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The Art of Conflict

The Rise and Rise of Post-War Lebanese Contemporary Art

Contents

I - Research relevance and scope of interest

This paper examines the conditions of Contemporary art production in Lebanon, triggered by two distinct historical events: firstly, the Civil War that spanned from 1975 till 1990, and secondly the October 2019 revolution. These events act as catalysts for art production, inspiring generations of artists, creatives, and thinkers, allowing them to produce period-specific art in Lebanon and the region. What is primordial to note, here, is that these two events had almost contradictory outcomes: the first provided artists with the unique opportunity to reflect and critique a peculiar reality, while the second inspired a whole population to express its collective frustration and imagination.

In order to explore the previous statements, the following research question is the central focus of this narrative: How did contemporary art evolve simultaneously with historical events in Lebanon from 1940 to 2020? Could the paradigm shift in collective expression provide a new argument in favor of the exclusivity and agency of art production in the country? It seems likely that, after the recent succession of political and cultural happenings in the country, we are arriving at a place where Art is unconsciously becoming an instrument for all.

In order to answer this research question, the adopted methodology will consist of a three-dimensional approach that will comprise the following: Firstly, I shall research the importance and relevance of art as a tool for social and political critique, and its role in society as an agent of expression and change in accordance with the overruling paradigm of each historical period. Then, I shall compare the Lebanese population's status quo with the evolution of a primordial public space – Martyr's Square – that clearly mirrors contextual Political and Artistic circumstances of respective times. Lastly, I shall select and analyze relevant pieces of contemporary art that clearly critique and respond to these previously mentioned periods, demonstrating how historical happenings have generated specific artistic styles and methods that are strongly vernacular and expressive. This methodological approach shall be the base of three emphatic arguments points.

Left: Raad, W. (1994). *Sweet Talks Comissions,* Video Still
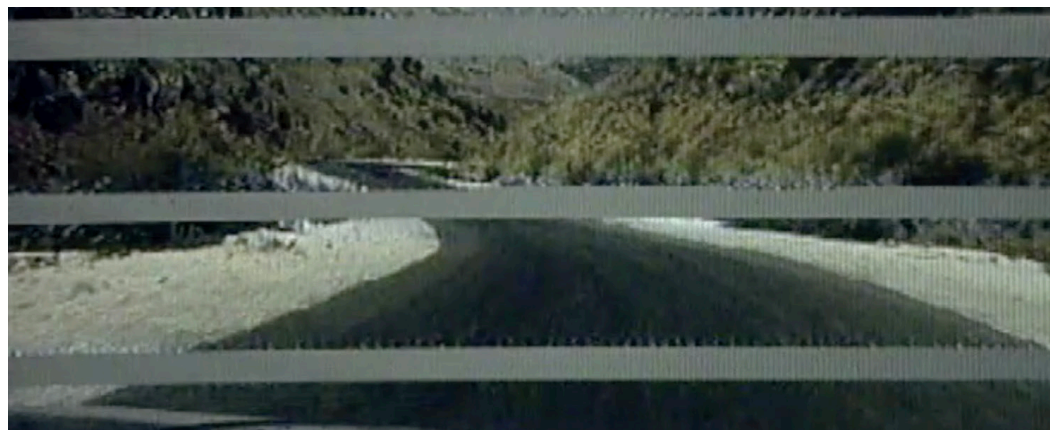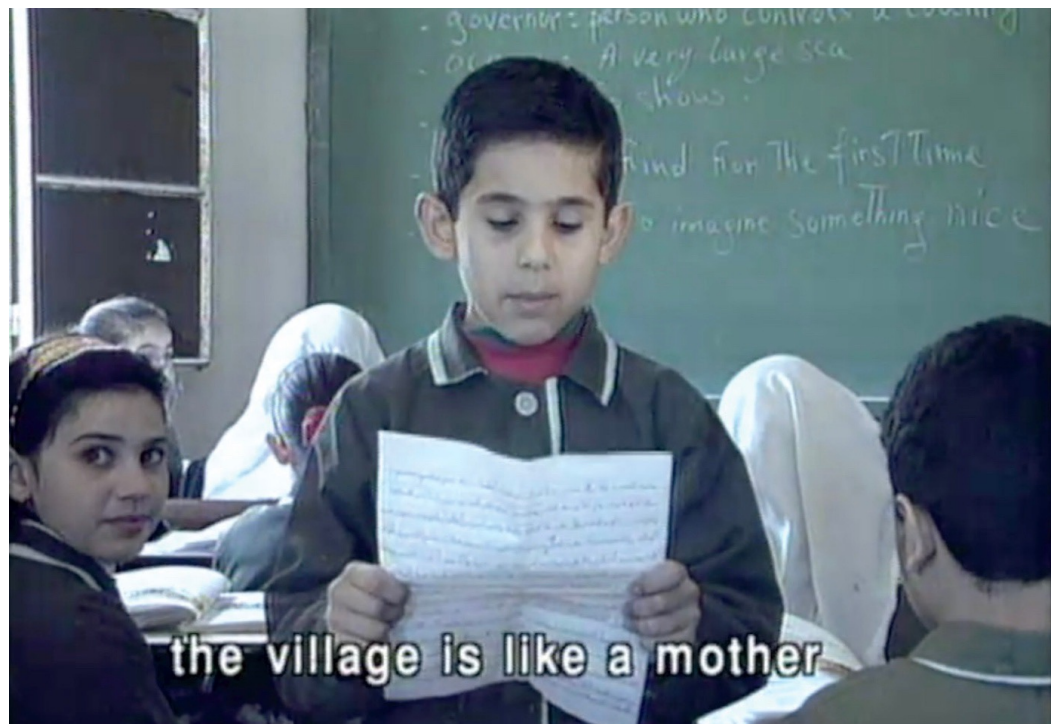
Zaatari, A. (1997). *All Is Well on the Border*. Video stills from BetacamSP video.

II - Contemporary art as a tool for social and cultural revolutions

"When the war ended in Lebanon, it was like it never happened" [1]

1. (Anonymous, 1992)

"While destructive, war is a generative force like no other." [2]

2. Barkawi & Brighton (2019), *Concepts and Histories of War*. Millenium

It is firstly important to provide the research with a theoretical and historical framework that centers the scope of this paper and justifies both the choice of topic and the methodology used throughout this thesis. The particular interest lies in the importance of visual culture – generated from decades of war and conflict in Lebanon – in depicting, denouncing, and portraying different facets of society, creating a context and platform for both artists and users to reflect on the past – and more importantly learning from it. With the absence of an official narrative or objective historical depiction of the events that took place in Lebanon after 1975, it is the Artist's word that is here taken as prime agent in the narrative.

Here, it is important to delineate the audience, or 'reach' of these mentioned artists. While highly critical, the role of the artist generally remains targeted towards a specfic audience. This exclusivity acts as an agent for socio-political discourse, but remains inaccessible for the general population, simple for the urgency and priorities in contextual situations. It isn't until well after the war that these works became greatly appreciated, serving as anchor points and references for different conflicts, stages, or specific incidents pertaining to the war. The documentary video *'All is well on the border'* [3] shows this phenomenon. We shall regard the artist as the 'trusted historian' in giving a voice to contextual communities and societies. As Margaret Hutchinson and Emily Robertson state in their introduction for the Journal of War and Culture Studies, "Whether drawing on inherited narrative and visual templates or creating new modes of expression to represent conflict, artists' images of war contribute to broader public narratives." [4]. The artist is then, by a new definition, the sole accurate historian, depicting events through his own methods and art. Akram Zaatari's photo-collage of moments he took from his apartment home in Saida during the war is a another great example of the artist's new role. The juxtaposition of different frames show the sheer force and impact of shelling and bombing on residential buildings. While firstly starting as a hobby of high interest, Zaatari's work evolves with the time to critique complex presents in the country's history. Timothy Ashplant et al. further the argument by stating, "Even while artistic media may seem to be operating within terms of conventional public fictions, they may still create spaces for the representation of otherwise hidden dimensions" [5].

