Milieus of ReMemory

Milieus of ReMemory:

Relationalities of Violence, Trauma, and Voice

By

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The artist Jakob Roepke provided a production of the image of his artwork for the book's cover. A friend since I settled in Berlin in 2007, Jakob is perhaps better known for his small, surrealist collages. When I recently again saw his angular sculptures at an exhibition, it struck me that they almost perfectly captured my inchoate efforts to define the notion of relationality informing the pulse beats of my book. Strange, I thought, that these irregular shapes could offer an image of thought I was struggling to verbally articulate. But then again, I further realized, Jakob has managed to render strangeness a constitutive feature of his art. I like to think that my discussions maintain the chiaroscuro of milieu borne by his angular sculptures.

CHAPTER ONE

DEPARTURE

Pitching Tents

In February 2005 people in Beirut, especially the youth, were busy erecting tents, temporary dwellings designed as sites of political intervention and transformation. Martyrs Square in the central district came to resemble a sea of billowing canvas. Rowdy and boisterous, dotted with brightly painted political slogans—journalists began referring to the site as "the tent city" (Young 2010, 31). This occurred in the wake of the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. In what could be regarded as an early instance of the so-called Arab Spring that exploded with contagious momentum six years later in Tunis in December 2010, people in Lebanon had had enough of an authoritarian Syrian/Lebanese political elite maintaining rule and order through the intelligence forces and Syrian army. A large protest movement broke through the barriers of both fear and the Lebanese army cordons, while a disenfranchised, energetic youth pitched tents and occupied the otherwise vacuous space of Martyrs Square. Whether referred to as "the cedar revolution" or, more locally, "intifadah al-istaqlal" (independence uprising), people spontaneously came together to publically protest and demonstrate against the conceit and arrogance informing Syrian/Lebanese politics and governance.

Hariri had been killed in the hotel quarter of the city on February 14, at the northern end of the Corniche straddling the sea in Ras Beirut. The car explosion was so big that I heard it from my office at Notre Dame University in Zouk Mosbeh, about sixteen kilometers away. Having an almost panoramic view of the sea and coastal highway to Beirut, I looked out of my window to make sense of the sudden and rather muffled boom, and saw a large, dark brown pall of smoke billowing up into the air. A half-hour or so later the news filtered in and circulated through the corridors.The university more or less closed down after students, staff, and academics vacated the campus. In the following weeks, the coastal highway I used to get to work was often jammed with protestors driving to

Beirut to join the uprising. I recall the protest movement as a carnival atmosphere in which class, confession, and gender distinctions were to some extent blurred. People of all backgrounds and allegiances took to the streets, in a spontaneous series of demonstrations that initially put the Lebanese authorities and army into a surprised retreat, watching from the sidelines.

While this event triggered a change of political alignments in Lebanon—breaking the decades-long Syrian stranglehold over Lebanese politics, all the while reconfiguring Syrian influence—it also ushered in a renewal of established political accommodations that since the civil war(s)[1] had come to be more intensively directed toward sectarian channels of power and authority. Lebanese politicians who had been happily catering to the Syrian occupation quickly intervened and joined the anti-Syrian momentum, while the spontaneity of the protest movement came to be co-opted toward the singular goal of the withdrawal of the Syrian army. One after another the leaders of established political parties/ militias demanded Syrian withdrawal, urged the unity of the Lebanese nation—*al-watan*—all the while reasserting, Machiavellian-like, their particular sectarian and private business interests.

Initial motivations of protesters to hang out and occupy public space, creatively discuss broader issues of wealth distribution and economy, gender and patriarchy, environment and employment, education and training, public welfare and governance, as well as violence and the disappeared from the civil war years, were swiftly sidelined. This narrowing and channeling of political action and sensibility into predominating, accommodating circuits of power and deference is captured by Moustafa Bayoumi's diary account of how the initial non-aligned movement in the tent city (or "camp," as he calls it) was overtaken by the tents of sectarian parties. "The camp's problem," he wrote a few weeks into the wake of the uprising, from his experience as a protester in the non-aligned section of the tent city,

> was by this time clear to me. The history of Lebanon is one of deep, almost unbridgeable, sectarian divisions which people believed—"hoped" is perhaps a better word—could finally be overcome after the Hariri assassination. The killing of the former prime minister—a national insult— illustrated the need for a strong and unified Lebanon. Unity is called for

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[1] Or else "the wars of Lebanon," to evoke Fawwaz Traboulsi's (2007) term. See in particular the third part of his book, where he provides a detailed, political economic history of the civil violence, war, ethnic cleansing, and foreign occupations that took place between the years 1975 and 1990.

over and over again at the camp, but its geography demonstrates the same confessional divisions that exist in the country itself—which is what makes the independent group all the more exceptional. (Bayoumi 2009, 3)

Although Bayoumi at the time refers to the non-aligned protesters as the "independent group," the uprising came to be understood by local, regional, and international players without necessarily making any significant distinction between sectarian and non-sectarian interests. More concerned with maintaining political influence, ideological commitments and business interests, regional and international players supported one political party/militia or another, rather than encourage debate over governance, political culture, and public welfare.

The Hezbollah and Amal movements took their chances and like the other parties/militias pitched their own tents in Riyadh al-Solh Square, a stone's throw from Martyrs Square. Backed by the Syrians, they played up to the political expediency of speaking for Lebanese unity while promoting sectarian divisions, all the while seeking to better represent and serve their constituencies—communities that had pretty well borne the brunt of Israeli aggression and occupation of Lebanon, mainly in the south. In the wake of Syria's subsequent withdrawal and consolidation of sectarian divisions, Hezbollah and Amal weighed in for a formal share of political power. Consequently, the uprising was steered towards maintaining the status quo, although with a redistribution of political alignments between what coalesced as the March 14 and March 8 alliances. The paradox, of course, concerned how, despite the channeling of authority and power toward sectarian divisions, each of these two political blocs cut across confessional demarcations. But amidst the maneuverings and rivalries, all parties, as well as the Syrians, seemed to agree that maintaining a weak and ineffectual state—no better symbolized by the absence of a president from May 20014 to October 2016—ultimately served their interests.

