language and computer literacy classes, child-minding, food nights, the migrant worker festival and May Day march). This was a noted shift from more proactive and politicised activities of a previous period, such as documenting racism on beaches. For its part, *al-muntadā al-ishtirākī* (the Socialist Forum) in this period also retrenched and concentrated on its publications and on internal reading groups and consciousness raising activities.

From this period there was one activity in particular which caught my interest because, unlike those discussed above, it was not parsed as a form of retrenchment. From around December 2013 I began being told that some ex-members of TBP, all of whom shared the political emotional habitus discussed in

³ Ultimately, things panned out differently, as English-speaking expats dominated the group. The point here, though, is on the intention of the group within a particular affective atmosphere.

⁴ Maple Razsa's documents a similar logic of retrenchment and the valorisation of infrastructure in his account of the opening of a squatted social centre by anarchists in Croatia in the aftermath of the 2003 Thessaloniki counter-summit (2015: 148-73).

the previous chapter, had begun to discuss the possibility of a new political organisation. In doing so they had decided on a different mode of organising. Rather than announcing the group and attempting to come to a political consensus among whoever answered the call, this group would begin in private and on an invite-only basis. Though it had no name as such, it was normally referred to as the *ḥalaqa siyāsiyya*, or the political circle. In this early formative period those involved were to hash out the basic political problems that had in one form or another plagued all the political groups of the previous five years: what position to take on the conflict in Syria, how to view various sorts of military intervention, the role of the resistance and Hizballah, how to position themselves between the interests of the two parliamentary blocs in the country. Hani, first encountered in Chapter 3 for his critique of the secular ghettos, was one of those invited to participate in the *ḥalaqa*. Of an older generation than most, he had been a member of one of the parties in the Left coalition at the end of the civil war (though never as a fighter). He then became an NGO worker, trained in conflict resolution, and ultimately came to abandon the idea that such engagement could lead to political change. When I first met him to discuss my research he had already been disillusioned for some time. The *ḥalaqa* had managed to engage him precisely because it allowed him to work through his frustrations: ‘we discuss many things when we meet. Like, are we with or against armed struggle? The fact that this is even on the table means that you are serious’. Important, too, was the desire within the group to review not just the recent past but the wider history of political engagement. As we ended the conversation he made a final point to me: ‘No one wants to go back, in Lebanon everyone is always going forward. By doing that we sustain the system. This new group is talking. Maybe we won’t become a party, but we are discussing things in an original way’.

Each of these engagements was, in its own way, animated by failure. With some, it was simply a matter of maintaining what infrastructure of activism, material or organisational, was still in place. Anxieties over sustainability meant that there was a value attached to simply maintaining activities over a length of time. Nevertheless, these activities also felt to those involved as having been dictated by circumstance and by the atmosphere of failure: in short, there did not seem to be the possibility of doing anything more than that. There was, however,

another order of activities animated by failure, like the *ḥalaqa siyāsiyya*. These were animated by failure but looked forward: they attempted to understand and work through the deadlocks that had produced failures in the past and look to organise from a position of certainty that had not been true at the beginning of TBP. The *ḥalaqa*, for example, was an attempt to set up a political structure that had been absent from contemporary independent activism, but had a strong presence in the leftist history of the country – a radical political party. To do so required, in contrast to the engagement that had immediately preceded it, TBP, a careful selection of initial participants, an attempt to come up with substantive political positions on all important questions, and to go public as a *fait accompli*. This, however, required attention to what had produced the feelings of despair that had motivated the project in the first place, a concerted look back in order to plan effectively for the future. As such, the *ḥalaqa* was, in theory, an impressively rounded project insofar as it brought together and attempted to mediate questions of political subjectivity, affect, and temporality.

To return once more to the shift I propose, from looking at failure in the past to activity in an atmosphere of failure in the present, we find that all these engagements are the product of that atmosphere. Failure is their ‘condition of possibility’ (Anderson 2009: 78). Retrenchment and maintaining infrastructure make little sense here unless we recognise the pervasive sense of failure. The desire to begin quietly on the part of those involved in the *ḥalaqa*, in diametrical opposition to how TBP had begun, was a clear response to past failure, to the failure-as-endpoint of that way of thinking one’s political engagement. As Fadia put it when I asked her to reflect back on the form of TBP,

it was a very practical sort of idea, that focused on democracy, or the delusion of democracy, and the idea that in theory we could get rid of the politicians. So it was a very [...] now that I look back [...] at the time I thought of it as a revolutionary project, but now that I look back I see it as more of a kind of neoliberal, democratic initiative to seize power in democratic ways, because I still thought at the time that it was possible.

This was no longer a way in which activism could be done. New politics was required, but the questions remained: what kind? and how? The *ḥalaqa* offered

one way to try to answer these questions and relied explicitly on dealing head on with the atmosphere of failure that enveloped its participants.

3. Storytelling, narrative, and the production of political morals

Activist responses in an atmosphere of failure, then, were able to maintain engagement. Maintenance was valued for its own sake in a context in which activist fortunes waxed and waned and in which the turnover of personnel was fairly high. A project such as the *ḥalaqa*, which looked to make sense of the atmosphere of failure and tried to make the failure actionable moving forwards, had a value even beyond mere maintenance. And yet simply enumerating responses to an endpoint failure is only a partial answer to the questions of how and why activists continue to be engaged despite and through the atmosphere of failure. There is something more to the *ḥalaqa*. It is in such semi-formalised contexts that activists were able to tell each other narratives of their own previous political engagements.

Through telling stories of past political engagements – whether they were deemed a success or a failure – independent activists were able to reaffirm and represent the necessity of doing political things. Indeed, the act of passing judgment and of producing causal arguments through narrative did much explanatory work for activists to understand how they had arrived at where they were. The casual but constant repetition of such narratives served to make these explanations immanent to activist political subjectivity. As Michael Gilson found to be the case for narrative in his fieldwork in Akkar, ‘reiteration and recollection gradually emerged as patterning experience, as patterned elements in experience, and as part of the routines of everyday social life’ (Gilson 1996: 62). Narratives also, through the affective work of being in a story together and being brought together by its moral, reaffirmed a sense of us-ness to all those involved in the telling of the story. Semi-formal contexts such as the *ḥalaqa* harnessed some of this affective and didactic power instrumentally towards a particular goal – forming a political party – but the work of narrativisation, folklorisation, and storytelling occurred

constantly at the informal level of conversation in the social and consumption spaces of independent activists. This work meant that a sense that there existed a network of possible activists, of a social group, was maintained even in moments where the atmosphere of failure seemed overpowering and the possibilities for political action seemed so limited.

A reserve army of persons knew the same things in the same way, then, and felt a general sense of being on the same side. I will show this through the retelling of three particular incidents. In doing so I argue that for those involved in that storytelling, the act of retelling reaffirmed everyone's involvement in the story, kept it alive in the present, and so too kept alive the moral of that story – the affectively inculcated knowledge brought out by the causality inherent in its narrativisation. I turn now to the circulation as stories of three key activist events: the Syrian embassy *mashkal*, the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest, and the Nasawiya café *mashkal*.

3.i Narratives of political protest

The Syrian embassy mashkal

It was late March, and Lamia wanted me to finally meet Antoine properly. He had been a core member of TBP and had been politicised through it. I also knew that he had been one of those arrested during the protest in the aftermath of the Nasawiya café *mashkal*. We decided to meet at the Duke of Wellington pub, housed within the Mayflower hotel in Hamra. During the civil war it had famously been the journalist hangout, with reams-worth of copy for international newspapers filed after looking out over the bombed out city from its roof. Now it catered to a slightly older clientele and was not particularly part of the new activist consumption circuit, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. It did, however, do two for one on all drinks on a Friday night. Majid, whom I had met at a film screening a few months earlier in which he had given a talk about the state of the labour struggle in Lebanon, arranged to meet us there. Sitting outside in the side-street off of Rue Makdisi, Antoine filled me in on his attempts to get me the tape of the parliamentary election strategy event at the Babel theatre from the year before, the event that had instilled so much hope in activists. From there we came round to discussing a

film screening that I, Lamia, and Majid had attended at the Nasawiya café a few nights earlier. Held under the auspices of the Syrian Association for Citizenship, the film screenings always revolved around politically salient films and ended in a discussion of the themes of the work. As exiles from across the border, invariably discussion would turn back round to how the films related to the situation in Syria. I commented that so far I had not heard anyone pass judgment on whose side they were on in the conflict. Lamia responded that they didn't need to – they were all against the regime.

At this Majid began recollecting the Syrian embassy protest. Where we were sitting it was possible to see SSNP posters on the corner of the street. The party's office was perhaps fifty metres away. The scene of the fight was perhaps one hundred metres further than that. He talked about being beaten, how De Prague had refused to let the wounded in, that he had had his glasses broken. He described being beaten again up at the Domtex intersection, how he had been dragged away to a car, then to another car, then to hospital. He recounted how he had gone to the Verdun police station to report it, that he had been made to sit in the 'computer room', so called because it had one computer in it, where a police officer disinterestedly filled out a form. The line-up was done in a single room with the suspects standing directly in front of him and so he did not accuse anyone. He was certain that some members of the line-up were police officers he had just seen in the office dressed casually. He said as much to one officer afterwards, who denied it and then smiled. He moved on to talk about the lawyer who had taken on the case but then dropped it as there was no way in which he could have gotten a conviction. He added that the lawyer doesn't follow through but takes the human rights and civil liberties cases on so he has a lockdown on international funding. Majid ended his narrative by stating that the SSNP run a racket all along the street but that really this is the only area that they have any control over, and that, basically, they are just fascists anyway.

There had been a number of interruptions to Majid's narrative of the protest. Lamia cut in to ask about one of the non-Lebanese people who had been on the original protest and who had taken photos of Majid covered in blood through a car window. She had wanted to know why the photo had been taken, seeing as she had

never seen that photo again. Another interruption had been for each of us to snort at the attempts by *makhfar ḥbēsh*, the infamous Hamra police station, to clean up its image through a propaganda drive. Lamia and Antoine also briefly discussed the lawyer themselves, as he had also taken on Antoine's case for his arrest after the Nasawiya café *mashkal*. At each of these we all chipped in, but immediately Majid returned to the story which he clearly wanted to complete and which had its own narrative logic.

There were also a particular set of meanings attached to the whole story. The implicit judgments of corruption and uselessness against the police are in wide circulation in the general population well beyond activist circles. Implicit support for the Syrian uprising was clear too in Majid's segue into his narrative from our previous conversation. One can also make out anxieties about the involvement of expats in independent activist politics as well as the various ways in which activism has become NGO-ised. The two are related in that activists constantly worried about being seen as not part of society and were particularly susceptible to criticism that they were deracinated, not least because their own positional critique operated on similar grounds. Prominent foreigners at political actions merely made this claim more believable.⁵ Majid's assertions about the reasons this particular lawyer took on certain cases are also tied to similar worries, that things were not being done for the right reasons.

The point I want to make at this particular juncture is that the shared meanings and mutual anxieties produced from and tying together Majid's narrative show that these recollections of the fight are clearly a narrative. They were rehearsed, and had already been recounted a number of times in the intervening years. Indeed, he told me shorter and longer versions of the event on different occasions, and only once at my solicitation. He had made sense of what had happened to him, and integrated it into understandings of how things work in his environment.⁶ The narrative, if it is successful, then serves to exemplify those understandings and give evidence for them. Crucially, these understandings and

⁵ Indeed, the presence of 'westerners' (*ajānib*) was used to attack the legitimacy of the trash protests of the summer of 2015. See Conclusion (Chapter 8).

⁶ Polletta has offered her own version of this narrativising process in the wake of the September 11th attacks (2006: 12–13).

assumptions are shared amongst independent activists. The story's narrativisation, or the way in which the events in the story connect and follow on from one another, was perfectly persuasive to all of us around the table in the Duke of Wellington. In being persuaded we were all (re)produced as fellow travellers of Majid's. Here, the storytelling act was one of affirmation and not contestation.⁷

The Nasawiya café mashkal

Mid-July. Halfway through Ramadan I attended a fundraising *iftār* (fast breaking) at Nasawiya to support a transwoman starting hormone therapy. Fadia, who had only recently come out of the political isolation that had kept her away from frontline activism since the previous summer, was in charge that night and was working the bar. She invited me behind the bar to help serve and to talk. She told me how much fun last year had been, that it had not been perfect but that everyone had gotten together, discussed, disagreed, and done things. Now no one was doing anything. We went outside so that she could have a cigarette and she continued. Now she felt free. Earlier it had felt as if she had put her life on hold for the year, but that it had been necessary after the parliamentary extension. At the time it had felt like a standard setback, but it had been so much more than that. She told me that she was trying to split her activism from her friends, as activism with friends is 'messy'. She then said she was thinking of joining Sami Gemayel's party, that he is sharp, unlike his brother Nadim, who is boring. The Gemayel family being the civil war and post-civil war leaders of the fascist Christian Right in Lebanon, it was at this point that I realised she was messing with me. Talking about the Gemayels, she asked me if I had been there for the 'famed Gemayel fight'. I answered that I had just missed it but that I had been told about it as soon as I got to Beirut. The man sitting next to us, who had been in the US until a couple of weeks earlier, cut in to say that he had known about it. Fadia smiled broadly and told us both that she should put a plaque up outside the building to commemorate the event. Switching to recollection, she told us that it had been amazing because 'everyone' had been in the area and had come down. Everyone, here, meant those who had been involved

⁷ For further discussion of the formalisation of narratives, and in particular the use of narrative and generic tropes, see Tonkin (1995: 38–65) and Sayigh (1998).

in TBP and in the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests, but it also meant members of student groups, acquaintances from NGO circles, and friends who happen to drink and go out in that area of Beirut. In a moment of need they gathered, and gathered quickly.

The 'famed Gemayel fight' is, of course, key here. The mode of our whole discussion had been completely informal, unlike many of those we would have subsequently when I more explicitly asked her questions about her experiences of political activism. It had been a conversation between two activists discussing political engagement, rather than a researcher and research subject. In truth, many of my conversations in the field skirted this line at all times, and it is perhaps the case that a more formalised relationship of researcher/researched would have produced quite different data. Regardless, in this instance it produced a certain candidness that, as we continued talking in the very building in which the fight had happened, perhaps unsurprisingly brought us round to the *mashkal*. Here again, prior knowledge of the event was a marker of belonging and its recirculation served to reproduce all three of us involved in the discussion as part of that same understanding of being an activist, that same shared history and structure of feeling. This fellow feeling was also reproduced by Fadia when the key component to her (short) narrativisation of the fight was the fact that everyone had come down together, that a wider network of fellow feelers had been activated in that moment. To a point, that same network was being primed for reactivation with each retelling of the story of the fight.

The lā lil-tamdīd protest

Mid-August, and I was invited along to a meeting between one of the secular student groups and an NGO coalition. A number of friends had told me I should talk to Malik, a veteran of a student group who had also managed to get elected to student council. We had finally sat down for a coffee a few days earlier, and he had told me about his parents leftist roots coming from the south of Lebanon, how his student group had been set up a few years earlier, and we had ended the conversation by recounting to each other what we knew about the pre-civil war history of leftist student action at the universities. He had also mentioned that the

NGOs always came to the student groups when they needed numbers on a protest, to put them 'on the frontline'. They were going to have a joint meeting with one of the NGOs, *min ajl al-jumhūriyya*, about the new parliamentary extension and that I should come. A few nights later, and there was no space in the large mezzanine library of Ta Marbouta. We moved upstairs to Re Gusto, the Armenian bar/restaurant that was itself another activist hangout. Eight students, myself, and two representatives from the NGO coalition, who arrived a quarter of an hour after us, were present. Before they arrived Malik spoke to a couple of the others about the archives of protest at AUB he had been looking at over the summer and stressed how far back those protests went, all the way to 1890.