3. Zaatari, A. (1997). *All Is Well on the Border*. Documentary Video

4. Hutchison & Roberts (2015)*, Art, War, and Truth – Images of Conflict,* Journal of War & Culture Studies, 8:2, 103-108

5. Ashplant et Al. (2015), *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration.*

The artists that have emerged after the war gained major public support and recognition from the Lebanese people, being the only people objectively depicting and telling the collective story of the people. Here, it is highly interesting to note that there was an ongoing clash between the overruling political class and the artists, the first trying to 'erase' and morph the narrative and contextual discourse into their favor – aiming to legitimize their public and political identity, while the artists "memorialize the war through social and artistic activities, and produced books, testimonies, films, articles, graffiti and architecture through which the war was remembered" [6]. Visual Culture is then a tool for artists to steer the argument, political discourse, and contextual status-quo in their favor.

6. Haugbolle, Sune (2011). *The historiography and the memory of the Lebanese civil war.*

While rarely objective, contemporary art of the time can surely be used as a tool and argument for social and cultural revolution in Beirut. In 'Art, Design, and Visual Culture', Malcolm Barnard argues that "visual culture may be thought of as the ways in which that structure of inequalities is first made possible and then either continued or contested (in societies)" [7]. So, taking visual culture as a starting point in the methodology, it is then wise to further explore the context through specific examples, rendering the approach and subsequent conclusions based

7. Barnard, M. (1998). *Art, design, and visual culture: An introduction.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Zaatari, A (2006). *Saida June 6th, 1982*. Chromogenic print, 50 x 98 7/16 in. (127 x 250 cm)

on accurate and sound arguments. The specific case of Lebanon is of particular interest in this thesis as the general population has long been stripped of artistic representation, perceiving Art as a secondary, elitist object that generally does not accurately convey a context. It isn't until the October 2019 revolution that a collective expression was clearly active and present.

It is then important to define the different types of art and 'visual culture' this paper will examine. While the different means of expression employed by artist to express their various outputs after the civil war are endless, the main interest lies in mediums that provide the most competent and representative vision of the Lebanese wars. The critical socio-political artist is at the heart of the adopted methodology. In 'Rethinking the Witness: Art after the Lebanese Wars', Ghalya Saadawi states: "in the context of Lebanon, these transformations (in art expression) pushed forth a rethinking of the witnessing position, through a reinvestigation of politics in art and art-theory writing." [8]. It is then being a witness of conflict and war that is the artist's prime tool in production and expression: living through this period and witnessing the different ramifications and effects it triggered is of great importance. It is also framing a witness, being able to convey their narrative, sometimes visualizing it. Through the careful use of documentation, photography, collaging, collecting, and drawing amongst other, a post-conflict narrative is born. Johann Metz states that memory can be an "expression of eschatological hope" and a "category of the salvation of identity" [9]. He further states that "memory is […] of central importance in any theory of history and society as a category of persistence to the passage of time" [10]. Representation and expression are essential for the advancement of a community. Cultural memory lives because there is a need for it. "It feeds a basic need for identity, salvation, hope, and resistance to annihilation". We can further question the previous statements, arguing that the artist and the people are essential in forming cultural memory.

In order to materialize and visualize the different stages of the Lebanese Conflict era and understand the transformation of the socio-political context of the country, Martyr's square in Beirut will be taken as a case study space. It is through this space and the different transformations and changes it underwent from the 1970s to 2020 that the history of conflict will be told: Martyr's square shall act as both argument and counter argument, vessel for expression and oppression, inclusion and segregation. It is the prime mirror of the Lebanese and their collective history. This public architectural space is then at the core of this paper's methodology. For the 2020 Venice Architecture Biennale, a team from Beirut analyzed this square's importance and relevance. In their research publication, they state: "Martyrs square […] has always had the capacity to shape a local collective. Through the ages, the square in its drastically changing forms and names, has proven to remain the people's central space of urban, social, and political reclamation. The continuous erasure of its built fabric has formed its identity and solidified its symbolism and significance." [11]. The significance of Martyr's square lies in its ever-accurate mirroring of the socio-political context throughout the years. Through an accurate depiction of the square's architectural boundaries and the study of human and material flows throughout the space, the selection and transformation of Martyr's square shall be an essential pillar of this thesis' methodology. It is then important to understand the square's historical evolution, and its relevance to the local population. The square holds its name from being firstly used in 1916 as a public execution square during the Ottoman occupation of Lebanon during the first world war. Subsequently, French occupation was predominant in the country in the 1920s, transforming Martyr's square into a French garden and fountain. Hotels, cafes, and theaters flanked the square from all sides, making it a central and essential component of the urban fabric. Between 1920 and 1970s, the Architectural space cemented its relevance as a major socio-political node in Beirut, being the stage for multiple cultural venues, political demonstrations, and social activities.

The series of maps to the right depict the evolution of the square throughout the ages. Each stage of transformation, due to social, political, or cultural factors, greatly impacts the urban fabric. There is a noticeable transformation in the manner people utilize the square as well. It is the most relevant and used public space in the country: since its conception, it was a core space for collective expression and identity. The 1975 civil war and 2019 revolution have greatly changed both the significance and manifestation of Martyr's square importance and existence. It is a space where collective memory and experiences are formed: the square's size and location make it an ideal location for congregation and protests. We shall examine the spatial transformations that have resulted from the two major historical events we are interested in through this thesis, providing historical contexts and thematic analogies in this narrative. This shall be further explored in the next chapter of this paper, where the first historical period under study will be examined and analyzed.

