Dwelling in the Barzakh: Mad Archives of the Lebanese Civil War

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Program in Literature in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The idiom of madness is ubiquitous in Lebanese cultural production about the country’s 1975-1990 civil war. Despite this, there has been no investigation into what, and how, this madness signifies. In *Dwelling in the Barzakh: Mad Archives of the Lebanese Civil War*, I work to fill this gap through an analysis of representations of madness in fiction, documentary film, and photography-based art from 1975-2015. I argue that madness is defined multiply throughout this time period, reflecting and responding to the political and social realities, as well as psychic perceptions, of life in Lebanon. The forms of madness articulated through these cultural texts are to be understood as the symptom of a populace dwelling in the *barzakh*, here defined as a spatiotemporal site of simultaneous rupture and (re)unification.

In what follows, I offer historicized close-readings of Arabic-, French- and English-language cultural texts. Analyzing these texts alongside the political backdrops against which they were produced, I derive theories of madness from the texts, pinpointing how both medium-specificity and the historical contingency of production help inform respective theories of madness in and after war.
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Introduction: What’s In a Name?

As anthropologist Sami Hermez has recently observed, “the 1975-1990 war in Lebanon [still] has no agreed upon name” (11). Some Lebanese refer to the fifteen-year period not as a single war, but to the smaller battles of which it was composed, such as The Hotels War (1975-1976), The Hundred Days War (1978), the War of the Camps (1985-1988), or the War of Elimination (1998-1990): battles which reflect a particular, local interest in the politics of the conflict. Others, following the lead of Lebanese former Ambassador and scholar Ghassan Tueni, refer to the war as *une guerre des autres* fought by international actors on Lebanese soil.¹ Another subset of the population will refer to the period between 1975-1990 as *al-ahdath*, or “the events,” a term which in its essential, and intentional, indeterminacy both refuses the term “war” while also avoiding the implications of acknowledging it as such.² The indeterminacy of such a term, while disavowing agency, also acknowledges other truths which make naming a fraught process. In spatial terms, Lebanon’s various regions effectively experienced different types of wars: the war that was underway in Beirut, the country’s capital, was often of a different nature from that which was occurring on the country’s southern border with Israel, or in the mountainous northern region, for instance. Could you, in fact, call these different battlefields part of the same singular conflict? And, in the country’s capital, Beirut, it would be all but impossible to confidently declare frontlines: the battlefields were often fluid, marked by streets, buildings, and blockades that could just as easily disappear in the course of war’s destruction. Then, of course, there is the issue of deciding the temporality of “the war.” The roots of this conflict could be traced back to the arrival of Palestinian *fidayin* in 1970, or to a brief 1958 civil war, or to the French colonial imposition of a foreign system of governance in the early 1900s, or to

¹ Whereas Tueni made sure to establish that he intended the term as an acknowledgment of the myriad international forces who ultimately occupied or supported Lebanon during the conflict, he had not intended it to be used as many have since deployed it: “to acquit the Lebanese of having fought the war” (24).

² In the early years of the conflict, prior to 1982, the term *al-hawadith*, or “disturbances” (but which can carry the connotation of “happenings” or “mishaps”) was also in use. See Jean Said Makdisi’s *Beirut Fragments* (1989).
relentless massacres between rival communities in the 1860s. For the sake of convenience and a common reference point for “History,” the date of April 13, 1975 has been used as the recent conflict’s starting point and the year 1990 (although sometimes 1991) is delineated as the conflict’s end – but the violence preceded 1975 and has continued even after 1990.

The difficulty of defining “the Lebanese civil war” and the reality that the conflict is not locally “viewed as one event,” reflects the challenge to naming posed by Lebanon’s unique demographic makeup (Hermez, 11-12). On the Mediterranean Sea, bordered by Israel and Syria, the modern state we know today as Lebanon is slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut. Its 6 million inhabitants are divided into seventeen religious groups: Sunni, Shia, Alawi, Ismaili and Druze Muslims; Maronite Catholics and Greek Orthodox Christians in addition to smaller sects of Christianity; and very small numbers of Jews, Baha’is, Buddhists and Hindus. The region owed its diversity to its reputation as a space of asylum for various religious groups from as early as the first century CE when populations from the Mediterranean relocated to modern-day Lebanon to escape the Roman Empire’s persecution of new Christians. In the period of time between the collapse of the Roman Empire circa 500 CE and the start of the new millennium – or, as William Harris contextualizes, from the “Maronite adoption of a Christian compromise and the Islamic conquest in the seventh century to [the] appearance of the Twelver Shia and Druze in the eleventh centuries” – the territory we know today as Lebanon “acquired most of its communal patchwork” (Harris, 30). By the time Lebanon fell under the control of the Ottoman Empire circa 1516 CE, the mosaic of populations had worked out a live-and-let-live form of tribal autonomy and self-governance.

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5 Statistics Lebanon, a for-profit Lebanese-based polling and research company, carried out an independent demographic survey of Lebanon’s population. Its results have informed reporting across the US government, including the publishers of the Central Intelligence Agency’s World Factbook.
4 See Gilissen 1996, Johnson 2001 for social scientific explanations of the applicability of the term “tribalism,” and Adnan 1982 for a literary representation.
At the end of WWI, France placed Lebanon under military administration. Whereas it was in the interest of Ottoman imperial administrators to tolerate difference and heterogeneity across its vast territory, the machine of colonially operated according to a much difference logic. Thus, in 1920, the colonial power redrew the map of their Middle Eastern mandate such that “Mount Lebanon” became a new entity split from Syria. The new territory, called “Grand Liban” or “Greater Lebanon” now included the port cities on the coast of the Mediterranean as well as the Beqa’a Valley on Syria’s western border (Traboulsi, 88). In 1923, the League of Nations officially placed the regions we today call Lebanon and Syria under French mandate. The various religious groups quickly lost their political autonomy, and now found themselves forced to reconstitute “Lebanon” as a tiny but homogenous and uniformly governed territory.

This new arrangement was unsatisfactory to a significant Muslim Lebanese population who had, until recently, been considered a part of Syria. To assuage tensions, the French introduced a constitution in 1926 establishing a colonial, parliamentary government in which representation was proportionally distributed among the new territory’s religious sects. The French assigned the positions of highest level of national governance to the three largest religious groups and according to a similar logic: the office of the President would always be held by a Maronite, that of Prime Minister by a Sunni Muslim, and Speaker of Parliament by a Shi’i Muslim. A census conducted in 1932 lent credibility to this distribution of power by announcing a Maronite majority in the new territory. By the time Lebanese politicians began the process of securing their independence in 1943, the politicization of the religious groups seemed irreversibly entrenched. In the aftermath of independence, the leaders of the various religious groups (now called “confessions,” according to the French term) negotiated a post-independence gentleman’s agreement, the National Pact – al-milhaq al-watani, in which they left the colonial power-sharing system intact.

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5 For histories of the transition between Ottoman and French colonial rule, see Albert Hourani’s *Syria and Lebanon: A political essay* (1946) and Kamal Salibi’s *The Modern History of Lebanon* (1965).
Over the next several decades, several regional and domestic developments would erode the strength of the confessional leaders’ commitments to these agreements. The rise of Arab nationalist sentiment across the Middle East briefly contributed to the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1958. Then, in 1970 Palestinian fighters engaged in war with the newly formed state of Israel were expelled from Jordan and relocated in Lebanon. Their presence quickly aggravated two groups: the Maronites and the Shi’a. The former felt threatened by the sudden surge in an Arab-identifying and largely Muslim population; the latter quickly became caught in the crosshairs of war between Palestinians and Israelis on Lebanon’s southern border. After years of skirmishes, diplomatic negotiations and regional interventions, war was declared on April 13, 1975.

During the next fifteen years, the central government and military of Lebanon would collapse. Instead, Lebanon’s tribal clans formed militias, often organized around confessional loyalties, which warred for a greater share of political control and were backed by scores of regional and international militaries and mercenaries. When the end of the conflict was announced in 1990 as a result of the Document of National Accord or Ittifaqiyat al-Ta’if, the war shuddered to a halt with neither decisive military nor political victory. The organization Human Rights Watch estimates that the war claimed nearly 150,000 lives; that nearly 210,000 more were wounded and disabled; and 17,000 were “missing” – the vast majority of whom were declared “kidnapped and presumed dead” by the Lebanese state (1993, 1). The International Center for Transitional Justice estimates that an additional 900,000 emigrated, and another 800,000 had been internally displaced (2013, 70). In the absence of a solution for Lebanon’s political predicament, violence would continue well into the 2000s.

Little wonder then, that the matter of how to name such a war remains unresolved. The proliferation of actors – national and transnational – in addition to the conflict’s continued

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6 On a trip to Lebanon in the summer of 2019, a tour guide accompanying me through the Beka’a region noted that his natal village had not begun to reintegrate until 2012.
aftershocks defy the possibility of locating a single narrative about the war. As literary scholar Elise Salem suggests, the Lebanese understand themselves as having experienced different wars, an observation which, I argue, applies just as much to how war is understood (or not) in the moment of its occurrence, as to how it is remembered and recounted later (248). The issue of remembering and recounting is what pushes the problematic of naming to the fore, containing as it does implications for understandings of the past and present, as well as indications of that which is still to come. The very names which the Lebanese use to describe (the battles and events in) the war, Hermez suggests, “serve as metonyms for entire histories” – note the use of the plural – “of life, death, oppression, and struggles of everyday life.” Taken together, they “produce[e] a genealogy of specific pasts,” imagined, recast and passed down to new generations in the mythologies and collective memories of confessional groups and other forms of group identities (Hermez, 22). To answer the question posed in the title of this Introduction, “What’s in a name?” the answer is: one’s past, present and future.

**The Name of Madness**

There is, however, at least one convention of naming on which many Lebanese seem to have agreed: that the war was “madness.” I first encountered this turn of phrase in 2011 when a group of Lebanese expatriates used the English word to describe the period between 1975-1990. They implied that it was this unresolved portion of contemporary Lebanese history that was responsible for the political unrest their country was then experiencing. I found the term again when I read my first Lebanese novel, an English translation of Ghada al-Samman’s Kawabis Bayrut or Beirut Nightmares. The book, a semi-autobiographical recounting of “the Hotels War” (1975-1976), was littered with references to “madness” and “insanity.” I located a copy of the novel in its original Arabic, wondering if this were not an awkward, Orientalist translation of her work. After all, in his chronicle of the war, *Pity the Nation*, British journalist Robert Fisk notes that Western European and American foreign correspondents based in Beirut would use terms such as “lunacy” to describe Lebanon’s
conflict. He notes with irony that “historical tragedies of similar proportions,” particularly European civil wars, “have not been recorded in this way,” suggesting a revisionist historiography whereby war was to be considered an aberrant tragedy in Europe but a given in the primordially intractable Middle East (432). Thus the appellation of madness would be, somehow, fitting for Lebanon.

In fact, however, in the original Arabic of Kawabis Bayrut, Ghada al-Samman had written of “al-junun,” the most commonly-used Arabic term for madness, so many times that I ran out of post-it notes. I turned to other texts, written in Arabic, French and English by Lebanese authors living in Lebanon and in the diaspora, in the early-, mid-, late- and post-war years, and found more of the same. In the early-war novels of Hanan al-Shaykh and Etel Adnan, and then in the post-war novels of Ilyas Khuri, Rawi Hage, Amin Maalouf, Patricia Sarrafian Ward, Hyam Yared and Najwa Barakat, the language of madness and war proliferated. Certainly, the notion that “war is madness” is not new: Homer’s ancient classics The Iliad and The Odyssey are replete with references to soldiers who have been driven to the brink of insanity by war. Sigmund Freud’s study of war neurosis among soldiers returning from WWI laid the groundwork for much of modern psychology’s understanding about the psychic impact of war today. But in Lebanese texts, I found more than simply a clichéd expression describing the violence of war. Madness, I realized, was an idiom which, though layered and variably-defined over the past several decades, has been in constant use as the Lebanese have endeavored to embed their politics and history into narrative.

While early-war writers such as al-Samman described paroxysms of violence which could only be described in terms of al-junun or la folie, the idiom of madness expanded, I found, to accommodate a wider vocabulary as post-war writers reflected on the conflict from which Lebanon had just emerged. The constellation of terms used to narrate Lebanon’s wartime madness in these later texts had rapidly grown to engulf a broader range of existentially-, psychologically-, and spiritually-linked vocabularies. As the language of madness grew, so too did literary arguments as to the phenomenon’s prevalence within the country: post-war literature imagined madness as a
condition which had metastasized to the entire Lebanese populace. By the mid-2000s, the idiom of madness had even found its way into the work of visual artists, particularly documentary filmmakers and photographers who sought to find new ways to represent the toll of sustained physical, psychic and symbolic violence in an era of renewed and supposedly “postwar” political turmoil.

In the pages that follow, I ask what (and how) madness signifies in the context of the Lebanese civil war. Highlighting the persistence of the idiom of madness in literature, documentary film and art between 1975 and the 2010s, I bring historicized close-readings of these media in conversation with theoretical works in the fields of postcolonial studies, psychoanalysis and trauma studies. Ultimately, I conclude that though madness signifies multiply throughout the decades, it is always seen as a symptom of a political and psychic stasis which leaves Lebanon in a liminal space. This is to say, Lebanon is always somewhere between the future and the past, between prior violence and its reenactment; acknowledgment and silencing; life and death; sanity and its absence.

To describe this existential state, I turn to *barzakh* epistemology – a crucial theoretical framework for this project. The Qur’an defines the *barzakh* in two ways, both of which are relevant for our purposes. First, it is where the soul of the dead reside before Judgment Day. In this space, the soul undergoes a second form of life, in which its contents are examined and that which was previously immaterial is made material. But the *barzakh* is also the site of a unique oceanic phenomenon: the place at which freshwater and saltwater meet, forming a barrier, such as in the Persian Gulf. So, taking the underlying concepts from these two definitions – one, the liminal space of the afterlife, and the other, an existential condition of simultaneously separation and conjoining, of being both and neither as scholar of Middle Eastern feminism, miriam cooke, has described in *Tribal Modern* – *barzakh* epistemology helps us to understand the historical and political indeterminacy of late 20th-century Lebanon: a condition which birthed madness.
A Note on “Madness” and “the Barzakh”

For many, the term “madness” suggests “psychosis,” a condition wherein one’s mental and emotional faculties have been so compromised as to render the individual in question no longer in touch with “reality.” Representations of madness in popular culture have encouraged us to think of “the psychotic” as an abused child who develops multiple personalities as an adult; a psychopathic serial killer; or a sedated patient with vacant eyes, lost to another place and time. Perhaps we think of madness in more clinical, diagnostic terms: schizophrenia, dissociative identity disorder, or delirium. This, however, is exhaustive of the types of madness considered a product of the violence between 1975-1990. While the madness of traumatic childhood events, of sustained warfare, or of complete dissociation can be a component of how insanity is represented across these media, it is only that – a component. As I make clear in the chapters to follow, Lebanese cultural texts draw upon a much larger universe of concepts in their imagining of madness – one which includes Arabic etymology; medieval medical beliefs and folklore; the impact of sociopolitical developments on notions of sanity (Chapter One); and psychoanalytic theory (Chapter Four). The literary mad(wo)men who emerge from within the pages of fiction, in particular, borrow from a multiplicity of tropes, including those which have informed the figuration of madness in Arabic literature and society for centuries and some which more intimately reflect the political exigency of Lebanon’s (socio)political realities.

For example, the Arabic term for madness, al-junun, and the etymological root from which it is derived (j-n-n), refers to that which is hidden, or which the ordinary person cannot discern. It is an explicit reference to the realm of the otherworldly: derived from the same root as the word jinn, a supernatural spirit, it also suggests that which is hidden from oneself.7 The mad(wo)man thus may be able to see or perceive that which is indiscernible to others, or, could be mad because they are self-alienated – they do not fully know themselves. In a heavily-family oriented culture, the majanin (those

7 See Okasha, 920; el-Ezabi, 194; al-Issa, xv. See also Dols.
considered mad), were traditionally taken care of by family members and looked after by religious figures. Far from a stigmatized demographic, they were often viewed as endowed with an unusual gift – the ability to see and understand more than that which the “sane” could see or understand of the world. Over the course of centuries, literary representations of the majanin from the Islamic world, and, more broadly, the Arabic-speaking world, expanded to reflect the adage “al-junun fumuun”: madness is of many kinds (El-Ezabi, 192). “Mad” characters might appear as “wise fools,” not unlike Shakespearean characters; “holy fools” or prophets (indeed the Qur’an mentions that prophets were perceived as madmen); romantic or lovestruck fools; as well as the psychotic.

Indeed, from the notion of the hidden, Arabic literature has produced a panoply of mad characters: the possessed, the harmless mad(wo)man, the wise or holy man, the poet, the passionate lover, the village idiot, the medically ill and even the Sufi (Dols, 10). Several of these tropes are adapted to the local complexities of the Lebanese civil war, and given voice in the literature I explore in the first two chapters of the dissertation. In Huda Barakat’s 1993 Abl al-hawa, for instance, the figure of the “holy man” has been somewhat transmogrified into a woman scarred by the violence of extreme confessional sentiment and tribal warfare. She is ultimately driven to take on the persona of a Saint who leads her village to war. Another example might be the protagonist in al-Samman’s Kawabis Bayrut (1977). While struggling to retain her grasp on both sanity and life, she sees in her writing the chance to offer a warning for future generations taking on dimensions of the mad “poet.”

In other cases, new composites of madness are produced: Hanan al-Shaykh’s protagonist in Hikayat Zabna (1980), for instance, is the victim of unceasing sexual and physical violence before the trauma of the war arrives. Her insanity is both a gendered commentary on Lebanese patriarchy as well as one

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8 See Al-Naysaburi, al-Issa, Al-Shammari, Okasha and el-Ezabi for further delineations of these categories.
9 The idea that madness should be so capacious as to encapsulate such a wide variety of ways of being mad is not unique to the Arab world, of course. In The Dictionary of Untranslatables, Clara Auvray-Assayas, Charles Baladier, Monique David-Mendard and Jackie Pigeaud trace European concepts of madness from ancient Greek and Latin linguistic and philosophical usage to Michel Foucault’s Madness and Civilization (1965). Their summary highlights not only the dialectic between madness and reason, but also acknowledge the myriad political, medical and religious contexts which have contributed to both positive and negative interpretations of madness (611-618).
of many examples of a family history of psychic instability in a violently postcolonial Middle East. By way of another example, Najwa Barakat’s character Najib in *Ya Salaam* (1998) is a man in denial about the role he has played in bringing about the war. Despite the law of general amnesty passed in 1991 – or perhaps because of it – his denial turns upon him, consuming him until he whittles away and dies. To understand madness as it is used in the context of discussions of this particular chapter in contemporary Lebanese history, in other words, is to acknowledge the ambivalence and capaciousness of the term. It also requires a continued commitment to flexibility in defining “madness” – a flexibility capable of accommodating the contingent political realities unfolding in the lives of the protagonists we encounter from 1975 to 2015, be they fictional, fact-based or somewhere in between.

As for the term *barzakh*, the condition which is responsible for the forms of madness I theorize in this dissertation, I arrive at my use of the term by way of medieval Qura’nic scholar Ibn al-‘Arabi and contemporary anthropologist Stefania Pandolfo. The term “barzakh” is mentioned in the Qur’an three times: in verses 23:99-100, 25:53 and 55:19-20. The first mention of the *barzakh* refers to an impassable barrier raised between the souls of the dead and their former lives, whereas the second two refer to the meeting point of – and barrier between – salt and freshwaters in the ocean. The “most common usage” of the term *barzakh*, writes Huda el Shakry in *The Literary Qur’an*, “derives from” verses 23:99-100 wherein the *barzakh* is figured as a partition between two temporal conditions: the past (back to life) and the now-present (the afterlife). But the epistemological contours I find most helpful as I consider the *barzakh* for Lebanon is considerably more nuanced. This is to say, I am interested not only in the *barzakh* as “a period of time that exists between death

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10 Verse 23:99-100 reads: “…when death comes to one of them, he says: ‘O my Lord! Send me back (to life) in order that I may work righteousness in the things I neglected.’ – ‘By no means! It is but a word he says.’ – Before them is a partition [barzakh] until the Day they are raised up.” Verse 25:53 reads: “It is He Who has let free the two bodies of flowing water: one palatable and sweet, and the other salt and bitter; yet He has made a barrier between them, a partition [barzakh] that is forbidden to be passed.” Finally, verse 55:19-20 reads: “He has let free the two bodies of flowing water, meeting together: Between them is a barrier [barzakh] which they do not transgress.”
and resurrection,” nor even in the progression “from its temporal designation in orthodoxy […] to its spatial designation within [Sufi] mysticism,” but in how the Lebanese *barzakh* encapsulates – and then politicizes – both the spatial and the temporal (Bashier, 81).

I arrive at this understanding of the *barzakh* by way of medieval Sufi philosopher, Ibn al-ʿArabi and medical anthropologist Stefania Pandolfo. The former offers an understanding of how it is that the *barzakh* can be both a spatiotemporal (and therefore existential) condition, while the latter helps connect the idea of *barzakh* to madness. In *Futuhat al-Makkiyah* (or *Meccan Illuminations*) written in 1238 CE, Sufic scholar Ibn al-ʿArabi interprets the Qur’an’s writings on the *barzakh* to suggest a partition not only between temporal or even spatial entities, but “between two worlds, states, levels or attributes” – and therefore between existential and ontological attributes (quoted in al-Hakim, 193; my translation). Moreover, this partition not only acts as a force of separation, it also works somewhat paradoxically to conjoin the two entities or attributes, causing them to also take on a secondary characteristic of a “unified state” (*ibid*). Pandolfo links Ibn al-ʿArabi’s particular reformulation of the *barzakh* to madness in her literary and psychoanalytic treatments of Moroccan discourses of mental health in the latter half of the twentieth century. In “The Thin Line of Modernity,” for instance, Pandolfo locates the *barzakh* in literature describing insanity, where the latter is figured as “a boundary and a bar, a slash, a partition and a limit between opposing terms, but also an *entre-deux*, an interstitial zone, an emergent beyond, in between classificatory terms” (120). She understands the “interstitial zone” produced by madness – a condition analogous to the *barzakh* – as “the enunciative boundary, the emergent locus of subjectivity” (121). In other words: an ontological condition here the division between the two also enables the creation of a third zone of being.

In her subsequent ethnographic work, *Knot of the Soul*, Pandolfo further analyzes the relationship between psychoanalytic theory and figurations of madness in Morocco – this time in the context of lived experience instead of literature. One of her case studies is Ilyas, a man suffering from a form of psychosis which he expresses in part through painting the walls of his apartment. Pandolfo
frames her understanding of Ilyas’s condition in terms of the *barzakh*. His bouts of psychosis have been explained to her in terms of the Islamic theological concept of *ta’bir*, “a crossing over that gives presence to another side of the real” (151). The term is eminently evocative not only of the supernatural access to a hidden order of knowledge or awareness, but also of a transitory state which suggests the *barzakh*. Accordingly, Pandolfo understands the images Ilyas produces as material witnesses to his altered psychic “state” (*hala*): a condition which corresponds to “a *barzakh* of the subject – at once an absence and a coming to presence, a paradoxical form of simultaneous sleep and waking” (156, 335). This is to say Ilyas’ mental illness is imagined as one where he is both absent from the material world, and yet brought into being in the material world through the act of painting, while straddling both. The two distinct realms are nevertheless conjoined through the very barrier which both separates them and permits their access: him. But the *barzakh* is both spatial and temporal: the images he has drawn are also “ontological intervals [between reason and unreason] that join while separating visible and invisible realms.”

Put differently, the images are representations of a state of being in time which make access to these parallel realms possible.

In the case of Lebanon, I insist upon retaining both Ibn al-‘Arabi’s understanding of the *barzakh* as an existential, spatiotemporal site of both separation and conjoining as well as Pandolfo’s recognition of the relationship between *barzakh* and madness. To them, I add the contingency of a century of Lebanon’s political history. From the start of the French mandate, and over the course of the country’s post-independence trajectory, the Lebanese subject will find itself in a crisis of position and enunciation. The Lebanese “nation-state,” as it were, will be both the ultimate goal and an impossibility. The many nations that have made up Lebanon for millennia and for centuries have produced competing, overlapping, incompatible and yet co-extant narratives of their histories and

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11 Collu, 2. See also Shahla Talebi’s *Ghosts of Revolution*. Talebi references the *barzakh* to describe the condition of the women held captive alongside her in Iran’s political prisons. Roudabe, one of her cellmates, was driven to a madness which Talebi describes as one characterized by a state of “neither living nor dying, but a state of *barzakh*, where one is neither alive nor dead, unable to live or die” (123).
futures. And it is at the cusps of these narratives, further troubled by the imprint of colonialism, that the Lebanese subject becomes unhinged, unable to identify who, what, when or where it is. Madness will not be, as Pandolfo identified in the Moroccan context, an analogue of the barzakh, but rather a product of it. As the century progresses and its violence intensifies, the Lebanese subject will begin to experience a secondary crisis – a moral one – born of the intense oscillations between peacetime and wartime standards of conduct, further compounding the sense of self-alienation.

Indeed, in cultural and literary studies, the barzakh has been a productive model for thinking through the impact of forces of twentieth century imperialism, colonialism and economic globalization. Writing of the cultures of the contemporary Persian (or Arab) Gulf, for instance, Miriam Cooke describes the confrontation between and coexistence of the Gulf tribes’ traditional ways of life and the “modernizing” repercussions of the discovery of oil in the region. The resultant culture is what Cooke calls the tribal modern: a balancing of the two ways of being in the world in which “the tribal does not compromise with the modern, nor does the modern erase the tribal. Is this possible? By Aristotelian logic, no; by barzakh logic, yes” (Cooke 2014, 75). Cooke suggests that the radical idea that the tribal and the modern should co-exist as “apparently contradictory states [which] remain in balance” (ibid) perhaps should not be so radical at all: in fact, perhaps it is simply another way of chronicling History (76). Her suggestion necessarily pushes back against the narrative requirement that History be a single story, permitting instead the plurality of experience, the palimpsestic layering of voices, moments and places, and the possibility of their coexistence.

Modern Arab writers have also evoked the language of the barzakh to describe the political, and the condition of the postcolony, offering further justification for our consideration of this epistemology in the context of Lebanon. Matthew Sharpe, for instance, describes texts by Francophone Maghrebi writers who chronicle their exile in Europe. Within these texts, he writes, he locates parallels between narrative expressions of the experience of border-crossing and the barzakh, including in Tahar Ben Jelloun’s novel Les yeux baissés (1991) [With Downcast Eyes (2010)] (Sharpe,
In another context, Nasrin Qader gestures toward Mauritanian author Mohammed Ould Ebnou’s novel *Barzakh*. The novel is narrated by a skeleton who struggles to navigate life in an unnamed and newly postcolonial Maghrebi state. The skeleton is “neither a presence nor an absence,” who dwells within “a time that cannot be captured” and belongs to “no domain, no territory” (Qader, 20). Whether in the metropole or in its so-called periphery, the citizen of the postcolony understands itself to be in a new world order. It is an infelicitous one insofar as it entails a liminality or suspense akin to a non-belonging, or even of only a semi-existence.

As literary responses to political contingencies, these latter imaginings of the *barzakh* suggest a thought experiment in narratological possibility: can one articulate the experience of the *barzakh* from within it? This is precisely the question that is at stake in the chapters that follow. The *barzakh* conditions in Lebanon from the onset of the war (if not earlier) to the present day, vary in accordance with the historical developments and their attendant sociopolitical consequences, both real and perceived. And, though madness is the constant symptom of the perpetually irresolvable political and psychic stasis of a nation, the ways in which madness manifests also change. Despite the irresolution, despite madness, despite the steady deterioration of the possibility of articulating from within the *barzakh*, it is precisely the task of communicating the nature of madness which, I argue, the authors, documentarians and artists attempt.

**Chapter Overview**

novels, I demonstrate, that the language of “madness” – expressed in terms of al junun and la folie – takes root. Several of the protagonists in these novels understand madness in two ways, both of which are gendered. The first is in terms of a crisis of nationalism. In evocative scenes recalling Achille Mbembe’s theorizing of the postcolony, they describe how the excesses of tribalism and confessional sentiment have been sublimated into forms of nationalism, and militarized by Lebanon’s men until it threatens to obliterate the nation altogether. The second, however, is a madness from which the female protagonists are made to suffer. The protagonists lament the apocalyptic scenes sweeping over their landscapes and denounce as misguided the ideologies which have given rise to them. But in a patriarchal society in which confessional fervor has been normalized, their dissent is not welcome. Thus, while balancing the trauma of war and the silencing effect of patriarchy and normative thinking, the protagonists in this novel are either accused, or driven to the brink of, insanity – and in some cases death. The madness of men becomes a symptom of the postcolony’s political barzakh and the madness of the women becomes a symptom of the siege of life during war.

By the time the war has been declared ended in 1990 and the general amnesty law is passed in 1991, Lebanon’s predicament has taken on a new shape. Chapter Two, *The Phoenix Will Not Rise: Amnesty and Amnesia in Postwar Lebanese Fiction* analyzes novels written between 1993 and 2002, their plots offering narrative accounts of Lebanon during this very same temporal window. Novelists Ilyas Khuri, Huda Barakat and Najwa Barakat, I argue, describe Lebanon’s postwar barzakh as a direct consequence not only of the new government’s unwillingness to address the war as a legacy of confessionalism, but the civilian populace’s disavowal, as well. Moreover, despite the political violence, the novels depict a populace which has collectively washed its hands of a war which is, in point of fact, still ongoing. The Lebanese have chosen to live, in other words, as if already partaking in a future which has not yet – and, I argue, cannot yet – arrive. Through the voices of former combatants struggling to find their way in a disorienting era of “peace,” the novels – *Abl al-hawa* (1993) [trans. *Disciples of Passion*; 2005]; *Ya Salaam* (1998) [trans. *Oh Salaam*; 2012]; and Yalu (2002)
[trans. Yale; 2008] – lay bare the untenability of peace. In this environment, madness finds expression in fictional representations of former combatants. Taking the form of amnesia, madness is etymological and metaphorical kin to amnesty.

The crisis of memory in the postwar era established in Chapter Two sets the tone for the second half of the dissertation, even as the object of focus shifts from literary texts to documentary and artistic texts. In these chapters, the barzakh may still be understood as an inherent, and permanent, irresolution to the originating circumstances of Lebanon’s conflict. The irresolution is compounded throughout the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, by the accumulation of new political developments which nuance the meanings and interpretations of the war. How, for instance, should one process President Bashar al-Asad’s decision to release political prisoners in neighboring Syria in the late 2000s, knowing that many of those who have not been released were among Lebanon’s 1975-1990 civil war’s “disappeared”? In Chapters 3 and 4, the media of film and art allow us to visualize the barzakh, offering a different frame of reference through which we might locate postwar madness.

In Chapter Three, Sabra and Chatila: Maps to a Massacre, Mirrors of Middle Knowledge, I contend that documentary films produced in the mid-2000s and early 2010s help illuminate the nature of the barzakh in the context of perhaps the single most taboo event of the war: the 1982 massacre of Palestinian refugees. By 1982, the midpoint of the war, the ideological commitments which had sustained confessional militarization had waned somewhat: Israeli, French, Syrian, US, and multinational armed forces were now present in the country, diluting the original confessional agendas and even changing the nature of warfare itself. Whereas the early years had been marked by intra-confessional massacres, and massacres between Lebanese confessions and fidayin, the mid-war period was characterized by occupations as well as combat with heavy artillery, due to the presence of powerful foreign militaries. The Maronite-led and Israeli-supported massacre of Palestinians in 1982 was a cataclysmic marriage of the early- and mid-war agendas and repertoires of violence. The
general amnesty, however, allowed the Lebanese perpetrators to reintegrate into society without fear of prosecution. They would be fully a part of Lebanon’s simultaneous return to a glorious past and embarkation upon a peaceful future. But whereas the combatants in Chapter Two suffer from the paucity of memory, the perpetrators of Chapter Three are plagued by a proliferation of memories they cannot escape. The films I analyze in this chapter – *Massaker* (2006), *In Place* (2009) and *Layali bila nawm* [Sleepless Nights] (2012) – illustrate the psychic impact of the collision between the perpetrators’ private, overpowering memory and the public’s silence in the face of the general amnesty, and in turn illuminate the [place] in which the perpetrators – as the ultimate expression of postwar moral torsion – remain suspended.

The final chapter, *An Aesthetics of Irresolution*, analyzes artistic photo montage spanning the late 1990s to 2015. During this period, Lebanon experienced a number of brief wars as well as periods of protracted political violence, civil unrest, and government paralysis. Against this backdrop, artists such as Walid Raad, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, and Ghassan Halwani create works which make reference to aspects of the civil war and its aftermath, but which are glossed through the meta-narrative of the discrete postwar era of political and psychic instability they inhabit. Their commentary is offered both through the aesthetic language of photographic montage and an accompanying semi-autobiographical narrative – an integrated duality of textual objects which enlivens their ability to articulate both the precarity of the situation they depict, and the situation from which they depict it. This is to say: their ability to depict the *barzakh* from within yet another iteration of it. To help answer the question of the possibility of this form of representation through the image, I turn to Georges Didi-Huberman’s theories on the representative power of the image in the wake of catastrophic violence. This approach is relevant not only for the challenge of representing the *barzakh* but also madness, which these artists invoke through their own references to the discourse of psychoanalysis. Several scholars in fields such as art and memory studies have chosen to interpret these particular works of art in terms of an attempt to create, or challenge, an
archive of the war. I argue instead that these aesthetic projects should be understood as an archive of madness.

As I conclude the dissertation, my conclusion, *In the Time of an Unstable Archive*, brings the dissertation to the present moment. Here I discuss the sudden proliferation of museum reopenings; the construction of new museums; and, the planning of future museums of Lebanese history. These projects are occurring under the auspices of the Lebanese state in collaboration with western European non-governmental organizations, as well as through the formed armed wings of various confessions. Independently stewarded, and committed to different narratives of Lebanon’s recent past and imagined futures, the explosion of attempts to create modern archives of national history sublimates ongoing political tensions into contemporary institutions which support competing projects of nation-(re)building. Still, the tension between state and other partisan archival agendas is not a new development. My research for this chapter has unearthed similar national and partisan archivization efforts from the pre-war era. Situating Lebanon’s compulsive drive to archive as part of a longer history, I ask whether the idiom of madness will continue to be the discursive condition of the nation-state in tumult.
Chapter 1: “The Troubled Traffic Between the Psychic Body and the Body Politic”

“Elle se souvient de son passé. Elle revit les moments qui l’ont marquée, ce qui a compté et va tracer la trame de son histoire, le fil conducteur de sa découverte d’elle-même et des autres. Peut-être pourra-t-elle, par cette analyse, découvrir le sens de la tragédie de son pays; peut-être arrivera-t-elle à la ligne de démarcation, à cette séparation absurde créée par la folie des hommes, ce monceau de ruines qu’il faut chercher à reconstruire.” — Evelyne Accad, Coquelicot du massacre

“La conscience nationale […] ne sera en tout état de cause qu’une forme sans contenu, fragile, grossière. Les failles que l’on y découvre expliquent amplement la facilité avec laquelle, dans les jeunes pays indépendants, on passe de la nation à l’ethnie, de l’État à la tribu.” — Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth

“In the historical bracket that preceded the eruption of the war,” renowned Lebanese novelist Ilyas Khuri has claimed, “there was no Lebanese novel per se, though there were great writers and great works of fiction.” In fact, Khuri goes so far as to say that “the Lebanese novel was only born during the [1975-1990] war” (Khuri 2006, 7, bold letters in original). In other words, Lebanon’s political contingency necessitated an aesthetic flexibility – one which would simultaneously preserve some of the hallmarks of modern Arabic literature (the tradition of the short story, or the oral and written qasida or maqama, the prose poem) while finding new languages through which to express tradition-altering experience.

Himself one of Lebanon’s most productive writers both during and after the war, Khuri’s own writing would index his personal acts of negotiation as he sought a form suitable to narrate Lebanon’s predicament. Though with room for literary license, his art imitated his life: Khuri had been a member of the Palestinian resistance group Fatah in Jordan, and then founder and editor of al-Mulhaq, a weekly cultural supplement to the Lebanese daily newspaper Al-Nabar (Lalami 2008, 1

The title of this chapter comes from Homi Bhabha’s Foreword to Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth (xxi)

Accad (1988), 19. Translation: “She remembered her past. She envisioned the moments that marked her, what mattered, and what traced the web of her story, the thread of her self-discovery and that of others. Perhaps through this analysis, she would be able to uncover the meaning of her country’s tragedy; perhaps she would arrive at the demarcation line, that absurd separation created by the folly of men, that heap of ruins she must try to reconstruct” (2006, 18).

Fanon (2002), 145. Translation: “…[N]ational consciousness is nothing but a crude, empty, fragile shell. The cracks in it explain how easy it is for young independent countries to switch back from nation to ethnic group and from state to tribe…” (2004, 97)

While Khuri’s writings on the Lebanese civil war are now canonical, several scholars have drawn attention to works by women who wrote about the Lebanese civil war concurrent with Khuri. In *War’s Other Voices*, miriam cooke calls several of these women “the Beirut Decentrists.” Whereas male literary output written on, and during, the Lebanese civil war often centered on “strategy, ideology and violence,” “angst,” and “revolution,” cooke explains, the Beirut Decentrists offered a different narrative of war (3). Uninterested in the particularities of competing ideologies or confessionalism, the latter viewed the conflict as an ignoble war, one in which “the loss of control, reason and logic” in the name of politics seemed hardly justifiable even when these politics were described with the most prolific of rhetorical flourishes (26). As such, “regardless of confession and political persuasion, [they] wrote of the dailiness of war,” and of “abandoned loneliness” with prose that “reflected the mood of the war and the emergence of a feminist consciousness” (3). Placing emphasis on the daily lived experience of war from the perspective of a gendered demographic largely barred from taking an active role in Lebanese politics, their writings would enjoy little in the way of immediate popularity.

Of the Decentrists I discuss in this chapter, Ghada al-Samman’s work did not circulate internationally until after the war ended despite her prolific wartime production. While her Syrian-born status and the contentious nature of the relationship between Lebanon and Syria may explain

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4 As one of several innovators of the Lebanese novel, his writing has garnered distinctions such as the shortlist for the Best Translated Book Award (*for Yalo* in 2009) and the Prix du Roman Arabe (*Comme si elle dormait [As Though She Were Sleeping]*) in 2008.
the failure of her literature to become popular in Lebanon closer to the time of its publication, her decision to publicize her romantic relationship with the assassinated Palestinian author, activist and icon Ghassan Kanafani after his death may have raised ire from many in the region, likely overshadowing the powerful nature of her commentary on Lebanese confessionalism and inequity in her literature. Etel Adnan’s novel *Sitt Marie Rose* (1978) was published in France, and was banned in the predominantly Christian sector of East Beirut and in a number of other Arab countries. While the ban reflected objections to the supposedly anti-Maronite and pro-Palestinian tone of her novel, it was also an illustration of the very prejudice she condemned in her novel: the rejection of a woman’s political voice. For her part, Hanan al-Shaykh’s explicit discussion of taboo topics such as female sexuality and gender identity in her literature was an obstacle to her ability to publish in her home country. In an interview with the United Kingdom-based newspaper, *The Guardian*, Hanan Al-Shaykh told journalist Maya Jaggi that she had taken her manuscript for *Hikayat Zahra* to nine publishers, all of whom rejected it. Yet while al-Shaykh’s writing was considered salacious in her country of origin, once translated into English, it became celebrated in Western classrooms teaching feminist international literature (Salem, 213).

This is not to say that male writers’ experiences at the frontlines of Lebanon’s military and political battles rendered their writing so politically-invested (in an orthodox sense) as to fail the convey the subjective experience of war. As Nouri Gana observes, even Ilyas Khuri’s literature (particularly *Abwab al-madina*) suggested the traumatic fragmentation of political and ideological meaning, as it ceded to a narrative of loss, mourning, and trauma (Gana in Buelens et al, 78). Rashid al-Da’if, arguably the other most prolific and well-known author of the Lebanese civil war, was also

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5 Ghada al-Samman was roundly criticized for published love letters Kanafani wrote to her prior to his assassination. She published the letters in 1993, nearly two decades after Kanafani was assassinated (Jadaliyya).
6 Evelyne Accad also notes that al-Shaykh’s work did not initially circulate much within Lebanon, a fact which she attributes in part to the low levels of literacy in the Shi’i community from which al-Shaykh originated; it is the Shi’i community whom, Accad presumes, would have been most immediately interested in her writing (Accad 1990, 44).
politically active during the war. A Maronite from northern Lebanon who nevertheless lived in the predominantly leftist and Muslim West Beirut during the war, he was an active member of the Lebanese Communist Party famous for his surrealist explorations of truth, narrative, memory and history (Amyuni 1996, 177; Al-Da’if 2001, 5). In al-Da’if’s novel, *Fushah mustahdaab bayna al-nu’as wa al-nawm* (1986) [*Passage to Dusk*; trans. 2001], the narrator tumbles through a cyclical tale of how he attempted to cross the infamous “Green Line” dividing Beirut’s eastern and western halves. He has been injured in a bomb blast and is at death’s doorstep, but persists in his narration of how he arrived at the condition of being *bayna al-nu’as wa al-nawm*, or between drowsiness and sleep – a *barzakh* condition not unlike the one Ibn al-‘Arabi describes as neither death nor sleep (al-Hakim, 192).

The incident the narrator recounts is semi-autobiographical. Al-Da’if himself suffered a devastating injury during a bomb blast in West Beirut. As Anton Shammas writes in the foreword to the English translation of al-Da’if’s novel, seeking treatment in a West Beirut hospital could easily have cost al-Da’if his life. Though *Passage to Dusk* has, at its core, an acknowledgement of the absurdity of one’s life being determined by another’s politics, the protagonist’s personal relationship to, and investment in, Lebanese politics nevertheless foregrounds his narrative. By contrast, the Decentrists write from the perspective that politics have altogether collapsed. Indeed, the sociopolitical position women writers occupied, and their resultant narratives of quintessential truths about the daily experience of life at war has rightly earned the Decentrists a reputation as part of a second wave of Middle Eastern feminists (cooke 1987; Accad 1990; Hanna 2016; Ragin 2019). In this chapter, however, I submit that the early-war novels written by al-Samman, Adnan and al-Shaykh should also be understood as the first literary articulations of a specific political critique: that of Lebanon’s madness. Between 1975 and 1980, these authors will help introduce what will become an idiom of choice to describe the war and its legacy for decades to come.
Al-Samman’s semi-autobiographical novel, *Kawabis Bayrut* (1976) [*Beirut Nightmares*; trans. 1997]; Etel Adnan’s work of historical fiction, *Sitt Marie Rose* (1978) [*Sitt Marie Rose*; trans. 1982]; and, Al-Shaykh’s *Hikayat Zahra* (1980) [*The Story of Zahra*; trans. 1986] feature female protagonists who report that the sights and sounds of early war Beirut recall “the chorus in a Greek play telling the story of a city stricken by the plague of madness” (BN, 63). While at war, Lebanon roasts beneath a peculiar sun whose rays are so hot that they “drive people off their sanity” (SZ, 29), and which bake a “wicked” quality into the air, one which smells of a “madness [that] is like a hurricane … drawing circles of fire in this country” (SMR, 98). The contagious insanity carried in water, air, and fire nestles in the souls of the warring militias: men “[emerge] from the fields of madness carrying with them … the harvest of blood” (BN, 66), “moved by a […] mad love … seek[ing] a primitive and absolute genocide” (SMR, 66). In opposition to the grandiose delusions of the combatants that the war will be “clean and definitive” with “a victor and a vanquished” (SMR, 33), the protagonists fear an impending apocalypse. Though there is no reference to the civil war of 1958 which the state decreed had ended *la ghalib la maghlub* – with neither victor nor vanquished – the narrator scoffs at the idea that Lebanon’s second civil war will find a clear solution.

To varying degrees, the novels suggest that the roots of this madness lie in the rapidly spreading cracks which the French colonial mandate inserted in Lebanon’s mosaic. Etel Adnan and Hanan al-Skaykh, for instance, make this point through a twinning of narratives – one of the history of this region of the Middle East and the other of a fictionalized protagonist – demonstrate how the internalization of certain racialized political narratives and collective memories during and after the mandate compelled individuals to acts of violence.8 Oriented more toward then- present-day 1976,

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8 *Beirut Nightmares* will hereafter be denoted by the initials “BN”; *The Story of Zahra* will hereafter be denoted by the initials “SZ”; and, *Sitt Marie Rose* will hereafter be denoted by the initials “SMR.”

al-Samman harshly satirizes the illogic of adhering to confessionalism in the post-mandate era, despite its clear failure as evidenced by the outbreak of war, twice.

While madness is discernible in the combatants and the bystanders who support their ideologies, suggest the narrators, there is a second form of madness at work which impacts the female protagonists in the novels. This second form of madness can be found at the crucible of patriarchal and political violence, as expressed in the first epigraph with which I open this chapter, and is expressed in terms of “la folie des hommes”: or, their refusal to accept “the other’s difference” and an equally stubborn understanding of nationalism in masculinist terms with “ownership and possession as final goals” (Accad 1990, 38). Elaborating on masculinist nationalism and its consequences, Michael Johnson’s study of the concept of honor in Lebanese society establishes that the “romantic nationalist” ideologies, such as those espoused by several of the militias active in the early-war period, relied upon an organizing structure which elevated the figure of the patriarch and subjugated women. In other words, the “submission to the ethnic group and its leadership” which made militarization possible also established a violent moral code with which to subjugate and control members of the group (Johnson, 201).

The ultimate paradox of these novels is that they all raise the question of whether the “madwoman” can speak. This is not to suggest that the protagonists in all three novels are mad in the same sense – or that they are, in fact, uniformly mad. Rather, I offset the word madwoman in quotations marks to reflect precisely the range of madnesses exemplified by the protagonists. Al-Samman’s main character, for instance, has a brief encounter with madness but emerges from it whole, able to sound a warning about that which has threatened both her sanity and her life. Adnan’s protagonist is not, in objective terms, mad, but has been thus labeled by the men in her community who see her autonomous political thought and action as a threat to the confessional code, and who ultimately murder her. And, finally, al-Shaykh’s protagonist suffers from psychosis prior to and throughout the war – up until her murder at the hands of a sniper. Are the (self-) declared
madwomen’s denunciations of Lebanon’s men simply reducible to unintelligible ravings? What kinds of archives do these accounts leave?

At the outset of the war, these texts propose, madness is an “upheaval in the status of knowledge” – a consequence of having stood in the gap between sanity and insanity (Felman, 12). It is a madness that keeps the female protagonists from becoming totally mad like their male counterparts, to paraphrase Rumi. It is a consequence of having stood in the gap – in a gendered, barzakh of the postcolony.

**The Postcolony’s Ailment**

Syrian-born journalist, essayist, and novelist Ghada al-Samman was born in 1942 to a family of intellectuals. Her mother was a writer, and her father a professor who became Minister of Education. In 1964, al-Samman moved to Lebanon to pursue a master’s degree at the American University of Beirut. While she was out of the country, Syria’s new Ba’athist government, sentenced her to imprisonment in absentia for leaving the country without permission. She spent the next few years living between London and Beirut, working as a journalist. Whereas al-Samman’s pre-war creative writing oeuvre consisted largely of collections of short stories and poems – genres intimately known and practiced throughout the Arabic-speaking Middle East – the war acted as a catalyst that shifted, if temporarily, her preferred form of narrative to the novel. She authored three books on, and during, the Lebanese civil war: *Bayrut 75* [*Beirut 75*] in 1975, *Kawabis Bayrut* [*Beirut Nightmares*] in 1976, and *Laylat al-milyar* [*The Night of the First Billion*] in 1986.

