

This is Not a Revolution: The Sectarian Subject's Alternative in Postwar Lebanon

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Abstract

The 2015 trash crisis in Lebanon resulted in the emergence of movements centered on rights and the state's responsibility. The protests and outrage were about an entire political structure that had allowed for such a failure in infrastructure to come into existence. After numbers on the street began to fade, the alternative discourses transitioned from the streets to the May 2016 Beirut municipality elections. My research explores how these actors relate to the state as citizens (a term they themselves use) within a political structure that perpetuates a kind of sectarian citizenship, and asks what being a citizen means in such a failed state, and how alternative fronts can push for a reconceptualization of citizenship, on a backdrop of neoliberalism.

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Introduction

I was set on walking from Mar Mkhayel to Hamra, passing through Beirut's downtown where people protested the waste management crisis that had hit Beirut and Mount Lebanon just a few month prior. The walk was to reach the site where protestors chanted their demands and clashed with the police, and an excuse to snap pictures of the disappearing cultural buildings. As well, Beirut's downtown was left with graffiti and protest art that I wanted to document and explore. In the summer of 2015, there was a wave of protests that was unprecedented in support. These protesters came out not in support of a political party or figure, but instead with the aim of achieving a common social goal: to establish sustainable waste management solutions. On August 29th, 250,000 people (according to the estimate by activist groups), gathered in Beirut's downtown to protest (Beirut Syndrome 2015). Many scenes emerged from these protests and were widely circulated on social media and in the press: an elderly man passionately talked to a riot policeman as he urged him to realize that he, along with the other young men in the line of service, do not belong defending politicians whom they know quite well to be the cause of their daily struggles and hardships; a soldier crouches, in tears after a night of violence in Beirut's downtown area, and protestors approach and offer water and comfort while taking him to an ambulance; a three-meter high wall, which protestors dubbed the "wall of shame," is erected in order to keep protestors out of Parliament Square, but was used as fresh canvas for protest art, while also bouncing back a tear gas canister to the riot police that shot it. Over the course of the protests, the state escalated police violence with excess use of tear gas, water cannons (ironically in a country where access to water is scarce and limited), and rubber bullets. Mohammad Kassir, a 24-year old student, took a blow to his head by a tear gas canister shot at point-blank by the riot police. He was hospitalized and suffered from permanent injuries due to fractures in his skull.

Police beat Ali Jaber to the extent that his right eyeball left its socket. He was rushed to American University Medical Center's (AUBMC) emergency room, but was evicted the next morning because his family was not able to pay the medical expenses. Ali's mother pleaded with the Health Minister at the time, Wael Abu Faour, to hospitalize her son. The health minister complied. I walked along the barbed wire and the soldiers protecting Parliament Square after all of these events had passed. I did not want to lose my phone at the very start of my fieldwork so I ignored the shouts of a soldier telling me to stop taking pictures of the area, and grabbed a cab towards Hamra – it was too hot to walk anyways.

The 2015 trash crisis in Lebanon resulted in the emergence of movements whose discourses centered on the rights of citizens and the state's role in providing these rights—mostly its failure to do so. In this sense, the protests and the outrage were about more than a garbage crisis. They were about the entire structure that had allowed for such a failure to come into existence. More than a year after the August 2015 demonstrations, the waste management crisis had persisted along other infrastructural failures. Although the movements had slowly left the streets, the alternative discourse continued to find its way in the May 2016 Beirut municipality elections.

My research explored how these social movements, which consist of individuals contesting their relationship to the state, operate within a power-relation that they hope to alter the very structure of, in an attempt to reach a collective goal. There were different political imaginaries in the street movements and the alternative Beirut municipal campaigns. They differed with regards to how to organize and confront the state; there was no single and united discourse among the alternative. In writing about these social movements, I begin by asking how these actors relate to the state as citizens (this being the term they themselves use), then I address

how the political structure creates and perpetuates a kind of sectarian citizenship, what being a citizen means in such a failed state, and how alternative fronts can push for a reconceptualization of citizenship, on a backdrop of neoliberalism.

My work is not on neoliberalism per se, but a version of its workings is evident in the production of sectarianism and of the sectarian citizen in Lebanon. I draw on a basic definition given by Harvey (2005: 2):

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.

Among other things, the institutional framework includes privatized (formerly public) institutions, the government's active role in deregulating the business environment, and the abandonment of social services and programs, all of which add to persisting inequalities. In the case of Lebanon, such practices have continuously undermined public services and the citizens' quality of life.

By sectarianism, I refer to a context-specific system in which sect is a marker of both political and social identity, and through this identity, the relationship between the citizen and state in modern Lebanon is defined and governed by. In my work, sectarianism is a social and political phenomenon (Cammett 2014, 11). It is an apparatus "whose purpose is control and management" (Rabinow 2009, 50). An apparatus is the network that is established through the heterogeneous grouping of its elements, which are the discourses, institutions, policies and laws, and in sum, "the said and the not-said" (Foucault 1994, 298). Sectarianism is deeply entrenched in Lebanese politics and society such that these elements operate in the most detailed aspects of the everyday. Rabinow writes, (2009, 52):

He [Foucault] identified the apparatus as characterized by changes in the position of its elements, the multiplying modifications of its functions, an overall articulated strategic intent, albeit an appropriately flexible one. The apparatus embodied a kind of strategic bricolage, a bricolage articulated by an identifiable social collectivity. It functioned to define and to regulate targets constituted through a mixed economy of power and knowledge.

The study of the organized mobilizations that took the streets of Beirut in 2015, as well the municipality campaigns that ran for seats in the Beirut municipal council, is anthropologically rich. These alternative movements exist within a complicated assemblage of socio-economic injustices, sectarian politics, and corruption, and these factors extend regionally and internationally. My research explores the different political imaginaries that emerged out of the street mobilizations of 2015 and transitioned into the Beirut municipality campaigns of 2016. My focus on the political imaginaries of the alternative also has the underlying goal of understanding activism vis-à-vis gender, class, and other intersectionalities. I use “alternative” as a broad term, meant to encompass people who advocate for social reform outside of the prominent sectarian discourse, a discourse that is the starting point of my anthropological work on the alternative. The alternative are those who are not in power, although that does not necessary mean they were nonpartisan, since activists belonging to out-of-power political parties have also advocated for reforms in the face of sectarianism. The category of the alternative is not rigid, it contains different configurations and possibilities of what it can look like. What gives it coherence is its relation of contestation to the ruling political elite within the sectarian structure. For my purposes here, the “ruling class” can be understood to refer to a set of prominent political figures that emerged with amnesty after their involvement in the 1975-1990 Lebanon civil war. These prominent figures represent their corresponding sects in a distribution of power planned out by the Ta’if Agreement of 1989 that helped end the war. The President must be a Maronite

Christian, the Speaker of the Parliament, a Shi'a Muslim, and the Prime Minister, a Sunni Muslim. The parliament elected Michel Aoun to the presidency in October 2016, filling a presidential gap that had lasted approximately two and a half years. Aoun, referred to as the "General" due to his military history, was a prominent actor in the war alongside Druze leader Walid Jumblat, head of the Progressive Socialist Party, Shi'a leader Nabih Berri, head of the Amal Movement and Speaker of the Parliament since 1992, Christian leader Samir Geagea of the Lebanese Forces, and Christian leader Samy Gemayel head of the Lebanese Phalange Party, among others. This oligarchy is not a fixed class of people, since it includes other individuals who are may be family members, but also partisan people with whom alliances are struck with.

I use "imaginaries" in order to explore how the alternative under study navigated and created different discourses within the political context. I draw on Taylor's concept of the social imaginary, which is "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings... carried in images, stories, and legends" (Taylor 2002, 106). This is, he adds "that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor 2002, 106). Taylor gives the example of a demonstration as an act which relies on and makes sense within a shared social imaginary (2002, 108):

this act is already in our repertory. We know how to assemble, pick up banners, and march. We know that this is meant to be within certain bounds, spatially (don't invade certain spaces), and in the way it impinges on others (this side of a threshold of aggressivity; no violence). We understand the ritual.

The social imaginary allows a wide understanding of the relations that exists between one another, as well as the relations to power structures, all of which frame practices as either acceptable and unacceptable behaviors to certain groups. The social imaginary shapes and is also dependent on people's relations, realizations, and interactions with the world, its peoples, and its

institutions. New understandings are formed and integrated within the existing imaginary—they are as dynamic as the human relations that form them. In order to discuss the narratives and discourses held and shared by the alternative, I repurpose the discussion of the social imaginary to the political, which in turn allows me to work with such a concept in its nuances in a specific context. My fieldwork in Beirut with and around activists allowed me to map the political imaginaries of activists, which I conceptualize as the “ideological political” and the “apolitical technocratic.”

Methodology

Trash cannot be ignored due to its experiential impact when found abundantly in the “wrong” places. It forces everyone to deal with it—even those who are apathetic—since it successfully encroaches on everyday spaces and follows people to the front steps of their homes. In this, it offers a significant site for anthropological research because, as an infrastructural failure, it is telling of the bigger context it exists in. Infrastructure as “an unsteady, flaky accretion of discourses, materials, practices, and technologies that actively need to be bound together through technopolitical projects” (Anand 2015), hence, the July 2015 crisis can be sourced back to a political system that had allowed the breaking point to happen due to corrupt waste management policies that had accumulated over the years. Beyond the vulnerability of their material constituents, infrastructures as signs and symbols contain a “multilayeredness” that “makes them such productive objects of ethnographic inquiry” (von Schnitzler 2015). By looking at infrastructure as a political product, which is what the activists were doing as well, I could link past and present governments and the pre-existing social and political structures that had allowed for its creation. A few days after arriving in Beirut in March of 2016, I became

aware of the transition in battlefronts from the streets to the municipality. I focus on the investigating and characterizing the ideological political and the apolitical technocratic political imaginaries which emerged in these protests and the electoral campaign, which also exhibited much-established continuities. I followed the political imaginaries as they transitioned to the municipality elections and solidified, as this took place.

My own position to the state cannot be neutral and I do not claim it to be. As a Lebanese youth myself, I supported past protests and movements that went against the sectarian regime, but were limited in numbers and did not achieve as much momentum as the mobilizations under study. Students and groups organized protests and assemblies that tackled the most pressing matter at the time. People took the streets to protest the unconstitutional and illegal extension of the parliament, to demand a law that would protect women from domestic violence after a series of deaths of women at the hands of their husbands, and to march for secularism, among others. In the position of both anthropologist and, in a way, the subject under study, my political and emotional engagement with the alternative pushes my position further away from what some might call objectivity. I attempt to embrace what positives this position can deliver. My local background knowledge is “as a tool for generating insights and understandings,” which otherwise could be “obscured by more objectivist approaches” (Juris and Khasnabish 2013, 9). Nonetheless, I aimed at a “soft” objectivity by holding equal distance from the different imaginaries of the alternatives. As I listened to how each group situated themselves in the common context of sectarianism, and how they explained their discourses and political imaginaries, I did not have an already established answer in the back of my head. I did not know what the best course of action for the alternative was, and at the time of my fieldwork, I could not advocate for one discourse rather than another. I went along with what the field had to offer

in terms of political imaginaries. This was ethnographic work in which the anthropologist was politically, academically, and even emotionally invested and committed to the movement. Between what Hale terms *activist research* vs. *cultural critique*, I undertook *activist research* (2006, 97):

a method through which we affirm a political alignment with an organized group of people in struggle and allow dialogue with them to shape each phase of the process, from conception of the research topic to data collection to verification and dissemination of the results

While *cultural critique* may profess political solidarity, it does not necessitate direct involvement in the struggle under study. Instead, *activist research* entails dual loyalties—to academia and to the political struggle that extends beyond the university setting and that will continue to exist and unfold irrespective of academia (See Hale 2008). My work does not end at the submission of my research. I too participate in and want to shape the political imaginary in which my subjects participate. People that I've met and talked with throughout my fieldwork guided my research, producing knowledge “through a dialogue among politically situated actors” (Hale 2006, 100).

The first phase of fieldwork took place in Beirut from October through November 2015, during which time I made arrangements for my second period of fieldwork. Once again in Beirut in March 2016, I conducted a total of 16 interviews with protest organizers, activists, researchers, and activists from the alternative Beirut municipality campaigns. My participant-observation involved attending town hall meetings organized by campaigns and groups, open house sessions, lectures series at universities, informal meetings, and occasional chats and outings. Although students belonging to various educational institutions across the country contributed to the alternative mobilizations, I limited my focus to student clubs at the American University of Beirut (AUB) who had actively participated in the protests—the most prominent being the

Secular Club and the Red Oak Club. Each club has a mission statement, goals, and history, all of which govern the dynamics through which it operates. As well, the most prominent campaigns of the street mobilizations were You Stink and We Want Accountability. It is widely accepted that You Stink triggered the most recent series of protests. Within the very first days of waste management crisis, the You Stink hashtag emerged on social media, in Arabic and English, meant to draw attention to the situation and to the state's failures. When the movement began to grow in momentum and started attracting numbers on the streets, different campaigns began to emerge such as We Want Accountability, among others. Even though the campaigns shared common grounds, each have their own mission statement and set of goals. You Stink limited their movement to the waste management crisis, while We Want Accountability expanded their identity to tackle the overall failures of the state.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter One, *The History of The (Re)Production of Sectarianism*, I draw on local historians' narratives in order to provide a historical context to the present sectarian apparatus. Placing sectarianism and its discourses within history, rather than outside, disputes the assumption that sectarianism is an innate feature of religiously plural societies and communities. "There is nothing inherent in the practice or interpretation of a religion that necessitates its translation into a political identity," states Cammett, "rather, sectarian identity becomes politically salient through the witting and unwitting actions of political actors" (2014, 11). In the chapter I outline main historic events and actors that helped in legitimizing and solidifying sectarianism as a mode of political and social governance starting in Ottoman times, leading to the context that brought about the waste management crisis in Beirut and Mount Lebanon in 2015. Here, history is a tool

that legitimizes the alternative's struggles against the sectarian system by presenting sectarianism as historically contingent rather than deterministic (See Rabinow and Rose 2003). By doing so, the alternative can contest sectarianism and frame their struggle as reasonable rather than utopic. By understanding the constituents of sectarianism, this beast can be demystified and its weaknesses can be highlighted, which give the alternative an opportunity to strategically strike. Like Makdisi, my aim is not to "figure out who supposedly 'caused' sectarianism," but instead set to position the alternative within a history that extends into the present (2002, 180).

Makdisi frames sectarianism in Ottoman times as a break and emancipation from tradition, since it created space for non-elite to participate in politics, while in modern Lebanon it has become the dominant structure that the alternative was attempting to break through. As Rabinow explains about apparatuses, "That initial response to a pressing situation can gradually be turned into a general technology of power application to other situations. The apparatus is a kind of formation" (Rabinow 2009, 54). The sectarian apparatus perpetuates dominant power/knowledge relations, but not in identical forms; it is in constant formation.

Chapter Two, *The Sectarian Citizen*, addresses citizenship in modern Lebanon, a sectarian citizenship, which perpetuates and legitimizes differences. Being a citizen in a sectarian state, governed by the sectarian apparatus, renders all citizens sectarian citizens, irrespective of their involvement in sectarian discourses and institutions. The chapter explores how such a citizenship is formed and how the consequent inequalities are perpetuated among citizens through sectarian institutions, discourses, and other subtle and not-so-subtle elements. A sectarian citizen is the citizen who accesses their rights and services through sectarian identity, which is the only form of access possible due to dominance of the apparatus. In turn, the sectarian citizen develops certain characteristics in relation to the apparatus, of which I elucidate

three: Othering, resiliency, and, pragmatism. In recognition of citizen agency, I explore how they work the system in order to facilitate everyday life and how they have adapted to ensure that the day-to-day goes smoothly as possible. From here I narrow my discussion to the activists, those who actively contest the apparatus despite still being within the workings of its elements. Chapter Three, *The Political Imaginaries of the Alternative*, then turns to the discussion of the political imaginaries that have become significant within the field, most prominently expressed within the discourses of the alternative municipality campaigns. The chapter explores the contrast between those repulsed by politics yet who still engage in the alternative mobilizations (the “apolitical” technocratic imaginary), and those who advocated for political organization within the alternative (the ideological political), and the differences between them. The technocrat’s pragmatism impedes the political’s goals while the political alienates the technocrats and the disenchanting population. Between these two, an everyday demonization of politics and political action shapes the political imaginaries of not just the alternative under the study, but for the population who have forsaken political involvement in any form.

This ethnography attempts to provide the historical context because it indeed weighs heavily on the alternative and its imaginaries. The weight perhaps sinks it deep into the ground, but as seeds, the deep soil might just be an appropriate environment for some sort of growth of an alternative capable of successfully contesting this dominant sectarian apparatus. The ethnography then continues to explore how the sectarian subject has been created and perpetuated, in turn exploring the possible ways through which this subject both adapts and contests the apparatus through the everyday as well as through political imaginaries and actions. The discussion finds its way by gravitating to the question of political organization, especially in the light of many “failures” of Arab uprisings. What manifested on the ground in Beirut in 2015

and 2016 may not be a revolution, as many had hoped of, but nonetheless it presented a shift in discourse aimed at mobilizing people to contest an apparatus that continuously threatens the livelihoods and prosperity of individuals, communities, and Lebanese society as a whole.