8. Saadawi, G. (2019). *Rethinking the Witness: Art after the Lebanese Wars.*

9-10. Metz, J (1977). *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*

11. Beirut Shifting Grounds, *Temporal - Martyr's Square Scope.* Retrieved January 20, 2022, from https://beirutshiftinggrounds.com/Temporal
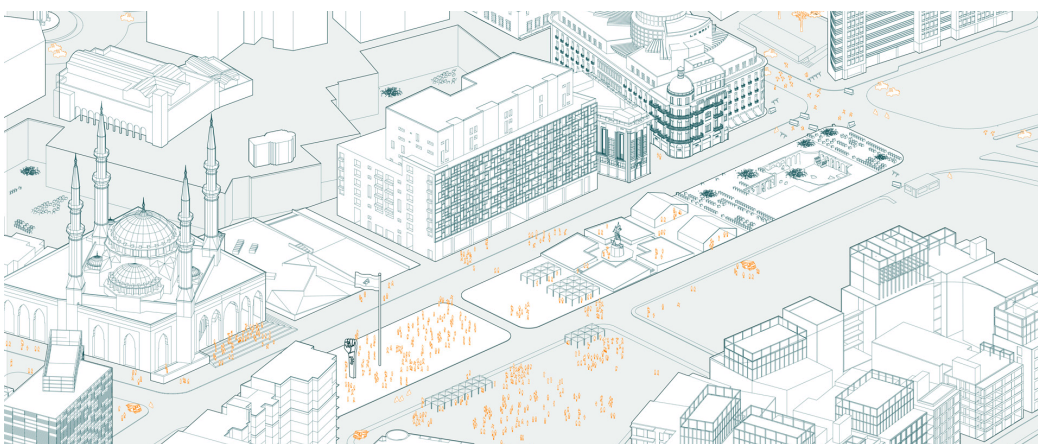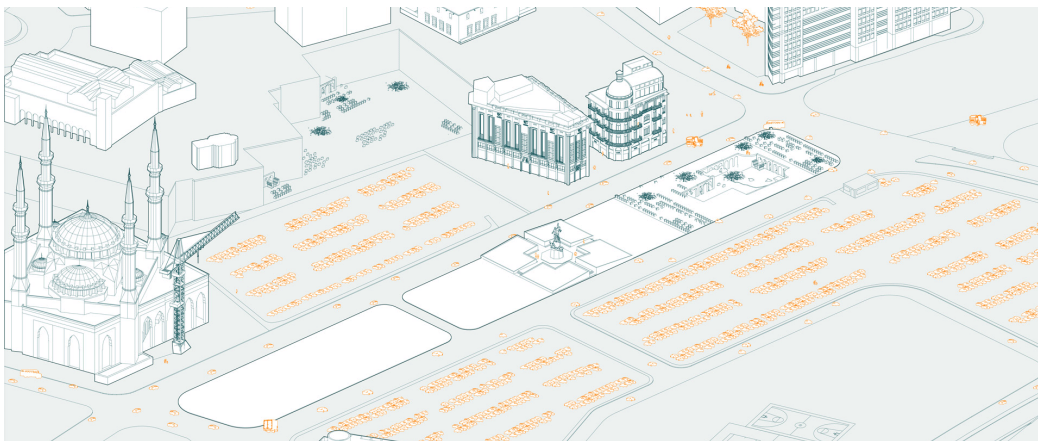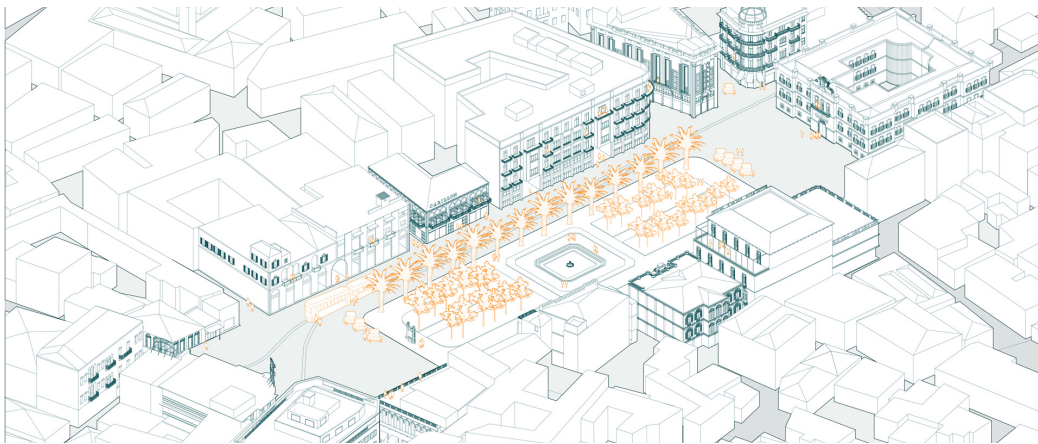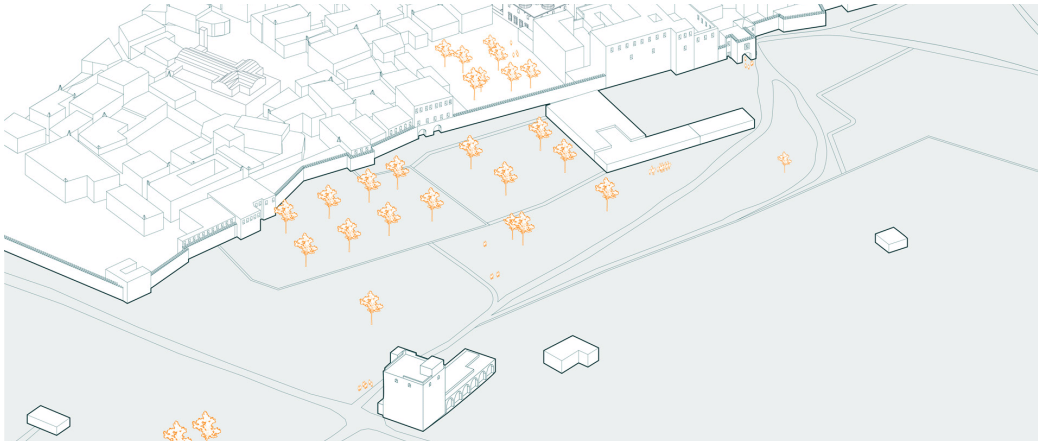
Beirut Shifting Grounds (2020), *Temporal - Martyr's Square Scope.* Marty Square Evolution Diagrams

III - The Artist as author: the civil war

"J'habitais la maison d'en face, Face à la guerre et au Jardin, De morts plantés et de rosiers, Ancêtres oubliés dans la dynamique d'une allée, Dans une cube de mémoire. Sous le balcon d'un oeil, une moitié de corps, L'autre formant un angle sur le trottoir. Une moitié de corps, sign isolé sur ma fresque de haine." [12]

12. Tueni, N. (1982). *Archives Sentimentales d'une Guerre au Liban*

"There are lies of which the ear is more guilty than the mouth." [13]

13. Maalouf, A. (1986). *Leo Africanus*

For this research paper, the ravaging effects of the war and its subsequent connotations are to be primarily studied through their recollection and manifestation in artistic and creative work. In order to do so, it is firstly important to understand the social, cultural, and political context that has led to the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war. It is an event that killed more than 100,00 civilians, displaced more than 30% of the population, and destroyed over 150,000 houses (with 53% destruction happening in Beirut). Several sectarian groups, including Christians, Muslims, Druze (including the further divisions each sect holds), fight for territorial control. Each sectarian group was responsible, or in control of a specific enclave in the capital. It is interesting to note here that, even though the whole country was at war, the fact that the Beirut's center was the most affected by violence and destruction is an analogy with the erasure of a neutral setting where the country's many different ethnic groups can coexist. The capital is then physically divided into two zones: a Muslim 'West' and a Christian 'East'. Both zones are separated by a 'Green Line', a no-man's land separating the fighting militias. Non-coincidentally, this line happens to lead to Martyr's square, due to its largely strategic location between the two zones. The war ended by mutual agreement between all parties involved, as local and international interest in a Lebanese war slowly dies out. The very mention of conflict is absent from official school history curricula, where studied Lebanese history conveniently ends in the 1950s. It is a war with no winners, only massive losses. The green line represented at the left clearly shows this schism. East and west are divided by a no-man's line, hardly crossed.

More detail and description of the events and happenings of the war are not to be further discussed here, as an accurate recollection of events and accountability was never agreed upon. The Lebanese people are, in that way, damned to forget. It seems here pertinent to refer to Nadia Tueni's poem which is mentioned at the start of the chapter. Her recollection of a house in which she resided prior to the civil war is one that is quite graphic and raw in content. The absence of a home, of a spatial manifestation depicting a distant memory, is compensated by a reimagination of her childhood home. In doing so, she creates a kind of 'archive of emotion', a remembrance of the violence and destruction she went through within the confines and boundaries of her home: the garden, sidewalk and mentioned alleyway become reference points for her individual memory. This archiving is done by most of the Lebanese people after the war: the absence of an official narrative, in addition to a complete lack of liability and culpability, forever holds them hostages of a distant past. Here, the selection of the poem as introductory element for this chapter is explained: the poem acts as a mirror of the internal subconscious process that transforms memory into a physical manifestation of an intense happening. While not describing the historical era under study, it provides insight into a population's constant exposure to such events.

