Mobilizing the Past in Revolutionary Times: Memory, Counter-Memory, and Nostalgia During the Lebanese Uprising

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Social movement studies have addressed the issue of nostalgia within two perspectives, focusing, respectively, on emotions and on memory. Our contribution looks at nostalgia in social movements by building upon the combination of these two streams in social movement studies. Going beyond a stereotypical vision of reactionary movements as backward looking and progressive ones as forward looking, we will suggest that while both types of movements look at some aspects of the past with nostalgia, they do it in a very different combination of emotions and memory. To compare how different movements perform their emotional and memory work, we focused on the recent uprising in Lebanon as a critical case in which mobilizations and counter-mobilizations have been carried out by different actors at the same time. In both cases, nostalgia was strategically developed for different moments of Lebanon's history through the movements' choices of the very spaces for the performance of contentious acts, but also the symbolic meaning attributed to them and the emotional work performed around the protest events. By developing a "tick description" of some main contentious moments where nostalgia emerged in the Lebanon uprisings, we aim to understand the ways in which nostalgia intervenes in the social construction of memories and counter-memories, in an emotionally dense environment.

KEYWORDS: contentious moments; emotions; Lebanon; memory; mobilization and counter-mobilization; nostalgia; social movements.

INTRODUCTION: NOSTALGIA IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Social movement studies have addressed the issue of nostalgia within two perspectives, focusing, respectively, on emotions and on memory. As for the former, research has addressed the potential effects of different emotions on the likelihood and the characteristics of collective mobilization. Social movement organizations engage in emotional work, trying to suppress those emotions (such as fear) that would discourage protest and strengthen instead those (such as outrage) that are more likely to fuel contentious politics. As emotions are not detached from cognition, the ways in which problems and solutions are framed have an impact on how people feel and, then, act. As social movements tend to prefigure a future, but also build upon visions of the past, the way in which memory is constructed and enacted affects mobilization, its size, and also its consequences. Memory is, therefore, a building block for the construction of social movement identities and also for the

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choices of repertoire of action. Memory work is always bridged with emotional work.

Being defined as the "pleasure and sadness that is caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again" (Merrian-Webster), nostalgia refers indeed at sentiments about the past, involving emotions and memory in its conceptualization. Combining reflections on emotions and memory allows one to go beyond a stereotypical definition of nostalgia as always linked to backward cognitive orientation and point instead at the relevance of its specific framing as well as at the importance of embedding nostalgia within different sets of emotions.

Late to emerge in social movement studies, concerns with emotions have spread in recent years based on the observation that social movements are certainly rich in emotions and that these play an important role in their developments. Often mentioned in research on social movements are anger, fear, envy, guilt, pity, shame, awe, passion, courage, anger, pride, joy, pride, love, indignation, grief, happiness, sadness, outrage, surprise, agitation, fearlessness, excitement, togetherness, and anxiety (Barker 2001; Fuist and Williams 2019; Gould 2004). Different typologies have been built, distinguishing emotions that address a specific object from more generic one, or short-term versus long-term emotions, or reciprocal versus shared ones (Goodwin et al. 2001). Emotions of trauma (grief, shame, helpless anger) are distinguished from emotions of resistance (pride, happiness, love, safety, confidence, righteous anger) in research on the movement against child sexual abuse (Whittier 2001:239). It was also noted that different emotions can play a different role at different stages of involvement: emotions such as anger, outrage, or fears can be particularly relevant in recruitment; indignation, pleasure, and pride can enforce commitment (Goodwin et al. 2001). Nostalgia is considered, in psychology, as a positive emotion with the (often restorative) effects of improving one's own mood and sense of life, rising self-esteem and optimism for the future. In this sense, it potentially connects with pleasure, pride, confidence, increasing identification in the group and potential engagement.

Social movement studies have in general embedded emotions in context in which social rules define the proper emotions to feel and the proper way to express them (Goodwin et al. 2001), looking at the ways in which emotions are produced in social interactions such as rituals to produce collective feeling (Berezin 2001). Moreover, understanding of the legitimacy of (some) emotions changes in space and time. Specific groups or specific environments nurture master emotional paradigms that define appropriate emotions. Pointing at the interactions (rather than counterposition) between emotions and cognition, social movement scholars stressed that emotions cannot be separated by instrumental action or ideas (Goodwin et al. 2001), as "participants in rituals communicate whole complexes of ideas and embodied feelings" (Barker 2001:188). In fact, emotions do contribute to ways in which people make sense and feeling is part of thought; thus, a emotions are not necessarily natural; moral shock alters ways of thinking (Gould 2004). From this point of view, the role played by nostalgia can vary according to its use by collective actors to mobilize attachments to a constructed past.

Social movements as well as movement events could produce emotions or intensify them (Collins 2001:29), fueling collective effervescence and group solidarity, strengthening the emotional energy (Gould 2001). Activists tend also to recognize the different emotional cultures dominant in the different environments they participate in, getting involved in a (non-necessarily conscious) emotional labor oriented to control some emotions and stimulate others (Whittier 2001). In fact, "movement groups interactively construct feelings that are genuinely felt (deep acting) and they strategize about and collectively decide what emotions to display or acknowledge in order to promote particular responses in observers (surface acting)" (Whittier 2001:237). Participation in transformative protest events produces pride and pleasure, thought self-respect (Wood 2001). Social movements can in fact stimulate nostalgia to consolidate a memory of a glorious past that helps the construction of a future.

Emotions and cognitions interact indeed in the construction of the past as all social movements embed themselves in with specific events or activists representing memory building blocks on which collective identities are constructed. Memory work is particularly important as movements need to construct collective identities at each new wave of protest with a mix of tradition and innovation. Each movement shows, in fact, a tension between building upon a tradition and presenting itself as new, finding local roots and reaching out around the globe. In Hobsbawm's words (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:13), to increase their legitimacy, movements tend to back "their innovations by reference to a 'people's past,' . . . to traditions of revolution. . . . and to [their] own heroes and martyrs." As agents of memory production, but also consumers of memories (della Porta et al. 2018), social movements build collective memory as "the set of symbols and practices referring to the past which are shared by a community of people" (Zamponi 2013:1). Social movement activists use memories to build their own collective identity, as "remembering helps community stick together in certain ways and break apart in others, while repression silences memory" (Zelizer 1995:219).