Chapter One:

The History of The (Re)Production of Sectarianism



- Locals of Mar Mkhayel at a Beirut Madinati town hall meeting

Beirut Madinati¹, one of the alternative campaigns that ran for the Beirut municipality council in 2016, organized town hall meetings in a few of the capital's neighborhoods prior to the election date. The town hall meetings were meant to introduce the campaign to the local residents as well as give them space to sound their concerns. Beirut Madinati introduced themselves, their ten-points program, and presented sets of questions that were specific to each of the neighborhoods they were in. The meetings were set in hidden and disappearing public spaces but were nonetheless inviting to curious locals who were asked to join in and take the floor. One of the town hall meetings was set in a small park that hosted a few trees, but even then cement didn't leave much room for soil. The little park was a few minutes away from the high school I once attended and it was only until that meeting that I found out that this little setting was a public space and not belonging to the nearby university. Another town hall was set up in Mar Mkhayel, a neighborhood full of heritage buildings, alleyways, and stairways. All of which are part of Beirut's architectural heritage yet untouched by real-estate developers, but nonetheless still at risk from erasure as has happened in most of the city. Municipalities, especially that of Beirut, have the prerogative to dictate many aspects of government that directly influence the everyday lives of its inhabitants, and they are funded to execute this governance. Beirut's municipality has a "cash reserve of 1.2 billion USD, 170 times the budget allocated to the Ministry of Environment," wrote Jad Chaaban, the Beirut Madinati coordinator, in an open letter shared on his blog, as trash continued to consume the city in August 2015. Beirut Madinati developed a ten-point program aimed at putting these funds to good use,² which, as presented in their program, could "alleviate many of the problems that make living and working in Beirut

¹ which translates to Beirut, My City

² English version of their Full Program can be found here <http://beirutmadinati.com/doc/Beirut-Madinati-Full-Program-en.pdf>

ever more difficult” (2016). Their electoral platform prioritized the inhabitant’s wellbeing, which was refreshing to a populace that had become accustomed to the fear-mongering sectarian discourses that dominate politics.

On a flight of stairs wide enough to seat a humble audience, Beirut Madinati set up their projector and sound equipment and started the discussion. An older woman took the floor expressing her frustration at the political and economic situation of the country, a general discontent and concern that seemed to summarize the situation the country was in. She was a tenant that benefited from the old rent law, along with others displaced by the civil war, which allowed her to stay in her house for low rent in comparison to the current market prices. The proposed change to the law meant that she would not be able to afford rent anymore since, as she told the audience, she was a widow and her son can barely cover expenses as is. The crowd applauded her and others continued to share their personal stories. An elderly man wanted to participate from his overseeing balcony, so he threw down his basket asking the volunteers to place the microphone in it so he could reel it back up. Instead, a volunteer ran up the stairs and delivered the microphone to the comfort of his balcony. People shared their stories of their daily struggles without a sectarian undertone, but I felt that sooner or later someone was bound to bring it up. It happened when one woman took the floor. After sharing her own struggles, she concluded with the emphasis on the need to fill the vacant presidency at the time, not as an urge for the democratic process to be freed from the political deadlock, but in order to ensure a Christian representation and safety. This went accordingly to fear mongering politics propagated by the political elite of all sects—the logic protecting “our own; from the danger of the Other.” I knew that a sectarian discourse would appear, since the socio-economic hardships do not exist outside of this prominent socio-economic and political apparatus. These problems are thus talked

about within the sectarian context. Some members of the audience expressed their dissatisfaction as they rolled their eyes and murmured discontent. Afterwards, another person took the floor and addressed this sectarian discourse the woman was engaging in, urging people to step away from it in order to address what he saw as the underlying and much more threatening issue at hand—the oligarchy’s control of the nation.

The political elite’s refusal to work together and compromise had left the presidency vacant for over two years and disabled the democratic process they supposedly upheld. They extended the parliament’s term twice, violated Lebanese law countless times, and monopolized politics, trapping the country in a political standstill. However, when a common enemy surfaced in the Beirut municipality elections in May 2016, the elite’s parties that were always at odds united. The ‘Byerteh list’- or the ‘Beiruti’s’ list - backed by Saad Hariri, head of the Sunni Future Movement and the March 14 alliance included members from the rival and much demonized March 8 alliance. The Byerteh list lost a few supporters from the public due to the sense of betrayal that came as a result of those alliances. However, the list, the name itself an echo of the distinct Sunni Beiruti dialect, tugged at the sectarian strings of the Beiruti heart in order to secure votes. The list’s campaign slogan, “keeping Beirut for its own,” was meant to proclaim the need to protect the Sunni identity of the city. It produced the ‘Other’ for a political function. This discourse, which excluded a huge portion of the city’s population, was an accurate reflection of the municipal electoral law that prevents the residents of the city from voting if Beirut is not their district of origin. This means that out of the 2 million residents in Beirut, only half a million are allowed to vote (Kassir 2016). As well, a large number of Beirutis have been forced to live outside of the city in towns such as Aramoun and Bchamoun due to the internal displacements of the civil war and to Beirut’s unforgiving housing market. The postwar

reconstruction efforts of Beirut were monopolized by the same oligarchy, which also played a role in emptying the capital from its “own.” Hariri, who himself has no ties to the city, had set claim to who is a true Beirut by using historical sectarian demographics of the city. By fixating on such historical accounts without the relevant context of what had happened afterwards in the civil war and during reconstruction, the oligarchy thereby freed itself from accountability. This sort of discourse is a threat to the sense of belonging that one may have to the city. It reduces the sense of belonging to a sect, stripped from experiences, memories, and struggles.

However, Hariri’s campaign slogan ignited a response from those who do in fact consider themselves Beirutis. I attended a 3-day workshop held by Nahnoo, a non-governmental organization, which aimed at providing necessary information on how the municipality works within Lebanese laws. The majority of the people who attended were not able to vote in the then upcoming Beirut municipality elections due to the archaic electoral law. Nonetheless, in defiance to Hariri’s slogan, they considered themselves Beirutis regardless of their bureaucratically-defined district of origins. Some expressed their refusal to vote in their designated municipality because they felt that since they did not live in their “district of origins,” they did not know the context, and therefore do not have the right to cast a vote that would affect the everyday lives of people who do live there. This voter registration issue added to the challenge of securing votes for the alternative campaigns, since not all who reside and pay taxes in Beirut are allowed to vote in the city. Cammett describes how “it is extremely difficult to change one’s district of voter registration, lest confessional ‘imbalances’ arise that are perceived to disadvantage or disproportionately favour religious communities and their associated political parties and politicians” (2014, 62). Disregarding the number of years of living in the city and paying taxes, the district of registration remains dependent on “the father’s (or husband’s) district of origin” –

a manifestation of how the sectarian system profits off the values perpetuated by patriarchy. Because of this, Beirutis have lived and will continue to live the effects of elections they cannot partake in. As well, the campaigns had to acknowledge those who *can* vote but have left city either due to internal displacement or immigration – “victims of neoliberal reform longing to return home” as noted by Kareem, a friend, and founder of Beirut Syndrome (2016). The low voter turnout demonstrated that these Beirutis remain disenchanted and disinterested in political engagement, despite the efforts of the alternative campaigns. This issue was at the core of a heated discussion at one of the Beirut Madinati open house meetings on April 6th, which ended up with two people abruptly threatening to leave the room after consuming all of the allocated Q&A time for that night. The conversation, or borderline argument, was, more specifically, on the question of how the alternative campaigns could reach out to the displaced Beirutis and restore their right to the city. Skepticism, cynicism, and frustration were as present as they are any other day in Beirut when a political dispute breaks out, whether among activists or partisan citizens.

Political elite in Lebanon are privileged in their ability to disregard sectarian discourses and fault lines when needed, in order to ensure political alliances and safeguard their positions within the state. People who are loyal to elites and their corresponding parties often find themselves in an alliance with a once deeply contested rival, overnight. The core argument of this chapter is to show sectarianism for what it truly is: a socio-political structure and not an innate feature of religiously plural societies. In this chapter I give resistance to sectarianism and sectarian identities a historical weight by connecting the current sectarian system to its history with the Ottoman Empire, European influences and colonialism, as well as to the local narratives. This historical context suggests that sectarianism is part and product of a political

imaginary, one that was produced within a certain historical context and later rearranged/reproduced by the political elite and its institutions. This treats sectarianism as a product of history rather than a practice that exists outside of it. Nineteenth-century sectarianism has been continuously produced, rather than being a deterministic feature dropped from above, or a primordial feature of Lebanese society, as in essentialist claims. By analytically de-linking sectarianism from religion, we are able to think about the history of sectarianism beyond the narrative of religion, allowing sectarianism a history not just bounded to religion and tradition but to historical events resulting from socio-economic and political factors. Weiss states, “not only would this make religious and sectarianism more analytically comprehensible, but it also, in turn, prove essential to understanding the historical foundations of sectarianism and other forms of political identity in the modern world” (Weiss 2010,18). This understanding, I suggest, creates space for the emerging alternative to navigate in.

The 2015 trash crisis in Lebanon resulted in movements that pushed for a discourse centered on the rights of citizens and the state’s role in providing these rights - mostly its failures to do so. Although the movements have dwindled in the streets, the alternative discourse continued to find its way in the Beirut municipality elections. The street movements and the alternative Beirut municipal campaigns operated with different political imaginaries that shaped their decisions as to how to organize and confront the state; there was no single, united discourse. Facing the Byerteh list, Beirut Madinati won 40% of the votes, yet did not win any seats due to the winner-takes-all electoral law. However, this was seen by many as a victory against the seemingly impenetrable political structure.

The Production of Nineteenth-Century Sectarianism

Without European colonial imagination, missionary activity, and Eastern Question diplomacy, there never would have been sectarianism. Indeed, without Ottoman reform, there never would have been sectarianism. But, most important, without local participation, beliefs, hopes, desires, and fantasies of the possible, there would never have been sectarianism. There has never been a pure sectarianism, only narratives about its purity.

Makdisi (163-164, 2000)

Sectarianism's history in Lebanon is often reduced to a fact of life, as an inevitable form of relations governing intersect affairs. The discourse around the inevitability of sectarianism is normalized because the conceived Other is always set to be present and a source of threat, such that only a confessional system that allocates political power among sects would ensure *ta'ayush*- a sought after state of coexistence dominant in the oligarchy's political presentation. Confessionalism is a form of governance that allocates government positions to individuals who identify with a certain sect based on an agreed upon sectarian quota. After a 15-year civil war, the perpetuated discourse is that it's either this sectarian rule under the present oligarchy or the reoccurrence of the civil war. The majority of people opts for the former and adapts accordingly in order to ensure that basic services and benefits are provided for when living in a continuous series of failed states. This discourse continues to occupy politics and daily life. Even the supposed cause of sectarianism—the events of 1840 and the massacres of 1860 in Mount Lebanon—is watered down to a dispute stemming from the “backward” religious intolerance between the Druze and Maronite Christians. Intolerance went against “modern” ideals of coexistence and the acceptance of differences, ideals that set “modern” societies apart from the

“traditional” ones, of course, in European terms. The “backwardness” of sectarianism, as a feature, is not disputed in political stances and speeches, but sectarianism, as an undergirding structure produced by history is openly defended and perpetuated. I borrow the timeline of the production of sectarianism in nineteenth-century Lebanon from Makdisi’ *Culture of Sectarianism*, in which I briefly highlight the events that add up to the complex history of sectarianism that formed the steppingstone for the present political apparatus.

For Makdisi, the story begins when Lebanese society opened to and navigated through the “Ottoman and European discourses of reform that made religion the site of a colonial encounter between a self-styled ‘Christian’ West and what it saw as its perennial adversary, an ‘Islamic’ Ottoman Empire” (2000, 2). Religious identity became the discourse through which the colonial and Ottoman interactions operated in. The disputes within this religiously plural society were reduced to sectarian differences that were characteristics of a “traditional” society in need of the European-Ottoman reforms. Europe’s gaze emphasized religion when representing and imagining Mount Lebanon, in turn setting the discourse through which “modernization” was implemented. Mount Lebanon was imagined along sectarian identities, which became seen as “the only viable marker of political reform and the only authentic basis for political claims” (Makdisi 2000, 2). The political self of the local communities had to be redefined and restructured to go in accordance with the sectarian identities that were at the core of the relation between the political elite of Mount Lebanon, the rule of the Ottoman, and the influences of the Europeans. This is not to say that religious differences were never found in pre-reform Mount Lebanon. Religious differences were present, but they were not capitalized upon in political discourses in nineteenth-century Mount Lebanon. Instead, the social order held by the “nonsectarian political elite” rendered sectarian language of little influence (Makdisi 2000, 36).

The stratification of the pre-reform Mount Lebanon society was along lines of social status and class. The adoption of sectarian divisions came about through strategic moves as the political elite played along with the colonial and Ottoman imagination in order to further their claim of right to land and legitimacy to rule over their respective sectarian community.

At the time, sectarianism did not reconfigure the social order; it did not redistribute wealth and did not tip the balance towards the benefit of the poor. Instead, those who were already in power were shifted into operating in a sectarian discourse. There were those who ruled and engaged in politics, and there were those, the majority, who were subjects to their rule. Prior to the events of 1860, violence existed primarily as “elite violence deployed to reaffirm a rigid, status-based social order defined as the rule of knowledge over ignorance” (2000, 29). Mount Lebanon was divided in accordance to the “various districts inherited by important families” rather than religion (2000, 31). Some of these families maintained their status socially and politically up till today such as the Jumblat family. Walid Jumblat, the most popular Druze political leader and the Progressive Socialist Party’s head, will soon bequeath to his son Taymoor Jumblat his legacy – a transfer already underway as well among other political families in present Lebanon. Sectarianism, as Makdisi claims, had potential to open space in politics for those usually displaced from it through claiming a sectarian identity- such as religious figures and peasants. But the social order was not shaken enough to allow for its reconfiguration. The sectarian discourse emphasized sect and made it a point of tension, it integrated religion into the political structure, which had already been established on a concrete hierarchy of social status.

Throughout the reforms in Mount Lebanon, the Ottoman and European narratives imagined the communities as divided along sect and interacted with the representatives of these communities, the elite, as such. The social status hierarchy continued to dominate politics but

now through sectarian lenses. In 1831, the “so-called founder of modern Egypt, Mehmed Ali” invaded Syria and Mount Lebanon up until 1840 when Druze and Maronite revolted against the occupation with the support of the Ottomans and European powers (Makdisi 2000, 51). After the revolt, with the restoration of status and power, came the sprouts of sectarian discourse (Makdisi 2000, 51):

In the wake of the restoration, the Shihab dynasty collapsed, and sectarian clashes broke out in 1841 in Mount Lebanon between Druze notables, who were returning from an exile imposed by the Egyptians, and Maronite villagers of Dayr al-Qamar. The conflict was, at heart, one of opposing interpretations of the restoration and contradictory invocations of rights and responsibilities in the post-Tanzimat era. This violence of 1841 ushered in the age of sectarianism.

The restoration process gave rise to intercommunal tensions as the elite disputed over land ownership and taxation control. Mount Lebanon was a periphery that did not comply with the “modern” image the Ottoman Empire was trying to achieve at the time. For the Ottomans, the tensions were due to the communities’ inability to tolerate sectarian differences among themselves rather than issues of land, taxes, and class struggle. In December 1842, following the efforts of elites, the Europeans and Ottomans came to a joint “decision to partition Mount Lebanon along religious lines” (Makdisi 2000, 67). The partition created the presence of a consistent Other reinventing society along sectarian lines and identities. This is obvious in present-day Lebanese society where the Other is always present and threatening to one’s sect. These categories have been well established socially, geographically, and of course, politically.

The tensions among the communities exploded in the bloodbath of 1860, where “at least two hundred villages were destroyed in the resulting sectarian conflict” (2000, 118). However, the treaty that restored peace, also further legitimized a sectarian structure in which the elite ruled. Salloukh et al. state that “the promulgation of the 9 June 1861 *Reglement Organique* of the

mutasarifiya of Mount Lebanon (1861-1914) to end the strife institutionalized a more intricate form of sectarian representation,” marking an important instance in the institutionalization of sectarianism (2015, 13).

Sectarianism in Times of Independence and Civil War

Even though the origins of sectarianism is commonly traced back to the 1860 events in Mount Lebanon and the political actions that followed, it is important to acknowledge that reproduction and reinvention of sectarianism of the nation was not limited to Mount Lebanon. Communities in the peripheries contributed to the making of the present sectarian structure in Lebanon through the interplay of local and colonial actors in different contexts of history. The Lebanese Shi'a community contributed to the structuring of sectarianism within the newly founded nation vis-à-vis colonial and local discourses based on sectarian rights and recognition (Weiss 2010). The point is not to recount the history of sectarianism and its actors in its details, but to demonstrate how this apparatus can be contextualized within history and be treated as a product of history rather than an inescapable malady of a Middle Eastern nation. It is not an end result. It is a structure that needs to be constantly sustained and secured by those at the core of it. “Sectarianism,” said a researcher I was introduced to by an activist I had caught up with a few days before, “is integrated in every sectors of our livelihoods to the extent that people feel if they’re outside of it, then they’re bare, they would no longer have any insurance.”