In order to understand why these events and recurrences are essential in this research, Lynn Meskel's definition of 'Negative Heritage' is here an important argument. The author proposes that cultures negotiate extreme events affecting their daily lives through their memory. Negative heritage becomes a place where memory and trauma are in conversation. Indeed, Meskel states: "(Negative heritage) can mobilize [societies] for positive didactic purposes or it can be erased, if it resists cultural rehabilitation and incorporation into the national imaginary" [14]. In the case of Beirut, surprisingly, the heritage was both used for mobilization and forgetting. It is also important to mention that these issues were present well after the end of the war. While in the process of 'healing', several questions arise around the rebuilding process. What elements do you

14. Meskell, L. (2002). *Negative Heritage and Past Mastering* Anthropological Quarterly, 75(3), 557–574.

Left: Deville, M (1990), *The verdant demarcation line, downtown Beirut*

15. Fricke, Adrienne. (2005). *Forever Nearing the Finish Line: Heritage Policy and the Problem of Memory in Postwar Beirut.* International Journal of Cultural Property.
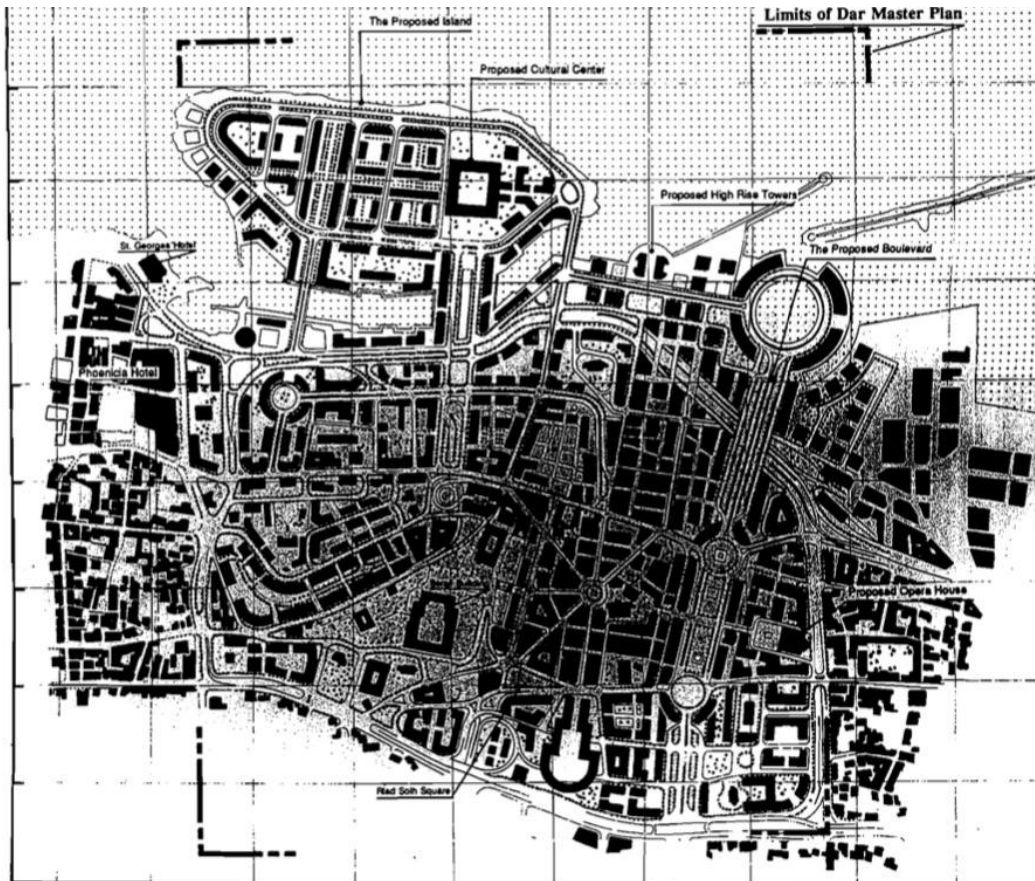
keep in a city that is struggling to reinvent its identity? As Adrienne Fricke states, "If culture is defined not only as what people do but how they make sense of what they have done, the enormity of the political problems of post–civil war reconstruction become clear." [15]. These implications are discussed through the work of contemporary Lebanese artists and their subsequent contextual relevance.

In order to further understand the multiple facets and politics of the era, Martyr's square evolution shall be again observed. As previously mentioned, the 'no man's land' effect was largely predominant from 1975 to 1990, stripping the area of any human, economic, and social activities. The image to the right highlights the reality of the urban space at the time of the war. Buildings were abandoned, others completely or partially destroyed by bombs and shells. A space of meeting and coexistence for the people was then absent. Martyr's square's abandonment was a primary indicator of the deep schism in the contextual societies. What became a fractured, segregated country was preceded by physical manifestations of that break, exemplified by the square's case. It wasn't until 1991 that a company named Solidere reserved full rights and exclusivity in rebuilding the city center, giving birth to what is now called the Beirut Central District. As its name implied, the 140-hectare area was reimagined to become a local, regional and international powerhouse. Steel towers replace the old souk, a luxurious high-end marina becomes the new focal point of the port, and modern buildings and motorways pierce their way into the new urban fabric. This masterplan, and the exclusivity given to Solidere was heavily criticized by the people. In 'A Post-War Urban Geography of Beirut', Michael Davie recounts the reception the Solidere plan received.

16. Davie, Michael F (1993). *A Post-War Urban Geography of Beirut*. HAL Archives

Indeed, he states: "[the proposal] put into question the legality of turning over private and public land to a private company which would enjoy a complete monopoly of decision as to the future role and physical aspect of the center of the capital" [16]. Solidere's vision is severely flawed. It is the opposite of what the people have wanted and been asking for. Instead, it favorizes white-collar individuals and enterprises, stripping the center of its pre-war glamour. Davie further explains the critique Solidere received by saying: "This very naïve prediction also ignores the fact that the rest of the city would not be rebuilt, nor would the basic services be offered to all: the center would be a very favored, almost extra-territorial piece of property for a very privileged few. It would thus place, in the very heart of a now unstable and socially fragmented third-world city, an inaccessible ghetto of prosperity" [17]. The Lebanese capital is nororious for not having any squares, statues, or any kind of personification, representation, or recollection of the war. The building and reimagination of Beirut under the Solidere model greatly contributed to the collective amnesia and repression. Solidere's slogan at the time was "Beirut, Ancient City of the Future". The intention was to preserve 'what is worth preserving'. There was an intention to bring back the country to its presumed golden age, one that never existed. As Fricke notes: "The signals a profound commitment to forget, or more pointedly, the will to amnesia, characterized by a physical inability to remember. If memory is bound up in some critical way with space, then the destruction of that space hinders the process of remembrance" [18]. Solidere was one of the major roadblocks, largely impacting the healing process.

17. Davie, Michael F (1993). *A Post-War Urban Geography of Beirut*. HAL Archives

18. Fricke, Adrienne. (2005). *Forever Nearing the Finish Line: Heritage Policy and the Problem of Memory in Postwar Beirut.* International Journal of Cultural Property.

One can somehow imagine the collective psyche (or collective unconsciousness) predominant at the time. To reference Carl Jung, a segment of the deepest unconscious mind is genetically inherited and is not shaped by personal experience. This forces individuals to share certain intellectual and behavioral patterns, grounded by their common trauma. Thus, manifestations of this collective psyche were captures by local artists and thinkers. As previously stated, artists function as reliable Historians, acting as the voice of the people. The inspirations were multiple. Some choose to represent the war and its many ramifications, while others choose to critique post-war efforts (such as reconstruction, accountability, and mourning, amongst others). Here, the artist is present.