This is not the place, and neither is it within the scope of my research, to provide further political commentary. To be adequate, one would have to note other aspects, such as Israeli aggression and civil atrocities (the summer war of 2006), the reorganization of a non-aligned Left, and more recently the emergence of the Beirut Madinati political movement contesting municipal elections with a public welfare platform.[2] I am also not interested in setting up the sectarian conduits of political authority and violence as a negative other to a positivist notion of the secular that assumes a contractual notion of politics—largely patriarchal—based

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[2] I provide their URL: http://beirutmadinati.com/program/?lang=en.

around notions of individual, inalienable rights. For this reason I find it facile to argue that the sectarian has somehow to be "overcome" once and for all, trumped by secular—i.e.: "rational"—forms of governance. In his critical genealogy of what he calls "formations of the secular," Asad (2003) alludes to a sense of how "the secular" comes to be constituted as, he writes with emphasis, "*the* epistemological domain in which history exists as history" (42–43).[3] I think we can add that in terms of a productive momentum the secular does not mark a historical departure from the sacred, but constitutes the latter's significance and resonance as a sacrificial alter in modernity. For example, any consideration of the highly charged sacredness and spiritual aura of nationalist commemorations reminds us how the emergence of the secular involves an incorporation and reconfiguration of the sacred—"an activated thing, religiously, politically, and discursively" (Gelder and Jacobs 1998, 22), to which I would add, emotionally and ontologically.

In this study, I will refer to *conduits*, *channels*, *differential* and *deferential distributions* and *circulations* of *material and imaginary resources*—rather than sectarian groups or communities, as though such groups and communities embody unchanging modes of attachment and identification. Emphasizing modalities of group coherence and composure,[4] recent anthropological studies of media and community have concentrated more on the "circulation" of cultural artifacts and related "formations." As Birgit Meyer (2010) notes: "a community is not a preexisting entity that expresses itself via a fixed set of symbols, but a formation that comes into being through the *circulation* and *use* of shared cultural forms that is never complete" (4; my emphasis). This sense of community and subjectivity as relational sites of emergence and comportment is similar to what Blanchot (1988) calls "the unavowable community." By this term, he means that at the very limits of a community's capacity to imagine and represent itself as somehow more enduring than any of its members, arises the non-formulaic murmurs that must be negatively named and expelled if it is to constitute itself as a community. Or else the text that provoked Blanchot's disquisition—Jean-Luc Nancy's (2008) *The Inoperative Community*: "I am trying to indicate, at its limit, an experience—not, perhaps, an experience that we have, but

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[3] In another context, Asad (2009) speaks about "secular critique as modern theology" (51). See his essay "Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism."
[4] Not group coherence, but conduits and modalities by which group coherence is accomplished through ongoing, constitutive shifts of porous boundaries and borders, according to deferential flows and exchanges of material and imaginary resources—the March 14 and March 8 blocs are good examples.

an experience that makes us be. To say that community has not yet been thought is to say that it tries our thinking, and that it is not an object for it. And perhaps it does not have to become one" (26). This is similar to Agamben's (2013) notion of a community defined not by a possession of property—material or ideal—but rather by the excess that always exceeds any ontological attribute, a "coming community" always in the process of undergoing the void that lies between integration and dis-integration (who belongs and who doesn't? How is belonging defined? etc.), an "infinite series of modal oscillations" (18).

However, to reflect on and foreground the epistemological, social-ontological and ethical parameters of my own approach, in my research in Lebanon I tend to concentrate on memory practices that initiate alternative modalities of social exchange to the predominating parceling of political communities and advocacy according to confessional allegiance. These latter communities have, to be sure, their own ways of recalling and accounting for the civil war and its memory. They no doubt have also to negotiate and manage internal fractures and articulations of discontent, all the while competing with other communities for scarce material and imaginary resources, or else control the circulation of symbolic capital. But my point here is that in speaking of confessional communities in terms of political constituency and advocacy—in respect to the circulation, distribution, and management of material and imaginary resources ("modal oscillations")—I have already intimated my intent not to reproduce an epistemic assumption of community and conflict in terms of a binary opposition between religious and secular. For concerning Lebanon there has been an almost overwhelming analytical approach to the explanation of violence and its affective force as somehow due to primordial attachments and identifications, concerning either ethnic and/or religious attachments.

As many commentators have pointed out, violence and suffering in Lebanon are endured and symbolically exchanged through familial and confessional bonds. Yet there is a tendency to essentialize or else ontologize these bonds as themselves the causes of violence and suffering. In his discussion of the relationship between the work of memory and justice, Paul Ricoeur observes that "the duty of memory is the duty to do justice, through memories, to an other than the self" (2006 89). Accordingly, how are we to situate this complex and compelling notion of "duty" in respect to the specific modalities of social exchange and predominating political cultures in Lebanon? The question is even more vexing when we consider that justice itself has all too often been regulated through patriarchal practices and discursive articulations of honor, revenge

and retribution. Of course, violence and trauma, like memory and justice, involve practices in the production of community, so that they come to be employed as reproductive mechanisms for the maintenance of social viability. Yet to ontologize such processes and social modalities into prediscursive attributes is to bypass a more instructive approach, playing into the hands of certain liberal agendas that fail to reflect on their cultural assumptions and hermeneutic repertoires.

Always to come, never identical or adequate to people's sense of a shared imaginative and/or practical self-awareness, as a molecular force community takes place in the irresolvable tension between a scattering and gathering. Memory is of course one such resource by which people manage to sow the terms by which they reproduce themselves as a community. Accordingly, by concentrating more on the channels, conduits, circulations and distributions by which a community takes shape, acts itself out through modalities of cohering, I find it productive not to underestimate how memory of an event often takes place as an event of memory.