Being socially constructed and inherently plural, memory is contested both from above and from below (Olick and Robbins 1998:126). Social movements develop their own selective memory, with transformative events being particularly relevant in the construction of the past (Wagner-Pacifici 1996:301). Within social movements themselves, "different communities refer to different sets of symbols and practices, and the same individual can belong to more than one group, developing a multilevel identity based on different mnemonic practices" (Zamponi 2013:1). As is the case with official memory, counter-memory is also selective: "Dominant memory is not monolithic, nor is popular memory purely authentic" (Olick and Robbins 1998:127). Within social movements, collective memory is in fact polyvocal, as it is the product of much work done by many actors (Irwin-Zarecka 1994). In this sense, memory is a site for struggles: "Agents of memory often participate in 'mnemonic battles' over how to interpret the past, who should be remembered, and the form that a historical narrative ought to take" (Jansen 2007:959; also, Petersen and Reiter 2015).

Exactly because it is filtered, framed, and contested, memory tends to change. In a processual approach, memory is both an outcome of protest and a tool for new

mobilizations, as in order to become relevant for public memory an event needs to be socially appropriated (Harris 2006:19). Memory works through mechanisms of collective remembrance that are related to the intention to remember (Bernhard and Kubik 2014). Collective memory is seen as a continuous process of negotiation, involving complex relations between past and present, through a process of sense-making (Olick and Levy 1997) that involves mechanisms of remembering, through mixes of recollection and commemoration, but also on those of forgetting (Zelizer 1995). Memories are cerebral and sensual (Wagner-Pacifici 1996): that is, cognitive and emotional mechanisms are involved in their presentation. Mnemonic practices allow social movements to appropriate symbols referring to the past (Harris 2006; Jansen 2007; Olick and Robbins 1998). As noted, "Memory defines 'us' and 'them'; it produces infamous characters and folk-devils; and it establishes the list of the veterans—heroic or ridiculous. Memory solidifies narratives and legacies, in relation to which we must adopt a position" (Neveau 2014:276).

Looking at movements as producers of culture, social movement scholars focused on concepts such as oppositional subcultures (Johnston 1991) or cultures of solidarity (Fantasia 1988). Their (counter)cultural work is carried out in free spaces, defined as "relatively isolated social settings where subordinate groups may question the rationalizing ideologies of the dominant order, develop alternative meanings, iron out their differences, and, particularly in times of acute social struggle, transform traditional cultural meanings and construct emergent cultural forms" (Fantasia and Hirsch 1995:146). In these spaces, memories are nurtured or challenged as memory entrepreneurs emerge: "there is no framing or reframing of memory without conscious effort in which new interpretations are produced and circulated" (Neveau 2014:276). They can develop different strategies, operating as mnemonic warriors—which have a unidirectional, single, and mythologized image of the past, while delegitimating alternative visions—or as mnemonic pluralists, who "believe that different visions are entitled, and attempt at discursively agree on common mnemonic fundamentals within a pillarized field" (Bernhard and Kubik 2014). They can appropriate memories or avoid them (Zamponi 2018). Memories are indeed part of movements' inheritance, working as anchors for contentious politics; they offer cues and legitimacy or denying them. They might help in forming collective identities, but can also strengthen divisions; they can empower or disempower.

Our contribution looks at nostalgia in social movements by building upon the combination of these two streams in social movement studies. Going beyond a stereotypical vision of reactionary movements as backward looking and progressive ones as forward looking, we will suggest that while both types of movements look at some aspects of the past with nostalgia, they do it in a very different combination of emotions and memory.

To compare how different movements perform their emotional and memory work, we focused on the recent uprising in Lebanon as a critical case in which mobilizations and counter-mobilizations have been carried out by different actors at the same time. In both cases, nostalgia was strategically developed for different moments of Lebanon's history through the movements' choices of the very spaces for the performance of contentious acts, but also the symbolic meaning attributed to them and the emotional work performed around the protest events.

By developing a "tick description" of some main contentious moments where nostalgia emerged in the Lebanon uprisings, we aim to understand the ways in which nostalgia intervenes in the social construction of memories and counter-memories, in an emotionally dense environment. While there are certainly specificities related with the very particular Lebanon history, in our within case comparison of core contentious events, we use a logic of discovery, rather than of hypothesis testing (della Porta 2008), to single out different forms of nostalgia. Comparing the ways in which the past was used by contemporary social movements in Lebanon, we will suggest that types of movements vary in the specific ways in which the past is referred to and the specific combinations of emotions that are mobilized in the process. In doing so, we will look at the ways in which nostalgic references to the past were elaborated during the recent uprisings of 2019 (part 2). To this aim, we will provide first an analysis of how nostalgic references to the past were mobilized by protestors in Downtown Beirut to challenge the post-war neoliberal urban politics and sectarian segregation. We will then assume as second term of comparison two counter-revolutionary episodes performed against them in the same site by partisans of the Mustaqbal movement and the so-called "Shia tandem" (Hezbollah and AMAL movement), respectively, each one contextualized in the specific network of remembrances and mnemonic conflicts wherein they took place. To understand this network is of particular relevance for the Lebanese case for, representing a typical example of deeply and violently divided society, memory conflicts among different social constituencies define political identities, provide meaning to actions and sites, ignite or underpin specific emotions. This is all the more true in times of intense socio-political change, when new social forces emerge and challenge the existing order according to new grammars and agendas of dissent.

The paper builds primarily on the extensive observation of the hours-long live footages of the protests, shot and streamed by the main national TV channels (Al-Jadeed, LBCI, and MTV Lebanon) from the very frontline of the mobilizations, whose recordings are still largely available on YouTube and the channels' own websites. Methodological, we then build upon recent reflections on visual data analysis, focusing on them as a source of information that allows to reconstruct protest events in their special configuration and time sequences (Nassauer and Legewie 2019, 2021). The sources—we argue—provide a particularly useful observation point for the aims of our study for, together with providing a punctual and choral live chronicle of the events object of our investigation, they also enable us to grasp the emotional landscape wherein the latter unfolded, as well as its evolution over time. The observation of live footage has been integrated with a variety of secondary sources (reportages, short papers, and journal articles, among the most important) aiming at better framing the broader context in which the case studies took place. Last but not least, for what concerns the historical reconstruction of the political genealogies of the actors and of the memoryscapes evoked or challenged, the paper relies on secondary academic literature.