Let us firstly examine the hands-on work of Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige titled 'Pyromaniac Beirut' [19], shown in the next page. Both images are photographs of the Lebanese riviera, notorious for its wealth and the multitude of hotels it hosts on the coastline. At first glance, it is evident that these photographs are destroyed, or rather heavily damaged by fire: the many buildings, hotels, and parts of the skyline present deliberate traces of fire damage all over. The artists' intention is visible: the project Wonderful Beirut follows the story of an imaginary photographer, comissioned by the state to photograph Beirut's icons and landmarks to be turned into touristic postcards. After the civil war of 1975, these areas were heavily damaged by shelling and street fights: the artists then burned the negatives of the postcards, in accordance with the damages caused to the sites, producing a series of evolving images that depict war-torn areas. This series of illustrations helps dissect the collective memory in witnessing a major transformation in the capital. Indeed, the artists were able to capture the ever-transforming, ephemeral state of war-period Beirut. Through their work, we can easily perceive the reactions and position of

19. Hadjithomas, J & Joreige, K (1997 – 2006). *Wonder Beirut: The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer,* face mounted C-print.

Solidere (1991), *Beirut Central District redevelopment proposal*

Youths congregating on both sides of the demarcation line - Anonymous (1991)

BEIRUT

THE LEBANESE RIVIERA

Beirutis regarding major political and social events. The artists are then the voice of the people. It is interesting to comment on the medium used in their work: inflicting damage to the 'structure' of Beirut's touristic landmarks implies the permanent addition of a layer of destruction and transformation. In a way, because of the damage, these sites will never recover their original state. Art is then utilized as a reflection and representation method, where the representation of war leftovers acts as an effective critique on physical, moral, and psychological destruction.

The second work of art relevant in this research is the work of Walid Raad and the Atlas Group, the fictional collective he operated between 1989 and 2006. The artist was notorious for his specific methodology, one that was able to accentuate his findings. Archiving was, for the first time, used as both artistic and resistive method. We shall dissect two projects that exemplarily utilize this specific methodology, and observe its effects. The first project titled 'My Neck is Thinner than a hair' observes the uses of 3641 car bombs in the 1975-1990 Lebanese wars. Photographed, dated, and archived, 49 images of car engines (the only element that survives after a car bomb detonation) were the result of this research, all representing different moments of the Civil War. Through postcards, Raad exhibits his work. The only trace of the artist would reside in this final exhibition: the act of archiving and documentation bears strong effects as an outcome, as it calls for witnesses of similar events to greatly relate to the images.

Raad's second project titled 'Let's be honest, the weather helped' continues The Atlas Group's methodological approach. The statement from the artist reads: "Like many around me in Beirut in the late 1970s, I collected bullets and shrapnel. I would run out to the streets after a night or day of shelling to remove them from walls, cars and trees. I kept detailed notes of where I found every bullet and photographed the sites of my findings, covering the holes with dots that corresponded to the bullet's diameter and the mesmerizing hues I found on bullets' tips" [20]. The resulting work is a series of collages, marking bullet holes on photographs taken by Raad. A rather extensive collection, and mirroring the first mentioned project, the artist is able to capture collective fears. All Beirutis have witnessed these events. The strength of Raad's work resides in the near-objective transposal of events and happenings that have been scarring and destructive to the collective psyche. He is, again, acting as both artist and historian. He is the unexpected voice of the people, without which accurate depictions and reflections proper to the era would have not existed. It is also peculiar to note that his archiving method was heavily appreciated by the Lebanese people, as it provided an agency to cultural and social dogmas.
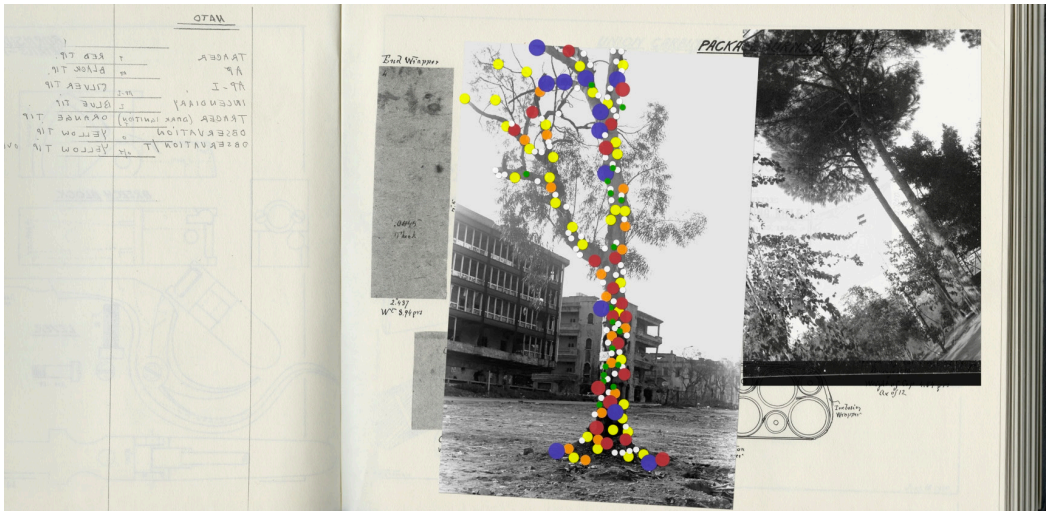
The last artwork, 'We've Got Visitors Coming Over', deals with the case of the missing and disappeared during and after the war. Ghassan Halwani's work comprises of an investigative approach. Despite being born in 1979, the civil war affected Halwani (mostly) indirectly. Like the case of 17000 other families, his childhood was heavily influenced by his own father's abduction. Since then, he was preoccupied with finding missing people posters around the city. For him, the grid-like representation of victims was to be heavily criticized. Most of the faces represented in the poster were either inaccurate, erased, or simply misrepresented – as was the case with his father's poster. His work starts as a restorative effort, where he attempts to complete the missing image with the help of a pencil. Realizing he could not do so to every poster in the city, the second step of his work was a sort of urban restoration. In 'Posthumous images', Chad Elias discusses Halwani's methodology, where he states: "[Halwani] resolved to find the photograph of his father again, even though now the original poster lay concealed under a thick layer of images that had been plastered on top of it. The artist starts the slow and careful labor of unearthing the poster. As the first faces on the poster began to appear, they were unrecognizable after seven years of weathering. Here on the walls, then, was a visual echo of the probable mass graves that lay beneath the streets: commingled bones that are unrecognizable and indistinguishable from one another. Halwani worked to find isolated distinguishing traits, and when he was able to determine fully the identity of a particular subject, he drew in the person's features and listed his date of birth and date and place of disappearance" [20]. Halwani's work arrives as a two-faceted approach: on one hand, it is a critique of a lack of official governmental rescue and finding missions, and on the other hand it is a collective reconciliation with the past. Individuality and humanity is at the forefront of Ghassan's work, as his efforts allow other personages to unify, heal, and come to terms with their respective tragedies. The artist here serves as prime 'trusted' investigator, critically exposing societal and cultural issues in post-war Beirut. The next chapter in this research examines the recreation of the 'artist', as a colossal shift in collective expression takes place in Lebanon after 2019.

The Atlas Group (1998-2006). *My neck is thinner than a hair*.