Al-Samman’s war trilogy was influenced by her interest in surrealism – specifically, the theatre of the absurd, of which she had been a student while in Beirut. European post-World War II

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9 In the poem “From Self to Self” Rumi asks, “What madness now keeps me from becoming totally mad?” (Rumi, 1997).
10 See Nancy N. Roberts’ “Translator’s Introduction” to al-Samman’s *Beirut Nightmares*.
11 Kifah Hanna has argued that a fourth novel should be considered part of her war-specific oeuvre. *Sabra tanakariyyah li-l-mawta* (*Masquerade for the Dead*), published in Arabic in 2003, explores the aftermath of the war and its legacy. Hanna writes that the al-Samman’s Beirut Trilogy should be considered a “Beirut Tetralogy” instead, as this last addition marks the true end to her novelistic writing on the war, as opposed to the 1986 text.
existentialists such as Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett have been credited with developing the subgenre, known to present highly surrealist plots or to ventriloquize incisive political commentary through protagonists such as outcasts and wandering ruffians. Absurdist writers often critiqued political ideologies, such as fascism, whose adherents had visited destruction upon the globe (Hornby 2015). Their protagonists dwelled on the fringes of society, offering witty commentary on the helplessness of the human condition through bizarre, and sometimes comedic, wordplay. Absurdism was a means through which to express a fear of a violence threatening to be apocalyptic.

But al-Samman’s brand of absurdism went a step further by incorporating madness: a combination best exemplified in her second novel, Beirut Nightmares. The novel is set over the course of several days in the winter of 1975-6 during the Hotels War.12 The protagonist, Ghada, is holed up in an apartment building directly in the snipers’ line of fire. Compelled both to serve as witness and to maintain her sanity, Ghada begins a journal in which she describes what she sees, thinks and dreams in language evoking the real, the surreal and the fantastic all at once. Her prose is confident in its assumption of an eventual audience: her entries are personal but occasionally suggest a second person “you,” the reader. “There are no weapons [in this house] at all,” she writes, before adding parenthetically: “Note: this isn’t an invitation to murder me!” (BN, 5). The cover art to the eighth edition of the Arabic text features a coffin, somewhat improbably bent in half, lying on a chaise-longue. It has been anthropomorphized to suggest a person reclining on a psychoanalyst’s couch, their legs stretched out in front of them, in the middle of recounting the strange turn of events that have brought them to the limbic state between life and death.

In Ghada’s writing, a city that was once the destination of dreams has been transformed into an “infernal place” (BN, 115). The neighborhood has become funereal: “flocks of starving ravens …

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12 Al-Samman offers few temporal markers in this text, but her narrator, Ghada, states that the war has been ongoing for eight months at the time of her writing (BN, 165), which, should we take Ghada’s time of writing as equivalent to al-Samman’s, was eight months prior to the book’s publication in 1976. The Hotels district was under siege from October 1965 until April 1976 (Fisk).
[descend] upon the area to scavenge for treasures among the corpses of the slain,” and, the surrounding “charred neighborhoods” are “little more than open graveyards” (BN, 303). When not besieged by bombs and gunfire, the streets emanate a silence so profound that Ghada becomes desperate to locate signs of life. Even the air above the graveyard-like city pulses with madness: missiles which crisscross the Beirut sky always seem to be on the verge of crashing through her apartment, evidence that even “the elements had gone mad” (BN, 1).13 The voices of the militiamen in the street below mix with the cries of animals, “like the chorus in a Greek play telling the story of a city stricken by the plague of madness” (BN, 61).14 Yet it is the banality of madness, not its spectacularism, which make this insanity so frightening. Madness, Ghada writes, has contaminated even that which sustains life: farmers emerge “from the fields of madness carrying with them the fruits of the bitter summer season of Beirut 1975 - the harvest of blood” (BN, 66),15 and passers-by become “drunk from the spring poisoned with the powder of madness” (BN, 63).16

Al-Samman’s surrealist absurdism is perhaps most deftly marshaled in a passage in which Ghada explicitly refers to the Lebanese confessional system bequeathed by the French Mandate. Ghada writes that she dreamt of a man who supervises a government-run storage locker which had been converted into a morgue to accommodate the rising death toll. As the volume of corpses begins to exceed the amount of available space in the locker, the supervisor tries to develop criteria upon which to determine which bodies to accept, and which to leave to the elements. Even in death, the corpses know the rules of Lebanon’s political game: “I’m the nephew of the Sunni Muslim minister,” one shouts. “If you don’t let me in, my uncle will relieve you of your job!” Another: “And I’m the nephew of the Christian Maronite minister. If you don’t let me in, you’ll be violating the principle of equal representation among the sects and of allowing corpses to be seated along sectarian lines! …

13 “…ka’anna ‘awamil al-cabi’a qad ‘usihat il-junun …” (7)
14 “…mithla kawrus iqliqi fi masrahya tarwi hikayat madina dharabaha ta’un al-junun.” (50)
15 “… wa kharaja al-rijal min haql al-junun hamilun ma’hum mawsim sayf bayrut 75 al-har …” (55)
16 This portion is not in the original Arabic version.
My uncle will have your head!” (BN, 222). The din climbs as the other corpses speak: a Shiite, a Druze, an Orthodox Christian, a Jew, a member of a powerful clan, the son of a militia leader, an entertainment icon, a mafioso, a corrupt election attendant, an American, and a wealthy man attempting to bribe his way in. The supervisor responds in the time-worn tradition of the Lebanese bureaucrat: asking for identity cards and honoring bribes, he reminds the corpses that “This is a government-run locker, mind you, so everything has to be done the proper way!” (BN, 223).

Ghada’s dream is an acerbic autopsy of her diseased polis. She excoriatingly caricatures the self-interested corruption of the Lebanese political and economic elite while they masquerade as representatives of a modern democracy. In the absurdist vein, she describes a chaotic and anarchic landscape upon which the forces of hell have been unleashed, and yet over which humans still seem to think they can exercise a modicum of control. The clamor of dead souls attempting to enforce the rules of the material world in the afterlife, championing the very system that led to their deaths, is nothing if not absurd. This is a culture in the barzakh of the postcolony – one not yet freed from the colonial systems and practices, yet no longer officially a part of a colonial order. This is a culture in “a simulacrum of life […] unmoored from its bearings and condemned to live among the ruins of its system of reference” (Pandolfo 2018, 6-7).

Al-Samman’s novel offers a literary gloss on the lasting damage of what many Lebanese writers and scholars have decried as a legacy of Lebanese tribalism and in what we may call the postcolony, per Achille Mbembe’s formulation. Mbembe’s prose in On the Postcolony echoes, in its very definition, some of the essential attributes of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s barzakh, Pandolfo’s understanding of its psychic analogue, and my interpretation of the political ontology of both. Evoking both a temporal and spatial dimension of the postcolony, Mbembe writes that the postcolony “cannot be

\textsuperscript{17} Here Stefania Pandolfo glosses the language and ideas in a speech given by Frantz Fanon at the first conference of Black Writers and Artists in Paris in 1956. The proceedings from this conference were subsequently printed as “Racisme et culture” in Présence africaine (June – November 1956).
reduced to a succession of moments and events” but rather should be understood as “instances, moments and events [which] are, as it were, on top of one another, inside one another” not in a relationship of embedding, but “a space of proliferation” (242). As an entity of multiplicity, palimpsest, cyclicality, and proliferation, the postcolony moves “in several directions at once” able to “occupy a period that, at the same time, has been, is not yet, is no longer, is becoming” (241). Its essential irreducibility to a period (e.g.: of a post-colonial moment); the tendency to dwell simultaneously in the past, present and future; and the creation of a space of proliferation causes the postcolony’s subjects to become, as Pandolfo described, consigned to a position of liminality and disarticulation.

The effect of ontological and existential multiplicity is to make the postcolony a site of the “troubled traffic between the psychic body and the body politic” – a dynamic site of psycho-political translation from within a simultaneously collapsing and self-reproducing vortex of space and time.18 “[T]he collapse of worlds, their fluctuations and tremblings,” Mbembe writes, are a reflection of “time as lived […] in its multiplicity and simultaneities” but, in turn encourage “the dispersal of language and its collapse into the silence of the void” yielding a distorted language (8, emphasis in the original; 179). Interpreting Mbembe’s reading of the postcolony in terms of the barzakh – and the Lebanese postcolony’s barzakh in particular – I understand the kind of madness to which the protagonists in these novels gesture to be a consequence of the latter. That language has disintegrated, and the primary means of expression has become violence is indicative of this psycho-political translation.

To wit: in The Story of Zahra, Hanan al-Shaykh includes a fictional character (the protagonist’s uncle) who is a member of the real-life Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). The party, founded by politician Anton Saadeh in Beirut in 1932, ascended to prominence on a platform of resistance and reintegration. With support across Lebanon and Syria, the SSNP’s original platform had been

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18 Homi Bhabha in Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth (xxi). It is this quote which provides the title for this chapter.
predicated upon the premise that the French- and British-occupied territories should be integrated into an anti-colonial, anti-sectarian and anti-Zionist Syria. Though the SSNP was unable to overthrow French and British rule and enact a Syrian renaissance, they remained active in the post-Mandate era, secretly organizing against the Maronite head of Lebanon’s newly independent government. Saadeh was executed in 1949, a loss which forced his party underground until the 1958 civil war and another failed coup attempt against a sitting Maronite president in 1961. The SSNP would be among the primary warring factions in 1975.

The fictional representation of the party and Lebanon’s pre-1975 history in al-Shaykh’s novel is illustrative of the relationship between the postcolony’s barzakh and the madness it spawns. Al-Shaykh constructs her idiom of madness by narrating the political history of contemporary Lebanon alongside and through the parallel fictional history of the protagonist, Zahra, and her family. Between the 1958 civil war and renewed conflict in 1975, an unnamed female cousin of Zahra’s is sent to a psychiatric asylum for unexplained mental and emotional distress. Reaching even further back in the region’s history to the Palestinian nakba, Zahra’s family history once again implies a connection between political developments in areas neighboring post-independence Lebanon and insanity. During the nakba, Zahra recalls, her aunt went mad; the creation of the state of Israel produced a new border arbitrarily separating her from her daughter for the rest of their lives, sending the aunt on an endless trek through the borderlands in her grief.

Zahra’s uncle Hashem acts as a bridge between the 1958 civil war (as well as the 1961 coup) and the 1975 civil war. In fact, when we encounter Hashem, the 1975-1990 war is only a few years away. As an active member of the SSNP Hashem’s anti-colonialist anger is sublimated into dysfunction and then insanity. Hashem has become disillusioned with the SSNP and his homeland after Saadeh’s death to the point of becoming irrational.19 “[M]y commitment to the party changed its

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19 This appears to be another element of semi-autobiography in fiction: in al-Shaykh’s interview for The Guardian, she noted that two of her three half-brothers were members of the same Syrian nationalist political party to which the fictional
form,” he recalls. “I can still remember how I burst out crying and rushed to all the party meetings, to all the regional centers, asking why they hadn’t set the world ablaze… How could we still breathe? Was not Saadeh the party, the party Saadeh? Saadeh was murdered, the party was therefore murdered” (SZ, 48). The national question began to take a backseat to neurosis and Hashem began to dissociate. Consumed by anger, he observed himself, as if out-of-body, as he “threaten[ed], point[ed] an accusing finger” at his former co-conspirators, accusing them of abandoning Saadeh, Lebanon and him. “The words would pour out of me, propelled by my saliva”; he was “like a grenade ready to explode at any moment” (SZ, 49).

Hashem insists that he was not the only aspiring revolutionary to fall victim to the political in-fighting washing over the fledgling state: the rhetoric fueling political actors during that era constituted “powerful currents [which] drew me, as they did most of Lebanon” (SZ, 49). The SSNP, he tells us, was unnerved by his zealotry sent him into exile in an unnamed country in West Africa. “Some thought me unhinged,” Hashem concedes (SZ, 50).20 While in exile, Hashem’s nationalist vitriol downgraded from a boil to a simmer, only to be reawakened when his adolescent niece, Zahra, began corresponding with him via letter from Beirut. As she was his only connection to Lebanon, his letters to her were “ten pages long” at their shortest, which, as Hashem acknowledges, “showed how disturbed I was” (SZ, 67).21

By the time al-Shaykh’s novel arrives at the second outbreak of war in Beirut, Zahra’s brother, Ahmad, has joined a Shi’ite militia and is on the verge of insanity, himself. Yet another post-independence outbreak of war, as Ilyas Khuri wrote, made evident that “time had not lapsed, that

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20 The original Arabic reads "majnun" (HZ, 55).
21 Here, the original Arabic of Hashem’s self-appraisal is a bit softer than the language of insanity: “fi hala qalaqa” (HZ, 76) suggesting his unwillingness to see his behavior in terms as stark as those in which his peers saw it. My translation.
there was no past, that the present was a mere reproduction of a past that refuses to fold” (Khuri 2006, 6). Ahmad’s militancy caused their father to avoid Ahmad “as if [he] carried some contagion” (SZ, 138). For her part, Zahra described her brother as perpetually in a propaganda- and drug-induced haze (SZ, 163). His impassioned defenses of the war contradict each other from day to day, reflecting the shifting alliances and priorities among the warring militias as ideology ceded to opportunism. On one day, Zahra says, her brother will claim that he fights to protect Shia interests; another, on another, it is to defeat American and Israeli imperialism and Maronite anti-Arab sentiment. The next it is a fight in defense of the Palestinians; but later, it could just as well be to defend the Shi’a against the Palestinians (SZ, 165-166). Inconsistent to the point of incoherence, the only thing about which Ahmad was ultimately certain was that if the war were to end, he would lose his sense of direction and purpose.

This was the banality of madness that made the war so frightening to its early-war female narrators. No political purpose or ideology could explain what had simply become a bloody fight no one would concede. Lebanese “politics” had gone from a pre-mandate system governed by “traditional elites [who] anchor[ed] their legitimacy in tribalism and tradition to perpetuate their seat in power,” as Ilyas Khuri claimed, to “a new form of colonialism” after the mandate, under which “wars of identity are waged,” to say nothing of the colonial interference in between (Khuri 2006, 7; 11-12). In this context, Zahra begins to see her brother as but the latest in her family to descend into madness – although most critics writing on this text have limited their observations on madness to that which Zahra evidences. Their relationship transitions from one of siblings to that of a doctor and her patient: “I would nod in agreement when confronted with Ahmad’s very real agitation as if administering a local anesthetic to soothe one part of him, even though the effect always wore off quickly” (SZ, 166).

The decades of turmoil in the postcolony – which Mbembe and Khuri theorize, and of which al-Shaykh offers a familial chronicle – also finds expression in the fiction of Etel Adnan. Born
in 1925 to a Greek Orthodox mother and a Syrian Sunni father, Adnan was no stranger to the tensions of regional sectarianism. In 1973, she wrote Jébu: Suivi de l’Express Beyrouth-enfer, which, like al-Samman’s Beirut 75, was retroactively heralded as having predicted the war. In 1976, the same year al-Samman published Beirut Nightmares, Adnan penned a collection of poems with a similarly urgent aesthetic: L’apocalypse Arab. The volume’s prose was characterized by a highly unconventional aesthetic which combined symbols with words (as if to suggest the collapsing of the symbolic order of speech) as well as onomatopoeia and disjointed sequences of violence. The intensity of violence, she seemed to say, was insufficient to stifle the need to bear witness, however stilting, but would nonetheless trigger madness.

In her next book, the novel Sitt Marie Rose (1978), Adnan described the real-life kidnapping, torture, and murder of Marie Rose Boulos, a Syrian immigrant married to a Lebanese citizen, who taught mentally challenged Palestinian children at a school in Beirut. Boulos was killed in 1977 by Maronite militias for her support for the Palestinian refugees and fida’iyn (Cooke 1987; Foster 1995). In Adnan’s fictional account, Boulos is recast as a Lebanese Maronite who taught deaf-mute schoolchildren in the Sabra refugee camp and “directed an organization that worked for [the Palestinian] cause” (SMR, 69-70). The young men with whom the fictional Marie Rose was raised have now become militiamen motivated by a racial animus against Palestinians and Syrians. The militia see Marie Rose’s support of “Palestinian terrorists” (SMR, 68) as a supreme violation of her natal community’s religious, social, and political kinship.

It is this racialized nationalism which provokes the unforgiving tone of the anonymous and omniscient female narrator. The Maronite men denigrate Palestinians and Syrians in the name of a Lebanon they wish to see as more European than Middle Eastern – which she interprets as a sign of their internalized colonial logic. Thus, they describe their Syrian neighbors as “simple,” backward, provincial – and, taking recourse to a familiar narrative, understand themselves (as Lebanese) to be “the first Europeans they [the Syrians] had ever seen. Excuse me, I mean Lebanese” (SMR, 5). The
language of the militiamen here contain thinly-veiled echoes of the ideology of Maronite political leader and Kata’ib founder Pierre Gemayel, who insisted both that the Lebanese “race” be understood as distinct from the Arab “race,” and that the Lebanese (as he defined them) should be understood to be inherently Christian, and therefore in closer proximity to Europe than to Arabs, who Gemayel considered uniformly Muslim (Entelis, 79; 111). Even in political terms, the Kata’ib party’s founder insisted upon a Lebanese proximity to Europe, specifically France: the relationship would be a “fundamental condition for Lebanon’s social and economic reorganization, moral and political progress…” (Entelis, 55).22

The fictional Marie Rose, like the narrator, understands all too well the nature of the affinity her childhood playmates have for Europe – and the consequences of this affinity. Reflecting upon her childhood with the very boys who would eventually murder her, she recalls that they had been “exalted by the Crusades”:

Mounir identified with Frederick Barbarossa because he was himself slightly red-haired. He bitterly regretted, as though it had happened recently, that Saladin had conquered Jerusalem. It caused him actual pain. The Crusades excited all of them. Every year, those French priests led a procession in which all the students of the Christian schools dressed in white tunics with square read crosses sewn front and back. […] They carried palm branches through the streets of Beirut singing ‘I am a Christian. This is my glory, my hope, my support…’ The next day at school they were proud of having defeated the Infidels. They dreamed of a Christianity with helmets and boots, riding its horses into the clash of arms, spearing Moslem foot-soldiers like so many St. Georges with so many dragons. (SMR, 48)

In a reenacted mythology complete with costumes, processions, and the bitterness of inherited generational memory, the Maronites rehearse the proverbial clash of civilizations; the one with which they identify, European and Christian, the one to which they are opposed represented by darker-skinned Arabs and Muslim. More than just lore, these narratives of identity infused even young boys with an acute sense of pain, glory and hard-won battles. Passion plays such as these were intended to cement the imagined Maronite community in an even older imagined past: “The

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22 Entelis is quoting from Pierre Gemayel’s words in Connaissance des Kataeb, p. 89.
seventeenth-century Maronite patriarch Istifan Douaihi [...] had identified what he thought was a Byzantine origin for his community,” historian Michael Johnson writes, and asserted that Maronite roots lay in the Mardaite tribe of modern-day Turkey. He believed the Mardaites had been “settled there [near Mount Lebanon] in the seventh century by the eastern Christian empire as a bulwark against the Arab Umayyad caliphate” (Johnson, 144). Tracing this genealogy from amidst the second Crusades, Tannus al-Shidyaq built upon this narrative, establishing an origin story which was ultimately mistaken, but nevertheless permanent, leading to the Maronite conviction that they were the legatees of “frontier fighters against Islam, a claim reflected, for example, in the name of [a Maronite] militia in the 1970s and 1980s: liwa al-marada or the ‘Mardaite Brigade’” (ibid). Narratives such as these were so all-consuming, suggests the fictional Marie Rose, that imagining any other identity was impossible. She recalls telling a young Mounir decades earlier that “he must have been the most ridiculous thing in the world,” marching in the Crusader procession, considering that he was “not a foreigner. You don’t come from France or England. You could never be a Crusader,” his eyes brimmed with tears as he asked “Are you sure? [...] Then what am I going to become?” (SMR, 48). The freighted question of “becoming” was as much rooted in a concern about Lebanon’s future, as in myths from its past.

It is the necessity of national belonging, Adnan suggests, which motivated the campaigns of torture and massacre common during the early-war period, including that which claimed the life of Marie Rose. The extremism which incubated within the most radical members of the armed wings of the confessions reached full expression from 1975-1978 when graveyard desecrations, torture and infamous ID card murders constituted some of the primary repertoires of violence (Johnson; Labaki and Abou Rjeily). The initial years of the conflict also saw a disproportionate number of large-scale massacres, including the 1975 Ain al-Rummaneh “bus massacre” which, for some, officially began the war; “Black Saturday” of 1975 in Beirut; the 1976 massacres in Karantina, Damour, Tel el-Zaatar and Aishiyeh; and the 1978 massacre in Ehden (ibid). These deadly but also highly symbolic forms of
violence – particularly sexual mutilation as well as the defacing and destruction of houses of worship and graves – were, in their own right, speech acts asserting the validity (or lack thereof) of claims made upon Lebanon, whether articulated in the past, present, or for the future (Johnson, 61). But the language in which this was communicated, the narrator in *Sitt Marie Rose* writes, was “sadistic.” “Every hour the radio reports blindings, castrations, nylon bags full of cut-up bodies thrown onto public squares, death by kitchen knives, a disturbing surgery, torture in a cemetery” (SMR, 16). In fact, the protagonists of one of the novels in Chapter 2, written after the war ended, will reveal that he participated in one such torture session. In utter dismay at the intensity of the early war violence, the narrator of *Sitt Marie Rose* suggests that the militiamen’s’ bodies “be exposed to daylight or examined under a microscope.”

There are superimposed layers of memory crammed in their brains as their dead cities are crammed under the hills. This civil war is a laser which has hit the center of their identities. It’s a nuclear explosion, not from a bomb, not from the exterior, but from the very heart of their race’s memory. (SMR, 40)

The millennia between ancient forebears and their present-day legatees; the superimposed layers of memory of the Crusades reenacted centuries later; the mythologized dead cities of Phoenician civilization kept alive in memory have created a kinetic energy which reaches its expression in the violence of the “pathologized” militiamen (Houssouba, 143). Like Ghada in *Beirut Nightmares*, the narrator observes helplessly as a “madness … like a hurricane” destroys Lebanon (SMR, 98).

**Beirut as Psychiatric Hospital**

Further dramatizing the dire nature of the sociopolitical situation in post-independence Lebanon, the authors’ novels specifically figure madness through the institution of the psychiatric hospital. In her novel *Beirut 75*, published months before the war began, for instance al-Samman

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23 In the original: “La folie est semblable à un ouragan et sa démarche est circulaire. Et tous, comme nous le voyons, tournent en rond, tracent des cercles de feu dans ce pays exigu devenu une arène fermée…” (104).
writes of a fiery Beirut into which a patient of a psychiatric hospital had escaped. Farah, an emigrant new to the city of opportunity, had been driven insane by the moral destitution of those who controlled his career prospects, and ultimately, his fate. His insanity develops under conditions which are meant as “allegorical fragments that reflect the societal insanity of Lebanon,” including economic, sexual and emotional abuse (Meyer, 149). His words are the last the reader will read, the last before war begins: “When I ran away from the hospital,” he recalled, the city was burning. “[T]he first thing I did was to steal the sign at the entrance that said ‘Hospital for the Mentally Ill.’ I took it to the city entrance, removed the sign saying ‘Beirut,’ and planted the other one in its place. I burst out laughing” (Al-Samman 1995, 115). In substituting one place-name for another, Farah heralds the inversion of the spaces of (in)sanity: an inversion which will reach fuller expression with the declared arrival of war. Though Beirut had long since consumed him and others like him, its populace had been content to banish him along with his protestations (the symptoms of madness) to spaces of confinement out of the public eye. Then, as the city edged toward self-destruction, the underbelly Beirut wished to hide exploded the boundaries of its confines.

Al-Samman’s pre-war invocation of the psychiatric hospital will recur in her early-war text, *Beirut Nightmares*. In one passage, the protagonist, Ghada, prepares a cigarette filter designed to neutralize the effect of the nicotine. Suddenly, she bursts out laughing, “Who was I trying to save my lungs for anyway?” she asks herself (BN, 109). “For the bullets? Hadn’t Beirut itself turned into one big madhouse?” And, if so, “why all this discrimination between residents of mental institutions and people who’d made their homes behind barricades and bolted doors?” (BN, 109). Here, as throughout her journaling, Ghada implies that the men with guns and those who parrot the rhetoric of their ideology had become no different from the pre-war mentally ill formerly hidden behind institutional walls. The population of the insane was rapidly expanding.

But what would it mean for an entire city – an intangible, immaterial site – to become a psychiatric asylum, a single edifice? Etel Adnan’s literary rendering of the story of Marie Rose
suggests an answer: “I went to [Sabra refugee] camp’s insane asylum,” Marie Rose recounts in the novel (SMR, 51). “On the ground floor, there was a window where children climbed to divert themselves. Three days ago a bomb fell near that room … Three young men were keeping guard to replace the fallen wall. One of them, chilled by melancholy, said to me, ‘We know that we will always be able to go crazy when it becomes unbearable. But them [the asylum patients], they’re already crazy. Where can they go?’” Though neither Marie Rose nor Adnan could have known this at the time, the metaphorical notion that Sabra could be a site of traumatic insanity would be actualized only two years after the book’s publication [see Chapter Three]. In 1982, footage of Palestinian refugees aimlessly roaming the streets of Sabra and Chatila in profound grief and disorientation would loop endlessly on televisions around the world. They were the surviving victims of a massacre led by the Kata’ib and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

The novel’s re-figuring of the refugee camp as a zone of shattered psyches was both an acknowledgement of the xenophobia that already victimized its occupants, and a foreshadowing of annihilation to come. In the literary imagining of the camp, the spaces of sanity and insanity had been inverted: those who had been considered sane would retreat into the asylum and the insane, “les fous,” would flee the influx of a new type of lunatic into the war-torn streets. But it is not only the fate of the wards for which the man at the camp expressed his concern, but for himself, too; the “chill of melancholy” Marie Rose perceived in his voice presaged his own feverish insanity to come, rendering ironic his standing guard over the ruined infrastructure. The relationship of patients and non-patients to the asylum becomes a metaphorical representation of the inversion of the poles of normalcy and sanity in Lebanon. The sane drive the insane from their shelter, simultaneously becoming unbalanced from war while also adapting to war’s insanity, and, in so doing, allowing war

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24 In the original: “J’allais à l’hôpital des fous des camp qui relie Beyrouth à l’aéroport.” (61)
25 In the original: “L’un d’eux, figé dans sa mélancolie, m’a dit: ‘Nous, nous savons au moins que nous pourrons toujours nous réfugier dans la folie quand ce sera insoutenable. Mais eux, les fous, ou voulez-vous qu’ils aillent?’” (61)
to become the new “normal.” Those considered insane before the war would find themselves doubly marginalized. The asylum as location (and even the idea of Lebanon as a land of asylum) has become a zone of danger.

Whereas the psychiatric hospital in al-Shaykh and Adnan’s novels serves a metaphorical and even allegorical function, in Hanan al Shaykh’s *The Story of Zahra*, the hospital takes on a much more literal significance, especially in relation to the gendering of female madness in mid-twentieth century Lebanon. Al-Shaykh was by no means the first woman in the Middle East to write of the literal or metaphoric insanity suffered by women in patriarchal cultures. Novels about young women oppressed by physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse at the hands of men; neglected by a maternal figure; and written off as “mad” had circulated in Middle Eastern women’s literature prior to 1982 and would continue long after. And, to some degree, the novels in this chapter could even be understood as having contributed to a global literary feminist Zeitgeist of the 1970s and 1980s which, broadly speaking, sought to refute the idea that women were innately irrational creatures whose “madness” and neuroses were signs of personal failures, as opposed to symptoms of systematic oppression.26

While several of the Middle Eastern women who wrote about women’s oppression and madness expressed themes that were part of this zeitgeist (particularly insofar as they reinterpreted the madwoman as a tool of critique), their work primarily addressed the specific geopolitical realities of their own national and regional contexts. For example, the two “madwomen” in Jordanian author

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26 In 1972, Phyllis Chesler published *Women and Madness*, in which she illustrated a trend among Anglo-American male psychologists who – following in the footsteps of Sigmund Freud – pathologized “depressive” or “hysterical” women, failing to recognize their behavior as signs of distress. She concluded that the concept and treatment of women’s mental health in the US also disguised a social agenda which enforced patriarchal norms – a conclusion shared by Elaine Showalter in *The Female Malady* (1985). Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert’s co-authored *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) undertook a literary analysis of representations of supposed madwomen, often finding that revered modern male authors had penned female characters forced into binary of the “angel” or the monstrous madwoman. These madwomen would be reimagined and given voice in women’s fiction such as Charlotte Gilmore-Perkins’ short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) and Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* (1963).
Fadia Faqir’s anglophone novel *Pillars of Salt* (1996) are cellmates in a British-mandate era psychiatric hospital. Their story is part of a commentary on “colonialism’s effects on the Jordanian man, and of course, Jordanian women, through exposing the tensions the culture faced, as it was stuck, made immobile, and was constantly looking backwards for a sense of *turath* [tradition]…” (Al-Shammari, 75). In the same year, al-Tahawy, published *al-Khibaa* [*The Tent*], a coming-of-age story concerning a Bedouin family in confrontation with the forces of colonialism. Her novel features a matriarch victimized by both disability and patriarchy. “Her only escape is insanity,” madness the only language through which she can respond to the “pressures and subjugation she endures [only] inside her head” (Al-Shammari, 134).

The postcolonially-inflected feminine madesses in Middle Eastern texts indeed extended to several of the Lebanese texts, but the latter were differentiated from the former by the condition of having been written against the particular backdrop of civil war. In this moment, the madness (real or perceived) which banished a woman to the fate of the unseen and unheard yet became the vehicle through which she named the madness of a world consumed by violence. For some protagonists, it was from positions of profound isolation, of which the asylum was emblematic, that this madness could be named. This was particularly the case in al-Shaykh’s *The Story of Zahra*. We are introduced to the titular character during her adolescence – a tormented era which coincides with the period between Lebanon’s 1958 and 1975 civil wars. Early on, we learn that she had been the victim of regular physical abuse at the hands of her father: shamed by his wife’s affairs, he took out his humiliation on his daughter. As Zahra transitions into adolescence, she is sexually assaulted by a relative, raped by an older man and forced to have an abortion. With the accumulation of violations,

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27 In her interview with Maya Jaggi of *The Guardian*, al-Shaykh described the autobiographical details that informed this portion of Zahra’s story: “[al-Shaykh’s mother] Kamila began a clandestine affair with a man, taking her two small daughters along as cover (Hanan, the youngest, subconsciously knew something was happening, "but I was too young to understand"). The experience of furtive danger as a child witnessing adultery found echoes in al-Shaykh’s third novel, *The Story Of Zahra* (1980).”
she loses her sense of self, of bodily integrity, and of agency, each lesson in powerlessness prompting a nervous breakdown or a temporary aphasia. Zahra’s family regularly summons doctors to sedate her, and even confines her to a psychiatric hospital where she is subjected to electro-shock therapy.

The psychiatric hospital had regularly featured in Middle Eastern travel literature and fiction for centuries (Al-Issa, 55). Early literature referenced traditional Islamic hospitals, or maristans, found in medieval Baghdad and Cairo as early as the ninth century, and more commonly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Nour, 49; see also Al-Issa). Their patients often included those with mental imbalances. But by the mid-nineteenth century, in the aftermath of British imperial forays into the region especially, the emergent institution of the European psychiatric hospital had become increasingly popular in the Middle East. One of the earliest known maristans in Egypt, for instance, became Qasr al-‘Aini, or the Cairo Lunatic Asylum, in 1827, and was the training destination of choice for medical students from Mount Lebanon (Katchadourian, 544). The facility closed in 1856, reopening under British administration as the state-run hospital of ‘Abbasiya in 1883. By 1907 ‘Abbasiya was full to capacity, triggering the opening of a second state-run psychiatric hospital, Khanka, in 1912 (Nour, 105). In 1898, the first psychiatric hospital opened in Ottoman Lebanon. Established by a Swiss missionary, The Lebanon Hospital for the Insane, or ‘Asfouriyeh, as it would be known, was only the second psychiatric hospital to open in the Middle East and would serve the region of Greater Syria (Rogan, 111). The French would soon join in the colonial enterprise of exporting psychiatry to the Middle East: in 1919, a monk established yet another hospital in Mount Lebanon which, by 1930 (while Lebanon was under French mandate) would become The Psychiatric Hospital of the Cross, or Dayr (meaning “monastery”) al-Salib. The two hospitals in Christian strongholds would be the only available facilities until the Islamic Neuropsychiatric Hospital opened in 1959, only a year after Lebanon’s first post-independence civil war (Katchadourian, 553).

28 See also Katchadourian and Nour. ‘Asfouriyeh is mentioned by name in the original Arabic-language version of Kawabbi Bayrut, though not in its English translation.
The European model of psychiatric mental healthcare in the Middle East – one in which electro-shock therapy was used – represented an infringement upon local understandings of mental health was celebrated by some, but not others. The wife of the French political scientist Roger Soltau wrote to a Swiss journal, exalting the arrival of ‘Asfouriye as a promising sign of the Ottoman territory’s progress toward modernity. Claiming Lebanon as her second home and “la Suisse du Proche-Orient,” she teleologically explained the need for such a facility as a sign of the fact that “le Liban a encore du besoin de l’aide de Europe” – specifically, Europe’s scientific knowledge (Soltau, 6). Beside the national self-interest evident in a Swiss writer’s acclaim for a so-called Middle Eastern Switzerland’s first psychiatric hospital (opened by a Swiss missionary), the institution’s presence, “un veritable modèle du genre” in Mme Soltau’s words, would move Lebanon as a country one step closer to modernity.29

The inhabitants of Mount Lebanon and the leadership of the Maronite church were initially resistant to ‘Asfouriyeh (Rogan, 117-119). The new model for the treatment of mental illness challenged local rubrics which often understood conditions of the mind, body, and spirit in vastly different terms: in fact, such conditions had traditionally been understood in non-medical (which is to say, social or spiritual) terms, and therefore addressed by and through the church as opposed to a medical institution.30 For instance, in the event that madness was considered particularly dangerous, the accused might be confined to a cave or monastery and undergo an exorcism in the belief that their madness was a sign of demonic possession (Miller 1939; Rogan, 109-110). The cosmology of madness in medieval and modern Islamic countries, and to a lesser extent, in Arabic literature, gestured toward an amalgamation of dynamic political, religious, social and cultural norms in other

29 Medical and psychiatric institutions were the tangible expressions of a broader connection between coloniality and the production and circulation of knowledge. Khanna’s Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism and Anderson, Jenson and Keller’s, Unconscious Dominions offer theoretical and case-based explorations, respectively, of how the theories and practice of European psychoanalysis were informed by, and then practiced upon, colonial subjects.

30 Okasha (922) and Nour (47) note both an initial and sustained effort on the part of Egyptians to hybridize the British models of mental health treatment which had been permanently introduced with their folk remedies once it became apparent that they would not be able to stave off the encroachment of psychiatry altogether.
words. Summarizing a key finding in Michael Dols’ seminal text on medieval Islam and madness, *Majnun: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, Historian Boaz Shoshan notes that “writing about madness in a particular society involves the history of medicine, law, and other subfields, but it is above all a study in the history of culture” (329; emphasis mine).

An illustration of the role of cultural norms in understanding madness can be found in the characterization of the nineteenth-century Maronite church’s attitude toward madness, as recast in short stories by Gibran Khalil Gibran. In his 1906 short story “Yuhanna al-majnun” [“John the Mad”], Gibran suggested that the Maronite church had become predisposed to treating dissent as madness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Gibran writes of a peasant who begins to read the Bible for himself as opposed to relying upon the clergy’s interpretation of the Gospels. With time, he comes to understand the local clergy as corrupt and steeped in sin, eager to persecute the poor for the sake of profit. Sharing his opinions with his family and other villagers, the church repeatedly detains him, labeling him “mad” and causing his ostracization. What the church calls “madness” (and a heretical one at that) Gibran wishes to show as a godly and revolutionary form of wisdom. The titular character is believed by some to be based on the story of As’ad al-Shidyāq, the first Maronite convert to Protestantism. As “conversion was considered a form of madness,” al- Shidyāq was captured by the local Maronite archbishop, imprisoned, tortured and starved to death around 1831, in a monastery across the valley from where Gibran was born.”

Nonetheless, despite the church’s efforts to challenge the incursion of a European institutional authority into matters it considered under its own jurisdiction, this resistance was would be short-lived. With the arrival of the second psychiatric hospital in Mount Lebanon, Dayr al-Salib, and the accompanying adoption of European models of mental health practices, such as electro-shock treatment, a cultural shift ensued (Aboujouade; Oxford Handbook). When the Israeli

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31 Per email correspondence with Professor Anton Shammas of the University of Michigan (Sept 2, 2019).

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occupation of Lebanon in 1982 forced ‘Asfouriyeh to close, contributors to the *Oxford Handbook of Psychiatry* have noted, Dayr al Salib would be the primary mental health facility serving Lebanon throughout the war years (Khoury and Tabbarah, 368).

**On Being (In)Sane in Insane Places**

Mental health hospitals in the Middle East such as ‘Asfouriyeh and Dayr al Salib, anglophone Jordanian author Fadia Faqir establishes in her fiction, were inherently a colonial project – a legacy of European *mission civilizatrice*. Exploring the tension between tradition and imperial ideas of modernity in British-mandate Jordan, Faqir’s novel, *Pillars of Salt*, prominently features the women whose failure to navigate the dynamic and gendered expectations of a society in flux are confined to a colonial psychiatric hospital. A new tool in the patriarchal toolbelt of oppression, her narrative of the function of the asylum was not altogether fantasy. At the height of its operations, for instance, ‘Asfouriyeh housed a well-known member of Lebanon’s intellectual elite, Palestinian-Lebanese writer and activist Mai Ziadeh. An outspoken supporter of the creative arts and of girls’ education during the early 1900s, her salons were attended by prominent intellectuals from the region, serving as regular fora for sociopolitical discussion (Ghorayeb, 376). But Ziadeh’s gender ultimately proved too distracting for some men: in the introduction to a posthumous volume of Ziadeh’s unpublished works, Ghada al-Samman notes that Ziadeh’s beauty meant that “her femininity often [stood] between her and the text […] precluding] an objective study of her works until many years after her death” (Al-Samman 1999, 35). Aware of her undervalued intellect and hyper-valued physical appearance, al-Samman claims, Ziadeh was an “agonized writer” (*ibid*). Her suffering reached its apex

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32 While evidence suggests that other hospitals operated small mental health clinics, or employed a doctor of mental health, they never attained the size or status of either ‘Asfouriyeh or its counterpart. Three considerably smaller mental health programs, all of which were smaller clinics attached to a larger hospital, opened prior to or during the war and remained open at least as of reporting in 2013: Dar al-Ajaza al Islamiyya clinic in 1959, St. George Hospital in 1980, and the mental health counseling division of Ain wa Zein hospital in 1989. As their primary function was not mental health specialization, I have not included them as notable mental health facilities. Thomas Friedman, writing in 1983 notes “the absence of any real infrastructure of mental health care in Lebanon” and only one psychologist at the largest university in the country, the American University of Beirut.
when her parent's, sibling, and Khalil Gibran, a close friend, all died in close succession. In the aftermath of these tragedies, Ziadeh’s extended family committed her to ‘Asfouriyeh.

Scholars have speculated about her family’s motives for committing her, several suggesting a baser desire to control her fortune or punish her outspoken feminism (Ghorayeb, Al-Samman, Boustani). News of her commitment to the asylum damaged her reputation: critics retroactively “accused her of being homosexual […] of coldness and lack of emotions, as well as sexual perversion,” overwriting her intellectual legacy with the rhetoric of deviance (Al-Samman 1999, 35). Even in death, Ziadeh’s words were overwritten by an insistent male voice: Ziadeh had continued to write while in ‘Asfouriyeh – writings which formed the basis of a novel written decades later by Algerian author Waciny Laredj. Al-Samman’s attempt to reframe Ziadeh’s legacy – an effort which predated Laredj’s fictional narrative imposition – thus constituted not only an attempt to recuperate the legacy of a woman marginalized by patriarchy, but served as an acknowledgment only a woman could offer of the challenges Ziadeh’s literary descendants would continue to face.

The crucible of the postcolony, patriarchy, (wo)men’s madness and war are consistently, if variably, expressed in the novels of al-Samman, Adnan and al-Shaykh. All three authors shared a view of the war as inherently mad, and of patriarchy as one of the war’s engines. The two worked together to make a double-victim of women who attempted to resist. “Because the meaning of madness, in both art and life, is always volatile — since it is defined in relation to what is culturally unacceptable, which also changes,” writes Dinah Manisty, “the state of madness in women’s novels is therefore itself a metaphor for what is not culturally assimilable” (Manisty, 163). This is to say that not only is Marie Rose’s political dissent and activism on behalf of Palestinians unassimilable to the Maronite community to which she belongs (in Adnan’s fiction), but so, too, is Ghada’s inability to accept war, or Zahra’s symptoms of distress in the face of domestic and national violence. Indeed, with the exception of Marie Rose, the protagonists either briefly (in the case of Ghada) or permanently question their own sanity. The pathologizing of women meant that a woman’s distress in the face of
sexual assault, incest, domestic violence, verbal and emotional abuse, or even political repression could only be interpreted as an innate and baseless madness.

Where the authors differ more significantly in their representations of madness, however, is in the manifestations of their protagonist’s madness – real or perceived. Their madnesses are not neatly mapped onto existing models or tropes – the wise fool or the divine accessory, for instance – but rather are reimagined in a specifically feminine and Lebanese wartime context. In this regard, the “madness” from which Marie Rose suffers is of a similar ilk as that which Nawal el-Saadawi describes in *Woman at Point Zero*, published only three years earlier: which is to say that neither protagonist is mad. Both el-Saadawi’s protagonist and her narrative are loosely based upon a woman el-Saadawi met in prison. The fictional version of this woman, Firdaus, was sentenced to death for killing her pimp after a lifetime of abuse, incest, forced prostitution and a failed attempt at sexual, financial and social autonomy. Firdaus is not mad. She is simply fed up. And while her attempt at a revolutionary act of self-emancipation may not be considered political in the orthodox sense, it too arises from the crucible of power, autonomous action and gender in Egyptian society. The literary and real executions of both Firdaus and Marie Rose in the late 1970s testify to the impossibility of a radical femihumanist politics.

Prior to their respective murders, however, an effort is made to “rehabilitate” both women through the punishing space of confinement and the normalizing discourse of (in)sanity. Firdaus, virtually in solitary confinement in a women’s prison, is visited by psychiatrists (including the semi-autobiographical Nawal el-Saadawi), and Marie Rose, is visited by a priest. The latter seeks to convince Marie Rose to repent of her (political) sin. He engages in debate with her until he can no longer withstand the charges she levies against the church, the confession, his sex, and their nation. She blatantly disparaged Christian theology as practiced in the Maronite community, blaming Lebanon’s patriarchal family and church structures for reifying the bellicose Lebanese male as holy and beyond reproach. He commands her to stop talking once she begins to criticize the church – the
very topic which had cost “John the Mad” his freedom in Khalil Gibran’s short story. “You’re depraved and sacrilegious,” concludes the priest. “You’re swimming in madness” (SMR, 97). Unable to exorcise Marie Rose’s demons, the priest will not visit her again except to attend her execution. Even the priest’s supposedly religious judgment of Marie Rose is intimately linked to the politics of gender. Masquerading as religious sanctimony, the priest’s allegiance to the militia compels him to understand her as both blasphemous and political deviant.

While it is clear to the reader that Marie Rose’s “madness” is sociopolitical construct of convenience meant to strip her of legitimacy, the narrator herself nonetheless suggests that there is a disconnect between Marie Rose and the world of reality after all. Marie Rose suffers the “great delusion,” the narrator says, that a conflict between men would render the political (and therefore transgressive) actions of women invisible (SMR, 101). The political sphere in Lebanon was gendered: an incontrovertible fact which meant that a woman could never acquire the status of political subject (cooke 1987, 141; Accad 1990, 66 and 7; Vinson, 187). For “every feminine act, even charitable and seemingly unpolitical ones, were regarded as a rebellion in this world where women had always played servile roles” (SMR, 101). What kind of madness does Marie Rose’s “delusion” suggest, then, if not a literal one? With the fullness of time, we are inclined to take a teleological view and see her politics not in terms of madness but radical – even revolutionary – but certainly avant-garde truth. Still, as Silke Weineck has written, “the belated truth of madness” is nevertheless truth only belatedly. It remains madness in the moment – heresy in religious terms (Weineck, 7).

Ghada’s “madness” is of a different ilk. To begin with, “madness” is not a label others place upon her, but one she places on herself as she attempts to locate herself in a world with inverted poles of normalcy. She is struck by the incredible violence unfolding around her, and the incredible disinterest or rapid normalization her peers display, and begins to wonder whether her sensitivity to the former is a sign that something is wrong with her. “Do you suppose I’ve started to lose my mind?” she asks her journal, semi-rhetorically (BN, 42). Hers is the conundrum to which David
Rosenhan alluded in his 1973 study, “On Being Sane in Insane Places.” What is the consequence of the environment and its norms on our own self-perception? Of course, as readers enjoying a spatial and temporal remove from the all-encompassing world which Ghada describes, we readily understand the behavior of her peers as coping mechanisms, but how is one to understand this from within the thick of the event? We are, after all, social creatures, self-calibrating according to our communities and social networks.

But Ghada’s relationship to madness expands from an intellectual and social inquiry to an encounter – albeit brief – with the psychosis brought on by the relentless proximity of death during war. A wave of violence has placed her, once again, on death’s doorstep – a place she has been almost hourly. This time, however, the violence has proven so disorienting that she does not know whether she is alive or dead. A bomb has struck Ghada’s street, plunging her into darkness. Cowering in her library, she feels rats “trying to feast on my corpse even before I’d had a chance to die” (BN, 230). Suddenly, her prose shifts, taking on a markedly different aesthetic from her previous writing:

Nightmare 101
Bullets. Bullets.
Thinking is an impossibility. The brain wasn’t made to be used
while nails are being driven into it.
I’m a frightened animal …
I whine and I howl …
I don’t meditate or cogitate …

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33 Rosenhan’s study sent volunteers without any discernible mental health ailments into a psychiatric treatment facility. His study claimed that they were incorrectly diagnosed with, and treated for, schizophrenia and other illnesses and that their claims of systemic abuse inside the institution were ignored as delusions. Recently, Susannah Calahan has published a book (The Great Pretender (2019)) in which she suggests that some of Rosenhan’s findings were fabricated. Notably, however, she does not disagree with the central provocation of his study: that a dangerous confirmation bias is at work within institutions, leading mental health professionals to incorrectly diagnose patients according to normative environmental conditions.
I bellow and I shriek …
I don’t ponder or deliberate …
I bark and I whimper…
I whine and I howl …

Nightmare 102
I whine and I howl …
……………………………..
……………………………..
……………………………..
……………………………..
……………………………..
… And I howl … (BN, 231)

On paper, Ghada reconstructs a semiotic representation of the process of losing consciousness and control over her body, voice, and thought. Her prose is tortured, repetitive in its vocabulary and sentence structure, trending toward pre-verbal regression. In her search for a form of

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34 In the original Arabic:

Kawabis 127

Rasās. Rasās.
Al-tafkīr mustahil. Al-dimāgh lam yakhliq liyusta`amal baynma masāmīr al-rasās tadruza.
Ana haywān madhūr …
`Awī …
La `ufakīr …
`Awī …
La `ufakīr …
`Awī …
`Awī …

Kawabis 128

`Awī …
……………………………
……………………………
…. wa `awī …….. (KB, 197-198)
writing capable of describing the simultaneous touching of life and death, in defiance of any law of biology or metaphysics, she reaches for what Felman calls 

all those words deprived of language […] the obstinate murmur of a language which speaks by itself, uttered by no one and answered by no one, a language which stifles itself, sticks in the throat, collapses before having attained formulation and returns without incident, to the silence from which it had never been freed. The charred root of meaning. (Felman, 41)

Indeed, this is Ghada’s attempt to create a language of madness – the product of someone’s “politics” or “ideology” which necessitated being nearly banished from this world, forced to witness in real-time, the fraying of the cord which once tethered her to life. This prose is the ultimate testimony to war’s violence, the ultimate testimony of someone always “standing on the dividing line between death and life.”