Such an approach lends itself to considerations of how resources circulate as differential and deferential modes by which a group of people comes to take shape and cohere through porous gaps and fractures—an incompleteness that is often symbolically denied, though physically played out as the unutterable real.

Overall, then, I concentrate on emerging cultural and social practices, especially among youth and women. While initiating and undertaking alternative practices of cultural production, political activism, advocacy, and social exchange, such inchoate collectivities, I want to note, do not lie outside of or beyond the more predominating, sectarian directed modalities by which power, authority, and influence transpire as certain distributions of material, imaginary, and emotional resources in Lebanon. While to some extent my research subjects understand their motivations in terms of departures from predominating modalities of collectivity, their more inchoate sense of collective work and action intersect, overlap, and cut across national/sectarian/patriarchal channels and conduits.

In a quite straightforward and practical way, my conceptual approach is inspired by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The primary tangent or coordinate—"image of thought," or "plane of immanence," perhaps—threading through their four collaborative works—*Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986); *Anti-Oedipus* (2004) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (2012); *What Is Philosophy* (1994)—concerns an emphasis on conduits and corridors, exits and entries, passageways, flows and distributions. This "molecular" (rather than the more holistic "molar")

approach to how groups and communities cohere is more occasional and site-specific than substantive, concerned more with the flows and assemblies, contiguities and assemblages, in which subjects emerge through knots of physical comportment, composure and discomposure. As one critic succinctly puts it: "With Deleuze and Guattari one leaves behind the well-defined forms of solid objects, for a description of relations between unformed elements" (Ballantyne 2007, 97). This non-substantialist insight helps me clarify a site-specific phenomenological approach to the porous and overlapping *milieus* in which people move and emerge as subjects. In doing so, they work with others to adapt material and imaginary resources to engage the social, cultural, and political channels and conduits of their environments—indeed, engaging modalities by which their subjectivities transpire as *relational* sites of exchange and social viability.

Activities surrounding and inhabiting a tent, we can say, are an almost perfect physical example of what Deleuze and Guattari call "associated milieus." There is no substantive inside or outside of a tent, only movements in and out, around and across the flowing fabric of a tent's temporary location. The very temporariness of a tent suggests a less solid distinction between an inside and an outside—one can just as well sit under an attached awning, a canopy that can be rolled back or even dis-attached. Pitching a tent transforms space into place, into a phenomenological "taking-place" (Agamben 2013, 2), whereby inside and outside are produced as modal oscillations of reference and physical movement through a number of overlapping, or "associated," passages. Perhaps Deleuze and Guattari (2012) had in mind something like the image of a tent when they described a milieu as an annex: "The milieu assumes a third figure here: it is no longer an interior or exterior milieu, even a relative one, nor an intermediate milieu, but instead an *annexed or associated milieu*" (57; emphasis in the original).

For all sorts of reasons, both the physicality and image of a tent have some consequence for my preoccupations in this study with memory, violence, trauma, and voice in respect to the *aftermath*—an after that is never after, but always becoming after—of the civil war in Lebanon. A tent straddles, and thus corrupts, distinctions between public and private. In Beirut, the pitching of tents in 2005 worked to annex public space for the production of political, social, and cultural activities. Whatever political shapes and contours, cultural practices and social orientations, the pitching of tents brought about at Martyrs Square and Riyadh al-Solh Square, they transpired as a temporary taking-place. Consequently, place was not defined by the coordinates of a map, or else a repetitive staging of

an event. It was rather experienced as an inchoate production of place, event, subjectivities, and publics. The very temporariness of the tents was embodied as an anticipation of their dismantling. Temporality and related hermeneutic embodiments of history erupted as an event that exceeded both the sign of the times and the time of the sign.

However we may argue against the politics of one side or another (or perhaps both sides), in 2005 both Martyrs Square and Riyadh al-Solh Square were transformed, mainly by a disenfranchised, passionate youth, into public sites of political action and social exchange. As I come in a section below to discuss activities in and out and around one particular protest tent, I suggest that the annexed blurring and place-making of public and private space and sensibility has some consequence for modalities of embodying and exchanging gender, especially concerning women activists and cultural producers. The proactive challenge to the parceling of public and private space has also some consequences for a notion of memory as *milieu*, rather than *lieu*, or perhaps to the tension between these.

Pitching Rememory

For now, I want to address and make a case for my notion of *rememory*, which I had evoked in my earlier study *The Fragmenting Force of Memory* (Nikro 2012), borrowing from Toni Morrison's (1997) wonderful novel *Beloved*. I had introduced the somewhat awkward term "dismemory" to suggest a more productive notion of forgetting and/or practice of memory as a convenient, politically expedient mode of historical amnesia—the sly collusion of *amnesty* and *amnesia*. The notion of *milieu* Morrison weaves into her novel is a prominent theme in her critical essays (1992, 1984), and has helped me to develop her accompanying notion of *rememory* towards a relational sense of what can be referred to as tensions between *lieu* and *milieu*. However, for the moment, rather than rehearse this theoretically, I cite two particular tents in Beirut in 2005 that remained standing after the political elite managed to put the "house of many mansions"[5] back in order, and the tent city in Martyrs Square became redundant.

One of these two remainders still standing was the "Hariri tent," a candle-lit enclosure designed to commemorate and mourn the death of the former prime minister. The other tent was put up with the support of the non-government   organization   SOLIDE—Support   of   Lebanese   in

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[5] To quote the title of a famous historiographical study of Lebanon by Salibi (1998).

Detention and Exile. Besides maintaining a vigil for memory of the disappeared (estimated at around 17,000, still unaccounted for) of the civil war, it was designed as a site of protest against the Lebanese government's lack of action towards recovering the whereabouts or remains of abducted and missing people.