The Atlas Group (1998-2006). *Let's Be Honest, The Weather helped*. Digital Prints, 45 x 72cm.
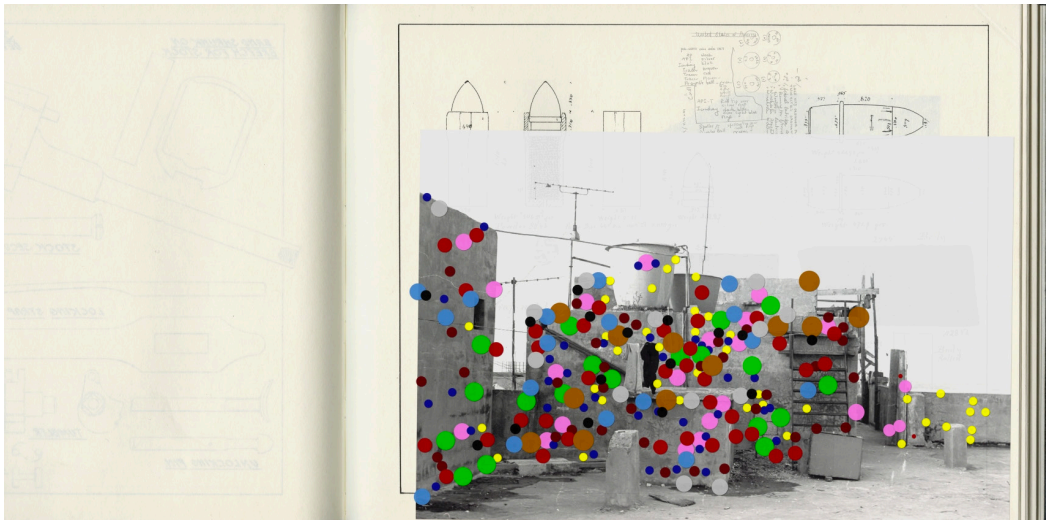
The Atlas Group (1998-2006). *Let's Be Honest, The Weather helped*. Digital Prints, 45 x 72cm.

• جورج إبراه
• مواليد ٦.
• تاريخ الاختفا
• مكان الاختفا

IV - The 2019 Revolution, or the birth of a collective expression

"Write down! / I am an Arab / I have a name without a title / Patient in a country / Where people are enraged / My roots / Were entrenched before the birth of time / And before the opening of the eras / Before the pines, and the olive trees / And before the grass grew" [22].

22. Darwich, M. (1973). *The Olive Leaves*

"There isn't one model of Resistance that are conceivable—solitary, spontaneous, concerted. Resistance can be possible, improbable, violent, savage or necessary. The form they take cannot be absolutely defined due to their transitory and changing nature, but the enduring characteristics of resistances is that they are intricately connected to exercises of power" [23]

23. Hearne, J (2011). *Resistance*

In order to understand the paradigm shift pertaining to collective expression in the country, one must first be introduced to the events that happened in Lebanon in October 2019. A series of wildfires ravaged the country, and the government was not qualified to provide an adequate response. Unimpressed and angered by these events, the people heavily critiqued the country's outdated firefighting response. While firetrucks and helicopters were unavailable, riot police trucks took the initiative to extinguish the flames, further angering the population: the government spends outstanding amounts of money on trinkets to keep itself in power. Two days later, the parliament introduced a new tax, imposing a 6$ monthly fee for the use of WhatsApp in the country. While not the only and main reason for what followed, it was the straw that broke the camel's back. Millions of people flocked to the streets, collectively demanding change. Protesting, barricading major transportation veins and nodes, and surrounding governmental institutions, the country was at the forefront of a revolution, first of its kind in the region. It was then, for the first time in its history, that Lebanon was unified. Breaking the shackles of the civil war and previous socio-political tensions off, the people were reunited towards a common goal: a radical change in deeply rooted political, religious, and social institutions. All political leaders that were once 'sacred' and 'forbidden from critique' – including the Hezbollah secretary general, leaders of the Amal movement, and other civil war era militia leaders – are now demanded to resign. During the two years that followed, there was a sincere hope for change. The unity and togetherness of citizens, young and old, inspired others to join. A common cause and concern for the whole population was born. This research is primarily focused on the collective expression of hope, trauma and frustration that followed. In order to further explore this statement, we shall firstly observe how public space was appropriated and reinstated in the country's urban fabric.

Martyr's square surfaces once more as the main stage for the October 2019 protests. As millions occupied the desolate public space, they would also surround closed-off buildings, gardens, and public squares that were unjustifiably closed to the public. One of the most prominent examples of this spontaneous appropriation is the case of The Egg. Designed by Joseph Philippe Karam in 1965, the brutalist cinema sits abandoned in the Beirut Central District. Heavily damaged by the civil war, this 'place for the people' has ever since been closed off, and restoration efforts to bring it back to life halted. The egg is owned by a private post-war investor, believed to be waiting for the 'perfect moment' to imagine the future of the Beiruti icon. As the events of 2019 escalated, more and more citizens occupy the streets. The fenced-off Egg is no longer considered 'hands-off'. Indeed, as its interior is greatly preserved, it became the central stage for social discussions, political agenda exposes, and reflections on the happenings in the country. The transformation of the Egg from a simple inaccessible edifice to the focal point of change is remarkable. Public space in Beirut is then born out of a dire need for it. The congregation of protesters in and around the building, in addition to a cultural appropriation of a fended off landmark public space, is a truly revolutionary act in a city that did not dare experiment. Indeed, collective expression arrives as an unexpected but greatly welcome phenomena.

As is the case with the egg, several other sites (including a private/public garden, the Grand Theater, and the Opera house, all abandoned) were also subject to heavy appropriation. While perceived by the authorities as acts of vandalism and trespassing, these appropriations hold much deeper significance. Wael Sinno writes the following in 'The Journal of Public Space': "What is remarkable about the revitalized Egg, is that this landmark, once a symbol of the Civil

24. Sinno, W. (2018). Posthumous images: Contemporary art and memory politics in post-civil war Lebanon

25. Awad, S. H., & In Wagoner, B. (2017). *Street art of resistance.*

24. Cherrak, A. (2020). *Arab Cultural Identity*

War, located on the green line, segregating the city, and dismissed as an eyesore by many, is now a place of integration reuniting the Lebanese people. It has become a place of hope" [24]. Public space is then reformed, given a new life. It is reclaimed, transformed into a collective place of expression catering to all individuals from different ethnic background. Sectarianism and political convictions are erased, considered a hinderance, discouraged for the realization of their common goal.

The last analyzed scope in this paper examines the rise of the collective artist in Beirut. Rana Jarbou states: "constructing new collective memories in public, and defacing older ones, exhibits the transitory nature of resistance and its prevailing impact in challenging systems of power"[25]. While many individual artists and street performers (including graffiti artists, installation artists, and others) did create pieces in the city center, the main interest lies in anonymous efforts. Manifested as graffiti, scribbles, inscriptions, slogans, and tags, these manifestations carry a common voice. Transposed on walls, streets, buildings, stores, light posts, the city becomes the canvas of expression. To clarify, vandalism is far from supported, and calls for a peaceful and civilized protest resonated during the entirety of the revolution. The people observe these street manifestations as icons for the revolution. In a period where chaos, energy and an absence of proper protocol and guidelines for these kinds of situations, collective expression instilled itself as the most common and classic and representative mode of representation. Indeed, as causes and purpose evolved with time, these tags and graffities keep evolving, hinting at a growing and conscious society. Here, we are introduced for the first time to not only the voice of an artist that would enable a collective expression, but the individual voices and expressions of thousands of citizens. It is interesting here to underline the role of graffiti and its relevance to this paper. We can then examine Ahmad Cherrak's comments, where he states: "The theme of Arab cultural identity is an important and fundamental question in the graffiti writer's imaginary […] and its conformity with a personal belonging with the local, the national, the Arab, so that his/her graffiti reflects this identity—while it focuses on the anthology of the ego and self as a function to mark one's existence" [26]. The wall expressions become then mirrors to a reaffirmation of a common cultural identity. Through these expressions, we witness the birth of the new artists. They are uninterested in aesthetics and beauty, but rather actively utilize their common sense to reimagine their ideal future. Fear from authority disappears, mouths loosen, and thousands of inscriptions reveal the identity of the people. What ensued consisted of a series of challenges and insults directed at the responsible people in power, clashes with an oppressive police state, and the realization of an existing common vision and goal for the country.