The two representatives sat down and began to outline their ideas for opposition to the new proposal to extend the parliament again. This time, the idea being mooted was to extend until the next election cycle and not just by another year. The younger of the two, Ghaith, began by giving the background to the last parliamentary extension, that the justification had been the security situation and not being able to control areas like Chiyah and Tariq al-Jdide, that the only parliamentarians who did not vote for it had been the Free Patriotic Movement. At this one of the students, Mahmoud, cut him off to state those parliamentarians had also not joined the protests and had not resigned. Nodding gruffly at this, Ghaith moved to the present moment, that they were here to coordinate with the students about how to oppose this.⁸ He said they had already started doing things, that they had revived the tomato revolution tactic by sending tomatoes to parliamentarians in the post. At this Malik scoffed loudly and said that posting them and not throwing them at their convoys was a weakening of the idea. Ghaith responded that it was not weakening, but that we could return to it. They had also printed up posters and wanted to know if the students would flypost them around the city.

The students responded. Mahmoud said that there would need to be escalation. Ghaith said he had no problem with this, that he had been with them on the front line of the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest the year before. Mahmoud nodded assent,

⁸ It was known amongst activists that Ghaith had been a member of the Free Patriotic Movement when it was a protest group on university campus in the lead up to 2005. His unwillingness to criticise them, and Mahmoud's provocation, should be seen in light of this.

but continued by saying that the second day the NGOs had not shown up. On the new *thawrat al-banadūra* (the tomato revolution), Malik repeated that it was weak to just send tomatoes by mail when last year they were throwing them at their portraits in public: how would receiving a tomato in the post do anything? To much laughter Mahmoud commented that maybe Fattoush, one of the parliamentarians, could use the tomato to make himself a salad (*fattūsh* is a type of salad).⁹ Another student, Lina, continued the criticism by saying that *thawrat al-banadūra* 'had become folkloric' (*ṣārat fūklūr*) when people talked about it now, and that it should not be diminished the way the NGO was doing. Ghaith responded by saying 'fine, but we need to build support back up, to gauge opinions to see what are possible options for action, we don't have a cadre of a thousand people to send here and there, we don't have political party money and resources. That is why we are meeting with you to see what to do, and what we have the capacity for'. The older NGO representative turned to Lina and gruffly told her, louder, blunter and ruder, that 'things are not frozen like last year!'

Ghaith reiterated that all options were open, including escalation. He said that he wanted as many people as possible, that he did not care if an *quwwātjī* (supporter of the Lebanese Forces, right-wing sectarian Christian party) came as long as he did not bring party slogans. Curt nods from the students. Ghaith introduced the pledge against the parliamentary extension that they were circulating to MPs. At this there were snorts of derision from the students. The older representative shouted 'what else can they do'. 'Resign!' was Malik's immediate reply. The older man then said: '*ṣurnā* unheard, *ṣurnā fūklūr bas. Bas* intellectuals' (We've become unheard, we've become only folklore. Only intellectuals.).

After this, the discussion became calmer and turned to some of the things that could be done. Ideas about broadcasting on radio, TV spots, trying to involve new people. Having arranged another meeting, the NGO representatives left. Immediately the students began discussing printing a special issue of their

⁹ Though the context and stakes are somewhat different, one can see in this joke and the recollection of NGO behaviour as students pushed into parliament square some of the quick-witted inventiveness of *irtijāl* (improvisational wit) that Gilsenan discusses, particularly in its gendering (1996: 206–231).

newspaper about the new *lā lil-tamdīd*, and about writing an article specifically against the NGO movement. Mahmoud was worried about being tied to them and their decisions and strategies. As an example, he offered a tactic that the NGOs would not accept, like throwing stink bombs at the police. This immediately bled into mutual recollections about the previous year's protests. One mentioned that they videoed and photographed the police's violent responses and that that had had an effect, that the videos also showed the protestors all defending one another. Another student added 'yeah, I defend you, you defend him' as he pointed around the table. Lina was less sure about cutting ties with the NGOs. Malik (re)told, to much laughter, the story (or perhaps joke) that when, last year, the students and politicals had pushed into the parliament square, the NGOs from the back had shouted at them: '*lā shabāb, lā, mā biddnā nfūt! hay mish bil-project proposal 'annā!*' (No guys, no, we don't want to go in! This isn't in our project proposal!). Before moving on to other matters, the students all tried to figure out together who amongst them had photos and videos from the protest, that maybe they could put them to use.

Unlike the previous two examples, these recollections occurred within a formalised setting and involved a confrontation between differing narratives of how politics should be done. Each side was drawing on their own understanding of what had come before. Crucially, however, in attempting to solicit student involvement the NGO side pandered to the political narrative of the protest (I was on the front lines with you!). For the students, meanwhile, the circulation and recollection of their particular narrativisation of the protest was an important bolster for, firstly, why NGOs could not be trusted (It's not in our project proposal!), and secondly, why the students were together. It produced them as a group of people with the same idea of what had happened and why. For them, its folkloric element was important for retaining an identity of the kind of activists and persons that they were, even while for the NGO representatives the folklorisation was only that: a mythic version of the event, one that was frozen in time and could say very little about what was needed now. Of course, for the students, that protest had marked the endpoint of NGO-style engagements – the

moral of the narrative of the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest was that working with the NGOs was useless. For them, it was the NGOs that were frozen in time.

3.ii Narrative and storytelling

There is, of course, an exceptionally large and varied anthropological literature on the meanings and structures of the stories that our interlocutors tell to one another in the form of myths. One need only think of some classic texts, from Franz Boas (1989) to Claude Lévi-Strauss (1978) to Victor Turner (1967). Linguistic and then dialogic approaches have looked at the microprocess of speech (Bauman 1984) and to the intersubjective production of knowledge (Tedlock & Mannheim 1995; Basso 1996). Though I will not spend much time on dialogism per se, it is worth saying a few things about the dialogistic character of the narratives I presented above. My own discussion does not make a particular claim on the art of ethnographic writing or the relationship between ethnographic authority and representation (Clifford 1983). The point is to show the ways in which narratives are interrupted, affirmed, sidelined and so on between the storyteller and the audience. Often, the difference between the former and the latter is itself not clear and stories are told in common.

The dialogic character of the three narrative retellings above should be obvious. Majid, Lamia, and Antoine (and myself) quite clearly riff off of one another, picking up on certain aspects in Majid's narrativisation to speak around its putative subject matter. This tangential derailing of the narrative was not confrontational but sedimentary, adding more layers to an account whose basic elements everyone accepted and working through the various beats of the story together.¹⁰ The consensual nature of the Nasawiya café *mashkal* narrative was even clearer as it brought together three people as fellow participants in the retelling, only one of whom had at the time even been in the country let alone at the fight itself. The account of the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest was, in contrast, confrontational and pitted one narrativisation of events, that of the students and

¹⁰ Given Majid's curmudgeonly character, which he very much played up to, these interruptions added to the collective fun as he became more and more impatient to get to the end of his account.

other politicals, against another that was its implicit other – a ‘shadow presence’, in Gilsenan’s words (1996: 59) – modifying how people spoke to one another and what they said. Even here, though, the dialogic nature of narrative production is clear, perhaps even more so than in consensual accounts, as historical knowledge is negotiated, to little resolution, between the two sides. In so doing, of course, the confrontation strengthened the students’ feeling of solidarity, and most likely that of the NGO workers too. Both the confrontational and sedimentary cases I present are far less ‘unpredictable and messy’ than those offered by David Graeber in his self-consciously dialogic ethnographic writing on Madagascar (2007b: 323). They are also less apparently ‘contested and potentially multiple’ than the narratives in Akkar between aghas, beys, peasants (*fellāḥīn*), and workers (Gilsenan 1996: 58). In the independent activist case in-group feeling is of particular importance in giving a form to both sedimentation and confrontation. As the meeting between students and NGOs showed, there were counter-narratives to the ones my interlocutors told each other. However, in the in-group context such counter-narratives did not pass muster. In Gilsenan’s terms, activists would not ‘recognise the narrative performance as authoritative or plausible’ (1996: 60). That they would not do so was itself tied to the content of the stories, insofar as the affectively inculcated knowledge of difference from NGOs remained salient to activist political subjectivity. The in-group, in other words, provided the (labile, admittedly) borders for acceptable meaning. I return to the social mediation of meaning in a moment.

Storytelling events, then, are dialogic by the very nature of the participation of a number of people reworking an account each time; they are the ‘the product of debate, revision and reflexive interaction’ (Gilsenan 1996: 164). Given the dialogic nature of narrative meaning-making, what can we say about the storyteller in particular and the story that they tell? Oral historians have perhaps unsurprisingly had much to say about the narrative form, given that their primary sources are the personal narratives of their interlocutors. Alessandro Portelli, one of the great theoreticians of the subdiscipline, argues that attending to personal narratives allows the researcher to better grasp the relationship between ordinary people and history. Taking war as a paradigmatic example, he states that it

keeps coming back in narratives and memories as the most dramatic point of encounter between the personal and public, between biography and history. For generations we have been taught in school that history is a narrative of kings and wars; the child's question – "Daddy, what did you do in the war?" – is an embryonic way of phrasing the larger question: What is our place in history, and what is the place of history in our lives? (Portelli 1997: ix)

This relationship, of course, is mediated through personal experience: what did *you* do in the war? In this there is a healthy awareness of the fact that what is of most analytic interest in personal narratives is what the recounted event or history tells us about the person recounting it. This is particularly the case in literate contexts where the burden of facticity can be pawned off to written sources (newspapers, books, and so on). In such a context – which Beirut for independent activists most certainly is – 'the boundary between what takes place outside the narrative and what happens inside, between what concerns [the teller] and what concerns the group, becomes quite thin, and personal "truth" may coincide with collective "imagination"'. In such a case, the narrative 'tells us less about events as such than about their meaning' (Portelli 1981: 99).

The concerns of oral history and of anthropology are not so distinct, particularly when we take into account that both disciplines are often in the business of listening intently to the accounts of our interlocutors to grasp how what they say about themselves relates to the social world in which they find themselves. An interdisciplinary conversation took place in the late 1980s through the 1990s and some anthropologists produced enlightening work on, variously, oral forms of history, personal narrative, and memory (Chapman et al 1989; Tonkin 1995; Banerjee 2001). One important insight from this period was the need to attend to the social production of history (Handler 1988; Connerton 1989), whilst concomitantly attending to how the experience of particular histories informs the sorts of people we become and the sorts of things we think it possible to do. In Anna Collard's words,

lived experience [...] forces people to think in new ways, to reconsider, for example, the balance of power, the law, the economy, and even kinship. The changes resulting from the lived conditions and the new thinking give rise

to changed 'experience', that is, to different lived experiences and new perceptions. (Collard 1989: 91)

The way in which such lived experiences are kept alive and salient in the contemporary moment is through the retelling of those experiences: 'in order to think about the past, one must represent aspects of it to oneself, or to others' (Tonkin 1995: 2). Stories are one such way to enact this representation. Far more could be said about the relationship between history and anthropology. The rapprochement and mutual interest evidenced in this period of research seems to have given way to parallel streams of research in history and anthropology once again (Axel (ed) 2002; Hirsch & Stewart 2005; Murphy et al. (eds) 2011).

For the purposes of discussing the stories that my informants told one another, I turn now to the content and form of the stories themselves. Having discussed the terms in tandem up until now, I'd like here to split out narrativisation and storytelling. Narrativisation is the production of events as a story, or narrative. Loosely speaking it will produce a beginning, middle, and end, and there will be progression of some sort through these various parts. As Francesca Polletta (2006) has shown in discussing social movement stories, the 'ands' and 'thens' of a narrative are not juxtapositions of many things; rather, they maintain some certain causal force, weak or strong as it is, that links the events that are retold:

What links [events] is more than chronology. Events are configured by plot, the logic that makes recounted events meaningful. Plot is the structure of the story. Without it, events would be mere occurrences, discontinuous and separate moments. They would simply follow each other rather than unfold. (Polletta 2006: 9)

From my Lebanese examples, this can be seen most clearly in Majid's recollection of the Syrian embassy protest. There is a chronology to the events as they unfold, certainly, but many connections occur on another level. So telling the story in the first place came about because I had mentioned Syrian exile perspectives on the conflict over the border. Being on one particular side of that conflict himself, Majid took the opportunity to tell a narrative of how the Syrian conflict had had an effect on him and on Lebanese activists generally. When he talked about the police and

the lawyers the narrativisation offered ample opportunities to pass judgment on both, for their corruption or their inability to get things done, respectively.

These implied causal connections mean, of course, that narratives require and leave themselves open to interpretation. In being told a narrative, one has to do this interpretative work and decide whether the way the story is being told is correct. In the case of the *lā lil-tamdīd* meeting, for example, we can see that there was a conflict over what the previous year's protest meant, about the lesson that should be taken from it. In their desire to get the students on board, the NGO pandering to their way of narrativising the protest was particularly telling, precisely because of how awkward that narrativisation made the tactics that they were proposing. For the NGOs the memory of that protest produces it as dead and unhelpful in explaining what must be done now. For the students, meanwhile, that memory was salient precisely because its narrativisation said something important about what can and should work (and who they should work with), and what cannot and should not.

If narrativisation is the way in which one produces a story, storytelling attends to the social life of that narrative. Stories circulate, and in being told personal meanings are made public, shared and shareable. Storytelling is an 'empowering act', because it allows one to 'experience[e] oneself, not as a creature of circumstance but as someone who has some claim, some creative say, over how those circumstances may be grasped' (Jackson 2002: 132–133). This empowerment is necessarily social, however, because one's claims on circumstances must be intelligible, if not wholly valorised. Michael Jackson is speaking to this when he states that 'in recounting one's own story, one salvages and reaffirms, in the face of dispersal, defeat, and death, the *social* bonds that bind one to a community of kindred souls' (Jackson 2002: 133). It is the social acceptance of narratives that provides storytelling with the power to make the world make sense. And so the mutual understandings of how things happened during the Syrian embassy fight bolstered Majid's narrative of the fight and valorised the particular way in which he recounted what had happened to him. The fact that the story of the Nasawiya café *mashkal* was constantly being told and retold to people valorised the moral of Fadia's narrative, that so many people showed up in solidarity – the narrative's circulation and consumption was

reproducing precisely that network of solidarity in its retelling, and therefore valorising Fadia's emphasis.

Narrativisation and storytelling are of course different modes of the same process and not distinct processes that people engage in. I am here dividing them out as a heuristic to see these two sides of a story: its internal logic, and its circulation and consumption. The two are interrelated at all times. Narrativisation relies on shared meanings as well as the storytellers personal recollections, or 'the interplay of intersubjective *and* intrapsychic processes' in Jackson's phrasing (Jackson 2002: 15), and these are produced through the circulation and consumption of stories themselves. As Elizabeth Tonkin states, albeit in a slightly different language, 'one cannot detach the oral representations of pastness from the relationship of teller to audience in which it was occasioned' (Tonkin 1995: 2). This, then, renders the representation of pastness – for our purposes, the story – a 'profoundly social process' (Tonkin 1995: 3).

Still, we can see now how these two elements, narrativisation and storytelling, come back together in the form of the three examples given above. The emplotment of a narrative already gives a particular sort of causal account of how things go, which can either be accepted or not by the person(s) to whom it is offered. Within activist groups the particular causal account finds fertile ground for acceptance. Even when only parts of that account continue to circulate amongst people who know that account well it reactivates both the sense of commonality that makes for fellow feeling and the affectively inculcated knowledge of the narrative: its moral, in other words. As with the bright landscapes of the city, or an activist emotional habitus, one must already be a particular sort of person to be affected the way that one is. So we see in the case of Fadia's snippet recollections and general callback to the 'famed Gemayel fight' that a knowledge and understanding of the event *in a particular light* is taken for granted to make sense of the event as worthy of recollection, as a marker of pride for Nasawiya (allowing for the joke about placing a plaque, and so for its folklorisation), and how the event brought together the loose network of activists (and others) in solidarity. The moral of the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests for the students, meanwhile, is that NGO-style politics, and by implication NGO-style people, cannot be worked with, shown in the high level of mistrust evident in the above account of the political meeting. The

authority of the story is itself intersubjectively produced as, in each case, it is based on the level to which it finds agreement with its audience. In other words, here it is 'socio-political conditions' that determine 'the authority of the narrator' (Tonkin 1995: 8). Of the three accounts above, the only moment of contention was precisely when there was a split in the shared understandings of the audience at the political meeting – where there was a clash of recollections mediated by the particular emotional habitus, NGO or political, of the participants. If the purpose of these stories is to convince people outside of the in-group of independent activists then this authority may often fall short. But in bolstering the fellow feeling of the in-group and (re)producing 'a horizon of shared possibilities' (Portelli 1997: 88), it proves much more efficacious.