The current sectarian system’s deep integration and dominance over public and private spheres have been further reproduced by two major turning points in the nation’s post-independence history: the 1943 National Pact and the 1989 Ta’if Accord (Salloukh et al. 2015,

2). Through these power-sharing arrangements, the sectarian system came to legitimize itself and expand until it had taken over every minute detail of Lebanese social and political life.

After World War I, the Ottoman Empire was mapped out and divided into colonial projects allocated to the major European powers. The arbitrary borders drawn up by the Sykes–Picot accords of 1816 divided the “Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire into two broadly defined British and French zones” (Traboulsi 2007,75). On 1 September 1920 *Grand Liban* (Greater Lebanon) was born, consisting of Mount Lebanon at the core with a Muslim coastline and valley. Greater Lebanon encompassed various communities that found themselves existing on newly declared Lebanese soil, as authorized by the colonial powers. The nation was formed as “a plural society deeply divided along overlapping sectarian, ideological, economic, regional, and cultural cleavages” (Salloukh et al. 2015, 14). Nonetheless, the nation was founded and eventually gained its independence from the French (Traboulsi 2007, 109):

Lebanon’s independent republic took off with two ‘founding documents’: a formal constitution and an informal verbal understanding between Bishara al-Khuri and Riad al-Sulh known as the ‘National Pact’, the only written trace of which is found in the latter’s ministerial declaration of 7 October 1943. The constitution itself contains a fundamental dichotomy. It establishes the judicial, civic and political equality of all Lebanese as citizens (muwatinin), inasmuch as it institutionalizes their judicial and political inequality as subjects (ahlin) belonging to hierarchized religious communities with unequal access to political power and public office. In this sense, the 1943 constitution left untouched the three main articles concerning sectarianism in the initial 1926 constitution (numbers 9, 10 and 95).

This dichotomy went along with the social construct of communities by not dismissing religious loyalties and sectarian dynamics. Instead, it politically legitimized already established sectarian hierarchies by giving religion space and power in politics, which rendered religious institutions into a governing apparatus. The personal status laws (*Qanun al-Ahwal al-Shakhsiya*) allow each

recognized sect the authority to organize affairs pertaining to marriage, inheritance, and other family affairs and implement them on the compliant sectarian subject (Article 9). Till this day there is an absence of a civil personal status law, meaning that there is no political alternative to the religious institutions. However, this creates a gap that people fall into when they actively dismiss their sectarian identities. Even though civil marriage cannot be conducted in Lebanon, most couples purchase wedding bundles from travel agencies to nearby Cyprus where the Lebanese state recognizes the marriage in accordance with the civil law of the state where the marriage was registered (Salloukh et al. 2015, 33). The state does not have a personal status law to manage people who have legally detached from their sect. When the sovereignty of the state, represented in the ability to govern the citizen and their affairs, is surrendered to religious institutions, then people who people who have legally forfeited their sect are left to fall through the gaps. It is interesting to see what can develop in these gaps where there are no civil personal status laws, perhaps creating a crack in the sectarian structure capable of producing a trans-sect identity.

The pre-civil war period, up till 1975, is extensively romanticized as the golden age of Lebanon. With the continuous series of later crises, it is imagined as a time to return to, a more “modern” time which is seen as far better than this gridlocked present. It is imagined as a time when the heart of the capital was a marketplace bustling with local shops, when there were trains and trams across the country, and women wore bikinis while they smoked their *argileh* in the Saint-Georges Marina - a safe orientalist adventure to say the least. But in fact, tensions were building up to sustain a 15-year civil war. However different reductive narratives circulate that attribute the cause to the wrongdoings of a signal group, which varies depending on whose narrative it is. A socio-economic crisis was underway such that between 1967 and 1975 the cost

of living in Beirut had doubled and the city “had been classified as more expensive than Washington” (Traboulsi 2007, 160). The population attempted to push for socio-economic and political change, but the ruling oligarchy resisted any threat posed to their structure. Political life in the 1970s saw a strengthening of political figures as leaders of their respective sect, in the state while on the verge of a socio-economic crisis (Traboulsi 2007, 170). On April 13th 1975, militiamen from the Christian Phalangist party gunned down a bus heading for the Tall al-Za’tar refugee camp, killing 21 Palestinians, in retaliation of a shooting at a congregation of their partisans earlier that day (2007, 183). That day became the start of the civil war and is commemorated as such, and the bus, an unofficial mobile memorial site, still stands as an ominous symbol of what happened and what may come.

While the start of the war is commemorated, the end is still up for debate. A stencil inked on the walls of the Beirut asks this question, literally: “Civil war [1975-?]” and another stencil answers: “When will the civil war be over? When sectarianism falls.” The 1989 Ta’if Accord ended the war, but it also managed to maintain and reproduced the (more or less) peaceful administration of the pre-existing sectarian political structure. The Ta’if Accord reinforced sectarianism as a form of governance by rendering public policy dependent on a confessional power-arranging troika: the Maronite president, the Shi’a speaker of parliament, and the Sunni prime minister. Postwar Lebanon’s political structure was thereafter caged between the hands of the elderly militiamen. Nabih Berri, for example, who turned 78 year-old in 2016, has been the speaker of parliament since 1992. The structure lost all forms of fluidity needed for political discourse and for the development of a political citizen. Instead, the nation was set for political paralysis and sectarian hegemony. Towards the end of *Pax Syriana* in Lebanon in 2005, the Lebanese political scene operated within a painfully obvious sectarian binary: the Sunni

dominated 14 March alliance and the mainly, but not exclusively, Shi'a dominated 8 March opposition. The Christians, Druze, and the rest of the sects gravitated to either sides of the dichotomy, seeking to ensure privileges for their respective sects. Alternatives fronts (or identities) were incomprehensible: you as a Lebanese were either/or.

Postwar reconstruction efforts were perfect feeding grounds for corrupt capitalist appetites. Infrastructure became a way through which the sectarian system sustained itself; not just in terms of the inflowing monetary gain but also in terms of social structuring. Infrastructure was used to further implement sectarian divisions through distributing what would normally be considered as fundamental “rights” as sectarian privileges. The postwar reconstruction efforts were in accordance with a political and sectarian agreement that the “postwar reconstruction involved a heavy dose of regional redistributive mechanisms determined along strictly sectarian lines” (Salloukh et al. 2015, 45). The Sunni-ruled Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) headed by Rafiq al-Hariri spent “around US\$7.4 billion on contracts with different sectors including education, agriculture, infrastructure, public health, industry, electricity, and waste management, with \$1.6 billion spent without any audit” (Salloukh et al. 2015, 45). The CDR allocated contracts to private companies and their subsidiaries owned by Hariri “namely, Solidere, Geneco, Sukleen, and Oger-Liban” (Salloukh et al. 2015, 45). A select few managed to successfully privatize government bodies due to the 1943 National Pact and the 1989 Ta'if Accord. The internalization of sectarianism, overlapped with private interest and capitalist ideologies, produced a state whose only function was to maintain the sectarian structure. The history of sectarianism is therefore important when discussing the current waste management crisis since the system was/is a direct force in shaping the present's infrastructural realities.

The Trash Crisis of 2015

The municipalities that came out of the 1975-1990 civil war were financially and politically exhausted. They did not have the resources needed in order to fully handle waste management in their areas. The Council for Development and Reconstruction, a body delegated to head the reconstruction process of post-war Lebanon by the Council of Ministers, signed back-to-back contracts with Sukleen, a private waste management company, slowly giving it monopoly over waste management in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Sukleen's authority was extended without consultation with the municipalities, violating municipality laws and decentralized administration principles. The private waste management company charged an inflated rate of \$155/ton of trash while the global average was \$75/ton.

On 21 July 2015, people began to take to the streets of the capital in protest of the trash piling up in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The Naameh landfill, just south of Beirut, a lot that took in over 15 million tons of trash over the course of 18 years, had been shut down four days earlier, the closure date well-known to politicians and the public beforehand. The Naameh landfill has opened in 1997 as a temporary trash management solution in the capital and the Mount Lebanon region, a response to a trash crisis similar to one that launched the 2015 protests. In an interview with *The Legal Agenda*, environmental expert Naji Kodeih “explains how the Ministry of Environment at the time prepared an emergency plan that was ‘acceptable’ in theory as it centered on sorting at the source, recycling, and composting. The leftover waste (15-20%) was to be buried in a sanitary landfill (Naameh)” (Mehanna and Ghamroun, 2015). It was initially meant to hold only a total of 2 million tons of trash but corrupt politics ran its course and deals were made with Sukleen, forcing the landfill to deal with 18 more years of unsustainable dumping (Al Jazeera, 2015). The landfill “indiscriminately accept[ed] around 80 or 90% of

garbage because of a lack of seriousness in the sorting process,” reported Kodeih (Mehanna and Ghamroun 2015). The residents of the areas surrounding the landfill made sure that it remained closed by blocking roads leading to it after the streets of the capital and Mount Lebanon flooded with trash after its closure on July 17th (Al Jazeera 2015). This blockage was not the first of its kind: residents had been protesting the environmental and health risks the landfill presented since the day it opened. However, their attempts were unsuccessful and did not contribute to the landfill’s predetermined closure date. Sukleen’s contract was supposed to end on 17 January 2015 after continuous extensions, even though it continued to charge an inflated rate and violate municipality laws (Mehanna 2015).

On 12 January 2015, the Council of Ministers extended Sukleen’s contract and delayed the Naameh landfill’s closure for six months for the last time. By the end of the six-month extension period, the government was planning on expanding the waste management model of Beirut and Mount Lebanon to the entire country through requests for tenders. In his interview, Kodeih said, “The January 2015 decree broke the monopoly on profits and distributed them among all Lebanese leaders using the logic of ‘to each Lebanese region its own Sukleen-like company’” (Mehanna and Ghamroun, 2015). This proposed divide-and-conquer strategy rendered trash as a new dimension of sectarianism to consider since the regions are governed by the main sectarian figures and trash management was to be divided between them. However, on August 25th the tenders were dropped due to public pressure, which instead, demanded an alternative and sustainable solution (Mehanna 2015). However, no such solution was implemented, instead, the government decided to open new landfills based on the same Naameh landfill model.

By providing a situated account of the garbage crisis in the city, I draw attention to the political framework waste management exists in. As an extension of the governing body, waste management is politicized, whether it fulfills its functions or not. The July 2015 crisis was the result of bad waste management policies that had accumulated over the years. The infrastructural failures can be sourced back to the political system that allowed the breaking point to happen in the infrastructure. To Kodeih, the trash crisis happened because “the previous system of managing garbage and its profits, a system tied via Sukleen to the interests of a single leader, could not satisfy the financial aspirations of the other leaders” (Mehanna and Ghamroun, 2015). Infrastructure is used as a political tool in order to pressure people into accepting a tailored oligopoly of the sector among leaders.

As this shows, sectarianism is the dominant structural form of governance in modern day Lebanon. Even the solutions offered to the waste management crisis reflect how deeply entrenched sectarianism is in politics. “The solution on the table suggests distributing waste on a regional basis, but this by nature also means on a sectarian basis. Thus, talk of Shiite, Sunni and Christian landfills has emerged,” writes Nader a columnist, economist, and Middle Eastern affairs analyst (2015). Understanding sectarianism and the political system that operates within it allows us to contextualize the realities of the present infrastructure, a process needed in order to understand the terrain in which the current unaffiliated mobilizations operate.

Trash did not take long to become a pressing matter as it occupied the streets and presented health risks. Its accumulation, combined with winter’s expected rain, created the potential for disease outbreaks, among them being cholera, a disease putting crowded Syrian and Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut most at risk (Buchanan 2015). The streets became intolerable and the infrastructural break was brutally visible. People could not adapt to the lack of

government waste management services the same way they do with the lack of other services, such as water and electricity. The lack of adaptation became obvious and added to the tensions between the state and the population. This needed a large-scale sustainable and efficient solution. As trash continued to pile up, politicians managed to produce empty statements and vague accusations instead of seeking sustainable solutions, or as some have demanded, resign. For the protestors, trash became a clear representation of the government's failure. A wave of protests was to follow that was unprecedented in numbers. These protests were not in support of a political party or figure, but instead aimed at achieving social and political change in accordance with different strategies, ideologies, and goals taken up by different campaigns.

To understand the series of escalated protests in 2015, it is necessary to provide more information on the political context and its dynamics. June 2013 parliamentary elections were postponed until November 2014 due to political paralysis and the civil war in neighboring Syria (Jalabi 2013). The 17-month extension was an ominous reminder of the past civil war, and this was the first time parliament had lengthened its mandate since then. Writing in *The Guardian*, Jalabi noted, "It comes after two months of failed negotiations over a new electoral law, along with prime minister designate Tammam Salam's inability to form a government in light of increasing divisions over – and fears of violent spillover from – the Syrian crisis" (2013). When it had been thought that the June 2013 elections would happen, an alternative front was preparing to "Take Parliament Back." Take Back Parliament consists of a group of individuals who aimed at "challenging the existing political conversation in the country, using the scheduled 2013 elections," which eventually did not take place (Alabaster, 2012). The platform that offered potential political reform was taken down, as it had become impossible for independent groups to participate in the political body of the nation. Prior to the parliamentary voting session,

“dozens of demonstrators armed with tomatoes marched in downtown Beirut on Friday [May 31, 2013] to protest the 17-month extension of parliament’s mandate under the pretext of ensuring stability” (Al-Akhbar, 2013). The protestors hurled tomatoes at the incoming parliamentarians as they arrived to extend their mandate. The mobilization prior to the voting session did not gather enough numbers and failed to produce public pressure strong enough to counter the unconstitutional extension of mandate. After the extension of the parliamentary mandate was agreed on, on 20 June 2013, hundreds of Lebanese activists gathered in protest. They were denied entry into the parliament plaza and were faced with police carrying batons when they attempted to “break through the barrier” (C. 2013). Although bigger in number than the initial protest, the majority of the population just accepted the extension as being an easy way to break free from the political paralysis, and perhaps a way to retain some security in the country.

There was no surprise when the newly set election date began closing in and the political body retained its stagnancy. The Members of Parliament (MPs) continued “to argue the need to postpone the parliamentary elections, scheduled in November, under the pretext of ensuring stability” (Harbi and Al-Saadi 2014). Hundreds of protestors marched their way to parliament, or the closest they could get to parliament, through the residential streets of the city chanting “We are the state, we are the people,” and “down, down with the extension” (Harbi and Al-Saadi 2014). They gathered around 350 people, a number exceeding past protests but could not muster up the pressure needed to stop the upcoming parliamentary extension (Aziz 2014):

Instead, on Nov. 5 (2014), that same parliament decided to pass a law that extended its term for 31 months, to end June 20, 2017. In May 2013, the parliament had extended its term that was supposed to end in June 2013 for 17 more months. By doing so, it canceled the parliamentary elections that were supposed to be held last spring and ensured a complete four-year term for its MPs elected in 2009.

After the final closure of the Naameh landfill, a wave of protests engulfed the streets of the capital. Individuals came together to organize a movement under the slogan of #YouStink; more movements under different slogans and different demands then budded after individuals began organizing. The peak of the wave was on 29 August 2015 where 250,000 people attended the protest in downtown Beirut. Beirut Syndrome writes: “People came from all over the country to participate, including Tripoli, Akkar, Barja, and from various towns in the South. By night time, a handful remained, and a few clashed with the police” (2015). Smaller protests followed but did not succeed in gathering as much momentum as before.

On December 21st, 2015 the Lebanese government met for the first time since September to agree on a temporary solution to the impending waste management crisis. The decree was to export the bulk of the capital’s and Mount Lebanon’s waste to other countries at a 200 million dollar cost, over the next 18 months (Issa 2015). However, the CDR cancelled the proposed deal with Chinook Urban Mining due to fraud allegations on the account of fabricated permits and the inability to provide authentic ones (Daily Star 2016). In March, the Cabinet approved two temporary landfills in Burj Hammoud, east of Beirut, and Costa Brava, the coast south of the capital. This temporary plan was set out for four years during which the government would be working on implementing a sustainable waste management solution (Basim, 2016). However, people were disillusioned with these “temporary” solutions ,knowing quite well that the state could not be trusted. They had not forgotten that the Naameh landfill had also been a temporary solution to a similar waste crisis, but that it took 17 years and the new waste crisis for its closure to happen. Even then, the landfill was forced open to accommodate the city’s accumulated trash far after its supposed closure.

The Political Imaginary in Modern Lebanon

In 1991, a law of general amnesty passed eradicating any chance of indictment for the crimes committed during the civil war; the law applied to crimes committed prior to March of that year (Haugbolle 2005, 193). The transition into peace was not a process that acknowledged the past and attempted to consolidate the opposing ends of the war, instead it happened through a state-sponsored induced amnesia. Overnight, people were supposed to forget and move on, drop their weapons and go back to their everyday life. The battles had ceased but there remained a lack of transitional justice, reparations, and accountability for the events that took place. Warlords transitioned into government positions through the logic of “the magic formula of *la ghalib la maghlub* (no victor, no vanquished)” which “became the official justification for such a transition from war into peace” (Haugbolle 2005, 193). Peace was agreed upon and sectarianism was the form of governance that guaranteed this peace. The situation was reduced to a narrative that limited people’s choice to either accepting sectarianism’s peace or risk falling back into another civil war and getting pulled into regional conflicts.