Swala, T. (2009), *The Egg,*

Avadenian, H (2019), *Egg Talks*
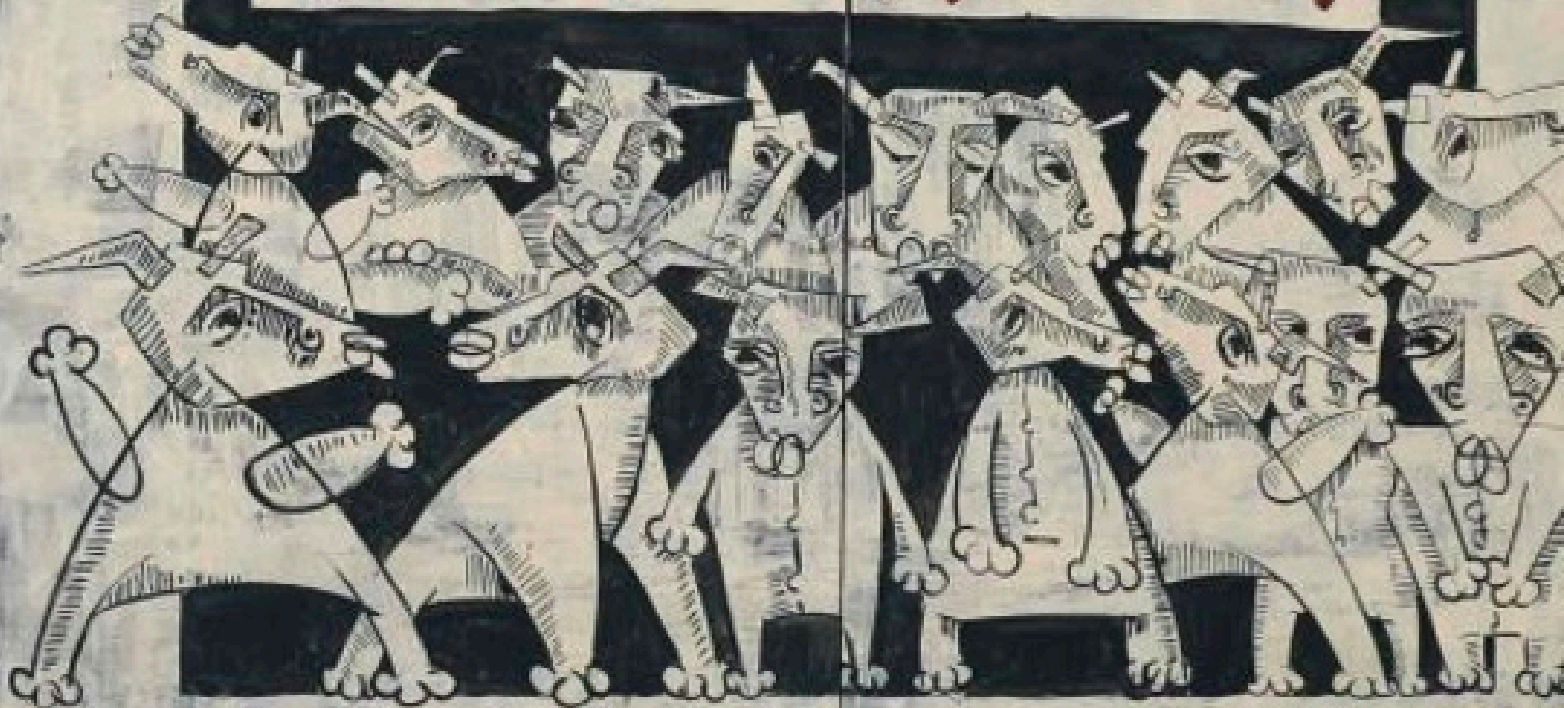
IV - The role of the artist

In order to homogenize this thesis and to answer the initial research question, it is always pertinent to reexamine and reflect on the proposed research and its subsequent methodology. The first argument resided in the examination of art as a tool to interpret a country's socio-political situation. Basing the reasoning on relevant literature dealing with the theme of visual culture, power, representation, and public space, the methodology is then introduced: the different studied mediums, case studies, and scope of this research were then defined in order to center and concentrate subsequent writings, arguments, and reflections. The second axis served as the introduction of the artist as a porte-parole for a general population. This was preceded by an examination of Lebanon's contextual history and socio-political climate. The depiction and exploration of events was mirrored with a case study that acts as an ideal representative illustrative example of the country's status quo. This was further demonstrated by a selection and analysis of relevant era-based produced artwork and research, which illustrated the role of the artist in a post-war society. The last chapter requestions the role and status of the artist in reimagining and expressing appropriate issues. Here, it is proposed that the 'trained' artist occupies a secondary role after the 2019 revolution, in the sense that citizens and revolutionists carry the cause, expressing themselves through appropriation of public space, impromptu tags and graffities, and the clear definition of an ideal future. A common voice is then heard, perceived, and understood to be the real demands of a population.

The proposed methodology proved efficient in the conduction and realization of this thesis, as a survey of the public backgrounds and historical events provided an adequate framework and scope for the research. A clear vision and intention are then constructed. It was able to lead the narrative into specific conclusions and realizations that respond to the initial reflections, while holistically examining specific social, political, and cultural aspects that lead to an alternative understanding of the Lebanese art scene. Contemporary art in the country is then a direct manifestation of the conditions its people face. The need for representation, archiving, remembering, and getting through a certain reality has enabled a strong visual and artistic representation through different mediums. Metamorphosing from an elite few to a thousand common voices, the definition of an artist in Lebanon continues to evolve. Contemporary art is then a timeless agent of change in the country. While exclusivity and specialization gradually fade with the arrival of the people's revolution, a more inclusive and expressive artist carries the torch for a limitless future, one that is unbound by political agendas and oppression.

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Title: Street Art of Resistance
Thesis Relevance: A collection of essays around the theme of revolution and people-produced art, this book is a collection of essays examining the different relations of power. Arguing and proving that street art is the primordial way of expression for the general population, this book is extremely relevant in this thesis as it demonstrates a clear understanding of art in relation to resistance, creativity, and urban psychology.
Citation: Awad, S. H., & In Wagoner, B. (2017). Street art of resistance.