NOSTALGIA AND THE LEBANON UPRISING

In political science literature, Lebanon is conventionally described as a deeply or violently divided society, that is, a society where ethnicity represents the main

fault-line defining rights and identities, and where periodical inter- or intra-ethnic conflict is generated when these groups derive mutually exclusive notions of political legitimacy (Nagle 2016:15). In Lebanon, these divisions walk along ethno-religious lines, with sects or *tawa'if* (sing. *ta'ifah*) acting as the basic unit for socio-political subjectification. The latter, in turn, do not represent immutable primordial essences, but rather modern and historicized constructs embedded into a complex reticulate of mutable and mutually feeding material, discursive, political, and legal-institutional practices and modes of governance.

Since the late nineteenth century, sectarian divisions have been accommodated into corporate power-sharing arrangements, whose specific distribution of powers and representative quotas among sects have been periodically brokered by sectarian elites and their international allies in moments of critical juncture (Salloukh et al. 2015:12-31). The basic blueprint for the current power-sharing formula was set up through the so-called Taif Agreement (1989), that is, the document of national reconciliation which put an end to the bloody Civil War that ravaged the country from 1975 to 1990. The document reflected the "no victor no vanquished" outcome of the conflict, and de facto institutionalized the sectarian structures consolidated in the terminal phase of the confrontations within the framework of a centralized but institutionally weak state. Within this institutional setting, political power was captured by an overlapping alliance of businessmen and ex-warlords, who exploited the control over state policies, revenues, and institutions to serve their own material interests and reproduce sectarian identities, first and foremost by lubricating "sophisticated clientelist networks that co-opt large segments of the population" through a variety of material and social benefits (Salloukh et al. 2015:2, Salloukh 2019b). Furthermore, the delegation of the management of personal status and the provision of welfare and educational services to sectarian institutions inherited from the pre-war period was maintained, and no process of national reconciliation was engaged in. As such, sectarian affiliation remained the most important public attribute of citizens, and private memories and sectarian narratives kept acting as the main points of reference for the people's knowledge of the past and *mise-en-sense* of the present, including inter- and intra-group rivalries (Salloukh et al. 2015). The conflictual fault-lines inherited by the Civil War were partially recrafted in the early 2000s, as the bloody transition which followed the end of the Syrian military rule over Lebanon polarized the national political spectrum into two rival camps (the so-called March 8 and March 14 coalitions) defined by the respective international alignment. This triggered yet another hardening of sectarian identities, underpinned by the troubled security situation which pushed citizens to re-entrench in their own communities. Geopolitics and the aggressive neoliberal economic and urban policies of the post-war period also played an important role (Fregonese 2012).

Due to the prominent position occupied by the "politics of amnesia" of the conflict championed by post-war elites in keeping the country a deeply divided society (Aboultaif and Tabar 2019; Haugbolle 2010), in the past two decades the question of collective memory has occupied an increasingly relevant place in the scholarship on Lebanon (Haugbolle 2010; Larkin 2012; Rabah 2017; Salloukh et al. 2019a). The topic has been addressed from a variety of vantage point and disciplines, stretching from urban politics (Khalaf 1994; Makdisi 1997b; Nagel 2002) and martyrs'

cultures (Volk 2010), up to cultural productions (Haugbolle 2012; Launchbury et al. 2014; Sawalha 2014) and "counter-amnesic" social movements and practices (Jaquemet 2009; Nagle 2017, 2020), which all stressed the intimate relation between the deliberate lack of a shared public memory of the conflict and the reproduction of sectarian identities. Amid this rich body of scholarship, the question of nostalgia has been predominantly addressed in relation to the instrumental use of the widespread imaginary of pre-war Beirut as the "Switzerland of the Middle East" in legitimizing the making of the capital's post-war neoliberal reconstruction (Makdisi 1997a). Other studies focused instead on the affective remembrance of the pre-War period as a collective healer to cope with trauma (Haugbolle 2010:96–131; Tarraf 2020). In both cases, the main focus has remained solidly entrenched in the Civil War and its afterlives, discarding the exploration of how, quoting Zamponi (Zamponi 2013:1), the set of symbols and practices referring to *other* pasts shared by sections or the entirety of the Lebanese society eventually orient the country's present.

Between October 17, 2019 and late February 2020, an unprecedented popular uprising took hold of the Lebanese streets to demand, through a variety of claims, practices, and solidarities, a radical redefinition of the country's post-war sectarian neoliberal order, the latter understood as a self-serving system of privilege, extraction, and co-optation whereby sectarian élites appropriated the bulk of resources at the expenses of citizens by exploiting sectarian divisions (Baumann 2016b; Salloukh et al. 2015; Traboulsi 2013). From the beginning, the protestors called for the demise from power of the entire post-war ruling class, considered as corrupted and responsible for the country's crisis (Majed and Saman 2019). This claim was condensed in the overarching slogan "*Killun ya'ni killun*" (All of them means all of them) (Halabi 2019), that also challenged the "March 8" and "March 14" polarization which had dominated Lebanese politics for over a decade.