Ara’ Research and Consultancy conducted a survey from September 28th to October 2nd, 2015, which included 500 people distributed demographically and geographically to fairly reflect the constituents of Lebanese society. According to the survey, 73% of the population no longer supports any political party and 88% will continue supporting the mobilizations after an expected resolution of the waste management crisis (Assafir 2015). This is not to claim that political loyalties to political and religious figures had disappeared. Any idea of a ‘revolution’ or anything that would completely overthrow of the current sectarian structure is generally labeled as reckless and inciting violence. And even with such numbers, the street mobilizations died out and people accepted the realities of an inadequate waste management strategy, as they had done

before with other services. “I’m not delusional about the alternative,” a volunteer and activist working with Beirut Madinati told me. “I know that the situation is very volatile. If multiple explosions happen, everything would fall back into place because of fear. People say that they don’t want the country to become like Syria, Egypt, or Iraq...They want security and stability.” People compromise in order to avoid a violent outburst. But these compromises, as the activist said, were self-defeating and did not push for socio-economic improvements.

Sectarianism asserts its continuation by rendering any alternative political front weak and incapable of significantly restructuring the apparatus. The current structure fears a united, cross-sectarian mode of political discourse that seeks to provide adequate social services and hold corrupt elite accountable, threatening the interests of the oligarchy. As Salloukh et al. write: “The persistence of sectarianism in postwar Lebanon hinges to a great extent on the sectarian/political elite’s successful destruction, sabotaging, or co-optation of alternative, cross-sectarian, and heterogeneous modes of political subjectification and mobilization” (2015, 70). And they were successful in doing so. Yet, the momentum of movements in the 2015 summer is still worth emphasis and attention since, even though it had died out in the streets, they represented a much-needed starting point for reform—they represent an instance of revolt, but not the revolution.

Sectarianism got reinvented, reproduced, and sharpened through local and foreign actors within specific historical contexts. Unlike the narrative perpetuated by the political elite, the sectarian structure is actually fluid, dynamic, and very subject to change. Chapter Two will discuss the production of the present sectarian citizen, and in turn, emphasize some of the characteristics of such a citizen. I argue that every citizen is a sectarian citizen due to the nature of the relationship they hold with the state and that this type of established citizenship is inherently differentiating. Understanding the nature of the sectarian citizen lays the grounds for

the discussion on the emergence of the different alternative narratives both in the streets of Beirut and in the municipality elections, when emphasis is given to the citizens who identify as activists and actively work to contest the state. So when Fisk states that “as long as it is sectarian, Lebanon cannot become a modern state” and that “without being sectarian, Lebanon will no longer exist” (Fisk 2006), I ask, where does this reductive binary leave room to understand the emergence of the alternative who indeed can imagine a Lebanon beyond sectarianism? This narrative is not just shared among foreign, and at times even orientalist, journalists, researchers, and state members, but also among the local people themselves. The alternative’s role, I argue, was to provoke the break from such a narrative.

Chapter Two: The Sectarian Citizen



-Posters around Hamra street read "We taught the crocodile how to be a crocodile", a satirical take on the sectarian citizen's resiliency and ability to adapt and concede

I sat down with a student from the American University of Beirut on the lush freshly cut grass of the Green Oval - something which is a privilege to have access to within the claustrophobic city - to discuss the mobilizations, their challenges, contexts, and the themes that emerged as a result. The student chose to stay anonymous. My semi-structured interview gave openness to the discussion and it slowly transitioned into a chat revolving around what it means to be a citizen and an activist in a society and state governed by sectarianism. We had this talk at an early point in my fieldwork when my intended focus was on those who were active in confronting the state through the alternative that had mobilized, rather than the pragmatic or partisan citizen. The emphasis on the sectarian citizen and their roles in the sectarian structure forced me to step back and reassess what I thought I knew about what it means to be a citizen in Lebanon. The nature of the relationship between the citizen and the state is inherently sectarian – all citizens, regardless of their political affiliations or their apolitical stances, are in turn, sectarian citizens. The process of creating the sectarian citizen is undergirded by a complex political economy orchestrated along sectarian discourses monopolized by the political elite. The citizen is forced to operate within this system, and more flexibility to navigate through it is given in accordance with socio-economic and partisan privileges. “You have to be so privileged to be nonsectarian,” the student said. In a welfare state such as Lebanon, socio-economic pressures as well as sectarian indoctrination and propaganda bind the sectarian citizen. You need to be able to afford to be nonsectarian, that is, to be financially independent in order to afford services and not need to rely on your sectarian identity and connections to secure these services. But even then, financially secure citizens still remain sectarian citizen in terms of their relations to the state, whether it is in the form of legal documents or accessing government services. Therefore, what it means to be a sectarian citizen differs in accordance with socio-economic status, gender, degrees

of partisanship, political awareness, and involvement with alternative movements. The experiences may differ depending on varying factors, but this form of citizen is essentially sectarian and differentiating.

I divide the sectarian citizenship into categories between the pragmatic and the insurgent. These categories are not mutually exclusive and the sectarian citizen's experiences in the Lebanese state are not limited to one or the other. The category of the pragmatic sectarian citizen is meant to describe those who support the state and its discourse, with varying degrees of partisanship in order to have access to social services, while the insurgent sectarian citizen describes those who are active in contesting the state, especially via the alternative movements under study. The common narrative among many activists and nonpartisan people is that this "passive" sectarian citizen—the citizen that perpetuates the sectarian discourse and supports the political elite—is a simple-minded follower. They are characterized as being docile. This circulated imagery denies the contextualization of such a sectarian citizen—it reduces the loyalties that are held by the partisans to symptoms of ignorance rather than account for the system that surrounds them. In fact, those who do benefit from their sectarian loyalties are not necessarily sectarian, and those who can provide their own services independently from the state are not necessarily nonsectarian. A repeated theme is that the intersectionality of the struggle must be understood and incorporated into how these alternative groups perceive the sectarian citizen in order to create accepting and inclusive spaces to gain people's support. The student told me of her personal journey on strategies for supporting an alternative:

One thing I realized is that you really cannot use the same rhetoric with everyone, as a leftist, no one wants to hear about class consciousness, no one gives a shit. What people care about is their livelihoods, their everyday experiences, what these groups are providing for them versus what they can't provide. In each of these groups there is a

certain space you need to play on. For example, one interesting thing I find is that the people who are really close to Hezbollah really do have a pseudo-leftist worldview where they think that Hezbollah is fighting the imperial hegemony of the West. And you can play on that, change that view, that yes, there is imperialism and it's not just the US. You want to free the people, well you can't free the people while enslaving women. You use these things. If you want to talk to a Hariri supporter, it's a completely different narrative...So you really need to change your narrative depending on who you're talking to and you can't shame them for it. If someone had shamed me, if the Red Oak hadn't been such a strong support system and had discussed these things with me, if they had just blocked me out because I liked certain people, I would've remained a person supporting the ruling elite.

Since all citizens of the sectarian state are sectarian citizens, then who is this citizen and how is their relationship to the state governed? From this I turn my discussion to citizenship and begin to construct the concept of the sectarian citizen. This rest of this chapter will look into the process of how the contemporary Lebanese sectarian citizen is produced, and continuously reproduced, through state institutions and the dominant sectarian discourses perpetuated by the state as well as the citizens. The different categories of the sectarian citizenship then lead us to the discussion of those who contest the nature of this citizenship through organizing into alternative groups and movements.

Who is the Sectarian Citizen?

The post-war power plays among the political elite have shaped the economy, political structure and governance, and the societal constituents of the nation, all of which create a certain kind of citizen. Economic dominance was accomplished through the post-war reconstruction efforts at the cost of increased corruption and social inequity and the fragility of social services (Makdisi 2004; Leenders 2012; Salloukh et al. 2015). Through capitalizing on the need for social

services, the select few had transformed the nation into a sectarian welfare state in which citizens cannot equally access their rights (Cammett 2014; Holston 2007; Holston 2011). Within such a state, services are transformed into sectarian favors and benefits rather than rights of a citizen.

Sectarian citizenship perpetuates inequalities, divisions, and exclusions that are defined at the political level, which, in turn, trickle into the details of everyday life. I draw on Holston's work on a kind citizenship in Brazil that "manages social differences by legalizing them in ways that legitimate and reproduce inequality," which he terms "differentiated citizenship" (2007, 3-4). This formulation of citizenship is based on the "conceptualization of right as the privilege of certain kinds of citizens" which legitimizes and reproduces inequality and divisions among the population (2011, 344). The *right-as-privilege* is representative of "the increasingly unacceptable discriminatory features of a political system which legislates unequal political and civil rights for citizens" (Makdisi and El-Khalil 2013, 18). The representation in parliament and the distribution of posts and positions in the government is in accordance with a sectarian quota. For example, the position of the Director General of the Ministry of Finance is exclusive to Maronites, the Ministry of Justice exclusive to Sunnis, the Ministry of Economy to Shi'as, and the Ministry of Judicial Police to Druze.³ As well, "matters relating to personal status (e.g., marriage, divorce, inheritance) are placed under the sole jurisdiction of the concerned religious authorities," meaning that certain rights and services are claimed through a sectarian identity (Makdisi and El-Khalil 2013, 18).

During our talk on the Green Oval, the student laid out the relationship she, as a citizen, holds with the state:

³ See also Table 2.3 "Sectarian Distribution of Major State Posts" in Chapter Two of *The Politics of Sectarianism in Post-war Lebanon* which further lists the distribution of state posts among the sects (Salloukh et al. 2015, 24)

Today, for the state, I'm not a woman, I'm not a citizen, I'm a Sunni, that's how the state views me, that's how the state gives me certain positions within its institutions, that's how the state tells me who I can marry and who I cannot. From day one the state gives me this identity... and it's very easy to fall into (these) identities.

Differentiated citizenship especially evident in the way women's rights are construed within the state and its sectarian institutions. Simply put, "Lebanon has not yet succeeded in granting full equal citizenship to women" (Abou Aad, Mansour 2012, 4). Since the state has forfeited its authority on matters relating to personal status to religious authorities, women can only claim their rights as to the extent in which their corresponding doctrine allows them to. For example, a Sunni woman, does not have equal rights as a Sunni man, but also does not have the same rights as a Maronite woman. For the state, citizens are categorized into sects whose management of personal affairs is then exported to their corresponding religious authorities, which in turn structure gender relations and personal affairs regardless of if it violates rights safeguarded by the constitution and countless international treaties that Lebanon has signed. Lebanese law, even if applied equitably, would not effectively protect women. KAFA (Enough), a Lebanese NGO, proposed a draft law as a means of reforming how the state protects women, only to undergo several amendments throughout the legislative process. The draft law was retitled from "Protect Women from Domestic Violence" to "The Bill for the Protection of Women and Family Members Against Domestic Violence"⁴ under the guise of ensuring equal protection for all members of the family. The law was altered such that "acts most characteristic of males' traditional authoritarianism, such as marital rape or female forced marriage, were taken out of the draft. Acts unrelated in principle to violence, such as adultery and prostitution, were included as acts of violence" (Saghieh 2013). The redefinition of violence by the state instead further

⁴ To read the full bill: <http://www.kafa.org.lb/FOAPDF/FAO-PDF-11-635120756422654393.pdf>

victimized women and reinforced a patriarchal culture governed by an obsession with moral norms. In addition, women hold few political positions, and even when they do, they are the daughters and wives⁵ of the political elite who also aid in perpetuating sectarian discourse. How women navigate through institutions, laws, and society demonstrates how the relationship of the citizen to the state and their rights is governed in accordance to sect, gender, partisanship, as well as other socio-economic factors. Sectarian citizenship ensures that these differentiations are emphasized rather than reconciled.

Beyond differentiation, there is another issue with citizenship-based access to rights. Not everyone who resides in the country is an actual *citizen*. There are groups of people who cannot be categorized as legal citizens, such as newly admitted refugees, generations of Palestinian refugees still deemed as such, migrant workers who have spent decades in the country, and children and spouses of Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese citizens.⁶ This raises questions of is citizenship acts as an alienating factor within alternative groups, which was a point of discussion among many of the activists that I spent my fieldwork with. Farah, an activist who ran as a candidate in the Beirut municipality elections with Beirut Madinati, asks:

In a country like Lebanon whose [big part of] the population is refugees, whose half of the working class is foreign, where are they in this discourse? Therefore to adopt a social

⁵ “Most Lebanese governments did not include female ministers until October 2004. The current parliament only has four female deputies out of 128 members. It is noteworthy that these four women were elected thanks to male members of their families, not on their own accord. Two of them, Gilberte Zwein and Nayla Tueni Maktabi, inherited their posts from their fathers. Bahia Hariri took a seat thanks to her brother, the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Sethrida Geagea became a deputy thanks to being the wife of Samir Geagea, former head of a militia.” (Aziz 2014).

⁶ The Lebanese state transgresses on equality by not permitting Lebanese women to pass their nationality to their foreign husbands and children. This is due to “an unjustified fear of allowing the naturalization of a large refugee population and of a sudden shift in the sensitive religious demographic balance of the country” (Abou Aad, Mansour 2012, 9).

justice discourse instead of a nationalist exclusionary one is the key that we should push for.

However, with Lebanon's complex history of interventions by networks of foreign political actors, scapegoating 'foreigners' (especially that of the Palestinians and Syrians) became a common practice among patriotic nationalists. This in turn renders adopting a social justice discourse instead of a nationalist one a challenge for the alternative political imaginaries. As well, this raises questions on nationalism and identity: what does it mean to be Lebanese at this time in history? And on what basis is the exclusion of certain populations justified? Different discourses address these questions, either reaffirming or deconstructing a Lebanese identity. Among them is a discourse adopted by the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP), an active, and contentious, political party in Lebanon that believes Lebanon belongs to *natural* Syria⁷ as opposed to the artificial borders set up by the Sykes–Picot agreement. They deconstruct the state's categories of Lebanese nationalism and citizenship and integrate them into an understanding of the topographical features and common culture of people within a natural geographic boundary of a greater Syria. This discourse stems from the party's history of anti-colonial work within a specific context of political changes and turmoil within the region. And of course, they are met with critics that refuse the reduction of Lebanese identity to the political events of the past or topography and instead reinforce the present Lebanese identity. My research does not do justice to the complicated discourse of citizenship and nationalism within Lebanon and within the alternative political imaginaries. Questions arise such as: how could a trans-sectarian nationalist discourse develop? Should it in fact develop? Who does it include and in turn, exclude? This is not to belittle the issue at hand but to instead acknowledge the limitations

⁷ More information on the SSNP can be found on their website:
<http://www.ssnp.com/new/about.htm>

of my research and highlight a persisting issue that dictates the lives of many. Activists who I did the fieldwork with are already Lebanese citizen. For this reason, I limit my conceptual framework for citizenship and nationality to the state's legal category of the Lebanese citizen. Citizenship, then, is used throughout this research as "the status of having the right to participate in and to be represented in politics" which entails a formal juridical identity (Baylis & Smith 2001). Citizenship entails rights and obligations as stated within the Lebanese constitution. In this sense, citizenship and nationality can be used as interchangeable concepts when referring to a *Lebanese* person, activist, or the general population. I use the legal definition of citizenship in order to ground the discussion around the creation of a form of citizen that is the *sectarian citizen* and how such a citizen, in turn, navigates through the sectarian structure.

The discussion around the sectarian citizen is important because it paves the way to the discussion on the alternative. It addresses who the alternative under study is, their overall context, and their relationship with the state. The sectarian citizen is created, and constantly sustained through the dynamics of the sectarian system and one of the ways that the state had produced the sectarian citizen is through its institutions, namely through social welfare services.

Social Welfare as the Infrastructure of Sectarianism

Social welfare, which includes health, education, and support for vulnerable populations and those in need, is used as a means to further the politics of exclusion among the differentiated citizens. It is a part of the dynamics of the reproduction of sectarianism and clientalism, and is in fact a key factor in the creation of the sectarian citizen. "In Lebanon, a quintessential case of a weak state in which power-sharing arrangements enshrine the political salience of religion and ethnicity," states Cammett, means that "welfare is a terrain of political contestation" (2014, 4). In

the absence of functional state institutions, political and religious organizations take on the role of providing services to the extent that an unofficial infrastructure of welfare has been created based on demarcating political and sectarian identities. What an activist, and person involved in the operations in Beirut Madinati, said resonates with an established narrative shared among the majority of the population:

It's really connected to how you can survive and live in this country, from hospitals to schools to who employs you, it's all circles, mainly sectarian. You use your connections that turn it political. It's not easy.

It turns 'political' when social services are acquired through pulling partisan strings and connection, which most have by virtue of being a sectarian citizen. The relationship between the citizen and the state, or the lack thereof, is then constructed around the consistent struggle to secure services through (un)official, political and sectarian connections. Therefore, social welfare should not be just understood in terms of citizens' struggles in securing services, instead, it should also be understood as a system or an infrastructure that "both constitutes and reproduces the politics of sectarianism" (Cammett 2014, 8).