The question arises, however, about what precisely is being said through these various narrativisations and in their circulations. Some of the narratives presuppose a particular moral: in describing the way in which he and others were beaten up by the SSNP, Majid's narrative viscerally produces the reason why independent activists cannot work with political parties. This is its moral. It also connects to generally held opinions on the police. Bluntly put, the story makes sense to its audience, which in this case was other independent activists (and myself). In the case of the organisational meeting between students and *min ajl*, there was contestation over the narrativisation of the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest. Though there the student narrative went unchallenged overtly, the deferral in assessing the weakening or otherwise of the tomato revolution (we'll talk about it later) and of holding one's tongue when the students mentioned that the NGOs abandoned the protest on the second day, show that the two NGO representatives would have told the story of the protest very differently indeed. The angry disagreement on what the protest's folklority meant in the present evidences this rupture in meaning quite clearly. It also ties each side to their emotional habitus as discussed in the previous chapter. Fadia's snippet recollections of the Gemayel fight, meanwhile, presume a shared narrativisation of the event on the part of her audience in order for her to pass more explicit judgments.

4. Stories for endurance

The key process that I want to get at, discernible both in narrativisation and in storytelling, is that there is a communal reproduction of events in order for them to make sense. It is the experiential domain that is interesting in stories. For Polletta, 'stories turn the strange into the new' (2006: 34). For Michael Jackson, 'in making and telling stories we rework reality in order to make it bearable' (2002: 16). He adds that stories 'aid and abet our need to believe that *we* may discern and determine the meaning of *our* journey through life' (Jackson 2002: 16). With this in mind I would now like to bring together these phenomenological elements of storytelling and narrativisation with the phenomenology of failure.

The atmosphere of failure had great affective strength for independent activists in Lebanon. This much is clear from Fadia's worry about transmitting the sense of failure to younger, starry-eyed activists. It is clear too in the way that those who had felt the failure of the previous eighteen months or so of organising could seldom look beyond the horizon of having failed and the restricted options in the political present. It is also clear in the ways that their strategies and tactics during this period were all responses in some way or another to the sensation of failure impinging upon them. The sense-making strength of narrativisation and storytelling was also profoundly affective. The meanings behind the narrativisations of the three events recounted above – the morals of those stories – were the product of affectively inculcated knowledge about those events. For the Syrian embassy protest, the impossibility of working with the political parties. For the Nasawiya café *mashkal*, one's impermanence in the space but the permanence of networks of solidarity. For the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest, the impossibility of producing real change through NGO structures. Constantly retelling the story of how that affectively inculcated knowledge was produced attempts to reproduce that knowledge for the teller and their audience and make that meaning resonate in the present. This could be seen clearly in the argument between the students and the NGO representatives about the folkloric quality of the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest. For the former it was dead, for the latter living.

Of particular significance in these narratives is their affective resonance – their moral. In a context of withdrawal and the waning of political efficacy, failure

talk was ubiquitous. But so too was storytelling. In particular, there was a folklorisation of some of the key political events of the last few years of independent activism. The numerous agonistic confrontations that activists had with various elites figure prominently in this folklorisation. Insofar as the moral can be made to be shared by listener and orator, then the story remains alive and politically resonant, precisely because it still means something in the contemporary moment and has something to say about what should be done in the future. It is hardly surprising, then, that moments of agonistic struggle figure prominently for such treatment. As the narratives above show, and as do the testimonies of TBP members in the previous chapter, it is in such moments that knowledge of difference – from the parties, from the NGOs – is affectively inculcated and made meaningful on a far more visceral level than mere abstracted knowledge could achieve. Of course, passing on the feelings that make this knowledge so vital is incredibly difficult. For those who have not shared in the intense experience or its equivalent it may not mean the same thing with the same force and in the same way – ‘you had to be there’ springs to mind as a phrase that captures the sense well. But for those who *were* there and who can draw on the same affectively inculcated knowledge, storytelling can have a very powerful effect in reaffirming that knowledge and in reproducing oneself as a fellow-feeling activist. In the face of an overbearing atmosphere of failure this was a powerful process through which a low-level of political engagement could be maintained, to get through the lean times, and for the morals of those stories to remain politically salient for the next upturn in activist fortunes.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an account of what it felt like to keep active politically when it seemed easier to not bother. With independent activists in Lebanon, though, we are not speaking of a ‘will to be otherwise’ as an existential requirement (Povinelli 2011). In fact, the force of potential inertia was all the stronger because of the moral character of their activism – they could stop and

their lives would be little affected. In such a context, the cost of giving in, materially at least, was minor at best. Exhaustion and burnout were a real concern. And yet some endured. Certain political strategies were produced through failure, many of which I described earlier in the chapter. Some deliberately aimed to maintain what activist infrastructures already existed. Others, like the *halaqa siyāsiyya*, aimed to look backwards in order to forge ahead, by creating an environment in which communal discussion of past events alongside higher level discussion of substantive politics, strategy, and targets, were privileged and made actionable.

Of particular importance in relation to affective endurance was the impulse to tell stories about past actions carried on in informal and semi-formal contexts. The three separate examples of narrativisation and storytelling of events above held fundamental importance for activist self-understandings. There is a soft causality inherent in those narrativisations, as well as the co-production of the narrative and the audience for that narrative that was carried out by the storytelling act itself. Together, reactions to the experience of failure and stories of past political actions were able to make continued activist engagement sensible to enough individuals to maintain at least a base level of activism: the strategies of maintenance and of sense-making in the form of the *halaqa* gave an impression of permanence and of future viability, while narrativisation and storytelling produced a sense of solidarity and fellow feeling through the process of mutual co-production of knowledge and shared meanings.

Making continued activist engagement worthwhile was a profoundly affective endeavour, then, that was predicated on the (re)activation of solidary feeling that could call on the practice of political engagement that had either been experienced together or was commensurable to other experiences of political engagement such as to make them intelligible in common. Such affective attachment is fundamental to the maintenance of political subjectivity. As Maple Razsa has stated, 'we must find ways to represent the powerful emotional charge generated' by political activism:

Successfully representing "love at the barricades" – as well as the quiet solidarity of a shared meal – requires finding ways to communicate, for example, those experiences that make palpable one's belonging. (Razsa 2015: 212, 213)

Stories had the capacity to do this for activists themselves, communicating their own experiences to themselves and those around them. In so doing, they mutually reconstituted how they were.

To some extent, then, political endurance was effected through storytelling. By definition, endurance entails maintaining oneself in adverse circumstances. Those circumstances might change, or they might not. The logic of activism as a way of engaging with the world, though, requires that one genuinely believes that one action's have the capacity to transform the world. Activist endurance, both its affective and infrastructural forms, entailed an orientation towards future action; their political subjectivity was predicated upon this very orientation. And much as the rest of independent activist experience in the aftermath of failure, their temporalities of action were also profoundly altered. It is to the question of temporality that I turn next.

7. Activist historicity and activist temporality: mythic past, living history, and the time of the future

1. Introduction

In the previous chapters I have explored both the ways in which independent activists came to differentiate themselves from the various other political actors in Beirut and how they maintained the concomitant senses of diffuse internal solidarity and distinction from others. It was the affectively inculcated knowledge of difference from both established political parties and the NGOs that sealed and fortified their political distance from those forms of engagement. This knowledge was produced in moments of contestation wherein divisions were inescapable, such as the Syrian embassy protest and the *lā lil-tamdīd* protest. It was the repetition and circulation of narratives of these previous political engagements that (re)produced a certain set of people as sharing both the political and affective dispositions that constituted them as independent activists – as politicals – to each other. More often than not, this process was carried out in informal spaces and moments of relaxation and conviviality.

In this final chapter I would like to tease out one more strand of the sense independent activists have of their political landscape: their understanding of the history of political struggle and their place in it. In turning to the sense of person-in-time that Hirsch and Stewart have dubbed *historicity* (2005) I look to grasp what it is to see oneself as being a node in the progression of history and time. This is particularly the case for activists who, in some way, must have a sense of antecedents and of progress into the future – even if that sense is one of past failure and the extreme difficulty of progression – and, crucially, that they must have some role in trying to achieve progress. This problematic of activist-person-in-political-time is rendered all the more interesting in Lebanon as it is nearly impossible to keep a hold on a sense of smooth trajectory to historical time: the beginning (1975) and the end (1990) of the civil war and post-bellum years up until 2005 exist in a hazy and loose state. The period from 2005, however, is clearly punctuated for independent activists in Lebanon. These historical ceilings

and basements matter hugely, because they influence the kinds of histories of political struggle that one can see oneself as part of. They also say a great deal about the ways in which senses of person-in-time are transmitted.

In what follows I begin with activist historicity: how activists relate to the past, and what they understand the past has to offer them in their present circumstances. Independent activists in Lebanon have two distinct attitudes towards the past. I call these *mythic past* and *living history*, respectively. The former refers to the ways in which events are interpreted and emplaced in activist historical trajectories when there is negligible person-to-person contact with those who took part in those events. The latter, meanwhile, refers to the circulation of events that are viewed as part of the personal histories of current activists themselves. As I will show, and returning to the discussion of secular cosmopolitans from Chapter 3, the sense of the past is intimately tied to the secular cosmopolitan generation to which independent activists belong. When there is little to no interpersonal distance prior political engagements are organically a part of contemporary and future action.

But historicity is not alone in figuring the time of activist political subjectivity. The aftermath of the most recent round of mobilisations that I have been tracking over the past three chapters has crystallised a *temporality of rupture* that is now crucial to activist political subjectivity. I will make the case for such a temporality being necessary for activism as potentially transformative action in time. To do so I draw on the recent literature that has attempted to renew and extend anthropological engagements with time and temporality (Guyer 2007; Humphrey 2008; Han 2011; Bear 2014a, 2014b). But I also draw once again on anthropologies of anarchism to discuss the particular presentist temporality and futurity of Lebanese independent activists. I propose that the experience of temporal rupture is common to activism as a modality of action in the world, even as the particular elaboration of that experience into a temporality of action may vary. In any case, the independent activist temporality of rupture, as a particular understanding of time, the future, and the rhythm of political practice, serves to provide my interlocutors with the capacity to imagine transformative action even when that possibility seems remote.

In section 2 of this chapter, then, I will discuss the various fraught and tenacious ways in which independent activists sense the history of their arena of struggle and inscribe themselves into longer-term historical political trajectories. I will use the active recollection of the civil war, in particular, as a paradigmatic example of mythic past, where temporal distance comes together with interpersonal distance to produce a recollection partway between recovery and oblivion. In section 3 I move to the more recent activism of the last five to ten years. The temporal distance here is minimal and there is no interpersonal distance to speak of, because it is a history of the activists' own making. This is a living history, as it is not about recovering a Left tradition from a fixed point in the past, but rather a collection of actions, events, and experiences that are still to be added to in the future. Activist recollection of living history, then, is oriented towards present and future needs.

In section 4 I move on to discuss what activist senses of themselves-in-time, alongside the affectively inculcated knowledge of difference and defeat, mean for their sense of how (and when) to do things in the future. The sedimentation of new events, new knowledge, and new experiences of difference has come to produce a radically altered temporality to that experienced even months earlier. In this section I add a discussion of the future of independent political activism to the discussions of its past (Chapter 5) and its present (Chapter 6). What will become clear in this discussion is how concretely activist futurity is affected by a very shallow historical depth that is tied to the immediate past of failure and the circulation of narratives of that failure. This shallow historical depth, however, is productive of a very patient and long-term strategy that pushes the future out and populates it with moments of potential rupture. This lengthened temporality speaks to one of the key concerns of independent activists, which is the boom and bust nature of activism in Lebanon. A strategy requiring a lengthened temporality brings into play the need for sustainability in activism that was a clear motivation for activist endurance, as seen in the previous chapter, and which, as I will show, plays a key role in organising activist senses of time. Further, such a temporality also provides activists with the capacity to imagine the future as inhabited by potential moments of rupture in which their actions can make a difference – it is up to them to be in the best position to take advantage of these when they come. In

conclusion (section 5), I offer a reflection on the imbrication of temporality and imagination in activism.

2. Activist senses of the past – mythic past

2.i Historical absence and the active recollection of the civil war

As the ever-growing literature on memory in Lebanon – historical, social, or otherwise (Makdisi 2006; Peleikis 2006; Volk 2008, 2010; Haugbolle 2010) – shows, the past is a fraught subject and open to much contestation. The long and ongoing saga of producing a unified historical textbook for schools in Lebanon, currently in limbo, is a clear reminder that everything relating to the modern state of Lebanon is the subject of dispute and controversy.¹ In Sari Makdisi's words:

Lebanon remains a country without an official history – that is, a country officially without history – and especially without a history of the war whose aftereffects linger on in our own discordant time. If the general amnesty on war crimes was supposed to enable the writing of the history of the war, the fact that the history has yet to appear thus suggests that the war itself – crimes and all – may not really be over, that its causes and preconditions remain quite fully intact and ready to go into another round. (2006: 201–202)

Whilst a state-sponsored historical narrative would have been open to question, its absence clearly shows the inability of the Lebanese political establishment to produce its own closure on that period. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who lived through the civil war are seldom disposed to speak of their own experience of it, particularly if they were themselves combatants (Silva et al. 2014; Hermez 2015). Though I had enough experience of this from my own extended family, many of my younger interlocutors, those without even an early childhood recollection of those years, corroborated this story from their own homes. An example: early on in our

¹ Famously, Kamal Salibi attempted to portray this reality in the final years of the civil war by writing each chapter of his *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (1989) from the subjective historical perspective of the key communities of actors on Lebanese soil.

friendship I sat down with Karim, one of the youngest (ex-)members of TBP, to discuss how he first came to be politicised. As part of his recollection, he mentioned that until high school he had known nothing about the civil war. Chuckling, he added that his father had told him that during the war he had 'been studying'. 'Do you believe him?', I asked. Karim tilted his head, furrowed his brow, pursed his lips and stared straight back at me: no. If those who lived through the war do speak it is often to reinforce the narrative of rights and wrongs of their side of the conflict (Silva et al. 2014). Mansour had a more intimate knowledge of his father's actions as a militiaman during the war, and on a number of occasions shared these stories with me. This openness, however, also came from the fact that his father fled Lebanon and renounced his militia allegiance relatively early in the fifteen-year conflict. Rather than being ashamed, Mansour's father was both regretful and adamant that the mistakes he made not be repeated by his children.

All this is to say that younger generations, from whom almost all the independent activists I interacted with were drawn, were reliant on what their parents, family members, and acquaintances told them about the past. Unlike contexts where oral transmission of history is a privileged mode of dissemination (Tonkin et al. (eds) 1989; Tonkin 1995), independent activists – along with many others of their age in Lebanon – felt the absence of a history that they could deem more concrete. Early on during my fieldwork I got involved in a discussion of citizenship and nationalism at the Nasawiya café. David stated that there was no disagreement over the reality of Lebanese nationalism, except perhaps the SSNP, but that the only way to access that nationalism was through one's sect. At this, armed with all the reading I had done in Lebanese history in preparation for coming to the field, I said that that was arguably a recent phenomenon and that before the civil war began quite a lot of nominally Lebanese people disputed the very idea of Lebanon as a nation (Salibi 1989; El Khazen 2000; Traboulsi 2007). I ended by suggesting, informed now by much of the literature cited at the beginning of this section, that there seemed to be a sense of collective amnesia post-1990 about the way things used to be before the civil war. Lamia jumped in immediately and corrected me in no uncertain terms: 'amnesia has been imposed on us by the warlords so that they can continue on in peace, and there was never any resolution to the war. So many of us want to know more about our history'.