The Hariri memorial tent lay right on the edge of Martyrs Square. His private firm Solidere had managed (amidst much controversy) the post-war reconstruction of the city center, almost all of which was destroyed during the war. The tent stood against the background of the massive blue dome and four minarets of the large Mohammad al-Amin Mosque. Hariri had financed the construction with his own funds, which is why it is locally known and referred to as the Hariri Mosque.[6]

Straddling the tent city, the Hariri tent became a center of public attraction and public display of mourning. With the use of large poster-like photo-montages depicting mourners, photographs of Hariri himself, large Lebanese flags draped across the ceiling and walls, candles, as well as a curious hagiographic painting that depicts Hariri receiving the Lebanese flag from the statues of Martyrs Square (Khatib 2012, 17), the tent was presented as something like a shrine, or else a "*darih*," a "tomb" (Vloeberghs 2012). Although a former prime minister and billionaire—dubbed "Mr. Lebanon" by some (Blanford 2006)—Hariri was not such a popular figure, though became so in death. Due to the eruption of the events in the wake of his assassination, in death he came to symbolize a sacred figure who had given his life for the unity of the nation. The date of his assassination, February 14, has since been declared a national holiday, and in February 2015, on the tenth anniversary of his death, the tent was converted into a mausoleum.

In her study *Memorials and Martyrs in Modern Lebanon*, Lucia Volk (2010) includes a section on the iconography of Hariri's fate, discussing his memorial tent in terms of a "Lebanese spirit of martyrdom" (170). The sacred significance of Hariri's death becomes clearer when connected to the subsequent withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon. Consequently, his death was construed as a sacrifice for the Lebanese nation, for Muslim and Christian constituencies alike. As a sacrifice for and symbol of national identity, the hermeneutic and symbolic significance of Hariri's martyrdom thus works to transcend sectarian/confessional differences and conflict. At the time of his burial, the media in Lebanon displayed a preference for images of Christians and Muslims

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[6] For a recent, ethnological discussion of the mosque, see Ali Nehme Hamdan (2017).

standing shoulder to shoulder at the site of his grave—the former reading a prayer, the latter reciting the opening verse of the Koran.

Where the Hariri tent occupied a highly visible site straddling Martyrs Square, adjacent to the noise and bustle of the protestors and tent city, the SOLIDE tent was pitched at the less conspicuous and much quieter site of the Khalil Gibran Garden, in front of the United Nations building. It was put up on April 11, 2005, as a shelter for a sit-in that had been organized to "demand to know about the fate of the missing Lebanese in Syrian detention."[7] SOLIDE's focus was directed towards protesting the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, especially concerning the many Lebanese that had been abducted (by Lebanese militias and Syrian authorities, it should be said) and transported to prisons in Syria.

In different ways both the Hariri and SOLIDE tents work as memorials, using photographs, candles, and other memorabilia to bear witness and maintain a public vigil. Both tents, in fact, fashion memory as a site of encouraging public interest in the personal fates of individual subjects, and in doing so involve varying registers by which the personal overlaps with the public. Yet there are significant differences in motivation, practice, and anticipation between the two tents. The SOLIDE tent places more emphasis on advocacy. The activists protest in front of the UN to put pressure on the Lebanese state to more seriously investigate the circumstances of the 17,000 people that had been disappeared by militias and their political parties, run by leaders and politicians who for the most part became part and parcel of the post-civil war government.

Obviously concentrated on the deceased former prime minister, the Hariri tent was motivated more for purposes of mourning, attuned to political expediency than political advocacy and activism. Although tents are usually regarded as transient dwellings that can be quickly dismantled, moved and erected elsewhere, from the start the Hariri tent carried an air of permanence. Almost immediately, the Hariri family flexed its wealth and connections, buying the plot of earth on which the tent stood, thus transforming a piece of public land into private ownership. In 2015 this permanence was extended indefinitely, when the site was transformed into the solid stone edifice of a mausoleum—a "legacy rendered eternal," one newspaper article observed (*Daily Star* 2015).

The SOLIDE tent, by contrast, still stands, its canvas still billowing in the wind. More precarious than the Hariri tent, it resonates with an activist anticipation of political change, resounding with ongoing sit-ins,

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[7] See "The Tent and Our New Project," found under "What We Do," SOLIDE (n.d.): http://solidelb.org/what-we-do.

demonstrations, talks and round-table discussions, public protests engaging the local and international media. The contrast is very physical— where the Hariri tent (now mausoleum) is designed for mourning and contemplation, maintaining a solemn and decorous honoring of a political figure, the SOLIDE tent is noisy and rambunctious, rowdy and eruptive. The former is attuned to a reverent silence, to the absence of voice and speech. The latter resounds with sound and voice, with speeches and shouts, with noisy discomposure. Where the one embodies a physical site of a solemn, polite and decorous politics, the other embodies a rowdy politics constantly taking place as a series of loosely organized events. Where the one situates the present as a site for contemplative orientation to the past, the other situates the present as a boisterous site attuned to the future.

I want to argue that where the Hariri tent situates memory as *lieu*—a site embodying the decorum of institutional shape, contour, and orientation—the SOLIDE tent exercises memory as *milieu*—a site of action, of social exchange, a taking place of politics more as an event than a formal, commemorative arrangement. While no doubt being involved in an eruptive, historical dynamic that brought about a reconfiguration of political alignments, the physicality and symbolism of the Hariri tent nevertheless maintained a conventional channeling of political advocacy along established confessional conduits and their constituencies. By contrast, the SOLIDE tent constitutes a site for alternative social and political engagement, especially concerning women who, due to circumstance and a concerted will to discover the fate of family members who had been disappeared, became political activists.