This welfare system relies on sectarian citizenship in order to manage affairs and secure services. Rights are sought through sectarian institutions and connections and not through citizenship. Without these sectarian connections, securing a job and ensuring services in an ever-difficult economy, especially for those who cannot afford to be independent from the sectarian welfare state, can be frustrating or even next to impossible. Cammett observes (2014, 37):

Ordinary citizens, then, may be forced to rely on clientelist arrangements to meet their basic needs. These arrangements bring with them inherent inequalities, create conditions of widespread social insecurity, and perhaps even undercut the possibility of constructing larger national political communities

However, this is not to say that the population does not in turn legitimize the legal and political inequalities through their participation. Abbas, a student activist at the American University of Beirut, confessed that even though he opposes his sect's and family's corresponding political alliances, he will still resort to them in order to secure employment after graduation, since, as he explained it, he does not want to end up being a "victim" and when it comes to securing a good life, there's every reason to be "selfish." It's easy to see why a student activist would consider depending on the sectarian structure to be a "selfish" act since compliance, even if forced, reinforces the sectarian logic and discredits the efforts of resisting such a force. Another student activist instead, who chose to remain anonymous, justified Abbas' self-proclaimed "selfish" actions:

The political economy of sectarianism is rooted and integrated in every sector of our livelihoods to the extent that people feel if they're outside of that, that they're bare, they would no longer have any insurance, this is the basis of the relationship that was built between the statesman and his patronage, not the citizen.

This well established discourse of compliancy among the majority of the population reinforces the sectarian and systematic segregation of citizens from their rights. But directing blame towards the sectarian citizen, rather than sectarianism, is something that the student I caught up with on the Green Oval, warned against:

You have so many people whose next meal really depends on their clientalism, which is why I really disagree with the view that a lot of 'liberal' or people who are on the pseudo-left have which bashes sectarian people and not sectarianism. I find this to be very problematic.

When the system does not seem to be going anywhere anytime soon, boycotting a potential source of services and income does not make sense to those dependent on them. This demonization of dependency goes along with the demonization of political involvement, which

will be addressed in Chapter Three. This, of course, plays a major role in shaping the political imaginaries of the alternative under study especially when people are then deemed “deserving” of such rule and system. However, in a talk with Rabie, one of the co-authors of *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*, I was reminded that, in fact:

No one is completely dependent for all their needs on this regime because if the majority of these people depend completely on this regime and that the regime is providing for them that would mean that this regime is actually good.

This reflects the unstable nature of the welfare distribution system. This instability in turn renders the category of the sectarian citizen at somewhat dynamic, though the constant reproduction of the sectarian system. From this instability, and the gaps in social services that the citizen is forced to navigate through, there comes the potential for some sort of resistance that can exist within the cracks of the system. Thus, I turn to the discussion on the characteristics of the Lebanese sectarian citizen under sectarianism, in an attempt to eventually start the discussion on resistance in the form of the alternative, its political imaginaries, contexts, and realities.

Othering, Resilience, and Pragmatism: Characteristics of the Sectarian Citizen

Although Abbas viewed his dependency on his sectarian connections to secure a job after his graduation as “selfish,” most people don’t second-guess such action and do not put themselves at fault—rather it is a fact of life for such a citizen and the way to get things done. In a meeting with Dr. Salloukh, which I believe to be a turning point in my fieldwork as I began to move away from addressing sectarianism as an ailment that cuts society, and specifically the social movements, to addressing it as an overarching structure in which the citizen is placed in the center, he said to me:

People have reached a point where they believe that by voting for sectarian leaders and the sectarian political elite, they can get their work, their services provided for, and so it is no longer abnormal to think in terms of the sectarian citizen, it is rather normal, which is what Gramsci calls hegemony. So people like You Stink, and others, are a minority, they are resisting, as I call it, an octopus that has many hands and the capability to reach deep into society and neutralize any threat.

Yet this sectarian citizen, who complies and aids in the sustainability of the system, knows what they're doing, I argue. It is indeed possible for a subject to *know* what their actions and roles do within the grander structure. Even though these effects may be/are *unintentional* or rather *inescapable*, they are still *known* by the sectarian citizen within such a hyperpolitical society as Lebanon. Especially when knowledge of how the system works and how one *works* the system are essential to secure services and benefits that, at times, can be the difference between life and death. Student activists, for example such as Abbas, participate while being aware of their place and their *inescapable* effects in perpetuating the sectarian structure. Despite the knowledge of the workings of the sectarian system, the system imposes truths that the sectarian citizen must live by.

I draw on Foucault's concept of power, and consequently power relations, to explain the not quite totalizing nature of the sectarian system and henceforth the subjectification of the sectarian citizen. Power, as "a mode of action upon the actions of others," entails that the subjects be free, such that "individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse compartments, may be realized" (Foucault 1982, 790). Power is a value neutral capacity for change that is exercised by all individuals and groups but to varying intensities, hence the unequal power-relations that exist within stratified societies. Sectarian subjects, such as Abbas, nonetheless still have choices in their participation in the sectarian structure, but the outcomes are not equal. If so,

when a citizen is faced with the possibility of not finding employment, or even securing life-saving medical services without partisan connections, what then does it mean to be a free subject?

“[N]o subject’s choice of tactics,” states Heller, “is ever the unconditioned product of a self standing outside of history and language. Indeed, all subjects are equally *unfree* insofar as their choice of tactics is inevitably mediated by an institutionally—determined linguistic tradition over which they have little, if any, control” (1996, 91). Knowledge of the workings of sectarianism does not tilt the power-balance in favor of the sectarian citizen— knowledge of one’s situation cannot constitute freedom by itself. Sectarian citizens are *equally unfree* subjects to the state’s power, which is “both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power” (Foucault 1982, 783). What Foucault calls “anti-authority struggles” are against this form of power, rather than specific institutions of power, or a certain group or class. Foucault writes of the power against which anti-authority struggles are directed that it (1982, 781):

applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.

I argue that the form of power through which the modern Lebanese state subjugates its subjects as citizens is sectarianism. In this sense, the sectarian citizen is interchangeable with the sectarian subject. For Foucault, the state is a very sophisticated structure that integrates individuals under one condition: “that this individuality would be shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific patterns” (1982, 783). In the following, I highlight three patterns, or characteristics,

in which the sectarian citizen becomes a sectarian subject: Othering, resilience, and pragmatism.

Othering

Since the continuation of loyalties to the elite is also based on kinship, political ideology is something that is inherited and transferred along these lines. The family is expected to place their loyalties in their respective political party, mostly depending on the sect and the patriarch's wartime alliances. Knowing someone's putative political loyalties can be easily achieved by just asking for their family name, which in itself is a marker of sectarian identity. Rather than a citizenship that promotes nationalism and a united national front, for example, sectarian citizenship instead reinforces and perpetuates the existing fault lines in the society. It creates an Otherness among citizens and perpetuates an "Us versus Them" mentality, which is evident in society and politics. As well, the sectarian subject knows that protecting sectarian identities secures services, benefits, and privileges, all while fending off the Other sectarian citizen (of different sects). Internal displacements during wartime led to increasingly homogenous communities as people migrated into their respective areas in accordance to sect, an ongoing occurrence even in postwar Lebanon. The state, in turn, justifies the need to control these differences through the legalization of these inequalities, treating them as de facto characteristics of the society.

Nonetheless, inciting sectarian violence is an offense prosecuted by Lebanese law. Coexistence, tolerance, and preventing sectarian feuds are heavily emphasized in the speeches and political statements of the oligarchy. Even though at surface value these speeches and statements may seem to promote peace, stability, and a united, yet diverse identity, they in fact rely on the constant existence of Other. This means that the category of the Other is consistently reproduced, something that must be accepted, yet treated with caution, creating a society which

is a grouping of Others. The student I caught up with on the Green Oval in AUB highlighted the importance of seeing through these discourses of tolerance and coexistence:

If you're phrasing the problem in the sense that you have 18 sects in Lebanon and they're fighting, yea that's a great outcome, let's all build an inclusive identity, let's all like each other. But the problem is really not that, you can see it very clearly, Aoun and Nasrallah love each other, a Christian and a Shia', you have these very absurd pictures of Hariri sitting with Nasrallah and Berri. It really is not a problem of sectarian identities.

Resisting sectarianism is not on the theological level, it is not on the level of addressing issues such as tolerance and coexistence among the sects. Instead, it is about seizing back power and control from the political elite. The political elite perpetuates the myth of coexistence among the sects in Lebanon, reproducing a damaging rhetoric of the consistent Othering of the sects. When the activists talk about Lebanon's current turmoil, they do not talk about theological sectarian identities, instead, they talk about the sectarianism's dominance in the state and its institutions and how the oligarchy benefits from such a form of power. They talk about the importance of raising class-consciousness as a way to break away from the prevalent sectarian discourse rather than find ways to coexist, which they—a group comprising different sects—already do.

Throughout my research, I follow the lead of the activists by decoupling sectarianism from religion, theology, and ontological questions pertaining to the holy and unholy. Sect, in this context, is a political marker rather than a marker of theological differences. The struggle against sectarianism is against a form of power that has subjugated citizens of the Lebanese state into subjects that practice Othering among themselves.

Resiliency

As proposed by Collier and Lakoff, infrastructures are instruments of biopolitical government that are “potential sources of vulnerability” (2015, 21). The material wellbeing (or lack of) of infrastructures, as well as people's interactions them, reflect the state of the political

system, since “construction and regulation [have become] a privileged method for governing vital flows in an urban and industrial society” (Collier, Lakoff 2015, 26). Infrastructure can either facilitate day-to-day life, as it should, or instead, can become another aspect of life that people worry about. The fragile state of Lebanese infrastructure pushes those with abilities to adapt into seeking replacements beyond any official political body: generators are bought to provide electricity when government power becomes too scarce and unreliable, drinking water is bought weekly from small businesses or from larger brand-named companies depending on financial accessibility, for example. “The breakdown of infrastructure does not necessarily mark a catastrophic moment in the disruption of the system,” Barry remarks, instead, citizens try to manage and seek these services for themselves (2015). However, some infrastructures cannot be replaced or navigated around by individual efforts. Road maintenance, waste management, and rain water management, are projects that only an overarching political body can control and manage due to their high costs, magnitude, and intrinsic interconnection. Municipalities in Lebanon have been stripped of their capabilities to create and manage small-scale infrastructural projects and repairs due to violations of municipality laws by the state. The state instead allocates the municipality funds to contracts with private corporations of the oligarchy’s choosing, leaving the municipalities with little to no financial or political power. The sectarian citizen is made “resilient,” especially in relation to the material condition of infrastructure and social services. As a sectarian citizen, rights and services are accessed through sectarian identities and contingent on partisan connections. However, even if sectarian institutions and organizations provide services, they do not do so on a stable and regular basis. The frequency and quality of the services are not reliable, and are contingent on many factors. Resilience here is a concept that “aspires to describe mechanisms for maintaining stability, survival, and safety – mechanisms that

seem equally applicable to the individual, society, nature, and technical systems” (Cavelty, Kaufmann, Kristensen 2015, 4).

Resiliency may have a positive connotation or may bring about a sense of pride for some, since eventually it is about how good you are at securing your own survival and making life as comfortable as possible within the limits of one’s context. It is a small victory for the sectarian citizen, day after day. However, it is formed of the burdens placed on the population and the nature of their relationship with the state. Resilience “always presupposes vulnerability, or a susceptibility to harm” and is seen as “de-politicizing” as it renders life as a continual adaptation (2015, 7). For exactly this reason, for some of the activists I spoke to, people’s adaptation to the system and their resiliency was not a virtue. Instead it is, as Nael, an activist with the We Want Accountability campaign, puts it, “a lack of action.” He and other activists have attributed this lack of action, and even, the relapse back to sectarian politics, to fear of stepping away from the sectarian apparatus. An activist who chose to remain anonymous saw that the garbage crisis was something that infringed on people’s dignity, and had the potential to allow for an alternative to emerge within this crack, but it nonetheless failed (at least in its immediate goals) because of people’s fears of bloody conflict. Sectarianism is viewed as a lesser evil than the outbreak of another civil war, and fear mongering politics consequently encourage the continuation of life within sectarianism. Material adaptation and resiliency is then a response the sectarian citizen engages in, encouraged by the political context that they exist in. Yet, within the nuances of being free, yet *equally unfree*, the sectarian subject’s resilience should not be posited “as the opposite of resistance,” despite it being de-politicizing. Although resiliency removes the subject from the level of enforcing change to mere reactionary roles, the citizen still acts in accordance to what they think is the best course of action within their limitations (2015, 7). Those within the

system still seek to overcome obstacles despite the lack of access to power and the abundance of cynicism directed towards the state, the reduction of the resiliency to its de-politicizing nature “simplifies the complex workings of power, empowerment, disempowerment, and the linkages between them” (2015, 7).

Pragmatism

I draw on James Scott’s term “passivity” as a characteristic of a group that “actually accepts its situation as a normal, even justifiable part of the social order” and “assumes at least a fatalistic acceptance of that social order and perhaps even an active complicity” (1985, 39). When activists were resistant to the idea of reopening the Naameh landfill, I had several conversations with neighbors who thought that the activists should stop causing trouble and let the trash get off the streets. The waste management crisis that had extended for more than a year had clearly exposed the underlying political structure that allowed for the crisis to initially exist and continue for such a time, but nonetheless, it disrupted daily life and the street mobilizations did not represent a sustainable and powerful alternative that people could support. People needed to get back to some version of normalcy, regardless if that was via a sustainable waste management solution or not.

In order to achieve normalcy, the sectarian citizen may seek electricity, water, and other services in manners that are not always legal, within the strict sense of the word. As Dr. Salloukh put it:

much in the same way a politician feels that he or she can do whatever they want with impunity, they want the citizen to feel the same, that you could also do whatever you want as long as you allow us to do whatever we [the oligarchy] want. Once we start establishing a strong state then that’s the end of the sectarian system and they don’t want that. Let the banana republic operate the way it is.

Even though the sectarian citizen might be passive in the sense that any deviation away from normalcy is not encouraged, the active compliancy is also a matter of pragmatism. In this context, the concept of corruption has to be fluid in order to take into account how the sectarian citizen navigates through everyday life within sectarianism in the quest to sustain normalcy. According to Olivier de Sardan, the notion of “corruption complex” offers a more fluid and broader definition of what count as corrupt. It is a continuum of corruption activities that vary from small scale everyday activities that citizens participate in to larger scale activities involving the state (1999, 27). This fluid definition allows corrupt acts to be defined as such with respect to the political and historical context and to the social norms and what people accept and refuse as corrupt. In this sense, the fluidity allows various small, and even larger scale corrupt acts, to be overseen and normalized within society. Olivier de Sardan gives the example of a citizen bribing a police officer in order to avoid a fine and avoid wasting time (1999, 35), which is a common occurrence on the roads of Lebanon—a process that happens as fast as the driver nonchalantly pulls out the bill to present it to the officer. The citizen, a subject embedded within a system that requires illegal behavior even in relation to the state’s law enforcement, has to operate within the logic of the system in order to get through everyday life. “The more corruption develops, the more it becomes engrained in social habits,” de Sardan states (1999, 32), and this is true of the Lebanese sectarian state.

Corruption in these circumstances is fundamentally important in defining and governing the relationship between the state and the citizen. In a foundational article by Akhil Gupta, *Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State*, corruption “functions as a diagnostic of the state” (1995, 389). For Gupta (1995, 389):

the discourse of corruption is central to our understanding of the relationship between the state and social groups precisely because it plays this dual role of enabling people to construct the state symbolically and to define themselves as citizens.

Corruption, in its continuum, is in fact one of the significant forms of the relationship between the sectarian citizen and the sectarian state. Further, the institutional weakness of the state do not just give space, but force citizens to engage in “corrupt” activities in order to secure services and establish the smooth ongoing of everyday life. Corruption sets the relationship between the citizen and state, as the means through which work is done. When the state is symbolically constructed as weak, the citizen in turn defines their citizenship in terms of managing to get work done through the corruption continuum rather than through the legal or putatively designated part of the governmental structure.

The Activist

Resistant discourses do exist but are limited in power and access to induce change. The difference, then, between an authoritarian state and a more liberated one, for Foucault, is the absence of flexibility, or *reversibility*: “when an individual or social group manages to block a field or relations of power, to render them impassive and invariable and to prevent all reversibility of movement...we are facing what can be called a state of domination” (1988, 3). This state of seemingly impermeable domination was evident in the 2016 Beirut municipality elections where Beirut Madinati lost all seats to the establishment list even though they “got more than 60 percent of the vote in the mostly Christian district of Achrafieh, and by some rough estimates, 30 percent of the Sunni vote in the city—a surprisingly high figure in light of widespread support for Hariri among the community” (Rizkallah 2016).