This desire to know more could also be seen in the attempts at active recollection that did exist. Each year, around the date of the outbreak of the war, the Secular Club in AUB run a series of civil war events. These are predicated on the sense that ‘we’ need to become more informed about our own past. As the then-head of the club stated at an event I attended during a return visit to the field, ‘we do not see a lot of independent voices in society, we don’t see talk of citizenship or a unified history for the country’. The first year of events I attended ran for a week and was tellingly named ‘a rupture of amnesia’. Round tables and lectures were held with the participation of academics and peace-building NGOs. So, for example, one event consisted of two speakers from the International Center for Transitional Justice, one of whom discussed a report he had put together on memory and the civil war, and a cinematographer who had been producing videos, independently and for the BBC, on the mothers of ‘the missing’ (*al-mafqūdīn*), mostly men who were ‘disappeared’ during the civil war and whose bodies have never been found. There were also film screenings of documentaries and feature films that spoke either to the period of the civil war or, often, to amnesia and lack of closure in the present. Throughout the week the Secular Club also curated a poster exhibition in the main thoroughfare of the university, in which political posters and martyrdom announcements from the war were mounted on black bulletin boards under headings such as: ‘glittering generalities’, ‘propaganda’, ‘amnesia’ and ‘selective amnesia’. These artefacts came from almost all sides of the conflict.²

In the years that I was present, the Red Oak Club also ran their own civil war remembrance events, the timings of which often clashed with those of the Secular Club. At their events, however, the speakers were almost always members, ex-members, or sympathisers of the Lebanese Communist Party, unsurprising given the club’s affiliation. As one example of such an event, a comrade, perhaps in his early seventies, gave a talk on one of the party’s leading intellectuals from the pre- and civil war years, Mahdi Amel. During the talk he went out of his way to discuss the party’s record in that period. It had not been that the Lebanese Left had

² Indeed, this caused an angry response from members of the SSNP on campus, who were not at all pleased to see their martyrs placed next to those of the right wing Christian parties. I will return to this moral equivalence work in a moment.

allied itself with the Palestinians as much as it had been that the rest of the Arab world had exiled the fighters to Lebanon where ‘the fascists’ attacked them, by which he meant the sectarian Christian Right. As such, the alliance was a defensive action. Secondly, *‘azl al-katā’ib* (the isolation, or intentional sidelining from power, of the Phalanges party), by some viewed as a determining factor for the outbreak of war, was in fact a reaction to the prior *‘azl* of the Left coalition.

There is a noteworthy tension between the Secular Club and Red Oak Club styles of active recollection. In the former, one can locate a large amount of moral equivalence work: *every side* produced propaganda, *every side* is engaged in producing amnesia, *every side* glorifies their own and vilifies the other. There is an appeal, too, to a common sense understanding of objective expertise in the form of academic and NGO forms of discussion. Here, the logic is that we must know the past so as not to repeat it. The Red Oak Club memorialisation, meanwhile, operated differently. There was no sense of moral equivalence evident at their events. How could there be, between oneself and ‘fascists’? The battle here is not necessarily against a sense of collective or selective amnesia, but rather to keep alive a particular tradition and history of action and thought. Hence the importance of Mahdi Amel to all this, whose work on sectarianism was deemed to still be important to understanding what is going on in Lebanon today (Prashad 2014; al-Saadi 2014). The impulse is not to know the past in order to avoid making the same mistakes again but rather to remember things from the past because they are still relevant today.

I have called this a tension rather than a contradiction because for none of those involved was there only one way of engaging with the civil war past. Leading figures from the war years Left are perhaps the only ones to have apologised for the things that they did during the war (Bardawil 2010: 300–317). It is difficult to argue, then, that that particular side of the conflict has been indulging in collective amnesia, even if aging cadre members might. At the same time, in discussions with leading members of the Secular Club it was clear too that they did not personally hold to the idea that there was a moral equivalence between the Left and, say, the Phalanges or Lebanese Forces. This tension in styles of active recollection is of signal importance to independent activists, who see themselves as the rightful inheritors of the tradition of Leftism in Lebanon, one that is not perhaps being

upheld particularly well by the historic organisations of the Left that still exist. In Chapter 4 I discussed this problematic in relation to bright landscapes in the city and how particular histories – to be possessed and invoked or discarded and belittled – are embedded and contested in the materiality of the city. Here I turn to an analogous discussion of recovering that Leftism from the memory/amnesia of the civil war. To inscribe themselves into that tradition independent activists had to try and oust one of that tradition’s institutional inheritors, the SSNP. As for institutional inheritors, they struggled to dissociate the good from the bad in civil war memory. This struggle is again animated by the tension between wanting to condemn everyone as equally culpable and wanting to recover the political memory of one side of the conflict, or at least key elements within it.

2.ii Fractious recollections of civil war heroes and villains

In discussing the anxious ways in which the good and the bad from the civil war are disinterred, I turn now to the screenings of one of the many films that deal with the memory of the civil war and, in particular, to the discussions that took place afterwards. *Sleepless Nights (layālī bilā nawm)* is a documentary directed by Eliane Raheb that focuses on two individuals in the present day (Raheb 2012). Maryam Saiidi, one of the leaders of *ḥarakat al-mafqūdīn* (the Movement for the Missing), and whose son, Maher, went missing in 1982 whilst fighting with the LCP militia, is followed as she asks those who might know about his fate. Assaad Shaftari, the once-head of secret police for the Lebanese Forces militia, meanwhile, is one of the few and certainly most prominent *pentiti* from the civil war. He has worked with the *ḥarakat al-mafqūdīn*, has put on the record his own crimes, but has not discussed the crimes of others he knew. He may also know something about Maher’s disappearance. As the film’s website states: ‘Through the stories of Assaad Shaftari [...] and Maryam Saiidi [...] the film digs in the war wounds and asks if redemption and forgiveness are possible’ (Layali Bala Noom n.d.). The first time I saw the film was at a screening organised by the Alternative Student Movement in LAU. The director spoke before we watched the film to say that Shaftari would be there afterwards for a Q and A. Before sitting down she asked everyone in the room to ‘remove your sectarian frameworks and allow yourselves to take part in

this human adventure'. The film itself was very affecting. Very stylised and clearly emplotted, almost to the point of tipping into surrealism, its many staged interactions blur the lines between authenticity and artifice. The director speaks constantly with her two protagonists, pushing Maryam to reveal how she is feeling and constantly questioning Shaftari about what he did, who he killed, and why he won't reveal the other war crimes he knows about.

Having never seen Shaftari's face before, I spent much of the film trying to figure out whether the man we were seeing on the screen was actually Shaftari or an actor playing him. It was therefore quite startling to come out into the lobby and see the man standing there, looking slightly sheepish. We sat around the large rectangle of couches in the cinema foyer, Shaftari off to one side and flanked by Eliane, the director, and a man perhaps in his thirties. Otherwise, there were 30-40 people, almost all of undergraduate age, many of whom I would come to know by sight or in person as members of ASM or as part of the consumption circuits of independent activist Hamra. The discussion began with one young woman asking another whether she still wanted to ask her question. The other woman stood up and stated in a quavering but resolute voice that she did not find Shaftari's transformation believable at all, and that when in the film Maryam had screamed at him for not telling her what had happened to her son he had clearly felt nothing at all. With that, she turned to leave. Eliane stopped her and asked her to stay for his response. He answered that the transformation had been slow. It began in 1988 when he came to realise that what had been missing from his life was love. He also had to come to terms with the fact that of the five assassination attempts against him, four had been from other Christian militia leaders. He felt that historians would agree, or might agree, that in the beginning the war had had a sense, that there were Palestinian armed factions, but that this did not justify or directly cause the awful things that were done afterwards. What he chose to do was to come out and say sorry and ask for forgiveness. If there is a reason to what he is now doing it is to show how easy it is to go from the good to the bad without even noticing. This is what he wants our generation to understand. The man sitting next to him jumped the queue of questions that Eliane had taken to tell the room that unlike the rest of the audience he had grown up during the war the child of a mixed Christian/Muslim marriage. He knew people from both sides and that all young

people had had guns then. Unlike Shaftari, who has come forward, the others who were militia leaders then are deputies and ministers now. A male student stated that every side was arming people and everyone was guilty. Shaftari told the student to go ask people around his neighbourhood what they had done during the war, that many will have been fighters and yet they will not have come forward.

Across the room a woman stated that 'in ASM we do not think in a sectarian way, but not everyone in Lebanon is non-sectarian. They will see things they find disgusting, but may also reflect on some things from their own upbringing. This film is for them and not for us'. She added that Shaftari deserved to be in jail but that what he was doing now was more important. What we should think about is that his peers at the time are our leading politicians now. Another woman, sitting on the floor, fixed Shaftari with her eyes and stated that everyone had a choice whether to join and fight or not. A different man forewarned that his question was '*qawwī aktar*' (stronger/harsher), to which Shaftari replied, with a half smile, '*aqwā min qabl?*' (stronger than what has already come?). In the film Shaftari had mentioned that during the war he was given confessional by a priest who then preemptively absolved him of guilt for a further five hundred killings, as the priest deemed it necessary for him to do so for the good of the Christian community. The questioner said that we hold to account (*nḥākim*) the politicians but not the religious figures. Shaftari replied that we must distinguish (*mayyiz*) between religion as faith and religion as religious organisations (*munazzamāt dīniyya*). He undid the top two buttons of his shirt to show that he was not wearing a cross on his chest. He said that he was still Christian, but '*bilā al-qurūsh al-dīniyya*' (without the exterior/trappings of religion). The woman who had first spoken, sitting very near to Shaftari, told him that the Palestinian fighters were not criminals, that she was Palestinian. Now sounding exasperated, Shaftari asked her how she distinguished between one killing and another, and why one killing is better than the other. A number of people pushed Shaftari on why he was not revealing more. He replied that were he to reveal, say, who killed 1000 Muslims he did not know whether he could deal with the consequences of having put that information out there. Eliane stepped in to say that 'our generation' – which she immediately corrected to 'your generation' – 'has to refuse this logic that only the Christians were responsible or were killers'.

Finally, a woman asked Shaftari how he reconciles having fought and killed for Christianity to now be living by Christian love. Before he could answer she continued by asking how he should expect youth to understand the arguments he makes when his own son does not understand? (In the film Shaftari's son admits that in photos from the war years his father looks happy and strong, that now all he does is apologise.) This shows his approach is wrong. She had seen him three years ago and felt anger, and now she felt that anger again in the room. On his son, Shaftari said that he had wanted a 'macho' father, a strong man as his friends and society told him his father had been during the war; 'now he sees me as weak'. His son had had a question about Islam and he had asked a Muslim about it, whilst when he himself had been growing up that would have been unthinkable. He said that living here in western Beirut, as he assumed his audience all did, does not reflect how things are in other parts of the country. He mentioned that his son had joined a political party; immediately the questioner tutted and threw up her hands as others in the room also voiced their displeasure. Shaftari became exasperated once again and said that she was showing her own prejudices as he had not even said which one, that his son had come to him with a list of reasons for joining and promising that the moment he heard a word about weapons, arming or training he would immediately leave the party and come tell his father about it. The questioner said the problem was that 'he has chosen a political path'. Across the room a slightly older woman, not in the ASM, interrupted her to say 'aren't we all political?' You are the ASM, right? So you too have taken a political path, no?'

I saw the film two more times whilst in the field, once privately with some friends and once more at a public screening held at the Nasawiya café, that time with Eliane but without Shaftari. On both occasions, with slightly different groups of independent activists, similar sorts of questions, anxieties, and angers were produced by the film. The viewing I rehearsed above is the most paradigmatic set of reactions to the film precisely because Shaftari was there to be questioned. We see the tension clearly traced out between moral equivalence and the desire to recuperate one side of the conflict. So, on one side there were statements like 'everyone is guilty' and 'every young man was armed', on the other statements like

'the Palestinian fighters were different'.³ There was also a pronounced tension between a sense of being above the problems of sectarian attachment and still being a part of them: witness the comment of 'this film is not for us' because 'in ASM we do not think in a sectarian way', whilst the director insisted that 'your generation' must think differently about the war legacy. Shaftari himself was also caught up in this, as he implored the audience to see how he had stripped away the trappings of religion, whilst still holding the view that the Palestinians were (are?) an existential threat to Christians in Lebanon. Yet another tension was that between different senses of the political: the political as negative sectarian partisanship in the case of Shaftari's son (he has chosen a political path), and the political as standing for something (aren't we all political?). These are the same tensions discernible in the memorialisations of the civil war at the hands of the Secular Club and the Red Oak Club in AUB.

2.iii Gaps, occlusions, and the interpersonal distance of the mythic past

Regarding the original problematic of historical absence, what is most important to take away from ASM reactions to the film is the confusion of all these elements within the group, sometimes within the same person: political/non-political, we only are non-sectarian/even we are sectarian, moral equivalence/moral superiority. The group itself did not have anything like a coherent sense of that history. They were themselves wrapped up in the widespread discourses of remembering and forgetting in Lebanese society, but with the added twist that both sides of the tension were relevant to aspects of the independent-secular-leftist activist nexus. Moral equivalence places the independent activist-as-secular-individual above the fray, having moved beyond the warring sides: 'this film is not for us'. The superiority of one side to the other, meanwhile, places the independent activist in a privileged historical tradition that stretches back to before the outbreak of civil war, regardless of how debatable and contestable that connection might be. Key to both, however, is the mythic quality afforded to the civil war past.

³ Interestingly, in that it conforms to the gendered nature of radical politics as I experienced it in Lebanon, those playing the moral equivalence game in the room were all men, and those privileging one side were all women.

There is a history gap: the early period of the civil war is what was most often represented when the civil war appeared in discussion, the period from which good and bad sides are most easily discernible. The Left, beaten in this phase of the war, appears as valorisable again in the moment of the Israeli invasion of 1982 and resistance in the form of Jammoul, first in Beirut, and then on a longer-term basis in the South.⁴ We have seen already, though, how that particular element becomes contentious in a space like Hamra, where the SSNP have to be evacuated from that tradition to which they are so central. What came after that in the war years – the war of the camps, the intra-Christian conflict – was seldom actively recollected (Traboulsi 2007: 220–239). When this period did come up, it elicited the most complications in producing a mythic past that would make sense for the Left as a whole. This is why Majid, so well versed in the history of the Left and of syndicalist activity in the country, kept trying to recover that legacy from the SSNP when we spoke about it by constantly asking me whether they were ever really left-wing in the first place. It also explains the utter disbelief so many independent activists have with older generations of leftists' continued support for Hizballah as the Resistance (*al-muqāwama*), despite the fact that it was Hizballah who decimated Left cadres and assassinated Left intellectuals in the final years of the civil war.

The absence from active recollection of the peace movement in the final years of the civil war is most interesting in this regard: a movement drawn from across Lebanese society against all the militias and the war order which was effective in mobilising and creating support across the country (Härdig 2011: 132–136; Hanf 2015: 638–640). This was almost never mentioned by those I knew who were still involved in independent activism in the present. The few who did mention the peace movement were those who were either involved in it in the first place – the very oldest interlocutors I had – or else worked for organisations spawned by that movement. So, those who work for the peacebuilding NGO CHAML are proud of the fact that many of their founders had been active as anti-war activists in the 1980s.⁵ Indeed, as Anders Härdig has explored, at the end of

⁴ This was the acronym of the Lebanese National Resistance Front, composed of what remained of the Left guerrilla forces from the early phase of the civil war, formed to resist the Israeli occupation of Lebanon.

⁵ Acronym of 'Non-Sectarian Non-Violent Youth Lebanese Citizens' in Arabic (CHAML).

the war those people and organisations moved into the NGO realm, seeing that as a space and form that could move beyond partisanship and the divisions that had led to the civil war in the first place (Härdig 2011: 102–210). This perhaps is one of the reasons that that period does not figure either as mythic past or as part of the circulated histories of contemporary independent activists. It has little to say about the need for historical antecedents by way of its desired transcendence of the political – seen itself as the problem with the current situation for politicals. Most importantly, however, those who had been involved in it are not part of the interpersonal networks of many independent activists. This antecedent is neither mythic past nor living history: neither a complete event in the past to be interpreted, nor part of the cache of subjective political experiences of current independent activists to be mediated by the necessities of the present and future.