Ghada’s intimate familiarity with the madness caused by war, and her good fortune to have emerged whole from her brief encounter with madness, enables her to see and name her world as it is in all of its morbid absurdity. This ability to see clearly is, however, what assures her of her own sanity – she is not subject to the same “mental derangement” of those who have allowed themselves to become accustomed to, even accepting of, the violence (Makdisi, 87). She is not, for instance, her friend Bilqis, who becomes so obsessed with the distraction of dance lessons during war that she neglects to tell Ghada that her own sister is dead. No – it is Ghada’s ability to name, question and verbalize madness that removes her from it. She can rest assured that she has “been equipped with some sort of psychological ‘righting mechanism’ designed to overcome the effects of outward events” (BN, 281). In fact, we may understand the entire journal upon which the semi-autobiographical novel is placed as her righting mechanism – a means of processing the experiences which threaten her life – a form of playful conversion of the morbid into the macabre. Through this

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35 In the original Arabic: “’A la al-khat al-fasil bayn al-mawt wa al-hayat ‘aqaf.” (115)
36 Here, I disagree with miriam cooke’s analysis of the novel. In War’s Other Voices, cooke writes that “Al-Samman is aware of her growing uncontrol, her madness” as the Hotels War continues around her (66). While Al-Samman, the author, may well have experienced a sense of “uncontrol,” I do not find textual evidence that translates her inability to control her environment into Ghada’s delusional break with reality. The latter’s nightmares, daydreams and imagined interactions are carefully composed and recorded renderings of the absurdity as her perceives it, even if occasionally after the fact.
mechanism, she attempts to come to terms with her vulnerability while simultaneously protecting herself from the insanity of her compatriots. She even manages to find some humor in her games: as she recounts her efforts to help her neighbors clear the detritus of the bombing (including cadavers), she imagines that she must look like a participant in “a ragtag procession of lunatics amusing themselves” (BN, 245). In her own version of an articulation of madness akin to what Michel Foucault called “the déja-la of death,” the trace of an otherworldly and permanent encounter with death is apparent (16). Ghada begins to feel “the kind of tranquility that I suspect is experienced by those who’ve crossed over from the realm of sanity to that of madness … [to] the inward peace that lies beyond pain” (BN, 131). She has encountered the space of the barzakh.

Our third protagonist, Zahra expressed a genuine madness in the sense of a break from reality. Decades of trauma stemming from physical, emotional and sexual abuse provoke psychotic breaks throughout her pre-war adolescence, inuring her to the new and universalizing madness of war. If madness in The Story of Zahra was always already intimately tied to the political – as we have seen through the characters of Hashem and Ahmad – Zahra is also to be included in this understanding. Despite the fact that she has no stated investment or interest in the politics of the 1958 war, the 1961 coup or the 1975-1990 war, she remains marked by those who do. Hashem’s imbalances and bizarre behavior, for instance, only add to her misery.

In the late 1960s, Zahra, tormented by her quality of life in Beirut, visits her exiled uncle hoping for a reprieve. But within days of her arrival Zahra perceives a threat from him in the way he touched her at a movie theater, and in the manner of his daily attempts to rouse her from sleep. “I sensed her uneasiness,” Hashem acknowledged, and yet he persisted, choosing once again to sublimate the irrational into a performance of sincerity: where he once masked political extremism as party loyalty, he now commutes his sexual energy into the pretense of avuncular familiarity overdetermined by an exile’s longing for homeland. He rationalizes his behavior as expressions of a desire simply to communicate to Zahra that “[y]ou are my family. A person without family is a lost
soul.” “Why do you tremble?” he wants to ask her. “Why don’t you let me cling to you and help me forget this time in limbo?” (SZ, 72). His madness, muted but still present, manifests as a perversion of kinship wherein he converts his niece into synecdoche for the lost *watan*, the homeland (Marroum 2008).

Zahra likens the mental anguish brought about by her uncle’s impositions to the sexual abuse she experienced in Beirut, both provoking what she calls an “unusual state of mind” (SZ, 38). Feeling trapped in a cycle of endless persecution, she takes recourse to a mechanism of self-defense she honed during her father’s tirades in Beirut: locking herself in bathrooms until she passes out. And, as in Beirut, doctors are summoned to the home to treat her with sedatives. Once more forcibly medicated by a man, once more deprived of any sense of personal safety, she has succeeded only in moving from one hostile environment to another.

The signs of Zahra’s madness peak after she weds Majed, an émigré from southern Lebanon who immigrated to improve his financial situation and his family’s social position. Zahra’s behavior quickly causes Majed to reconsider the soundness of his decision to marry her; she no longer seems capable of improving his social standing. If anything, she is now a liability. Embittered by her consistent rejections of his sexual advances, and humiliated that he must now do the work of a woman by serving as caretaker for an ailing spouse, he begins to despise her. One evening, Majed and Zahra entertain guests at home. Suddenly, Zahra becomes engrossed in the task of drawing an imaginary square upon the wall, and attempting to place the flowers gifted her by their guests inside the square. She believes herself to be decorating a framed picture of her mother. Alternately laughing and swearing, she continues until Majed, humiliated, forces her to stop.

An uncanny echo arises between this scene and one in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, published nearly a century earlier in 1892 and set in the United States. In

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37 In the original Arabic, Zahra says “wa ana fi hadhihi al-hala” (“when I am in that state”; 30, my translation), suggesting a far more nuanced and gentle allusion to her mental wellbeing.
Gilman’s story, a woman is sequestered in the attic nursery of a vacation home. The doctor and her husband have ordered the confinement as a cure for what they have decided is hysteria. Imprisoned in the room, Gilman’s protagonist believes she sees a woman trapped behind the wallpaper, attempting to get out. The story concludes with the protagonist locking herself in the room, prowling around its edges as she peels off the wallpaper, both freeing and becoming the trapped woman. In both *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *The Story of Zahra*, the protagonists attempt to transcend the alienation and harm brought about by patriarchal oppression by entering into a fantastic mode of relation with another (imagined) woman who can help them escape their domestic prisons. Of course, by submerging themselves deeper into an alternate reality as a means of escape, the women render themselves even more inscrutable to those who are ostensibly sane. To the question of whether the mad(wo)man can speak, they appear to answer “no.”

Majed throws his mad wife out of the house, preparing to take his defective merchandise back to her family (Hashem) and demand restitution and divorce. “Get up and get dressed, you mad, mad woman. You are insane! … Damn you, get up and put on your clothes! You should put on the clothes of the Angel of Death rather than your own” (*SZ*, 109). The link that Majed draws between madness and living death announces Zahra’s precarious life in the *barzakh*. Her failed attempt to “reconcile the irreconcilable, that is, to adjust to her alienating social reality,” has yielded an incommensurability so profound that she now experiences the “loss of sense of self,” and even “existential death” (Abudi, 245). “I feel as if salt water is flowing in the space that surrounds me,” Zahra says, evoking the language of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s *barzakh* (*SZ*, 93). Reflecting on her life, she wonders “Is a person born with this uneasiness? Ever since I can remember I have always felt

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38 For a compelling analysis of how the figure of the madwoman fails be subversive, falling instead into patriarchy’s trap of creating a (female) subject devoid of power, see Carminero-Santangelo’s *The Madwoman Can’t Speak: Or Why Insanity Is Not Subversive*. Evelyne Accad and miriam cooke offer cogent explanations of the failure of Zahra’s attempt to subvert the violence of patriarchy and war through her wordless acts of resistance, specifically through her sexual liaison with the sniper back in Beirut who ultimately murders her. See Accad’s *Sexuality and War* and cooke’s *War’s Other Voices*.

39 In the original Arabic: “Yalla qumī, ilbāsi ya majnūna, ya khūra. Laysh īṭī ya bint al mā‘ālūna…” (*HZ*, 129)
uneasy” (SZ, 111). On the eve of her return to Beirut, and of the outbreak of war, Zahra’s madness heralds the re-emergent disease of the Lebanese body politic.

When Zahra returns to Lebanon, she finds her homeland at war. Yet the disturbed balance of her own psyche is at a curious equilibrium with Lebanon’s collective dysfunction. Suddenly, Zahra was no longer the only one feeling or acting abnormally, nor the only one who preferred to retreat inside their own mind. Emergent madmen such as Zahra’s brother Ahmad are not ostracized. Social norms have become so distorted that Zahra is no longer clear what the standard for normalcy is – which means there no longer is a normal. “I hear, close by, scattered gunshots,” Zahra reports, “yet feel as if they are at a great distance. This war has made beauty, money, terror and convention all equally irrelevant. It begins to occur to me that the war, with its miseries and destructiveness, has been necessary for me to start to return to being normal and human” (SZ, 161). Zahra has accepted the universalization of madness — whether as social deviance, ex-centric eccentricity, or genuine psychosis — as the only condition through which she can find peace in the Lebanon of her present-day.

In his article for The New York Times, Thomas Friedman interviewed Dr. Anatranik Manoukian, the last manager of ‘Asfouriye, which had closed by the time of the article’s publication. Dr. Manoukian asserted that “his patients — who were caught in the middle of some of the worst shelling and bombing [of the Israeli invasion in 1982] — tended to be more healthy mentally and to require less medication and treatment during the fighting than when it was over.” Manoukian’s paradoxical observation illustrates the inversion of normalcy: when at war, safety seemed most imminent at the apogee of a moment of violence, and the supposedly mentally imbalanced felt unperturbed by their surroundings.
Conclusion

Where does the greater madness lie, al-Samman, Adnan and al-Shaykh ask: with the society engulfed in madness or with the women whose varying forms of, and encounters with, madness allow them to name (and thereby protect themselves, at least for a time) from Lebanon’s greater affliction? The texts suggest the former: Lebanon, as its body politic is figured across these novels, has little self-awareness, no capacity to see its own limitations. If madness (al-junun) entails that which is hidden even from oneself, and (la folie) is characterized by a blind and convicted adherence to a path which deviates from reason (Felman, 35), then it is the larger Lebanese society whose madness poses the greater risk.

But, has the self-avowed madwoman made plain the madness of others? Were we to adopt Shoshana Felman’s understanding of the relationship between language and madness, the answer would appear to be “yes.” Language, Felman argues, entails the power of naming “and, through naming, mastering the object” (Felman, 82). If Ghada uses written language to identify the madness in those around her, even as she questions her own sanity; if Zahra senses the madness lurking under the façade of male self-righteousness even as she acknowledges her own condition; if Marie Rose can denounce the illogic of Lebanon’s patriarchy even as she is silenced, then by naming the Other as mad, the women, too, exercise an agential form of power. But Felman takes her argument a step further. In even the initial pronouncement of madness – of Marie Rose’s murderers, of Zahra’s oppressors, of Ghada’s self-doubt – there lies within an act of betrayal.

Madness as such “no longer adheres entirely to its meaning; it stands at a certain distance from itself. […] Beneath the mask of accusation, the accused becomes the accuser […]. It is as though reason did not exist at all…” (ibid). This is to say – at least in the context of these Lebanon’s protagonists – that the political reality has made the meaning of madness so inverted that even the direction of its charge must be questioned. The “madwomen” needn’t respond at all, it seems! The
sheer reality answers for them. If accepting this logic seems hard to do in reality, part of the wonder of the genre of fiction is that we are allowed to – even asked to – suspend our thinking on what is realistic in order to entertain a more theoretical hypothesis. In other words, while no one has heeded Ghada’s warnings in the moment of the Hotel Battles of 1975 and 1976; while no militiaman is ready to reflect upon the recriminations offered by the narrator of *Sitt Marie Rose* in 1978; while Zahra’s family and neighbors will not be able to perceive themselves as Zahra sees them in this moment, we as readers are nonetheless asked to do that work. As the reader of Ghada’s journal entries; as the recipients of the testimonies on the death of Marie Rose; as the last bastion of hope that Zahra’s story – despite its many interruptions – will be heard, we are to receive them while entertaining the possibility that the woman in question may be eccentric, and even mad, but that their difference is contiguous with a truth few others can see.

The demand for a witness will become a crucial request in light of the events that follow. In the wake of the war, when a general amnesty is announced, absolving former combatants of any responsibility for their actions and reinstalling former warlords in positions of power, there will be a mysterious silence in place of an accounting. What the women in this chapter tried to name and expose, the men at the heart of the novels in the following chapter will hide from themselves and from others. The narrative voices shaping the contours of novels written in the wake of the 1991 General Amnesty, are not only male, but also former combatants. While the country in which they live claims to have entered an era of peace, their fractured and fragmented speech will gesture to a deeper crisis of history and memory. It is in the fractures and fragments that we ultimately find “a truth that is both unmediated and uncontaminated by and inaccessible to language” – a truth that their language, of necessity, distorts (Weineck, 13).
Chapter Two: The Phoenix Will Not Rise: Amnesty and Amnesia in Postwar Lebanese Fiction

“...A psychiatrist might be concerned at the mental health of a people who can so quickly hide their scars, knowing as they do that the hatreds and suspicions and endemic rivalries that sit deep in them are not being reconciled, but lie up there in the long grass.” — Tim Llewellyn, Spirit of the Phoenix

By 1980, when The Story of Zahra was published, war was being waged on multiple fronts across the country. On the country’s southern border with Israel, the South Lebanon Army led a militia of Maronite and Shi’i fighters allied with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) against the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Shi’i civilians fled the violence on the country’s borders. The year 1980 also marked the entry of armed wing of Amal, a Shi’ite political party, into the conflict. Until 1980, the party’s leader, present-day speaker of Lebanon’s parliament, Nabih Berri, had resisted entering the conflict, withstanding intense political and military pressure from the PLO to fight alongside them. Amal’s ranks would quickly be swollen however by a significant number of displaced Southern Lebanese and supported by Syria, becoming the most powerful organized Shi’i militia for the next several years. Meanwhile, on Lebanon’s eastern border with Syria, the Maronite Lebanese Forces were at war with allied Syrian military and the PLO, and just north of Beirut, Maronite Kata’ib leader and future president-elect Bachir Gemayel led an attack on rival Maronite militia, Dany Chamoun’s Al-Numur (the Tigers) in a bid to consolidate power.

By 1982 (the year of Israel’s invasion) however, it was clear that Lebanon’s conflict had long since expanded beyond its initial scope, overtaking the confessional rivalries or anti-Palestinian sentiment which had begun the conflict. As Jean Said Makdisi would write, if the early days of war had been characterized by clearly-defined (if deeply problematic) “ideologies and nationalisms,” the mid- to late-war periods represented a descent into a “generalized rage” (133). And, in one of the most critically-acclaimed postwar anglophone novels to chronicle the mid-war period, Rawi El-Hage’s 2006 Deniro’s Game describes the 1980s as a time of absurd propaganda, fading ideology and the violence of thugs and thieves without political conviction (78).
As the 1980s progressed, new actors joined the war and familiar actors intensified their roles. The Israeli military invaded, and, while in-country, lent their support to the Kata’ib and Lebanese Forces as the latter massacred Palestinians in the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps. Syrian troops and war machines proliferated; targeted assassinations, kidnappings and car-bombings were added to the repertoires of violence; Iran began to support a new Shi’a militia, Hizballah, which was at odds with the Syrian-backed Amal; the PLO and Amal went to war; and the Maronite militias threatened to tear Lebanon into two as rival warlords attempted to assume control of the country. These events radically transformed the nature of the conflict even at a tactical level: direct forms of violence were increasingly replaced by indirect forms of violence including tanks and heavy artillery, car-bombings, and aerial campaigns. These developments necessarily altered how war in Lebanon would – and could – be remembered.

In September 1989, approximately 60 Lebanese members of parliament convened in the town of Ta’if in Saudi Arabia to work out a treaty that would end the conflict. This was not the first attempt at such an effort, but it would be the last. With support from Saudi, US and Syrian mediators, the Ta’if Accord was ratified in November 1989 and implemented the following year. All militias were called upon to disarm, with the exception of Hizballah which was deemed necessary to the fight to restore Lebanese sovereignty, especially against Israeli occupiers in the south. The agreement also stipulated adjustments to Lebanon’s system of confessional governance, in order to create a fairer balance of power between Sunni and Shi’a Muslims and Christians whose numbers had shifted dramatically since the 1932 census.1

Though no side had won Lebanon’s war, by 1990, major regional and world powers had shifted their attention from the quagmire in Lebanon and began to focus on nearby Iraq, which had

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1 The Accord called for the Sunni Prime Minister to be appointed by Parliament instead of by the Maronite President, and also adjusted the ratio of Christian to Muslim members of parliament to 50:50. See United Nations Peacemaker Taif Accords (1989).
just emerged from an eight-year war with Iran and was already headed toward year another conflict: the impending Gulf War. Lebanon was left to its own devices as far as how to address the devastation wrought by a decade and a half of internationalized civil strife: the war had claimed nearly 150,000 lives, wounded and disabled nearly 210,000 more and resulted in over 17,000 being declared “missing,” the vast majority of whom would be legally declared “kidnapped and presumed dead” by the Lebanese state (HRW 1993, 1). Others would estimate that an additional 900,000 would emigrate because of the war, and another 800,000 would be internally displaced (ICTJ 2013, 70).

Despite the stipulated requirement that Lebanon’s political leadership commit to the “fundamental national objective” of “abolishing political sectarianism,” the agreement did not mitigate the impact of decades of confessionalism into which Lebanese had been indoctrinated since the French mandate. None of the steps necessary to accomplish such a lofty goal had been taken by the new Lebanese government – a governing body whose members were primarily career politicians and warlords. The primary signatories of the accord were themselves “the conflict’s protagonists,” and the document they drew up not only laid the groundwork for the declaration of a general amnesty a year later, but also included “no truth-seeking [initiatives], mismanaged reparations, and incomplete institutional reform, all of which undermined prospects for justice and national reconciliation” (ICTJ 2014, np).

Critics throughout the country as well as human rights organizations denounced what they came to see as a policy of “state-sponsored amnesia” over the course of the 1990s – a policy which was anathema to transitional justice, and which left the key obstacle to political stability unaddressed (Ibid). Over the next decade, Lebanese lawmakers quickly went to work forming the legal infrastructure which they hoped would announce a firm barrier between the era of past war and

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2 On a recent trip to Lebanon in the summer of 2019, a tour guide accompanying me through the Beka’a region noted that his natal village had not begun to reintegrate until 2012.

3 The 2014 ICTJ report references the commonly used phrase “state-sponsored amnesia” (s) and notes that scholars of the war identify “sectarianism” as “one of the root causes of the conflict” (4).
present peace. In 1991, for instance, the Lebanese government declared a blanket amnesty for any war crimes committed prior to March of that year. Near simultaneously, Lebanon’s Minister of Defense ended preliminary investigations into the forced disappearances of 17,000 Lebanese, accepting the militia leaders’ dubious claims that they no longer held political prisoners, and remaining silent on the fate of those held by neighboring Israeli and Syrian forces. In 1995, a new law established that anyone who had been missing for more than four years was to be considered legally dead; the law was interpreted by the families of the missing as an attempt to thwart serious investigation. While post-war governments made some efforts to address the needs of a populace emerging from conflict, they were often underfunded and ultimately discontinued.

Plenty of resources, however, were available for the reconstruction of downtown Beirut, where infrastructure was quickly torn down and rebuilt to evoke a glamorous cosmopolitanism inspired by Europe under the auspices of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. The logic of the phoenix was at work in such a reconstruction project and in myriad other acts of formal legislation, investments and informal dialogue wherein politicians attempted to turn a new page. The legendary bird which rises from the ashes had been an important signifier for a subgroup of the Maronites who believed themselves to be descended from the ancient Phoenicians. Such a lineage set them apart from the vast majority of the Arabic-speaking and predominantly-Muslim Middle East and lent legitimacy to their vision of a secular and westernized Lebanese state: like the phoenix, the inheritors of the Phoenicians would rise again. Accordingly, when Maronite militias entered the war, helping to reduce much of the country to ashes, it was from these ashes, they claimed, that they would help Lebanon rise again. Loyal followers of Bachir Gemayel would dub him the “phenix du Liban” in the aftermath.

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5 Law No. 434, May 25, 1999 on “the principles for declaring the missing dead” (ICTJ 2014).
6 For instance, in 1993, the government began a program to resettle the internally displaced and provide aid. The initiative involved a number of different government offices yet the ICTJ found that corruption and confessional preferences characterized even this humanitarian process (see ICTJ 2014, 21-22). In 1996, a commission was announced to begin drafting a new national history textbook. The project was never completed and today, private schools use their own textbooks and public schools used one that predates the civil war.
of his assassination, anticipating a messianic return. In 1982, speaking before the United Nations General Assembly, his brother and replacement as president, Amine, would rather prematurely insist that “We shall rebuild what was destroyed and thus have Lebanon appear in your midst a few years from now, a phoenix rising victorious from its own ashes” (United Nations).

Nonetheless, it remained clear that the partitions enacted discursively and legally between war and peace were imagined, at best. Neither the Southern Lebanese Army nor Hizballah had disarmed; they were still at war in the south, and would remain so until well into the 2000s. Syrian and Israeli forces continued to occupy Lebanon executing targeted assassinations, abductions, and torture in collaboration with their Lebanese proxies (ICTJ 2014, 71). Syrian forces targeted those who opposed their presence as a violation of the sovereignty promised by the Ta’if Accords. Meanwhile, Israeli forces continued to occupy Lebanon, arguing that though Lebanon’s civil war may have ended, Hizballah still constituted a threat.

In the years immediately following the war’s end, Lebanese fiction writers in the 1990s suggest, it was not just the state which attempted to ignore the ongoing violence and instability: civil society was also complicit. In this chapter, I demonstrate how novels published by sisters Huda and Najwa Barakat as well as Ilyas Khuri ventriloquize popular complicity with the amnesty through the voice of the former combatant, who is here imagined as a sudden victim of amnesia. While the trauma of long-term warfare undoubtedly contributes to the amnesiac condition of the postwar combatants, I argue that the authors describe something different. They describe a layering of amnesias both traumatic and chosen. The willfulness of this amnesia becomes clearer when we compare the description of combatants in these postwar novels to those of the early war era – scenarios in which militiamen took up arms in defense of ideology with unflinching conviction. In contrast to their early-war counterparts, postwar fictional paramilitaries have little, if anything, to say about their former political investments. In fact, their narratives are heavily depoliticized – as if the war from which they had just emerged had simply happened, without cause, without agency. Setting

The connection the authors made between government amnesty and popular amnesia seemed to be substantiated by the political developments that formed the backdrop to their publications. In addition to legislative acts which stymied accountability, the rhetoric of former warlords had shifted to a reiteration of the 1958 civil war trope “la ghalib la maghlub,” encouraging a gravitation away from the polarized political discourse of the past years and toward an imagined and uniformly Lebanese collective victimization. This approach allowed not only a retroactive recoding of the war, but also made possible a longer-term renegotiation of its consequences. In a 2010 survey of former combatants in the civil war, representing nearly a dozen militias, nearly three-quarters of those surveyed claimed that they had been able to integrate and adapt into post-war life without incident (Diwan al-thakira al-Lubnaniya, 20). Their apparently seamless re-entry into society occurred despite the fact that 44% of those surveyed acknowledged that their wartime activities had included kidnapping rivals or civilians; another 44% were involved in the designing and execution of explosives (40); 45% acknowledged having taken part in the torture of prisoners (*ibid*); and 20% acknowledged burning villages or neighborhoods in an attempt to force migration (39). The reference to having reintegrated “without incident” is further brought into question by statistics which show a dramatic increase in post-war alcoholism (43; 57); increased abuse of illegal drugs (57); and a more than threefold increase in prescription drug use (*ibid*). The amnesty it seemed, simply

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7 This percentage may be higher among members of the Kata’ib who included massacres and ethnic cleansing in their repertoires of violence more often than other militias. For more see Entelis (1974) and Johnson (2001).
8 Self-acknowledged illegal drug use was at 8%.
allowed combatants to indulge the fantasy of amnesia, not only for the war, but also for the lingering effects which the war evidenced in their lives decades later.

The protagonists of the novels I analyze in this chapter, however, will not be included in this joyous narrative of rebirth. We might say that they represent the one-quarter of the surveyed former combatants who acknowledge a failure to reintegrate and adapt once the war ended. From the dank recesses of prisons, psychiatric hospitals, sanatoriums, attics, and dimly lit-flats, they will be forgotten by Lebanon and forgotten by history. They are in an impossible condition: unable to return to a space and time of a war that has officially ended, and yet resisting the notion of a national redemption assured through the myth of the phoenix, they languish in a netherworld of madness and, in several cases, go to their death. In both form and content, their stories become a metaphor for the writing of Lebanese history in the era of the amnesty.

**Choosing Amnesia**

Writing in 2012, sociologist Samir Khalaf admitted that he had been increasingly disturbed by the “pervasive mood of lethargy, indifference, weariness which borders at times on collective amnesia” in Lebanon since the end of the war was announced in 1990 (Khalaf, 14). In the two intervening decades, both of which had supposedly been postwar, the country nevertheless experienced continued political violence, cycles of collapsing parliament and a leaderless state, and the strain of confessionalism. Khalaf suggests that a weary populace became disillusioned with (and therefore divested from) politics, but also de-cathexed from the political narratives and history that were so important during the war, instead devoting itself to living up to its reputation as a hard-partying, trauma-overcoming nation.

Yet this interpretation was not fully satisfactory for Khalaf. While he fundamentally believed that the two decades since 1990 had witnessed a trend towards amnesia, he observed that this same amnesia somewhat paradoxically masked the “salient symptoms of retribalization” – symptoms which
he construed as the ultimate signs that confessional ideology and fervor not only had failed to dissipate, but were in fact resurging (ibid). In an effort to explain this paradox, Khalaf scrutinizes his use of the word “retribalization,” and concludes that if one were to consider the history of the country from the seventeenth century, (and, one might argue, perhaps even earlier), “[o]ne might argue that Lebanon has not been detribalized sufficiently to be experiencing retribalization” (“Retribalization: Emblem or Armor?” in Lebanon Adrift). While the Lebanese have been tempted to offer a self-portrait which identifies the tribal as a long-past element of their culture, one which fails to reflect their modern reality, Khalaf argues, the very forces associated with rapid urbanization, the spread of market economy and the exposure of a growing portion of the population to secular, liberal and radical ideologies, etc. – did little to weaken or erode the intensity of confessional or sectarian loyalties. Indeed, in times of social unrest and political turmoil such loyalties became sharper and often superseded other ties and allegiances” (ibid).

What Khalaf identifies, in other words, ultimately suggests the condition of the postcolony or of the barzakh: the condition of multiplicity and simultaneity of space and time which, in this case, permits both remembering and forgetting – both detribalization and retribalization. That is to say, Lebanon’s particular paradox of simultaneity echoes the paradox of memory itself. Khalaf writes:

The longing to obliterate, mystify and distance oneself from the fearsome recollections of an ugly and unfinished war, or efforts to preserve or commemorate them are, after all, an expression of two opposed forms of self-preservation: the need to remember and the need to forget. The former is increasingly sought in efforts to anchor oneself in one’s community or in reviving and reinventing its communal solidarities and threatened heritage. The latter is more likely to assume escapist and nostalgic predispositions to return to a past imbued with questionable authenticity (Khalaf, 14-15).

In disciplines attending to the study of the brain and the psyche, the dynamic relationship between memory and forgetfulness is indeed a significant factor in how amnesia is understood. When occurring in the wake of traumatic events, loss of memory is often called “traumatic amnesia.” This concept suggests that an event was so overwhelming that the individual in question
unconsciously compartmentalizes the memory to prevent it from interfering with their daily functioning. The American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders-V refers to this kind of amnesia as “dissociative amnesia.” The dissociative amnesiac usually experienced “localized” memories, meaning that what the person does not recall is a specific set of events in time, or “selective.” Without an external trigger drawing attention to a gap in memory, the individual in question has an “amnesia for their amnesia”; in other words, they do not know that they are missing a piece of their memory (DSM-V, 291). Nevertheless, the memory remains intact. While traumatic amnesia, as indicated earlier, is not an unlikely scenario for some of our fictional protagonists recently emerged from war, neither is an amnesia of a more elective nature. Paul Ricoeur posited that remembering is a labor-intensive act: one has to willingly recall, as in call back to mind, or summon. If one must work to access memories, refusing to do this work would leave the memory dormant. Neither “lost,” “blocked,” nor “forgotten,” it simply has not been called upon.

Susanne Buckley-Zistel’s concept of “chosen amnesia” is useful here. Chosen amnesia, she writes, is the process by which a memory is not only neglected, or not recalled, but also becomes less accessible with time. Buckley-Zistel developed this concept in the context of her research with survivors and perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. During the genocide, civilians turned against each other in an ethnic cleansing spurred by mutual propaganda. When the catastrophic violence ended, it did so as a result of military defeat, not because any of the underlying causes of the conflict had been addressed. Tensions remained palpable as surviving Rwandans – perpetrators, collaborators, victims, and the in-between – returned to live intermingled amongst each other in a state-mandated peace. During her interviews, Buckley-Zistel noted a recurrent pattern: though her interlocutors could readily recount the violent events of the genocide, they claimed to be unable to remember its causes. The survivors deemed it prudent to banish thought and conversation on the
ethnic rivalries which started the war precisely because they had remained unchanged in a post-war “peace” – and therefore still posed a threat.

[I]t became apparent that, although memory about the genocide was considered to be very important, some aspects of the past were eclipsed from the discourse. Interviewees frequently made their omissions explicit […] This concealment resembles some form of amnesia, albeit selective, or what I shall call *chosen amnesia* […] I shall employ the notion as an analogy to refer to the social, collective inability to remember. This inability […] implies that the memory is still stored in the mind, even though the group does not (choose to) have access to it at present. (in Williams and Buckley-Zistel, 133-134; emphasis in the original)

What Buckley-Zistel describes is the discursive reframing of national trauma that would shape Rwanda’s political discourse for decades. This reframing would be worked into the teleological story of one of contemporary Africa’s most democratic and peaceful nations – Rwanda’s own phoenix-story. But this narrative would be, in part, forcibly imposed upon the populace from the state: “We are all Rwandan” newly-elected President Paul Kagame would declare as the country began to institute nationwide courts of reconciliation and commemoration (Moss, 440). The phrase became the national refrain, and was intended to banish tribal difference in the name of national unity – not unlike Lebanon’s politicians hoped to do through references to a unified Lebanon and the outlawing of sectarianism. Though tribal tensions remained in the months after the genocide, survivors would have to live alongside each other without reprisal: it would be all but impossible to avoid memory of the genocide, but it was in everyone’s best interest to remain silent on how it had happened in the first place. With the repression of silence, of course, comes forgetting: knowledge is not transmitted to younger generations and truths are ignored, reimagined, or manipulated. Over time, what is remembered – actively recalled – about the genocide are the events, the actions, the dates, the people … but not the causes, the motivations, the ideologies that may still be harbored to this day. While this decision to forget for the sake of survival is made on an individual basis, it becomes a collective decision at the point that silencing, and eventually choosing not to recall (or choosing to forget) becomes a coping strategy of the masses, reinforced by the state. And though
Lebanon and Rwanda’s conflicts ended under different circumstances, the types of environments to which civilians were forced to adapt in the aftermath of violence were largely similar.  

Buckley-Zistel presents her concept of “chosen amnesia” as one of an analogy between an individual psychological phenomenon and a collective discursive practice. To some extent, this precaution is necessary considering the care with which one must approach the extrapolation of theories about the individual psyche to the space of the political. But perhaps she need not be so over-cautious. How else are we to consider a situation in which a plurality chooses not to call to mind the reasons for a conflict – in Lebanon’s case, the politics and ideologies to which they had sworn allegiance? Is that not an act of collective, and chosen, amnesia?  

The shift between the disciplinary language of the social scientific behavior of the individual and the more humanistic language of the discursive and theoretical behavior of the political group is not surprising: as several scholars have noted, concepts related to trauma (including amnesia) have seeped into non-psychological disciplinary discourses since the 1990s (Caruth, 4). In contexts as varied as literature of the postcolonial Caribbean, ethnographies of post-genocide Rwanda, historico-legal analyses of the Troubles in Ireland and historical studies of Lebanon after 1990, a panoply of terms are invoked to represent amnesia in the wake of traumatic violence. Many who evoke the language of amnesia in the context of describing popular reactions to political events, I argue, do so with terminology that indicates less interest in the psychology of traumatic amnesia than the social and political manifestations of forgetting. For instance, scholars describe instances in which the state

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9 Of course, a notable exception would be the fact that Rwanda’s government is not a power-sharing government and that the “vanquished” among the population were largely made out to be the “victors” in the emergent post-genocide political order by virtue of their accession to positions of political power and subsequent control of the government. Nevertheless, for the average civilian’s daily life, living amongst former enemies and being constrained by law with respect to the nature of how to discuss and comport oneself with respect to the genocide was a similar condition.  

10 See also Fassin & Rechmann (2009). In fact, the concept of “trauma” itself was initially derived from the medical field and meant to describe biological damage sustained by the body in the wake of impact from a foreign object. The concept was then borrowed by social scientists, who would use the concept of trauma as a non-literal analogy for the impact of external events of significance on the human psyche.  

uses its power to force its citizens to forget their lived experiences through historical revisionism, propaganda, and intimidation as: “prescriptive amnesia”; the “politics of erasure”; the “absolution of amnesia”; “capitalist peace”; the “embedding [or programming] of amnesia”; and, rather plainly, “political amnesia.” When civilians are agents of their own amnesia, (insofar as they refuse to recall certain events or the conditions which gave rise to them), scholars have described the phenomenon in terms of “chosen,” “hysterical,” or “therapeutic” amnesia; “amnesia histories”; the politics of “amnesiac respectability”; “social forgetting”; and even “unintended amnesia.” Finally, state impositions and civilian self-censorship often merge to form its own particular entanglement. To this category, scholars have given the terms “shared amnesia”; “strategic unremembering”; “social [or societal] amnesia”; “collective amnesia”; “almost-willful amnesia”; “religion of amnesia”; and “collective amnesia.”

The latter, hybrid category of amnesia combining the mandate of the state and the survivalist-motivated volition of the populace, is what political scientist Nicole Loraux considers constitutive of an originary case of political amnesty: that which occurred in Athens circa 400 BC in the wake of a post-Peloponnesian war coup against the Athenian state. Arguing that what undergirds the Athenian democracy which we reify today is in fact its proverbial dark side – the threat of violence – Loraux recounts the aftermath of a violent dictatorship wherein peace was guaranteed only by virtue of a civilian populace willing to develop an amnesia for the political terror of yesteryear. The decision to not recall, to borrow Rieur’s formulation, was enforced both through official means (such as the new democratic government’s prescriptive “ban on recalling the misfortunes”) and by unofficial means (oaths sworn by the subject not to recall it) (Loraux, 146).

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15 Coincidentally, just as Lebanese civil society came to refer to as the war as al-ahdath, or, “the events,” Loraux writes that Athenians used the term kaka to euphemistically refer to the “misfortunes,” or “events,” of their own war (149).
Nicole Loraux theorizes the city, or the “polis,” as a Freudian psychoanalytic subject who has forgotten its own foundational violence.\footnote{Ricouer and Loraux made substantial use of Freudian psychoanalytic theory as concerns memory. They extrapolate from his theories of the mechanism of individual memory, as well as the phenomena of repression and repetition compulsion, in order to discuss collective memory and forgetting in 20th century western Europe, as well as position the city as a subject, respectively. Both acknowledge the methodological reservations some might have with respect to the scale of their analogies, as well as the non-clinical nature of their extrapolation (see Ricouer, 70 and 78). Ultimately, however, they justify their use of Freudian theories through reference to passages in which Freud knowingly performs similar analogical extrapolations (as in Group Psychology). In Loraux’s case, she also nods to the theoretical connections often drawn between the city and the human soul (referenced also in the Islamic context by Stefania Pandolfo) to explain her leap from the analysand to the Athenian polis (see Louraux, 74 and 78-86).}

Amnesty and amnesia were twinned etymologically and in practice: whereas amnesia is the simple act of forgetting, amnesty is the political act of specifically forgetting that which is perceived to have been an act of wrongdoing. Loraux and Ricoeur understood amnesty as a “commanded” or “institutional forgetting” separated by only a “thin line of demarcation” from amnesia (Ricoeur, 453-455; Loraux, 451). For theorists such as Ernest Renan and Maurice Halbwachs, institutional forgetting was a pre-requisite to social cohesion in the modern nation-state: it would be impossible to maintain stable states cohering around the centripetal force of nationalism if the disparate groups which made up the nation all retained their narrative memories of historical wrongs.\footnote{See Ernest Renan’s “What Is A Nation?” (1882) and Hallwach’s La memoire collective (1950).} A similar logic characterized the decisions of Lebanese political leaders whose policies prioritized domestic stability, national security, and economic regeneration (in addition to self-absolution) over moral redress and justice. In a country where a confessional-based power-sharing agreement has remained the prevailing model for national governance, there would be little room for active recollection of past wrongs at the hands of rival confessions.

But as with all things forgotten – intentionally, unintentionally, or any combination thereof – Sigmund Freud tells us, they will resurface. And when they do, the form they take is likely to be disruptive. This was indeed the case in the literary universes constructed to describe postwar Lebanon. As the titular character of Oh Salaam observes, it was as if the entire city had succumbed to
a neurosis for which the cause was evident but the cure untenable, self-medication habits turning anti-depressants and anti-anxiety drugs into household names (Barakat 2012, 162-163). Whether in fictional or non-fictional discourse, “madness” in the post-war broadened beyond junun and folie, relegating both to just one of many manifestations of insanity in a universe which now included delirium (wahm al-dimagh) and feverishness (al-barara); hysteria (al-histiriya), despair (al-ya’s) and the fragmented mind (ra’s munfakkak); the soul (al-ruh) that has been damaged, shadowlands (al-dhilal), the barzakh, and demonic whisperings (al-waswas); and, finally, schizophrenia (al-fisam), neurosis (halat ‘usab), and the nervous breakdown (inhiyar ‘usab). Undergirding all of these conditions, however, was the disorientation of amnesia: the precursor to the disintegration of the self.

Literary plots have used the theme of amnesia to suggest both the possibility of a rebirth as well as that of a nostalgic paralysis that prevents it (Dieguez and Annoni). In the context of literature about amnesias developed amongst Lebanese postwar combatants, however, amnesia can also be figured as a vehicle through which attitudes toward war, soldiers, or political ideology itself may be critiqued. While the authors of Yalo, Disciples of Passion and Oh Salaam indeed use amnesia as a critique, they use it both to deny the narrative of postwar rebirth while simultaneously illustrating the disarticulation of the Lebanese legatee of the postcolony: the militiaman. The protagonists in these novels can neither anticipate a future, nor romanticize a past. Suspended in a present whose very meaning is in question, the protagonists’ striking silence has taken the place of the clamor of political rhetoric and ideological fervor.

The Phoenix Will Not Rise

Huda Barakat, a Maronite, was born in 1952 in Khalil Gibran’s natal village of Bachareh (Rakha 1999). After graduating with a degree in French literature from the Lebanese University, she relocated to Paris to begin a PhD program in 1975, returning to Beirut when the war broke out. In Beirut, she worked as a translator, journalist and writer. She spent the majority of the war years in
Lebanon, marrying a Muslim man and starting a family (ibid). In the conflict’s penultimate year, 1989, she left for Paris with her children, citing a desire to preserve her children’s safety as open warfare ensued between Maronite militias and her interconfessional marriage became strained. Very soon thereafter she began to publish a series of novels for which she ultimately garnered much acclaim both in the Arab literary world and the international literary marketplace, landing on the short-list for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction. Her fiction, published between 1990 and 2005, prominently features male protagonists driven to madness during the war, particularly in her novels Hajar al-dabak (1990) [The Stone of Laughter; trans. 1995], Abl al-bawa (1993) [Disciples of Passion; trans. 2005], Harith al-miyah (1998) [The Tiller of Waters; trans. 2001], and Sayyidi wa habibi (2004) [My Master, My Lover; abridged trans. 2013].

Critics have observed that her work provides a perspective “burdened by a conceptual exploration of war and conflict and a persistent desire to look into how the human mind [particularly that of the perpetrator] experiences, reacts, and suffers during disastrous events” (Al-Ghadeer, 115). Indeed, through Disciples of Passion in particular, Barakat is committed to “exposing the pathology of violence” (ibid). The anonymous Christian protagonist and narrator of this novel has gone mad. At the end of the war, he addresses the reader from Dayr al-Salib, The Psychiatric Hospital of the Cross [see Chapter 1], alternately narrating life in the asylum and reflecting on that which he remembers – or more importantly, is willing to share – about his recent past. From his confines, he recounts non-linear, highly abstract fragments of his story. He suffers from delusions, slides in and out of fugue states, and, of course, has bouts of amnesia. Curiously, though, he does not have amnesia for his amnesia the hallmark of traumatic amnesia. That is to say, he is aware that there are holes in his story – and in many cases, he sees this to his advantage as a storyteller. He warns us early on: “As for what

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18 Barakat maintains that her geographic distance from Beirut is not the variable that explains her production in Paris; rather, she says she simply found herself “intimidated” by the prospect of writing a novel (Rakha, 1999).
I have to say, I’m perfectly aware that it is all nonsense. Sometimes it’s a lie, sometimes an evasion, perhaps an act of duplicity, a sport, just an empty tune” (DP, 76).

The very “it” to which he refers, however, is indeterminate, referring both to the notional idea of what he has to say, as well as to his literal words: phrases which sometimes include “I cannot remember” or “I have since forgotten” at integral moments. Between omissions and that which he has genuinely forgotten, we never receive an explanation of how he arrived at Dayr al-Salib in the first place, much less a coherent narrative of his relationship to the war and how he believes he was impacted by it. Amnesia, he tells us at one point, is “cathartic,” something necessary for him to go on living – if one can call his torturous life “living.”

We are able to glean some information, however, by reading between the lines of the limited information he allows, locating traces in what he has not said. For instance, he tells us that he was kidnapped and tortured in West Beirut, and then returned home in a prisoner exchange. His recounting of this episode – and of the war in general – manages to evade discussion of several crucial details, all of them germane to the question of confessional affiliation. Nowhere does he name the militia that kidnapped and tortured him, or explain how or why he was captured. The reader is only given clues as to the probable affiliations of his kidnappers through oblique references to the parts of town at which his kidnapping and exchange occurred: the mention of West Beirut, for instance, indicates that he was captured by the PLO or Palestinian-allied Lebanese militias such as the Lebanese Arab Army, or even the armed wing of the Lebanese Communist Party. Through this, a reader knowledgeable of the war might deduce that he was part of a Maronite militia. But even the fact that he was a paramilitary is information that he never explicitly states. At one point in the novel, he vaguely suggests that he had been involved with an armed organization, but he does so fleetingly, subsuming this reference in a story about someone else’s descent into madness. We deduce again his paramilitary history when he mocks a hospital psychiatrist who suggests that he try drawing to rid
himself of the memories of killing. This is the first, and only, time that we will be told he had any such memories in the first place.

Aside from his elision of confessional politics in his references to the war, he also somehow manages to avoid commenting on how he internalized the logic of confessionalism in his personal life. We learn that our hospitalized, Christian narrator had an affair with a married Muslim woman during the war. The affair, however, rapidly soured: he ended up holding her hostage, and, he tells us, others have suggested that he murdered her. He doesn’t remember, so he can’t be sure. Our narrator neglects to provide a clear reason for the deterioration of their relationship, but he does sporadically recount (as if unrelated) a series of epiphanies and recollections surrounding their time together. Importantly, these anecdotes implicate the hyper-politicization of their religious backgrounds, giving the lie to his attempt to erase politics and ideology from both his personal history and that of the war.

Though the novels discussed in the previous chapter also emphasize the experiential impact of war, the effect is much more sinister here. Even if the narrators and protagonists in Chapter 1 devoted more of their commentary to the impact of war on their daily lives than they did to a discussion of partisan motivations, they nonetheless addressed the latter directly. Here, however, the narrator seems to wish to avoid politics. Not only does he avoid mention of the violent militarization of politics that has impacted others, but he also manages not to mention his own role in the destruction of Lebanon, or his agency in his own self-destruction.

The tactic of narrative denial here not only suggests personal complicity with the general amnesty’s protection, but also nods toward a broader trend of growing disillusionment with war by its end. A study of over four hundred former fighters conducted in 2010 shows that the average combatant participated in the conflict for only seven of the war’s fifteen years: less than half of the conflict (Diwan al-thakira, 33). While this is certainly not a negligible amount of time, when we combine this information with other quantitative and qualitative data, a fuller picture emerges. For
instance, nearly sixty percent of those surveyed indicated that either a sense of futility or a debilitating injury sustained in the war were behind their decision to lay down arms (ibid). In other words, the psychic and physical toll of war eventually came to outweigh the ideological motivations for it. This was especially the case during the latter half of the conflict when increasingly aggressive foreign interventions changed the character of the war altogether. Interviews carried by local newspapers in the 2000s also indicated that during the mid-to-late 1980s, many low-ranking former fighters felt as if their leaders had betrayed them and their cause (Haugbolle 2018). Our protagonist’s amnesia and disregard for political detail is therefore, in a way, a commentary upon the collapse of ideology.

While his narrative is certainly rife with deceit, misinformation and avoidance, it is also laced with lacunae and gaps that are not intentional. He alludes to his amnesia in a roundabout way, noting that the many things he has forgotten often return to him as if unbidden during his captivity and at Dayr al-Salib. Upon emerging from these episodes, he feels “on edge” desperately digging up rocks, dirt, leaves, and dust in search of something whose identity he does not know, until he eventually altogether forgets that he had been in search of something to begin with (DP, 83). He is aware of his mental imbalance, describing himself as if his mind had fallen into pieces, introducing a fragmented form of consciousness. In language far more vivid than that of al junun or la folie, the language of his selfhood is not simply expressed in terms of a psychological state but an existential one, as well: he describes the failure of memory, somatic dis-ease, insatiability, and hopeless fragmentation.

Yet the traces of that which he has sought to elide from his story remain. The novel makes this most clear over a single span of less than ten pages, which contain three brief anecdotes. Braided
together, they help the reader form an understanding of our protagonist’s sanity as the price of violent confessional ideology, even if he is unwilling to acknowledge it as such. In the first of the anecdotes, we learn that the war arrived at his village when two brothers of a local woman, Hanna, were killed. Whether they had been the deliberate targets of a militia, or simply unfortunate victims remained unclear. Regardless, Hanna evoked the creed of tribal Lebanon, demanding blood payment. Standing at the center of the town square, she is thronged by statues of “the powerful and enormously compassionate patron saints, our lords and fathers who have preserved our blood from the impurity of mixing and fog of intermingling” (DP, 94). She calls upon their ancestral names as she prays to the Virgin Mary.

Hanna began to speak, the narrator recalls, addressing ancestors and the Virgin alike “without any preliminaries, eschewing chants and formulaic prayers,” asking them to “protect our village and crush our enemy … to send sulfur and flame raining down on whosoever threatens the Virgin’s children.” And as she spoke, a group of women surrounded her, beating their chests like drums “to the rhythm of the penitence and insistent piety behind the sentences of Saint Hanna, whose words are coming faster and in fragments” (DP, 96). Her grief-laden exhortations catalyzed a religious frenzy in which villagers reported seeing the Virgin Mary’s hands dripping blood instead of holy oil. A silence descended upon the village in the wake of this call-to-arms, and the men who had not yet joined the war began to ready their weapons. While the protagonist never revealed the identities of those upon whom his townspeople will seek revenge, his narrative (admittedly reductive to this point insofar as it has distilled the conflict down to a war between Christians and Muslims), makes it clear that the latter will be the target.

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22 Michael Gilsenan’s 1989 Lords of the Lebanese Marches offers a detailed analysis of the nature of tribalism in Akkar province (a northern Lebanese town) in the years prior to the 1975 war. A significant portion of his study is dedicated to understanding the development and resolution of blood feuds between and within Lebanese clans.