The Uprising—or Thawra, "revolution," as labeled by the ensemble of actors who embodied it—cross-cut sectarian, regional, gender, and generational boundaries on an unprecedented scale, and sedimented in the shadow of the economic downturn that the country had been experiencing for almost a decade (Daher 2020; Mazzucotelli 2020). Much of its propulsive force came from the political activation of socio-geographical constituencies (rural and peri-urban areas, petty bourgeoisie of self-employed, urban proletariat) which had so far remained on the margins of the transgressive contentious cycles that the country had experienced (AbiYaghi and Yammine 2020; Bou Khater and Majed 2021). This posed an unprecedented challenge to the legitimacy of the authority of sectarian leaders who, for the first time in the post-war period, saw consistent portions of their constituencies revolting against their rule. The challenge to the sectarian order passed also through the *thuwar's* ("revolutionaries") displaying of a new sense of inclusive and post-sectarian national belonging, claimed and performed through both everyday practices of intracommunal solidarity and spatial reappropriation, as well as iconoclastic performances of rejection and distinction against the symbols of sectarian patriarchal domination, including the public shaming of the sectarian leaders (Majed and Salman 2019). This produced a profound alteration of the set of hegemonic political values, norms, and symbols which, if on the one hand brought many observers and activists to welcome the Uprising as a long-awaited end to the Civil War (Kassir 2019), on the other trig-

gered a profound sense of outrage, defiance, and alienation amid the invisibilized, yet still consistent, sections of the Lebanese society remained loyal to the existing regime. The latter found expression in a variety of sectarian counter-mobilizations performed by partisan constituencies either in support of their leaders or against the *Thawra* tout-court, most notably though direct attacks against protestors' camps and roadblocks. A complex dialectics between rejected pasts and contested presents thus redefined the dominant terms of the political confrontation from the dichotomy March 8–March 14 into the sectarian versus non-sectarian one. Within this conflict, nostalgic references to the past were used by both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces to raise claims on the present. This was particularly the case in Downtown Beirut, where the social nostalgias embodied by the revolutionaries in the contentious reappropriation of its urban infrastructures overlapped with the revocation of landmark sectarian pasts deployed by partisan forces in a series of violent attacks performed against them. Whereas the former burgeoned on an emotional landscape characterized by pride, joy, and healing, the latter bursted instead from reactive feelings of outrage and rage.

The following three sections provide a contextualized description of the conjunctural, emotional, and memory landscapes wherein nostalgia surfaced during the Lebanese Uprising by focusing first on the spatial practices performed by the revolutionary forces in Downtown Beirut, and then on the counter-revolutionary attacks performed against them by the partisans of the Mustaqbal Movement and by the so-called Shia tandem, respectively. In doing so, the sections aim at scrutinizing how, in times of intense emotions, transformation, and political reconfiguration, nostalgia emerges and operates within pitting constituencies to pursue or resist change.

SUBVERTING NORMS AND FORMS: THE UPRISING AS A COUNTER-MEMORY IN THE MAKING

In a timely article published on April 2019, the scholar Hannes Baumann concluded his brilliant analysis of the contentious backlashes in the ongoing crisis of Lebanese capitalism by warning about the risks of an imminent currency crisis which "might result in a sudden erosion of living standards that could in turn lead to a severe political shock" (Baumann 2019:73). The statement was made at the margins of a comparison with the socio-political effects of crisis of Lebanese capitalism of the early 1970s, stressing how, notwithstanding several substantial historical differences, "what remains constant [...] is the unwillingness and the inability of Lebanon's political elite to resolve it and create a sustainable and equitable alternative." Therefore, the author added, "the country's only hope appears to be contention from below" (Baumann 2019:72). The prophecy of Baumann was fulfilled 6 months later, as the attempt by the Lebanese government to impose a new tax on the Voice-Over-Internet Protocol Services (the so-called WhatsApp tax), in a moment in which the first signs of an impending currency collapse started to become visible, sparked the largest and most transgressive wave of anti-systemic protest ever experienced in the history of the country[3].

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3 https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy-calls-idUSKBN1WW1ZA

The Uprising started as an expression of the popular outcry against the sharp deterioration of the living conditions experienced in the previous years, in a context of crumbling state services and rampant clientelism. The protest sparked in Beirut to quickly propagate all over the country, in a veritable explosion of collective anger which brought together citizens of all sects, social, and political backgrounds, including regions and neighborhoods considered until that moment as bastions of sectarian loyalty. This produced a disruptive snowballing identification and galvanizing effect whereby, within the space of 2 days alone, about two million people (i.e., one-third of the estimated resident population) were estimated occupying the streets, including in remote villages (Jadaliyya Reports 2019).

Since the very beginning of the protests, the claims of this heterogeneous multitude spontaneously converged on the quest for an immediate resignation from power of the entire post-war ruling class, grounded in the shared everyday experience of impoverishment and deprivation. Claims were framed according to an explicit "us versus them" rhetoric pitting the starved people against the corrupted politicians, accused of having abdicated the basic duty of taking care of their people in their role of both statesmen, but also—albeit more implicitly—of sectarian leaders (Daher 2020). As stressed, among others, by Rima Majed (2017), in fact, one of the main mechanisms of reproduction of sectarian loyalties in Lebanon has historically resided in the clientelistic provision of material and social benefits by sectarian leaders to their constituencies, within the framework of a broader moral economy where the *za'im* (the sectarian leader or strongman) or the party are invested with the moral obligation to take full care of "their" people in exchange for support. This moral component represents, in turn, an integral part of the wider political economy of sectarianism whereby, thanks to the access to state power, sectarian forces orient the political economy of the country to appropriate the bulk of social and economic surplus and redistribute it through confessional channels (Cammett and Issar 2010; Cammett 2011, 2014). The functioning of this system began to tilt from 2012 on, as the rentier mechanisms of wealth creation upon which the political economy of post-war Lebanon—including the sectarian one—had been built entered into an irreversible structural crisis, depriving both the state and the sectarian structures of the resources needed to provide for the growing needs of the people across the whole social spectrum (Baumann 2016b). This created the precondition for anti-sectarian and anti-neoliberal claims to be merged together in an unprecedented transgressive fashion, and to feed mechanisms of identification and solidarity among protestors proving able to produce from below a new sense of unity and belonging in defiance of sectarian divisions.