In essence, there is a generation gap between independent activists and those immediately older than them – those younger than their parents but older than them, or else already further along the standard life cycle of marriage and children – the activist death that Sari and Shadi were discussing in Chapter 3. Indeed, if we return to David Scott’s conceptualisation of generations first discussed there, the historical and temporal aspects of generations are fundamental. To pay attention to the temporality of generations

keeps us alert to the fact that mere copresence in historical time does not make for contemporaneity – that contemporaneity depends, rather, on a similarity of formative influences, a shared location, that creates the conditions for a rough commonality of perspectives. (Scott 2014: 166)

This is as much as I have already stated for the constitution of the secular cosmopolitan generation in Chapter 3. I further suggested, in agreement with Scott, that within that generation we might think of independent activists – politicals – as against NGOs as ‘polar-forms of the social and intellectual responses to a historical stimulus experienced in common by all’ (Mannheim 1952: 302–305; Scott 2014: 166). But this polarity is predicated on a commonality of experience *and* interaction. Between it and previous generations, however, this is absent. To Scott’s mind, for an intellectual tradition to form there must be ‘a dialogical relationship (whether implicit or explicit) to older intellectual generations, as social institutions of time’ (Scott 2014: 161). Such a dialogue is not commonplace,

even between members of different generations who had been active in the same organisations. As this chapter was being completed, al-Modon, an online newspaper that deals with civil society issues in Lebanon, presented a special issue on *ṭullāb al-tisʿīnāt* (students of the nineties) and the political organisations they founded. As I talked about the special issue with Mansour, he explained that he was amazed and surprised by the history of those groups, including No Frontiers, a group which he had himself been a member of and which had finally dwindled away during my time in the field: 'kinda feel embarrassed now that we ran NF into the mud ultimately. I know it was dying probably since 2008, but still kinda shame seeing the tradition, history, weight'. The special issue, and the surprise it garnered for Mansour as completely new information, shows how much this period was not a part of the living history of present-day independent activists.

3. Activist senses of the past – living history

The title of the al-Modon special issue, 'students of the nineties', is apt indeed if we consider it something akin to Eric Hobsbawm's long nineteenth century (1988). The Lebanese nineties, in this reading, came to an end in 2005 with the 'cedar revolution':⁶ the assassination of ex-prime minister Rafic Hariri, the official withdrawal of the Syrian presence on Lebanese soil, and the eventual partition of institutional political life between March 8th and March 14th. For the vast majority of my interlocutors, 2005 represents historical bedrock: for those with no personal experience of it, it serves as a zero point, and their sense of historical political parameters is foundationally based on the post-2005 règlement.⁷ From that date onwards, independent activists produce their sense of history from two sets of

⁶ The name it was given in supportive Lebanese media and by the international press. By the time I conducted fieldwork, no one called it this, if they ever had done. Rather, the period was always shorthanded as *elfēn ū khamse* (two thousand and five).

⁷ As with all historical experiences of time, the history of 2005, particularly before the March 8th and March 14th divide became categorical, was more complex (Khatib 2007; Chalcraft 2016: 502–506). As far as my interlocutors reflect on the past, however, 2005 has come to stand for this – a perspective they are not alone in holding.

event-dates.⁸ The first are event-dates of importance to all Lebanese and which most everyone uses to periodise the recent past: the March dates of 2005, the Israeli war of the summer of 2006 (the 'July War'), the short civil war of May 2008. A second set of event-dates punctuate the recent past for independent activists specifically. These are the events and movements that they were themselves involved in. These event dates become a part of the circulation of stories like those described in the previous chapter that have made those events a living history to independent activists, one which is categorically theirs and in which they are agents with a clear sense of action in time and place. Mythologisation certainly occurs – witness the folklorification of moments of intense struggle discussed in the previous chapter – but it was of a different order to that of the civil war. In this history, one does not fumble around trying to sort the good from the bad. Rather, one is tactically building upon previous engagements in a dialectical form. With the accumulation/sedimentation of new events, the form and contour of that history itself changes. In this sense too it is living: it is not a fixed point in the past for one's opinion to differ on but rather a history of oneself and one's endeavours to be added to and refined. This emergent quality to history leaves open the possibility that senses of temporality and futurity will change, perhaps drastically. As Matt Hodges has stated of the 'living tradition' of his rural French/Languedocian interlocutors, such practices of recollection are important for highlighting 'how historicity emerges from historical time' (2014: 118). This is a point I will return to in the final section of this chapter. For now, I turn to a more detailed discussion of the living history of independent activists.

3.i. 2005 as historical basement

If the topic had not already come up in previous conversations, I would often begin more formalised discussion of activism with my interlocutors by asking them how they first became interested in politics. The very oldest could remember and discuss a time before 2005, and could talk about their own engagements prior to

⁸ By event-dates I mean simply the sorts of dates that punctuate the past and become crucial moments (events) with which that past is 'periodised' (Hodges 2010: 34).

that date. For most of them, this engagement took one of two forms. Some could point to conflict resolution work and work with NGOs like CHAML, or they could point to involvement with civil society groups like Helem.⁹ Others, those whose engagements had been pitched on an explicitly political level, had been members of the ULDY.¹⁰ These people had also been ‘nineties students’, involved in organisations like No Frontiers in AUB or Pablo Neruda in LAU, for example (Badreddine 2015; Nahla 2015).

Those who were a little younger began their stories of politicisation with 2005. This was either the earliest moment in which they were aware of ‘politics’ or else it was the first time that they had personally become involved in politics. So I heard many stories of what people had been doing at the time. In a period of heightened tension in early 2014, as car bombs continued to explode around the country and in the southern districts of Beirut, I sat with Lamia as she recalled the previous times that she remembered feeling this tense. Chaining one cigarette after the other she recalled the assassination of Rafic Hariri in 2005, how she had been doing rounds as part of her degree in the American University Hospital. They had felt the shudder of the massive explosion, saw the news on television, and had not even had time to process the information before the hospital’s corridors filled with people bleeding out. In 2006, meanwhile, she remembered waking up early every day during the bombardment to line up for gas and food before going home, sitting and waiting. Later during the war, she was able to move up to the Chouf with her family, where she volunteered at a school that had become a makeshift shelter for those fleeing from the South.¹¹ For those whose political engagements proper began in that period, more often than not that engagement came through the university groups created in the 1990s. General Michel Aoun’s Free Patriotic Movement had already been protesting in the relative safety of the universities since the early 2000s (Härdig 2011). In the aftermath of the March marches and the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanese soil, an attempt was made – particularly but

⁹ One of the first gay rights organisations in the Middle East, along with al-Qaws in Palestine. For a (critical) history of the organisation, see Benoist (2014) .

¹⁰ The Union of Lebanese Democratic Youth: though it no longer has official ties with the Lebanese Communist Party, which in turn has its own youth division now, there is much historical and present-day overlap between memberships.

¹¹ An analogous experience of the July war was that of anthropologist Kirsten Scheid, who went from sitting and waiting, to doing relief work by the bombardment’s end (2007).

not solely in AUB – to unite both Left and independent student groups under the anti-Syrian, March 14th aligned, Democratic Left (*al-yasār al-dīmūqrāṭī*). In the wake of its disintegration, this came to be read as an attempt by political elites to harness and co-opt the anger and fervour of student activists. Hagop, for example, was involved in both the Democratic Left and No Frontiers, but drew away from the former after the assassination of its most prominent founder, Samir Kassir, when it became clear to him that ‘it was just funded by Hariri’. Majid, also involved in this period, agreed with this assessment but added that the ultimate break came with the July War in 2006, when the March 14th side behaved disgracefully. As an example he mentioned how they had met with Condoleezza Rice as American-funded bombs rained down on the country.

However, the majority of my interlocutors’ political stories began later. For them, the post-2005 status quo was the ultimate backdrop for their initial aversion to politics and then eventual politicisation. So for those who became politicised in the process of engagement with TBP, many of their stories begin with either dissatisfaction or disaffection. To return to the younger TBP members whose politicisation was discussed in Chapter 5, a sense of aversion at the post-2005 status quo was all too clear. When I asked Nadia if she had done anything political before TBP she smiled sardonically and stated: ‘I was involved in politics insofar as I was studying politics’. Antoine told me that he had never been involved in anything because he was ‘disinterested’ and that ‘nothing would lead anywhere’. Karim, meanwhile, had wanted to do something but could not see how to do so on the Jbeil campus of LAU, where the post-2005 March 8th/March 14th divide was all-encompassing:

There was no outlet for me in Jbeil, there were only the political parties [...] I knew that it was bad and I felt that I had a responsibility to do something about it. I also had a blog back then and I tried to raise awareness of what was going on [...] They didn’t care what I was doing because I couldn’t hurt them.

In spite of the differences outlined above, in all three instances 2005 remained a foundational moment, a historical basement. For the youngest this was clearest, as they found it difficult to think of a time before then in political terms. For those in the middle, it was the inception of their political subjectivity and, more often than

not, their first taste of political betrayal and dashed hopes. Even for the oldest, though, it was still being produced as a year zero. As Hani, with a long history of NGO engagement at his back, put it in his typically generalising style: ‘civil society is in crisis [...] the old ideological parties died in 1990, and the NGOs died in 2005 when they had no solutions’. It is clear too in the contours of the political landscape. Establishment politics is still entirely framed by the March 8th/March 14th divide: legion were the times that I received bemused glances when I told acquaintances in the field that I was researching politics beyond March 8th and March 14th, as if the thought that there might be such politics was itself absurd. To a point, of course, this was true. As we saw in Chapter 2, ‘independence’ became an important referent for activists precisely because of the need to stay apart from the two parliamentary sides.

2005, then, was activist year zero. The key events since then also fit this pattern of differentiation. The 2006 Israeli war saw huge amounts of solidarity with internal refugees in the moment, as people across Lebanon opened their doors to them as they fled. However, in its aftermath resentments remained that ran along March 8th/March 14th lines – that Hizballah had caused the war and it was their fault. Years later, the Wikileaks revelations about March 14th ministers and their discussions with the American ambassador only served to further reinforce the things that people already knew and which already fit the March 8th/March 14th paradigm (Musallam 2012). The 2008 clashes, then, again fit this paradigm as the two institutional political sides actually went to war with one another on the streets of Beirut and the Mountain.

3.ii The dialectical sedimentation of activist engagements

These, then, are the key events in Lebanese political life known, discussed, and interpreted widely amongst the population, well beyond either independent activist networks or the secular cosmopolitan generation of which they were a part. Independent activists incorporated these events into their subjective political histories, but they were there as the backdrop for activist events and movements that overlapped with and came after them. These were incorporated and built upon in a dialectical fashion. Let us begin with Fadia. When I asked her about her

earliest political memory she stated that ‘like many of us, I was personally politicised when the *isqāṭ al-nizām* protests happened’. She then gave her own narrative of the event-dates relevant and known to all Lebanese, but weaving them into a meaningful account to activists:

There was a very long trend since ‘91 until maybe 2005 of NGO work that took up issues, causes, and did NGO kind of work. So mostly legal reform, awareness campaigns, a bit of community organising. And that was a very postwar sort of reaction because also all those people who were fighting on the Left or fighting against or mobilising against the war needed somewhere to go, something to do [...] And then when 2005 happened there was a big mess, and the mess went on for two, three years. But certainly between 2005 and 2008, it was just one big political mess. So people were unsure about who to side with and what to do. The cedar revolution: is something happening? should I be part of it? After the 2006 war lots of people did relief. After 2008-2009 I feel that there was a proper shift in thinking about politics in the activist world, where people started to realise that democracy is broken, the decision making mechanisms are broken, millions and millions of euros and dollars are being put into campaigns, and nothing’s happening, nothing’s budging. The polarisation between March 8th and March 14th had stabilised. People had left March 14th in big masses because of the death of Samir Kassir, and how his party fell apart. But a lot of people voted [in 2009] [...] were disillusioned with their vote and left March 8th as well, particularly because of the Free Patriotic Movement, internal issues, their failure to keep their promises.

The first activist specific movement she discussed was *Laique Pride* in 2009.¹² *Laique* had ‘packag[ed] secularism into this one march’ and this had been important because ‘even protest was new to us’. At the end of 2010 Muhammad Bouazizi self-immolated in Tunisia and the Arab revolutions began: ‘of course we were very inspired’. A planning meeting was called for what would become *isqāṭ*, and ‘the discussion was that there’s a moment in the region, let’s build on it and see what we can do here’. *isqāṭ* therefore found ‘fertile ground’ (*arḍ khuṣba*) between disillusionment, the small protest precedent of *Laique* and the wider regional tumult.

For Fadia, *isqāṭ* taught activists three things:

¹² For more on *Laique Pride* in particular, and 2009 to 2011 more generally, Karolin Sangebusch has carried out research on the key players from that period (2012).

One, it named the regime sectarian, and afterwards everyone was talking about the sectarian regime as a direct cause of all our problems; two, it made it clear to us that we are in need of a political movement, not a project-based movement but a long-term political movement [...]; and three, it became very clear [...] that it's one regime and it's two sides of the same coin and they work together, there's no use taking sides.

For this reason, and for providing experience of protest, *isqāṭ*

was a crash course for a lot of activists, and there are a lot of groups that came out of that movement. One of them was TBP. Another was *ḥaqqī 'aleyyī* (I must act), another was *tayyār al-'amal al-mubāshar* (the direct action movement), [and] there were regional offshoots of the movement.

When I asked her what had led to *isqāṭ*'s downfall, she stated that

the external thing of course is that the political parties tried to ride it, because they're fucking assholes [...] internally we did not have the maturity and we didn't have the courage or the leadership to kick out the parties [...] That was one. Two was the inability to translate outside of protests: we would always say that we need to do a million things, go to the streets every day and talk to people, mobilise people, get people online and get on the media, but we just never got around to doing that.

Moving to Take Back Parliament she said that, alongside the stated aims of the movement, it was a chance

to also build on many things from *isqāṭ al-nizām*: to force us to do grass roots work that wasn't just protesting, to force us to talk to people, to force us to build leadership, to force us to get out of Beirut [...] to force us to find 128 people and run them together [...] to fight the whole polarisation together.

Finally – and as we saw in Chapters 5 and 6 – when she looked back on TBP, Fadia had come to see it as a neoliberal response and that something different would be needed moving forward.

I have reproduced Fadia's account of dialectical historical sedimentation as it is one such account that speaks for the whole period under discussion from someone who was involved in all of the independent activist engagements of the recent past, but I was offered versions of such an account by many other activists.

David had spun me a similar account in which the falling apart of *isqāṭ* produced groups like *ḥaqqī ‘aleyī* and, ultimately, TBP. These were responding to, and building upon, what went wrong and what went right in *isqāṭ*. Majid, meanwhile, had a characteristically more cynical spin on the same events, seeing them as one attempt after another to purge substantively leftwing political actions of rightwing or apolitical individuals and ideas.

3.iii The temporality of living history

The repetition in form and dialectical connections in such accounts is stark. It is not too much of a stretch to see them as versions of a ‘public narrative’ (Lazar 2014: 93) of history, if here we recognise ‘public’ as the in-group of activists who circulate this history inter-personally.¹³ There are many things that could be said about these accounts. Here I would like to draw out, in particular, their structural and temporal elements. Firstly, the dialectical relationship between the events and movements. Each phase of activism is portrayed as a direct reaction to the successes and failures of previous phases. Witness how the inability of NGO forms to effect change produces forms of direct protest (*isqāṭ*), whose success at signifying the entire political class as culpable, but failure to practically exclude institutional parties from its practice, in turn produces a reform movement that attempts to use electoral and legal frameworks to subvert that political class (TBP), whose failure comes from having expected the rule of law to matter. To do this, of course, activists must engage in a lot of interpretive work, often agonising on what those successes and failures mean. Over the past few chapters I have discussed in detail the products of these interpretive processes, in the form of the inculcated knowledge of difference from both political parties and NGOs, as well as the narrative strategies through which this interpretive work is disseminated and kept in constant circulation. On this point, however, what is important is that this interpretive work produces the recent past as an integrated whole.

Secondly, in being an integrated whole this activist living history is radically different from the mythic past discussed in the first half of this chapter. Though

¹³ Or, indeed, an activist ‘master narrative’ (Gilsenan 1996: 60).

these events are discretely identifiable moments in the past, independent activists are clear in their minds that from *isqāṭ* we get to *ḥaqqī ‘aleyyī* and TBP and so on. There is no lacuna, no missing period of time. This is quite unlike the generation gap between independent activists and their immediate seniors discussed above.