23 Barakat’s narrative simplification of this conflict in terms of a war between Muslims and Christians is worth noting here. The fact that her narrator makes no distinction between sects of Islam and Christianity but lumps them together is more in line with over-simplified Western narratives of the Lebanese civil war than what are often more nuanced Lebanese literary and intellectual perspectives.
Very shortly thereafter, he offers a second anecdote suggesting the role of confessional rhetoric in inciting, or at least celebrating, violence. He reflects upon the regularity with which television stations would broadcast videos after a suicide-bombing attack. The videos would feature the last words of the martyr who recorded a final message to be seen after his attack, when he was dead. Videos of Muslim militiamen, the narrator said, would be broadcast into West Beirut, and those of Christian militiamen would be broadcast into East Beirut so that the appropriate sectors could celebrate their respective martyrs. Barakat’s narrator scrutinizes the concept of martyrdom, recalling the messianic rhetoric of one particular broadcast piped into his living room: “He tells us that he will shed his blood for us … his blood that is the most elemental condition of our beatitude. … He said to them: Take, eat. This is my body. And they took it and ate. He said to them: Take, drink. This is my blood. And they took it and drank” (DP, 109-110).

And yet, there is a contradiction: the narrator had actually begun this passage describing a Muslim martyr’s video – someone who would neither believe in, nor use, the language of a messianic Christ. I maintain that the slippage between the two faiths does not suggest that the protagonist views the warring factions as inherently the same. Rather, he calls attention to the paradox of the universal and almost formulaic rhetoric of war, regardless of professed political or religious affiliation. His ability to see this clearly has ironically only been afforded to him once he has entered the space of the psychiatric asylum. In this space, removed from the rest of society, he cogently deconstructs the figure of the martyr, and, in so doing, the war’s “politics.” The various propaganda arms of the paramilitary organizations, he realizes, have conditioned the populace to reduce a man to his image, and his image to a signifier, until all that is left is what he calls a “[c]reated, crafted icon.” (DP, 110). The war, he then suggests, is waged in and through these signifying icons, creating a labyrinthine echo of nostalgia – a distortion of space and time – one that conflates the time of the Messiah with the time of Lebanon’s civil war.
The sense of being adrift in space and time sets the protagonist’s village on a permanent collision course with history, just as the rootlessness of the martyr places the paramilitaries and their supporters afloat on the sea of political violence. It is in this context (and still in this ten-page section of his narrative) that the protagonist offers his final anecdote. This one is more personal. It demonstrates how the polemics of his interconfessional wartime affair caused him to feel unmoored from his sense of identity and community. He recalls his lover’s fear that her husband and children would misinterpret her absence as a sign of her death. She begins to emotionally withdraw: the distance causing our protagonist to eventually realize that she had become “a woman without any place” (DP, 102) and, given the fever sweeping his community and hers, she could not be folded into his family. She could only make him lose his. As his lover becomes other, she becomes an object upon which to inflict violence.

Now, the narrator will never acknowledge – not even from Dayr al-Salib – that militarized confessionalism is what thwarted the possibility of love during war. He certainly would not admit that he internalized its illogic and allowed it to sabotage their relationship, if not drive him to outright murder. But it is readily apparent that the souring of their relationship is a reflection of his inability to see himself as both a member of his confessional community and able to have a romance outside of it. The environment had provoked a crisis of identity, forcing him to make a choice between kinship and love. He chose the former, crafting a new narrative wherein his pursuit of her had somehow transformed into her denaturing of him:

… she had stripped me of my final refuge and my own people […]. She knew that she had turned me into a creature no better than a naked worm and one without a family, abandoned in the midst of the turmoil of a battle that we had at least to admit was fratricidal. She left behind a worm that, if killed in the street by a stray bullet, would have no one to go to the hospital morgue to identify it or carry it to wherever its family had their ancestral mausoleum. That woman took my burial place from me. (DP, 103)

We do not know whether the protagonist became part of a militia before or after his failed affair. Nor do we know if he actually killed his paramour. But even without definitive answers, the
impact of militarized confessionalism and its logic is clear: he belongs, he has a people, or he does not. What could be greater proof of the primacy of identity in our hierarchy of needs than, as Erich Fromm says, “the fact that people are willing to risk their lives, to give up their love, to surrender their freedom, to sacrifice their own thoughts, for the sake of being one of the herd, of conforming, and thus of acquiring a sense of identity, even though it is an illusory one” (Fromm, 63; my emphasis). Our protagonist’s affiliation with a militia, the militarization of his natal village and the souring of his affair are, in themselves, sufficient reasons to refuse the work of remembering to say nothing of the torture he experienced or the threat of social alienation he believed would follow the affair. Forgetting, in his case, or refusing to call upon certain memories, could certainly be preferable to remembering. Amnesia is a strategy that allows him to live with himself.

But amnesia is not only of interest because of the questions it brings to light about memory and volition, but also for its implications with respect to witnessing. Trauma theorists borrowing from Sigmund Freud have long held that healing is best accomplished through the “talking cure.” The supposition sustaining psychology is that a person will experience fewer and less intrusive symptoms of trauma if they are able to verbalize what has scarred them. Witnessing is equally important for those involved in post-conflict work – be it humanitarian, human rights, or transitional justice. In these lines of work, witnessing is a means of reconstructing a record of events, and paving the way for future reparations.

For the mad, however, and certainly for the amnesiac, witnessing is all but impossible. How could someone who cannot recount a chronological sequence of events be a witness? We can imagine – in what they do not say, in how we read into their affect, for instance – what they have witnessed, but then we (perhaps improperly) are attempting to share the work of witness with them. I understand Barakat’s novel as suggesting that amnesty and amnesia make witnessing impossible. To begin with, while amnesty is the condition which would allow the narrator to speak freely about the war, should he wish to, it also creates the conditions for him to contour his amnesia. Moreover,
where the amnesty all but nullifies the sense of urgency for his testimony, his amnesia – again, one of the many symptoms of his madness – strips a potential and as-yet-unuttered testimony of its credibility. And so, the two are in collusion over and beyond the etymological connection suggested by the words which both have, at their core, the meaning of forgetting, leaving in the past.

But the protagonist is not simply challenged in his ability to witness: he also refuses to witness. His refusal is illustrated through his interactions with the resident psychiatrist at Dayr al-Salib, a Lebanese émigré to the United States, who has returned to offer his services. It is no coincidence that Barakat has chosen an émigré to insist on the need to witness. In “The Historical Background of Psychiatry in Lebanon,” American University of Beirut-trained psychiatrist and trustee Herant Katchadourian notes that by the mid-twentieth century, psychiatrists from the United States constituted the newest wave of foreign doctors of the psyche to arrive in the Middle East. The figure of the western or westernized psychiatrist appears often in Ghada al-Samman’s short story collection *Al-Qamar al murabba*’ (1994), usually as a means of illustrating the failure of western psychiatry to accurately characterize the psychic and spiritual experiences of émigrés from Lebanon and Syria (Ragin 2018). In Huda Barakat’s *Disciples of Passion*, the Americanized doctor scribbles notes “in a foreign script,” and asks his patient to recount his memories. His demands come across as voyeuristic, even “sadistic,” so the protagonist refuses (DS, 68). When the doctor assumes his charge cannot talk (as opposed to will not), he encourages him to draw. Here, the protagonist’s disgust reaches its apex:

Oh Lord. This was all I was lacking …

‘Sit by yourself – you were a hostage, and they tortured you. Take your time. Be witness to the violence.’ This is what the doctor says to me. You, whose body erupts in violence, whose head flares with the memory of killing and the desire to kill again and again, with no limit, no end. Draw, write, doodle.

Draw a white dove from whose wings fall beads of red. Or a green branch. We will bathe you and comb your hair. We will mount a grand exhibition, an opening with great publicity and fanfare. In the hospital, at Dayr al Salib.” (DP, 70-71)
In his sarcastic internal monologue, he rejects both the expectation of witnessing and its language, finding them deeply uninterested in his personal healing, and ultimately meant to satisfy others’ wishes to see violence sublimated into a more palatable semiotic. Are the white dove and the green branch much different signifiers than Lebanon’s phoenix? Perhaps the dove is a distant relation—a cousin—which would make even the doctor’s project of healing complicit with the politics of amnesty and the psychology of amnesia. In this case, the doctor’s delusion would be more concerning than the protagonist’s: what would it matter how the protagonist presents his narrative if those intended to hear it want only a certain version told in a particular way? Never mind that the patient feels as if his “body erupts in violence” and his “head flares with the memory of killing and the desire to kill again and again.” His audience is uninterested in plumbing the depths of the latent threat contained in his body; in understanding what his memories of killing are and why he was tempted to kill. The talking cure is no cure at all.

In perhaps the most searing indictment of the consequences of amnesty and amnesia, the unnamed patient at Dayr al-Salib reveals the difference between what he considers a compassionate (self-inflicted) amnesia which he authorizes for himself, versus that which the Lebanese public wishes would befall their hospitalized relatives. His own family, he says, would prefer to believe that his amnesia is entirely a function of the brain damage he suffered during his torture and is therefore also irreversible. He will allow them to believe this, he says, for the sake of postwar peace. His family is typical of those who visit the hospital. Believing their relatives to be truly catatonic and only semi-conscious at best, he says they would prefer to hold onto the hope of having been forgotten so that they, in turn, can forget their relatives when they return home to peace. So he will not correct their insistence on attributing his illness “vehemently and angrily, to my kidnapping and the torture sessions,” especially since “they [all] agreed,” reaching this conclusion without ever seeming “aware of my presence as they offered reasons for my mental illness” (DP, 15-16).
These people don’t think that invalids have anything to do with real life, because they believe that we exist in its shadows, in its unreality, on its remote and barren margins. [W]e, they think, exist in that obscure and ephemeral realm that divides life from death. … Yet we do remind these people awfully of themselves. Our bodies are like theirs; like them we walk and talk, and in spite of our pasts we were just like them, before we arrived at our present state, broken, ill, far removed from life and its brilliant essence” (DP, 65).

Evoking the barzakh, the protagonist describes both a space into which the insane were forced by the war, and to which they remain abandoned by their families, the public, the amnesty. No one wishes to rescue the barzakh dwellers. Nor does anyone wish to realize that they, too, are in a barzakh of their own making. Instead, visitors to the psychiatric hospital enter only to seek out a confirmation that they will not become the living dead they see before them – those who somehow touch both war and peace, forcing them to remain connected in defiance of a law which announced their separation. The barzakh-dwellers insist on the unthinkable: that the phoenix will not rise.

Palimpsestic Erasures

In another postwar novel, however, it is the madman who believes himself to be the phoenix, arising from the ashes of those who persecute him. The belief in the possibility of a personal rebirth (as opposed to a national rebirth), freed from the tortuousness of postwar life, is central to Ilyas Khuri’s novel, Yalo. It is 1994 and the protagonist, Daniel Yalo (who goes by “Yalo”), has just been sentenced to ten years imprisonment on multiple counts of rape and theft. For the last three years, he has been in detention, under investigation by police who believe that he was part of a network of Israeli-allied militia driven underground by the declared end of the war. Accused of planting explosives in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, Yalo is tortured and repeatedly forced to write and re-write his “confession”: itself a repertoire of torture, the narrator tells us, used by Arab regimes on political prisoners (Yalo, 193-194). Through the relentlessness of his (re)writing, by the novel’s end, he eventually comes to understand both the futility of recounting his past and instead focus upon the delusional option of constructing himself anew: after three years of torture and countless drafts of his
life story – all of which prove dissatisfaction to his captors – Yalo completely dissociates. “Daniel” takes over the task of narration, explaining that Yalo has retreated into silence, ascended onto a “heavenly throne” which is his permanent home (Yalo 303, 314).

Despite the admixture of madness and religion in his narrative, Yalo does not and cannot assume the mantle of the divine madman: he is not a prophet, nor is he endowed with an otherworldly understanding of life. He does, however, have access to another reality, one which his peers have been quick to disavow and of which his psyche retains a trace even as he dissociates: war. His dual consciousness is characterized by his recognition that he has been branded “culturally unassimilable.” Refusing the narrative that he is asked to espouse in order to be accepted into postwar Lebanese society; unable to make sense of his pasts; and suspended at the meeting of two temporalities which are perhaps not so separate after all, he gives birth to himself anew, into a cosmological order of his own making.

But Yalo arrives at this point slowly. His efforts are initially dedicated to an earnest attempt to write the story of his life, including the story of the crimes of which he stands accused. A third-person omniscient narrator permits readers access to Yalo’s non-linear, and often stream-of-consciousness thoughts, interwoven between drafts – pages which in themselves produce an account considerably more nuanced than the requested confession. To the police and judiciary meant to ascertain his guilt, his writings are nonsensical ramblings. To us, as readers, they are convoluted attempts to offer a personal or familial history in parallel with a regional political history. If, in The Story of Zahra, this narrative technique broadens the aperture through which readers make sense of the Lebanese political landscape between 1958 and 1975, it works to allows readers of Yalo to appreciate the devastating impact of the amnesty the post-war era. “Tossed here [in the prison], isolated from the world, Yalo was confused as to how he should organize his memory. He was confused because things came to him all at once and the images intermingled in his head, times
overlapped in his consciousness…” (Yalo, 144-145). The *barzakh* space-time of the postcolony, in other words, is also that of the postwar.

He could, for instance, simply offer a story of 1991: this is, after all, what he has been asked for. Instead, he takes us on a journey spanning Ottoman Turkey to Lebanon of the early 1970s. It is the mise-en-abyme nature of the story Yalo offers, a story of the circumstances leading him to imprisonment in 1994, that will prove too nuanced for the penal system to process. What he offers, in its written form, is a palimpsestic text overdetermined by history, memory and the gaps in between. It is of no use to Lebanon’s legal guardians; but as a metaphor for a century of Lebanon-in-the-making, and as an explanation of madness in the aftermath of a war as yet un-ended, it is useful for us. Yalo’s drafts and unwritten memories chronicle an intergenerational account of the last century of a family hailing from the Mediterranean – a previously unwritten history which, in Yalo’s account, encompasses Ottoman genocide, forced migration, religious zealotry, madness, and war. It is also a searing indictment of a state collapsed into anarchy, abandoning a generation of young men to fend for themselves, seeking to make them a scapegoat for the ongoing violence.

The more Yalo is tortured, the less he ultimately intends his drafts to convince an audience of adjudicators of his professed innocence: the act of speaking requires someone who will listen, and he knows that no one will listen to him. Once he realizes that he has been effectively condemned to death, and that “the dead do not write,” he decides to stop writing altogether (Yalo, 239). By this time, we have a better understanding of his life and the story he was trying to tell. With that said, neither Yalo’s confessions, nor the novel which contains them, offer an account of Yalo’s actions as a paramilitary, nor his postwar criminality. The nested and incomplete narratives in Khuri’s novel are voiced by a madman whose drive to record is punctuated by regular acknowledgments of amnesia (Yalo); a dissociated personality who will guard his secrets (Daniel); and an omniscient narrator complicit in Yalo/Daniel’s omissions. The overlapping silences – intentional and otherwise – run concurrent to the state’s amnesia. The novel imagines the Lebanese state’s historical consciousness as
a pockmarked landscape – one which necessitates precisely the intergenerational chronicle Yalo tried to offer. His chronicle may not have cleared his name, but it would have corrected a version of history which held men like him as simply part of a criminal underbelly blighting Lebanon’s peace, and not an embodied vestige of a legacy of violence from which the region has failed to break. Unlike the narrator from Dayr al Salib, Yalo is not willing to go to his grave quietly, the sacrificial lamb that will allow postwar Lebanon to preserve its fantasy. He is unwilling to be the scapegoated madman sacrificed on the altar of history and insists upon telling a story of decades of structural and forced erasures.

But his narrative of structural violence is also framed in such a way as to eclipse personal agency insofar as he avoids remembering and naming in their entirety those actions which marked him as a participant in Lebanon’s most recent violence. We learn that Yalo fought with the Maronite Lebanese Forces from 1979 to 1989 before fleeing to Paris and becoming temporarily homeless. He returned to Lebanon once the war ended in 1991 to serve as a personal security guard for a notorious wartime arms trafficker and his family. For several months, he robbed and raped men and women who drove to a forest abutting his employer’s property, and it is during this period of time that he has been accused of collaborating with underground members of the Lebanese Forces to terrorize the country as it transitions to postwar life.

Freed by the general amnesty, the courts have no legal interest in Yalo’s ten-year involvement with the Lebanese Forces. In fact, Yalo will not offer any details about this portion of his life in the multiple drafts of his confession, nor will the omniscient narrator who recounts Yalo’s life and thought-processes have much to say about this period of Yalo’s life. Amidst a series of erasures, therefore, the reader is left with a metaphor, and a provocation, for the problematic of how a nation of victim-perpetrators will write their [Hi]stories. Left in the barzakh between life and death, between one self and two, between Lebanon’s past and its present, Yalo is emblematic of the fate of very recent memory -- memory perhaps not even fully processed -- which the state buries alive.
Given the nonlinear style in which Yalo recounts his life, the reader is required to create something akin to a mental timeline of their own as they read through his multiple drafts, adding and inserting new elements of his (family’s) story with each version. By the novel’s end – when he has finally stopped drafting and falls silent – we realize that Yalo’s account of his life began with a foundational historical erasure. Shortly after the Armenian genocide in 1915, Ottoman troops massacred the inhabitants of the Syriac Christian town of Tur Abdin in modern-day Turkey. “[N]o one remembers [my grandfather’s massacre]” Yalo drily observes, “because it was a minor massacre incidental to a major one [the Armenian genocide]. Woe unto a people butchered in a peripheral massacre, because the butcher will not even find it necessary to wipe the blood from his knives.” (Yalo, 295). Reconstructing teleologically a list of the other events Yalo curates in his drafts of his life, his grandfather’s traumatic story will lay the groundwork for Yalo’s understanding of the history of violence which will inform his own life. But the prequel about historical erasure can also be understood as a prequel to another historical act of erasure. In the early 1990s no one will want to remember Lebanon’s Yalos: those who came of age during the war, descended from histories of violence they were destined to reenact. Lebanon’s Yalos will instead be confined to small, dark spaces which remove them from sight and memory: prisons, sanatoriums, attics. They will hang in limbo, haunted by a past that is anything but “past” and unable to join the rest of the country in its declared move toward a peacetime future. Marching closer to death by way of insanity – specifically, an amnesia for the events of the war which parallels the public’s amnesia for their very existence – they will become peripheral to Lebanon.

Yalo’s grandfather, a three-year-old at the time of the massacre, was orphaned and taken in by a Kurdish family as part of an Ottoman program to distribute the surviving children (Yalo, 295). When the Empire dissolved, the adult survivors who had escaped the violence returned to reclaim their children. Now an adult, Yalo’s grandfather felt as if he belonged to both and neither the world of the Turkish Kurds who had raised him as their own and of his Syriac relatives who had returned
to claim him. This latter group, his biological family, inflicted upon him the abusive rage and violence born of their unprocessed trauma and misery. There was no joy in the reclamation of family. Rather than stay with them, he fled to Beirut and married into the family of a Syriac priest. Under his father-in-law’s tutelage, he was trained as a religious figure and was encouraged to see himself as a “disciple” chosen “from among the children of the massacres” (Yalo, 299). It is in Lebanon, land of asylum, that Yalo’s mother is born, and, where she eventually gives birth to Yalo in 1969. Yalo’s grandfather and mother will raise him alone: Yalo’s biological father will abandon them, leaving Yalo’s mother to feel crushed by the ever-tightening constraints of her father’s religious zealotry and patriarchal sensibilities.

Yalo’s early childhood memories include watching his grandfather deteriorate after the arrival of a mysterious visitor who turns out to be the latter’s adoptive Kurdish father. The visit so consumed his grandfather in memories of a traumatic past that he became a “maniac obsessed with delusions and the idea of death” (Yalo, 241). As a young Yalo struggles to understand what is happening to his grandfather, violence in Lebanon begins to accelerate in anticipation of civil war. In 1972, Yalo plays outside with a friend; a shell drops on his street, instantly killing his playmate while striking Yalo temporarily deaf and dumb. Yalo will develop both an ulcer and permanent amnesia for the incident, only aware that it happened because his mother told him (Yalo, 208). As the war violence intensifies, his grandfather continues to suffer, spiraling toward death, whittling away into a “crazy man” with little memory (Yalo, 259).

Following the grandfather’s death, Yalo and his mother flee their predominantly Syriac Beirut neighborhood and relocate in a Maronite enclave. His mother is miserable, feeling as if she were in exile, fated to die away from her homeland, not unlike her father. Gradually, Yalo watches as his mother, too, begins to turn into a “maniac” (Yalo, 178). She begins to hallucinate, sleepwalk, and becomes obsessed with the idea that her reflection has disappeared from all mirrors in her house. Yalo faces three options: resign himself to the inevitability of a hereditary insanity, flee, or join the
war. While in prison, he will claim that only the third option seemed truly viable: no one voluntarily chooses insanity, and, he tells us, that his grandfather had once told him that emigrating would kill a man’s soul – the fruit of which seemed evident in both his and demise and that of his daughter. Yet, Yalo will also claim to have joined because he needed to escape the insanity of his house. Whatever the reason, he joined the Maronite Lebanese Forces in 1979 and remained with them for the next ten years.

All that we learn about Yalo’s time with the Lebanese Forces comes from two brief vignettes: fleeting interruptions to his stream of consciousness-style interior monologue. As with our glimpses into the wartime life of the protagonist in *Disciples of Passion*, these brief recollections establish the power of confessionalism to motivate violence. The intersection of religion and violence have haunted multiple generations of his family: by the time we arrive at Yalo’s generation, this intersection takes the form of the 1975-1990 confessional warfare. In the first of his two memories, Yalo and his peers from the Lebanese Forces drag three men into a cemetery, crucify them, and violate their bodies (Yalo, 26). His other memory of the war is of a funeral of a particularly sadistic member of his militia. At the funeral, the dead militiaman’s mother suffers a nervous breakdown: convinced that her son had become a saint at the moment of his death, she had been profoundly disturbed to see her son’s bones in the casket. She would spend the rest of her life in psychiatric hospitals.

Both events are also events for which he subsequently develops amnesia. The intensification of torture at the hands of the investigating police in the early 1990s and his resultant proximity to death seem to have triggered the brief resurfacing of these memories, as if embodied intergenerational memory overdetermined by a longer history of political violence had itself resurfaced. At the same time, it is precisely this connection between violence, death and religious fervor that initially rendered these memories unbearable, pointing as they did to Yalo’s own complicity in a project which he elsewhere portrayed as a structural force which drove his family (and
by extension, him) to insanity and death. In other words, repressed through an amnesia which is neither entirely traumatic nor chosen, the memories of his complicity in the very structural history he critiques will resurface only under torture.

Yalo escapes to Paris in 1989, disillusioned with the war before it comes to destroy the Maronite militias. As with the inconsistencies in his stated rationales for joining a war which he mostly avoids narrating as he writes the story of his life, so too does he offer contradictory explanations for why he left. One of the explanations, however, is notable for its detail as well as the consistency with the trope of the long history that has led to his imprisonment. He recalls his mother telling him about the Druze-Christian wars in 1860, and his impression that they “inaugurated a chain of massacres” in Lebanon for over a century (Yalo, 196). During one of these massacres, his mother told him, a woman “went into a stupor” and began to wander the country “like a madwoman” (Yalo, 198). But it is not only the madness of traumatic response to the violence of war that is born during these massacres, Yalo realizes, but also a madness which presages that of the militiamen in 1975. By 1975, Yalo says, the Lebanese had “dug up the history of all their past wars to justify their madness” as well as the zeal with which they crucified, burned, desecrated, massacred, tortured, bombed and dismembered” (Yalo, 197). Marching under the worn but cared-for banners of confessional myths and memories, Yalo eventually felt as if “he had taken in too many stories and couldn’t bear it any longer” (Yalo, 197).

Yalo's memory is paradoxically both prodigious and constrained: he has preserved two generations of oral histories detailing the history of weaponized religion, and yet cannot accommodate the memory of his own lifetime of complicity in a similar project. As a metaphor for collective memory in Lebanon, Khuri’s protagonist is emblematic of the process by which the embers of war never fully extinguish. There are layers, millennia even, of painful memories (as Etel Adnan’s fiction tells us) embodied in the present generations. Reflexively, without thinking, these generations heed the call to arms. Once there is nothing left to destroy and it is time to rebuild, they
will – but the memories have not been expunged and the traces of blood have only accumulated. Yalo is the latest member of his generation to enact embodied memory. Torn by the compulsion to write his intergenerational memory into history and the simultaneous need to repress knowledge of his own actions in the present, the drafts he writes offer confessions (the state’s goal) underlaid with a repressed history (his goal): a double text. But his text is also doubled in a way he did not intend. The drafts he authored are histories of structural erasures written atop his own personal erasures. He is unwittingly in collusion with the very agenda which he denounces: it is the amnesty which allows his fantasy of rebirth as “Daniel.” But the price of being born again as Daniel is the silencing of Yalo, a man whose memory was already compromised and who now refuses to talk; and the price of the amnesty was state-sponsored amnesia.

**Escaping the Barzakh**

Najwa Barakat’s *Oh Salaam!* also takes up the delusion of rebirth, attuned to the question of the political economy of postwar memory and forgetting. Set in post-war Beirut, Barakat’s protagonists are former bomb-makers, torturers and snipers. There are, however, no contextual clues which could help the reader decipher their confessional affiliations. Najwa Barakat’s depoliticization of the postwar combatant, acknowledging only a generic paramilitary past, adds another layer of nuance to the literary relationship imagined between amnesty and amnesia as it related to confessionalism. Whereas in Ilyas Khuri and Huda Barakat’s novels the protagonists may choose whether to discuss the politics of their wartime affiliations or not (and mostly choose not to), it is Najwa Barakat, the author herself, who removes the confessional signifier from her novel. This assumption of agency enables her to highlight a different facet of the postwar amnesty’s afterlife: pervasive hypocrisy and corruption across all confessions. Published in 1998, against the backdrop of the Prime Minister Hariri’s reconstruction of downtown Beirut, Barakat is already at work pulling
down the newly-constructed facades to reveal a city of the living dead. Her literary Beirut is one where ghosts choke the future, and the war continues to claim its victims.

The protagonists are connected by their recent histories as paramilitaries as well as by their families. In the world of *Oh Salaam*, we find a widowed fiancée and a grief-stricken woman who was to be her mother-in-law. The women, Salaam and Lurice, are linked by their fiancé and son, respectively, “The Albino,” a torturer in one of the militias. They share a home, the latter largely keeping to a small attic apartment: the literal madwoman in the attic, Lurice seldom interacts with anyone other than the imagined ghost of her son, with whom she communes as if he were still alive, simply regressed to a more innocent pre-adolescence.

Their droll existence is punctured by the reappearance of Luqman, a friend and co-combatant of The Albino. Luqman, a former bomb-maker, is struggling to acclimate to a society whose moral codes have suddenly been reversed. Postwar Lebanon has disowned its recent past and many of those who were a part of it – save those whose pre-war family names and wealth allowed them to return to status quo ante. With little more than a resume of criminal activity to boast of, he is unemployed and bitter while the well-heeled enjoy a reincarnating and opulent Beirut. Luqman scoffs at the façade of new luxury high-rises towering above war-blighted neighborhoods:

>The [new] buildings had strange, seductive names, enticing designs, and specifications that beggared the imagination. They rose up and remained half-finished, hanging in the air. Like ghosts. Like freaks of nature, growing taller and more absurd. Like powerful men when they go mad and suffer delusions of grandeur, afflicted by hallucinations, amnesia, and nervous breakdowns. (OS, 31)

Anthropomorphizing postwar Beirut’s luxury aesthetic as an amnesiac but powerful madman, Luqman sees the reconstruction, and its architects, as transparent veneers pitifully delusional in their belief that they have masked the true face of society: his. Remaining half-finished, the projects will occasionally be stymied by land rights disputes between the government and deed-holding citizens who have since emigrated, the flight caused by the war interrupting the narrative of
a city rebuilt from it. Echoing what Shane Alcobia-Murphy calls “willed amnesia” which was precipitated by an act of state,” the frenzy of construction is meant to mask the state’s fear of that which it would prefer be laid to rest (Alcobia-Murphy, 84). But the partially-covered trace remains, a signifier of both living death (“ghosts”) and madness, the twinned elements of barzakh-dwelling.

Indeed, the Lebanese state has an economic incentive to encourage amnesty and amnesia: there was profit to be made in a narrative about the future, even and perhaps especially if that narrative shirked the past and its legacy. Rita Barnard has spoken of the profitable collaboration between the post-apartheid South African state and the advertising industry. The aim of this collaboration was to induce “strategic unremembering” among citizen-consumers by redirecting their attention away from the past, and toward an imagined future in which peace was underwritten by financial prosperity. The campaigns to re-brand the country “in the interests of the market” referenced and then re-signified the process of post-conflict rebuilding in the language of consumerism – a pursuit immediately recognizable to critics of Hariri’s work with Solidere’s in downtown Beirut (Bernard, np). In Lebanon, John Nagle writes, there is a “capitalist peace” at work – one which highlights the imbrication of financial motivations with tenuous political stability. This peace, according to Michael Humphrey, remains viable only through “elite deals, amnesty and amnesia” which act as the façade hanging over “the layers of violence on which peace is constantly reconstituted” in Lebanon (Nagle, 149; Humphrey, 6 and 14).

While Luqmán will never be part of the elite whose deal-making will help secure their amnesty and facilitate their amnesia, he will nonetheless attempt to create himself anew as a renaissance man. Recalling that Lurice, the mother of his deceased friend, The Albino, is a wealthy

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24 On nearly each of my four research trips to Lebanon between 2016 and 2019, I heard a different explanation for why so many of the reconstruction projects in Beirut appeared stalled. These stalled projects were even more noticeable than the apartment and office buildings pockmarked with bullet holes and damage from shells which sprinkle nearly every neighborhood in Beirut, and many of the coastal cities of Lebanon. One explanation I heard repeatedly was that the contractors who attempted to build on the land were stymied by a dispute over inheritance and thus rightful ownership of the property.
woman, and that Salaam is her guardian, Luqman sets about the task of ingratiating himself with both, hoping to acquire sufficient funds to leave Lebanon and start life over. As he spends more time with Salaam, he is compelled to join her on her regular visits to her brother, who has been languishing in an unnamed government-run sanatorium for years after witnessing the death of their parents during the war (OS, 43). During one such visit, Luqman encounters Najib, yet another member of the outfit to which Luqman and The Albino belonged. When the war ended, Najib became a drug-smuggler, turning to a life of petty crime like many low-ranking former combatants, including Yalo. When he was apprehended by the police, Najib’s superiors bribed the necessary officials, ensuring that he would be spared a life-sentence and placed in a sanatorium instead of prison. Once Luqman and Najib are reunited, Luqman proposes a business partnership: Luqman will arrange for Najib’s release whereupon they will launch a rat extermination company, an enterprise in which Luqman has no interest outside of generating sufficient revenue to emigrate.

For Najib, however, the stakes of this project are much higher. While in the sanatorium, Najib had become a disciple to another patient – widely considered to be a madman – who believed that plague-carrying rats had caused the war. The patient had dedicated himself to finding a permanent method of extermination so that Lebanon would not fall victim to their disease again. He conducted research and experiments on the sanatorium’s rat populace, recording his findings in notebooks which he bequeathed to Najib when he died. Najib vowed to continue his quest for a mode of exterminating the offending rodents, particularly “Surmulot ou rattus norvegicus,” a particularly fratricidal and cannibalistic species of rat which kills because “it enjoys destruction” (OS, 80-81).

25 In the original: “al-musaha al-hukumi” (39). Barakat’s nomenclature suggests a degree of literary license in order to make her point about government corruption. According to a 2010 report by the World Health Organization, published a decade after Ya Salaam and two years before its translation as Oh Salaam, the vast majority of mental health facilities in Lebanon were “community-based” as opposed to government-run (WHO-AIMS). The few facilities that were government-run were partially staffed with psychologists but more commonly with social workers, nurses and non-mental health practitioners.
“Its memory is prodigious,” Najib’s mentor wrote, in a thinly veiled allegory to Lebanese confessional militarism. “It passes on information about a specific position from generation to generation […] It enjoys powerful nationalistic sentiments and is noted for a deep hatred toward outsiders and strangers, even from their own species,” he continues (OS, 82). His language evokes that of Etel Adnan’s narrator. By choosing to continue the madman’s research, Najib has chosen amnesia. Unwilling to confront the consequences of his involvement in the war, he overwrites his memory of the causes and nature of the conflict with a new narrative which projects responsibility onto rats. He so successfully re-encodes this narrative that he dedicates the remainder of his life to this pursuit. It is his own rebirth – a path to redemption which allows him both amnesty for his deeds and amnesia for the memory of them. But as his delusion progresses, his madness accelerates, and he dies before he can find a “cure.”

Despite Najib’s march toward death, Luqman is oblivious. In full pursuit of his exit strategy, he seems unaware that his former comrade-in-arms remains trapped in the grip of war. Luqman does not even think about the war, unless it is to briefly observe how far he has fallen in social stature since its end. Bitterly, he recalls how his now-estranged family members had quickly noticed when his “star was rising” during the war, and ingratiated themselves with him in order to have access to his money (OS, 45). But the old class of elite was once again ensconced at the top of the post-war hierarchy; if he were to try to tell anyone that he used to be a powerful figure “they would have arrested him immediately and made him a permanent inmate of this asylum. Who would ever believe him if he told of the power, influence, and wealth he used to have?” (OS, 50). Rather than rebuild in this postwar society, he wants simply to “blot out his past with the stroke of a pen” and begin life anew in Paris (OS, 111). He fully intends to take advantage of the amnesty’s provisions for amnesia.

His ability to hold the past at bay seems all the more remarkable considering the extent to which it has consumed Salaam and Lurice – the only other two people from his past with whom he retained a connection. Salaam and her brother were orphaned during the war when their parents were
killed during a round of shelling. Her brother suffered a psychotic break. Unwilling to care for him, Salaam placed him in a sanatorium, leaving him to languish with her as his only visitor. It was easier for her to make semi-regular trips to see him than to be burdened by his living at home with her, especially if she were to have any hope of marrying. When an unforeseen turn of events resulted in his being ejected from the sanatorium and forced back into her care, she murdered him. Even postwar – in Salaam’s mind, anyway – a woman’s value and livelihood still hinged upon marriage: with her brother in the way, her designs on Najib would surely fail. The fratricide she carried out in what she saw as the means by which to guarantee her own survival is the trace of the war ongoing within her. That is to say, Lebanon’s war may have ended, but hers has not: the death of her parents, her brother’s madness, the murderous career of her fiancé and his own demise have taken an irreversible toll upon her, making reality too much to bear. Like Najib, she chooses amnesia: after she murders her brother, she tells herself that he “died, first of all, to thank her. Second, he died to liberate her. And third, he died to absolve her” (OS, 178).

Throughout the chaos wrecking the lives of his former friends, Luqman remains oblivious and continues his preparations to leave the country. The night before he is to leave, he pays a visit to Najib and Salaam. He finds Salaam sitting alone in the dark, putrid-smelling apartment. Najib’s body is decomposing in one of the back rooms. In denial about the death of yet another lover, Salaam, too, has gone mad. Terrified, Luqman flees the scene, but he becomes more convicted in his decision to leave Lebanon. Hardened by this certitude, he returns to the house in the hopes of stealing more cash. But Luqman has forgotten about the madwoman in the attic. In fact, she is no longer in the attic: she has descended, and mistaken Luqman for the ghost of her son, The Albino. Silently, she locks them both in the house and turns on the gas. Addressing an apoplectic Luqman as if he were her son, she reassures him that they will find rest in death.

Barakat’s narrator explains that, in fact, The Albino’s death had been a murder: Lurice murdered her son when she learned of his heinous wartime occupation. Her subsequent psychosis
and amnesiac communication with an age-regressed version of her son, had therefore not been a function of melancholic grief but a perverse refuge from her act of filicide. It was a narrative which preserved a moment in time at which their innocence remained intact. In this light, Lurice’s murder-suicide becomes legible as not only another manifestation of trauma, but also a solution (if unintended) to the moral conundrum which has haunted her initial act of murder. Though Luqman is not, as she thought, the ghost of her murdered son returned to haunt her, he is, in a manner of speaking, his metaphoric ghost. His appearance disturbs Lurice’s sense of moral equilibrium, for in Luqman, her diseased mind recognizes something familiar, uncanny, dangerous. She voluntarily takes her own life if it means once and for all ending the curse to which she gave birth in the form of her son and his postwar incarnation.

Taken as extreme analogues for the worst of Beirut’s underbelly, Luqman and his cohort are plagued not by rats but with denial, madness and amnesias both traumatic and chosen. Unwilling to truly address their pasts, they repeat them, trapped in homicidal and suicidal cycles of violence. The flat, haunted by the ghost of The Albino, is a trap which claims the lives of those who thought they had survived both him and the war. It is the a physical, if metaphorical, representation of the barzakh. While narratives of rebirth prevail in Yalo and Oh Salaam, escaping the barzakh conditions of a declared postwar state while psychic and structural violence is ongoing, Barakat’s novel suggests, is possible only through death. It is through death that one can be freed of fantasies of rebirth, and of being held hostage by the past. And yet, through the deaths of her tangled web of protagonists, the culture of amnesty and amnesia will effectively remain unchallenged. Barakat’s protagonists have freed themselves from the maddening bind of the postwar amnesty but have left the rest of the country to contend with its consequences.
Conclusion

Of course, *Oh Salaam* is a fictional world: Lebanon’s former combatants are not meeting their demise by murder-suicide or being haunted to death in droves. Barakat herself knows this: in 2019, twenty years after the publication of *Oh Salaam*, she returns to the space of the sanatorium in her novel *Mister Nun* (Sulyeman 2019). *Mister Nun* offers the story of Lebanon’s wars: a story which has yet to exhaust itself because it remains as yet untold. The protagonists of the fiction of the decade of amnesty bore firsthand knowledge of the war but developed an amnesia for it which made their narratives incomplete. They were unable to complete the accounts begun by the fictional women in Chapter One. Thus they were shunted forward to be addressed in the future, once more – a future which still relived its past.

But if the early war novels and the postwar texts which answer them leave gaps in the narrative archive of war, allowing the equally vague signifiers of *al ahdath* and “the Lebanese civil war” to stand, they nevertheless provide the skeleton of another type of archive: an archive of madness. By testifying to the *barzakh* conditions of the postcolony, the violence of war, and of amnesty and amnesia, the madnesses which are articulated from within these strange space-times are preserved on the page – indecipherable as accounts of war, but plain as ledgers of its cost. The authors who have crafted these novels, all of whom have lived in Lebanon for a significant portion of the war, have given new life to an idiom whose meaning extends beyond the diagnostic, to include the cultural, historical, political and relational as literary maps of a world.
Chapter Three: Sabra and Chatila: Maps to a Massacre, Mirrors of Middle Knowledge

“Imagine if everyone knew what I knew! They’d go mad” – Assad Chaftari, Deputy Chief of Intelligence for the Lebanese Forces

While some authors of Lebanese post-war fiction were concerned that a government amnesty would fuel amnesia, further enmeshing Lebanon in its political quagmire, there were two demographics for whom amnesia was all but impossible. Former militia commanders (now Lebanon’s postwar politicians and business elite), and the men who carried out some of the conflict’s bloodiest massacres under their orders lived with experiences which resisted the obliterating power of forgetting. Unlike the fictional, ordinary combatants discussed in Chapter Two, real-life perpetrators clearly recall the details of their action, as well as their motivations, even decades later – a fact which is established through interviews in amateur documentary film from the mid- and late-2000s and early 2010s.

Nevertheless, while they are able to recall and remember, they seem to be in a crisis of knowing. This is to say, after watching and listening to them, viewers are left with the very clear impression that they do not, and cannot, know not what they have done. The barzakh in which they dwell is one in which they have been estranged from themselves and from self-knowledge: they remain at the cusp of a painful knowing and a numbed refusal to know, an unlikely simultaneity that can result only in stasis. The symptom that testifies to this condition – the madness that alerts us to their position in the barzakh – is the breakdown of language; the failure of the enunciative subject. Throughout their filmed accounts of their roles in the war’s violence, the perpetrators invariably experience the failure of language: itself a sign of a knowledge they cannot name except at the expense of their sanity. “Imagine if everyone knew what I knew!” the former Deputy Chief of Intelligence of the Lebanese Armed Forces demands of his audience during an interview in the 2006 film Massaker. “They’d go mad!”
Implicit in his comment is the suggestion that he, himself, would have to be mad, in light of what he knows. Yet, he does not think of himself as mad. Nor does he give the impression of someone who is mad at any point. This is because, as becomes clear, there are limits to what he knows – even about himself. And there are certainly limits to what he will allow the Lebanese public to know, even decades later. In this chapter, I understand “madness” in more subtle terms than the forms it took in Chapters One and Two, and the “madmen” are considerably less self-aware. The madness of the perpetrator, therefore, cannot be conveyed through language, for their language (as a reflection of their self-knowledge) has collapsed in various crucial places. Instead, the trace of their madness is conveyed through the films’ aesthetic translation of their barzakh condition: the paradoxically simultaneous reality of overwhelming memory and self-alienation. Recall here that the etymology of al-junun includes the connotation of that which is hidden, even to oneself. The documentary films at the heart of this chapter – Massaker (2006), In Place (2009) and Layali bila Nawm [Sleepless Nights] (2012) – use their medium-specificity, I argue, to show where the failure of language gestures to the abyss of the barzakh and the madness that coheres within it.

At the cusp of the new millennium, when the novels in Chapter Two were published, a small wave of apologetic testimonies arose from within the ranks of a protected class of former militia leaders. Occupying prominent political roles in the postwar era, leader of the Druze party Walid Jumblatt and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, as well as icons of the war protected by their social capital such as Kata’ib leader Joseph Saade and Lebanese Forces officer Assad Chaftari, began to come forward. The drip of accounts began as early as 1989; by the mid- to late-2000s, this number was steadily, though slowly, increasing. In addition to the knowledge that they remained immune from prosecution, their willingness to speak openly was likely also catalyzed by developments in

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26 A partial list of such accounts include those from: Joseph Saadé (1989); Joseph Abou Khalil (1992); Alif Haydar (1995); Fawwaz Trabulsi (1997); Assad Chaftari (2000); Robert Hatem (2002); Karim Muruwa (2002); Soha Bechara (2003); Samir Geagea (see Al-Safir 2007 and Daragahi 2008); Regina Sneifer (2008); and, most recently, Maroun Machalaani (2018). See Eddé 2010, Haugbolle 2010 and Nikro and Hegasy 2014 for details.
regional politics with clear connections to the 1975-1990 war: the initial withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2000 (a process which would not be complete until 2005); the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri; and the 2006 Israel-Hizballah war. Seldom, however, do authors of these accounts outline in any detail their own personal transgressions. Rather, as the novelists in Chapter Two prepared us to expect, the former warlords used the opportunity to disavow the ideological causes that had driven them to arms. They presented the conflict as a deceitful perversion of politics and seized the opportunity to attack their political adversaries. It behooved them, Carla Eddé suggests, to claim a temporary insanity, or to project blame onto others in service of their own political and economic ambitions as they continued to wage war through other means.

But even as “an abundance of literature” was being produced “that addressed the political, sociological, confessional and sectarian dimensions [of the war],” and Lebanon's politicians occasionally added empty platitudes to this discourse, the voices of the rank-and-file had only been heard through the funnel of literary imagination (Chaftari in Diwan al-thakira, ix). Their relative silence, however, was not an indication that they had forgotten or truly moved on – particularly for those involved in the worst of the war's violence. As nearly a generation of conflict came to a close, they were simply struggling to “create a historical narrative into which they fit” in order to keep pace with the abrupt historical revisionism which was, it seemed, the consequence of the amnesty- and amnesia-fueled peace (Morgan in Ten Brink and Oppenheimer, 156).

Reconciling these diametrically opposed signifiers of identification – confession versus nation – much less transitioning smoothly between the two, was, to some, an exercise in cognitive dissonance. The wartime narrative to which they had once appended their sense of identity had rested upon the primacy of

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Morgan writes of Jean-Luc Godard's fiction film Allemagne 90 Neuf Zéro in which the German protagonist, a former secret agent, finds himself utterly without mooring once the Berlin Wall falls and the Cold War ends. The reunification of Germany and the world’s newfound interest in developments elsewhere (in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf), Morgan writes, were completely disorienting (Ten Brink and Oppenheimer, 154-155). It is in this context that it the incommensurability of a reconciling a combatant’s wartime past with a political ambition for the future is suggested.
confessionalism – a governing rubric now disavowed by Lebanon’s postwar leaders who called instead for a new “Lebanese” nationalism. The wartime codes by which the combatants had lived for years, and which had legitimated their violence, were incommensurable with this new group identity. Thus, standing in the gap, the prospect of madness seemed to rear its head once again.

The Kata’ib and IDF-led massacre of Palestinians and Lebanese in the Sabra and Chatila camps in 1982 has become perhaps the singular incident in the collective Lebanese psyche which foretold the unlikeliness of a transition in the nature of the conflict still underway. In 1982, the IDF launched a full-scale invasion of Lebanon intended to root out PLO fighters who continued to fight and organize on Lebanese soil. By September 1st, under the supervision of the Multinational Forces, the majority of PLO fighters had withdrawn from Lebanon, departing for North Africa and other destinations. Thousands of their family members and refugees remained, including in the refugee camps on the outskirts of Beirut, as well as displaced Lebanese. Ten days later, the Multinational Forces departed, their mission accomplished, though the IDF remained behind. On September 14th, newly elected President, Kata’ib leader Bachir Gemayel was assassinated. Under the pretense of securing the capital in anticipation of a new wave of violence, IDF forces invaded West Beirut and instructed their Kata’ib allies to cordon off parts of the city, including the refugee camps which they considered training grounds for the former PLO fighters. But the wave of violence that was to come would be from the Kata’ib, enraged by the death of their leader. With the city under curfew, the Kata’ib began to massacre Palestinian refugees in the camps on September 16th. This was no hair-trigger response: it was pre-meditated. “The question we are putting to ourselves” a Kata’ib official reportedly said to his IDF collaborator, “is how to begin, by raping or killing?” (Hirst, 156).

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28 For detailed anecdotes concerning the situation leading up to the massacre as well as a first-hand account of the massacre’s immediate aftermath, see Robert Fisk’s Pity the Nation (2002), David Hirst’s Beware of Small States (2007) and Thomas Friedman’s From Beirut to Jerusalem (1989). For background information and eyewitness accounts, see Alain Menarges Les secrets de la guerre du Liban (2004).
For the next 24 hours, Kata’ib forces raped, castrated, tortured, and murdered an untold number of the thousands of men, women and children living in the camps. The allied Lebanese Forces and other militias were reported to have helped them. Survivors told Robert Fisk, a reporter on the ground, that they heard Shi’a Muslims from the south of Lebanon among the perpetrators: Southern Lebanese Army commander Saad Haddad was rumored to have been in collaboration with the Kata’ib during the massacre (Fisk, 359-400). The IDF kept flares lit over the camps so that the Kata’ib could see clearly and provided security reinforcement around the perimeter. When the massacre ended, the militias cleaned up some of the evidence before allowing aid workers and foreign correspondents into the decimated camps. Those walking through the camps in the aftermath of the massacre would find plenty of evidence to conclude that not only had the attack been planned in advance – carefully coordinated and logistically executed – but the clean-up had been premeditated, as well. While the tell-tale signs of massacre were inescapable, including flies and mutilated corpses exposed to the elements, Fisk recalls, militiamen had also clearly been at work digging mass graves and covering corpses with lye to mask the smell. A Kata’ib member interviewed for a 2006 documentary, Massaker, testified to the scale of the clean-up during the 48-hour period following the massacre. The Israelis had provided tarps and nylon sacks, he said, as well as chemical solvents to disguise the smell of rotting corpses. They directed their Lebanese counterparts to prepare mass graves as men like him handled corpses he described as full of maggots, their flesh falling away from bones. He laughs ruefully, recalling that the Israelis had thought of everything. While the international community’s outcry would pressure the Israeli government to conduct an inquiry into its role in the massacre – one that was, of course, exculpatory – the continuing violence in Lebanon and the announcement of the general amnesty would permanently protect the Lebanese perpetrators from identification or prosecution.