One of the main terrains of this transgressive combination was that of spatial practices, most notably through the contentious reappropriation of public spaces. The two main forms whereby it took shape were that of roadblocks and the so-called "revolution camps," that is, permanent tent cities built in the main mobilized squares acting as focal point for debate, organization and contestation which, since day one, represented the main places of the Uprisings' claim-making. The transgressiveness of spatial reappropriations resided also in a more complex network of symbolic and social legacies, directly linked both to the country's past of sectarian strife, and its exclusionary neoliberal present. Following the increasing sectarianization of the

Civil War, throughout the 1980s, the political and demographic geography of Lebanon was recrafted by militias into homogenized sectarian enclaves under their direct rule (Traboulsi 2011:220–239). The areas were bordered by militarized checkpoints and roads turned into fearful demarcation lines, which remained stored in the country's collective memory as one of the most vivid symbols of militia violence and sectarian segregation. The segregating sectarianization of the space remained a distinctive feature also of the post-War period, visually embodied in the profluvium of flags and martyrs' portraits marking the passage from one party's area of influence to another (Corstange 2012). This process was further fostered by the politics of neoliberal reconstruction pursued after the war which, together with commodifying a variety of former popular public places as privatized sites of high-end consumerism, enabled sectarian forces also to directly manage the urban politics of the areas under their influence (Harb 2000). Nostalgic feelings were so embedded in various public spaces. Geopolitics, new conflicts, and the cyclical resurgence of sectarian violence also played a fundamental role (Bou Akar 2018; Fregonese 2019). By taking roads and squares back, the Uprising ripped them from this network of meanings and turned them into subverting spaces of encounter, defiance, and connection. One of the denser and more vivid sites of memory and reappropriation was undoubtedly downtown Beirut.

Before the outbreak of the Civil War, downtown Beirut—or the Burj, as it was commonly known at that time—consisted in a popular commercial and cultural area hosting different suqs, cinemas, theaters, and sites for leisure. Every day, it was crossed and lived by citizens of all confessions and socio-geographical extraction, who unanimously perceived it as the genuine popular hearth of the city (Larkin 2010). The site was first strapped from this role with the outbreak of hostilities, when it became the first outpost of the infamous demarcation line (the so-called Green Line) meant to divide the city for the next 15 years. Throughout the 1980s, it had already been the object of an aborted attempt of a speculative reconstruction, which provoked the bulk of the destruction of its physical infrastructures (Makdisi 1997b). The project was fully accomplished in the post-war period with the neoliberal reconstruction promoted by the billionaire-Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, who exploited the nostalgic memory of its pre-war intimacy and social role to legitimize its transformation into a privatized high-end playground inaccessible to most of the Lebanese (Makdisi 1997a). Downtown Beirut represented also a vivid symbol of the post-war aborted revolutions, most notably of the Independence Intifada of 2005, which, between 2005 and 2008, saw the area being transformed from a site of hope for reconciliation and sovereignty into a battleground for the affirmation of the new sectarian fault-lines which are still defining the polity (see Infra).

This ensemble of mnemonic legacies was completely subverted by the immense "revolution camp" which mushroomed there within a few days, to become a home for the liveliest contentious experimentations and cross-fertilizations of the Uprising. The camp started as a spare group of tents mounted by the students of the Lebanese University in Riad al-Solh Square, in front of the government building (the Grand Serrail), to quickly assume the shape of a veritable "counter-city" within the city spanning from Martyrs Square and Samir Kassir Garden to the North, up to the Azarite parking and the Ring Bridge to the south. The expansion of the camp devel-

oped in parallel with the contentious reappropriation of numerous iconic buildings which had remained abandoned since the Civil War, most notably the "Egg," an adveniristic cinema left incomplete before its inauguration because of the explosion of the conflict, and the Grand Theatre Mille et Une Nuits, which were brought back to life in defiance of the double erasure imposed over them by war violence and neoliberal reconstruction. Child and food corners, meeting and leisure areas, and an open-air suq also appeared (Atallah 2019). As such, the old spirit of the Burj was brought back to life to challenge neoliberal urbanism and spatial segregation, "demonstrating – as Fawaz and Serhan note – through these newly established sites of operation the possibility of reorganizing Beirut's historic core into an actual lived space" (Fawaz and Serhan 2020). The same happened with the rest of the camps mushroomed all over the country which, the respective differences notwithstanding, all built in practice a new model of citizenship and social organization alternative to the existing one.

The array of inherent subversions operated through the spatial practices was refrained and multiplied in an overt manner through a variety of repertoires of action, such as the physical destruction of party symbols, acts of sanctioning against banks, and claims on public properties, as well as the embodied connection of geographic areas of different sectarian belonging through convoys, human chains, and demonstrations of transregional solidarity (Daher 2021). Equally importantly, the Uprising produced a new emotional landscape made of joyful euphoria, pride, and healing, which found its quintessential sublimation in the breaking of the wall of fear and deference against sectarian leaders by naming and shaming them in public. The shift from anger to joy was as rapid as the spread of the protests, and found expression in the party-like character assumed by the earliest occupations of the squares, which were literally turned into immense dancefloors crossed by thousands of citizens mesmerized by such an unexpected mass upsurge for change (Bajec 2019; Osman 2019). Joy, pride, and healing were also constantly displayed as a distinctive identity feature of both the protest and those who embodied it, according to two major framings aiming at making this heterogeneous mass a new collective subjectivity entitled to determine from below the political future of the country. The first one was outward-oriented and exhibited these emotional features in explicit opposition to the violence, hatred, and coercion attributed to the ruling elite, with a clear reminder to the Civil War. This binary opposition was refrained in a variety of slogans and chants such as "*Ihna el-Thawra el-sha'abiyyeh, ento el-Harb el-Ahliyyeh*" (We are the popular revolution, you are the civil war), or "*Silmiyyeh! Silmiyyeh!*" (Peaceful! Peaceful!) to answer the attacks by both partisan constituencies and the police forces. The second one was instead inward oriented and tended to frame the joyfulness of the protest as the symptom of a deeper "Lebaneseness" intimately entrenched in the national ethos (Rakickaja 2021:93–96). This essentialization blinked at both the nostalgic imaginary of pre-war Beirut as the land of all pleasures (Kassir 2010:385–408) and the post-war one of a hedonistic, resilient country able to dance on its own ruins (Martin-Malikian 2013), and was part of a broader process of grassroots nation-building whereby the Thawara sought to create its own "us" by searching for common civil symbols and cultural references free from sectarian legacies (Rakickaja 2021:95). Another important symbol in this sense was the national

flag, reappropriated by protestors since day one as a unifying counter-symbol to be displayed on walls, streets, and the very bodies, in a profluvium of cedars and red-white stripes which profoundly altered the visual landscape of the country. The national anthem and the old repertoire of patriotic songs of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s played at any corner, most notably of the national diva *par excellence* Feirouz, were also part of the process (Abdul Reda 2019).