Rather than exercising memory as a compliment to established sectarian conduits and channels, contours and orientations—political constituencies, party lines, patriarchal arrangements of power, authority, and influence—the SOLIDE tent involves social practices, political activism, cultural production, and relational modes of emergent subjectivities, on the borders and fault-lines of predominating community, gender, and class modalities of attachment and belonging. This is not to say that attributes of religious affiliation and political sensibility, patriarchy and state authority, have no consequence for the activists, but that such attributes alone do not guide or else channel a collectivizing sense of their motivations and actions. As an expansive milieu of political activism, the SOLIDE tent blurred more established gendered demarcations of public and private, guided by a specific demand (recovery of the missing and disappeared) which worked to expose the interests of

politicians in maintaining memory more as *lieu*, formally sanctioned as dismemory, restricting the past to a neatly packaged past.

One example of the tension taking place between memory as lieu and rememory of milieu is the official commemoration held in April 2000 to mark 25 years since the start of the civil war in 1975. While demonstrators attending the commemoration at Martyrs Square boisterously protested against the government's neglect of the missing and disappeared languishing in Syrian and Israeli prisons, the politicians turned a deaf ear and spoke about the need to forget the violent past. In the presence of the then President Emile Lahoud, speaker of the parliament Nabih Berry, and then Prime Minister Salim Hoss, Rafik Hariri claimed in his speech that "The civil war has become a relic of the past. . . . Not a single building should be kept as it is to remind us of the civil war. There is no need to preserve this painful memory" (Khayyat 2000). Clearly, the politicians of the time were more comfortable with a formal, sanctifying modality of remembrance that serves to distance the past from the present, in the process producing coordinates of dismemory by which the present is purified from the ills of the past.

What is interesting about the commemoration in 2000 is how it works to establish a temporal hermeneutic by which the violence that occurred during the years 1975–1990 could be regarded as a singular event with a clearly defined beginning and end—as "the civil war." In my research, I have come to be attuned to a phenomenological sense of violence as a lingering condition and circumstance, as not quite out of the ordinary. At the same time, I have found that a post-civil war generation proactively working on maintaining the past as a critical site of memory is just as interested in a temporal hermeneutic that neatly defines a periodic beginning and end to "the civil war." In a later chapter, I discuss the oral history project *Badna Naaref* and video project *War Stories*, in which teenagers from high schools in and around Beirut held interviews with their parents' generation, recording and documenting the latter's experiences of war and violence. In doing so, the high school students contribute to the temporal hermeneutic of "the civil war." Yet, different to the official and expedient production of dismemory that works to render the present uncontaminated by the past, the stuttering temporalities of the personal stories the students solicit and document—the work of the students themselves—serve to situate memory of the past as a pressing, contentious concern for the present.

As I strive to demonstrate throughout this book, *it is the tension between these temporal hermeneutics—between memory as a periodized*

event of the past and as an emerging, episodic event of the present, between lieu and milieu—that informs my notion of rememory.

This temporal split involves a number of other tangents, such as the emergence of political-cultural affiliations among the youth participating in oral history and memory projects, or else among the activists around the SOLIDE tent. While not quite forming a community, such affiliations nevertheless constitute "singularities" taking place through social contours and orientations of working at "being-with-one-another" (Nancy 2008, 53), a belonging fashioned around social capacities to adapt material and imaginary resources and undertake tasks that provide alternative means of engaging political and public cultures in Lebanon. I discuss this dimension of engaging resources in respect to Wadad Halwani's (2009) short film *The Last Picture . . . While Crossing* in my chapter on photography. Her adaptive, collage-like style expresses a more relational and non-substantive notion of subjectivity. As Nancy (2008) writes: "Being is put in play among us . . . it does not have any other meaning except the dis-position of this 'between'" (27). Like Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "associated milieus," and Agamben's notion of "modal oscillations," Nancy puts more emphasis on belonging and community taking place in movements in and out of corridors and passages, exits and entries, inside and outside.

Another significant, temporal and phenomenological, tangent informing my study concerns an intergenerational displacement of memory. Maintaining the fifteen years of civil violence, war and atrocity between 1975 and 1990 as a temporal reference means by now (2018) the necessity of distinguishing at least three generations and at least three coordinating temporalities: those who had experienced their childhood and youth before 1975, those who experienced their youth during the civil war, and those born after 1990. Across and between these generations subjects tend to embody and hermeneutically employ varying temporal impulses, depending on multiple and layered past-present-future coordinates.

The compelling significance, as well as resonance, of this generational "dis-positioning" (to evoke again Nancy's term) informs the momentum of a recent film by Nadine Naous. At one point in her *Home Sweet Home* (2014)[8] she refers to her adolescent sense of the end of the civil war in 1990 as "turning everything upside down." Born in Beirut in 1974, Naous experienced her whole childhood and early youth amidst the violence. Unlike people of her father's generation, she had no experience of a

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[8] See my essay on the film, "Ya 'Ayb al-Shoum: Scenes of Auto/Bio/Graphy and Shame in Nadine Naous's *Home Sweet Home*" (Nikro 2018).

circumstance of non-violence by which to normatively incorporate violence as abnormal. While this observation needs to be more nuanced, the point is that her generation embodied a different temporal and phenomenological hermeneutic to that of her father's generation. The latter, to be sure, tended to incorporate a sense of the failure of progressive (pan-) Arab movements and nationalisms. But my point is that, having inhabited a childhood and adolescence where the *anticipation* of physical—not only actual—violence was the norm,[9] Naous had no sense of ideological "failure" as a normative hermeneutic by which to orient herself to her political sensibilities. Temporally and temperamentally part of what can be called a civil-war generation, Naous is wedged between her father's generation and a later generation that has no prolonged, enduring existential experience of the deprivations of the civil war.