Through the documentary films Massaker (2006) and In Place (2009) directed by the German-Lebanese founders of the Beirut-based NGO Umam Documentation & Research, Monika
Borgmann and Lokman Slim, as well as the film *Layali bila Nawm [Sleepless Nights]* (2012), directed by Lebanese documentarian Eliane Raheb, we encounter some of the rank-and-file perpetrators and commanders who were involved in or connected to the atrocities. *Massaker* introduces six of the militiamen who helped perpetrate the massacre, whereas *In Place and Sleepless Nights* feature commanders of the warring militias. Across all three films, Borgmann, Slim and Raheb’s editing draws attention not only to the mental gymnastics the men perform in order to maintain the delicate balance of overwhelming memory and the refusal of knowledge, but also establishes the figure of the perpetrator as a critical epistemological lens through which to assess Lebanon’s postwar moral torsion. Departing from the fictional representations of ordinary combatants discussed in the previous chapter, these documentaries locate the barzakh not in the collusion of amnesia and amnesty, but in the collision between the public amnesty and private, overpowering memory.

In Borgmann and Slim’s *Massaker*, for instance, former Maronite militiamen sketch detailed maps of the refugee camps whose populations they slaughtered. Two and a half decades later, the memories of those three days in the camps remain so vivid that the men are able to recall the locations of the roads, buildings, and people (which they saw only that once) in prodigious detail, as if the massacre had occurred only yesterday. Still, their maps, which they draw in silence, correspond not to an objective representation of the landscape of the camps, but to their inability to translate and communicate, two and a half decades later, what had been a psychic imperative to massacre.

This failure to communicate is not necessarily proof of the un-representable nature of trauma, as Cathy Caruth has claimed (1995), but of the illogic – the unreasoned madness – of massacre as an act itself. The aberrant nature of the 1982 massacre (as opposed to more conventional forms of wartime violence) becomes even more clear when historicized in the context of the Lebanese civil war’s arc. Massacre, as a repertoire of violence, had been a routine, if tragic, feature of the early war period when ideological rivalries were at their apex. Labaki and Abou Rjeily’s data places the death toll from massacres in the triple and quadruple digits between 1975-1977, and
then dips to double-digits until 1982. By this time, alliances had changed several times over and many Lebanese had fled the country. New militias and international backers entered the fray, such as the Syrian-backed Shi’a militia, Amal. Direct violence between militias, or inflicted by militias upon civilians (close-range actions with knives, machetes, pistols) increasingly ceded to indirect warfare (characterized by tanks, machine guns, aircraft gunners) thanks to more robust international arms supplies and the physical occupation of Lebanon by Israeli and Syrian military forces.\textsuperscript{29} The nature of warfare had shifted considerably, making the massacre a repertoire of violence that was now an outlier.

Political scientists studying repertoires of violence have noted that a break in patterns of violence (such as a recourse to direct modes of violence during a period of war characterized largely by indirect violence) signals a deeply personal and emotional desire for revenge and control (Balcells 2019). This type of close-range and revenge-based atrocity is so common that there has been a name ascribed to those who commit it: “berserkers” (Shay 1994). “Berserkers” are described as partially dissociating as they commit or aid in the committing of atrocity. The act of dissociation (which constitutes a break from reality, reason and logic) is a psychic distancing mechanism which allows the perpetrator to inflict as much damage as possible.\textsuperscript{30} The perpetrators of the massacre at Sabra and Chatila, in other words, had to enter a space of madness in order to carry out the massacre in 1982, and then (try to) reintegrate into a world of comparative normalcy or sanity when the act was over.

The metaphysical and psychic spaces into and out of which these men have moved over the course of the last several decades, finds aesthetic expression in the staging of the interview rooms in the documentary films. If I have previously distinguished the interviewees according to their status as

\textsuperscript{29} For more detailed descriptions of the distinctions between direct and indirect forms of violence in war, see Kalyvas (2012) and Balcells (2019).

\textsuperscript{30} Shay (1994) gives examples from his own interviews with US veterans of the war in Vietnam who committed atrocities: “I got very hard, cold, merciless,” “I lost all my mercy” (82). Another describes an “ecstasy of power […] pure frenzy” (ibid) Shay continue to describe “berserkers” as (at least in the moment) “insatiable,” fearless, “inattentive to [their] own safety,” “feeling invulnerable,” and “insensitive to pain” (ibid).
either rank-and-file (as in Massaker) or commanding officers (as in In Place and Sleepless Nights), they can also be distinguished on the basis of the literal and metaphorical positions from which they speak. On the one hand, the rank-and-file perpetrators in Massaker tell their stories from clandestine, dimly-lit and anonymous locations scattered throughout Lebanon. Their settings evoke the attics, prisons, cloistered flats and psychiatric hospitals that are the sites of madness and death from Chapters One and Two. Yet, despite the similarity, they (unlike the fictional protagonists) are able to come and go from these darkened spaces at will. They may exit, stepping out in the light of the day where they are able to resume their lives as one of Lebanon’s phoenixes. It is only by their own volition that they have (re-)entered a space of darkness, accepting a provocation to remember that which they have been granted the authority to forget.

Their commanders, on the other hand, are filmed in spaces which are quite different. On the set of In Place and Sleepless Nights, cameras follow them as they walk or drive openly on the streets of Lebanon, in broad daylight, or sit in well-lit and tastefully decorated rooms. As respected members of government, or well-known and influential figures in society, they are the most visible embodiments of the phoenix: the clearest “proof” that from destruction can come new life. But, in the limelight (and because of it) they will be nowhere near as forthcoming about their role in the massacre or what occurred. They will obfuscate and manipulate conversations in such a way that makes clear that the political ruses are anything but over. Eloquent, composed, and having clearly compartmentalized their memories more effectively in order to retain a place in the public light, the former commanders in In Place and Sleepless Nights remain fluent in the linguistic register of partisan propaganda. In at least one case, one has even mastered the performance of repentance. The war, it seems, can only be recounted from the dark, in obscurity, or not at all.

In playing with the optics of light and dark, the documentarians behind these projects make visual how the past is still present, hiding in plain sight; how two temporalities are simultaneously separated and conjoined, coexisting where others insist they do not. In order to make visible the
depth of the currents rushing beneath the façades of dispassionate authority, in her film *Sleepless Nights*, Eliane Raheb makes use of literal and metaphoric mirrors, accessing hard to reach angles, micro-expressions, and reflections of the past that undercut carefully curated testimony. Her incessant probing allows her viewer fleeting glimpses into the psychic and political space in which the former commanders dwell.

**Moral Injury in the Barzakh**

Much of the current academic research on perpetrators has been conducted by social scientists. Recent scholarship has attempted to take into consideration a host of other factors that motivate perpetrators including opportunism, triggering events, socialization, and situational developments.\(^{31}\) They are indebted to Hannah Arendt’s controversial and humanist-oriented tract of political philosophy, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), which inaugurated a trend toward a more capacious understanding of mass violence and its agents.

Prior to her studies of totalitarianism, academic research on perpetrators of political violence was primarily limited to the social sciences – a discipline which largely reduced the perpetrator to a psychopathic and manifestly abnormal breed of human, before briefly turning to the conviction that ideology (such as fascism) was capable of producing perpetrators (Maynard in Williams and Buckley-Zistel 2018). Arendt insisted upon a non-pathological and non-ideological understanding of perpetration: one hinging upon the idea that a perpetrator was an unquestioning, uncritical human being motivated by obedience and rationalizing their actions through professional ambition and a desire to belong. Her approach infuriated many who mistakenly saw her as reducing not only the perpetrator of the Holocaust to an ordinary person, but also the Holocaust itself to an ordinary event (Robinson 1965; Arendt 1966). Still, it opened the door to a method of inquiry

\(^{31}\) See Kraft 2014, 26 and 54; Williams and Buckley-Zistel 2018, 3; and Maynard (in Williams and Buckley-Zistel 2018), 3-64.
capable of considering a heterogenous set of individually-, psychologically-, socially-, culturally- and politically- determined factors which compel perpetrators to their actions.

Nonetheless, the orbital pull of homogenization which the methodologies of social science disciplines entail, premised as they are on models, types and categories, has worked at cross-purposes to muddle the more contemporary figurations of the perpetrator. In “Theorizing Ideological Diversity in Mass Violence,” Maynard observes that the core “paradox” which “holds back understanding of perpetrators” is the tendency of scholars to “consistently [emphasize] perpetrators’ heterogeneity” while generating “overarching theories of mass violence […] that tend to homogenize” (1). He fails, however, to acknowledge that we can arrive at an “understanding of perpetrators of mass violence” through disciplines other than those based on empirical data analysis, such as that which his research prioritizes. In other words, what he describes is a failure particular to social science.32 My analysis of postwar documentary film returns to Arendt’s model by attempting to draw our understanding of perpetration from the perpetrator, and render them not an exceptional figure but an epistemological tool through which to read Lebanon’s stasis. To this end, I conclude that the perpetrator’s postwar _barzakh_ is another name for the phenomenon known as “moral injury” and the associated psychic disturbances it engenders.

Psychotherapists working with United States veterans of the US war in Vietnam initially coined the concept of moral injury in their attempt to describe the psychological, biological, and social consequences of perpetrating (and even being a bystander to) wartime atrocities. The need for such a framework arose, in part, out of perceived political necessity. As the term “trauma” become incorporated into the vocabularies of communities beyond that of the medical and psychological

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32 Illustrating Maynard’s paradox within the social sciences, in _Perpetrators and Perpetrations of Mass Violence_, Williams attempts to provide an empirical “typology” of perpetrators of genocide in order to “provide a degree of systematization […] and provide] a conceptual foundation for comparative perpetrator studies.” He cautions the usefulness of his work with the acknowledgment that the “genesis and manifestation [of genocide] can only be understood when boiled down to the individuals who constitute it, their actions and the relations they have to each other” (Williams and Buckley-Zistel, 18), none of which, I argue, could be discerned through an aggregate profile as offered through his typology-based method.
professions, including politicized advocacy groups, the word seemed to become exclusive to victims and survivors; it was in poor taste to suggest that victimizers, too, could suffer trauma. With time, however, the content-based distinction between the two began to hold more significance than the semantic, or political, distinction. Proponents of moral injury felt that the concept of psychological trauma insufficiently accounted for the deeply social, existential, and sometimes spiritual crisis brought on by involvement in an atrocity (Shay 2002, Litz et al 2009, Moon 2019). In other words, moral injury could be coincident with trauma, but not reduced to it (Beckham et al 1998, Ford 1999).

To date, the origin and continued discussion of the concept of moral injury has been limited to psychotherapists, theologians, and servicepeople in the United States. However, I contend that there is a more geopolitically universal application of the term that becomes possible when we reconsider the core concepts at the foundation of moral injury. Ultimately, these concepts are readily visible in the documentary films I discuss in this chapter. Psychotherapist Robert Jay Lifton’s clinical research on US veterans of the Vietnam war marked the concept’s origin, although Jonathan Shay, a Department of Veterans Affairs’ psychiatrist, coined the term in the 1990s. Through the accounts offered by recently returned veterans, Lifton distilled the motif of the “hero as warrior” – a myth which, he claimed, enabled the crafting of a new moral code which annulled religious and secular injunctions against the taking of life (Lifton 1973, 26). The “hero as warrior” mythos worked to inoculate soldiers against the “extremity of psychological and moral inversions” that were inevitably caused in war (19). When successfully internalized, the mythos allowed a redefinition of the

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33 In defining a “politics of trauma,” Didier and Fassin analyze how the term “trauma” has been re-signified through its “everyday usage” in such a way that the word now refers not only to “the cause of the suffering that is being treated” but also “a resource that can be used to support a right” (8, 10). In their 2011 study on moral injury, Drescher et al write that “most researched traumas involve victimization and […] the exposure criteria for PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] does not mention perpetrating trauma” (8).

34 The question of when and how to apply concepts to geopolitical contexts outside of their ontological origins is an important one, and has been asked in the context of several concepts related to moral injury, such as psychoanalysis (see Ranjana Khanna’s Dark Continents and Warwick Anderson et al’s Unconscious Dominions); trauma (see Gert Buelens et al The Future of Trauma Theory); and post-traumatic stress disorder (see Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtmann The Empire of Trauma). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to ask whether the concept of moral injury “travels” or, whether the concept can be considered a global or universal one.
normative and the just, creating situations in which atrocity could be understood simply as a form of combat (50, 55). The consequences of these moral inversions were the product of a new era of warfare, Lifton argued, surpassing the war neuroses described by Sigmund Freud in response to World War I, forming a response to the particularities late-twentieth century phenomena of guerrilla warfare, counterinsurgency, and the emergence of the civilian-combatant – the conditions which Lifton defined as the “atrocity-producing situation” (20, 41).35

Lifton’s praxis amounted to a close-listening, as it were, of his interlocutors’ accounts, to discern the lexical frameworks through which veterans legitimated and retroactively rationalized their participation in atrocity. The conclusions at which he arrived through this method suggest two crucial nodal points which trigger psyche-altering moral inversions, and which then require the combatant to develop a reoriented schema of meaning to justify their actions.36 The first inversion occurs in the act of war itself wherein the requirement to kill is reframed in terms of self-defense. This line of reasoning is employed variably to justify war itself, a specific combat operation, and atrocities.

Lifton’s theory of the “death encounter” helps explain how moral inversion can extend the logic of self-defense to atrocity. The knowledge that one has somehow survived death, he argues, invariably provokes a psychic crisis – the death encounter (Lifton in Caruth 1995, 131). Even before the atrocity, the perpetrator has likely had multiple death encounters: they have killed, witnessed killing, and almost been killed. Since death is the most psychologically disturbing of encounters for humans, Lifton writes, the soldier must find a way to reinterpret these encounters in a way that is not existentially threatening if they are to continue on the battlefield. Thus, they understand their death encounters in terms of a “glory” – to continue with the hero as warrior analogy – made manifest by a supposed ability to cheat death (Lifton 1973, 25). The soldier tells himself that not only has he

35 Today’s scholars of moral injury point to the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as continuations of both this style of war and its associated psychic consequence.
36 US Navy veteran and medical anthropologist Kenneth MacLeish’s 2018 study of moral injury comes to a similar conclusion about the conditions which generate moral inversions in war.
survived death; he has mastered it. He is invincible, reborn as if through a baptism by death (106). Paradoxically, death makes the combatant feel more alive, and he begins to see his death encounters as transactional: he purchases his right to life by stripping another of theirs (ibid). By this logic, even an atrocity can become an act of self-defense. Yet, when the soldier adopts this romanticized narrative, Lifton argues, he forecloses the possibility of a psychically healthy relationship with death, deferring inevitable internal mental and emotional conflict. This experience is not specific to the US soldier or to the battlefields on which they find themselves.

The second nodal point at which moral inversion occurs happens when the perpetrator reintegrates into a civilian populace upon the cessation of violence (100). For US soldiers returning from Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, public hostility to the wars and its fighters challenged their conviction that their actions were justifiable. Expressions of dismay from the very people in whose names they fought unsettled their battlefield codes of morality. Militarized civilians in Lebanon’s civil war faced a slightly different version of this challenge: in many cases, combatants returned home to live among those against whom they had fought. Moreover, with neither a decisive military triumph nor a negotiated political victor, the successful reintegration of enemies would require the disavowal – at last in practice – of former animosities. In other words, the war required combatants to suspend their membership in a community whose primary impulse is mutual survival, in order to join their respective militias. These militias assumed power over life and death and were governed by a different moral system. Just as abruptly, however, the men were forced to don a civilian moral code in 1990. The successive inversions provoked a tremendously disorienting cognitive dissonance.

Finally, in the case of Lebanese former fighters, the problem of navigating competing moral orders was further intensified by the rhetoric of postwar state actors. Warlords-turned-politicians now signaled that former fighters should disavow the political identities in whose name they had broken both secular and religious injunctions against murder. The mandate to “remember” past
injuries, mythologies, and hostile partisanship had been supplanted by the directive to forget and disarm in the name of a new nationalism.\textsuperscript{37} Under such conditions, if the psychic consequences of the first moral inversion (the death encounter) could conceivably be delayed, the second moral inversion provoked by reintegration and the third, provoked by political rhetoric, would eventually disturb the careful compartmentalization carried out by perpetrators of atrocity.

Twenty years after Lifton’s research, US Veterans’ Affairs psychiatrist Jonathan Shay determined that the signs of moral injury were expressions of guilt or shame.\textsuperscript{38} This assertion has influenced contemporary studies of moral injury, leading many of today’s theorists to incorporate guilt and shame into their definitions of moral injury, sometimes to the exclusion of other characteristics.\textsuperscript{39} Yet, guilt and shame do not indicate the presence of moral injury, I contend, but rather a perpetrator’s consciousness of their moral injury, even if this consciousness is only partially acknowledged. For perpetrators of atrocities who do not express guilt or shame (the majority of the men interviewed in the films in this chapter), moral injury is expressed in subtler forms. This is especially likely where pre-war and wartime ideologies and prejudices retain their power even after violence has ended – such as in the absence of political or military resolution of a conflict, and the granting of amnesty.\textsuperscript{40} Psychotherapist Mel Singer adds that the kind of ideologies that motivate war are indicative of a worldview of righteousness (378), making it unlikely for one to feel guilt or shame (381). In this context, moral injury might instead be made manifest through numbness or projected

\textsuperscript{37} In a survey of former fighters, 51.5\% of respondents reported sustaining war-related injuries but not receiving healthcare support from the state: not only did the state require the former fighters to forget, the state also forgot the former fighters (Diwan al-thakira, 23). “The madness and disorder that [former perpetrators] are faced with […] results from encounters with the social structures in which they themselves are entangled” (Sharpe, 404). Government neglect of the postwar veteran, as well as wartime abuse of power by commanders are the primary factors which motivated Shay to define moral injury in terms of a betrayal by leadership.

\textsuperscript{38} Shay first articulates this claim in \textit{Achilles in Vietnam} and repeats it in subsequent texts (such as \textit{Odysseus in America} and later articles).

\textsuperscript{39} While some scholars have used terms such as “remorse” and “self-hatred,” I consider these to be similar enough in meaning to be synonymous with “guilt” and “shame.” See Beckham et al (1998), Singer (2004), and Litz et al (2009). Jinkerson notes that “Nearly all moral injury descriptions include guilt or shame” (124).

\textsuperscript{40} Unlike conflicts fought by a military on foreign soil (the vast majority of US wars), civil wars are more likely to result in lingering ideological commitments. It may be easier to doubt the validity of one’s mission in another’s country and feel guilt (Lifton 1973, 99) than to do so fighting for causes, territories, and people in one’s homeland.
anger. The individual becomes withdrawn, in a state best described as “deadened” and “anesthetized from life” (Lifton 1973, 126). This should not come as a surprise: as Lifton observed, the experiences and narratives of basic training through which soldiers are conditioned are intended to numb the soldier, making the expression of guilt less likely (20, 57). Lifton and Singer’s research suggest that anger and numbness, in addition to guilt and shame, are indications of a failure to reconcile conflicting moral codes. Indeed, Lifton coined the term “static guilt” or “numbed guilt” to suggest a “middle knowledge” (127). He understood middle knowledge as a semi-conscious processing of events such that “one can neither find a place for the painful death-linked truth within one’s overall formulation of self and world, nor deny the pressing evidence of that truth” (60-61).

The paradox of this position, Lifton writes, “is solved by evolving (at least) two contradictory images” of the truth of the event, each of which obscures the other. Such a solution, I contend, leaves the perpetrator suspended in a position of both – and therefore neither – knowledge and denial.

For our purposes, “middle knowledge” could just as well be a sign of semi-consciousness of the barzakh: a product of multiple moral inversions that have disturbed the perpetrators’ sense of psychological and existential balance. Perpetrators inhabit a psychic barzakh through which actions, behaviors, and attitudes are embodied forms of memory which testify to the disavowal of knowledge – the failure to acknowledge. Meta-critically, the term “middle knowledge” also nods to the sociopolitical conditions which form an obstacle to the perpetrators’ self-awareness, such as the general amnesty; “collective amnesia”; censorship; and, social taboos. At the confluence of moral injury and the politics of the postwar period is thus a blind spot in which Lebanon remains opaque even to itself. This is to say that those who suffer from moral injury are not only the perpetrators of

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*Wood (2014) comments upon his observations of numbing in the US veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (np). In more general, terms, numbing, dissociation and other methods of creating distance between the ego and a painful event are understood as possible expressions of trauma.*
massacres or extreme acts of violence, but the Lebanese populace as a whole: a people whose poles of moral orientation have been inverted by violence, ideology, confessionalism, and the seemingly permanent barzakh of the postcolony so many times that morality has become a fungible concept.

On this point, at least, the novelists and the documentarians seem to agree.

To dwell in the barzakh in this context therefore means to inhabit an optic blind spot in which witnessing and justice have been delinked. Documentary film in particular, in its demand for “a new vantage upon the act of seeing,” offers an opportunity to dwell in this space, and thus arrive at a fuller and more conscious form of knowledge (Rastegar, 157). In the case of the filmmakers in question, the Lebanese viewer in particular is asked to dwell in the space at the intersection of a surplus of memory and its repression. This is a truly unusual invitation considering the types of war-related fiction films that were being produced around the same time. Lebanese fiction films produced in the 1990s and 2000s and which mediated on the war’s legacy often told the story of the war through a victimized subject, or presented a narrative of non-partisan, universal suffering. This conspicuous absence of politics might be understood as either a humanistic impulse toward reconciliation – but could also be understood as an act of self-censorship in a country where it takes little to be accused of fomenting sectarianism. Ultimately, as compelling as the stories in these feature films are, the elision of the political renders them complicit in a culture of amnesia. The few documentary films which attend to the perpetrator more markedly become a distinct genre of film insofar as they have no pretensions of neutrality. They are a clear intervention for a Lebanese

42 I borrow the term “optic blindspot” from Burckhardt (25).
43 See for instance Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige’s Aljawm akhir (2005) and Bahij Hujaj’s Que vienne la pluie (2010).
44 Rastegar views Ziad Doueiri’s iconic West Beirut as emblematic of a “broad and generally uncontroversial narrative of the war that invited identification across sectarian lines” in a bid for a sanitized collective memory (163). See also Khatib, 2008. Ayoub even notes the complete excision of the figure of the Palestinian fighter from Lebanese film (59), implying that such moves eliminate the most polarizing aspects of the war in favor of a sanitized narrative. Finally, Richard 2008 pans a corpus of Lebanese film backed by foreigners whose financial support influences the message of films about the war to the point that the conflict seems meaningless.
45 Famously, in 2010, the members of a Beirut-based Middle Eastern art collective, Samandal, were sued by the Lebanese government for “inciting sectarian strife,” “denigrating [Christian] religion,” “publishing false news,” and “defamation and slander.” Their graphic art and cartoons were considered a threat to national security. See Ragin 2017.
audience which – alongside and because of their denial of the perpetrator – exist in a curious “relationship with ‘time’ and ‘history’ and ‘the past’ … [leaving them] ‘stuck’ in the present” (Ayoub, 68).

**Maps of a Massacre**

Monika Borgmann, a former journalist with a Cairo-based German radio program, began the seven-year process of producing her documentary film, *Massaker* in 1999 (personal interview). The film featured the perpetrators of the 1982 massacre of an untold number of Palestinians living in the refugee camps at Sabra and Chatila, on the outskirts of Beirut. The infamous massacre was committed by Maronite militias days after their charismatic leader, Bachir Gemayel, who had just been elected president, was assassinated. His assassination became the rallying cry for his followers. They sought to assuage their grief by attacking Palestinians, the “other” whom they imagined to be the most significant threat to Lebanese national sovereignty. Over the course of three days, the militiamen raped, maimed, and slaughtered Palestinian men, women and children while the Israeli Defense Forces looked on and provided logistical and tactical support. It would be the only event of the war to draw condemnation from the international community. Spurred by foreign outcry and domestic criticism, Israel conducted a superficial inquiry into its role in the events that led to the massacre. In Lebanon, on the other hand, the 1991 general amnesty law continues to preclude any investigation, no matter how superficial, into the identities and activities of the perpetrators.

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46 Unless otherwise indicated, information about the making of the documentary *Massaker* comes from a personal interview with Monika Borgmann at her offices in Beirut on 13 May 2019. Borgmann, along with her Lebanese Shi’a partner Lokman Slim, is the co-founder of Umam Documentation & Research, a non-governmental organization begun in 2005 whose mission is to create a “[Lebanese] citizen resource center focused on Lebanon’s conflict-laden and war-loaded past.” They aim to boost “reflection” through programming, workshops, exhibits and reports to “help counter the culture of amnesia and institutional capriciousness that characterized Lebanon’s post-war era” (https://www.Uمام-dr.org/en/home/about-Uمام/1/advance-contents/3/mission-statement, accessed 21 May 2019).

47 The Commission of Inquiry into the Events at the Refugee Camps in Beirut, colloquially known as the Kahan Commission, was established in 1982 and concluded in 1983. The report concluded that the only culpability for which Israel should take responsibility was the failure to anticipate and prevent bloodshed, which was attributed solely to the Kata'ib and allied militias.
Borgmann began working on her film not yet twenty years after the massacre, just shy of a
decade after the end of the civil war. Both Lebanese and Palestinians sought to dissuade her from
pursuing the project: the topic was too sensitive, she was told, and she would not find any
perpetrators willing to talk about it. Still, Borgmann persisted, determined as she was to offer “une
protestation contre toute une culture d’amnistie et d’amnésie.” In 2001 she located her first
interview subject. She describes him as loquacious, motivated by “machismo” to divulge his
recollections – hardly the reticence she was told to expect. In fact, by the end of that year, her
interlocutor had recruited four others to the film project.

Shortly after the would-be documentary subjects began working with her, they were
arrested. Upon release, they recanted their statements, claiming they had lied about taking part in
the war, and that they had only participated in her documentary for financial gain. Though
Borgmann was forced to begin her project anew, she did so with a better sense of the nuances that
“amnesty” entailed: not simply impunity but also an enforced self-censorship. With the help of her
Shi’a Lebanese partner, Lokman Slim, Borgmann changed the stated scope of the project to include
a more general chronology of the war inclusive of, but not limited to, the massacre. She found a new
cohort of interviewees in 2006, and over the course of three days of filming, the six men featured in
Massaker discussed the carnage for the first time since 1982. As it turned out, it would also be the last
time. Once the film was completed, the subjects declined the opportunity to see it, though they did
keep abreast of the media coverage it garnered, sharing articles they found with Borgmann and Slim.

In the film, the interviewees are protected by anonymity: we do not learn their names, and
their faces are either outside the frame or shrouded in shadow. The directors’ use of backlighting and
chiaroscuro makes it impossible to distinguish many of the details in a given frame except for

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48 Quoted from a separate interview with the filmmakers whose transcript is in a pamphlet included with the Massaker DVD.
49 In our conversations, Borgmann did not specify a particular actor or subdivision of the Lebanese government responsible for the arrests.
gradations of light and dark. While this aesthetic nods to a pragmatic concern (protection from reprisal), it also reminds the viewer of the lesson Borgmann learned about the dual nature of amnesty. It was as if the freedom promised by the amnesty came at the cost of keeping their truths – even their lives – in the shadows. That amnesty is paradoxically predicated upon secrecy is underscored by extra-diegetic sounds such as car horns and distant voices: these interruptions of otherwise closeted spaces and moments amplify the conditions of the film’s production, reminding the viewer that discussing the massacre remains taboo. Therefore, in order to tell their story, the men must present as at least notionally complicit with society’s insistence on amnesty – they must remain in the dark.

The anonymity of the men also serves another purpose: to offer the viewer a meta-critical understanding of the impact of the amnesty on the broader Lebanese population – one embodied in the form of the perpetrator. Joram ten Brink writes that films which shroud the perpetrator in anonymity effectively “ceases to be about the soldier [or perpetrator],” becoming instead “about the ethics/morality of masking and a reflection on […] society” (Ten Brink and Oppenheimer, 257). This is precisely the impact of the staging of the scenes in Massaker – a staging which is as much a cinematographic statement as it is a necessary precaution for all involved in the film’s work.

As they speak, the camera is insistent in its attention to body language. Fidgeting, pacing, clenching, tapping, locking, clutching, and shrinking, the men’s nervous, unconscious movements become the primary affective language of the film. Borgmann and Slim force the viewer into an uncomfortably intimate proximity to their bodies, which are mediated almost entirely through extreme close-up and medium close-up shots. In a separate interview, Borgmann recalls that the idea

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Ten Brink believes that Massaker in particular, however, undercuts any critical potential inherent in keeping the perpetrators’ identities anonymous by compensating for them by focusing on parts of their bodies, or aspects of body language that allow the viewer to identify which of the six perpetrators are speaking. These techniques, ten Brink implies, detract from the potential ubiquity of the anonymous perpetrator by allowing the viewer to associate the act of perpetration with a discrete, even if unidentifiable individual. I disagree – the parts of the men’s bodies that we are allowed to see (a tattoo, a limb, a digit, an article of clothing) hardly constitute sufficient means of identification to allow the average viewer (Lebanese or non-Lebanese) to identify the speaker.
for the intimacy of this framing came to her as a result of her 1996 interview with a Lebanese sniper.51 She recalled his body language being more interesting than what he actually said; she felt that, when taken together, the two forms of expression offered a more complete picture of his disease (“les deux langages se complétaient”). In their attention to body language, Borgmann and Slim found a non-verbal register through which to communicate the nature of embodied memory. It was a method capable of moving past the men’s individual willingness or reticence to speak or Lebanon’s desire to hear them, and eventually past their failures of language.

Gradually, we learn to recognize which perpetrator is speaking through the cues provided by the mise-en-scène of rooms in which they are filmed, glimpses of their bodies, and differentiated hues of light. Their affect, behavior, and attitudes, we realize, can hardly be condensed into a single profile – that of “the perpetrator.” Instead, we are presented with a cross-section of experiences and personalities. Some of the men are talkative, boisterous, intimate in their conversational tone. Others are reticent, whether because of a guarded suspicion or a deep-seated sense of personal dis-ease. Their differences notwithstanding, none express guilt or shame. They do, however, seem to distance themselves from the events they narrate: they deflect, lie, and describe life at war in terms of a cinematic adventure.

For scholars of perpetrators and film, this is not surprising. Joram Ten Brink and Joshua Oppenheimer describe the relationship between acts of violence and the cinematic; they note that cinema has greatly influenced how acts of violence are committed in real life, or, put differently, the performance of violence has taken on a cinematic quality. In a perversely cavalier scene, then, we find one of Borgmann’s interviewees’ projecting responsibility for the savage rape of a Palestinian teenager onto an anonymous fellow militiaman, instead of acknowledging (as Borgmann believes) that he had been the rapist. As he describes the rape, the interviewee appears unusually animated,

51 See pamphlet included with the Massaker DVD.
rising from his seated position to pantomime rape, mimic screams, and gesticulate while laughing.

The memory of the rape is graphically clear, but true knowledge of it has been pushed away so that the violent act could be reduced to a comedic performance – a reenactment of someone else’s barbarism. It is this same man who will complain that, during their military training, the Israeli forces in charge of his unit required his militia to watch a documentary about the Holocaust as opposed to what he wanted to watch: the more entertaining and adventurous film, *Tarzan*.

While Borgmann was filming, she perceived that several of the interview subjects went to great lengths to maintain psychic distance from knowledge of their perpetration in other ways, as well. One subject in particular, a self-professed animal-lover, was a member of an elite killing squad. Throughout his interview, he often abandoned his testimony to play with and discuss the pet cats who prowled and played around his legs and feet. Whereas he was often unwilling to answer questions about the massacre directly, he volunteered with great emotion how disturbed he had been to find that, during the massacre, some men had turned their weapons upon horses – innocent creatures that they were – instead of just humans. Borgmann recalls that while they filmed his interview, he spun around on a low bar stool, moving in such a way as to hide his body from the camera. Usually extraordinary articulate and fluent, Borgmann herself stumbled as she tried to describe her uncanny impression that, during those moments, he became lost to the past. In a literal sense, she meant only that his psychic life was anchored in the past, as evidenced by his living in an isolated hovel in the mountains, with only cats for company. But there is another layer of meaning which we may understand from her words: devoid of shame, regret, or guilt, he finds himself forced into a partial silence and isolation in a country which no longer holds a place for him or his memories. In one scene, viewers hear Slim’s voice softly demanding that the man admit that his victims had been unarmed when he murdered them. The perpetrator refuses to speak for nearly ten seconds. When he breaks his silence to answer, it is to lie: if they encountered an unarmed
Palestinian, he said, “then we didn’t shoot, of course.” He is not willing to acknowledge what he remembers, nor will he allow Slim, or the viewer, to know the full extent of his truth.

But it is not just these silences that alert us to the collapse of knowing in the face of overpowering memory. As viewers of this film, we also learn to recognize signs that the former perpetrators remain unable to cohere a sense of identity from the dissonant realities of their wartime and postwar senses of self. The separate but adjacent and occasionally psychically-blurred nature of their pasts and presents is visualized through the maps they draw on-camera: as they attempt to explain their drawings, the men encounter the collapsed bridge between their two selves.

Borgmann told me that the map-making exercise, such a crucial signifier for the film, had not been pre-planned. It was the result of an impromptu decision Slim made when he gave his first interview subject a pen and a piece of paper and suggested that he draw what he remembered. The result was remarkable, Borgmann recalled: though this man had set foot in the refugee camps only once in his life, nearly two and a half decades ago, his illustrations were as detailed as if he had visited only moments ago. Borgmann and Slim asked the five remaining men to draw their own maps and found similar results. The map-making vignettes became so meaningful a framework for their understanding of their subjects that they montaged footage of the men as they draw into a sequence which immediately follows the opening credits.

Initially, the screen shows a tightly-framed close-up of a hand in motion drawing a large circle on a white sheet of paper with a black marker (00:01:22). When the circle is complete, the hand moves on to the next detail in the drawing. The camera zooms out, its focus still on the paper, to reveal a man with his back to the camera. His head covered by a handkerchief; a lit cigarette dangles in his other hand. Carefully, he places a row of dots clustered close together around the perimeter of the circle, and then a second row of more widely-spaced dots. We are to understand his drawing as a representation of an execution: Palestinians packed tightly together around a pit, a firing squad behind them. “This is how the massacre happened,” he tells his off-camera interlocutor. As he utters
these words, the camera’s focus shifts: whereas the focus of the camera’s wide-angle shots had been the map, it is now the man. The shift in focus prompts us to register an accompanying semantic shift, signaled through his use of the word “this”: though his drawing was the initial referent for the word “this” (“this is how the massacre happened”), the camera angle changes the referent from the map to the man. In so doing, the directors intervene to make clear that whatever the map depicts, it is not—it could not be—“how the massacre happened.” There is a disconnect in this man’s mind between what he knows and what he has drawn, and his map is the index of this disconnect.

As the minutes progress, we encounter the other men at work on their maps with equally intense concentration. Some use symbols to mark people and places, others deploy more abstract techniques. They work with intensity, their papers becoming increasingly crowded as they add details. Though they were alone with the film crew as they made these drawings on different days and in different locations, the images have been edited together through a series of rapid jump-cuts, heightening the sense of uniformity in their actions then, and in their recollections now. We are shown an extreme close-up of a new sheet of white paper upon which another perpetrator draws a series of arrows and interconnected lines, painstakingly labeling them in miniscule handwriting (00:01:54). Ten seconds later, another extreme close-up reveals a sheet of orange paper on which a different perpetrator draws a series of lines and arrows. The camera follows the marker’s impression upon the paper. Suddenly, there is another cut to a room awash in a harsh, pale blue light. Now at medium-range, the camera allows the viewer to peer over the shoulder of a man at work in front of an easel, his shadow eerily pantomiming his movements on the wall next to him. Five seconds later, there is another jump-cut: we are in a sepia-lit room looking at a close-up of a map whose drawn-in topography has taken over the entire paper. After a moment, there is one final cut: on a large sheet of red paper, the last of the men has very carefully and neatly drawn a series of boxes connected by lines (00:02:26). His profile is eclipsed in shadow as the camera zooms out. He puts down his marker in silence. He is finished.
Like the first subject, each of these men is ultimately unable to translate their memories of their actions to this paper – nor do they seem to be aware of the untranslatability. But as viewers, the failure is clear: some of the men who spoke animatedly and at length about their childhoods or even the banalities of life at war never quite seem able to answer a question directly about the acts that they personally committed in the camps. The anecdotes they volunteer, or which are drawn out of them, concerning those three days are more often phrased in terms of what others did, or what they remember seeing. Where they invariably find an obstacle to continued verbal communication, they would prefer to draw. It buys them time and distance – they place their markers and papers, their tools of mediation and translation, in between them and what they know … or what they wish to not know despite their keen memories.\footnote{It is perhaps because of moments such as this that the director of the 9-hour Holocaust documentary, Shoah, Claude Lanzmann has famously spoken about the “obscenity” of trying to understand a perpetrator, most especially by allowing them the opportunity to speak of how they came to be a perpetrator (see Lanzmann in Caruth, 1995).}

When asked to describe the massacre, for instance, one man answers as if he had been asked an altogether different question. He starts to talk about the personal psychological impact of the event preceding the massacre, the assassination of Bachir Gemayel. However, even this deflection is revealing: he describes a loss so profound that even his own mother's death, he claims, would fail to trigger a similar amount of grief: “Bachir was dead and we were, too.” In other words, he has articulated the moment at which his system of meaning collapsed: the very one which had sustained him and his peers until that moment. He has traced the sudden emotional paralysis of meaning to the moments just before he bloodied his hands. He has identified the moment of unreason, of illogic, of disconnection from reality, of madness, that licensed the “berserker” state. But, now, in this moment, he cannot find a way to explain, how his leader’s assassination justifies massacre. He does not know, even though he remembers. To escape this problematic, he severs the possibility of
communication altogether, simply insisting that neither he nor his peers knew what to do in the face of their tragedy (00:39:40).

But as he pronounces these words, the editors cut to a scene of another subject silently at work on his red paper, carefully drawing the circles, lines, doubled lines, and labels which are intended to be the “this” of how the massacre happened. The suggestion in the juxtaposition of these moments is that the men did, in fact, know what to do and how to do it. There was no hesitation in their actions then, nor is there any hesitation as they produce their visual aids. What is more, the mendacity of his statement is plain to Lebanese viewers, most of whom know the history of the massacre: the logistical and tactical collaboration between Israel and the Kata’ib predated the war, and this particular operation had involved considerable advanced planning.

Still, not one of the men, least of all Gemayel’s most fervent mourner, are able to account for how grief turned into planning and executing a massacre. “You are asking questions I don’t know the answer to” remarks another of the militiamen, holding a handmade drawing of the camp in his hands. “You’re asking why I did it” (00:05:53). For all of its details, his map cannot answer questions. If he has drawn anything, it is a representation of the missing links between a triggering event and a murderous response, between an event during the war and a way of making sense of it once peace has been declared. The stakes of being asked to explain that which cannot be explained now (and perhaps could not be explained even at the time) are explicated by another interviewee who likens the experience of being filmed, albeit voluntarily, to being placed on trial. The irony of his assertion is perverse considering that a trial is the one thing to which he will never be subjected. But the sentiment he wishes to express is powerful: despite its protections, the amnesty has paradoxically caused him to live in fear of being judged guilty.

Umam’s target audience for all of their workshops, exhibits, films and written material is Lebanese. This is clearly stated in their mission statement and is reinforced by the fact that their products are written or recorded in Arabic, with limited translation into English.
This is a sentiment reiterated in postwar literature, as well. In Wajdi Mouawad’s novel *Anima*, his protagonist speaks to former Kata’ib who were at Sabra and Chatila. One of his interlocutors spends more time discussing the difficulty of discussing what happened than what he actually did:

*As’ab chi houwwé e-htokhbir ma fi as’ab menno … You understand? I mean talking about it is the hardest war is easier you kill, *khallass* Now you could be my son and you want me to tell you that I was … here and there … like this and like that? … No … it’s like a trial … The trial and the sentence … Amnesty — amnesty ‘emlo amnesty no trial ma ‘emlo trial Chou badak a’mil I would have preferred a trial…” (Mouawad, 309).

The ellipses which offset the words “here and there” and “like this and like that” both interrupt the storyteller’s account and the listener’s ability to follow it. Like the maps, the ellipses are signposts to that which the perpetrators cannot find a way to represent, either visually or in words. Whereas the perpetrators in *Massaker* draw their way around the massacre, the interlocutor in Mouawad’s novel dances around it verbally. Finally, he says, after having not said anything about the massacre at all, he would have preferred to have been put on trial. Had he known his options were to talk about what he had done or to stand trial for his guilt and receive a sentence, he would have chosen the latter.

It is significant that the act of speaking and the act of drawing appear to be mutually exclusive – they cannot happen at the same time. The men speak only during a pause in their drawing, while the marker is still, or no longer in their hand. In these interstitial moments they attempt to supplement the story they believe they are telling through their illustration. In one scene, a subject takes a break from his red paper to smoke [00:41:15]. Breaking away from the intensity of his wordless drawing, he returns his consciousness to the film-crew in the small, dark room alongside him. He begins to describe his militia’s approach to the refugee camps, and the meeting between the massacre’s architect, Elie Hobeïqa, and the waiting Israeli officers. What he describes, however, is not what he has drawn: neither their arrival under cover of darkness, nor the instructions given during the meeting of commanding officers can be found on the paper covered in lines, shapes, and
increasingly cramped writing. After his brief narrative interlude, he returns to his map in silence, working contemplatively to fill in more details. What he sought to visually represent, and then to verbally describe, has become disordered: he has drawn the camp before explaining how they arrived there, and he has “illustrated” the tactical implementation of orders without acknowledging what the orders were. His speech and his drawings fail to refer to each other. Only what is unspoken seems to directly address the massacre. With time, one-by-one the men begin to abandon their maps, gesturing to them only vaguely. Waving his marker in the direction of his paper, another man recalls the sounds of the camp: screaming, shrieking, crying (00:55:50). It is by way of these sounds – not the roads, alleys and buildings marked on his map – that he navigated through the camp. His marker stops moving and he stops speaking as his memory takes over, offering a silenced sonic orientation to the camps.

Despite having all the trappings of documentation, the maps are hardly a record of the massacre’s history. At no point have the men provided a legend for the plethora of symbols that cover their paper. Tellingly, even their own locations on these maps are absent, or lost somewhere in the anonymity of shapes. The illustrations do not show the “this” of “how the massacre happened.” Instead, the maps mediate memories that, as Borgmann noticed throughout the filming process, are embedded in and expressed through their nervous body language. Mapmaking holds their past at bay, preventing them from cohering their fragmented war – and postwar identities – giving evidence, in other words, of why so many would prefer them to stay in the shadows. Through this lacuna of representation, woven carefully between scenes that suggest the highly variable psychological conditions of the men so many decades later, the directors have made visible the perpetrators’ barzakh.

In speech, the men recall; in drawing, they reproduce; but, in silence, they relive what remains at the heart of their collapsed communication. The failure of their speech signposts the collapse of meaning after one too many moral inversions. Not only have the political amnesty and
public amnesia expunged the possibility of an acceptable narrative through which to express their pasts, these phenomena have conspired with the devastating consequences of the death encounter to eliminate narrative at all. There is a complete collapse of the enunciative subject—a psychic numbing which leaves them on a dangerous mental and emotional precipice. Continuing their attempts to hold death at bay, they struggle “with how to cohere and how to absorb and in some measure confront what [they have] been exposed to” or done (Lifton in Caruth 1995, 137). In the process of this struggle, they become unwilling, and then perhaps unable, to feel guilt or shame (ibid). Their numbed demeanor is, as Lifton writes, “a form of doubling in the traumatized person” in which “there are elements that are at odds in the two selves, including ethical contradictions” (ibid). This affect, Lifton writes, is especially common in perpetrators for they are “people who doubled to adapt to evil” (ibid).

**Introducing the Mirror**

The men of *Massaker* were the rank and file of the warring militias. But in Eliane Raheb’s film, *Layali bila nawm* (2010), we encounter the militias’ commanders, including a high-ranking member of the Lebanese Forces, as well as the former commander of the Lebanese Communist Party’s militia. Unlike the subordinates who appear on-camera in tank tops, shorts, and jeans, looking to various degrees disheveled, the former warlords cut a more polished image. They are immaculately-groomed in shirtsleeves or suits, stoically and earnestly looking their interviewers or the camera in the eye as they speak. Having been in the public eye longer, they are more practiced and make few extraneous movements. They present as controlled, measured, steadier and more deliberate in their speech. Their refusal to answer certain questions is declared calmly and courteously, and rhetorical tactics of evasion are artful.

Given their mellifluous speech and staid composure, making plain how they dwell in the *barzakh* will require a different mode of directorial intervention. Raheb’s approach is to unsettle her restrained interlocutors, baiting them out of the comfort of rehearsed remarks and leading them into
deeper waters. It is a process she chooses to record on-camera, for the viewer’s benefit. Where Borgmann and Slim forced Lebanese viewers to acknowledge the conditions of their filmmaking—namely dark and secret interview rooms—as the product of collective amnesia, Raheb now forces her viewers to acknowledge another consequence of amnesia: the men who were in power during the war remain so well-protected by their impunity that they do not fear the light of day. In fact, they seek it out, camera-ready and confident that they can control the narrative. Her style of questioning must therefore be unconventional and aggressive: in one instance, she ejects her interviewee from her car when he refuses to answer her questions. Refusing the role of the director who is neither seen nor heard, she insists on the visibility and audibility of her and her film crew throughout. Her self-reflexive filmmaking is her way of responsibly being in community with perpetrators who are as wily as they are valuable as resources that will allow an eventual understanding of the country’s recent past, if not for themselves, then for those who observe them.54

*Layali bila nawm* addresses the fate of the families of Lebanon’s 17,000 disappeared in the post-war era, and the futility of their search for truth in a culture of amnesty and—as the film reveals—an often feigned amnesia. One of the documentary’s protagonists is Maryam Saidi. Her teenaged son, Maher, disappeared during the war and was last seen alive on June 17th, 1982 fighting alongside the armed wing of the Lebanese Communist Party during a battle near the Lebanese American University’s Faculty of Sciences building. Maher’s militia sought to hold back further territorial encroachments from the invading Israeli Defense Forces and their Maronite allies, while nearby the massacre at Sabra and Chatila was underway just a few kilometers away (Khalidi, 84). Raheb has encouraged Saidi to look for answers from the film’s other protagonist, Assad Chaftari, the deputy chief of intelligence and security of the Maronite Lebanese Forces. In the film, Chaftari positions himself as a born-again Christian. He spent the decades after the war and prior to the film’s release

54 For another example of this documentary style or strategy, see Vice’s analysis of Claude Lanzmann’s techniques for interviewing perpetrators in Lanzmann’s film *Shoah* (2013).
giving interviews, speeches, and writing letters apologizing for his role in the conflict. He was the first high-ranking wartime protagonist to speak publicly of regret. Raheb probes and ultimately reveals the limits of his remorse however by staging repeated confrontations between him and Maryam Saidi. As a hysterical Saidi alternates between demands that he give her information to help find her son, and accusing him of hypocrisy when he refuses, Chaftari appears cold and indifferent.