The new sense of unity and belonging undoubtedly represented one of the most distinctive features of the Lebanese Uprising, to the point to be hailed by several observers and participants as the long-awaited end of the Civil War (Chahine 2019a; Kassir 2019). On the other hand, the binary mechanisms of "sanctifying and sanctioning" through which the Thawra built its own self engendered new exclusionary dynamics which left no space "for a grey area of complex political identities" (Ghazali 2020). It in fact extended the negative attributes associated to the "Sulta," that is, the political power and their pundits, to the ensemble of citizens not having fully abjured to their sectarian loyalties and belongings. This triggered the emergence of a profound sense of alienation, defiance, and outrage among sectarian constituencies, preparing the terrain for a variety of counter-revolutionary mobilizations and violent upsurges polarizing the polity along a new sectarian versus non-sectarian divide.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER: MUSTAQBAL MILITANTS RECLAIMING MARTYRS SQUARE

While for the *thuwar* the nostalgia enacted in Downtown Beirut was grounded into its idealized pre-war social function of vibrant cultural and popular heart of the capital, the nostalgia associated—and, later, performed—to the site from the side of the partisans of Hariri's Mustaqbal Movement was grounded into much more concrete and vivid sectarian feelings.

Twice prime minister and founder of the Mustaqbal Movement,[4] Rafic Hariri was assassinated by a car bomb at the edges of Downtown Beirut on February 14, 2005, in a spectacular explosion costing the life of further 21 people between passer-by and members of his protection staff. The suspicions fell immediately upon the Syrian regime, whose relationship with Hariri had profoundly deteriorated in the previous months, especially after the latter's endorsement of the UN Resolution 1,559 demanding the withdrawal of Damascus troops from Lebanon after almost thirty years of occupation (Blanford 2006). His memorialization in Martyrs Square begun in the immediate aftermaths of the assassination, following the decision of the family to engrave him in the heart of the city where he had worked all his life rather than in his native town, Sidon. The piece of land for the graveyard, bought on the same day of the murder, was deliberately chosen at the intersection of two other memorial sites dedicated to the Lebanese nationalists executed by the Ottoman governor Jamil Pasha in 1916 (the Martyrs Monument by Martino Mazzacurati) and to the victims of the Civil War (the Garden of Remembrance, still unfinished). This choice is to be located in the framework of a broader discursive construction aiming

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[4] Rafic Hariri served as Prime Minister of Lebanon between 1992 and 1996, and again between 2000 and 2004. For a political biography of Rific Hariri, see Baumann (2016a).

at framing his assassination—and, hence, his political mission—as a martyrdom in the path of nationhood, reconciliation, and sovereignty (Vloeberghs 2012; Volk 2010:163–175). The symbolic passage from statesman to martyr was definitively consumed during his funeral, celebrated 3 days later at the graveyard's site, in a spectacular public ceremony carefully crafted—as Knudsen notes—to look as neither partisan nor sectarian, but rather as the popular mourn of a wounded nation, finally reunited around the common flag (Knudsen 2016).

Attended by a crowd of estimated 250,000 participants from all confessions and social backgrounds, the funeral turned into the inaugural act of a broad-based political movement—the Independence Intifada, or Cedar Revolution—linking the demand for truth about the president's assassination to the quest for an overarching political renewal starting from the Syrian withdrawal (Haugbolle 2006). The lead of the movement's discourse and political direction was captured quickly by the so called *mu'arada* ("opposition"), a cross-sectarian and cross-ideological coalition of anti-Syrian parties formed in 2004 against the backdrop of the contested constitutional reforms imposed by Damascus to enable the re-election of the loyal Emile Lahoud to the Presidency of the Republic. The coalition had formally debuted in December 2004 with the so-called "Bristol Gathering," named after the hotel where the foundational encounter was held, at the end of which a programmatic document was issued (the "Bristol Declaration") condensing its demands for emancipation from the Syrian yoke in the slogan (Choucair-Vizoso 2005). The main signatories included Walid Joumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party (Druze), Hariri's Mustaqbal Movement (Sunna), and a large Maronite front led by the Kataeb Party, the Lebanese Forces, and Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, as well as a variety of smaller secular forces and political personalities of heterogeneous ideological orientation. The other actors who took the street included an equally heterogeneous array of secular youth collectives, CSOs and NGOs arose in the background of the postwar wave of civic and leftist activism, and, above all, an outstanding mass of first timers activated by the profound shock that the assassination provoked in the national social fabric (Chemaly 2009).

The Independence Intifada spanned from Hariri's funeral day up to the end of April of the same year, and found in Martyrs' Square its natural beating heart. There, mass demonstrations, cultural events, and public debates intertwined for weeks with a ceaseless influx of citizens and prominent political leaders paying tribute to Hariri's grave, in defiance of the sectarian and political boundaries which had been dividing the national social fabric for decades (Haugbolle 2006). This temporarily turned the entire Beirut Central District, from being a depoliticized "site of commodified nostalgia" (Larkin 2010), into a transgressive and transformative arena of mourn, encounter, and activism, raising high hopes for a genuine national reconciliation. These hopes were however quickly disattended by the sharp polarization of the national political spectrum into a pro and anti-Syrian camp which unfolded alongside, drawing the blueprint for the sectarianized re-composition of the polity into two pitting coalitions defined by the respective international alignment.

The coalitions came to be known as March 8 and March 14, from the dates of two outstanding conflicting demonstrations that the pro-Syrian camp and the *mu'arada* hold, respectively, during the Intifada,[5] marking the definitive end of the liberal utopias which had informed the early reaction to Hariri's murder (Knio 2005). Henceforth, Martyrs' Square became "the" political square—lived, conceived, and perceived—of the March 14 coalition, providing a home to the memory of the new martyrs in the following, turbulent years, as well as to its most salient political celebrations, under the virtual vigil embrace of the founding patriarch. Meanwhile, Hariri's identification with the site was further consolidated through the inauguration of two new celebrative monuments edging the Downtown's perimeter, and, above all, the assimilation de facto of the new Muhammad al-Amine Mosque to the political space of Hariri's graveyard, creating a powerful network of remembrance turning the very heart of the city into a diffused monument perennializing Hariri's triple legacy of businessmen-statesman, national martyr, and communitarian leader (Vloeberghs 2015:361–368).