As I have said, this scheme of three generations needs to be further nuanced, to appreciate how people endured and acted on, for example, the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon up to 2000, as well as the Israeli onslaught and civil atrocities in 2006—the so called "summer war," (*harb Tammuz*, July war). My broader point is that, as subjects of their milieus, people embody and exchange social livelihood as hermeneutic patterns of relational comportment. Across generations (again, this category should be nuanced to consider class, gender, as well as ethnicity), such patterns encompass varying modalities and sensibilities by which social life can be meaningfully inhabited. How I experienced time and duration as a child, for example, is very different to the way in which my children embody time as a hermeneutic pattern of comportment. Unlike my children, the imaginative, anticipatory capacity to communicate with someone on the other side of the world in almost a split second was not part of my childhood.

This generational register has some consequence for memory taking place as and through exchanges of truth and testimony. The literary scholar Syrine Hout (2012) has drawn attention to the significance of generational differences when considering truth and realism in literary production emerging from the civil war (13). As I discuss later in respect to the high school oral history projects *Badna Naaref* and *War Stories*, across and between the generations, truth and testimony involve different, even conflicting temporal assumptions. Briefly (as I mentioned above) the high students conduct their interviews with a distinct, periodized notion of the past, all the while assuming a normative sense of violence that can be

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[9] For an ethnological discussion of violence and modalities of anticipation see Sami Hermez (2017).

categorized. By contrast, the older generation, respondents in the interviews, embody a sense of inhabiting violence as enduring conditions of their childhoods. In such circumstances, a bombed-out, hollowed building, for example, was not so much an aberration, but part of the fabric of their worlds. Sonic booms and gunfire, as well as the silence punctuating these sounds, constituted the textural acoustics or auditory noise of their urban environments.

In respect to my notion of rememory, then, I am interested in what transpires (and respires) as the relational tension between the lieu and milieu of memory. While the interviews the students produced can be stored and retrieved as an archival resource, their very production, storage, and retrieval involved the high school students in a molecular gathering and undertaking of tasks. These activities fashioned contiguous modalities of "being-with-one-another" (Nancy), contiguous "associated milieus" (Deleuze and Guattari)—without the need for a symbolic, iconic, or else substantive sense of a primordial identity, whether this be construed religiously, politically, or indeed as a heady mixture of both.

Citing Sites: Between lieu and milieu

Inventories and trajectories of memory and violence variably inform the respective circumstances and motivations for establishing both the Hariri and SOLIDE tents, as well as the actions surrounding them. Both tents, I have suggested, can be regarded as *sites* of memory, a term I want to problematize to draw a distinction between Pierre Nora's (1989) influential notion of *lieux de mémoire*[10] and what I contrast as *milieux de mémoire*. While both *lieux* and *milieux* can be translated as "sites," a perhaps better translation is, respectively, place and environment—the latter term having a connotation of the social, or socius; the former resonating with a sense of spatial boundedness. For reasons I address below, I want to emphasize the notion of "place," although with a more dynamic and restless connotation of place-making.

The English edition of Nora's multi-volume *Les lieux de mémoire* is titled *Realms of Memory* (Nora and Kritzman 1996), employing neither *place*, *environment*, nor *site*. One English translation of his famous, programmatic introduction—"Between Memory and History: Les *lieux de*

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[10] For critical reviews and discussions see, for example, Ho Tai (2001) and Sengupta (2009). I have benefitted from Anne Whitehead's *Memory* (2009), especially pages 139–47. I have previously addressed Nora's essay in my *The Fragmenting Force of Memory* (Nikro 2012, 22–26), and here offer a varying critique.

mémoire"—employs the terms "real environments of memory" and "sites" as opposites, as in the following, much quoted passage from Nora's (1989) very first page: "There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory."[11]

The longer title of the English volumes of Nora's study[12]—*The Construction of the French Past*—is also telling, as it suggests the (de)constructivist momentum of European intellectual culture of the 1980s, with its more spatial and semiotic coordinates allied to a distrust of linear temporality. Nevertheless, Nora's binary frame of reference— history and memory, *lieux* and *milieux*—implicates a revisionist nostalgia steeped in a sense of loss of temporal continuity, especially around a somewhat Hegelian notion of *nation* stuttering through periodic fractures, though always on the way towards developing a capacity for self-awareness. This temporal-hermeneutic nostalgia is suggested by, among others, Michael Rothberg (2010), who perceptively observes: "Nora's innovative rewriting of the French past from a nonlinear, 'site-specific' perspective remains indebted to a rather traditional teleological view of modernity." As Rothberg goes on to observe, "What he repeatedly calls 'real' or 'true' memory appears to give way to the artificial reconstructions of postmodern memory sites divorced from any organic community of remembrance" (4).

Rothberg's valuable point concerning Nora's nostalgic assumption that there are no more "real environments of memory," no sense of an "organic community of remembrance," has some methodological consequences, in respect to a critical phenomenological departure from one strand of the (de)constructivist momentum informing Nora's work. Considering his preference for an imagined nation purified from imperial and colonial entanglements, we could say that while Nora assumed the French nation as

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[11] This passage is translated differently in the first of the three volumes in English: "*Lieux de mémoire* exist because there are no longer any *milieux de mémoire*, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience." (Nora and Kritzman 1996, 1). Yet both translations relay Nora's sense of the apparent lack of *milieux* as a historical condition of the equally apparent pervasive concentration of *lieux*—centered on his causally charged term "because," *parce*. See the French original "Entre mémoire et histoire: La problématique des lieux" in Nora (1984).

[12] In fact, there are two sets of volumes translated into English. Nora's approach in the introduction to the second of these sets is clearly articulated in terms of a revisionary historiography intent with maintaining a nationalist framework of reference, For example, he refers to Algeria in terms of a "colonial war," or else a "civil war," rather than a de-colonial or anti-colonial war. In the almost five hundred pages of the first volume, this is the only reference to Algeria. See Nora and Jordan (2001, viii).

a "construction," his work contributed to the epistemological cohesion and purity of that construct.