Pursuing another lead, Raheb finds and interviews Elias Atallah, the former commander of the Lebanese Communist Party’s armed wing, and therefore the commander of the missing Maher’s militia. Like Chaftari, Atallah remained in the public’s view after the war. His particular brand of self-promotion was to turn his military career into a political one, finding, as many other warlords did, a position in post-war parliament. If Raheb’s denuding of Chaftari will be motivated by a desire to expose what she clearly sees as disingenuous repentance, her motivation with Atallah may well be the calculated nature of his political career. His post-war political tenure has been characterized by a series of decisions tethered not to his supposed wartime political convictions, but to opportunism: expelled from the Communist Party, he launched his own political organization and entered into a strategic political alliance with his wartime enemies, the warlords-turned-politicians of the Kata’ib.55

Atallah’s on-camera demeanor suggests a deeply confused man attempting – and failing – to play the part of the classic and controlled statesman. A few years prior to Raheb’s film, he was featured in another documentary, In Place (2009), directed by the duo behind Massaker. In the film, a low-budget series of 20-minute individual interviews with Chaftari, Atallah, and two former Amal fighters, Atallah is barely intelligible. Depending on the context, his nonsensical responses at times

55 Atallah’s party is part of the March 14 alliance, a coalition of several major political parties united primarily by their opposition to the March 8 alliance. The two coalitions formed in the immediate aftermath of the withdrawal of the last of Syrian occupying forces from Lebanon in 2005. Demonstrations surrounding this event later became known as the Cedar Revolution, after the symbolic national tree of Lebanon. Generally, members of the March 8 alliance are considered pro-Syria and pro-Hizballah and include Amal, Hizballah, as well as the party of the current president, Maronite former general Michel Aoun. The members of the March 14 alliance, whose primary members are the Kata’ib and former Lebanese Forces – in addition to the party led by current Prime Minister, Saad Hariri – oppose Syria and Hizballah. The formation of these coalitions noticeably departs from wartime animosities and alliances, reconfiguring a new political topography.
seem a function of his own artifice or a tragicomic performance of delusion. “I got dragged into the war,” Atallah insists, almost as soon as we encounter him. “I found myself in the midst of it. […] I felt that my duties as a human put me in that position.” One could construe the last portion of his statement to mean that his political convictions compelled him to fight. It would be hard, however, to reconcile that assertion with the first part of his statement in which he describes himself as without agency; first a victim of anonymous others who force him to fight, and then, more passively, a victim of war. He continues, his slow, pensive cigar-smoking suggesting his desire to inspire control and confidence, despite his nonsensical answers: “My motivations were not sectarian, although sectarianism was at the heart of this war … and other dimensions were also present.” Despite his muddled syntax and inscrutable meaning, his posture is relaxed, his cigar hanging languidly between his fingers, his occasional gestures loose and disinterested, as if this were just one of many interviews scheduled that day. It is as if he is entirely unaware that his speech sounds like the ramblings of a man increasingly alienated from intelligible speech.

In the years between the filming of In Place in 2009 and Layali bila nawm in 2012, however, Atallah’s performances have become more polished. Perhaps the lack of any consequences for his public discussions of the war have given him the self-assurance to accept interviews on the topic of the war, even without knowing the agenda of the interviewer. But Raheb capably edits the film in such a way as to undermine his confident demeanor, while working on-camera to draw out the truth lurking underneath: that he is an angry and fearful man. Her editing is characterized by jump-cuts between Atallah and her own crew, moving rapidly through the establishing moments of the interview. This forces him to share the screen with her and her film-crew in the final cut of the film.

It is unlikely that Atallah was aware of how the footage from the interview would be presented in the film’s final cut. As he was being recorded, several cameras were trained on him: he was at the center of their – and therefore our – optical focus. It was to these cameras, through Raheb, that he speaks to his imagined public, performing the practiced and composed persona of a
shrewd politician. He has, perhaps, paid less attention to the cameras whose lenses are not trained on him. Simultaneously, they record the footage of Raheb’s crew in the process of recording Atallah. Spliced together, the “story” of the film will not be Atallah’s curated appearance and message, but the curation of Atallah and his message. Raheb’s cameras will capture his dis-ease when the interview strays into topics he does not wish to discuss, and he is unable to control the interview’s direction. She will place him in a defensive posture which he has likely not had to assume since his days as a commander.

In *Layali bila nawm* for instance, we hear Atallah’s voice before we ever see him: “Why are we here?” a voice asks Raheb off-camera (00:43:40). It is Atallah. Raheb’s camera crew has set up a camera on a tripod in a sitting room. From its lens we can see an armchair tucked into a corner next to a built-in bookshelf. As we wait, the crew walks back and forth, arranging their equipment. Without fanfare, the scene cuts to an extreme close-up of Atallah’s fingers fiddling with the laces of his black patent leather dress shoe as he sits in the chair. Raheb’s camera teases the viewer with suggestions of Atallah’s eventual presence – his voice, his shoe – much in the same way Atallah will eventually try to skirt around the questions he will be asked. Indeed, the next cut does little to establish more about our interlocutor: we see Raheb’s camera crew testing the audio output, and then a cameraman sitting in Atallah’s chair, eyes wandering, as if waiting for his team to finish ensuring their set-up (00:43:53). Finally, already a full minute into the scene, we see Atallah’s hand, holding his trademark lit cigar, his arm cloaked in a suit (44:05). The camera pulls away, granting a medium close-up of him seated, smoking. Suddenly, the visual feed of yet another camera takes over – a camera positioned somewhere around the corner from the armchair; this camera shows him from a different angle as if spying on him. The first camera, the one with which he interacts throughout the interview, is there to record him as he wishes to be seen; the second provides us with subtext, mimicking his staged performance through a reflexive acknowledgment of the staging of the very interview.

Raheb’s multiple cameras join together the sum total of vantage points from which one can derive a
clearer picture of the perpetrator’s behavior – clearer, at least, than the one which they are prepared to show us.

With no prompting at all and apropos of nothing, Atallah states firmly that he both knows nothing and remembers nothing. Without a word, Raheb reaches towards him, holding a sheaf of papers in her outstretched hand (00:44:41). The feed from the second camera momentarily takes over to provide a view of the room, its occupants, and the equipment. His face is impassive as he takes the papers. The camera positioned in front of the armchair takes over once again, offering a close-up of the papers: they are photographs of Saidi’s son. Atallah studies them, conscious of the camera lens trained on him, feigning concentration as he holds the papers and a cigar lighter in the same hand. The symbolism is dark: as he continues to disavow any knowledge of the boy whose image he holds, he may as well be touching fire to the images, burning them to untraceable ash, foreclosing the last path to finding an answer. Tellingly, the first moment of this interview sequence in which the viewer sees him as he wishes to be seen – lucid and in control – is this one.

Perhaps he has misinterpreted Raheb’s momentary refusal to push him further for he has relinquished his defensive posture. No longer worrying his shoelace, he folds one leg easily across the other. Arms and hands gesturing freely as he speaks, his voice becomes louder, his words coming more quickly as he talks not about Maher Saidi, but about the summer of 1982, in general. Like the man in Massker who answers a question about his role in the massacre with a description of his personal despair at the death of his leader, Atallah will use his prodigious memory as a red herring to distract us (and himself) from the question of what he knows. Unbeknownst to him, however, the camera angle will shift again (00:45:30). We become aware of a third camera evidently pre-positioned at a height that enable sit to capture the images reflected in a mirror-like surface, perhaps a security mirror, suspended in the ceiling’s corner. Situated just above Atallah’s chair, the camera’s entire focus is now the image of the room below as reflected in the metal. Due to the convex shape of the mirror, however, the proportions are distorted. Atallah’s seat in the armchair at the corner of the
room appears exaggeratedly tucked away; it would be hard to find him were it not for the reflection of his outstretched arm hinting at his location. And, though the actual distance between his chair and Raheb’s is perhaps a matter of a few feet, the reflective surface shows an immense gulf between them, a literal reflection of their metaphoric position. Behind Raheb stand three of her camera-crew; they appear as a body sitting in judgment, a safe distance away from his verbal manipulations. If this *mise-en-scène* were not part of Raheb’s original plan, its poeticism is certainly apparent to the viewer. Despite Atallah’s practiced affect, his tangent-like diatribe conspires with the inverted reflection of the room to subvert the confidence he wishes to project. The reflexive filmmaking Raheb has so carefully arranged for this scene – the cinematic code of this film – has upended the warlord-turned-politician.

Taking advantage of what now becomes apparent as Atallah’s weakness, Raheb begins to push him into uncomfortable territory. While he waxes eloquent about the bravery of the Communist Party militiamen and their last stand against the inevitable crush of the advancing Israeli army, she interrupts to ask who the Communist Party’s *Lebanese* enemy was during that battle (00:46:42). He ceases talking abruptly, draws on his cigar, and releases two puffs of smoke that almost veil his face. The silence holds, though the smoke clears: he remains on-camera and the question lingers in the air. “I don’t know,” he answers. The answer to Raheb’s question is the Kata’ib, the very party with whom Atallah enjoyed a parliamentary alliance at the time of filming. She pushes again: “weren’t the Kata’ib your enemies?” Without blinking or breaking his stare, without so much as twitching the cigar he holds suspended in the air, he repeats himself: “I don’t know.” But lest he seem like a man not in full possession of his faculties, he adds: “frankly, we forgot that period.” In other words, in order to justify his proclaimed lack of knowledge/refusal to know, despite his clearly prolific memory, he needs to negate the latter and develop a feigned amnesia for the political.

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56 I borrow the term “cinematic code” from Christian Metz. See *Film Language: A Semiotics of Cinema* (1968).
The grammar of his evasive and dishonest answer also hints of dissociation: who is the “we” to whom he refers? Has he abandoned his previous use of the first-person singular in favor of a royal “we,” which, semantically at least, might diffuse blame? Or, does he pretend to speak on behalf of the entire Communist Party; and, if so, with what authority? The Communist Party with which he was once affiliated has since expelled him; surely they have not forgotten anything at all.

Recognizing that his repeated lies have placed him in a weakened defensive position he becomes aggressive. He leans forward, waving his cigar and his index finger at Raheb (00:47:02): “now I really want to know. What’s your story? Why do you want to know about the battle at the Faculty of Sciences?” As he attempts to regain control of the interview, hoping to position Raheb as the untrustworthy party, Raheb’s camera-crew curates the final shot of the interview sequence. The composition of the shot consists of two-thirds of his face, along with his signature cigar, as a nearby framed photo of a much younger Atallah comes into focus from the bookshelf behind him. Neither a mirror-image, nor a shadow-image, the photograph of the younger man seems almost a ghostly doubling. It is a tightly-closed frame, the lens causing him to appear confined in a claustrophobic space: he is inseparable from his past, even in the present.

Raheb’s probing interrogatives and relentless presence has forced her interlocutor out of a comfortable, controlled narrative, and into a position for which he has no pre-prepared script. While her line of inquiry disrupts Atallah’s careful self-representation, her directorial and editorial decisions simultaneously perform a parallel disruption. Her decision to withhold his image for the first several minutes disorients the viewer, compelling us to observe Atallah more closely when we finally encounter him. Her frequent cuts back and forth between her own face, the camera-crew in the room, and Atallah himself heighten our sense of disorientation, leaving us with an impression not unlike that which follows his inscrutable monologue in In Place. In turn, this diminishes the likelihood that we will see the man as he wishes to be seen. Instead, he appears at the center of a visual maelstrom, a convoluted world of his own making. Finally, Raheb’s use of the reflective mirror
temporarily releases the viewer, now presenting Atallah as the disoriented object. That the interview sequence concludes with his doubled image is the final coup de grace: the Atallah he is today has hardly been detached from the Atallah of the war-era. If anything, he has become even more grotesque.

**Time in the Mirror**

The use of the mirror in film is uniquely suited to the task of making visible the distortions of space and time in which the perpetrators have become ensnared. By definition, Paul Virilio writes, cinema is a ‘flow in which the fantastic world of the past rejoins the world of the present”: the act of seeing, capturing, replaying, and seeing again a series of images circulates between and among temporalities (Virilio, 30). In collapsing the past onto the present, changing their temporal relations to each other, and relocating the space of the event to the space of its representation, cinema becomes a distinctive medium of temporal visualization. Deleuze’s notion of the “crystal-image” helps explain this collapse. Time, he writes in *Cinema 2*, coexists in “levels of duration” wherein a single event simultaneously belongs to multiple “sheets” of the past (xii). An event both participates in the continuous present while also being already consigned to the past. Its two valences form a “mutual image” whose constituent parts are indiscernible (81), with indiscernibility defined as “the objective characteristic of certain images which are by nature double” (69). Deleuze’s neologism, the crystal-image, is that which “make[s] perceptible […] relationships of time which cannot be seen in the represented object and do not allow themselves to be reduced to the present” (xii). In other words, this kind of image reveals the nuance of time that is not fixed but is rather between moments. A unity of undistinguishable images, it is time in its purest form (82). The crystal-image, I argue, manifests the barzakh.

The quintessential crystal-image, Deleuze posits, is the mirror, for it negotiates between two types of images and their temporalities: the “actual” and the “virtual.” “The present is the actual image,” writes Deleuze, the material object in front of the reflective surface, “and its
contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror” (79). The mirror catalyzes the split which allows an image to be both of the present and the past in the moment we apprehend it. But this is not to say that the reflected image is any less real than that which is termed “actual.” Like a circuit made of light-play, the mirror oscillates, refracts, reflects and obfuscates until the point where virtual and actual are reversed: “the mirror-image is virtual in relation to the actual character that the mirror catches, […]yet it is actual in the mirror which now leaves the character with only a virtuality and pushes him back out-of-field” (70). In other words, the mirror-image assumes a presence, an agency, which destabilizes the primacy of the actual image, changing its status to virtual as if in conversation with each other. Thus, the impact of the two views of Atallah’s sitting room as seen through the security mirror’s reflection: the latter becomes visually symbolic of the true dynamic of the arrangement, causing the viewer to interpret the scene anew.

The Deleuzian understanding of the mirror as a signpost of collapsed space-time is also consistent with interpretations of the barzakh in Middle Eastern writing. In theological terms too, there is a link between the barzakh and the mirror: Ibn al ‘Arabi writes of a “mirror image, which acts as a bridge or ‘isthmus’ (barzakh) between the reflected object and the mirror […]” (Chittick, 25). In other words, the barzakh is visually represented by a reflection which joins the otherwise separate real object to its image. The relationship between mirror and barzakh also has precedent in literature. Matthew Sharpe writes on texts by Francophone Maghrabi writers who chronicle their exile in Europe; he finds within these texts parallels between the narrative experience of border-crossing and the barzakh. In particular, it is in Tahar ben Jelloun’s novel Yeux Baisés (1991) that the barzakh is articulated in relation to the mirror: for ben Jelloun’s migrants there is always the “danger of losing yourself in a labyrinth of signs and a demonic play of mirrors” which conflate their past and present selves (Sharpe, 411). And, as Nasrin Qader observes, in Moussa Ould Ebnou’s novel Barzakh, the

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57 Sharpe is quoting ben Jelloun here.
skeletal protagonist who is “neither a presence nor an absence,” dwells within “a time that cannot be captured” and belongs to “no domain, no territory” (20). His story is contained in and told through crystals, fragments “in relation with no totality; […] they are not copies of anything, that is the doubling is not mimetic” (16). Ben Jelloun and Ould Ebnou’s imagining of the *barzakh* is a referent-less orientation wherein either a new kind of reality emerges from an “illusionary play of images and words […] and] generates a new world,” or one goes mad (Sharpe, 411-412).58 The connection established between the figure of the migrant and the *barzakh* – a relationship made visual in and through the mirror – is consistent with the suggestion of some scholars that we understand the *barzakh* as a state of pilgrimage – a condition of being in motion, in transition between two destinations (Archer, 8-9).

In films about the afterlife of the wartime perpetrator, the mirror is therefore an appropriate aesthetic through which to represent the labyrinthine, fragmented, overlapping dimensions of life in the *barzakh*. Indeed, Lebanese idiomatic expression also established the significance of the mirror as symbolic object. In Evelyne Accad’s essay, “Le miroir brisé et le désir de mort,” for instance, her criticism of masculinist discourse extends beyond the oft-cited complaint that Lebanon’s male authors often anthropomorphize Beirut as a prostitute.59 Accad rejects the narrative of a city that works its feminine wiles to entrance men with promises of power and wealth only to claim their lives, money and sanity later. Instead, she figures Beirut as a (genderless) mirror which simply reflects ill-gotten gains and manipulative designs of those who stand in front of it. It bursts into shards from the pressure of corruption, patriarchy and confessionalism masquerading as self-righteous ideology. Elsewhere, Judith Naeff describes men’s wartime narratives which render the city of Beirut either as a metaphorical mirror, or in need of one. Ahmed Beydoun and Ilyas Khuri’s wartime fiction, Naeff

58 Here Sharpe quotes Stefania Pandolfo’s *Impasse of the Angels: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory*, p. 178.
59 See Miriam Cooke’s *War’s Other Voices* and Evelyne Accad’s *Sexuality and War* for further discussion of the gendered anthropomorphizing of Beirut.
writes, liken Lebanon’s failed “cosmopolitan mimicry” to a broken mirror, describing a Beirut which has violently devolved into “uncohered fragmentation,” unable to recognize its potential (153). Jalal Toufic, on the other hand, advocates not a metaphoric relationship between Beirut and a mirror, Naeff writes, but suggests that Beirut needs a mirror in order to see, re-imagine and resurrect itself (155).

To a degree, the Lebanese trope of the (shattered) mirror contains echoes of Lacanian psychoanalytic understandings of identity and self-recognition. In his article, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” Jacques Lacan builds upon Freudian theories of child psychology. Small children become anxious and insecure in the face of their helplessness. Unable to navigate the world without relying on adults, they feel fragmented and inchoate. This deep-rooted insecurity could be represented in the Lebanese context by the insecurity of the post-independence era, newly urban portions of the mosaic attempting to cohere to the nation-state model without a blueprint. It is on perceiving their reflection in a mirror, however, that small children re-imagine themselves: contrary to the shattered and disparate entity they previously imagined themselves to be, they now see in front of them a whole, integrated unit of coherent matter, fully functioning in the world. This reflection heartens and reassures them (albeit only temporarily). But it too must inevitably shatter: as the child matures into an adolescent and adult, they realize they will always fail to fully realize the image of the whole they thought they saw. The reflection in Lebanon’s mirror, in other words, is of a shattered ideal built on a tenuous foundation.

If war-era metaphors of Beirut as mirror were predicated on a city’s fragmented subjective identity desperately in need of repair, post-war metaphors gestured toward a damaged social polity whose psyche was lost to a liminal time and place. Rastegar describes this suspended condition in

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As noted in Chapter One, many critics object to the attempt to politicize psychoanalytic theory by extrapolating from what is meant to be a theory of the individual psyche to a collective group. Despite this, there is a long tradition of using psychoanalysis to theorize the national psyche, rooted in part through readings of Freudian group psychology.
terms that indirectly suggest the *barzakh*: she refers to the “sense of being between life and death” and “the uneasy liminal status of living through death, or dying with life” (156-157). In Lebanese post-war film in particular, Rastegar suggests, the mirror becomes a reflexive object through which both the characters and the viewers might apprehend the precarity of Lebanon’s balancing act. In *War is Coming*, Sami Hermez argues that the post-war banalization of violence brought about by the amnesty and reconstruction have placed Lebanon in perpetual limbo. This limbo takes the form of irrepressible living memories, which anticipate what Hiba bou Akar calls *The War Yet to Come*, and which various cultural producers have also described as a suspended condition. Lebanon’s “temporal irresolution” – the ontological condition of being permanently in-between wars even after the end of the 1975-1990 violence – produces individuals who both haunt, and are haunted. In these fictional imaginings one’s options, according to Rastegar (and Najwa Barakat) are limited to exile, death, and insanity in the absence of a perpetually-deferred justice.

Raheb’s use of the mirror therefore extends the life of a Lebanese signifier while expanding its role outside of fiction. Her mirrored conversations evoke the toxic chauvinism Accad observed; the fragmentation resulting from haunting described by Rastegar; and, the injunction to reflect as suggested by Toufic. These antecedents help inform what ultimately becomes Raheb’s unique visualization of the perpetrator’s amnesty-era *barzakh*. We see this again through the aesthetic representation of her conversations with Assad Chaftari, the former deputy chief of intelligence and security for the Maronite Lebanese Forces. He is implicated in the massacres at Sabra and Chatila refugee camps by his position as aid to Elie Hobeïqa, the architect of the assault. Since his public apology in 2000, Chaftari has claimed responsibility for hundreds of deaths: he says he has killed

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61 Focusing on post-war fiction films, Rastegar points to doubly-exposed shots and shot-reverse shot sequences as cinematic techniques used to signal the presence of the undead, echoing a cinematic code that has been in use since early cinema.
63 Rastegar cites as examples Marun Baghdadi’s *Hurub saghira* (*Little Wars*, 1982) and Samir Habchi’s *Al-‘Asar* (*The Tornado*, 1992). The “cinematic tropes of the undead” Rastegar argues, are “a critical reflection on unresolved calls for justice” (156).
with weapons at close-range, poisoned people, and detonated bombs (Layali bila na'm, 05:15). He has described the social indoctrination through which he was taught to believe that Muslims were the enemy and Palestinians were a threat to Lebanese sovereignty – narratives which contributed to his decision to join the Kata’ib on the eve of war in 1974. During the war, he fundamentally believed that everything he did was in the name of his Christian duty to defend Lebanon.

In 1986, as the long-present fractures within Maronite leadership threatened to become all-out war, Chaftari fled east with his family to the Beka’a Valley. Some time later, he became involved with a reconciliation-oriented NGO and, he says, experienced a moral and religious change of heart. Notwithstanding his fear that the Lebanese public would think him “mad” or “naïve,” he says, he began his apology campaign (Chaftari). Though he claims to have been ostracized by members of the Maronite community and even subjected to assassination attempts, he has been the emblem of peace and reconciliation for international non-governmental organizations working in Lebanon.

Enlightenment notwithstanding, Chaftari’s attitude is much more complex than he is prepared to acknowledge. His calls for reconciliation, for instance, do not extend far enough to convince him to help families by disclosing the locations of mass graves. Though the existence of the graves is an open secret, he insists on protecting those who dug them, calling the graves a “trauma” and “an unhealed injury” in a country where “the war didn’t end” (Varzi, 2016). “For now, the country is not ready to discuss this issue,” he has said (ibid). Though Chaftari’s suggestion that “the country” needs more time ostensibly refers to the lack of political interest or juridical capacity, his reticence is likely personal: he forecloses a line of questioning in his interview with the definitive comment that “Some secrets are not only mine, Assad Chaftari’s personal secrets. They are party secrets and belong to the Christians” (00:36:20). These tribe members, “Christians” whose secrets he so stalwartly guards – conflating a Maronite political agenda with adherence to a religious tradition – are the very same ones who, he claims, abandoned him, attempted to kill him, and maintain the misguided politics from which he has turned away. In feigning a non-confessional national agenda, he
demonstrates his continuing allegiance to a confessional creed and identity – he has not “detribalized.”

Raheb tries to bring these contradictions to light for both Chaftari and the viewer in one scene in particular: Raheb and Chaftari are seated across from each other at his dining room table. Behind them is a large, decorative mirror against which the Chaftaris have rested family photographs. In silence, the documentarist and her subject listen to a taped recording of an interview they held some years ago. Chaftari’s facial expressions change rapidly as he listens to an older version of himself speak about the error of his ways: a slight smirk as if repressing a laugh, a close-mouthed sigh exhaled through his nose, then something akin to sorrow. Raheb stares intently at him. When he finally looks up, he meets Raheb’s gaze with a now inscrutable expression. His battery of previous facial expressions, however, suggests that he found something awkwardly amusing about his past self-condemnation. The viewer then hears Raheb’s recorded voice asking the recorded Chaftari whether he had personally killed anyone during the war. Of course, he says: it was his job. She asks for more: how did he kill? Chaftari winces slightly as he listens to himself describe the various methods he used to end lives. And then suddenly, the voice stops. As if he remembers what he said next before his words played back, Chaftari looks at Raheb across the table. His recorded voice resumes after a pregnant pause: he wants to ask her a question, if she wouldn’t mind. Having heard about all the people he has killed, what does she think of him? The view on our screen has returned to the original framing of this scene: a medium-range shot of the two sitting across from each other at the table. Chaftari smiles awkwardly. His shoulder twitches. He plays with his hands. He looks at Raheb just for a second as she leans back, her recorded voice telling him she is not even sure how to answer that question. He says he understands. It is hard to imagine that the somewhat abashed voice on the tape belongs to the same man in this documentary, or that he would care to ask that question now. Chaftari looks away from the tape recorder as if suddenly interested in the details of the room.
around him. He has been left alone with a question that he now seems to find almost embarrassing in its candor and its unanswerability.

There were two audiences for this scene: Chaftari and Raheb’s future viewers. Chaftari is an audience insofar as Raheb wants him to confront a past version of himself that was, to some degree, more honest and vulnerable than the one with which she now interacts. The confrontation clearly unnerves him: his shifting eyes search out something in the room which can serve as an anchor. This unsettled demeanor allows Raheb’s audience to apprehend his limbo – past and present selves clashing, producing an unreconcilable image of a man inscrutable to himself and to us. If the viewer finds the tension overwhelming, they are not alone: Chaftari earlier expressed his frustration with the emotional toll of filming. Raheb, he complains, is concerned only with “images and film and getting a wonderful scene.” He, on the other hand needs “two weeks to recover after the [filming]. The whole past hits me again. The anxiety and sleepless nights … ” (00:02:28). But this is precisely the point: Raheb wants him to experience these sleepless nights, for which she has named her film. His sleep was a privilege afforded by the amnesty, and one his victims have not been able to enjoy.

When the listening session is over, Raheb stands, handing Chaftari a paper from which he is to read. As she moves, the mirror reflects a boom microphone waving briefly into view (00:05:51). The on-screen appearance of multiple recording devices has already situated Chaftari on a continuum of multiple consecutive temporalities, to which the mirror now adds its own manipulations and convergences of temporal-spatial dimension. The mirror and the recording devices (a sort of sonic mirror, if you will) establish a fun-house effect whereby several Chaftaris converge into one, yet remain permanently differentiated by time, and by his character in each of those moments. Though his affect and perhaps even attitude has changed over time, their multiplicity and co-presence nods to the complexity of his current position. Chaftari looks at the script Raheb has handed him, and then, in a voice an octave higher than usual, he complains: her script incorrectly states the year of his birth, and his position in the Kata’ib hierarchy (00:06:02). Off-screen, Eliane
takes a beat and, with great patience, asks how he prefers to describe his position. Chaftari looks at her in silence. The reflection from the mirror shows her face and shoulders, out-of-focus as if Chaftari were arguing with a ghost.

**Combatant and Perpetrator Memoirs**

The accounts offered by perpetrators of war – whether low-ranking or commanders – uniquely add to our understanding of the afterlife of war and its madness – even, and perhaps especially, in the truths left out of the accounts. The documentary films I consider in this chapter demonstrate the failure to find a meaningful narrative form through which to cohere overwhelming memory of atrocity, and highlight the deleterious effect of the amnesty on its supposed beneficiaries. As the men suffer their personal moral injuries, the films implicate the viewer by forcing a form of cognitive dissonance upon us as we bear witness to a body politic that is still ailing. With maps and mirrors, the documentarians illuminate an untenable state of affairs, and through these same objects, the perpetrators confront themselves. Though this confrontation produces neither a heightened self-awareness nor catharsis, it is clear that it has a devastating effect.

Not only does the medium of documentary illuminate new aspects of the afterlife of war in comparison to fiction, it also offers a more frank account than those which are presented in some of the perpetrators’ self-published writing. But this latter kind of narrative may also be illustrative of the disproportionate number of former Maronite combatants who penned memoirs and other accounts of their experiences relative to other confessions. In the film *In Place*, co-director Lokman Slim asks Assad Chaftari why so many of the former commanders who have come forward to offer an apology have been Christian. Chaftari suggests that a “Christian” culture of confession may make it natural for many Christian perpetrators to apologize and ask for forgiveness. Comparably fewer accounts

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*In this case, perhaps “Catholic” would be the better descriptor considering the proximity between Maronites and Catholics.*
exist from Shiite ex-combatants, for instance, and writings from Sunni and Druze militiamen and -
women, members of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, or the Southern Lebanese Army are
noticeably absent (Eddé, 27; see also Haugbolle 2018). During his interview in In Place, Chaftari
suggests that the Maronite (or “Christian” as he calls it) perception that they had lost the war could
explain the demographic imbalance. The losers, he implied have more reason to reflect on the war.
Like many of his confessional background, Chaftari counts himself, a Maronite, among the war’s
losers despite the official declaration that there had been neither victors nor vanquished. Indeed, a
regular theme in the Maronite accounts is disillusionment with the Maronite agenda as it descended
into the vicious intra-party battles between 1988 and 1990. Regina Sneifer, for instance, one of the
few women in a militia, penned a memoir in which she briefly outlines her budding adolescent
commitment to the Maronite cause. She uses the majority of the text, however, to express
disappointment with the “fièvre collective,” or “folie collective” and “épidemie” that began in April 1975, and
the Maronite descent into fratricide (Sneifer 2006, 44).65 Written in a surprisingly impersonal tone,
she dedicates the book to her son, in the expressed hope that a collective witnessing of the past will
stave off a dark future. Other accounts often denounce Maronite leadership or adopt a somewhat-
altered language of Greek Orthodox journalist and diplomat Ghassan Tueni who claimed that rather
than a civil war, Lebanon had experienced une guerre des autres. Unsurprisingly, apologies, where
present, are offered in vague terms, without acknowledgment of specific and personal acts of wrong-
doing.66

65 Several years prior to the publication of her memoir, Sneifer wrote Guerres maronites (1994), an attempt to explain the
devolution of the Maronite nationalist movement in Lebanon.
66 Accounts such as Soha Bechara’s 2003 memoir Resistance are all the more notable in this context. Bechara, a Greek
Orthodox member of the Lebanese Communist party, was held prisoner for a decade in an infamous detention center co-
administered by the Israeli Defense Forces and their Maronite Lebanese allies in the Southern Lebanese Army (SLA) for
her attempted assassination of the leader of the SLA. Her account is an unabashed declaration of support for Palestinians
and leftist Lebanese, but also global causes of resistance against occupation. Any silences in her account surround not her
own deeds and involvement in Communist-militias (which she describes in detail) but the particular hell that was life in the
prison known as Khiam.
Still, it would be a gross overgeneralization to suggest that all Maronite perpetrators have disavowed their political pasts, however superficially, in writing. Some of the biggest proponents of historical revisionism were staunch confessionalists who viewed these narratives as amnesiac. In “The Historiography and Memory of the Lebanese Civil War,” Sune Haugbolle describes interviews and letters from Lebanese who openly lamented that the public had so quickly forgotten the confessional martyrs around whom they rallied only years earlier. These individuals despise the parroting of what Haugbolle terms “intellectual patriotism,” the apparent price of membership in a reconciled Lebanon (np). Similar sentiments have been echoed as recently as the 2019 inauguration of the Kata’ib’s Independence Museum. Leaving no doubt as to the museum’s purpose, Maronite Patriarch Bechara al-Rahi emphasized that had it not been for the Maronite “martyrs” of the recent civil war, “we wouldn’t have been here today. […] They died so that we would live” (“Kataeb Party Inaugurates Independence Museum”). Former President Amine Gemayel’s remarks at the same inauguration sounded a call-to-action for youth whom he sought to educate about the past “that we once had” (ibid).

In 2018, Maroun Machaalani, a prominent Kata’ib officer who led several of the men featured in Massaker on their macabre mission, published a memoir coauthored by a member of the Gemayel family. In Croix de Guerre [War Cross] he walks a delicate balance between the two positions: there is both historical revisionism about his opinion of the Maronite militias and their leaders as well as a fierce loyalty. He blames “leaders [who] praise you incessantly, suck your blood and push you towards forfeiting your own life to quench their thirst, then consume you entirely before letting you down” for the country’s devastation (np). Like Chaftari, Machaalani insists that he has relinquished his fundamentalism. His Christian rebirth has supposedly been the vehicle through which he endeavors to undo the damage caused (by an unnamed agent) to the “solid and

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67 This and the remaining citations from his book are taken from his introductory remarks.
psychologically balanced man I was before” (ibid). Grateful that he no longer feels “suspended in the
void, like a destitute monarch” – an echo of Najwa Barakat’s Luqman – “somber in the profound
abyss of depression and despair,” he writes that he just narrowly avoided a permanent descent “into
an inferno of my own making” (ibid). Despite his intimate recognition of the barzakh-state in which
the war placed him, he nevertheless continues to characterize his time with the Kata’ib as the work
of a “freedom fighter,” and his reference to himself as a member of the “Christian resistance” gives
the lie to his self-representation (ibid). It is this kind of paradoxical self-misidentification which
pervades the discourse of many former members of the new, apparently non-political or non-
confessional Lebanese Christian Kata’ib and Lebanese Forces today, as evidenced by men like Assad
Chaftari.

Carving out a space separate from fiction, or from the perpetrators’ fictionalized narratives,
the documentaries I discuss in this chapter offer a third perspective, expanding our understanding of
the repertoire of adaptive responses in a climate of amnesty and denial. Whereas in the former,
meaningful discussion is certainly foreclosed by ex-combatants whose insanity drives them to death
(Oh Salaam), or by those who withhold their truths in favor of “intellectual patriotism,” the meaning
produced in these films is emblematic of the country’s tension. The former militiamen in Massaker, In
Place, and Layali bila naum whose accounts straddle deception and forthrightness, whose old
allegiances remain, walk a precipitously thin line which touches both the past and the present yet fully
belongs to neither.

Conclusion

Assad Chaftari told the Beirut-based NGO Umam Documentation and Research “that a
specialized research institution [should] be commissioned to survey the attitudes of former
combatants. He viewed such an assessment as being akin to an X-ray with predictive value” (Diwan
al-thakira, vi). It is an ironic suggestion when considered in light of his own attempts to erect barriers
to truth. Notwithstanding his lionized stature as the country’s first high-ranking perpetrator to apologize for atrocities and his role in the war more generally, he is unwilling, if not unable, to truly bear witness to the nature of the madness which he fleetingly acknowledged as endemic to the war’s perpetrators. If the knowledge he holds would drive others mad, and if he performs a form of public service by not sharing information that would mentally cripple his countrymen and -women, how does he manage to avoid the loss of sanity, himself?

Indeed, his comment suggests that he thinks he has avoided madness, when in fact he is in a constant battle to stave off his fate. This madness is linked to the sense of being estranged from oneself; the mind disconnected from the body, unwilling to code as “knowledge” that which the body and the unconscious have stored as memory. Alarmingly for the future of Lebanon, some theological interpretations posit that it is not just the spirit or the soul that is confined to this purgatorial space-time, but that in the process of waiting the body is reduced to a corpse (Lange, np). In the context of war, the becoming-corpse in the *barzakh* is a testament to the impact of death. For survivors of what Robert Jay Lifton calls the death encounter (a “survivor” here defined as anyone whose body has been touched by death, including those who have caused it), the *barzakh* registers an encounter whose trace is irrevocable and permanent (Lifton 1967). Lingering in this space is evidence of the “indelible imprint of the event and its endlessly reverberating psychological repercussions,” repercussions which, for Lebanese perpetrators, involve an endlessly foreclosed encounter with their exiled peacetime selves in a curious third space (Lifton 1967).

But it is not just the perpetrator who hovers indefinitely in this indeterminacy. Brian S. Powers writes that it is possible for members of a society to mistakenly project all of our “collective violence” (which, I would clarify, includes violent ideological and religious sentiment) onto the perpetrator so as to keep our own self-image immaculate. We neglect to address the profundity of the moral rift into which these combatants have descended once the conflict has ended. Leaving the perpetrator “sequestered in a bizarre moral space” we move on, unwilling to consider what their
condition “suggests to us about our own violence” (9). It is this kind of hypocrisy that Najwa Barakat’s Luqman found so offensive and dangerously alienating in Najwa Barakat’s Oh Salaam, and which these documentarians make plain, even as they maintain their focus on perpetrators.

A quintessential example of the impact of this indeterminacy can be found in the fiction film produced by Lebanese filmmakers Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Yawm akhir [A Perfect Day] (2005). In the film, the viewer is given access to a day in the life of a mother and her son who are haunted by the late-war disappearance of their husband and father, respectively. In their film, Hadjithomas and Joreige included a prop in the form of a newspaper clipping announcing the disappearance of their character and featuring his photograph. The clipping was a curious mixture of fact and fiction. The filmmakers had researched the historical events of the late-war period in order to construct a credible plot. In the course of their research, they learned of a car-bombing in the northern city of Tripoli which had taken place on April 25, 1988, and which would likely have been followed by a string of abductions (Aida sauve moi, np). Hadjithomas and Joreige selected this date for their fictional character’s disappearance and contracted a local Lebanese newspaper to reprint an archived page from that day’s paper. Although their character and his kidnapping were fictions, the story of the impact of a man’s disappearance on his family was inspired by Joreige’s uncle. Moreover, the photograph they used was of a man named Antoine, an actual kidnapping victim who was a relative of the filmmakers’ assistant.

Shortly after the film’s release, a woman who had attended one of the initial screenings recognized the black and white photograph of Antoine and contacted the filmmakers. The man they called Antoine, she informed them, had not disappeared on that date: he had simply left his wife for her. The first wife assumed he had been kidnapped and mourned him as such. Ironically, however, sometime later, Antoine ultimately did disappear, presumably as a result of kidnapping. His disappearance was still under investigation when the film was released (Aida sauve moi, np). Antoine’s
limbo was a narrative trace predicated on an uncanny mixture of fact and fiction, but became a latency which haunted both the film and the surviving families, or, put otherwise, art and life.

In such a maddening environment, how does Lebanon move forward in a post-war era and create an archive about the period from which they just emerged? As the following chapter will make clear, the task of archivization is all but impossible … unless one is able to find [value] in what I call “mad archives.”
Chapter Four: An Aesthetics of Irresolution: Contemporary Photomontage

For contemporary artists using their craft to grapple with their country's political crisis in the 1990s and 2000s, many found that they had to speak to the long and layered history of the war in Lebanon over the prior three decades, especially as the country found itself in renewed battles with Israel in 1992, 1996 and 2006. United under the banner of the Party of God, the Lebanese Shi’ite political party and militia Hizballah found a powerful backer in the Iran Quds forces during the 1975-1990 war, and quickly established itself as Israel's most potent opposition in the region. In their “open letter addressed to the oppressed in Lebanon and the world” in 1985, Hizballah articulated their mission accordingly:

1. To expel Israel (IDF) for good from Lebanon, as a prelude to its total annihilation, and the liberation of Jerusalem and its holy cities from the occupation;
2. To expel the Americans, the French, and their allies from Lebanon for good, thus rooting out any influence of any colonial power on Lebanon;
3. To submit the Phalangists to just rule, and make them stand trial for the crimes they have committed against Muslims and Christians, through encouragement from America and Israel;
4. To allow our populace [the Shi’a of Lebanon] the right of self-determination […].

Hizballah’s Iranian resources as well as its organizational efficacy and service to neglected communities in southern Lebanon rapidly elevated the organization to the level of a parastatal actor. By 1992, it officially became a party with representation in the Lebanese parliament. Since then, the continued challenge to Lebanese sovereignty posed by Israel, as well as changes in postwar political agendas among parliamentarians, has allowed Hizballah to create alliances in unlikely places. Notable

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1 Excerpted from “The Text of Hizbullah’s Open Letter Addressed to the Oppressed in Lebanon and the World, 16 February 1985” (as reprinted in Alagha, 43).
among these is its alliance with former Maronite warlord and current president, Michel Aoun, and his party, the Free Patriotic Movement. Adapting its political arm into a recognized and legitimate actor (at least within Lebanon), the war-era paramilitary organization guaranteed its position as a crucial, if controversial, component of today’s postwar Lebanese establishment.

Despite Hizballah’s initially marginal position vis-à-vis Lebanon’s political establishment, and the fact that Israeli occupying forces officially withdrew from Lebanese territory in 2000, the conflict between the two rivals would continue to have repercussions, making it impossible to consider the 1975-1990 war fully an event of the past. In addition to low-intensity conflict and brief, intermittent wars, the nature of the Israeli-Hizballah wars themselves have been reminiscent of the events between 1975-1990: the actions of the IDF in 1996, for instance, provoked a renewed international outcry, reminding many of the massacre at Sabra and Chatila.2

But even outside the scope of the wars between Israel and Hizballah, however, violence began to resurge in Beirut and in the northern city of Tripoli in the early 2000s. Both cities experienced waves of car-bombings and assassination attempts from 2000-2008, with the most high-profile victim being the sitting prime minister and architect of the Solidere reconstruction efforts, Rafic Hariri. The violence was, to some degree, a response to power struggles between Sunni and Shi’a political parties (exacerbated by the actions of external actors such as Iran), but also reflected the impact of returning fighters from theaters of war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Most recently, the war in Syria, which began in 2011, has opened new fronts for warfare in northern and eastern Lebanon: expanding its mandate beyond the purview of the four aims elaborated in its 1985 open letter, Hizballah has fought alongside Bashar al-Assad.3

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2 During the course of their attack, Israeli forces committed a massacre in the southern town of Qana, shelled a United Nations compound, and carried out indiscriminate attacks throughout the country in order to pressure the Lebanese government into curbing Hizballah.
3 In November 2009, Hizballah issued a manifesto articulating an expanded view of their role in the region in the wake of regional and global developments. Their stated purpose laid greater emphasis on “reclaim[ing] human rights and contribut[ing] to the arousing of the Arab nation,” and doing so in a way that honored the “privileged/distinguished
In this same period of time, a third type of violence has taken root: an epistemic one which places the relationship between the Lebanese state and its subjects at the center and which would also reverberate for the next two decades. In 2000, five years after the Lebanese state declared that the 17,000 wartime missing or disappeared were to be considered legally dead, Bashar al-Asad’s regime released over fifty Lebanese prisoners, many of whom had been declared dead by the Lebanese state less than ten years prior. The uncanny return of the dead provided new energy for ongoing efforts, led by the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon and other NGOs, to lobby parliament for accountability. A few years later, the Beirut-based NGO Umam Documentation & Research launched a nationwide traveling exhibit featuring photographs of some of the missing as part of their effort to renew discussion on the war and its consequences. A decade later, the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011 proved yet another source of energy for Lebanese organizers, encouraging organizers to collaborate with the International Center for Transitional Justice and submit a draft law to Lebanese parliamentarians. The law proposed a national inquiry into the status of the civil war-era disappeared, a full two decades after the demands were first made (ICTJ 2012). Six years later, in November 2018, parliament finally passed a version of the law, acknowledging the families’ right to information about the missing, and authorizing the printing of certificates which converted their status from “legally dead” to “missing” (Noureddine).

Finally, though a degree of progress was made on the unresolved question of the fate of the missing and disappeared, new developments occurred which extended the life of other civil war-era

relations between Lebanon and Syria, for this is in the common political, security and economic interest of both countries” (Alagha, 118 and 130).

4 This prisoner release was part of a broader amnesty arranged by Bashar al-Assad to commemorate Hafez al-Assad’s 1970 purge of Ba’athist “dissidents,” and was likely an attempt to diffuse lingering resentments from his father’s regime.

5 The Committee, founded in 1982, halted their “Campaign for the Disappeared […] on the 28th of July 2000, but the movement re-emerged a few months later, in December 2000, with the release of 54 Lebanese prisoners by Syria, some of whom were declared dead by the commission of inquiry. The Committee and different human rights organisations launched a new protest campaign against the Lebanese and Syrian authorities” (Civil Society Knowledge Centre).

6 The exhibit, Missing … and they never came back was a temporary installation at the United Nations headquarters in Beirut, and was also featured in Eliane Raheb’s Layali bila nawm, discussed in Chapter Three.
tensions. The influx of over one million Syrian refugees into Lebanon as a result of the Syrian war, for instance, has once again exacerbated nationalist prejudices and prompted anti-refugee sentiment. Fear that Lebanon’s sovereignty is being violated by the presence of a non-state military actor has resurfaced in response to the growing influence of Da’esh, or the Islamic State. And, the ongoing manipulation of the country’s leadership by regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran continues to fuel the sense that Lebanon remains a battleground for stronger nations in the region. Recent scholars have argued that the civil war is not truly of the past, but remains an ongoing reality as violence has been sublimated into discursive practices such as political discourse and material realities such as urban planning.

The condition of stasis has left Lebanon caught, as artist-intellectual Walid Sadek writes, in a “protracted now, maintained by politico-sectarian factions structurally capable, through the deployment of intermittent bouts of violence and tenuous traces, of renewing the conditions of civil war and maintaining their prolonged dominance” (Sadek 2012, 481). Sadek suggests that many Lebanese have little faith in the ability of domestic parties to transcend the confessional agendas and other underlying issues which fueled the war, seeing the current status quo as in the interest of the established political class. Sentiments of this ilk have been expressed in novels such as Rabih Jabir’s Taqrir Milis (2005) in which the protagonist waits for United Nations Commissioner Detlev Mehlis to announce the findings of his investigation into the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri. The novel never reveals the findings which are announced after its publication, but compares the limbo-like position of waiting for the results of the report – results which the narrator believes will do little to change the sociopolitical dynamic in Lebanon – is matched by the literal purgatory inhabited by

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7 Human Rights Watch cites evidence of forced evictions by municipalities within Lebanon who consider the new refugee population a threat to their own quality of life. See HRW 2018.
8 Hizballah is largely seen as a proxy for the Iranian government; Saudi Arabia’s alleged kidnapping of sitting prime minister Saad Hariri in 2018 is yet another example of the influence of foreign agendas in Lebanon’s domestic politics.
9 Sami Hermez’s ethnographic study of post-war sociopolitical discourse in War Is Coming: Between Past and Future Violence in Lebanon (2017) and Hiba bou Akar’s analysis of post-war urban planning in For the War Yet to Come: Planning Beirut’s Frontiers (2018), are recent examples.
his sister, who narrates a portion of the novel. The sister was kidnapped and murdered in the early
1980s by a militia and addresses her brother from the other side of the partition between life and
death, explaining the surreal world in which the dead spend their days writing their life stories and
reading books. They, too, it seems, are in a suspended state of waiting.

It is from within a similarly metaphysical stasis that the contemporary Lebanese working in
the mid-2000s and early 2010s begin to enunciate new claims of madness. As with the prior three
chapters, I ground my claim regarding the significance of madness in the language employed by the
artists themselves. Walid Raad, for instance, has referred to his artwork as “hysterical symptoms” of
“unconscious events,” formed by “cultural fantasy”; Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige
variously describe theirs as “latent images” and “symptomatic images”; and Ghassan Halwani has
described his art-making process in terms of a compulsion that is “not very rational.” Nearly
universally, these terms invoke the language of psychoanalysis and trauma theory. This is no accident:
the artists claim to be in search of a means through which to “express traumatic events of collective
historical dimensions,” especially given that their present realities cause them to feel as if their lives
have become inscrutable (Raad in Merewether, 180). They refer to the challenge of expression under
these conditions not only in the artworks about which I write here, but elsewhere in their oeuvre, as
well.

In the works I analyze in this chapter, in particular, the language of madness and psychic
confusion varies: in the case of Ghassan Halwani, madness constitutes a reference to his own lived
experience. In Hadjithomas and Joreige’s work, the expression of madness is mediated through a
fictional character which the artists have created in order to make a larger claim about contemporary

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10 For reference to hysterical symptoms and collective fantasies, see Walid Raad in Charles Merewether (180). For reference
to unconscious events, see Kareem Wilson-Goldie (20-24).
11 Latent Images is the final installation of Hadjithomas and Joreige’s multi-year project, Wonder Beirut. The concept of latency
is central to their artwork. See also Hadjithomas and Joreige’s essay in Cotter’s Out of Beirut (77).
12 See Halwani’s question and answer session during the Toronto International Film Festival Talks (8:59).
13 Walid Raad, for instance, uses similar language to describe a video-installation, The Hostage Tapes, which he understood as
probing “the possibilities and limits” inherent in representing experience (Raad in David and Saadek, eds., 136).
Lebanese history. Walid Raad’s artwork carries the suggestion of the continued threat of madness both to him as an artist working on representing the impact of the war, and to Lebanese society writ-large. Irrespective of the disparate subjects of madness – actual and potential – the artists make clear that everyone is now impacted by the curious stasis of peace and war.