The realization of the al-Amin Mosque had strongly championed during his lifetime by Rafic Hariri who, strong of the active support of the Grand Mufti of the Republic Rashid al-Qabbani, conceived the construction to become the epitome of the renewed political centrality earned by the Sunna community in the post-war period (Vloeberghs 2008). The architect of this ascension had been Hariri himself who, thanks to the combination between outstanding personal wealth, the strong domestic and regional connections, and a favorable international conjuncture, managed to fill the gap left amid the Sunna community by the Civil War and build his irresistible ascension in the national political arena (Baumann 2016a). The articulation of his ascension triggered also a profound reconfiguration of the political boundaries of the Sunna community around his person, according to a brand-new political imaginary molding the ideologization of his entrepreneurial success with a moderate nationalist ideology and a carefully strategized appeal to the Sunna tradition to frame his sectarian constituency-making (Di Peri 2015). This created the precondition whereby, after his death, the mosque came to plastically symbolize his hegemonization of the Sunna camp, perennially associated with an alleged golden age whereof he represented the undisputed maker.

This cumbersome political legacy was inherited by the younger son Saad who, however, succeeded only in part to maintain the political, material, and symbolic capital accumulated by his father. A major source of erosion came from the adjustment of the post-war power-sharing formula sealed by the so-called Doha Agreements in 2008 which, by compelling the Lebanese polity to governments of national unity, forced Hariri to adopt a compromising position toward Hezbollah, including for what concerned the controversial institution of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to investigate his father's death (Vloeberghs 2012). Saad's position got further weakened by the growing political weight earned by the March 8 coalition after 2009, and, above all, by the domestic backlashes of the Syrian crisis, which put Hariri increasingly at odds with the historical Saudi ally (Macaron 2021). This contributed

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[5] The withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon was formally announced by President Bashar al-Assad on April 5, 2005, and was completed by the end of the same month.

to progressively alienating the consensus of the radical component of the Sunna street, who perceived Saad as too accommodating vis-a-vis the Shia enemy (Di Peri and Meier 2016). At the same time, despite Hariri's Mustaqbal Movement managed to remain the leading force of the Sunna community, the partisans did not remain immune from a growing sense of marginalization which, while contributing to further enhance the myth of Rafic as the maker of the post-war Sunna golden age, engendered a certain looming discontent toward the downsizing of Saad political weight. This two-folded posture of Mustaqbal partisans emerged with a great clarity from the patterns of mobilization followed throughout the long months of the Uprising.

Following the outbreak of the Uprising, on October 29, 2019 Saad Hariri announced his resignation from the position of prime minister. The decision to step back was framed as an act done for the sake of Lebanon, its dignity and civil peace, in a carefully crafted televised speech aiming at locating Saad's act in the patriotic path traced by the father. The paternal legacy was especially emphasized by a large portrait of the late father visible behind the son's back (CNN 2019). Hariri's conciliatory posture toward the Uprising played an important role in keeping Mustaqbal militants away from the street confrontation with the *thuwar*, despite the latter's reappropriation of Mustaqbal's landmark political space, and the constant public exposition, including through explicit insults, of both Rafic and Saad Hariri. The mobilizations of Mustaqbal militants concentrated instead against the long March 8-led talks to express Hariri's successor, which ultimately led to the appointment of the former Minister of Education Hassan Diab on December, 19, 2019.[6] The mobilizations followed for the most part a reactive pattern addressing the main steps in the talks' developments, in the form of road blockades, tire burning, and motorbike parades in the main Sunna strongholds of the country, such as the neighborhoods of Tariq el-Jdideh and Corniche el-Mazraa in Beirut, the towns of Tripoli and Sidon, the Akkar region (Lebanon Support, Map of Collective Actions Lebanon). At the center of militants' grievances stood the marginalization of the party from the talks, which was perceived as violating the Sunna's prerogatives by the Shia ruling rivals, and the right of the community to its self-representation. The mobilizations also represented an act of loyalty to Hariri, perceived and claimed as the sole legitimate representative of the Sunna community in the shadow of the paternal legacy. This dominant pattern of mobilization tilted on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of Rafic Hariri's assassination.

As thoroughly examined by Vloeberghs (2015:368–372), the commemoration of Hariri's murder has historically represented the confirmation act par excellence of the popular loyalty to Rafic's political legacy. At the core of the confirmation ritual stands the visit to the graveyard, characterized by a higher or lower degree of spontaneity/organization according to the country's circumstances and the broader top-down organization of the event. Due to the extraordinary circumstances triggered by the Uprising, for the commemoration of February 14, 2020 the leadership of the Mustaqbal Movement opted for holding the official ceremony at the party's headquarter (the Maison du Centre, in Beirut's Kantari neighborhood, right behind

6 https://www.ft.com/content/3c687a1a-2281-11ea-b8a1-584213ee7b2b

Downtown's perimeter), where Saad, after months of moderate declarations against the March 8 coalition, pronounced a fierce speech at the address of the President of the Republic Michel Aoun and his son-in-law Gibran Bassil, whereby he formally disenfranchised himself from the politics of compromise which had characterized his late mandates as prime minister. Hariri further blinked at the frustrations of his constituency by remarking loud and clear that the community was not marginalized, and that the Uprising was nothing but a further step forward toward the idea of Lebanon pursued by his father.[7]

Hours before the beginning of the ceremony, a composed crowd of partisans had already started to converge toward Hariri's graveyard to pay its personal tribute to the memory of the president-martyr. The pilgrimage unfolded in parallel with the hectic everyday activities of the Thawra tent city, in a climate of respectful tolerance eased by the temporary separation of the two spaces by removable metallic barriers put by the army to avoid confrontations.