The English translation of Nora's programmatic essay now dates almost thirty years. While most commentaries emphasize the way in which he provides a historical account of the distinction between memory and history, I want to focus more on how this binary bears upon his failure to better consider the critical, conceptual, and practical value of distinguishing *lieu* from *milieu*. Both these binaries—memory and history, lieu and milieu—underpin his assumption that *a historical condition* of the emergence of *lieux de mémoire* is the absence or loss of *milieux de mémoire*. For Nora (1989), memory has somehow been drained of its social impulses, transformed into subjectless *lieux*, or symbolic sites, archival store houses, museums, and ritual commemorations that apparently afford "no referent in reality; or rather . . . are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs" (23).[13] His somewhat nostalgic sense of a loss of historiography as "critical discourse," "an intellectual and secular production," is articulated in contradistinction to memory as "remembrance within the sacred," "spontaneous," "unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation." "At the heart of history," he claims, "is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory" (9).

As "ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness," Nora (1989) defines *lieux de mémoire* as "museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders"—"devotional institutions . . . beleaguered and cold . . . rituals of a society without rituals." They are *lieux* or sites of memory to the extent that they no longer encompass a social practice and critical dialogue with the past. Thus *lieux de mémoire* are "moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded" (12). The analogy is compelling, the rhythm of the language somewhat poetic, the tenor encompassing a nostalgia for "true memory," or what is vaguely defined as "unspoken traditions" having social and collective implications (13).

Memory and history, then, accrue their conceptual significance through their binary opposition—the latter, while attuned to a critical activity, serves Nora's nationally focused agenda; while the former, memory, risks a fragmentation into competing narrations of the past, corrupting his

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[13] Here and following, I am quoting from the *Representations* (Nora 1989) version of the essay.

preference for a collectivizing national narrative. Some twenty years later, in a 2006 interview, Nora refers to memory as "terrorism," and goes on to evoke the need for what he calls "an authority of reconciliation": "Reconciliation through history takes longer. But, ultimately, it is that which is needed, because memory divides and history alone unites" (quoted in Rothberg 2009, 269).

Much of the secondary literature in memory studies fails to appreciate that Nora does not write from the purview of the study of memory, but rather as a somewhat unreconstructed historian, all-be-it enamored by a spatial, (de)constructivist momentum he adapted for his nationalist agenda. It would thus be fair to say that for Nora environments in which memory takes place no longer involve a collectivizing production of social cohering. Consequently, historiography is increasingly charged with a nationalizing mission of fulfilling this roll. Migrants from former French colonies may well have varying memories and experiences—embody varying temporal hermeneutics—of French history, but acknowledging this would disrupt symbolic mandates of national "unity." Indeed, the political circumstances (the so-called Paris *banlieue* "riots" in October–November 2005) of the interview I have been referring to are significant. As Rothberg (2009) observes: "Speaking against the backdrop of recent and ongoing social unrest among migrant and minority youth, Nora creates a chain of associations linking memory with the supposed pathology, irrationality, and violence of history's victims" (269).

For my purposes the rigidity of Nora's distinction between history and memory assumes a narrow, rather historicist view of memory whose social force has come to be subdued by its apparent self-referentiality, absorbed by preservative impulses of documentation, memorialization, and commemoration—"rituals of a society without ritual," to repeat his astonishing phrase. In other words, Nora's binary, largely historicist opposition not only underestimates how people proactively work on and experience memory as social engagement, but also discards the value of memorials and commemorations as modalities of social exchange encompassing critical debates and discussions, as well as ethical practices of healing and mourning. He tends to underestimate a public ethos attuned to a sense of responsibility for the past; and further, how this ethos involves critical debates to appreciate the many and varied voices crowding both past and present.

Interestingly, Nora's work has been productive for postcolonial historical and memory studies, particularly concerning spatial dynamics of monuments and memorials. Such research places emphasis on how the notion of *lieux* disrupts epistemic schemes of teleology, to focus more on

what Aleida Assmann calls "topoi," or "the texture of memory in a non-linear and topological way." Critically noting Nora's nationalist, even "patriotic" agenda, Assmann (2009) nevertheless suggests that his interest in "how history takes place" offers a critical alternative to progressivist historiographies: "Instead of emphasizing continuity and unity, Nora has provided us with a conceptual framework with which to approach the fragmentary, inconclusive, and highly elusive texture of national memory" (151–52). She goes on to demonstrate that this lends itself to a more "transnational" appreciation of the space and place of memory, considering the many and varied "traces" of its material expression.

Assmann's essay comes from an edited volume by Indra Sengupta (2009), who in her introduction argues:

> It is precisely by destabilizing, as it were, the concept of *lieux de mémoire*, by critically deconstructing it and opening it up to a more nuanced understanding than the consensus-building and nation-oriented approach that the Nora project has adopted, that its possibilities as an analytical tool for colonial and postcolonial contexts can be realized. (6)

Sengupta gives some emphasis to a nuanced *application*, a nuance that affords both descriptive and conceptual registers. Accordingly, her volume is designed to question a conceptual distinction between history and memory that would vacate accounts of "social agency" and practices "by which sites of memory are made and change in meaning" (5).

Sengupta is more interested in how sites of memory encompass varying sedimentations and cross-cultural histories that complicate the often purifying, imperious symbolic claims to nationalist identifications/mandates animated by monuments, statues and other forms of memorialization. This concern informs Jay Winter's (2009) contribution, which evokes a sense of memory as "multi-vocal" and as a "palimpsest," so that a monument can be studied as a syncretic phenomenon filtering and encompassing diverse and competing histories and practices. As he argues: "Instead of focusing on symbols as stabilizers of national identities, we observe the ways in which symbols and cultural practices reflect plural identities, contradictory histories, and contested narratives about national identities, colonization, imperial power, and their aftermath" (171). According to Winter, this more "transnational" estimation of symbolic associations embedded in cultural practices has become particular pressing since the mid-twentieth century, in the aftermath of decolonizing revolutions and movements, and the growing and more visible numbers of migrants coming to Europe from former colonies.