Thirdly, the interpretive work which produces this living history as an integrated whole has a clear temporal orientation towards the present. The interpretation of what went right and what went wrong in each period of engagement speaks concretely to present concerns for how best to engage in activism. In doing this, activists are not independent analysts of their own history, obviously enough, but rather are engaged in a committed attempt to mine those previous engagements for their use in the present. One further distinction can be made, therefore, between mythic past and living history: the former is mined specifically for the purposes of identification, while the latter is further mined for tactical purposes. In harking back to a Left trajectory from anywhere between twenty five and forty years earlier, independent activists are engaging in identity work rather than trying to emulate any particular practices. This is quite different from, say, viewing Mahdi Amel's writings as relevant for the present day. In producing a continuous and continuing history of their own practice over the last few years, independent activists are attempting to make that history speak concretely to the necessities of the here and now. It is of practical importance to now that in the present day one cannot work with the political parties, and one cannot work with the NGOs, and one cannot expect legal frameworks to matter, and one cannot expect to be protected from incarceration, litigation, and physical violence because of one's relative privilege as urban, middle class, tertiary educated – in short, as members of the secular cosmopolitan generation. The dialectical, sedimentary accruing of these affectively inculcated knowledges is what forms the content of activist living history.

4. Temporality and futurity

4.i Orientations towards (what to do in) the future

Of course, in being temporally oriented to the here and now, the interpretation of the events that form a part of independent activist living history is also open to change as and when the present day reality changes. It may well be the case that if that reality changes too much an event might fall out the back end and become mythic past: something to look back on fondly, with which to identify, but with little to say to the concerns of present-day activism. Were the division of institutional politics between March 8th and March 14th to collapse, say, the huge amount of practical, affective and intellectual work put into producing oneself as 'independent' might well no longer carry any importance for future generations of activists, much as the expulsion of the Palestinian *fidā'iyyīn* spelt the end of a certain sort of tactical engagement in the Lebanese Left from 1982 onwards. In being interpretively open and in being temporally-oriented to the present, this living history is by necessity also in discussion with what independent activists should do *moving forwards*. Having discussed the relationship between the independent activist near and distant past to the present, I turn now to the relationship between the present and the independent activist future.

To this end, in this final section I look to the contemporary temporality of activism in Lebanon. The recent living history of independent activism, and particularly the most recent mobilisation cycle that I have tracked over the last few chapters, has served to radically reorient activist temporalities. In particular, independent activists now embody an intriguing mixture of attritional and revolutionary time that makes it possible for them to imagine rupture in the everyday. The sense independent activists have of transformative potentiality immanent in the everyday caps the radical difference that their political subjectivity has wrought between them and the NGOs. In its emphasis on present action, independent activist temporality bears resemblance to anarchist practice, turning 'away from ends and towards means' (Razsa 2015: 11). However, in Lebanon there is a keen awareness that it is not necessarily in the capacity of independent activists to bring such rupture about, but rather that it is on them to be in the best position to take advantage of such potential for rupture when it

arises. In order to discuss rupture, however, I begin by returning once more to a protest that was anything but a crucial moment, and which felt nothing like a transformative event.

4.ii Apathy at the new parliamentary extension

Having asked my friends and interlocutors about the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests for much of my time in the field, and having witnessed their wistful recollections of those days – the anger, the excitement, the energy – I was looking forward to being able to share in these experiences when parliamentarians began floating the idea of another extension to their mandate in mid-2014. This time, rather than a year, the extension would run until the next electoral cycle. At the planning meeting discussed in the previous chapter, though, it was already clear that student activists were not that enthusiastic about the protest. Before the first planned large-scale march the group organising the protest, *al-ḥirāk al-madanī lil-muḥāsaba* (the Civil Movement for Accountability), organised a number of smaller protests at a variety of government buildings that they publicised across social media. In attending them, however, it became clear to me that they were photo ops and little more. A group of around twenty people each time would stand with signs in a cordoned off area, watched impassively by the various army, police, and private security guards in the vicinity, disinterestedly resting their hands on their rifles or leaning up against a barrier. A speech or two would be made, and then everyone would leave. The whole thing would last around twenty minutes. The first march, recounted at the beginning of the thesis introduction, appeared more promising, initially at least. Yet even as we wended our way through the historic neighbourhoods of the city Mansour was already telling me that this was far fewer people than had been there the year before. Those chanting were mainly the students, who had come prepared with megaphones. I have already discussed how things ended once we arrived in Downtown: the students attempted to resurrect some of the more radical chants from the year before that called out the army and police, and were castigated by the older NGOs in attendance. I attended the second march, two weeks later, which was now half the size again, and the students were nowhere to be seen. The third march was even more negligible. Indeed, apart from

the students, none of the politicals whom I knew came to any of these events, even though they had told me again and again that the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests from the year before had been one of the best actions they had ever been involved in.

Much as was the case during the wave of student protests earlier that same year, I became a go-between of sorts with those interlocutors who were not attending, letting them know what had been happening. This time, however, the tone of their responses was a mixture of mockery and anger at the protests themselves. We saw in the previous chapter the passion elicited amongst student activists by the perceived weakening of tactics, like mailing tomatoes to parliamentarians rather than throwing tomatoes at them. The posters that the campaign put up opposing the extension also caused anger. Majid, in particular, was furious at a poster, white on black, with a cartoon sheep looking out and a tagline stating 'I'm voting'. He hated the posters, found them patronising, and wondered whom they expected to bring in with such a slogan: 'it really pissed me off'. Tellingly, these posters were put up around Mar Mikhael and Hamra, the secular cosmopolitan consumption sites. This fact was not lost on Majid, who questioned precisely who it was they were targeting, and to what effect: after all, it was not the negligible secular cosmopolitan vote that would make any difference. Then again, if the point was, instead, to play on secular cosmopolitan feelings of distinction and superiority from the 'sheep' who made up the majority of the country, then perhaps their spatial location makes better sense. In any case, when I asked friends why their organisations were not participating, I found out that many had been sounded out but had ignored the invitation. The general feeling, reiterated in the conversations I had with politicals about the NGOs throughout this period, was, again in Majid's words, that 'they won't change anything with their tactics, they don't know how to do something different'.

4.iii The times of revolution, the long-term, and the everyday

The non-participation of politicals made sense in the context of the affectively inculcated knowledge of difference from NGOs that I had been piecing together during this period. But another element of this differentiation became apparent the more I talked to politicals about tactics: a radically altered temporality, both from

the rhythms of NGO action and from their own previous temporalities of the future. Regarding the rhythms of NGO action, there was a general distaste for how inflexibly every action was planned as this meant that the NGOs were not open to the immanence of the action itself. Recall David's distinction between the NGOs and political:

The NGOs are unable to deal with how this work is happening because for them if there is no plan [...] for them it's absolute chaos, whereas the political ones are just "we need to move, we need to move, quickly - there is no time to make strategies, we have to use this energy that is happening while it's here".

In Chapter 5 I discussed what his words meant in relation to affectively inculcated knowledge of difference. Here I would like to emphasise the temporal dimension to his words. Openness to wherever the energy of a protest might lead is a radically different temporal orientation from trying to contain that energy. We saw the effects of this temporal dissonance during the first *lā lil-tamdīd* protest, where the rupture between NGOs and political came about over different emotional habituses, within which different temporal orientations also played out. Of course, there are structural reasons why NGOs plan and do not adapt to the immanence of the event. These are clear enough in Malik's joke at the expense of the NGO representatives: 'no guys, no we don't want to go in! It's not in our project proposal!'. NGOs must receive funding in order to carry on their work. They have to tailor their work to meet the demands and expectations of current and prospective donors and backers. Protests that turn violent or appear to be out of control look bad. None of this is inherently surprising, and it is a well-worked critique of NGO work both academically and within my fieldsite.¹⁴ But the temporal dimension is fascinating because the cyclical nature of funding proposals and the short-term nature of the funding stream lock NGOs into a pattern of maintaining themselves as they are – continuing to provide whatever service they provide as they provide it. This in turn presupposes that year on year things do not change radically, as radical change is not good for an industry that is based on year on year renewal. This is a temporal orientation that sees the short-term future as a

¹⁴ Amanda Lashaw has written a thorough overview of this 'impasse' (2013).

continuation of the present, with perhaps a long-term future inhabited by some ideal goal (full accountability, social justice). Politicals, meanwhile, have a different perspective on the short-term future, at least as regards moments of potential rupture. Here, embracing the immanence of the event is important precisely because politicals would like that moment to be transformative, so that what comes after should be different from what came before.

That type of moment would be an event in the Badiouan sense, a 'pure break in the becoming of the world' (Badiou 2003, 2011; Dewsbury 2007). Some anthropological uses of Badiou's sense of the event are enlightening here. Caroline Humphrey has stated that such events 'bring about the sudden focusing or crystallisation of certain of the multiplicities inherent to human life and thus create subjects, if only for a time' (Humphrey 2008: 359). Jane Guyer also emphasises the subjective experience of ruptured time as a crucial element in the anthropology of the event:

The navigation of subjectivity and sociality under a consciousness of events puts process into question and forces inquiry into how events are ever aggregated (or woven) into social synchronies and cultural representations or accumulated over time, and for whom. (Guyer 2007: 417)

This certainly plays out in the case of independent activists in Lebanon if we go by their recollections of the importance of events like the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests as the moments when politicals felt able to act and to engage in agonistic confrontation with the state. It is these recollections which produced those events as important ruptures in the consciousness of the in-group of independent activists. If, with Badiou and Humphrey, we accept that 'the singular innovations of the event persist by means of conscious acts of witness by individuals' (Humphrey 2008: 360), then we can further grasp the importance of narrative and storytelling for reproducing independent activists as a (loose) solidary group, all of whom share a particular political subjectivity.

Sian Lazar has built upon Humphrey's use of Badiou to emphasise how different temporalities come together in such events, that it is the event that 'makes ordinary time into astonishing time, and [through it] the revolutionary potential inherent in ongoing political activity is released' (Lazar 2014: 90). Lazar asks: 'what turns attritional time into a revolutionary moment, or links attritional

time to astonishing time, thus making historical time?’ For politicals in Lebanon, and in contradistinction to the NGOs, it is an openness to the immanence of the event which allows the opportunity to produce it as a transformative moment in its aftermath. Moments of possible rupture, like the first *lā lil-tamdīd* protest, then, contain their own time that must be harnessed and capitalised upon.

So much for the future in moments of rupture. By definition, however, those moments are few and far between, and though they have to be capitalised upon when they come around, outside of them one’s orientation to the future is different. The effect of the movement from hope to indignation to frustration and despair that I have been tracking over the last few chapters has been temporally transformative for the futurity of independent activists. In the aftermath of TBP’s dissolution, one of the most common judgments on its failure was that eighteen months was not long enough to complete the groundwork for its potential success. ‘We would need years’ were the words I heard more often than not. It was May – who went through a very stark politicisation process during and after TBP – who put this altered temporality and what it entails in terms of future action, to me most eloquently:

In the last period [of TBP], okay we got fucked in the elections, but at least we could be in the communities on the ground. For example, if in this neighbourhood we could see how we could help, over time maybe people will start to trust you. In every community there needs to be trust. And in this way, with time, we can build in the future, after four or five years, something stable. [As TBP] we were never something real, something stable [...] We need to be a little realistic on the ground. You can’t expect people to trust in you, unless we can provide some infrastructure, spaces [...] support for communities.

In this quote we can see many independent activist preoccupations coming together: the need to move beyond the secular bubble, the fervent desire to be emplaced in the materiality and the social relations of particular sites in the city, the need to be more than merely reactive, the need to abide for a length of time. In reformulating the future as May did, we see a full medium-term for activism that is, put simply, to endure for four or five years, to produce some infrastructure that will mean that activists will be better placed to act the next time a revolutionary moment arrives. As May added later in the conversation: ‘right now we won’t be

able to bring down the system (*nizām*), and even if we did we don't have the infrastructure, the resources, we don't have anything'. This is the realism to which she referred earlier: to know that work needs to be put into the short- to medium-term, but to still have a genuinely transformative motivation behind that work to give it some sense. This motivation exists of course in the long-term future, but its motivational core is held within the immanent possibilities of the event, the moment of rupture, and where they could lead. But to fully take advantage of a moment of rupture in the future – which the NGOs cannot and will not do – the non-revolutionary short-term requires attritional, day-to-day, low-level work, which may not be spectacular but is indispensable as preparation.

4.iv Politics of rupture, analytics of transformative action

The independent activist temporality of rupture, then, presupposes a particular confluence of event, action, and time. Though the moment of rupture is different from the everyday time, it emerges from it. *Kairos*, the exceptional time of significant events, emerges from *chronos*, the sequential time of the everyday.¹⁵ Alain Badiou's restriction of the event to world-historical moments, however, is far too limiting to account for activist temporality. Far better attuned to it is the presentist temporality of anarchist practice. This presentism has been noted by many of those who have done ethnographic work on anarchist practice. Felix Ringel has dubbed the actions of his anarchist interlocutors in the German city of Hoyerswerda a 'creative presentism' that 'reclaim[s] both the present and the near future in a city which otherwise seems to have lost its hold on the future' (2012: 175). They create 'micro-utopias' in the contemporary moment (2012: 182) and act as if they are already free, to borrow David Graeber's dictum of the logic of direct action. For Ringel, anarchists' 'politics are found not just in the contents but also in the formal and conceptual aspects of their knowledge practices' (Ringel 2012: 183). Maple Razsa makes an equivalent claim when he states that his anarchist interlocutors

¹⁵ See Antonio Negri's *Time for Revolution* (2003) for a thorough exploration of the two within a framework of revolutionary action.

shifted away from an emphasis on a future utopia and toward a commitment to forms of practice, away from ends and toward means. In particular they embraced direct action, understood as an intervention against existing conditions in a way that prefigures an alternative. (Razsa 2015: 11)

David Graeber, meanwhile, is perhaps most clearly attuned to the sense of event-as-transformative that I have been piecing together above. In his discussion of the logic of direct action he suggests that contemporary anarchist practice draws on a variant reading of Situationism, which called for ‘the creation of “situations” where one could subvert the logic of the Spectacle and recapture one’s own imaginative powers’ (Graeber 2009: 528). Contemporarily, however,

it’s no longer possible to imagine [insurrectionary moments] as representing a fundamental permanent break that will usher in a completely new society. (In a way, of course, this is only a realisation of something that was always true.) We are left instead with an open-ended struggle, the realisation that we are, effectively, already in a situation of permanent revolution. Freedom becomes the struggle itself. (Graeber 2009: 528)

Whilst each of these formulations appears to capture certain elements of the independent activist temporality of rupture that I traced out, there are nevertheless discrepancies. To begin with, my discussion has not been centred around forms of direct action (though many of my interlocutors engaged in these as well). Further, May’s words above ought to have made clear that whilst potential moments of rupture are immanent within the everyday it is not in the capacity of independent activists to bring them about – rather, they must plan for them in the attritional time of the day to day, to be in the best position when the time comes to move with ‘energy that is happening while it’s here’, in David’s words.

In the closing pages of *Direct Action*, David Graeber quotes the CrimethInc collective approvingly when they state that ‘freedom only exists in the moment of revolution. And those moments are not as rare as you think’ (CrimethInc 2003; Graeber 2009: 528). This image of multiple potential moments of rupture arising from the everyday is closest to the temporality embedded within independent activist political subjectivity. That this also underlies anarchist practice is in no

doubt. But my own interlocutors were anarchists only in the most heterodox manner; taking on board certain elements of anarchist practice whilst producing others from their own experience and countenancing tactics, strategies, and orientations that very much exceed or contravene the anarchist playbook. As I have emphasised throughout this thesis, this is because it is the experience of practical political engagement that serves to orient political subjectivity and not the other way round. Maple Razsa's anarchist interlocutors already saw themselves as anarchists by the time he met them. He shows in great detail how his interlocutors' subjectivity continued to change through their political engagements; but those changes were wrought upon persons with a clearly defined prior ideological affinity – certainly in their own minds. And given the normative emphasis on action in the present within anarchist practice, it is not unsurprising that subjective transformation be valorised as it was – it was, as Razsa states, part of the point (2015: 11–12).