Though I acknowledge the influence of trauma discourse in the artists’ theoretical interventions, I concur with Michael Rothberg’s claim: the poststructuralist literary discourse of the 1990s which informed the concept of trauma as it is used today is “necessary but not sufficient” to understanding the artists’ claims, invested as they are with their own historical, political, and cultural specificity (Rothberg in Buelens et al, xii-xiv). In fact, these works push back against one of the central claims of trauma theory – that trauma is unrepresentable or unspeakable – in their visual expression of the phenomenological experience of postwar life. The task of representing madness and communicating it – sometimes even transferring it – to a viewer is one of the many ways in which these projects suggest that “trauma generates narrative possibility just as much as” its supposed “narrative impossibility” (Craps in Buelens et al, 51; emphasis in original). Artist and filmmaker Lamia Joreige attests to this paradoxical condition of possibility as she describes her efforts to “restore an essential speech” through her work, even if “a complete narrative” of the war remains inaccessible (Joreige in Cotter, 18). The value of this form of speech lies in its position as “evidence of intense and rare human experiences[…],” witnessing to Lebanon’s particular predicament (ibid). The traumatic is therefore communicated as a meaningful expression of madness, articulated from within yet another barzakh. It is an expression revealed in the montaged arrangement of the photographs and the affective knowledge they seek to communicate.

As they explore the possibility of expression, Raad, Hadjithomas and Joreige, and Halwani make creative use of photographic records. Organizing these records per an archival aesthetic, they heavily curate the images in order to offer fantastic visual renderings of lived experience both during and after the 1975-1990 war. They accomplish this through the aesthetic of the photomontage: the
sequencing of disparate images placed together to form a composite whole. Montage, as a technique of representation, exemplifies the paradoxical simultaneity of possible and impossible narratives by asking us not only to attempt to discern meaning from the images, but also from in between them. A visual *barzakh* becomes the corollary to the psycho-political, materializing as the fragments and elisions lurking at “the limits of the documentary image” which “betray the existence of hidden psychological realities” (Demos, 171). Ultimately, these projects displace “information,” as a unit of knowledge, with a more subjective and maddening form of “truth,” an affective knowledge whose building blocks are lived experience.

**Interpreting Lebanese Postwar Art**

Much of the postwar Lebanese art about the war and its aftermath departs significantly from the formal and thematic elements of earlier Lebanese modern art. The most renowned Lebanese modern artists, such as Daoud Corm, Mustafa Farroukh, and Paul Guiragossian – representing the 19th century, independence-era, and immediate pre-war phases of Lebanese history, respectively – were formally trained, often in Europe, and recognizably in dialogue with established European genres and movements of visual art. Several of today’s most prominent postwar artists, on the other hand, began their careers as amateurs with no formal training. Freed from constraint, their work often hybridized performance art, photography, film, and installations. In addition to Raad, Hadjithomas, Joreige, and Halwani, many – such as Walid Sadek, Lamia Joreige, Bernard Khuri, Rabih Mroue, and Akram Zaatari – have gone on to international acclaim, their work popularized through international taste-making festivals such as the Venice and Sharjah Biennales.

The international visibility of postwar Lebanese art has provoked a considerable body of critical scholarship from Europe and the United States. Critics rightly perceive that the war catalyzed a shift in national artistic production, and that a significant portion of the emergent cohort was interested in the intersection of aesthetics and national politics. In their search for a conceptual
framework to describe the nature of these projects, however, many scholars seized upon the ubiquity of the archival aesthetic, interpreting this aesthetic as a politics of resistance: a counter-archive of war, in other words. Charles Merewether, for instance, interprets Walid Raad, Jayce Salloum, and Akram Zaatari’s art in terms of “counter-archival [projects] that challenge the very logic of an archive” (16-17). He understands them as attempting to answer back to a history instantiated “from the perspective of power” (16). If the art in question is understood in this light, the artists, for their part, are described as “putting themselves into the roles of historian and journalist” in the “postwar renaissance of Lebanese art” (Gillespie, 2016). If this is our interpretive lens, we must ask: to what originary archive of war these works of art serve as a counter? And, more pressingly, what does it mean for art to archive?

Traditionally, the archive is understood as created, or at least maintained, by an institutional authority, if not a state actor. For most of the war, however, Lebanon’s central government had collapsed. Even after the government was reconstituted, efforts to establish a national archive failed, as evidenced by the lack of a national Lebanese history curriculum for the period from 1958 to the present day (Gilbert-Sleiman). While it may be tempting to conflate the state’s historical refusal to archive with an archive of absence, there simply is no archive of the war, making it difficult to establish a counter-archive. Proponents of the position that contemporary postwar art is counter-archival have therefore been forced to find a more creative answer to the question of how a body of work can be counter- to a non-existent archive. Mark R. Westmoreland, for instance, implies that we should treat the Western media’s “over-determined” narratives about Lebanon as the archive against which the artists push back (270). Elisa Adami suggests that we take, as perhaps an unofficial archive, the myths and rhetoric upon which the foundational claims of confessional identity politics are based (109). In so doing, she suggests that the counter-archive positioned in postwar art is not counter to the state but counter to a decentralized constellation of political actors.
Those more interested in the question of the aesthetic than in its intersection with the political, on the other hand, are interested in establishing the medium of art itself as inherently counter-archival. The Guggenheim museum in New York City, for instance, describes Raad’s work as primarily interested in “questioning the authority of documented experience,” implying a dichotomy between aesthetic and document, art and archive (Guggenheim). Across these theories, it becomes impossible to identify a single, agreed-upon originary archive. The inclination to frame postwar artistic production in terms of the counter-archive is therefore less a reflection of Lebanese reality, than of the modern predisposition of scholars of memory and poststructuralist art to think in terms of the archive.

In the past half-century, a number of theorists have sought to offer their definition of the concept, practice, and institution of the archive. Michel Foucault argued that the archive is a technology of power. Consistent with the ideas he expresses on discourse, knowledge, and power elsewhere in his oeuvre, he understood the archive to be the foundation for, and the range of, what can be said and discussed as fact – often to repressive effect. A few decades later, Jacques Derrida used the archive as a lens through which to view the field of psychoanalysis, likening the archival impulse to the Freudian pleasure principle and death drive: the archive destroyed and forgot some events with the same zeal with which it recorded and remembered others. In the 2000s, scholars such as Achille Mbembe (in Hamilton, Harris and Reid, eds. 2002); Ann Cvetkovich (2003); Diana Taylor (2003); and Ann Stoler (2009) brought gender and sexuality studies as well as postcolonial

14 Though the museum’s interpretation suggests that “documented experience” belongs to the domain of the archive, and that archive’s locus of enunciation is an institution of power against which the artist pushes back, I would answer that experience (of madness, in this case) is precisely what Raad tries to represent, and to endow with authority.

15 A few critics, however, have sought to interpret Lebanese postwar art according to a different line of inquiry, notably: what impact has protracted war had on the ontological status and role of the image itself? Jacques Rancière has broached this question in relation to the work of Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige (Rancière 2008). His inquiry, like that of T.J. Demos in The Migrant Image and Paola Yacoub and Michel Lasserre in Out of Beirut, derives from Paul Virilio’s concept of total war. Demos writes that total war – a condition whereby preparations for and acts of war dominate even the peacetime functions of a state’s economy, infrastructure and politics – impacted Lebanese visual culture and memory practices, producing a crisis in both (171). See also Mark R. Westmoreland’s “Making sense: affective research in postwar Lebanese art” for a discussion of what he calls “the postwar crisis of representation” (1).
theory to bear on the archive. Insofar as they called attention to the archive as a tool or space of exclusion and destruction, their work dialogued with the claims made by Foucault and Derrida. Yet, they also pushed a step beyond their antecedents, exploring a more capacious mode of relation between the archive and memory through concepts such as affective archives (Cvetkovich) and the deep history of the archive (Stoler).

Though the precise nature of a concept which seems to encapsulate both noun and verb continues to be a source of debate, there is a general agreement concerning its stakes: triangulated with power and memory, the “essential quality” of the archive is its capacity to serve as a prosthetic for memory (Kieckhefer, np). The presence or absence, use or dis-use, acceptance or rejection of the archive has the potential to determine what, how, and why we remember. Pierre Nora articulates the stakes of the slippage between archive and memory in stark terms: “[m]odern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image,” Nora writes, making memory contingent upon “its exterior scaffolding and outward signs” (7). In post-conflict countries with a militarized heterogeneous population, such as Lebanon, the question of memory and the uses to which it may be put (through the vehicle of the archive), can be polemical.

Nevertheless, the impulse to articulate and preserve some form of collective cultural or historical memory remains strong. There is a desire to confer order and meaning upon events when “the relationship between past, present and future is being transformed beyond recognition,” as is the case during and after conflict (Huyssen, 27). The genre of the war story, writes miriam cooke by way of example, “has usually been written very soon after war,” at the very same moment that there is a push to create a canon, reflecting the immediacy of the desire to process events as well as to

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16 Walter Benjamin (“The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” 1935), Siegfried Kracauer (“Die Photographie” 1927) and Andreas Huyssen (“Present Pasts” 2000) have expressed pronounced concern about the potentiality of archived media (through the technologies of recording devices and the Internet) to usurp memory altogether.
record them in anticipation of a future need (cooke 1996, 29). The texts created in this moment will become the material universe from which later generations will interpret their history. As a consequence of how soon such texts are published in relation to the paradigm-shifting events in question, the narratives they propose – whether as written documents or visual claims – are retrospectively invested with authority. In other words, as Okwui Enwezor writes, “the photograph becomes the sovereign analogue of identity, memory, and history (…) giving the photographic document the aura of an anthropological artifact and the authority of a social instrument” (13). Even at a semantic level, the very language Enwezor uses to describe the function of the photograph evokes traditional notions of the archive: sovereign, artifact, and authority. The aesthetic of the photograph and our understanding of the nature of its iconographic relationship to memory is what drives the tendency to characterize these works in terms of the archive. The question, however, is what they are an archive of – to which I propose the answer: postwar madness and its representation.

In addition to the impulse to discuss memory in terms of the archive, the trajectory of discourse among critics of post-structural art also reinforces the idea that art created in the wake of political violence should be read in terms of the (counter-)archival. Lebanon, in particular, has been folded into this globalizing discourse; this has been made apparent through comments such as Sarah Rogers’s assertion that the “archival aesthetics” of postwar Lebanese artists establish a link between Lebanese productions and other “global neo-conceptual projects” informed by postmodernism (Rogers, np). Postmodernist approaches tend to destabilize the possibility of singular truth claims or history, particularly through the act of countering the archive. Charles Merewether’s 2006 anthology, *The Archive*, illustrates the implications of applying Rogers’ theory of a global, postmodern discourse on the archive to the Lebanese context. *The Archive* is an anthology which excerpts well-known essays on the subject of the archive alongside commentary from international artists who Merewether has identified as employing an archival aesthetic. The artists draw inspiration from geopolitical contexts as disparate as postwar Lebanon, the US during the civil rights era, and post-Ceausescu Romania.
Rather than derive his theory of the archival from these works of art, however, Merewether presents them as corroborating evidence, proving the veracity of already-extant theories of the archive.

His treatment of Lebanese postwar photography-based art, for instance, is theorized under the rubric of “retracing” the archive, another way of articulating the formation of a counter-archive. Projects which retrace the archive, according to Merewether, “contest not only the dominant construction of the archival as historical record but also its effects” (15). His definition suggests a Foucauldian influence insofar as it interrogates the relationship between narrative, power, and their consequences. As he theorizes the retraced archive, he gives the example of a post-dictatorship artist in Chile who explores the “marginalized and erased figures of Chilean history,” occluded by, and in, photographs taken and deployed in the service of the Pinochet regime (160). Merewether then includes Gayatri Spivak’s writing on the archive as another theoretical framework through which “retracings” can be understood: in the essay Merewether reprints, Spivak refers to the colonial production of knowledge on the part of the British in India, and argues that the archive they have created might as well be a form of literature (Spivak in Merewether, 164). Speaking of an authentically Indian archive, Merewether seems to imply, would require a retracing, or a countering, of this originary, if colonial and literary, archive. Whether speaking to the popular resistance to a repressive state, or the postcolonial project of pushing back against the hegemon (Merewether, 16-17), neither of these contexts are suitable for the work of postwar Lebanese artists. And yet, Merewether places these “retracings” in the same category as works by Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari: two artists whose postwar projects have no such state archive against which to position their claims.

As I have suggested, we might instead understand postwar Lebanese art on the subject of the war and its legacy not in terms of a counter-archive of war, but as an archive of madness. Such a move requires us to contemplate the statements the art makes on their own terms. This is, in fact, what the contemporary Lebanese artistic community has asked us to do. Artist-academic Walid Sadek
reminds us that the “intentionality of art” is not synonymous with the articulation of a politics, though it may well be informed by one – a reminder that the aesthetic and the political are two separate spheres not reducible to each other (Saadek 2002, np). Christine Tohme’s interviews with Beirut-based artists elucidated a similar sentiment; while the conditions of life in Lebanon have indeed compelled artists to “consider the meaning of art in the face of political turmoil and instability,” it is the meaning of art that motivates their craft. “Conflict,” she explains, “becomes a general state of mind, a way of life,” and the art, she implies, is a way of representing the nature of that reality — not of defining it (Dagher et al, 100). In another iteration of this same point, artist Rasha Salti sought to reorient American art historian and critic T.J. Demos’s understanding of postwar Lebanese art, noting that art is meant to “open channels of dialogue,” and not to answer political or historical questions (Dagher et al, 107).

We might therefore arrive at a more interesting conclusion about the relationship between art and archive in the case of contemporary Lebanese photomontage should we take into consideration the local and sociopolitical conditions of production for these works and the intentions of the artists themselves. As Okwui Enwezor suggests: we should view the archive as an aesthetic conduit for art, one which foregrounds “the ways in which archival documents [and] information gathering […] inform and infuse the practices of contemporary artists” in Lebanon, as opposed to overdetermine the meaning of the work (22). This approach allows us to enter more critically into conversation with these pieces and discern the madness that is archived through them.

**Hysterical Symptoms**

Walid Raad’s *My neck is a thinner than a hair: Engines* (1996-2001) consists of montaged and framed documents slightly larger than a standard sheet of paper. They feature black-and-white

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*I thank Nayla Tamraz for her invaluable advice to allow art to represent itself as art and not as politics in our conversation in Beirut in May 2019."*
photographs, purportedly gleaned from Lebanese newspaper archives, which depict the aftermath of
car bombings which rocked the country in the mid-to-late 1980s.

Figure 1: Walid Raad, *My neck is thinner than a hair.*

One of the iterations of Raad’s exhibit is described thus, according to the Museum of
Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City:

This work assembles one hundred photographs of car engines taken by amateur and
professional photographers. During the civil wars, approximately 245 car bombs exploded in
Lebanon, detonated by groups across the political and religious spectrum. The only part of the
car that remained intact after the blast was the engine, and newspaper reports of car bombs
consistently included photographs of engines and the police officers, politicians, and
onlookers who gathered in the aftermath of the explosion. Raad collected the photographs
from newspaper archives in Lebanon, scanned their fronts and backs, and printed them with
the date of the explosion, the name of the photographer (when known), and an English
translation of the photo opportunity. This is just one lens through which Raad examines the
ways in which the economic, political, and social history of Lebanon has been recorded,
recalled, and understood. (The Museum of Modern Art)

What “lens” does Raad use exactly? How do his aesthetic choices in the curation of archival material
allow us to perceive both the *barzakh* and the madness which arises from it?
One answer to this question is discernible through the literal arrangement of his exhibit. At the MoMA, for instance, the framed images have been arranged in a neat ten-by-ten grid. Standing a certain distance from the exhibit, a visitor might have the impression that they are facing a wall of evidence, much in the same way that a forensic analyst would arrange clues on a board to solve a crime. “Who was responsible for which attack?” we might ask, or “who was the target on this day?”

![Raad's exhibit on display at the Museum of Modern Art (Source: moma.org)](image)

That the viewer may reflexively try to play the role of investigator is not an accident: Raad recalled that when images like these ran in local newspapers the day after a bombing, the photographs were treated as “intelligence document[s],” as if they contained “secrets” which might bare themselves to a discerning viewer. “Though the engines rarely served as evidence in investigations of the violence” because they were often destroyed in the explosions, “politicians often posed next to them to suggest that they were doing everything in their power to solve the crimes” (Raad, “Night School, Part 1”). In several of these images, we can discern men in shirtsleeves or bulletproof vests standing next to the
ruined cars, conversing about the objects in front of them. In an environment of protracted conflict and a central government of limited efficacy, the spectacle of an orderly investigation — and one in which the viewer seems invited to participate — would have been reassuring. It offered the illusion of control in the face of the dangerous and uncertain, suggesting an end or an answer, even where one was unlikely. Reproducing these images of post-explosion investigation and arranging them neatly, uniform in color, spacing, formatting, and size adds to this effect, allowing the viewer to mimic the detective work of piecing together information like so many sections of a puzzle.

And yet the history to which the montaged photographs allude was anything but ordered and orderly. The exploded bombs sowed chaos and destruction, and then dispersed into microscopic particulate matter, taking evidence of their existence along with them. In addition, the cars were often stolen and could not be traced reliably back to a responsible party (Raad, MoMA sound recording 420). In both contexts, the photograph (both as a story in the newspaper, and as record on a museum wall) provides ample information but is ultimately of limited use. The charred objects on the ground in the 1980s were pieces of evidence, their compromised condition making closure all but impossible. Their black and white indices on display thirty years later similarly offer up little more than a belated account of an act of violence. The impression of information is belied by the impossibility of knowledge — it is a paradoxical, even illusory state of affairs.

The illusion of useful information about the war continues at a more granular level, as well. The photographs comprise no more than one quarter of each document and are uniformly positioned in the upper left quadrant of the landscape-oriented paper. In the opposite quadrant are handwritten notes and a stamp with a date, both in blue ink. Small black lettering printed above each section indicates that the viewer is looking either at the front of a photograph or the annotations on its reverse. The bottom half of the document remains largely blank with the exception of minuscule lettering: a date, the name of the photographer, the name of the archive from which the photo originates, and a translation of the notes inscribed on the back of the image. Taken together, the
image, the handwritten notations, and the typeset catalogue notes bear all the trappings of a
phenomenon meticulously recorded in a personal archive collated from public records. Indeed,
personal collections of photographs or war detritus is a common theme in wartime and postwar
creative expression.18

But the archival aesthetic is being deployed in service of a work of art. Raad in fact enjoins
the viewer to approach the documents not as “intelligence documents,” in the way they were received
by the Lebanese public, but as “aesthetic documents” (Raad, “Night School, Part 1”). We do this by
shifting our attention away from the unit of information and toward a deeper knowledge revealed in
the arrangement of the images. We are to look for the ways “extreme violence can produce new ways
of assimilating the data of the world,” moving the viewer away from the project of scrutinizing facts
in an archive, and toward the process of converting them into affective knowledge (Raad, MoMa
sound recording 421). Raad insists that it is not only the historical fact that has a claim on truth:
“some facts are emotional […] and some facts are aesthetic. An artwork is an interesting instance in
which one may be able to maintain all these facts in their continuum and their complexity” (Raad,
MoMA sound recording 421).

It is understandable if the archival aesthetic proves too distracting a façade, standing in the
way of our ability to recognize Raad’s so-called aesthetic and emotional facts. Georges Didi-
Huberman exposes our investments in and expectations of the photographic image of a traumatic
historical event through the example of the few remaining photographs of Buchenwald
concentration camp, while it was operating. Whatever it is that we think we find in such images, he
says, is usually a symptom of our tendency to either “ask too much or too little” of a photograph

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18 Patricia Sarrafian Ward’s novel The Bullet Collection (2003), for instance, features an adolescent who collects and identifies
the bullets she finds on the streets of her neighborhood. Rawi Hage’s protagonist in Cockroach (2008) has a similar
inclination. Ziad Doueiri’s child protagonists in the fiction film West Beirut (1998) record events on their Super-8 handheld
recorder. Walid Raad himself acknowledges that he collected war material (moma.org/audio/playlist/20/421), and Chad
Elias observes a similar tendency in the artwork of Akram Zaatari in Posthumous Images.
In other words, as we assess the photograph, we effectively try to measure a material and aesthetic object against a metric of use-value, pressing the object into the service of answering a question about violence. Seldom, Didi-Huberman implies, are we able to view the object on its own terms: the image must be either an “informative” document (an “intelligence document” in Raad’s terms), or it is “inadequate.” In either case, we tend to “approach [an art form] by isolating ‘what there is to see,’” or “‘what information is revealed’” – a method which, I claim, is ultimately problematic in the case of Lebanese postwar photomontage (34).

Didi-Huberman asks us to adjust our expectation of what the image is and does in acknowledgement of the fact that the ontology of the image is always already “intermingled with the incessant urge to show what we cannot see” (133; emphasis in the original). In other words, the attempt to capture an image in the first place stems from the desire to capture not only the physical contours of material objects, but also the aura which these objects emit – the affect they produce, the feelings they provoke. The material object becomes worthy of capture because of its evocation of something intangible. Didi-Huberman cites desire and death as examples of elements which are present in a photograph, endowing it with meaning which we cannot literally “see” (33). We can interpret this to mean that, more than information, the photograph communicates an essential truth, affectively.

Montage, Didi-Huberman then adds, is particularly adept at conveying these affective cues: “Montage intensifies the image,” giving “the visual experience a power that our visible certainties or habits have the effect of pacifying or veiling” (136).

How can Didi-Huberman’s prescription for close-reading photographs help us in our search for the aesthetic and emotional facts of war in Raad’s photo-documentary montage? Raad’s “aesthetic facts” lie in the meta-commentary of the documents’ arrangement. The multiple documents contain images not of a single event but of a phenomenon whose events have become iterations: a repetitious cycle of destruction. The identical layout of the documents and the similarities between the photographs are a visual translation of the repetition. The relentless presence
of seemingly identical images produces an effect which makes it difficult to focus on the details of any one image. In fact, being forced to confront the reality that these images are indices of discrete events becomes overwhelming: an emotional response which provides a small affective window onto the experiences of those who survived the events.

The photomontage representation is further linked to the experience of disaster, Didi-Huberman writes, in that there is never “one image,” and certainly not an “all-image” capable of representing violence (136). This is true despite our tendency to pronounce certain images of an event “iconic.” Yet, rather than despair of the possibility of representation he continues, artists who have survived “the emptying experience” caused by “the destruction of humans by humans” represent through fragments “a series, montages in spite of all” in which “disasters are multipliable to infinity” (125; italics in the original). Unlike the notion espoused by Walter Benjamin (1968), Siegfried Kracauer (1993), and Andreas Huyssen (2000) that the phenomenon of the “flood of photos” made possible through mass media constitutes a threat to “the dams of memory,” here, the flood opens to the possibility of affective knowledge (Kracauer, 38). Perhaps for this reason, so many other international artists have chosen to use the montage format in photography-based exhibits to represent violence.19

Montage works to communicate affective truths not only through the intensification of the image, but also by channeling affective energy through the gaps between images. This notion of the

19 We may also find this trend outside of Lebanon, as in Andy Warhol’s Race Riot (1964) and Felix Gonzalez-Torrez’s Untitled (Death by Gun) (1990). Warhol’s montaged images uses patriotic red, white and blue colors to pigment a black and white image of black men and women being attacked by police dogs and white police officers. The original, now-canonical image that Warhol used was taken by a LIFE magazine photographer the 1963 protest in Birmingham, Alabama. It is repeated and reproduced in multiples and in different pigments, with the effect of recreating the feeling of being overwhelmed by the violence of the image and its repetition as well as provoking the absurdity of the rhetoric of American values (signified by the red, white, and blue pigments) in the face of such brutality. Gonzalez-Torrez’s montage several decades later does similar work. His exhibit consists of stacks of papers nine inches high which feature a grid-like arrangement of hundreds of black and white photographs of faces, each of which belongs to a life taken by gun violence in the US over the course of one week. The tiling of these nearly five hundred faces makes it nearly impossible to discern each individual in the amount of time one usually contemplates a piece of art. Like Raad’s photographs of car bomb detritus, the paradox of intense similarity and overwhelming volume works in tandem with the knowledge of ceaseless individual events to produce a disturbing affect.
mnemonic is decidedly at odds with Siegfried Kracauer, for instance, who juxtaposes the supposed completeness of our memory of an event with photographic records of the same, maintaining that it is photograph which is “full of gaps” (50). His opposition implies the inferiority of the photographic record as compared to human memory. Eschewing this perspective, we arrive at a threshold of understanding which will allows us to identify an element of the psyche in these works, located in the gaps of the montaged images. Raad’s exhibit, for instance, is comprised of individually-framed documents montaged into a single exhibit – the singularity of each document is protected by the edges of the cardstock on which the material is printed and the boundaries of the frames which encase them.

But what if we were to reinterpret the gap as a kind of third image, per Didi-Huberman’s claim that montage “makes every image into the third of two images”? (138). The gap between images is formed by and yet separate from its two parent-images. It is a third space and mode of relation which invokes the existential qualities of the barzakh. From the gulf between the images emanates a form of speech which makes itself known through the beholder’s sense that there are “hidden psychological realities” at the boundary of the image, as Demos suggested. Raad himself refers to the “unconscious event” preserved in his artwork, the presence of which foregrounds “what is sayable, believable and known,” about the experience of war, not only “at the level of the senses, reason, consciousness and discourse but also with what holds to be true at the level of the unconscious” (Raad in Merewether, 180). What Raad seems to suggest is that in the images – or, more precisely, in the arrangement of these images – is a form of knowledge. What, then, do these montaged images know?

This question, in combination with Raad’s claim to have produced “hysterical symptoms” of the war, leads us to the work of Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud. In their 1893 essay “On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomenon,” the pair write about a form of hysteria which is derived not from a single event, but from “a series of affective impressions – a whole story of
suffering” (10). The context of Lebanon in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s – marked by a series of events that continued “the events” of the war of 1975-1990 – certainly can become the grounds upon which a series of affective impressions of war, and of war-while-at-peace, may contribute to a story of suffering. Faced with an interminable constellation of triggers, patients who suffer from a hysteria of this ilk, Freud and Breuer write, “have their reasons for not saying what they know” of the etiology of their hysterical symptoms, or may truly not know (9). The montaged images in Raad’s work – like the “hysterical” patients the psychoanalysts observed – instead offer the terrible truths of their knowledge through affective imputation, sketching the outlines of a maddening condition.

The unconscious of Raad’s art becomes the conduit through which this knowledge is expressed. It is signified by an empty space which nonetheless remains full of meaning, and it is in this space that a form of transference may occur between the artist, the artwork and the viewer who work together to imagine what experience lies in this recess. “It is clear,” writes Raad, “that what we hold to be true is not necessarily consistent with what is true at the level of the senses, reason, consciousness and discourse but also with what holds to be true at the level of the unconscious” (Raad in Merewether, 180). This space emanates an appeal to find truth not only from that which consciously presents itself as information in the artwork, but also that has not yet been given material form: madness as lived experience.

Raad’s aestheticization of photographs from the war in My neck is thinner than a hair constitutes neither a desire to produce a (counter-)archive, nor a retracing or contestation of another archive. He has chosen instead to create an archive, but an archive that testifies to a product of war (madness) as opposed to an archive of war itself. He transforms the sterility of information he has purportedly found from local newspapers – sources of temporal distance and dispassionate objectivity – into an access-point for an affective knowledge of the lived experience of life in the 1980s.
The Diaries of Madmen

Nearly simultaneous to Raad’s project, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige created Wonder Beirut (1997-2006). Their ten-year experimental project was an attempt to “[come] to terms with the sociopolitical situation” they faced: that of the postwar barzakh (Tsui, np). They began their project in the barzakh of the immediate post-war and continued to develop their work as a second barzakh came into view. That is to say, the reignition of war in 1996 occurred against the ongoing repercussions of amnesty, reconstruction, and its concomitant amnesias, while simultaneously prompting a new wave of encounters with violence. Lebanon was struggling to extract itself from, and ignore, a wartime past that seemed to be repeating itself in the present.

Composed of three parts, Wonder Beirut is set in both the early war period of the Hotels’ Battle (1975-1976) and the present day. It tells the story of an invented character, Dr. Abdullah Farah, whose photographs, Hadjithomas and Joreige say, form a “diary” which offers a “chronicle” of Lebanon’s history (“Words on Works”). From this chronicle, a narrative is constructed around both “the evolution of the character” of Dr. Farah, and Lebanese history (ibid). Indeed, Hadjithomas and Joreige understand Wonder Beirut as having certain novelistic qualities (ibid), evident even at the level of Wonder Beirut’s subtitles: Part One of their artwork is entitled The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer.20

20 Though this may be unintentional, the URL for the project website has replaced the word “story” with “novel.”
Figure 3: An image from Hadjithomas and Joreige's *The story of a pyromaniac photographer*

The visual images in Part One are accompanied by a narrative text which proclaims that between 1968 and 1969, the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism commissioned Dr. Farah to take photographs of prominent sites in Beirut for use in promotional material. His images were turned into postcards. However, “as of the Autumn of 1975,” continues the narrative, only a few short months into the civil war, “Abdallah Farah systematically burned the negatives of the postcards, in accordance with the damages caused to the sites by the shelling and street fights. Dr. Farah used to photograph the image after each new burn he inflicted on it, producing a series of evolving images […]” (“The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer”). Already we have the constituent components necessary for a novel: the character and their narratological point of view (Dr. Farah); the plot (the onset of war as it disrupts a

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21 In fact, a handful of the postcards Hadjithomas and Joreige display as the work of the fictional Dr. Farrah exist in real life. The artists’ website also observes that “Those same postcards are still on sale nowadays, although most of the places they represent were destroyed during the armed conflicts” (“The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer”). Sold in tourist shops and stationary stores in the years before the war, some of them, including the one for which this project is named, have resurfaced in shops as part of the culture of postwar nostalgia kitsch.
government collaboration with an artist); the theme (war); the setting (1975 Beirut); and the conflict (the crisis of witnessing).

Dr. Farah burns the vibrant blue, green, red, and beige hues of his original photographs until the images appear yellowed, warped, bubbled, and scratched. The landscape of Beirut becomes altered beyond recognition, as the photographer goes so far as to destroy portions of the image, burning small holes into the photo paper. It is as if – recalling the novels of Etel Adnan, Ghada al-Samman, and Hanan al-Shaykh – he has created a visual rendering of a contagious disease spreading across the indexed cityscape of Beirut. In Part 2: Postcards of War, Dr. Farah has montaged the photographs of the burned negatives, arranging them as a series of images which convey a near panoramic scale of devastation. They are arranged in a grid, forming a patchwork quilt of vibrant damage. The images are separated from each other by thin strips of white space and are occasionally pockmarked by small holes. Where the white space and holes seem to offer a reprieve from the details of devastation which have begun to swim together, these interruptions are in and of themselves indicators of repetition and indices of violence.
But, according to Hadjithomas and Joreige's narrative, Dr. Farah takes his project even further: he proceeds to burn sections of photographs which correspond to sites in Lebanon that have not yet been destroyed. His actions suggest an obsessive-compulsion that has both outrun the process it was intended to mirror, and which mimics the run-away nature of an outbreak of violence that was to last a decade and a half. The use of the term “pyromaniac” in their project’s title no longer seems incidental: it is an explicit reference to madness. Pyromania is defined as a rare mental disorder whose sufferers are mostly male and is characterized by a compulsive need to set fires in order to release tension (DSM-V). The qualifiers attached to this definition — that the disorder is usually found in men, and the connection between destruction and the release of tension — seem appropriate considering the claims about the gendered nature of war made by the early war women novelists.
But the appellation “pyromaniac” also resonates in a different way. It provides information about the conditions of production for the destroyed but highly aesthetic images which Dr. Farah chronicles from within the eye of history. His 1968-1969 photographs index scenes and/or places in Lebanon, while the 1975 burned negatives index the destruction Dr. Farah both observed and inflicted while his country was at war. The burns also signify, perhaps on an unconscious level, Dr. Farah’s resistance to an illusory pre-war government narrative which sought to present Beirut as anything other than a country on the brink of war as evidenced by the Minister of Tourism commission. Burning these picturesque postcards was both a maddened and yet completely lucid response to the untenable nature of life in Lebanon. Read this way, the project becomes a clear subversion of what Okwui Enwezor has called the “iconomy” of images – “the vast economy of the icons linking archive to traumatic public memory” – which so often can be found in the media (29).22

Hadjithomas and Joreige’s story of the character of Dr. Farah in combination with his/their artwork narrows the gulf between the experience of madness and the viewer. Moving a step beyond My neck is thinner than a hair, madness which transmits affectively and directly, the project asks the viewer to bear witness. In this case, the viewer is a witness to the evolution of madness for Dr. Farah, conveyed through his photomontage project created in the eye of layered history – in the eye of another barzakh. Thus, the conditions of production of these photographic artworks is therefore part of how we interpret the work itself – an argument nearly deeply resonant with Didi-Huberman’s insistence that the phenomenology of a photograph is as important as the image itself. He gives as an example the presence of black spaces or blurred images in four photographs taken surreptitiously from within Buchenwald concentration camp by a victim of the Holocaust. The photographs have been taken from a position proximal to one of the gas chambers. The composition of each image reflects the rushed and furtive conditions under which they were taken, Didi-Huberman takes care to

22 Paula Yacoub and Michel Lasserre discuss the internationalized representation of Lebanon’s war as media event in their essay in Out of Beirut.
note: the conditions themselves are indexed and expressed through the black spaces and heavily blurred sections that compromise our ability to see the structures that are the object of the photo. Should the viewer try to make a pronouncement upon this image’s informational value without taking these marks into consideration, he warns, they will fail to see what Didi-Huberman refers to as “the truth of the image” (35). In the case of *Wonder Beirut*, the truth is that the image is the index of madness, expressed through pyromania.

Another of Raad’s concurrent projects, *Let’s be honest, the weather helped* (1998-2006), similarly communicates the mad(dening) experience of war through informational material, an archival aesthetic of photo montage, and an accompanying narrative – now, however, Raad asks his viewer to bear witness to an artist’s encounter with madness. His project gives the impression of *mise-en-abyme*: it consists of enlarged and framed photocopies of pages of a notebook. A pronounced amount of black space frames each piece, as if the scanning bed of the photocopier had exceeded the size of the pages being reproduced. Affixed to the various notebook pages are black and white photographs depicting bullet-scarred buildings in Lebanon, a common sight to this day. Superimposed over some of the bullet holes are large, multi-colored dots. Each color corresponds to a country: the dots indicate the country of origin for the piece of ammunition that left this scar on the building.
The arrangement of the material on the notebook pages is crucial to our ability to look past the purported information revealed about international contributions to Lebanon’s war, and locate instead an affective knowledge about the lived experience of war. Take for instance the deep black borders framing the notebook pages. Rather than an extraneous residue that bears no significance to the artwork, its presence (as Didi-Huberman would instruct us) demands that we read it as part of the artwork. Reconsidering the black spaces in this light, the viewer may be primed to think of these dark zones as an opacity which literally and metaphorically surrounds even the clearest “evidence” concerning the nature of foreign involvement. Only a few foreign militaries openly acknowledged their involvement with the Lebanese militias, for instance, far fewer than suggested by the information on these pages. Thus, even after the war has ended, certain knowledge remains relegated to the dark.

In addition to the dark spaces, another formal site of meaning is found in the semi-disorganization of the material on the page. Several of the papers pasted into these notebooks are layered and hidden. Nearly all have been pasted in at haphazard angles: the frenzied pastiche of a
personal archive-in-the-making. What initially appears to be a glut of information about foreign arms (collected and preserved like with the photo-documents of car remains in My neck is thinner than a hair), in a careful attempt to provide order, is ultimately inscrutable – irrational. The mixture of various media with text; the cacophony of documents, drawings, and notes; and the greyscale of the photos against the vibrant colors of the labels become antithetical to any sense of an ordered aesthetic.

Yet it would seem that any attempt to visually represent the deep history of war, particularly on a scale as minute as its impact on individual buildings, must refuse linear order. After all, the very conditions of production for such an artwork necessitated a doubling and unfolding over time. After the damage has been photographed, for instance, and the photograph is placed in the notebook, the image is revisited. In the process of this revisiting, it is reinterpreted through the placement of color-coded stickers signifying the bullets. It is then rearranged as part of a broader schematic which includes other photographs, technical drawings and charts labeled in typewritten ink, too small to be deciphered. The presence of the charts and drawings mark another interruption in the reinterpretation of the photographs: we imagine that the artist would have had to consult another resource to find these charts, and then synthesize them with the information from the images. But the information he adds to his photographs causes the very objects with which he began to become literally buried under new information. Once again what appears to be a glut of information is, upon closer scrutiny, in fact a way of communicating the mad disorder inherent in war and any attempt to represent it.

As we did with Hadjithomas and Joreige’s Wonder Beirut, we can locate this madness by contextualizing the visual clues in Raad’s artwork and the narrative he provides concerning the genesis of Let’s be honest. Raad’s wall-text and online captions for this piece establish the work as a visual representation of the circulation and distribution of foreign weaponry. The idea for this project, he says, emerged out of his small, personal collection of bullets and shrapnel, accumulated
over the years (Raad, MoMa sound recording 421). Later, he encountered Jane’s Defense Manual, a volume containing open-source information on the types of weapons every country manufactured. Consulting this manual in order to identify the source of the items in his collection, Raad realized that the objects in his possession were “an index of all the countries that manufactured and sold weapons to the Lebanese militias in the last 30 years” (ibid). He therefore decided to produce a notebook which would “imagine such a claim” regarding the creation of “a chain from the design, to the manufacturers, to the trade, to the discharge, to the impact, physical and psychological” of these sales (ibid, emphasis mine).

Raad’s description of his project adds another layer to how we may perceive the psychological impact of the war in his artwork, beyond the haphazard aesthetic of the montage and the interstitial black spaces between the images. For instance, in his description, Raad intentionally uses the word “imagined”: his visual representation of the chain connecting weaponry with physical and psychological damage, however verisimilar, is a product of his own creativity. He does not have the ability to catalogue and verify the millions of bullets that have pierced buildings in Beirut and so has been left to conjure them from absence. But we also find his imagination at work in a figure that seems to appear on only one of the notebook pages: a mechanical drawing of a serpent-like figure. The serpent has been partially obscured by a photograph, yet its head rises over the image, looming above it to stare out at the viewer. An animate creature ruptures the aesthetic created by two-dimensional, black and white images of inanimate destruction. Its face is unhappy. Perhaps madness, the serpent insinuates as it looms over the montage, is in having too much information.

The serpentine figure and the notebook pages remind us of another set of notebooks concerning a different species: the notebook about rats written by the psychiatric patient in Najwa Barakat’s *Oh Salaam*, discussed in chapter two. Najih, one of the doomed perpetrators of the war, becomes friends with the author of these notebooks while himself a patient at the hospital. The author of the notebooks had been convinced that a plague of rabid rats had caused the war. Bent on
finding a way to exterminate Beirut’s rat population, he finds a disciple in Najib who will continue this research once he is released back into society. Bound in “black leather, thick pages filled with beautiful, ornate handwriting,” the author had “recorded in Arabic everything he observed about rats.” Accompanying these observations were scrawled “chemistry equations, recipes, and instructions about ways to combat” the rats, as well as “lists enumerating the types of traps, illnesses, poisons, materials, germs” (79). Estimating the ratio of rats to humans at “twenty-to-one,” the notebook’s author offered a detailed analysis of the various species of rat inhabiting the country. He was particularly invested in Rattus norvegicus, a species which “enjoys destruction” and has a “prodigious” memory. Tribal by nature, these rats host “powerful nationalistic sentiments” and harbor “a deep hatred for outsiders and strangers” (80-81). While this information is, of course, not strictly accurate, there is a certain truth in the implication that a horde of destructive mammals has begun to ruin Lebanon out of an exaggerated sense of nationalism and a predilection to violence.

Both the notebooks of Barakat’s madman and in Raad’s exhibit contain “information” of unknown provenance, and uncertain accuracy, yet express a kernel of truth.

**Artworking Through Irresolution**

My neck is thinner than a hair, Wonder Beirut, and Let’s be honest the weather helped offered a window onto madness through the repetition of, and gaps in between, montaged images purporting to be either historical information or its index. In the first example, the viewer was offered the opportunity to affectively experience the madness of irresolution in the context of the waves of unsolved car-bombings in the 1980s. Raad then extended the subject of madness to include a version of himself by imagining the task of tracking the provenance of the foreign munitions which destroyed the facades of Beirut buildings. The disorder of his notebook suggested the diary of a man in maddening circumstances – a theme which Hadjithomas and Joreige made explicit through the chronicle of Beirut’s destruction recorded by their pyromaniac photographer.
All of these examples, however, were postwar commentaries about wartime conditions and events: the 1980s car bombings, the 1975-1976 Hotels’ War, and the material impressions left by bullets fired between 1975-1990. They are thus metacommentaries: arguments removed from the temporality of the events they reference, mediated by multiple subsequent barzakhs which refract multiple madesses. The final example I offer through this chapter, Ghassan Halwani’s *We’ve got visitors coming over* (2013), differs in this regard. It is a postwar meditation on a specifically postwar matter: the legacy of the missing and disappeared. Though influenced by the presence of multiple barzakhs in the last decade, it attempts to enter into conversation with an element of the most recent one: the stasis produced in part by the ongoing limbo of the missing and disappeared.

*We’ve got visitors* was created several years after Raad’s or Hadjithomas and Joreige’s, making it important that we foreground our analysis of it through the events of the intervening years. As the other artists’ projects neared completion in 2001 and 2006, new developments were arising. Then-prime minister Rafic Hariri was assassinated in 2005, with blame attributed to actors ranging from the Syrian, Lebanese, and Israeli states to Hizballah. Though his assassination was certainly the most high-profile, it was only one of many to occur during this decade: political and intellectual leaders were regular targets of the supposedly disarmed militias and their associated political parties. Alarmed by the assassination’s implications for Lebanon’s prospects for stability, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) began an investigation into the assassination that same year. It then issued UNSC resolution 1757 in 2007 which established the Special Tribunal for Lebanon whose mission investigate the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri.23 On the heels of Hariri’s assassination came the outbreak of war between Hizballah and Israel in 2006.

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23 The Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) has been subject to considerable criticism from transitional justice and human rights organizations targeting its mandate and efficacy, including by a former prosecutor and former president of the ICTJ, David Tolbert (personal interview). The limited mandate of the UN investigation and subsequent tribunal foreclosed investigation into the continuation of acts of war in the form of frequent targeted assassinations, particularly in 2005 and 2006, despite recommendations from prosecutors. Moreover, the mandate was described in terms of an investigation into acts of “terrorism,” placing the prime minister’s assassination at a semantic, legal and political remove from the 1975-1990 war. The STL is also one of the few tribunals to have been established outside of the country whose affairs are under
The recurrence of war violence in the 2000s and 2010s and its reprisal of elements of the 1975-1990 war formed the basis of the feeling of irresolution. Artist and professor Walid Sadek recalls the response to the miraculous return of Lebanese who has been disappeared into Syrian and Israeli prisons during the war. “While the disappeared were gone, we conversed with their disappeared form. As if it were a corpse. A present absence.” When the unthinkable happened and some of the disappeared returned, it was therefore to much initial fanfare. With time however, local newspapers printing front-page stories about the returns with great zeal quietly began to replace their articles with buried stories about the mental, emotional and physical troubles the returnee was undergoing while trying to reintegrate. The returned were then literally re-disappeared. The provocations of this sociopolitical irresolution proved generative for artists and scholars working creatively on Lebanon.

Sadek, in particular, has written voluminously on Lebanon’s need to “linger with the corpse” of the war, an answer to Freudian theories of supposedly healthy mourning and pathological melancholia (Sadek 2012, 483). Freud maintains that, in the face of losses such as death, mourning can only begin when the lost object has been acknowledged as such. The failure to do so compromises mental wellbeing in the form of melancholia, a “pathological disposition” marked by a “turning away from reality” and a “hallucinatory psychosis” (“Mourning and Melancholia,” 242). As explored in Chapter One, melancholia can be a response to the loss of not only a material object, but also an idea such as that of the nation-state. The refusal to relinquish the metaphorical lost object of a national ideal led to violence which Etel Adnan, Ghada al-Samman and Hanan al-Shaykh described...
as poised on the brink between fratricide and suicide. What they described, in Freudian terms, was the destructive force of melancholia which causes the individual to channel their destructive energies internally, compromising the ego, instead of allowing the individual to adapt to a new view of the world (“Mourning and Melancholia,” 244). In the case of Lebanon, Sadek implies, the various losses occasioned by both the war and the peculiarly liminal politics of the postwar are the objects with which Lebanon must be forced to grapple. Letting go of what was lost, or mourning, is unhealthy, he implies, because the Lebanese have perfected the art of at least appearing to let go, but to problematic ends. While the lingering he recommends would be considered an unhealthy form of melancholia by Freudian psychoanalysts, Sadek implies, the Freudian articulation of melancholia fails to take into consideration the collective political necessity of sitting with loss.

For instance, the material remains of the war themselves constitute a challenge to the ability to move forward. Entire buildings have been abandoned, their inner and outer walls scarred from bullets and shells, yet the buildings have not been (and will not be) repaired or torn down. With time, passersby have acclimatized to the ubiquity of the infrastructural ruins of war interspersed among luxury high-rises and other new construction. It has become easier to ignore them in the face of postwar sociopolitical stagnation than to think about what they signify on a daily basis. Ignoring may easily be confused with the healthy decision to mourn and move on in the face of what cannot be undone. But Sadek finds value in the lingering traces of loss insofar as they provoke a level of reflection and introspection that holds the promise of releasing Lebanon from its barzakh-laden history. The corpses of these buildings keep open the portals that move Lebanon between past, present, and future; they allow a more flexible temporality and the opportunity to hold “uneasy conversations” (Sadek 2012, 482). These conversations are immanently preferable to the discourse of

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25 Conversations with Lebanese still living in Beirut have suggested that the ghostly buildings remain standing for reasons ranging from ongoing land ownership disputes, to the lack of clarity about the ownership of buildings whose owners have been living abroad for decades.
present-day politics, which ignores the past in favor of the “protracted now [holding] the Lebanese amidst a structural violence palliatively substantiated in the necessary furnace for a yet-to-be-born non-sectarian future” (481).

In other words, the postwar narrative of progress and postwar modernity uses the threat of past (and possibly future) violence as the justification for further structural violence in the form of amnestic reconstruction campaigns and legislation. The practice of nation-state (re)building, writes Durrant, requires citizens to agree not to search for the corpse, to leave the tomb of the dead soldier without a body, in order for its present- and future-oriented logics to stand (Durrant in Beulens et al, 105). Sadek’s agenda is essentially to “disrupt[t] the national imaginary and instantiat[e] an alternative form of community” in the act of lingering with the corpse (ibid).

Literary critic Ken Seignurie takes a different view of Lebanese responses to the irresolution of postwar Lebanon. His impression, unlike Sadek’s, is based upon data points reflecting not the individual attitudes of the average Lebanese, but wartime and postwar literary texts from the cultural elite. Among this demographic Seignurie finds a more intentional level of engagement with war-related loss in the postwar era. He cites the reappearance of a “medieval motif” of Arabic poetry known as *wuquf ‘ala al-atlal* – or as he translates it, “standing” or “stopping” by the ruins – which he locates in a number of novels as well as in the lyrics of popular singers such as Fayruz from 1975-2005.

As originally conceived, *wuquf ‘ala al-atlal* was a form of remembrance of people and places tinged with “memory and longing” (Seignurie 2008, 52). Seignurie argues that contemporary Lebanese literature, however, has adapted this motif in a way that is more ambivalent: the literature in

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26 Here he glosses Benedict Anderson who, he writes, “locates the imagined communities of the modern nation state, organized around that universal abstraction of death, the tomb of the unknown soldier. Anderson argues that such tombs have to remain empty in order for the nation’s powerful discourses of heroism and sacrifice to function” (105). Quoting Marc Redfield, Durrant further observes that the corpse is “the remainder, the excess that nationalism’s official scene of mourning excludes” [...]” (105).

27 In *Standing by the Ruins*, Seignurie translates *wuquf* as standing, whereas in an essay a few years earlier, he uses the translation “stopping.”
question inaugurates a form of “elegiac humanism” which adopts a posture of critical self-reflection in the face of the apocalyptic (ibid). While it evokes the past, “whetting affective investments”, it remains “critical, not celebratory” (53-54). In particular, the criticism offered by literature acknowledges that nostalgia can ultimately become a driver of “racist, sectarian and patriarchal revanchisms,” the very warning which Sadek issues in his qualms with the supposedly present- and future-oriented nature of contemporary Lebanese politics. Both Seignurie and Sadek advocate the necessity of lingering, standing, stopping with the corpse, by the ruins if Lebanon is to escape its barzakh.