This rigid (yet dynamic) sectarian structure may have disenchanted those seeking an

alternative front, however resistance to the system requires a conceptualization of a new kind of citizenship. Holston also discusses an alternative form of citizenship that confronts the inequality and differentiation: insurgent urban citizenship. It refers to the mobilization of citizens who have right-claims to the city, due to their relationship and concern for “issues of housing, property, tenure, transportation, day care, plumbing, and so forth, largely understood to constitute a residential domain of social life” (2011, 336). These citizens confront the reproduction of inequality by organizing themselves into an alterative force against the regime of inequality (2011, 336). The general aim of the street mobilizations and the alternative municipality campaigns was to organize in order to achieve a common goal, either in establishing a sustainable waste management plan or to demand full reforms in the state and accountability. The insurgent sectarian citizen, unlike the pragmatic, is active in supporting, participating, and facing the sectarian structure. However, this category is not meant to be exclusive or within the sharp boundaries of a definition. The sectarian citizen can fluctuate between forms of citizenship, between the pragmatic and the insurgent. Even though a citizen may be against the sectarian structure and how things operate within such a structure, they may still resort to the logic of the clientalist sectarian system in order to secure services and facilitate day-to-day life. Practicing insurgent citizenship does not delegitimize the struggles of daily life, even though internal dissonance becomes inevitable when activists have to resort to sectarian connections.

I draw on two distinctions that Susan Tiano applies to study the consciousness of women assembly workers in Mexico: “Alienation” and “resistance.” Tiano states: “Alienation” indicates women who are mistrustful of or reject the system but feel powerless to change their lives. “Resistance” denotes women who reject the system as unjust and believe that they are capable of effecting positive changes in their conditions” (1994, 199-200). The differing factor between

these two distinctions is the extent the worker has access to power, or rather, the capability to induce change in their lives. I view the activists as navigating between alienation and resistance, as they comply with the sectarian system's logic despite their rejection of it. A way in which resistance to the structural power, within this logic, can then be achieved is when individuals and groups begin achieving more access to power, which is facilitated by economic leverage. Economic liberation is a key point emphasized by the majority of the activists that I have talked to. Nizar works within Nahnoo, and NGO that launched a project titled *Participatory Municipalities*, which aimed to train youth in understanding municipal law and governance, to further their political awareness and participation. He states:

If we don't stop the people's dependency on the social welfare of the parties, we can't be liberated. Liberation starts economically, then in other ways. I think the focus of the struggle in Lebanon should be on liberating people financially and breaking the dependence on political parties ... for people to be able to live without their favors.

Such perspectives are not surprising in a country where wealth distribution is concentrated in the hands of the few. An example of that is how “0.05 percent of Lebanese citizens control 34 billion dollars worth of bank deposits and 2 per cent of bank accounts dispose of 70 per cent of the total bank deposits” (Traboulsi 2014, 37). Hariri's postwar reconstruction project oriented the economy in favor of neoliberal policies and ideologies which had “a leading role for the financial and construction sectors at the expense of industry and agriculture; substituting reliance on market movement for development; privatization; prioritizing imports over protecting local industries; the state withdrawing from its distributive role and from the provision of subsidies, etc” (2014, 26). Economic capital can open up more access to the power-diagram and give more options to navigate away from the sectarian grid. However, is economic liberation enough for a sectarian citizen to abandon their partisanship and become resistant? As an activist told me that

in order to protest you have to be “well off, so you’d be able to take a day off work and risk getting arrested”, which appeals to a middle-class rhetoric.

However, the middle-class rhetoric would not explain what was happening on the streets during the mobilizations. People who came from marginalized neighborhoods participated as well in the protests, those who could more seriously could “not afford” to be arrested or beaten up. But their position within the mobilization was challenged. They were demonized as ‘infiltrators’: people belonging to established political parties who utilize violence as a way sabotage the movement and turn the public opinion against it. In one lecture titled “The Class Dynamics Within The Protest Movement,”⁸ the category of “infiltrator” was deconstructed to reflect the stratifications in society along socio-economic lines rather than have it limited to a discussion on security and violence. Activists acknowledged what was an emerging exclusionary characteristic of the mobilization that rejected people from these marginalized neighborhoods, and in turn addressed it. The alternative political imaginaries, varying in positions and discourses, navigate through complex political, social, and economical terrains. The next chapter discusses the political imaginaries that transitioned from the streets into the Beirut municipality elections, their challenges, and their differences. The political nuance that had emerged needs to be addressed prior to any speculations on the success or failures of the alternative. Throughout my fieldwork, activists and researchers told me that the alternative is not powerful and does not have the ability to unite and mobilize people. Internal disputes and differences in positions had prevented such a unity and had proved to be a main issue when discussing the preliminary phases of constructing a powerful alternative.

⁸ <http://www.statushour.com/the-class-dynamics-within-the-protest-movement.html> Part of an eight event series titled “The Protest Movement in its Intersectionalities” sponsored by the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut.

Chapter Three:

The Political Imaginaries of The Alternative



-Protest graffiti in Downtown Beirut reads "We Will Not Pay"

Beirut Madinati's second town hall meeting on April 16th, 2016 attracted a number of locals from the surrounding Mseitbeh neighbourhood in Beirut. The town hall initiated discussions that were structured around a set series of questions posed by the campaign on issues specific to the neighbourhood. These questions addressed the effects of urban development projects on the lives of the residents; the condition of social services and infrastructures; and factors affecting public safety in the neighbourhood. The discussion, which focused on the failure of the state to secure basic social services for its citizens and the continuously increasing hardships of life, paralleled that of the first town hall meeting, which had been held in another Beiruti neighbourhood.

At the very end of the town hall meeting, an activist took the floor and what she said brings the landscape of the political imaginaries in play clearly into view. She was responding to a resident's comments which denied the need for a political discourse about the municipality's role in the daily life of the residents. "Everything," she countered, "*is* in fact political. Healthcare *is* political, the electricity *is* political, and life itself *is* political." From an outsider's perspective, the negation of the political in these domains might seem absurd or nonsensical, since the municipality is one of the main points of political contact the citizen has with the state. But apolitical positioning has a functional purpose: it is a logical response to the deadlocked political arena of Lebanon. By placing politics aside, day-to-day interactions can go smoothly, inciting conflicts can be avoided, and things can get done. This pragmatism is sometimes requested by signs and stickers set up by small shop owners and taxi drivers – signs that usually hang alongside other signs that warn against taking on debt from the store and attempting to haggle down prices. Some even state these rules in elaborate poetic sentences.

The politics, which were repudiated among the activists, enact partisan and sectarian discourses of inter-sect alliances, produced by the political elite. Politics here are what the political leaders of the corresponding sect engage in when establishing alliances with the other political leaders. It was in contrast to this form of politics that the political imaginary of the “apolitical technocratic” emerged, a significant and widely appealing refusal to engage in “politics” in order to instead focus in producing effective governance. However, the “apolitical technocratic” approach also repudiated an ideological stance – it did not engage in a discussion that takes place within the spectrum between Left and Right (I place this within an admittedly broad definition of ideology). At the April town hall meeting, however, the activist would not have it. She was frustrated by the increasing withdrawal from politics, and emphasized that those in the municipality at the time “are in politics against the citizen” and that the people “have been alienated from the public sphere and need to take back the municipality – the closest form of power to the citizen.”

The back and forth between the audience in the town hall meeting presented clearly to me this conceptual binary that the alternative political imaginaries seem to have segmented itself into, of political/apolitical, or, more precisely, ideological political/apolitical technocratic imaginaries. I couple apolitical with technocratic because during the launch of the Beirut Madinati campaign, the organizers labelled themselves as apolitical. But after heavy criticism from activists, they replaced ‘apolitical’ with ‘technocratic’ while keeping the same approach. In this chapter, I explore these two political imaginaries of the alternative that became apparent in the street mobilizations, but more significantly, in the 2016 Beirut municipality elections. The campaigns that I construct this chapter’s argument around are Beirut Madinati and Citizens Within a State. I begin by defining each campaign’s political imaginaries in terms of their

approach, tactics, and self-characterizing rhetoric, in the lead-up to the election. Drawing on my fieldwork, I analyze the “apolitical technocratic” and “ideological political” as part of and in relation to an already established and much deliberated moral framework. However, the binary is not meant to represent an all-encompassing worldview of the alternative under study. Instead, I use it as a conceptual tool that facilitates the differentiation of these two prominent approaches to governance, as well as to further clarify these as significant political imaginaries shaping the elections. Proposing this binary is for me one step in mapping out the political imaginaries of the alternative within complex networks of politics, geopolitics, history, economics, as well as social networks. Differences within the ideological political branch of the dichotomy further produce capillaries that reveal a struggle for unanimity and unity.

After laying out the conceptual binary and the differentiation within its branches, I then turn to the sectarian citizen’s position within what I am calling a “moral framework.” This is a moral framework that came about within the specific context of war and postwar sectarianism, such that politics and political involvement have been demonized and repellent. Within this framework, I frame the sectarian citizen as an ethical subject in their engagement, or lack of thereof, in politics. I attempt to study “the ways people try to act morally and be ethical subjects rather than approaching them primarily as rational or strategic agents driven by power and interest” (Fassin 2013, 249). This work, as Fassin puts it, lies in a grey territory that “obliges us to rethink what we take for granted about the distinction between the bright side and the dark side of our moral world and about the separation of the ethical from the political” (2013, 249). As well, I take the everyday as an important site of engagement that the ethical subject has with politics. I argue that this site holds the potential to be the starting point in which the appalled

sectarian citizen can be involved in politics with the aid of those actively contesting the state through politics.

I end this chapter with an open-ended discussion on the future of the alternative, written as the country continues to drown in its own waste while the oligarchy perpetuate its dominant political discourses, alienating the people from claiming state power, and consequently profiting off the chaos of the nation. Ultimately I want to ask, in a nation whose security is contingent on fragile internal relations and external regional factors, how an alternative can be successfully conceptualized and formulated so as to be able to influence change to/within an adaptive and hegemonic sectarian regime? By compiling knowledge into a structured conceptual map, I aim to allow future conceptualizations of an alternative to tread lightly while successfully navigating through the minefields of the political terrain.

Apolitical Technocratic and Ideological Political

“The main problem with the mobilizations,” an activist volunteering with the Beirut Madinati campaign says, “is a reflection of the Lebanese civic society’s own problem. It’s the problem that the anti-establishment movement, people like myself who are Left and secular in Lebanon have not been able to find a united discourse or a way to talk without clashing.” Within the context of the 2016 Beirut municipality elections and within the constraints of Lebanese politics, my focus is on the different political imaginaries the alternative have adopted and used to navigate through the sectarian political terrain.

The municipality elections proved to be a suitable terrain for the manifestation of the political imaginaries of the alternative already at play. “You cannot influence the Lebanese political system from above,” says Nizar, an activist who works at Nahnoo, an NGO focused on involving people into political action. “That’s a realization now that change from the national to

the local level is not going to happen.” Instead, the municipality elections, which were threatened with postponement and even cancellation, presented a potential instance in which an alternative front would be able to breach the system. The circumstances around the elections were in the favor of the alternative. Campaigning and elections took place during the garbage crisis and in a heightened environment of political engagement; as well, the risks of participation were low and the possible gains were high in terms of pragmatic and political significance. The alternative municipality campaigns wanted to capitalize on the indignation that individuals and communities felt, which was highlighted by but not limited to the garbage crisis, in order to gain support against the prevalent sectarian political practices. The “context helps,” said the volunteer, “it’s now a matter of dignity, and dignity is something that mobilizes people. They felt humiliated as trash suffocated them, and a lot of things can be reconsidered in such a situation.” As well, the anticipated low voter turnout meant that the alternative needed to mobilize just enough numbers in order ensure victory in the elections against the oligarchy’s slate. In one of their open house discussions, Beirut Madinati’s campaign argued that securing the minimum number – 20% of the voting population in Beirut amounts to 100,000 votes – was in fact achievable. Unfortunately, because of the winner-takes-all format for the elections, the campaign fell short of winning any seats on the municipal council. But nonetheless, at the time of the campaigning, Beirut Madinati framed the municipality elections as a possible victory, which they pushed for as hard as they could.

Beirut Madinati’s apolitical technocratic discourse aimed to attract people who would not necessarily be the characteristic activist or *revolutionary*, but who felt disenchanting and alienated from the state and its political discourses. On the municipal level, the separation from sectarian politics and focus on technocratic issues allows people to gather under a common and agreeable

goal, and therein to navigate away from the established political structure. A technocratic approach within the municipality elections, urged as the viable one by some activist groups, avoids the otherwise necessary dependence on alliances from the parties in power. Moreover, it negates the need to take stances on certain issues, thereby avoiding further disassembling and repelling of activists due to the ideological differences that are bound to surface. The tactic of marketing of their program technocratically appealed to not just activists, but also to disenchanted people of marginalized communities. Because of this opportunity and capacity to take on a technocratic approach, the municipality elections ended up offering a low-risk terrain to engage in an alternative discourse. As well, the municipality was just small enough to limit the discourse around it to very private local affairs and disengage it with the regional and international issues and their stances. This allowed Beirut Madinati to adopt its technocratic political stance that avoided the muddy terrain of sectarian politics. However, this did not cater to all of the alternative's tactics and perspectives in the overall political discourse.

The technocratic approach disregards ideological and sectarian disparities to instead focus on the immediate goal of finding sustainable and effective solutions to the issues facing the city. It does this by attempting to elect experts, professionals, and academics to the Beirut municipality. This, for the volunteer I spoke with, was a way to translate the mobilization's energy into "something very tangible on the political level without going through the hardships of establishing a political party." Constituting a political party would entail taking stances and providing answers that the technocratic campaign does not necessarily have, not just in regards to the nation, but also the region. Taking a stance on an issue may alienate parts of the alternative and dismantle lines of support. By limiting the political discussion to the city's economic and social issues and, by providing technocratic solutions to these problems, Beirut Madinati hopes

to offer an escape from the deadlocked political situation. The campaign's code of ethics thus prohibits having a politically affiliated candidate on their slate: "We are liberal and independent individuals that vow to withhold from sectarian and political alignment."⁹ Beirut Madinati's ten-point program focuses on the wellbeing of the infrastructures of daily life through which the inhabitants live in the city. The program proposes solutions to traffic, unaffordable housing, lack of public green spaces, the waste management crisis, and advocates for the preservation of the city's architectural and natural heritage. "Today", read their program under the housing platform point, "the average price of an apartment in Beirut is more than \$570,000, or 1270 times the minimum monthly wage. At this rate, more than half of the children in Beirut today will not be able to secure a home in the city." However, the technocratic propositions to solve social and infrastructural problems did not satisfy skeptic Beirutis and activists.

I had met up with the activist that rebutted the apolitical technocratic approach at the Mseitbeh town hall meeting and I asked her what she thought. She responded:

What does technocrat mean? It means that you removed politics from the (discussion) and you just have the expertise to fix the sidewalks. There's avoidance to determine who we are because everyone's from a different background... there's no political discussion, so it ends up some who don't have an issue with the neoliberal system and others who want socialism, and those in between. Ideologies are not a secondary matter. Policies, laws, and projects... everything is based on that. The question is what country do we want? What kind of society do we want? These are the questions that we are supposed to answer. The municipality is a place where you can try to involve people, try to make people part of the political discussion after years of being excluded from any political work.

⁹ <http://beirutmadinati.com/code-of-ethics/?lang=en>

The idea is that it's not a matter of whether or not the state is lacking in a technocratic approach, as experts can be found and recruited. The state has funds for that, *if* there is intent. Instead, the issue is that the established sectarian confessional system intentionally benefits from the *lack* of an effective technocratic approach towards development projects. Researchers and activists that I have spoken with credited the campaign with being well organized and ambitious, but missing the ideological dimension needed in order to engage in political action and determine stances and strategies. Political vision, in this view, directs the application of the expertise and knowledge in accordance with set ideologies and principles, whether towards the privatization or the municipalization of public services. The technocratic approach does not touch upon the political complexities that these Beirut-specific urban problems exist in, especially in relation to the sectarian structure. The approach does not address how problems can be solved within a politically charged context. The reason why the sidewalks aren't maintained, for example, isn't because there is an absence of practical understanding of *how to fix* the sidewalk. Instead, the sectarian confessional state operates in a way that favors the absence of maintenance and development. Infrastructure such as roads are usually fixed prior to elections in order to win the votes of their disgruntled constituency. What is then needed to pressure change towards urban developmental goals is an alternative that can push the government into using some funds for the welfare of the city. And, as some of the activists that I've spoken to argue, this can only be achieved with a strong political identity, reflected by a strong political party

Despite the activists' concerns, the apolitical technocratic approach's appeal for the general public is understandable. It did not involve itself in the disputes over sectarian identities and policies that have exhausted and disenchanted the population from political involvement. It therefore avoids the differentiating factors that add to the threat faced by an already dispersed

alternative. The political imaginaries diverged in very pronounced ways between activists towards the beginning of the campaigns for Beirut's municipality elections. These divergences and difference of stances and ideologies existed prior to the municipality elections, but the elections allowed these stances to be clearly identified since the campaigns and their political stances gained visibility, which had set the tone for the discourse concerning the alternative's political engagement.