Much as in the discussion of a politics of affect as against an affective analytic of the political with which I ended Chapter 5, here I want to posit a distinction between a politics of immanent rupture and an analytic of transformative action. The temporalities of both anarchist practice and independent activist practice valorise present action, and both understand the potential for rupture arising from the everyday. To a greater or lesser extent, this valorisation comes from intellectual elaboration of one's experience of exceptional time, *kairos*, of one sort or another. This elaboration of experience is what undergirds the valorisation of direct action: 'one can begin to experience genuine freedom, even to create liberated territories, in the here and now' (Graeber 2009: 527).¹⁶ The force of (particularly intense) experience has been evident from the moments of conflict that remain salient and meaningful for independent activists, which form their living history and upon which they elaborate their temporality of action. Recall Fadia's recollection of the experience of NGO betrayal at the *lā lil-tamdiid* protest: 'the moment it actually hits you [is] when you really understand what these things mean beyond just a theory'. But, importantly, it is the experience of feeling free in the first place that matters. One might elaborate that feeling in

¹⁶ The anarchist concept of temporary autonomous zones (TAZ) is also predicated on precisely this logic (Bey 2003).

one way or another, valorise it or sideline it, elaborate a temporality of action that accounts for it as part of one's political subjectivity or not. But that experience remains immanent to one's embodied memory of political engagement.

The point in all this is that the experience of *kairos* – exceptional time – as a moment of rupture is an experience intrinsic to activism itself and not any particular elaboration of political time. Rather than predicating a temporality of rupture on anarchist or any other practice in particular, we ought to conceive of a temporality of rupture as part and parcel of activism – as a desire to engage in potentially transformative action. To believe that one has the capacity to substantively transform the world requires that one conceive of time as potentially punctuated. This does not necessarily mean a belief in an ultimately utopian telos of end time any more than it necessarily means endless improvisation. It also does not mean that every person involved in political engagement must have, *a priori*, an elaborated conception of rupture. As the above discussion of activist living history made clear, the production of political subjectivity is a continuous, never-smooth process of dialectical sedimentation– punctuated by successes and failures (often more of the latter), endpoints and downturns, cardinal moments of intense fellow feeling and languors that stretch for months, enjoyment and despair.

This distinction – between the feeling of exceptional time and the elaboration of a politics of exceptional time – is solely analytic and relates to the general experience of rupture. But just as an emotional habitus is an elaboration of underlying feeling that valorises particular ways of understanding and emoting that feeling, which in turn makes available particular modalities of action, so too is a temporality of rupture an elaboration on the experience of *kairos*, which valorises particular ways of making that experience commensurable to one's desire to act in the world. In this respect, the independent activist temporality of rupture surfaces as a vindication of the dialectical sedimentation of setbacks, failures, and, yes, successes. This temporality has become embedded in activist political subjectivity such that it provides an agentive way to conceptualise how political activism works and how one's actions have the capacity to transform the world. To draw out my interlocutors' affinity with anarchist practice once more, 'insurrectionary moments there will certainly be' (Graeber 2009: 528); and those moments are not so rare – as you, or they, think.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has looked to the historicity and temporality of independent activism in Lebanon. In a context in which various institutional forms of memory are unavailable, independent activist historicity is divided between mythic past and living history. I have shown how the former can and is only drawn upon piecemeal; it serves to offer antecedents and a political trajectory but is dissociated from current organising. There is a generation gap between the protagonists of previous periods of political organising and my interlocutors. There is no such gap within living history, which refers to the political experiences of independent activists as a polar form of a single generation. This living history, as the accounts of both grizzled and starry-eyed interlocutors showed, is the product of the dialectical sedimentation of prior forms of engagement. By tracking this process of sedimentation we gain a sense of the heterodox nature of activism in Beirut as it oscillates from one potential set of tactics and allies to another. With each swing, however, new knowledge accumulates and, insofar as it is made to remain meaningful and resonate with contemporary circumstance then it will continue to be a part of independent activist political subjectivity.

The clearest way in which living history – as an intersubjectively produced and maintained repertory of prior experience – has an effect on contemporary political subjectivity is by reorienting it to a temporality of rupture that is elaborated upon the experience of the exceptional time of intense moments of contestation. Alongside an affectively inculcated knowledge of difference from others in their social field – from NGOs to political parties to the apolitical members of their secular cosmopolitan generation – these moments also afford independent activists with the capacity to imagine their own ability to transform the world. As David Graeber has argued, imagination as the ability to believe and envision a world-otherwise is perhaps the most important element to believing in one's own capacity to act.¹⁷ Revolutionaries, he says, 'break those frames [of

¹⁷ For precision's sake, this form of imagination is what Graeber calls *immanent imagination*, 'the capacity to imagine things and bring them into being' (2009: 526). He has restated his conceptualisation of imagination more recently in *The Utopia of Rules* (2016: 45–104).

institutional structure] to create new horizons of possibility – an act that then allows a radical restructuring of the social imagination’ (2009: 532). Direct action, meanwhile, is ‘an experiment [...] in the realignment of imagination, in the creation of truly non-alienated forms of experience’ (2009: 537). I made the case above for some elementary part of this experience, unelaborated into a normative temporality of action, being foundational to political activism itself. I also argued that the independent activist elaboration of a temporality of rupture is effective because it is able to transmute their experience into a rhythm for future action that, embedded into their political subjectivity, allows them to imagine a future in which they can act and imagine their own efficacious action within it.

8. Conclusion: activism, failure, and the politically possible

1. The trash protests

In May 2015 Sukleen, the private contractor in charge of refuse collection across a large part of Lebanon, including all of Beirut, stopped collecting the bins. Their contract with the Lebanese state had come to an end and the parliamentary deadlock that had been a relative constant throughout my fieldwork meant that no new contract was forthcoming. The garbage piled up. On street corners, trash mountains took over the pavements. Throughout the summer residents awoke to the sharp and nauseating smell of burning trash as municipalities struggled to keep refuse under control. Illegal dumps opened up across the country.

A protest movement, You Stink (*til'it rihitkun*), began staging symbolic protests. They collected trash and threw it over the barricades, barbed wire, and the heads of police, army, and security contractors at the parliament building and the Bank of Lebanon. Mostly made up of 'NGOs', the 'politicals' amongst my interlocutors steered fairly clear of the protests in the first month or so. The trash crisis (*azmat al-zbēle*), though, continued. Now, the crisis began to appear to independent activists as a potential moment of rupture. As the protests became larger the relationship with state and security forces became agonistic, the demographic constitution of protestors changed, and independent activists came to the fore as participants. No longer merely the secular and cosmopolitan generation from which both NGOs and politicals drew their ranks, the young, poor, and disenfranchised began coming in from Beirut's suburbs and further afield to take part in the protests, often defying the party structures of control in their home spaces. The security response became more violent. Fights turned into organised security charges. Water cannon and tear gas became a standard part of the security response. Snatch squads and the targeting of particular prominent activists in the crowd followed. Rubber bullets were used for the first time, and on August 22nd a young man was shot in the head. Each day from then until August 30th saw greater numbers coming to protest each day in downtown Beirut.

The numbers, violence, intensity and frequency of protest were a significant escalation of the previous years of protest recounted in this thesis. The NGO response, however, stayed the same. You Stink had lost control and, citing the presence of paid up party 'infiltrators' (*mindassīn*) acting as agent provocateurs and turning the protests violent, vacated the protest spaces; they removed their classed and privileged bodies from the protests and compelled the security response to be all the more severe. For the reasons recounted in this thesis, the manoeuvre, this time, did not surprise independent activists. They, meanwhile, refused to leave the space and stayed to get tear gassed, water cannoned and shot at with the disreputable. A moment had come and they intended to take advantage of it. The next day You Stink organisers returned to the protests, realising they had made a tactical mistake. Now, though, they wanted the politicals involved, having realised that they were better equipped to act on the street but none too happy to be working with them.

The protests ultimately fizzled out, but only after several months of protest, an astonishing mobilisation beyond the confines of the secular cosmopolitan generation, a huge escalation in security state repression and sustained elite actor impotence. Yet the protests did come to an end. At the time of writing, over a year after the trash crisis began, no real solution has come to the fore. As such, the trash protests continue the dynamic of failure and political possibility that has been so central to the independent activist experience in Beirut with which this thesis has concerned itself. Independent activists had a political subjectivity distinct from that of other actors in the social field, one promoting a confrontational way of engaging politically in the world and valorising an openness to wherever a potential moment of rupture might take them. Having already gone through the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests, and viscerally aware of how NGOs were likely to behave in the protest moment, they were both unsurprised when You Stink abandoned the protest and better able to take advantage of the situation in their absence. They engaged with and politicised persons beyond their secular cosmopolitan generation in a mass and confrontational context. And, when I returned to Lebanon in December 2015, the atmosphere of failure was not so total as it had been when I first arrived to begin my fieldwork.



Figure 8: Activist traces. A wall in downtown Beirut in December 2016, six months into the trash protests.

This thesis has looked at the process by which a transformation in subjectivity takes place – becoming an activist – and how that transformation is maintained in adverse circumstances – remaining an activist through failure. The central claims of this thesis have been the following. Activism is best conceived of as a political subjectivity predicated on transformative action-in-time. An activist political subjectivity is produced *through* engagement in political practice. Its production, inculcation and instantiation are processual. Moments of contestation provide, in the Lebanese context, particularly salient events through which such a subjectivity can take hold. The space of activist engagement is a common thread in the

instantiation and maintenance of activist subjectivity: it is where claims of belonging and ownership are made, it is where action is (or is not) possible, it is where an activist political subjectivity takes root. Affect animates the space of activism, giving force to political engagements. Activist political subjectivity displays a temporality of action guided by the potential for rupture in the near future and the need to prepare for that potential in the present. This temporality comes to be produced through prior failed political engagements, is central to the production of difference from other political actors, and provides hope and purpose to activist futures.

Action-in-time – or, in other words, what might be possible and when – brings us full circle to where the thesis began. With time and temporality we revisit – from the vantage point of knowing the history of success and failure, hope and despair, organisation and violence – the themes of the first chapters of this thesis: what politics looks like in Lebanon and whether there is space for a politics-otherwise in the interstices of the status-quo (Chapter 2), who activists are and what differentiates them from the wider social field (Chapter 3), and what the spaces of activism are and how activists affect and are affected by them (Chapter 4). The first three chapters of this thesis served to illustrate the field of activism as encountered in a present moment. The following three chapters, meanwhile, took an explicitly diachronic approach and excavated the trajectory of a particular affective narrative, a trajectory that passes through one chain of political engagements and brings about a better understanding of the present moment of activism – of radically altered political possibility in and through failure. Chapter 5 gave the history of the movement from hope to despair and indignation and discussed how Take Back Parliament engendered a ‘political’ emotional habitus – for some, but not all – that was distinct from an NGO-like relationship to action-in-time. Chapter 6 looked at the atmosphere of failure and despair that settled after the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests and discussed how narrative and storytelling kept alive fellow feeling for activists at the same time as it kept alive the political knowledge of difference from NGOs. Chapter 7 turned to describe how this chain of events produced a radically altered sense of time and the future, and in so doing opened a space for political possibility through the atmosphere of failure.

Central to the organisation of ethnographic material and the argumentative framework of this thesis has been a particular understanding of the relationship between the mundane and the exceptional, the attritional day-to-day of engagement and the paradigmatic, visceral moment when things become clear and transform the basis for the mundane and exceptional in its aftermath. To conclude this thesis, then, I would like to draw out a number of the overarching themes that motivate each of the chapters.

The first theme is that of change and transformation. Persons *become* independent activists, *become aware* of their difference from others in their social field. In the Lebanese case, this happens through moments of contestation, in particular. To this end, I turn once more to event-centred ethnography to show why it is a privileged methodology for accounting for the transformative dimension of the social.

The second theme is that of the instantiation and reproduction of change and transformation. Once one becomes an activist there have to be ways in which that engagement is maintained. Throughout the thesis I have discussed mechanisms by which activists do this. Yet activists are not the only ones in their social field, they are never in complete control of their landscapes, and they are often working in an atmosphere of political failure. This thesis has neither been an ethnography of subjection nor one of freedom to act without restriction. It has shown in fine detail the various ways in which their political subjectivity affords independent activists with the capacity to imagine efficacious action in the world even through atmospheres of failure. At the same time, it has been an exploration of what lies beyond activists' own capacity to control but which nevertheless produces them. In other words, how far their subjectivity and horizons of possibility are shaped by their material and historical environment in ways they might (not) desire, and might (not) be aware of. To this end, I turn to a discussion of the ways in which I have discussed affect in this thesis: as socially produced but always out there in the world beyond any particular person, it motivates and circumscribes in ways that are difficult to direct, exceeding particular political projects even as it motivates them and gives them force.

A third theme has been what part of transformative events, the effects of affects and the production of subjectivity are specific to political activism. I

foreground once more the centrality of political practice to the production of activist subjectivity as a subjectivity that faces out onto the world and sees transformative action as possible. Activism cannot be adequately understood without the experiential realm of activist subjectivity. This is particularly so in overarching moments of failure, when objective analyses fall short in accounting for the maintenance of activist engagement. In closing, I turn to failure and political possibility and comment on what this thesis can say back to activists in Lebanon.

2. The event-ness of things

David Graeber, whose work on direct action and anarchist practice I have drawn on liberally in this thesis, began his anthropological engagement in rural Madagascar. The monograph that surfaced from this research, *Lost People* (Graeber 2007b), is fascinating for what it tells us about the possibilities of ethnographic research when allied clearly and explicitly to a theory of history and change. He states that his is a ‘particular, perhaps experimental’ ethnography, in that

it treat[s] ordinary people [...] as historical characters. By this I mean, treating them not as exemplars of something other than themselves – or at least, not primarily so – but rather as actors, human beings actively shaping the world in which they exist, even if they are (like any of us) not entirely aware of the degree to which they are doing so. People who have the capacity of acting in ways that no prior model would have been able to predict. (Graeber 2007b: 29)

He adds that his intention was to ‘retain a sense that one can never be completely sure what these people are about to do’. In other words, it is contingent possibility that analysis has the tendency to erase: ‘social science, after all, is very good at describing things that have already occurred in such a way as to imply they could have been predicted beforehand; it is rarely able to actually predict anything’ (Graeber 2007b: 30). For anthropology there is a more specific problem. Where political science or historical sociology might have the tendency to render an

account of change flat, anthropology has historically fallen into the trap of being unable to account for change at all within its models and descriptions.¹

The account of political activism I have given in this thesis is one of how particularly located people, through practical engagement, *become* activists and, further, how that sense is maintained in the face of failure, defeat, and seeming lack of efficacy. It is, then, an account of change and its aftermath. In producing this account I have tacked back and forth between activist *and* not-activist, between synchronic description of various sites *and* how they have come to be diachronically produced as particularly bright landscapes for activists, between contemporary positions *and* the particular historical contingencies that brought them into being, imbued them with force and maintained their resonance. This movement is central, of course, to the thesis given the subjective transformative weight that I give to political engagement and to visceral agonistic moments for bringing these transformations about. An event-centred methodology has been particularly germane to such an endeavour. Such a perspective, as Bruce Kapferer states, 'goes beyond conventional perspectives of the event as representational of the social or of society and, instead, [sees it] as a moment or moments of immanence and the affirmation and realisation of potential' (Kapferer 2015: 2).

This thesis is full of events. Their open-ended potential, I hope, has not been overly curtailed by the analysis that I have given. Indeed, the potential open-ness of any new event is itself entirely what the activist temporality of rupture is predicated on. Clearly, though, past events have an object-life of their own and become completely entangled in the production of activist political subjectivity. Fadia's account of protesting outside of the city and coming face to face with people 'outside the bubble' of secular cosmopolitan Beirutis (Chapter 3) is just such a transformative event: it produced a critical reflection on her personhood and aided in the production of her activist political subjectivity. Of course, there were others on that protest who did not inhabit precisely the same sort of event, or for whom it elicited a different set of reflections, or perhaps none at all: there is a constant, necessary contingency to the transformative potential of events that such an account renders clearly. The three *mashākil* (fights) described in Chapters 4 and

¹ This is, of course, a very long argument with numerous bodies of literature engaging it as a problematic. For references, see Ohnuki-Tierney (1990).