For their part, Hadjithomas and Joreige explore the overlapping space and time of the Lebanese postcolony and the impact of the most recent wars through their concept of latency. The artists’ definition of latency is, on first glance, influenced by trauma theorist Cathy Caruth. Caruth derives her own usage of the term from Freud’s ideas about the psychosexual development of pre-adolescent children. Freud understood children as in a period of sexual latency which can overlap with an amnesia for traumatic childhood experiences. As she developed a theory of trauma, however, Caruth removed the sexual/developmental framework in favor of an experiential one, such that latency would instead be understood as a period of time during which an individual does not have conscious access to the memories of a traumatic event. Nevertheless, through symptoms such as the repetition compulsion, the individual could reenact various aspects of the trauma unconsciously (Caruth 2016).

While Caruth’s trauma-based definition of latency is certainly one way of understanding Hadjithomas and Joreige’s concept, I hold that sociologist Avery Gordon’s work has greater resonance with the social and political interventions which Hadjithomas and Joreige make through their narrative-based art in the Lebanese context. Gordon describes the experience of being haunted as a symptom of structural social and political repression. “The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure,” Gordon writes, “and investigating it can lead to that dense site where
history and subjectivity make social life (8). I suggest that we understand Hadjithomas and Joreige’s concept of latency as more in line with Gordon’s “haunting” than with Caruth’s “latency.” Gordon removes haunting from the sphere of the personal, making it social and historical, as well, or, a product of social and historical processes. “To be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects,” Gordon writes, connecting personal perception and lived experience to a broader sociohistorical context with long-term repercussions, or effects, that outlast the event itself (190).

Hadjithomas and Joreige conduct their exploration of Lebanese latency through both film and their photographic artwork. In 2009, they opened an art installation, *Faces*. The exhibit featured enlarged photographs they took of the ubiquitous posters created by various confessional groups commemorating the deaths of their “martyrs,” those who had fought in the civil war or subsequent battles with Israel. These posters can still be found today on walls and infrastructure in southern Lebanon and in the heart of the Hamra district of Beirut, transforming the landscape into an open-air mausoleum (Maasri, 2008). The banners, fluttering in the breeze, boast the symbols and colors signifying the disparate political parties, keeping the memory of the dead alive after decades. Over the course of several years, Hadjithomas and Joreige photographed these posters as the elements degraded the images, and then worked with graphic designers and illustrators to restore these images. Despite their efforts, their agenda is ultimately impossible to complete: the images of the missing can never be fully restored. Latency in *Faces* emanates from the physical posters and their waning aura. Latency is also the haunting trace of left by those who the populace promised to remember in perpetuity, but whose ideological beliefs – for which they gave their lives – have since faded from the public’s line of vision as fast as their own martyrs’ faces.

Ghassan Halwani’s *We’ve got visitors coming over* also takes up the theme of latency. Halwani’s father was kidnapped in 1982, prompting Halwani’s mother to establish the Committee of...
Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon ("Sons of a Father's Disappearance"). A year later, Halwani personally witnessed a man being kidnapped by militiamen on a busy street. After the war, both the anonymous man and Halwani’s father reappeared, albeit in different forms: Halwani saw the kidnapped man on the street, his face disfigured, and, in 2008, he encountered his father’s image included among hundreds of others used in a poster advertising Umam’s exhibit for the civil war’s missing (ibid). A miniature photograph of Halwani’s father was included in a montage of hundreds of photographs of Lebanon’s missing and disappeared. The black and white photographs formed a wall of anonymous faces, each only a few inches in size. The effect of the montage overwhelmed Halwani: “the size reduction and repetition of faces arranged in a grid produced a total collapse of individual identity” (Elias, 102). His father had been erased yet a second time. As with the martyr posters which Hadjithomas and Joreige photographed and partially restored, elemental wear and tear on the poster had degraded the image of Halwani’s father in such a way that threatened to banish his father from memory. But Halwani was also unnerved by Umam’s unintentional reproduction of the violence of disappearance through such an anonymous manner of representation (Toronto International Film Festival Talks). It would take some time for him to decide how best to reckon with these multiple erasures of his father, both literal and aesthetic, as well as the impact of these acts.

What Halwani was implicitly attempting to come to terms with was as much his specific loss as it was the loss of a “social figure” which he wished to reinvest with a “social life.” While this could be understood as a melancholic approach, Sadek’s view would allow us to understand it as in terms of a potentially productive lingering. His resultant artwork would represent a “recalcitrant, anti-therapeutic form of mourning” (Durrant in Beulens et al, 97) in which he asks art to work against its very nature. While the nature of art is to mimic the processes by which subjects are formed (ibid), the task in front of Halwani is to represent the visceral impact of continued irresolution brought about by ongoing and renewed disappearances, the undoing of the political subject. Ultimately, Halwani will
work toward this visualization by incorporating this irresolution – in the form of the caesura, absence, the blank space – into his artwork. These interruptions are what allows his art to be faithful to the affective experience of irresolution insofar as they evince a “mimetic solidarity with life” (Durrant in Buelens et al, 104).

He visualizes this reality through *We've got visitors coming over*. Seven years after his initial encounter with his father’s photograph in Umam’s poster, Halwani went in search of the photograph once again. The original poster remained precisely where he last saw it. Locating his father’s image, he began, once again, to fill in the missing details. He then moved on to the faces of the other missing individuals on the poster, working meticulously to identify any distinguishing facial features which could help him identify the person whose contours he followed. Wherever possible, he completed the person’s image, writing in their birth date, date of disappearance and the location they were last seen alongside the poster. But there remained a considerable amount of blank space, and missing features.

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29 Unless otherwise specified, information on the background for Halwani’s project is sourced from Chad Elias’ *Posthumous Images*, pp 104-106. Elias obtained the information in his personal interview with Halwani.
Referring to Halwani’s process as one of “urban excavation,” art historian Chad Elias notes the influence of Halwani’s participation in a number of forensic workshops held in Lebanon by the International Committee of the Red Cross. The workshops, Elias writes, were the NGO’s attempt to “explore the existing capacity [of the Lebanese state] for forensic investigations” into the fate of the civil war missing (Elias, 105). The influence of forensic methodology, Elias argues, can be observed in details such as the strings which Halwani has wrapped around nails, designating the borders of the original posters he works on as if mapping out a plot of land. Not unlike the critics referenced at the

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30 Subsequent reports published by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) conclude that the political leadership in Lebanon had neither the will nor the resources to conduct an investigation along the lines of those the ICRC had carried out in Argentina and other countries. See the 2013 ICRC report. Over time, the organization’s work in Lebanon expanded to include general human rights and humanitarian concern (e.g.: visiting detained prisoners) and, later, providing care for Syrian refugees displaced from the ongoing war.
beginning of this chapter who have likened postwar Lebanese artists working in photography to historians or journalists, Chad Elias assesses Halwani’s project as the work of “a type of urban archaeologist,” who reverses time in pursuit of the missing (Elias, 107). Despite Elias’ metaphor, however, neither the archaeological method nor the artist’s implements can avoid the empty spaces bounded by string and left unmarked by pencil. In these empty spaces wait so many more individuals than those whose identities have been rediscovered.

For the viewer to imagine what (or who) should be placed in the blank spaces is an impossible task, much like it would be for a family member to answer the question of where their missing loved one is. In the ICRC survey, conducted in 2012 and published in 2013, 77% of the surviving family members of the disappeared interviewed by the ICRC thought it possible that their missing were still alive.31 Events such as Bashar al-Assad’s prisoner release in 2000, and a 2008 prisoner exchange between Israel and Hizballah bolstered this sense of possibility. Spatially, the missing could be anywhere, but, temporally, they are nowhere: they remain trapped in war either by their deaths or by their imprisoned lives in the barzakh of the postwar amnesty and amnesia. By allowing this barzakh to remain represented on the page, Halwani “encircle[s] the trauma,” allowing its presence in such a way that “remain[s] faithful” to memory (Edkins in Beuelens et al, 133).

Archaeological metaphors notwithstanding, Halwani himself is under no illusion about the nature of his undertaking: neither an activist nor a state official, he considers himself first and foremost an artist (“Sons of a Father’s Disappearance”). In his lecture to the Toronto International Film Festival, Halwani warned of a very recent history which was quickly “fading away” under the influence of amnesty, and the unintentional reinforcement of amnesia through anonymous representations of the missing. He said he felt that “something [needed] to be done” to keep the memory of the disappeared present (07:01). His project, like those throughout this chapter,

31 According to this report, the vast majority of disappearances and kidnappings took place between 1975-1976 and 1981-1986. See ICRC 2013.
repurposes photographic archival material and reinvests them with [meaning and energy],
transforming them into new objects which “represent the missing person in the society to which this
person is still belonging [sic]” (13:29). His use of the word “represent” underscores the primacy of
his artistic agenda: rescuing these objects from the *barzakh*.

Halwani understands himself to be suffering, like others in Lebanon, from a condition
provoked by “images of violence” which neither he nor Beirut were capable of digesting “for years
and years” (Heron, np). Not only did it take him seven years between his first interaction with the
found image of his father and *We’ve got visitors*, but it also took another six years for Halwani to figure
out what to do with the footage he took of himself at work on *We’ve got visitors*. In 2019, he released a
very short documentary about the war-era mass graves on top of which the new luxury high-rises
dotting Beirut’s coastline have been built. In the film, *Erased____, Ascent of the Invisible*, he includes
some images from *We’ve got visitors*; his inclusion of these new latent images testifies to his own
encounter with madness. Both the images and their indices are left as unresolved as Lebanon’s reality.
So long as he is in the *barzakh* (both psychically and politically), these images are, too. With no
apparent political resolution in sight, his drive to carry out this work was “more related to emotions
and not completely rational,” and his compulsion to continue digging at the city’s walls continues
(*ibid*).

Beirut’s walls have become his mad notebooks. Much as he wants to move out from under
the weight of what he considers Lebanon’s version of intergenerational trauma, and to pursue a
different kind of artwork, he says he is unsure whether he will ever be able to (*ibid*). As with Raad,
Hadjithomas and Joreige, Halwani’s search for a way to manifest a mad(dening) truth out of the
archival units of information forced him into confrontation with montage in order to try to
surmount the feeling which initially overwhelmed him. This montage was not of his own making, as
it was for Raad, Hadjithomas and Joreige’s work, but an already existent montage.
Conclusion

In my discussion of the way in which photography has been repurposed, I claim that the artists ask us, as viewers, to understand the value of the arrangement of photographs and its attendant narratives through a more considered approach. These projects are in direct contradistinction to, for instance, another type of photography-based artwork: published collections of photographs taken during the war. Books consisting of “full-page pictures of blood and guts” could be found “in Lebanese living rooms” even while the war was ongoing (cooke 1996, 17). Though these texts were not products associated with any militia or confessional party – instead released by purportedly neutral third parties such as publishing houses, photography syndicates and (later) postwar government-funded initiatives – they were nonetheless invested in particular narratives of how to record Lebanon’s war. Boasting titles such as Harb Lubnan [The Lebanese War], the photo albums co-emergent with the events of the war paradoxically archived a past that was not yet past.

The images contained within this class of photo albums are representative of precisely the kind of archival improbability that contemporary artists such as Walid Raad and Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige critique. These books are too-neat narrative forms of representing war. They are forms which need to be destabilized precisely because of their claims to having documented objectivity and truth, but without acknowledging the role of narrative in curating and disseminating a photo-archive of Lebanon’s war. Admittedly, the drive for this particular form of an archive was understandable, particularly mid-war. Achille Mbembe warns of the latent threats which lurk in the violent remains of the archive: “Left to themselves,” he muses, “the[se remains] might eventually acquire a life of their own” (Mbembe in Hamilton et al, 2002). Rather than allow the traces to reactivate, the archive’s designers sought to cauterize the wounds by forcing the semblance of stability and permanence onto their (inherently narrativized) curation of war. But it is precisely
because the “conditions for narrative” are, as cooke describes, an “impulse to moralize” that their projects become prime grounds from which to reconsider the function of the archive decades later (cooke 2002).

The aesthetics of Lebanon’s irresolution, indexed and represented through photomontage, record suffering and articulate a madness which, far from the refusal of verbalization, speaks profoundly about the psychic impact of post-war developments. Halwani’s artwork, gestating since his father’s disappearance in 1982, and realized in 2013 and again in 2019, is a product of the paradoxical simultaneity of war and peace. From this space, Halwani struggles to find an art form which will help him represent his truth – his brush with madness – with the raw materials of archival information. Since he can never fill in the faces and identities of those for whom all traces have disappeared from the poster, his artwork can never be finished. In this way his project mimics the liminal conditions of space and time from which it was born. Stretched across multiple temporalities, it is historical in the datedness of the source material; it is present, created in the stalled eye of history; and, it is of the future, because there will always be another detail to fill in. Working from within the *barzakh* and against the passage of time, Halwani attempts to make information meaningful again by investing it with identity and memory. It is a Sisyphean task to which he will obsessively return, despite himself.

Walid Raad’s *Let’s be honest the weather helped* also establishes a direct relationship between the artist, his attempts to represent war, and madness. His multi-year project is an imagined rendering of the international supply chain which supported the war in his homeland. His project derives its significance not from its apparent informational (if imaginative) agenda, but from the visualization of an underlying truth. The desire to make sense of fifteen years’ worth of information about bullets and their provenance can only result in a frenzied, and unsuccessful, attempt to stay in control of what are ultimately an inconclusive constellation of technical drawings, photographs, and labels. The materiality of madness thematically connects this piece to Raad’s earlier project, *My neck is thinner than*
Here, instead of offering himself as an intermediary through which to communicate madness to the viewer, Raad prompts the museum-goer or gallery visitor to experience this psychological irresolution for themselves. In the face of an overwhelming wall of information about the 1980s car bombs, the viewer is ultimately forced to abandon hyper-intellectual responses to this work and to instead allow their affective faculties to help them locate the truth, the point, of the artwork. Launching a direct address to the viewer, Raad opens an empathic mode of relation.

Finally, through the intermediary of their fictional character, Hadjithomas and Joreige’s *Pyromaniac photographer* and *Postcards of a war* situates the encounter with madness in between the direct appeal to the viewer, and the mediation of the artist’s encounter with madness. The madness, specifically pyromania, of the invented character who has supposedly produced this artwork provokes an unstoppable impulse to re-create the war he seeks to capture, before spiraling beyond his control and becoming a compulsive need to destroy. The corruption of this figure is one of the best examples of the dangerous impact of long-term violence.

Through edited and manipulated photographs of charred car parts, bullet-scarred buildings, psychedelically-colored cityscapes, and the images of the missing, these artworks access and communicate the madness of an ongoing *barzakh* to their audiences. The artists’ approaches vary: they are either direct or mediated. The artists’ temporal framings also vary: the accompanying narratives speak to the task of aesthetic representations from within the differing periods of 1975-1990, 1996-2006, or in Halwani’s case, 2013. Yet they all affirm the continuing theme of madness as the primary mode of relating to the experience of war and its aftermath, and trace this madness to the *barzakh*. 
Conclusion: In the Time of an Unstable Archive

“(To have archive fever…] is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive. […] It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrespressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.” – Jacques Derrida, Archive Fever

On each of my research trips to Lebanon over the course of writing this dissertation, I encountered several sites purporting to be archives (though some more readily appeared to be archives-in-the-making) of Lebanon’s 1975-1990 war. As my project makes clear, the creation of such an archive is no small undertaking. Indeed, at the national level, the task has proven all but impossible: consider, for instance the failed effort to create a national history curriculum for implementation in Lebanese grade schools. Yet, whereas the confessional structure of the Lebanese state has made it unlikely that an official “Lebanese” (state) archive of war will emerge in the near future, the leadership of several of the various confessional groups have created their own archives. In other words, despite the state’s insistence on a rhetoric of post-war non-sectarianism; despite the populace’s amnesias and forms of middle knowledge delinking violence from ideology; and, even despite ebullient insistence among Lebanese protestors in 2019 that the masses thronging the streets had finally identified a national political goal more important than confessional politics (Brumberg 2019), confessional narratives remain deeply entrenched. And, as the present day archives-in-the-making of the Lebanese civil war suggest, so, too, are the confessional claims upon Lebanon’s future.

In the concluding pages that will follow, I will offer brief descriptions of some of these new archives, taking care to position them in contrast to perhaps the single contemporary example of an archive-in-the-making – a museum – funded neither by a particular confession nor an NGO, and in fact partially supported by the Beirut municipality. But before offering these examples, I wish to historicize these new post-war, 21st century archival projects. That is to say, I advocate that we understand these “new” archives as, in fact, the product of a century-long project of archiving in and
through a century of the maddening, *barzakh* conditions of the postcolony. With a broadened temporal aperture, we no longer find ourselves confronting a discrete occurrence (the sudden resurgence of confessional narratives some thirty years after the war’s end), but a contemporary iteration in the cycle of an “archive fever.”

As I have shown through this dissertation, for a modern nation-state whose various demographic groups could claim centuries of history in the region, the militarized confessions were as invested in memory as they were in futurity. Each political milestone in modern Lebanese history portended an opportunity to stake a claim: the 1860 Mountain Wars between the Druze and Maronites; the transition from imperial province to French Mandate; the 1932 census; independence in 1943; the 1958 civil war; Black September in 1970; and, the period from 1975-1990. Each of these moments of political uncertainty and violent maneuvering therefore also corresponded to an accompanying effort to resurrect, curate, record and erase claims on the past. These narratological and archival claims on the past – made in the name of Lebanon’s future – were always constructed in relation to politics and violence.

Take for example Said Akl, a Maronite nationalist born in 1911, just prior to the French mandate. Throughout the mid-20th century, he distinguished himself as a prolific poet, playwright and philosopher. One of his most significant contributions to Lebanese letters, however, was his invention and advocacy of a new script called “Lebanese” in which he used Latin characters instead of Arabic script to represent the written vernacular of Lebanese Arabic.1 This script would become a formidable tool in the arsenal of radical Maronite nationalists who advocated for a secular, non-Arab Middle Eastern state. Akl’s alphabet would be used to rewrite major works of literature, form the basis of Maronite newspapers and play a pivotal role in Maronite propaganda of the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s. By evoking the legacy of an ancient Phoenician lineage, a history of invention and reinvention

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1 For a detailed account of Akl and his project, see Salameh 2010 and Kattar 2015.
of the alphabet, the Maronites sought a cultural and geopolitical legitimacy to their claims on the past, and upon the present. Though the Maronites often see themselves as having lost the war — both because of the terrible intra-confessional fighting that destroyed their platforms in 1989 and 1990, and the slight reduction to Maronite power stipulated by the Ta’if Agreement — Akl’s project still resonates today. Regina Sneifer, for instance, one of the few female combatants from the 1975-1990 wars to have served in a Maronite militia, authored a French-language novel, Benta’el: Fille d’alphabet (2014), which resurrects the narrative of a Phoenician Lebanism. Her titular reference to the daughter of the alphabet persists in the reclamation of a narrative while breathing new life into a mythology central to a portion of the modern-day Maronite community.

Another sign of the contiguity of archiving and violence was found in the production of posters featuring the “martyrs” of the various militias who fought in the 1958 civil war, the 1975-1990 war, as well as in the battles with Israel in the 1990s and 2000s. In a study of war-era political posters, Zeina Maasri identifies the primary characteristics of these posters: they clearly identify the name, date, and place of the martyr’s death alongside the militia and political party with which he was affiliated. The backdrop almost always includes language and confessional-appropriate imagery (cedar trees for Maronites and bright green and yellow for Hizballah) signifying sacrifice in the name of confession and nation (Maasri 2009). The posters, Maasri writes, “did not conform to the typical components of the obituary poster. The poster was in fact prepared before the military operation took place: in other words, a martyr’s poster was in the making before his/her martyrdom” (Maasri 2009, 95). The inversion of the order of an event and the creation of its archive is the source of significant consternation on the part of the madman in Dayr al-Salib in Huda Barakat’s Disciples of Passion. The sane, he suggests, do not seem to find any cognitive dissonance in this bizarre phenomenon which ultimately renders the event (the attack) and its protagonist (the martyr) both permanently memorialized in space and time, and also lost to space and time. Speaking of martyrs who recorded videotapes aired on television broadcasts, the protagonist says, the martyr “has no place now, outside
of this videotape (which will run only once). His place is the air [...] The poorly colored image, the metaphor and the abstraction. It is a metaphor that conveys no referent, transfers no meaning; it is an abstraction without any concrete notion to bear it” (DP, 110). Just as the martyr is now without a proper time, he is also without a proper place. Something of him — and everything that he is meant to evoke — exists because of, in, and solely through the screen. And yet he has claimed his space in an archive, even if the archive is still in the process of being formed.

Examples such as these demonstrate that before, during and after war, there was an interminable search “for the archive right where it slips away,” to quote Jacques Derrida (91). As suggested by the quote which comprises the epigraph to this coda, Lebanon’s confessional leaders and intellectuals had a “compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement” – one that they believed fundamentally would legitimize their acts of war (ibid). War was waged in, on and through, archived images and words as much as through physical violence.

But it is not just the incessant drive to create an archive – even and especially in the face of instability – which gestures to an archival fever. Archive fever, Derrida tells us, is marked not only by the insistent desire to create, but also the drive to destruction. On some level, we can see aspects of this destruction in ‘Akl’s project or Maasri’s panorama of posters: the elevation of the “Lebanese” language requires the obliteration of the linguistic history of Lebanese Arabic; and, the reification of the various confessional martyrs is predicated on the ultimate act of destruction – death. But even outside of these examples, there are other forms of archival destruction on display in Lebanon over the course of its century-long history as a postcolony.

Perhaps the most iconic site of archival destruction has been the Beirut National Museum, known locally as “mathaf,” or museum. Various scholars, writers and artists have alluded to the unusual creative and destructive alchemy which the war enacted upon the cultural site. In her 2015
The paucity of information about the prewar contents of Mathaf is curious: though the lacks existed in both the prewar and postwar contexts, the implications differ dramatically. The absence of a pre-war inventory nods to a general pre-war disinterest in Mathaf as a site of Lebanese history: a truism to which Jean Said Makdisi attests in her war memoir, Beirut Fragments, when she notes that the warehouse of antiques was “never a great cultural center” prior to the war (54). The second, postwar lack, however, suggests a guarding of the secrets of the museum’s contents. It is as if the contents, and therefore the archival site, had been invested with existential and yet precarious meaning by virtue of having become “a symbol of the country’s division and the backdrop for sectarian violence” (Joreige, 7). This was a remarkable transfiguration: the museum had evolved from an unremarkable project of imperial curiosity to a countrywide symbol of both war and national history.

Even more radical forms of destruction and recreation were underway in other parts of Beirut in the postwar era – zones not limited to the radius of Hariri’s Solidere reconstruction. Many buildings remain marked by bullets and shells; many lots remain empty, identifiable as the site where
a building once stood before the war – but many more have been, and are being, replaced as the city bows to the pressure of urban capitalist development. For many such sites, the project of remembrance is being overwritten as re-membrance, as the city is rebuilt according to what architect and artist Bernard Khuri calls Lebanon’s new “architecture of entertainment.” 2 Khuri is perhaps most well-known for his redesigning of a section of the Karantina port district into a nightclub for the rich and famous. The site was historically a quarantine for goods and people dating to the French mandate, before becoming home to Armenians fleeing the genocide in the Ottoman Empire. Serving as a refugee camp for several of the intervening decades, this space is emblematic of the layered histories of imperialism and militarization. With the tidal change in Middle Eastern geopolitics midway through the 20th century, the camp became home to displaced Palestinians. The strong association of Karantina with quarantine and refugees in the mid-twentieth century was such that the Maronites in the neighboring areas erected a wall to keep the non-citizens on the city’s periphery.

During the initial years of the 1975-1990 civil war, the camp was the site of an infamous massacre by Maronite militias bent on driving Palestinians out of Lebanon. The militias burned it to the ground. None of this palimpsestic history is legible in the sites’ current form.

There is also the quiet matter of the Lebanese state’s quiet re-militarization of former sites of significance during the war, such as the downtown Beirut Holiday Inn. A towering structure in the Hotels District near the city’s waterfront, the now-empty hotel was one of the four major hotels (the Phoenicia, the St. Georges, the Holiday Inn and the Excelsior) used as a site of intense militia battles during the 1975-1976 Hotels War. Of the four hotels, only the Phoneicia, a 7-star hotel, has been rebuilt and remains in active use. The St. Georges stands empty, yachts anchored in the bays in front of it. The Excelsior is tucked away onto a side street, bearing the tell-tale craters made by shells. And,

2 Khuri made this comment during a lecture for the Penny W. Stamps Distinguished Visitor Series at the University of Michigan School of Art and Design. His address “New Wars in Progress” is accessible here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlWcMTQ6H4Y&feature=related%2F
the Holiday Inn looms behind the Phoenicia, gray, pockmarked with bullets, an unsightly view for anyone occupying the Phoenicia’s rear rooms.

Legends about this building abound: that militias would throw people out of the window and shoot them on their descent for target practice; that snipers would kill passers-by brave enough to leave their flat to find food or water. Haunted though the building is, the Lebanese state has seen fit to use it as a military base. In 2019, I found street-level steel frames separating the building from the prying eyes of passers-by. An invitation, it seemed: peering in, I saw military tanks parked in rows in front of the building. I looked up and saw a camouflaged lookout’s nest, too new to be a vestige of war, and then saw a tank filled to capacity with soldiers and their weapons turn into an obscure side entrance I had not yet noticed. Later, I learned from Monika Borgmann that the Lebanese military uses several defunct pieces of infrastructure around Beirut in much the same manner: including Burj Murr, near the landmark Mohamed al-Amin mosque featured in so many aerial pictures of Beirut. These cratered buildings cannot be torn down: they are too close to highways or other buildings to be bulldozed without creating collateral infrastructural damage, so the military’s solution is to use it much in the same way it was used in its recent past. But all around these buildings, life on the street continues as usual.

Thus, if madness, a symptom of the condition of the Lebanese postcolony, is figured in the postwar era as amnesia; as middle knowledge; and as the gap between information and truth, it is also figured as the structural form of the lieu de memoire, and the attendant drives to create and destroy them.

Two of the most prominent contemporary examples of the ongoing nature of this tension can be found in Hizballah’s National Resistance Museum in the southern Lebanese province of Nabatiyeh, and the Bayt Bayrut museum (supported by the Beirut municipality, various NGOs and foreign governments) located in the country’s capital city. Briefly, I will describe the difference in the linguistic and affective registers of memory, drawing attention to the power of the former and the
relatively unsure voice of the latter. While Bayt Bayrut is the only official non-confessional museum about the war in the country, its status as a non-state supported entity has placed it and its future in a precarious position. What the institution is now is only a shell of what it was intended to be; and it remains to be seen what it will be allowed to become. By contrast, Hizballah’s powerfully-curated and well-resourced museum is only one of several confessional sites of memory which have emerged in the past decade: on April 13, 2019 (the 44th anniversary of the start of the 1975-1990 war), the Kata’ib party announced the opening of the Kata’ib Independence Museum, dedicated to honoring the party and its legacy. A local party newspaper describes the inaugural remarks given by former President Amine Gemayel (brother to assassinated Bachir Gemayel and son of party founder, Pierre Gemayel): in them, he extolled the museum as a site of “testimony, remembrance and forewarning” (Kataeb.org). And on the opposite end of the country, there are plans underway to restore Khiam, a notorious prison run by the Israeli proxy militia, the South Lebanese Army, which was bombed in 2006 when the Israelis realized that former prisoners had returned and were offering tours of what had effectively become a museum of suffering.

Mleeta

You will know that you have reached the southern Lebanese province of Nabatiyeh because of change in the landscape’s color. Your eyes will register a sea of yellow flags with the green

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3 Claire Launchbury has described the historical trajectory of Khiam, the now non-existent clandestine prison as having gone “from barracks, to prison, to museum, to ruin” (Launchbury 2014, 516). The edifice’s history began in 1933 during the French mandate when imperial soldiers used the outpost as a headquarters for their regional army. After independence in 1943, the desert outpost was taken over by the Lebanese Army. In 1978, it was taken over from the defunct military by the Southern Lebanese Army (SLA) who would use the site as a clandestine detention and torture center with the unofficial backing and material support of the Israeli army who occupied Lebanon until 2000. The prison’s existence was initially denied by both Israel and the SLA; they collaborated to combat the Shi’a militia, Hizballah, quashing resistance in their territories. Even after the SLA permitted a visit from the International Red Cross in 1985, the SLA and Israeli Defense Forces banned the Red Cross from reporting on what they had seen (Lavie 1997, 35). The site continued to remain a black hole for those who ran afoul of the SLA until 2000 – ten years after the civil war had officially ended. In 2000, Hizbullah took over the site, turning it into a museum where former detainees volunteered as tour guides (Launchbury 2014, 516 and Deeb 2008, 393).
Hizballah logo, or banners bearing the circular logo of the Amal party, or full-color posters bearing the face and torso of Shi’i Speaker of Parliament, Nabih Berri. And always, always, martyr posters everywhere. Moving away from the coastline to drive inland toward Mleeta, tucked into the mountains, you will pass the gnarled steel hulls of buildings destroyed by Israeli bombs. They look exactly like what you see any time a local news channel broadcasts the aftermath of a bombing campaign in any present-day war zone: pillars of concrete and exposed steel. But these hulls are over a decade old. My driver tells me that growing up in Nabatiyeh as a child, he used to walk the three or four hours from one part of the south to another to visit friends and family. It is no longer safe to do so: landmines still line the roads. The United Nations has not finished demining. Caution tape makes some roads impassable.

And then there is Mleeta, sitting at the top of a mountain, shrouded in silence and the mist of clouds. Mleeta is an experience. Everything about it is curated, from its location, to the landscaping and the order in which you traverse the vast museum whose component parts are both indoor and outdoor. When you arrive, you immediately enter a theater in which you watch a Hizballah-produced film about the party’s decades-long fight against Israel. The images and voiceovers are accompanied by a score which alternates between rousing battle-tunes and mellow, contemplative music. The film’s narrator speaks unquestioningly of “the enemy” and “the resistance”: there is to be no uncertainty about whose narrative you are receiving and what story you will be told. This is a monument to the party that preserved Lebanon’s sovereignty.

On the day that I visited, a delegation of students from a school in the northern city of Tripoli were visiting. The majority of them were Christian. I expected some tension, notwithstanding the fact that the leader of one of the most powerful Christian factions in parliament was currently (if improbably, given their war history) allied with Hizballah. There was none. As the students watched the film, I heard a low buzz which rose to a murmur and finally clearly and loudly articulated words:
the students were reciting Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah’s victory speech announcing the defeat of Israel with jubilant tones and raised fists.

My mind swam as my eyes adjusted to the light and we were ushered to the next exhibit space where a life-sized wax mannequin of Hassan Nasrallah greeted us. Bathed in light, he stood with his arms open in a large, high-tech room with what can only be described as a militarized aesthetic. Camouflage nets were tossed over glass display ports in the floor, illuminated so that visitors could see weapons that militiamen had recovered from Israeli soldiers. Placards lined the walls, listing the testimonials of former combatants who had fought in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, their “fight” being as much military as it was intelligence gathering: their testimonies featured detailed explanations of the Israeli military’s structure and weapons, and extolled the bravery of Hizballah soldiers in the face of one of the regions most feared militaries. Having learned the names, dates, events, places and facts marking decades of conflict in southern Lebanon, in the cavernous room resembling a hideout, you exit into the outdoors, facing “the abyss” into which Hizballah soldiers pushed the Israeli military in 2006.

The abyss is figured as a literal sinkhole, a massive sunken installation of Israeli tanks, weapons, and helmets arranged like death’s sculpture garden. There are fewer placards here and those that do exist have considerably less text: this is to be an affective experience, not an intellectual one. What do you see, what do you perceive in the face of so much evidence of intended destruction? On one side of the abyss lies a stack of precariously balanced barrels dropped from Israeli fighter jets: they contained flammable substances which were meant to incinerate the mountains and their inhabitants. There is a destroyed tank, a hallmark of physical advantage and might, reduced to impotence. It sits next to a missile filled with fragments — a cluster-bomb — which, the exhibit is careful to note, is illegal according to international standards, but which the Israelis used anyway. Elsewhere, a large, round faux spider-web stretches over another Israeli tank. It takes about ten minutes to walk the perimeter of the abyss – a curated archive of aggression, of disaster averted.
After staring into the abyss, you are invited to explore a forested hiking path which recreates the covered trails along which Hizballah fighters hid as they made camp in the mountains. Mannequins stand, camouflaged in green ponchos, going about the task of healing the wounded, assembling RPGs, and cooking. Different weapons “stations” are on display – heavy artillery and light artillery all hidden in half a mile of foliage protected from above by military camouflage, and from the sides by sandbags and steel. You then enter a bunker. The steel-lined walls and ceilings give you just enough room to pass with a two-foot clearance above your head and enough space for the high school class in front of me to file through two at a time. Parts of the bunker’s hallway splits off, leading into a recreated “living room,” “kitchen” “prayer room,” and “communications rooms” before stealthily passing you through yet another tunnel.

Exiting the bunker, you find that you have returned to the final yards of the trail to find an open clearing with a full display of every type of weapon Hizballah fighters have used. The deadly weapons are so close that you could touch them if you wanted to. There are no signs that tell you not to. Perhaps doing so will help you imagine yourself as part of the struggle. Exiting the clearing, you find yourself on the other side of “the abyss,” facing a looming stone staircase. There is a placard nearby suggesting that Hizballah’s martyrs have ascended this staircase to heaven. This is, after all, according to the resistance museum’s literature, “where land meets heaven.” For those who are not faint of heart, you are invited to ascend the stairs yourself. Admittedly, I hesitated to do so.

Bayt Bayrut

By contrast, Bayt Bayrut is decidedly undecided about what it is, what it wants to say, and how. In large part, this is as much because of the careful steps its curators must tread – a level of care which Hizballah’s instrumental role in Lebanese national security allows the organization to avoid – but it is also a reflection of the difficulty of finding a non-confessional narrative of Lebanon’s
politics. The museum takes its name from the building in which it is housed, a restored Ottoman-era mansion. Originally built in 1924, the edifice’s neo-Ottoman construction was a landmark of bourgeois society. Its facade has since been partially destroyed by bullet holes, and graffiti coats some of the internal walls. At the war’s end, the family who owned the mansion planned to have the building demolished, but the architect of the Bayt Bayrut project, Mona El Hallak, successfully petitioned the city to take it over in 2003. In 2008, El Hallak began to design and construct a museum of the civil war from the building, enlisting support from the Beirut municipality and foreign sponsors. But her project would stall for over a decade and has yet to come to fruition in the way it was imagined.

To some extent, El Hallak had foreseen this: she had made clear to establish that her vision for the site was one in which patrons could discuss the experience of war – not the politics of it (Fordham 2017). She was sensitive to the reality of ongoing confessional tension – one which was implicitly denied by Beirut’s governor who asserted in an interview with National Public Radio in 2017 that “a museum covering the civil war now is a good idea,” and suggested that any delay in the museum’s opening was due to bureaucracy as opposed to political concerns. This notwithstanding El Hallak’s insistence that a museum discussing the war would bother many, including her own parents.

In the end it seems, politics were unavoidable. After myriad delays – including speculation about disagreements among various confessional politicians – the museum did indeed open its doors in 2018, but to a limited-run exhibition featuring contemporary art from the Middle East.

By the summer of 2019, it appeared to have made slight progress toward its original intent, although not much. Much of the building remains empty. Upon entering, you face a multi-story open-air vestibule, its floor lined with hunks of fallen pieces of the building’s interior walls. The heart of the multi-story building has been hollowed out and reconstructed to accommodate a multi-level

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4 Author’s interviews in Lebanon in 2019.
floor-to-ceiling glass window and a four-story set of spiral stone stairs. The facade of the building remains largely intact: it still bears the yellow-hued stone with elaborate archways, cutouts and balconies recognizable from photographs. Portions of the original internal walls intermingle with newly constructed segments of wall, presumably where the wartime damage to the building required structural replacement.

Portions of a few of the building’s floors were open to visitors. They featured temporary exhibits: a display of photographs and their negatives from a pre-war photography studio that Hallek found on this site; artwork from artists who lived in Mosul during the Da’esh occupation; and black and white photographs taken during the 1975-1990 civil war. This last exhibit is in a bright, airy, white room with plenty of nooks and passageways. Black-and-white photos are mounted on easels often featuring the works of photojournalists who perished in the war. The photographs are fairly uniform: they typically depict ruined infrastructure, fighters, or victims of the war — oftentimes children. The accompanying placards feature the same three lines with little variation: the first line identifies that the image in question was taken during the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war, the last contains the photographer’s name. The line sandwiched in between the two generic identifiers is most often a generic descriptor of the image. For instance, rather than name the militias to which various fighters whose images are reproduced belong, it reads (in English) “Lebanon during the war” or “Fighters on the Green Line in Beirut.” The exhibit feels sparse, decontextualized, vague. It is unclear what message visitors are to take from it. What – or who – are we to remember? Of what – or of whom – is this an archive? And why is this exhibit in this particular building?

It would be unfair to compare the quality of the archive at Mleeta with Bayt Bayrut. The circumstances surrounding how they came into being, the conditions of their production are vastly being. The autonomy of Hizballah’s political status in Lebanon affords it a financial, political and narrative freedom that El Hallak and her collaborators, subject to the myriad demands of the state, the municipality and various donors, do not. What is, of interest, however, beyond the radically
different quality of the archives they put forward and the conditions of archival enunciation is the fact that these efforts are being made at all. It is tempting to ask the question: why now? Why the Kata’ib Independence Museum in 2019? Why the reopening of Khiam in the years to come? But to do so, I argue, would be to ignore the longer history of Lebanon’s relationship to the political archive. That is to say, the history of modern Lebanon has always been one which oscillated between many forms of warfare: archival battles, political tension, and outright violence.

If what I have described is a cacophonous landscape of memory – one which is written, rewritten, overwritten and erased; one which is being written about and amended before, during and after the key events that would spur the creation of an archive – it is precisely this impression I mean to give. It is the impression of an archive fever which has held Lebanon in its grip since its establishment as a modern nation-state, preoccupying state-, para-state, and non-state-actors alike. These projects, at their core, are an attempt to archive that which madness has left with no name, and with many names. They are an attempt to archive madness itself.
Appendix A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Developments</th>
<th>Literary and Cultural Developments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>1906</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swiss missionary establishes the second psychiatric hospital in the Middle East in modern-day Lebanon: ‘Asfouriyeh</td>
<td>Gibran Khalil Gibran publishes his short story “Yuhanna al-majnun” (“John the mad”)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1914-1918</td>
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<tr>
<td>World War I</td>
<td>1920</td>
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<td></td>
<td>France redraws the map of “Lebanon,” siphoning part of “Greater Syria” into the new country</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1922</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ottoman Empire is officially ended</td>
<td>1923</td>
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<td></td>
<td>France is granted a mandate for the territories of Syria and Lebanon by the League of Nations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1926</td>
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<tr>
<td>France inaugurates a constitution for Lebanon; origins of the confessional system of governance</td>
<td>1930</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dayr al Salib becomes Lebanon’s second psychiatric hospital</td>
<td>1932</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colonial powers in Lebanon conduct a census of the local population. This will be the only census the country will have</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anton Saadeh founds al-Hizb al-Suri Al-Qawmi Al-Ijtima’i (the Syrian Social Nationalist Party)</td>
<td></td>
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1936
Sheikh Pierre Gemayel founds the Kata’ib

1939–1945
World War II

1943
Lebanon attains independence from France

1948
The state of Israel is formed. Palestinians begin arriving in neighboring states, including Lebanon

1953
Samuel Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot* is first performed in Paris, helping to inaugurate the “theatre of the absurd,” a genre which will influence al-Samman’s Beirut trilogy

1957
President Chamoun unilaterally enters Lebanon into alliance with US President Eisenhower against the USSR and its Arab allies out of concern that an Arab nationalist vision will compromise Lebanese sovereignty

1958
Egypt and Syria form United Arab Republic with the support of Lebanese opposition to Chamoun

Assassination of Lebanese politician who calls for Chamoun’s resignation leads to civil war

1959
Lebanon places Palestinian camps under pseudo-military rule requiring inhabitants to use passes to move between camps, prohibiting the circulation of newspapers and limiting other civil freedoms

1964
The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is established

1967
Arab militaries are defeated in their war with Israel.
1968
Israel bombs Beirut’s international airport as reprisal

1969
Clashes begin between Palestinian *fedayeen* and Lebanese Army. Cairo Treaty legitimizes presence of PLO in Lebanon

1970
Jordanian monarchy expels Palestinian *fedayeen* from the country (“Black September”). They relocate to Lebanon. Right-wing nationalist paramilitaries in Lebanon begin training camps with support from Israeli military.

1972
PLO officially establishes headquarters in Beirut.

1973
Israeli PM Ehud Barak launches attack on Beirut

1974
Clashes between *fedayeen* and Lebanese paramilitaries intensify

1975
Saida fishermen’s protest results in assassination of labor leader, and PLO supporters ambushed in Ain al-Rummaneh. April 13 is retroactively declared the start of the war.

1975-1976
The Hotels War. Members of dozens of militias fight for control of the Hotels district – strategically located near the port of Beirut.

1976
Etel Adnan publishes *L’apocalypse Arab*, which will be published as *The Arab Apocalypse* in 2008

David Rosenhan publishes “On Being Sane in Insane Places”

Robert Jay Lifton establishes an inquiry into the nature of moral injury with *Home From the War*

Ghada al-Samman publishes *Bayrut 75*, which will be translates as *Beirut 75* in 1995
1977
Marie Rose Boulos, a Syrian immigrant teaching Palestinian children at a school in Beirut, is murdered

Ghada al-Samman publishes *Kawabiss Bayrut*, which will be translated as *Beirut Nightmares* in 1997

Ilyas Khuri publishes *Al-jabal al-saghir*, which will be translated as *Little Mountain* in 1989

Nawal al-Saadawi publishes *Imra‘ab ’inda nuqtat al-sifr*, which will be translated as *Woman at Point Zero* in 1983

1978
The Hundred Days War. A fragile alliance of Maronite militias led by Bachir Gemayel go to war with the Syrian army.

Etel Adnan publishes *Sitt Marie Rose*, based on the story of Marie Rose Boulos. The story will be translated into English in 1982

1979
Hanan al-Shaykh publishes *Hikayat Zahra*, which will be translated as *The Story of Zahra* in 1986

1980
Shi‘ite Amal militia enters the Lebanese Civil War, backed by Syria

1981
Ilyas Khuri publishes *Abwab al-madina*, which will be translated as *Gates of the City* in 1993

1982
Israeli military invades during the summer. In September, the Kata‘ib and IDF launch the Sabra and Chatila massacre. ‘Asfouriyeh closes.

1985-1988
The War of the Camps. Shi‘ite militia, Amal, attacks Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut.

1986
Rachid al-Da‘if publishes *Fushshab mustadbaf bayna al-nu‘as wa al-nawm*, which will be translated as *Passage to Dusk* in 2001

Ghada al-Samman publishes the third volume in her war trilogy, *Laylat al-milyar*, which will be translated as *The Night of the First Billion* in 2005
1988-1990

1989
Lebanese MPs gather in Ta’if, Saudi Arabia to negotiate, vote on and sign a treaty to end the war.

1990
The Lebanese Civil War is declared over.

1990-1991
The Gulf War begins between Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

1991
Law No. 84 is passed, granting a general amnesty which absolves all militias and armed actors of responsibility for crimes committed before March 1991, with the exception of political and religious assassinations. All militias are required to disarm with the exception of Hizballah.

1992
Clashes break out between Israeli military and Hizballah in southern Lebanon. Hizballah becomes a party in the Lebanese parliament.

1993
Huda Barakat publishes *Ahl al-hawa*, which will be translated as *Disciples of Passion* in 2005.

1996
New clashes between the Israeli military and Hizballah in southern Lebanon; Israeli massacre in the town of Qana recalls earlier war violence.

Lebanese government announces a commission to begin drafting a national history textbook. The work is never completed.

Miral al-Tahawy publishes *Al-Khiba`,* which will be translated as *The Tent* in 1998.

Fadia Faqir publishes *Pillars of Salt*.
1999
Law No. 434 is passed declaring those still missing from the Lebanese wars, “dead”

2000
Syrian and Israeli troops begin to withdraw from Lebanon

Syrian President Bashar al-Asad releases 50 Lebanese prisoners from the 1975-1990 war and its aftermath from Syrian jails

Assad Chaftari issues his public apology in a letter to the nation published in Al-Nabar newspaper

Walid Raad begins work on *My neck is thinner than a hair*. Work on this project will continue until 2001

1997
Joana Hadjithomas and Khali Joreige begin work on *Wonder Beirut*. Work on this project will continue until 2006

1998
Najwa Barakat publishes *Ya Salaam*, which will be translated as *Oh Salaam!* in 2012

Walid Raad begins work on *Let’s be honest the weather helped*. Work on this project will continue until 2006

2001
Umam Documentation & Research cofounder Monika Borgmann begins research for her documentary on the Sabra and Chatila massacre. She will be forced to restart when her interview subjects are arrested

2004
UNSCR 1559 calls for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Lebanon

2005
Prime Minister Rafic Hariri assassinated

2002
Ilyas Khuri publishes *Yalu*, which will be translated as *Yalo* in 2008
All remaining Syrian military and intelligence actors depart Lebanon pursuant to UNSCR 1559

2006
Outbreak of war between Israel and Hizballah. IDF bombs Khiam, the former clandestine prison which ex-prisoners had turned into a museum

2007
UNSCR 1757 establishes the Special Tribunal for Lebanon

2008
Hizballah opens its Resistance Museum in Mleeta

Mona El Hallak begins to design Bayt Bayrut museum

2009
Borgmann and Slim release In Place

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige release Faces

2010
Umam Documentation & Research conducts its survey of former combatants in the war

2011
Outbreak of war in Syria as civilians call for the ousting of President Bashar al-Asad

2012
Eliane Raheb releases Layali bila nawm

2013
Ghassan Halwani releases We've got visitors coming over

2018
Lebanese parliament passes a law restoring the status of “missing” to those who had since been declared “legally dead”
2019
Protests in Lebanon turn into a months-long campaign against the government

Kata’ib Party announces the opening of the Kata’ib Independence Museum

Ghassan Halwani releases short documentary film, Erased, Ascent of the Invisible, based in part on his 2013 project
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Biography

Renée Michelle Ragin is a New York City native. She received her Bachelors in History and Literature from Harvard University in 2010 with a certificate in Spanish. Her honors thesis, *Picking up the Pieces: The Literary Renegotiation of History in the Post-Trujillo Dominican Republic* was the starting point of her interest in the relationship between political and psychic violence and forms of cultural expression. From 2010 to 2014, Renée served with the US Department of State as a Public Diplomacy-coned Foreign Service Officer, with tours of duty in Washington, D.C. and Saudi Arabia. She received her PhD in Literature from Duke University in 2020.

Her publications to date include “No Guilt, No Shame: Discerning Signs of Post-Conflict Moral Injury in Atmospheres of Political Impunity” (forthcoming with the *Journal of Veterans Studies*); “Contemporary Epistemologies of Militarization in the Global South: Palimpsests and accumulative processes in Lampedusa and Lebanon” (the introduction to her co-edited special issue of *Cultural Dynamics* entitled “Militarizing the Global South”); “Women’s literature of the Lebanese Civil War” in *The Literary Encyclopedia*; and, “Haunting the Barzakh: The Wartime Émigré in Ghada al-Samman’s *Al-Qammar al-nurabba’*” in *Mashriq & Mahjar*, in addition to a number of book and film reviews as well as interviews and blog posts.

She has been the recipient of Duke University’s Dean’s Graduate Fellowship; a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) grant for the study of Arabic; a grant from the Academy of Global Humanities and Critical Theory in Bologna, Italy; and a research collaboration grant from the Duke Support for Interdisciplinary Graduate Networks.