The other imaginary available, that is, brought into being through the protests and the campaign elections, instead embraced political involvement and the need for an ideological foundation to set an alternative political force. Citizens within a State, which fielded only 4 candidates to the Beirut municipal council while Beirut Madinati ran for the full 24-seat council, were more interested in creating an organized political framework through which they would engage in state reformation. They advocated for a secular, democratic, just, and potent state, as well as the need for partisans to converge within this transitional phase.¹⁰ For former Labor Minister Dr. Charbel Nahas, the beginning of the 2015 street mobilizations in response to the waste management crisis was political to begin with. The campaigns that emerged as the result of crisis were not ecological by nature; they operated on the political threads of the nation and presented the crisis as a result of the sectarian confessional system and the state that supported and accommodated it. The waste management crisis was just one of the many infrastructural failures of the state; however, its urgency came from how the garbage declared its encroaching presence on the city's streets whether by sight, stench, and its physical occupation of space. The demonstrations saw people joining in from marginalized neighborhoods in which the infrastructures to support daily life were weaker and more vulnerable than others, although the

¹⁰ This is outlined in the press release statement for their campaign launch <http://mmfidawla.com/2016/03/24/press-release-citizens-within-a-state-movement-launched/>

urgency presented by the waste management crisis did not resonate quite as much for those already experiencing daily and ongoing state-sponsored aggressions. Instead, the numbers on the street curated an instance in which people were able to demand their rights – an instance of demand. However, the paradox, for Dr. Nahas, was that this instance remained as such and did not develop into a fully engaged political force capable of resisting and penetrating the governance structure. After the peak on 22 August 2015 that led hundred of thousands to the streets of Beirut, activists were left asking: what now? The campaigns that remained on the streets faded as numbers dwindled in support. Activists and organizers knew that people were getting exhausted and too disheartened to answer the calls to protest on a consistent basis without anything to show for it. August 22nd became the turning point for the political imaginaries of the alternative, when those involved had to self-reflect and confront the pressing questions pertaining to their direction and future identity. The discourse around the political imaginaries transitioned from the streets and into the municipality, but even then the ideological political approach did not take off. This was because of the differences in thought and ideology, the same difference that the apolitical technocratic approach avoided.

I attended one of the open meetings organized by The Independence of the People that aimed to provide open space for discussing and sharing ideas among those who participated or just sympathized with the mobilizations. Disparities were apparent even among those who agreed on the necessity to engage in politics. These disparities extended from the discussion of the role of the state to securing rights and services, to the current state of the NGO market in the nation, to the question of Hezbollah's arms. Beirut Madinati isolated itself from the need to take positions on such issues by limiting its focus to the technocratic needs of Beirut. Engaging in multiple political dimensions would force them to take positions that would necessarily alienate

groups of people. However, despite the heated disagreements and the heavy weight of frustration and dissension, their alternative political imaginary was escaping the sectarian structure. It does, I suggest, so when it thinks about the apparatus as whole. From the outside, it is able to gaze at the totality of the structure, see the cracks, and strike at vulnerabilities. Even though the alternative in Lebanon has little to no power to influence social change within a network of power-relations of national, regional, and international actors, they still attempt to conceptualize alternative positions. In a way, it is a thought process that imagines the possibilities of post-sectarianism and what that might look like through addressing key issues.

I interviewed former Labor Minister Dr. Nahas who was leading the Citizens within a State campaign and was pushing for the formation of a new political party, a few weeks prior to the election date. He framed the prevalent apolitical technocratic discourse as part of a moral framework:

The discourse takes a moral correlation when you don't want to include a position. If you don't want to hold a position, what's left? That we're the good ones and they aren't, we're clean and they're dirty? We're good people and they're thugs? It's not an issue of pure and impure – however this issue is not about morals.

What he highlights is that the discussion around political action and the formation of political parties among activists is effectively moralized, in that it demonizes those politically active in parties, and victimizes those who are not, while painting them as morally superior. Any involvement with a political party, associated with the state, taints. The political imaginaries of the alternative were within this moral framework, one that is configured to the specificities of the context in Lebanon.

The Moral Framework of Lebanese Politics

Although Oriental tales of taxi rides in Beirut are clichéd, I have to include my own, quite simply because the driver nonchalantly summed up the moral attitude directed towards politicians and politics. When I was surprised to see him take the longer route to my home, he told me that he had to because of the recent road blocks set up by a politician living nearby. “They’re all thieves,” he said, “except Tammam Salam, he’s a good man, he has nothing to do with the rest.” Tammam Salam, the Prime Minister at the time of this ride home, is an independent politician and a key centrist figure. He was given the task of forming a new government in 2013, a task that took 10 months to accomplish due to political tension and disagreement. He is not an official member of any party, giving him legitimacy and distance from the demonized partisans. The demonization of politics and political involvement go back to the civil war when, during the 1970s, as Nael, a lawyer, activist, and member of We Want Accountability, explained, political parties were naturally equated with militias. The equation happened because political parties during the war took up arms, turned into militias, and participated in atrocities common to a war. Militia politics extended after war, with a more or less subtle display of arms, into public and private institutions by taking control over “customs duties, ports, indirect taxes, and various modes of mass communication-television channels, AM and FM radio stations, and newspapers...” (Salloukh et al. 2015, 20). Its extension to institutions and to the social fabric suffocated all aspect of everyday life. People felt disheartened and powerless in this form of politics and they felt that these politics, which was then generalized to politics in general, was something best avoided. This section attempts to explore the moral framework through which the sectarian citizen, as an ethical subject, engages in politics. This is done in terms of exploring the demonization of politics, its effects in political imaginaries, and

how the sectarian citizen views politics. In turn, this leads to the discussion on the form politics takes in the context of the Lebanese sectarian state, which I refer to as abject politics.

I undertake a moral anthropology of Lebanese politics, however, not to present a discussion in terms of the Kantian-Aristotelian discourse of what a good life is and how to attain it in absolute terms. Instead, I aim to explore the sectarian subject as an ethical subject in politics within the specific context of the historical, political, and socio-economic conditions of the sectarian structure. I draw on Fassin's reworking of *ressentiment* in order to explore the process of the demonization of politics that the sectarian citizen is constantly undertaking (2013, 260):

Ressentiment is a reaction to historical facts, which generate an anthropological condition: victims of genocide, apartheid, or persecutions experience this condition. It implies not primarily revenge but recognition. It signifies the impossibility to forget and the senselessness to forgive. The man of ressentiment may have been directly exposed to oppression and domination, or indirectly, through the narratives of his parents or grandparents, for instance.

In his article titled *On Resentment and Ressentiment: The Politics and Ethics of Moral Emotions*, Fassin exemplifies *ressentiment* through the context of South African apartheid and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the AIDS controversies. In what follows, I think with this concept within the context of a state-sponsored amnesia and lack of transitional justice in postwar Lebanon. At the end of my fieldwork, during which the conceptual binary of the political imaginaries of the alternative were apparent within the municipality elections, I sat down with Nael to discuss people's aversion from politics. He says:

I think that the phobia of parties is the first problem that we have. Not belonging to a political party is nothing to be proud of, I'm in a political party, I'm active in a civic mobilization, but I have my own political thought based on certain principles. The problem is tying parties to sectarianism, to kinship, to feudalism, and to thugs. Unknowingly, people who are afraid of parties are the people that reinforce corruption,

feudalism, and this political anomaly of a situation. What does not belonging to any party mean?

In postwar Lebanon, relationships between the perpetrators and the victims were not made official by legal and juridical powers, as they were in South Africa. Instead, a heavy veil of silence was forced on the nation when amnesty was granted to not just soldiers, but also and more tellingly, to warlords. Lebanon's institutionalized practices of induced amnesia and the lack of transitional justice, nonetheless do not shake the "impossibility to forget and the senselessness to forgive." Politics in the postwar setting is a reminder of the capabilities of political parties and political involvements have that can bring about chaos, destruction, and death, as it had done during the war. If we assume that there is a target for *ressentiment*, that is, *ressentiment* towards the perpetrator, of apartheid, war, and institutionalized forms of injustice, then in the case of the sectarian citizen in Lebanon, their *ressentiment* is towards politics itself. The combination of *ressentiment* and fear of reoccurrences of violence allows the sectarian citizen to, rightfully, demonize politics. The nonpartisans, among those who had refused to vote, even at municipal levels, develop everyday tactics to shun politics. Aversion from politics avoids heated discussions which have the potential to turn into fatal arguments, it avoids bringing up the past in an environment that does not allow for healing, as attempting to dig out a bullet only to deepen the wound. You would avoid politics in order to keep friendships and even families in tact. The ethical way of living for the nonpartisan is then to avoid involvement with politics and its actors. The nonpartisan is repulsed by the way partisanship manifests itself through the impunity granted to the perpetrators of unlawful acts. Partisans are then tainted as thugs, thieves, outlaws, and in the light of the recent street mobilizations, "infiltrators." This becomes incorporated in the ethics of the everyday for the nonpartisan sectarian citizen.

The political economy of the sectarian system has latched onto the most banal aspects of everyday life through its institutions and other capillaries. A deep association of livelihoods with the political structure was inevitable, but in Beirut a consequential sense of helplessness allows politics to be dismissed as deadlocked, and therefore the sectarian citizen sees participation as useless. When anti-neoliberal theories position the state in opposition to the free market, it disregards that the state has become “inextricably part of the workings of the market and, hence, no longer an ‘outside,’ an antidote, or an antithesis” to neoliberalism (Comaroff 2011, 146). The state, as an accomplice, then “is increasingly reduced to an exercise in the technical management of capital” killing off ideologically founded politics and replacing it by “the politics of interest and entitlement and identity—three counterpoints of a single triangle” (2011, 146). In Lebanon, this kind of politics acts on neoliberal tendencies that provide the most possible profit while respecting the sectarian structures and quotas, and, indeed, respecting the sectarian wealth distribution patterns. Comaroff states that “if we are to fashion other futures, it is critical to grasp fully the nature of the beast and of its capillaries—and their effects not just on our lives but on our thought processes” (2011, 164). How does the state, and sectarianism, contribute to the demonization of politics in ways other than repressing transitional justice? What, then, is this form of politics that is deadlocked and preferably avoided by the sectarian citizen? What constitutes it? If politics is moralized along the boundaries that Dr. Nahas sketched, does this mean that there is a “right” form of politics that the alternative should aim for, one in which politics is not tainted? Is it one of (non-sectarian) political ideologies?

I use abject politics in order to draw a distinction between the form of politics, which is based on sectarian identities and fear mongering narratives, and a “right” form of politics that relies on practices, approaches, and ideologies centered around debates on the nation’s

wellbeing. I draw on Kristeva's concept of abjection (1982) in order to conceptualize the form of politics perpetuated by sectarianism and the state. Kristeva explains, "The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (1982, 15-16). The abject manipulates laws, conventions, and logic, and this form of politics that works within sectarianism does that. The sectarian partisan can share drinks with their counterpart from a rival party whom they have been at odds with for years, overnight, with the decree of a newly formed alliance between their leaders. Abject politics is the consequential form of politics that operates within sectarianism and further perpetuates it. It has succeeded in limiting the sectarian citizen's idea of what politics is, to deadlocked discourses that play on sectarian identities and scapegoating tactics. The partisan, who does not see its perversions, seems illogical to the nonpartisan and they are as shunned and demonized as the politics they undertake. It is a politics that navigates well within the institutions and overall lawlessness of sectarianism. It is reminiscent of wartime politics since it relies on discourses of Othering and blind sectarian loyalties. It is centered around key sectarian figures and their presumed representation and protection of their corresponding sect. Those who confront the abject often revolt by disengaging since, as Creed writes (1993, 65):

The place of the abject is where meaning collapses, the place where I am not. The abject threatens life, it must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject, propelled away from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self.

However, this form of politics is powerful because it fuels young men to pick up arms and fight in the name of their party whenever their political leader demands it while other parts of the population are completely disengaged. Abject politics in Lebanon, disengages and ultimately

repels the disenchanting population from politics all together. The ideological political activists were trying to take back politics from both abjection and disengagement. If social change is to happen, both must be confronted. The confrontation to abjection allows the sectarian citizen to recall the genealogy of their state of being. The abject is one condition for the creation of the sectarian citizen, an ugly truth repelled by many. To counter it, as Nael explains:

We're in need of awareness of what politics is. Politics is about platforms, ideas, and drawing up a plan... We're in a direction that is against the state and its practices, but just because it's in the form of a party, we stand against it while we accept any other form of organization?

Politics is blind here in Lebanon, when there was no longer any leadership in the state no one cared. President or without a president, parliament or without parliament, it doesn't make a difference. The definition of what a state is has been shattered. There is no state. People had to make their own, the state is now the owner of the electrical motor that delivers electricity to the neighborhood—that is now the local authority.

The plea for an affectless version of politics built on platforms and plans reveals the abject nature of politics that operates in sectarianism. The state did not address the waste management crisis in terms of debating the best course of action to provide a sustainable solution, instead, it was in terms of debating the distribution of profit among the sectarian elite. The same could be said for electricity, water, and other infrastructural failures. This form of abject politics does not even include a technocratic perspective to the crises devouring the country. But Beirut Madinati raised the standard, to an extent. The oligarchy's presentation of its platform for the Beirut municipality elections was a desperate copy of Beirut Madinati's well-researched and well-presented platform. In contrast, the Byerteh list stitched together a logo, a slogan, and platform points just prior to the elections. Regardless, it was unprecedented for an establishment list to present a platform, even if the campaigning council never meant to execute it. The usual political rhetoric solely depended on sectarian alliances and regional strongholds.

Nael, a member of an out-of-power party, argued for the need to engage with politics and the need to step away from demonizing political action:

I have a problem with someone who is not politicized. Perhaps they haven't found the right party that expresses their thoughts, I don't have a problem with those who do not belong to a party but my problem is with those who say it with pride as if belonging is an allegation of some sort.

Taking back politics involves establishing a discourse outside of the prevalent sectarian system, that involves stances, policies, and an overall direction focused on the wellbeing of the nation rather than a sect. However, in the pragmatic sense, how would a politically engaged alternative navigate inside of the structure, or even penetrate it, without risking getting tainted by establishing alliances with the parties in power? The politically engaged alternative has to establish positions and alliances to navigate through the sectarian system since ideology alone cannot guarantee victories. In that sense, is compromising necessary for the success of the alternative within the state? I believe that in some points it might be the realistic course of action, but towards the end of my fieldwork and over a year after the waste management crisis of 2015, the alternative did not organize into a political party or promote “real” politics. This reflects that the alternative is in the preliminary stages, and at that stage such questions are theoretical and can only produce but a few scenarios. I turn to another question that instead focuses on the sectarian citizens themselves, especially the disengaged, and their roles in the alternative. How can the already engaged citizens in the alternative reach out to them and involve them in political action? For this, I discuss the everyday and its potentiality as a site for taking back politics.

Taking Back Politics Through the Everyday

For Das, the everyday is “taut with moments of worldmaking and world-annihilating

encounters that could unfold in a few seconds or over the course of a life” (2015). The demonization of politics and hence its avoidance ensures that world-annihilating encounters are at a distance. The everyday then holds the “potential for continuous transfigurations that can make everyday slights, grudges, betrayals, boredoms turn into lethal conflicts” (2015). In addition, powerful political actors have the numbers and arms to convert the everyday into “a theater of conflict for national level political confrontations” (Das 2007). Therefore the nonpartisans can attempt to keep violence at bay if they maintain an apolitical position that distances the potentiality for world-annihilating encounters. However, the ethics of the everyday that demonizes politics can only attempt to distance these encounters when they present no immanent danger. When confronted with arms, the lack of affiliation to other parties cannot always guarantee safety. Maintaining everyday life constitutes attentive processes which aim to keep violence at bay but “without ever the satisfaction that the problem of violence has been solved once for all” (Das 2015). Everyday life is thick due to the complexities of these processes that aim at sustaining everyday life; the moral framework which demonizes politics operates within the context of the everyday. Al-Mohammad’s work in post-invasion Iraq explores how an ethics of the *rough ground* of the everyday is “understood in terms of the ways in which life is not only open to the pain, suffering, joy, and ennui of others, but also to how in the entanglements and relations of lives with other lives in the everyday, lines of care and concern emerge, are fostered, and also frayed” (2012, 44). The everyday allows us to engage in an ethics that is not just limited to the *self*, but an ethics that acknowledges the thickness and complexities of life as people carve their paths through it, as an ethics “of the *relationship* or the *with*” (Al-Mohammad 2010, 437).

I focus on the ethics of the everyday because in the context of the nonpartisan, the

demonization of politics inhibits, as Das calls it, the absorption of newness (2015). In terms of collective political action, newness involves “tectonic shifts that might be in the nature of slow changes that are not on the surface, and second, it involves the mobilization of energies that go into bringing newness at the political level (but these energies are not always durable)” (Das 2015). Yet newness is needed, especially by the alternative, in order to introduce a new language of governance and to reform relationship between the state and the citizen. The alternative mobilizations, both in the streets and in the municipality elections, utilized a new language in the Lebanese political terrain, one that focused on accountability, transparency, the need for improving and providing public services, and the need to follow platforms and ideas instead of sectarian identities and fear mongering politics. Asad states that after the July 3rd in 2013, military coup in Egypt (2015, 8-9):

it becomes apparent that there never was a “revolution” because there was no new foundation. There was a moment of enthusiasm in the uprising, as in all major protests and rebellions, but the solidarity it generated was evanescent. A hopeful attempt at beginning a tradition never guarantees the hoped for future: clear aims, good judgment, patience, and willingness to learn a new language and how to inhabit a new body, are required to respond to the various dangers and opportunities that emerge from attempts to found a new political order.