Title: Art, Design, and Visual Culture
Thesis Relevance: Barnard discusses the importance and relevance of visual culture in contemporary societies. After explaining each medium's relevance, strengths, and weaknesses, the author considers visual culture as the primordial means of communication and importance in neo-societies. The importance of this book in relation to this paper acts as a strong foundation for the reasoning and methodology at hand: visual culture remains an integral part of Lebanese residents' lives, a sign and symbol of their everyday collective experiences.
Citation: Barnard, M. (1998). Art, design, and visual culture: An introduction. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Title: The Temporal Lens: Martyr's Square
Thesis Relevance: Beirut Shifting Grounds is the title of the work on the Beirut Pavilion at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale. The temporal lens focuses on the evolution of Martyr's square throughout the ages, explaining both its social relevance and its contextual developments from 1940 to 2020. This work will be used as both a historical reference explaining the development of the square, and as an analysis tool dissecting the different phases of transformation of the space.
Citation: Beirut Shifting Grounds, Temporal - Martyr's Square Scope. Beirut Shifting Grounds. (n.d.). Retrieved January 20, 2022, from https://beirutshiftinggrounds.com/Temporal

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Title: The Art of Reconciliation - Understanding art from the October revolution through multimodal discourse analysis as a part of a reconciliation process in Lebanon.
Thesis Relevance: This paper recognizes the importance of the October Revolution as a main catalyst for the consequent mass-production of street art in the country. Acting both as a reflective discourse and a collection of online data, images from the revolution, and people-produced artwork, the paper acts mainly as an archival entity. It aims to prove that reconciliation of the people with each other and with their past happened through these different modes of Art. It is relevant in this paper as a source exhibiting contextual examples of space appropriation.
Citation: Bergman, H. (2020). The Art of Reconciliation - Understanding art from the October revolution through multimodal discourse analysis as a part of a reconciliation process in Lebanon. (Department of political science – University of Lund).

Title: Aesthetics and Politics
Thesis Relevance: In conversation over German context between 1930 and 1950s, this book examines the relevance of aesthetics regarding literature and art. An interlinked debate between thinkers about Marxist controversies, the authors try to unfold the intricacies that exist between art and politics. This debate is especially relevant in this paper, as visual culture and aesthetics are the main critiques of a political system that has persistently failed.
Citation: Bloch, E. (1977). Aesthetics and politics. London: NLB.

Title: A Post-War Urban Geography of Beirut

Thesis Relevance: This paper examines the main events and incidents that have shaped Beirut's geography after the 1970 civil war. Ranging from a multitude of case-specific historical happenings, the research from urbanists, sociologists, and specialists examines the intricate landscape of post-war Beirut. This paper shall be used in this thesis in order to demonstrate the reality of a period-specific city, and how these changes acted as inspiration for a generation of artists.

Citation: Davie, Michael F (1993). A Post-War Urban Geography of Beirut. 1993. HAL Archives.

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Title: Posthumous images: Contemporary art and memory politics in post-civil war Lebanon

Thesis Relevance: In Posthumous Images, Chad Elias attempts to collect works of various artists, architects, thinkers, and designers that have worked around the topic of the Lebanese Civil War. Attempting to both showcase the work and to give a voice for the general population of Lebanon, this publication reconsiders the collective Lebanese memory after the war. I shall use this book in order to gather specific artworks, images, and examples relevant to arguments present in the thesis.

Citation: Elias, C. (2018). Posthumous images: Contemporary art and memory politics in post-civil war Lebanon

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Title: Forever Nearing the Finish Line: Heritage Policy and the Problem of Memory in Postwar Beirut

Thesis Relevance: This paper questions the next steps to take in rebuilding Beirut after the civil war. How do residents reconcile the memory they have of their history with a new reality that was forced upon them after the civil war? This paper shall be used an argument in this thesis to prove that art could have been the answer in commemorating the collective memory and imagining a future.

Citation: Fricke, Adrienne. (2005). Forever Nearing the Finish Line: Heritage Policy and the Problem of Memory in Postwar Beirut. International Journal of Cultural Property. 12. 163 - 181. 10.1017/S0940739105050150.

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Title: Revolutionary Graffiti

Thesis Relevance: This article examines the importance of street art in conveying a population's psychology, ranging from urban instances of graffiti to complete art installations in the city. The author tries to demonstrate how street art is an important indicator of social resistance, taking examples from different societies, showing their cultural and social relevance. This book is especially important in this paper as it acts as a reference and argument for the cultural relevance of appropriation of public space, subject to comparison with the 2019 revolution.

Citation: Georgeon, D. (2012). Revolutionary Graffiti. Wasafiri, 27(4), 70-75. doi:10.1080/0269 0055.2012.714122¬

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Title: War and Memory in Lebanon

Thesis Relevance: Sune Haugbolle provides an in-depth exploration of the events of the civil war. More importantly, the author examines the Lebanese's relation to this war, arguing that they have never really reconciled or come to terms with their past. Memory is an important component of this work, one that I will be using in this thesis to prove that it is only through art that memory can be addressed and examined.

Citation: Haugbolle, Sune (2010). War and Memory in Lebanon. Cambridge University Press.

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Title: Art, War, and Truth – Images of Conflict

Thesis Relevance: In Art, War, and Truth, the authors examine the generative influences of war itself. Starting by examining the narratives and destruction that is caused by wars, they then

reflect on the effect of these events on artists' styles and inspirations. They prove that war is only remembered through the eye of the artists, giving them prime position in terms of narration of the destruction and aftermath. This is the argument I shall further explore in this thesis.
Citation: Hutchison, M. & Robertson, E. (2015) Art, War, and Truth – Images of Conflict, Journal of War & Culture Studies, 8:2, 103-108, DOI: 10.1179/1752627215Z.00000000065
(Ashplant et al., 37).

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Title: Beirut Street Art: Painting a Revolution
Thesis Relevance: This journal article examines the causes of the October 2019 revolution and, more importantly, showcases examples of artistic and social expression, focusing on Beirut's walls and buildings. I shall use this article to gather examples and illustrations focusing on the remnants of the October revolution.
Citation: Karam, D. (2020). Beirut Street Art: Painting a Revolution. Nuart Journal, 2.

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Title: The fragmenting force of memory: Self, literary style, and civil war in Lebanon
Thesis Relevance: Focusing on experimental medium of expression that emerged in-mass after the Lebanese civil war, this work questions art as a leftover of the civil work, considering its role in being an agent of change. I shall use this book for cultural and historical frameworks, examining some examples mentioned as supportive arguments in this thesis.
Citation: Saadi, N. N. (2012). The fragmenting force of memory: Self, literary style, and civil war in Lebanon. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

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Title: Rethinking the Witness: Art after the Lebanese Wars.
Thesis Relevance: Ghalya Saadawi paints a holistic overview of the artistic scene in Lebanon after the end of the Civil War. Arguing that the end of the war acted as a catalyst for expression that was previously shut down, Art for Saadawi signifies a challenge to representation and testimony, making the artist a witness and primary interlocutor and representative of the contextual political and social discourses. I shall use this source as critique of the role of the artist in art production after the Civil War, and as socio-cultural contextual framework.
Citation: Saadawi, G. (2019). Rethinking the Witness: Art after the Lebanese Wars.

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Title: How People Reclaimed Public Spaces in Beirut during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising
Thesis Relevance: The journal article provides a narration of instances of public space reclamation in Beirut after the 2019 revolution, providing examples and illustrations of these instances. I shall use this source to gather arguments, illustrations and examples backing key ideas in the thesis.
Citation: Sinno, W. (2020). How People Reclaimed Public Spaces in Beirut during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising. The Journal of Public Space, 193-218. doi:10.32891/jps.v5i1.1258

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Title: On being the other in post-civil war Lebanon: aid and the politics of art in processes of contemporary cultural production
Thesis Relevance: Hanan Toukan provides an in-depth analysis of post-war contemporary Lebanese art, as a series of conversations between the artists, the publics, curators, critics and others. It questions the role of postmodern visuals in imagining the world of the future, and the exposure to more global issues and phenomena. I shall use this source as critique of the role of the artist in art production after the Civil War, and as socio-cultural contextual framework.
Citation: Toukan, H. (2010). On being the other in post-civil war Lebanon: aid and the politics of art in processes of contemporary cultural production. The Arab Studies Journal, 18(1), 118-161.