Memory and the Arab Spring

My present discussion of the two sets of binary oppositions—history and memory, *lieux* and *milieux*—informing Nora's argument has some consequence not merely for better refining their conceptual coherence, but also their practical, methodological value towards appreciating contemporary memory practices in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutionary and protest movements that erupted in late 2010 and 2011. From Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt in the Maghreb, across to Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Bahrain in the Mashreq, the spirit of revolt resonating through these movements had an almost immediate effect on those of us whose research is intellectually and temperamentally tied to these countries.

While more directly aimed towards overturning authoritarian, if not dictatorial political institutions and related modalities of governance, the spontaneous protests served to question what Hamid Dabashi (2012) has phrased as "postcolonial ideologies" (xix). The "end of postcolonialism," he points out with his characteristic passion, is a historical, geographical, *and* intellectual event. As he proactively argues: "We need to alter the frame of reference, the analytical apparatus, the disciplinary thinking, that we apply to these facts and our understanding of the Arab Spring" (224). Dabashi's point is that the protest movements and revolutionary actions surprised predominating intellectual schemes of historical and geographical understanding, going so far as to suggest that a geography of liberation questions the graphic contours of "the Middle East."

Dabashi's argument has some bearing for thinking through the application of memory studies' frameworks and epistemological repertoires. While I do not understand my research as an expression of Arab Spring sentiments, I have nevertheless tried to reflectively consider and incorporate how my encounters with my research material and research subjects in Lebanon have come to question and alter my theoretical terms of reference and conceptual assumptions. Part of such reflection involves acknowledging—in a rather classical phenomenological gesture—that "sources" and subjects of research have their own ways of inhabiting and engaging their environments. Once addressed as sources and subjects of research they have to some extent been transfigured and constrained to respond to the epistemological and conceptual repertoires informing the contours by which a research agenda is applied. But to be more specific: how do the manifold refrains of memory studies, embodying as they tend to do European-centered temporal rhythms and epistemological inventories, speak to the varying

historical and geographical circumstances in which I conducted my research and gathered my "sources," storing them as *re*sources.

As I have come to learn, and want here to foreground, the movement and application of an epistemological repertoire can be just as enabling as it can be narrowly limiting. As Edward Said (1991) outlined in the first of his traveling theory essays, in moving across geographies and temporalities theory can become an "enabling condition of intellectual activity." And yet

> one should go on to specify the kinds of movement that are possible, in order to ask whether by virtue of having moved from one place and time to another an idea or a theory gains or loses in strength, and whether a theory in one historical period and national culture becomes altogether different for another period or situation. (226)

Said to be sure was well aware that any *place* consists of a number of crisscrossing modalities of inhabiting and disinhabiting place, just as any *time* consists of manifold ways of inhabiting and disinhabiting temporality.

However, the point is that this sense of an epistemological repertoire as both enabling and limiting requires more *relational* (rather than relativist) and *responsive* orientations to the circumstances and occasions in which a person or thing is gathered as a "source," whose significance and resonance is transported into a varying epistemological and temporal scheme deriving from elsewhere. *Responsiveness* suggests that one cultivate (methodological, ethical, epistemological, temperamental) capacities to be sensitive to the ways in which sources and subjects of research come to question the terms of reference by which they are addressed. While *relational* points towards the myriad ways in which a source is experienced other than a source.[14]

Following the work of Nora, the notion of "place" has come to accrue conceptual currency in memory studies. Yet a constitutive aspect of this currency has been to downplay how memory practices initiate errant rifts and voids brought about by alternative modes of articulating past and present temporalities. Indeed, one could argue that Arab Spring protest activities and movements introduced rifts between memory and history—

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[14] For example: I may well gather a copy of a film as a source for my research, but the film itself circulates and embodies alternatives modalities of significance— viewed in a cinema house for entertainment, shown at a film festival because of its primary historical theme, shown at another film festival because of its technical achievements, etc.

whereby the authoritatively imposing, largely symbolic, formerly commemorative and panoramic rigidity of official state history is sundered by an emerging babble of diverse memories taking place in public and refashioning political sensibilities.

While cultural memory studies has often incorporated political sensibilities as part and parcel of the monumentalization of urban space, or else in respect to the musealization of artefacts (Andreas Huyssen's work is an exemplary example[15]), there has tended to be a neglect of how memory practices *initiate* place as sites of political advocacy. Much the same can be said of social memory studies, or else collective memory studies. Beginning with the significant early twentieth-century work of Maurice Halbwachs (1992), and coursing through the work of Connerton (2007) at the near end of the century, collective memory studies places more emphasis on ritual and structure—what Halbwach's otherwise called "memory frameworks," or "social frameworks for memory." Drawing on theories of duration to develop a notion of "social habit memory," Connerton fashioned a much tamer, Apollonian notion of Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, which could be otherwise read (as Walter Benjamin [1992] had) as an eruptive Dionysian fragmentation of embodied habit, or else a splintering of a predominant temporality (linear, progressive, teleological) embedded in narratives coalescing around memory frameworks.

Championing a notion of memory as embodied "performance," Connerton (2007), to be sure, was rallying against relegating the study of memory to cognitive schemes of "codes and rules." Yet, whether a mental or embodied attribute, memory is still defined by reproductive patterns somehow escaping the notice of people inhabiting "the society that remembers." As he goes on to write: "The habit-memory—more precisely, the social habit memory—of the subject is not identical with that subject's cognitive memory of rules and codes; nor is it simply an additional or supplementary aspect; it is an essential ingredient in the successful and convincing performance of codes and rules" (36).

In this vein, social memory studies tends to presuppose categories of group cohesion, concentrating more on how groups cohere according to predominating narratives, public sites of commemoration, or else sub-consciously embodied codes reproduced through (spi)ritual practices. While this has provided critical insight into conflictual processes by which collectivities stick together, mostly according to nationalist sentiments, the

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[15] See, for example, his compelling *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Huyssen 2003).