Even though the Lebanese mobilizations were not as intense and powerful as the Egyptian, I draw a parallel between the two political moments. If this is not a revolution, then what is?

Conclusion

Rabie and I have coffee on the hustling Bliss Street with the company of AUB's army of sandwich-hungry cats — cats that have claimed the area and strut through the university and the nearby restaurants and cafés. “They expect to achieve results on the very next morning of the protest,” he says, “people are not patient.” Anyone who dares to hope needs rapid affirmation in the face of cynicism and frustration. Most of the time, anyone believing in promises of social change ends up being ridiculed and scrutinized for being too naïve, since no tangible outcome has come out of the alternative. I had unknowingly booked my plane ticket back to Ottawa a few weeks before the Beirut municipality election date. I seriously deliberated extending my stay just to vote, but numerous constraints made this impossible. I urged my family to vote for any of the alternatives, as an attempt to garner a few votes for these campaigns even though I was not able to cast my own. But they had sworn off any political support/affiliation, even for an unaffiliated campaign. Many people were frustrated, and activists in the Beirut Madinati campaign took this into account when considering what to do if the alternative lost the municipality elections. They had decided that they and their volunteers had to push through the loss regardless of the frustration to sustain the fight for a better quality of life. Being a Lebanese activist entails the fluctuation between “alienation” and “resistance” – between feeling powerlessness to change and actually have the capabilities to do so (Tiano 1994). Rabie, however, was not sanguine about what even this tenacity could achieve:

The regime is strong because it has a representational base in all of the sects. Also, the surrounding region does not allow for a large margin for change especially due to the problems in Syria, the amount of refugees in Lebanon, the political power relations in Lebanon, the regional powers, and the struggles between these regional powers which has taken a military turn in places, in addition to Israel and terrorist groups. There are a

lot of problems and constraining variables, each of which may present an existential risk to the country.

On November 12th 2015, a double suicide bombing in south Beirut killed over 40 people and injured hundreds. This broke the relative peace in the country, since the latest previous attack had been in January of the same year, in northern Tripoli. The year before, bombings had been very frequent. I recall that prior to coming to Canada to pursue my graduate degree, bombings were happening on a weekly basis. Because security inevitably takes precedence under such conditions, activism and the call for social justice become deprioritized. How do activists nonetheless act toward creating an alternative future, when the present is nearly overwhelming? How can a campaign find and implement solutions to problems that are the product of the political economy of a sectarian confessional system within a volatile regional and internal context? These questions weighed heavily on Beirut Madinati's ten-point program. Of course, they were completely aware of the limitations that they would face if they managed to defeat the odds and win the council. They were up against a structure that dictates political action every step of the way, especially within the context of the capital's municipality. As it turned out, they did not win. Nonetheless, their participation had an effect on the oligarchy. Their participation in the elections forced the Hariri-backed list to bring forth their own program, an unprecedented move by the political elites who had previously relied solely on a sectarian rhetoric that disregarded the causes of the socio-economic struggles of everyday life. Even though the elite's program was a replica of Beirut Madinati's, activists perceived this to be a step in the right way to reform politics; a small victory. The ten-point program pushed the oligarchy into "developing," even if just for presentation, a platform that was centered on the inhabitants' needs and concerns. As a disenchanted Beirutite myself, promises of green public spaces, a reliable transportation system, a sustainable waste management program, among others, were enjoyable

ideas to entertain, but never to take seriously. Much as promised by the widespread frustration, street mobilizations withered and the municipality elections ended with few victories to claim, all while the deterioration of services and the quality of life continued. The cynicism of the everyday citizen was reaffirmed.

In light of the Egyptian uprising in 2011 and 2013, Asad addresses the creation of a new political foundation, a foundation which is a “rupture from the past and an opening to the future,” an “ambiguity that lends itself to the concept of revolution,” one which is needed in order to influence change and realize the aspirations of overthrowing the old regime (2015, 183). What interests me most in this work is that, in addition to the relationship between the subject and the state, Asad also attends to the relationship between subjects themselves. In doing so, he acknowledges the value of a rupture, and remaking, within subject-to-subject relationships. However, everyday interactions may render a new foundation “virtually impossible” when there is mutual distrust and a “long history of contradictory political experience” (2015, 190). Asad argues, within the Egyptian context and within the specific relations among the secularists and the Muslim Brotherhood, that “like the destructive shifts following capitalist crises, the fractious time of petty dispute and distrust overwhelms the temporality of learning discursive traditions, on recognizing how dependent one is on others, and living accordingly” (2015, 199). This kind of discord was occurring among Lebanese activists; petty disputes and personal attacks seemed to undermine the common purpose of those opposing sectarianism and the state. The recent street mobilizations were grounds for confronting these issues, however, the surge of activism in this time period an opportunity for these issues to surface. But as Nael pointed out, activists were slowly coming together as the momentum resided. They were no longer able to mobilize hundreds, and as numbers dwindled those who were remained were left with each other. Das

questions Asad's pessimism, as he claims that it was a failed revolution, and asks about the importance of "these moments of heightened intensities within the life worlds and their potential for generating something that might exist for now in the margins of consciousness but might grow later into something yet unthought" (2015). The transition of the battleground from the streets to the municipality exemplifies how the alternative sought something previously unthought. The question became, after the defeat in the elections, what can the alternative do in order to propel itself towards an inclusive and powerful form of activism?

Throughout my fieldwork, the activists that I spoke with emphasized the importance of recognizing the intersectionality of the struggle, especially when asked about future actions and tactics that an alternative front would take. A true all-encompassing alternative discourse would then need to recognize the various experiences of injustice, oppression, and discrimination present and integrate these experiences, as well as the subjects of these experiences, as part of the identity formation and thinking processes. This includes tackling gender relations in a patriarchy continuously reinforced by both capitalism and sectarianism, while acknowledging class relations and differences, and the struggles faced by immigrants and refugees among other subtle intersectionalities. Then, "how can we gather around a political discourse and program and support each other?" asks an activist who is part of a political socialist feminist group, "that's what we need, that's why our movement is weak because this doesn't exist." For this activist, the fight is centered on one "sophisticated enemy." The exploitation of natural resources, the deliberate weakening of national institutions, and the marginalization of local governance is all its workings. An inclusive form of activism entails support for different struggles while still tackling the sectarian structure; which is a feature integral to the identity of the needed alternative.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Lebanon take on specific and varying causes. However, within the context of a weak state and strong sectarian fault lines, the work that they do further contests the relationship between the state and the citizen (Kaouès 2012). NGOs compensate for the state's failures, which in turn simultaneously relieves people yet compromises their right-claim to the city.¹¹ During the garbage crisis, NGOs took on the role of sorting and attempting to safely dispose of the garbage as best they could. Some activists thought that keeping the trash piled up on the streets would have instead continued to incite people to join the mobilizations and protest. Trash should be a function of the state, not of NGOs or individuals. There was an insistence that the solution to the waste management crisis was not dependent on the individual's ability to recycle, although, without a doubt, a culture that promotes green practices does help in developing sustainable waste management solutions. Activists traced the waste management crisis, as well as other infrastructural failures, to the sectarian structure and its actors that had continuously denied municipalities not just their right to manage their own waste, but also their right of governance. Drawing on Collier and Lakoff, I situate the waste management crisis in terms of biopolitical governance and how, in turn, the sectarian citizen responds and lives with the realities of infrastructural failures. Resiliency, as a characteristic I explore in the sectarian citizen, is not just understood as de-politicizing. Instead, by drawing on Cavelty, Kaufmann, and Kristensen, I suggest that resiliency of the sectarian

¹¹ There are certainly cases in which NGOs have done more harm than good and yet they still operate unregulated. A small example is when Syrian women who were refugees residing in a small town in northern Lebanon were telling me how they're repelled by these various and numerous NGOs. It was when I was conducting focus group interviews as part of my work as a research assistant. They recounted how an NGO came in and engaged their children in activities in the sand and on the beach. But when they left, the women were forced to bathe their children in cold water because of the lack of hot water, let alone water. Their children fell ill because of that and they said that it was avoidable. The NGO complex that Lebanon witnesses is a research in itself.

citizen is complex and essential to surviving everyday life. Framing resiliency in a negative light dismisses the daily struggles that the sectarian citizen faces. Resiliency, alongside pragmatism, allows this citizen to work the system they are trapped in.

NGOs represent, at most, a temporary and less effective solution to problems that require institutional reforms. But within a sectarian context, some NGOs instead comply and perpetuate the dominant discourse. Sectarian parties work with sectarian organizations to target and serve specific sects. There are NGOs that cater to one sectarian demographic while appeasing the corresponding political figure. These criticisms of NGOs do not aim to dismiss the work that aides people and actually makes a difference. But even if they only offer small scale and temporary solutions, and even if NGOs proudly do not ascribe to the sectarian discourse, they still contain this potential for damaging the alternative. Nonetheless, there are NGOs that do not comply with the sectarian discourse and advocate for rights, yet still often suffer from an oversight of class relations. Asad notes (2015, 201):

Middle-class activists, with institutional funding from Euro-America and access to Western networks, tell their fellow citizens to claim their rights as free persons from their state and to produce more efficiently in a free economy. One result has been that this civil society has become further alienated from the predicament of the urban and rural poor. Market-time, with its emphasis on the sovereign consumer, not only undermines much of the continuity of everyday life but also disrupts the time necessary for cultivating trust that goes beyond the interests of the individual.

The concept of class stresses how (in Marxist terminology) relations to the means of production “establish antagonisms and generate conflict and struggles,” through which these “relationships impose their logic, their pattern, on social processes” (Wood 1982, 50). Class, as a marker of social experience, shapes the interactions and relations within the civil society, as well as the space it occupies and its place within power-relations. The “rupture,” or break, into a powerful

political imaginary occurs at the level in which class is recognized and people, as a collective, are mobilized—a form of class consciousness that is not limited to one segment of society.

Talks of class relations with activists, who lean towards the Left, often led to discussions on syndicates and trade unions—the historic site for the manifestation of work-based class struggle. Their importance was emphasized in the struggle against financial and economic powers, however their status in postwar Lebanon seems subdued. “The Left is very weak here and, in my opinion, the only way to actually achieve long term change,” said Nizar, “is through a strong leftist movement, through strong unions mainly. But, we are very far from that now.” The romanticizing of working-class people and their struggles also romanticized unions as sites of contestation between labor and the state, but this does not hold up within a heavily entrenched system of sectarianism. Union members align themselves with the dominant political parties, directing the discourse towards sectarian representation rather than demands. With a few exceptions (most prominently the Syndicate Coordination Committee, a coalition of private and public school teachers and public sector employees headed by Hannah Gharib, elected Secretary-General of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) in April 2016), unions have not participated in the political imaginary of the alternative that contends the dominant sectarian discourse. Unions, in this sense, need to be reimagined in order to accommodate urban settings, because if strong links do not exist between workers and their communities, then their mobilizations to demand rights and social justice are doomed to fail (Harvey 2012, 138-9). In an urban setting such as Beirut, “the collective labor involved in the production and reproduction of urban life must therefore become more tightly folded into left thinking and organizing” (Harvey 2012, 139). But in Lebanon, it being no exception, socio-economic hardships alone are not enough to link workers to communities with disregard to sectarian politics and identities. Class-consciousness

may exist, but it is overshadowed by sectarian identities. How then can a city organize itself? Harvey answers: “we simply do not know, partly because not enough hard thought has been given to the question, and partly because there is no systematic historical record of evolving political practices on which to base any generalizations” (2012, 140). Nonetheless, the context-specific forms of mobilization and organization found in different cities, from informal to formal, from hierarchical to egalitarian, provide models that can be understood, studied, and adapted if needed.

I can't claim that I hold an answer to the Lebanese question. I, as well, remain baffled. The attempt to enter the municipality councils in the 2016 was a moment for the alternative to ask questions, to engage its differences and reimagine itself in its nuances, and confront and reconcile differences. I find, however, that Hardt and Negri's concept of multitude speaks to the uncertainties of action and organization that have emerged since the municipality battles of 2016. To work with the multitude necessitates not just the reimagination of unions, but the reimagination of organizing people who carry different struggles in order to advance collective rights and demands without dismantling and overlooking key differences. The multitude conceptually collapses boundaries between the economic, the political, and the societal. I find that this collapse is both the strength and the weakness of the concept of multitude. These struggles are “constituent struggles, creating new public spaces and new forms of community” (2000, 56). The organization that stems from such an understanding attempts to be both local and global. However, the leap into the global to become a part of the global workings, risks the blurring of the locality and specificities that produced a resistance, or alternative, to begin with. This leap begets ahistorical discourses and becomes dismissive of the contextualized alternative. Nonetheless, I think with this concept within the Lebanese context, where there is a need to take

a small step towards the global, there is a need to establish a dialogue in the nation that can go beyond the specificities of the sect, at the very least. Drawing on Makdisi, sectarianism is treated as a product of a specific historical context which created the context of the sectarian citizen's struggles. The struggles that the sectarian citizen must always be situated vis-à-vis sectarianism that is placed inside of history rather than outside of it.

The multitude is the continuous dialogue between the actors of the struggle - it is created in "collaborative social interactions" (2004, 361). Hardt and Negri state: "What is necessary and possible today is a form of labor organizing that overcomes all the divisions of the old unions and manages to represent the becoming common of labor in all its generality—economically, politically, and socially" (2004, 224). They call for an opening of unions to other segments of society whether they are mobilizations or other civil society actors rather than an exclusion to just a specific and limited category of workers. Even though this project approaches the boundaries of the form of a political party at a different site, it nonetheless reimagines how such an organization could come to be. The multitude is the existence of the struggle between the specificities and the generalities of its context, such that (2004, 351-2):

Each local struggle functions as a node that communicates with all the other nodes without any hub or center of intelligence. Each struggle remains singular and tied to its local conditions but at the same time is immersed in the common web. This form of organization is the most fully realized political example we have of the concept of the multitude.

Rehmann critiques Hardt and Negri by stating that multitude does not "answer the political question of how the different components of the multitude can be brought into a productive arrangement" (2013, 14). Rehmann then offers other forms of conceptualization by drawing on Hans Jürgen Urban's concept of a "mosaic left" which describes the coming together of different identities and organizations to form a mosaic-like arrangement (See Candeias, 2010).

Nonetheless, I saw the multitude expressed when Lebanese activists pushed for inclusivity in their activism. Such a connectedness might already be present and growing, and want to ask, how does the concept of multitude help in forming a politically sustainable alternative front? I regard the multitude as referencing a mode of subjectification needed for the creation of the alternative political subject. It is primordial for an intersectional and all-inclusive form of activism that does not negate its values when addressing existent intersectionalities. It incorporates the struggles of women, migrant workers, refugees, among others, not just as the organizations' goals for social justice, but into their identity and working body. The end goal of the multitude is not universalism; instead it allows for varying models of organization to organically bud in accordance with subjects at their specific locality.

The question of how to organize a city, let alone a nation, into an alternative front weighs heavily because of its broadness, an overarching question that requires substantial and detailed strategies that take into account the historical, economic, social, and political, as well as regional and international factors. Beirut Madinati's technocratic approach to the municipality was a constraint in itself, but it allowed them to work and reach out to people using a discourse that did not involve taking conflictual stances. A call for the "downfall of the regime" did not project well on the streets of Lebanon, where people are fearful that an overthrow would lead to a descent into chaos. The state labeled the protestors as people who wanted to incite violence and tip over the peace balance. For many, the violence emitted by the sectarian structure during a more or less peaceful time is still better than a lapse of state, especially for those who have lived through wars and turmoil, for fear of their recurrence. An inclusive language of activism is essential to the making of an alternative, but how widely adopted can it become among Beirutis? And how will it mobilize the apolitical disenchanted population? How can such an inclusive

rhetoric spread beyond the bubbles of middle-class activists in the city? Is it elitist talk to begin with?

At first, my research was aimed at thinking about what a revolution might look like, an all-encompassing mode of organization that would free the nation from a suffocating structure. But the mobilizations and campaigns of 2015 did not spark a revolution; this was not the moment of grand downfall. Yet they were still valid expressions. The street mobilizations of 2015 were in response to the garbage crisis, but it was obvious that the outcries were not limited to the garbage. It was about the way the entire political structure shaped everyday life. The call for a grand revolution against the state would have been void since there is no substantial and sustainable alternative foundation. Instead, drawing on Didier Fassin and Veena Das, I suggest that a more viable form of activism stems from everyday revolt, from focusing on what can be done to make everyday life more survivable. The garbage crisis, which has extended into 2016, and, at the time of writing this research, continues without a solution, emerged into the banality of everyday life, along with other infrastructural failures. More anthropological work is surely needed to address questions of revolt in the everyday, emphasizing the apolitical and sectarian subjects' central role in establishing an opposing force to that of the dominant structure. Lebanon is in a more or less peaceful interval of time, that must be taken advantage of by remembering the history of the present, while trying to grasp control a future despite the constant recurrence of frustrations.

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