5 are, too, transformative events whose enduring force and meaningfulness in the face of failure is evident in their narrative circulation (Chapter 6). Meanwhile, Chapters 5, 6, and 7 together foregrounded affectively inculcated knowledge to account for the transformative work of a particular event chain. Even the discussion of the university tuition fee protest in Chapter 2 treats it as an event insofar as it transformed the outlook of my student interlocutors – Sari, Mansour, Carine, Malik – in its wake.

These events are not simply descriptions of social reality in miniature, vignettes that clarify what everything is actually like, or microcosms of a larger social totality; rather, they always have an effect on that reality, with the potential to change it in smaller or larger ways. As Kapferer's words make clear, this is a radically different way of understanding the social world. It is also a radically different way of understanding *action* in the social world. If everything has transformative potential then the stakes for action are completely different. Where theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari (2004) or Brian Massumi (2002) miss the significance of such *potential* is in overstating the case and reducing all that is worth discussing to the grounds of becoming: just because it can does not mean it will, and not attending to how things do not come about is to do a disservice to the potential for transformation in the first place. Where a pessimistic theorist of the event like Alain Badiou (2003, 2011) misses the significance of event-ness is in circumscribing the ontological basis for events to such a degree that they must be world-historically important and therefore limited to very few people. What ethnography as a methodology and a sensibility offers, however, is the potential event-ness, ontologically, of social action alongside an awareness that most of the time this potential is unrealised.

It is precisely a desire for and orientation towards potentially transformative action that I have claimed to be foundational to activism as a distinct modality of acting in the world. I further argued that the elaboration of that desire and orientation will be particular to the circumstances, histories, feeling states and emotional habitus of any one activist context. As I showed at the end of Chapter 7, the elaboration of a particular temporality – of rupture, in the case of independent activists in Lebanon – builds upon the experience of

exceptional time, but that experience necessarily precedes it.² That being said, the potential event-ness of things, in conjunction with a knowledge of one's inability to predict how or when such a thing might happen, is precisely the temporality that activist political subjectivity is predicated upon. If one does not on some level, despite (or perhaps through) the critical pessimism of failures past believe that one's actions have transformative potential, then one is no activist. The difference between activists and not-activists is not that the latter do not do political things or transform the world but rather that their subjectivities are not so closely predicated upon engaging in transformative action. Ordinary people in certain circumstances, perhaps the majority of circumstances, may be far more effective in bringing radical transformation into being, but that is not what is at stake in a discussion of political subjectivity.

An ethnographic engagement with the avowed action of activism, then, brings into relief the potential event-ness of things whilst keeping hold of the work that must go into grasping when such a potential is most likely, preparing in advance to be best placed to grasp it, and keeping alive its event-ness in its aftermath. This thesis has been a contribution to such a line of enquiry. My claim in utilising such an event-centred methodology, then, is to fundamentally agree with Kapferer's assertions in relation to ethnographic reality. A fine-grained discussion of the production of activist political subjectivity through an avowed engagement with event as potential might bring this into particular relief, but that is not to say that only those who engage avowedly in potentially transformative action can engender radical breaks. Such a methodology opens up new trails for the ethnographic exploration of the social world as a contestable, transformable site. Methodologically speaking, then, the key contribution that this thesis makes is to show how one can ethnographically engage with contexts in which distinctions, conflict, and mutually exclusive social, political, and personal projects play out,

² As such, both ethnographer and activist are attempting to understand the same experience, though for different ends. This is a clear case of paraethnography, the analyst's theoretical paradigm being not dissimilar to that of her interlocutors (Holmes & Marcus 2006; Boyer 2010). This has been true for myself, but so too for ethnographers of anarchism like Felix Ringel, Maple Razsa, and David Graeber. That we as anthropologists take on board and allow the categories of our interlocutors to shape our thinking is, if it is anything, to be aimed for. In doing so, however, we must still attempt to account for what is specific and particular, and what is generalisable (and how).

never smoothly, across time. An event-centred approach, one that understands their transformative potential for particularly-located persons even as that potential is denied or circumscribed, offers a way to describe and analyse such contexts without explaining away or flattening all potential. This is clear enough for ethnographies of political movements or activism, but it ought to go without saying that these are hardly the only contexts where such conflict plays out.

3. Affect

In stating that activism constitutes a desire to engage in potentially transformative action-in-time, the point is not that everything worth discussing in relation to activists is conscious or avowed. Rather, it is that a conscious and avowed stance towards engaging in the world reorients the relationship between the conscious and unconscious, objective and subjective. Affects are located aside from consciousness. They are socially produced but beyond the social subject. As such, they are vital to both opening possibilities and setting limits for transformative action-in-time: affects always exceed any political subjectivity's or political project's ability to account for them. It is at this level that affect in its multiple registers comes to the fore.

In Chapter 4 I foregrounded the affective materiality of certain bright landscapes in Beirut. I argued that activists were drawn to such spaces for the possibilities they allowed, but so too for the historical trajectories that produce them. Conflict in such spaces is closely tied to how activists cannot erase the presence of others from the landscape, and vice versa. Affect motivates and frustrates, becomes inscribed into the logic of political subjectivity and possibility even as it exceeds it. Chapter 5 turned to the process through which affect came to motivate one political project, Take Back Parliament, and how an emotional habitus was produced – a way of valorising certain ways of cognising affects into politically sanctioned emotions, ultimately coming to motivate particular embodied actions during moments of political conflict. Here, again, affect can never be fully captured even as it provides force in moments of contestation. The

different ways of engaging with state violence – animated by indignation but valorising radically divergent action for politicals and NGOs – are testament to this very point. Chapter 6 took up the force of what I have called the affectively inculcated knowledge of difference that arises out of such visceral moments as the *mashākil* and the *lā lil-tamdīd* protests. By looking to how this knowledge of difference is continually elicited in in-group storytelling we come to see the social life of affect once the moment in which it is first felt has passed. Chapter 7, meanwhile, investigated the temporal reorientation that the activist emotional habitus, in conjunction with the affective knowledge of difference, produced for Lebanese independent activists. In particular, the affective strength of the experience of *kairos*, exceptional time, comes to be elaborated into a normative temporality of rupture that provides my interlocutors with the capacity to imagine efficacious action in the future. These chapters together have shown the multi-faceted ways in which underlying feeling states come to be (imperfectly and imprecisely) inscribed into political projects, how they come to affect how and what activists do in situations of instinctual action, and how the aftereffects of such situations (events) continue to organise political subjectivity and the horizons of political possibility after the fact.

I see the contributions of my analysis to anthropological engagements with affect as follows. Firstly, the material aspects of affect, as discussed in Chapter 4, ally my project to that of recent affective anthropologies. Anthropologists like Ann Laura Stoler (2008), Yael Navaro (Navaro-Yashin 2009, 2012), and Gaston Gordillo (2014) engage with material detritus in particular sites and spaces and the affective resonances they produce for and with their informants. They treat these resonances as contextually bounded and temporally situated, produced in the interplay of different pasts with the present. In so doing, they produce engagements with affect as historically and temporally bounded, socially engendered even as they exceed the social subject. Even as their projects look to bombastic theorists of affect (Massumi 2002; Deleuze & Guattari 2004) their own ethnographic portrayals of affective experience greatly complicate the picture. Rather than the sublimated critique discernible in the above authors' scholarship, this thesis has argued back at abstract theorising on affect from ethnographic material to make a number of claims. Firstly, it has argued that affect can only be

pre-discursive or pre-social if we cut the temporality of the production of affect to one moment without attending to the historical depth required to imbue certain sites with the affective resonances they have or, indeed, to have made certain persons affectable in particular ways. The discussion of bright landscapes and irritability in Chapter 4 spoke to precisely this and showed how affect becomes enmeshed in the both conscious and background projects of spatial claim-making, motivating them but never collapsing into them, always producing an excess.

Secondly, the thesis has argued that attending to avowed political projects in the world allows us to trace particularly placed actors with particular subjectivities that are produced through and motivated by affective feeling states. A central claim of this thesis has been that political subjectivity is produced through practice. By tracing particular people within a social context and how their political subjectivity and horizon of possibility transforms through political engagement, we gain a better understanding of how affect has effects through particular social and historical contingencies, affecting some people in the social field in radically divergent ways from others. Once more, such a perspective wards against the easy abstraction and totemic quality of affect in the work of certain affect theorists (Massumi 2002; Sedgwick 2003), even as it provides proof for the real effects that affect has on lived experience. Though I make this case overtly at the end of Chapter 5, the argument plays out across the chapters of this thesis, together producing a narrative of the role of affect in the subjectivities and horizons of possibility of some, and by no means all, Lebanese people.

Thirdly, this thesis pushes recent anthropological engagements with affect towards subjectivity, a topic that this literature has averred. The thesis does so not by undoing the important theoretical and methodological work done by these engagements, but rather by beginning from the presupposition that subjectivity is not internal-facing but oriented towards what is beyond the self, produced intersubjectively beyond the subject, and motivating action in the world. As such, it is amenable to affect as lying beyond the self. If, as Navaro states, the anthropology of emotions 'kidnap[ped them] from the psychological disciplines, turning them into anthropological objects of study' (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 24), then my

engagement with affect has attempted to kidnap subjectivity from interiority.³ In exteriorising subjectivity it has served to better render it an anthropological object of study. In being intersubjectively produced, the political subjectivity of independent activists is always mediated between multiple people whose orientation to time and past events are not coterminous (Chapter 3 and 7) and whose discussion of them renders those events as an externalised object to mould and be moulded by, as the stories of moments of contestation come to be discussed (Chapter 6).

The point, then, is to engage with how avowed political projects bring into relief the ways in which affect is productive of our interlocutor's experience of the world. This then becomes refracted in what they know of themselves (subjectivity) and what they understand it to be in their power to do (horizons of possibility). In doing so, this thesis has offered an example of how to integrate affect as the non-conscious and non-discursive into conscious and discursively inscribed social action without collapsing the former into the latter.

5. Political activism

In the introduction to this thesis I named this an ethnography of activist experience. I have argued that greater attention must be paid to the experiential realm of activism if what we desire is to account for the force and motivation of political engagement, in particular when the expectation to give up in the face of failure appears so strong. I have shown that what matters most is how one's political subjectivity and horizons of political possibility are realised through political practice and then maintained intersubjectively amongst political activists.

³ Navaro states, in concluding her excellent and extensive critique of previous work on subjectivity (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 21–27), that her monograph 'propose[s] an anthropological approach that would study affect and subjectivity in tandem' (2012: 24). Nevertheless, the argumentative thrust of her study remains on making the case for affect beyond the subject, rather than on her interlocutors' subjectivities. My argumentation, meanwhile has been geared towards elucidating how a particular subjectivity – one amongst many in the same context being affected, putatively, by similar landscapes and materialities – comes to be affected differently to others.

Agreeing with the spirit underlying the affective turn in studies of social movements and political contention, I have looked to account for the passionate dimensions of political activism as fundamental rather than epiphenomenal aspects of the political. Influenced further by recent anthropological engagements with radical politics, anarchism in particular, I have concentrated on the production and maintenance of political subjectivity as crucial to continued mobilisation. In this, I have offered an account, in keeping with Maple Razsa's subjective turn (Razsa 2015), of subjective transformation as fundamental to one's capacity to transform the world. Not least, this is because one must have the capacity to imagine the world as transformable and to imagine one's own actions as being capable of transforming it (Graeber 2009).

To this end, Chapter 2 provided a description of the status quo against which activists orient their political engagement, and elucidated the key dynamics that organise potential politics-otherwise: independence, leftism, secularity. Chapter 3 looked to what kind of people go through the twin processes of secularisation and cosmopolitanisation, and how some amongst them develop a positional critique that is foundational to activist political subjectivity. In both cases, it is only through the experience of political practice that such a subjectivity can be durably installed. From there, the chapters continued to introduce various moments in which my interlocutors felt they became political activists as they related to the political movement or group under discussion. At the same time, the material presented pointed to the mechanisms through which activist engagement was maintained, whether it be social and consumption practices in resonant sites of the city (Chapter 4), or long term and intense political organising (Chapter 5), or the narrativisation of past events (Chapter 6), or altered temporalities of action instantiated in new political sites and organisations (Chapter 7). As the section above made clear, affect, as the provider of force and meaning-making potential to the events and practices of political activism in Lebanon, is fundamental to the experience of activism.

The point of such an experiential framing of political activism is to attend to what objectively-oriented analysis cannot: without an understanding of how particular people organise and understand their own political subjectivity and horizons of political possibility we cannot fathom why some groups are able to

succeed when they do and why others fail. It also gives a sense of how activism can endure when its continuation might appear objectively futile; it allows us to understand how certain ways of engaging with the world, political practices, tactics, and so on appear to resurface from nowhere for external observers, as was the case with the trash protests of 2015 which opened this conclusion. Razsa may well be correct in identifying something particularly subjective about anarchists, who 'intervene in their self-understandings and in the constitution of their very desires' (Razsa 2015: 11; see also Razsa & Kurnik 2012). But, as with experiencing time as punctuated by moments of potential rupture, so too any activist political subjectivity, anarchist or otherwise, must 'struggle to develop individual and collective subjects who are antagonistic to dominant social relations and yearn for radical change' (Razsa 2015: 27). This thesis has provided an account of just such a struggle.

6. Failure and political possibility

Finally, a few words on political activism in the Middle East. As I have drawn out throughout the thesis, independent activism in Lebanon resembles non-institutional, anarchist, or horizontalist forms of political practice in many other parts of the world: its inventiveness in the face of low institutionalisation, its way of engaging with urban space, its use of social networks and consensus decision making, its presentist temporality of action. By way of concluding, I would like to think a little more closely about the relationship between Lebanese independent political activism and political activism in the wider Arab world. The cross-pollination here also been clear: witness the importance of *isqāṭ* as the Lebanese chapter of the Arab revolutions of 2010-11, or the extent to which events in Syria have affected politics in Lebanon, from institutional elites down to independent activism. Egypt, too, was never far from the discussion and solidarity protests took place outside the Egyptian embassy throughout my time in the field. The relationship to the Arab revolutions as moment of possibility and as curtailment of that possibility in the years since remains vital across the region.

The goal of this thesis – its overarching intention rather than the specific arguments it has made – has been to save the possibility of politics-otherwise from failure by showing how failure need not be annihilation. Much like affect and ruination, what work activists have managed to achieve leaves traces in the material and social fabric. But activism in Lebanon has managed more than that: in and through failure it has survived, and activists have become more sure of themselves, more sure of how to engage with the world, with whom to work, of what it is and is not possible for them to do, where and when. The trash protests of summer 2015 show this. Repression and counter-revolution in Egypt or Syria have rendered the situations there far more difficult for the activists with whom my interlocutors felt affinity across borders. Those activists were also, as the experience of *isqāṭ* showed, dealing with very different authoritarian regimes and very different social situations. In many ways, this thesis has been a discussion of the very contingent historical, social, and political specificities of activism in Lebanon. But across the region, the revolutions made the possibility of politics-otherwise manifest. The potential for transformative events is not so far back in the sands of time, no matter the betrayal of the promise of those events since then. And, as elaborated through the independent activist temporality of rupture, that transformative experience can be made to stay with you, to inform your capacity to imagine the world and your efficacious action within and upon it. For as long as that experience remains salient to one’s political subjectivity, then the potential to engage in transformative action remains too. In a moment of counter-revolution, demobilisation and retrenchment, holding on to such an experience becomes all the more important and all the more powerful.

This thesis has not dealt with the structural factors that played into the outbreak of political dissent in 2010-11. It is not a political economy of the region.⁴ Rather, this thesis has been about how persons – activists – with a particular political subjectivity and particular horizon of political possibility come to be produced. Without an account of such processes, the possibility of political transformation is infinitely harder to imagine. What I have argued is that political practice, as a series of relative failures through which one continues to engage in

⁴ Though such analyses are, of course, of fundamental importance for political activism and political change.

potentially transformative action-in-time, can produce and valorise an open-ended sense of the future and of political possibility. In its own way, this thesis has attempted to make manifest this (political) truth, to keep it alive for activists themselves.

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