The atmosphere began to progressively change during the afternoon, as the graveyard began to be reached by organized groups of partisans chanting slogans and brandishing the party's symbols after having attended the official celebration at the Maison du Centre. This engendered an escalation of provocations between them and the *thuwar* degenerating quickly into violent altercations and launching of objects, including a short irruption by Mustaqbal militants in the tent city. To spark controversy in the eyes of Mustaqbal militants was an umpteenth insult addressed to Saad Hariri who, amid a profluvium of slogans remarking the personal loyalty to the leader, was repeatedly framed by his constituency as a "red line" not to be passed (LBCI 2020). The tension between the two groups was ultimately dampened by the interposition of the army and the mediation of the Mustaqbal deputy Sami Fatfat, who managed to persuade the crowd to abandon the confrontation and return, in a disciplined manner, to the graveyard's site. On the other hand, the political claim on Martyrs Square on the anniversary of Rafic Hariri's murderer, represented a powerful—albeit ephemeral—act of self-reaffirmation pitting the legacy of the supreme sacrifice of the founding patriarch and symbol of the lost political grandeur as an identity landmark to resist and oppose the new marginalizing pressures propelled by the Uprising.

CLASHING AT THE EDGES: SHIA COUNTER-REVOLUTION AND THE SPECTERS OF "MAY 7"

Contrary to Mustaqbal militants whereby the direct confrontation with the *thuwar* represented a sporadic episode, both the partisans and the party leaders of the so-called "Shia tandem," that is, Hezbollah and the AMAL movement, positioned themselves to the forefront of the counter-revolution since the very first days of the Uprising (Saab 2019). This oppositional posture was strictly related to the sense of threat and outrage sparked by the unprecedented scale of the Shia participation in the revolt and its transgressive load. The latter reified in a variety of fearless, icono-

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[7] https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1206487/hariri-le-compromis-presidentiel-est-de-lhistoire-ancienne.html

clastic attacks at the address of the two formations and their leaders, stretching from desecrating slogans and open accusations of corruption, up to the destruction of party symbols and the storming of prominent MP offices at the very heart of their strongholds. Furthermore, while during the previous anti-systemic cycles of contention the direct attacks against Hezbollah, its secretary general Hassan Nasrallah, and its weapons represented a cumbersome taboo both within and outside from the Shia community (AbiYaghi, Catusse and Younes 2016), this time sharp critiques came also from formerly sympathetic media outlets and political forces. The simultaneous explosion of similar protest waves in Iraq and Iran was also a major source of concern.

At the street level, Shia counter-revolution found its most eloquent expression in a series of repeated, violent attacks launched against the *thuwar* and their camps, which spanned throughout the whole period of the Uprising. The attacks were paralleled by an aggressive delegitimizing campaign against the protestors whereby the two parties, while formally endorsing the grievances expressed by the squares, aimed at framing the Uprising as a foreign-orchestrated destabilizing campaign against Lebanon and the resistance. Furthermore, both AMAL and Hezbollah deployed consistent efforts to shipwreck the popular quest for a new government of independents and re-impose a new political one after Hariri's resignations. It should also be noted that while both parties denied any direct involvement in the organization of street violence, the same parties made little effort to publicly condemn or prevent such acts, and often adopted public positions fanning the flames of tensions.

The two main nodes of confrontation coalesced in the Shia-dominated provinces of South Lebanon and the Beqaa, and in downtown Beirut, and followed two distinct rationales strictly related to the socio-sectarian peculiarities of each node. As of the Shia provinces, the confrontations were predominantly inscribed into a broader strategy of intra-communal intimidation oriented to reaffirm the threatened territorial hegemony. The intimidating techniques included a variety of repertoires stretching from the personal threats against activists to the periodical physical destruction of protestors' tents and gazebos, and, especially in the smaller villages of the Baalbak-Hermel region, managed to have some success in progressively discouraging the protests (Amhaz 2020). In the case of downtown Beirut instead, they answered through more nuanced reactive and identity dynamics, taking the shape of acts of sanctioning and self-affirmation against a mobilization perceived as both exclusionary in their regards, and outrageously desecrator of the political world to whom they belonged. To perform the attacks were Shia partisan constituencies pouring in Downtown Beirut from the peripheral or pericentrical strongholds of the tandem, most notably the Dahyeh and Khandaq al-Ghamiq, according to storming dynamics reminding under many aspects past episodes of sectarian strife. This inscribed these confrontations within a thick network of traumatic communal memories whose deep roots are to trace yet again in the turbulent transitional period which followed the withdrawal of the Syrian troops.

In effect, after the victory of the March 14 coalition at the elections of May 2005, the country got caught in a deep political crisis reflecting the delicate reassessment that the domestic and regional power balances were undergoing (Clark and Zahar 2015). One of the major sources of conflict revolved around the question of

the disarmament of Hezbollah which, after the suspicions fallen on the organization for the assassination of the late prime minister, regained momentum after the "July War" fought against Israel in 2006. Another prominent source of controversy concerned the legitimacy of the presidential mandate of Emile Lahoud, whose refusal to resign after the Syrian withdrawal was perceived by the March 14 coalition as an unacceptable element of continuity with the previous regime (Geukjian 2014). The tension between the two camps got further exasperated by a long wave of political assassinations against prominent anti-Syrian public figures (politicians, intellectuals, security officers), within the framework of a broader process of regional polarization between a pro-US and a pro-Iranian camp inaugurated by the US invasion of the Iraq in 2003. Amid these multiple strains, on December 1, 2006, the March 8 coalition decided to launch an open-ended sit-in in Martyrs Square targeting the government headed by the Mustaqbal "falcon" Fuad Siniora to demand a blocking one third of votes in the distribution of the ministerial portfolios, which would have virtually endowed the group with a veto power on the government decisions (Quilty 2007). The demand was firmly rejected by the prime minister, who placed as counter-condition for an endorsement the abandoning by March 8 of its support to Lahoud. This opened the floor to a consuming war of position between the two camps, of which the sit-in became the plastic reification (Knio 2008).

The sit-in or *i'tisam* started in Riad al-Solh Square to then expand and stabilize in the upper part of Martyrs Square in the form of a veritable tent city which virtually put the whole downtown area under siege for over one year and a half. The sense of mutual segregation was further enhanced by the army bordering the *i'tisam* area with high metallic barriers, which became a powerful metaphor of the deep fragmentation that the national political and social fabric was experiencing. The separation between the two camps was characterized also by certain class undertones for, as already happened in 2005, to animate the *i'tisam* were yet again the deprived inhabitants of the Shia suburbs of the capital (the so-called Dahyeh), including the displaced of the Israeli raids of 2006, in striking contrast with the high-end, exclusionary recrafting of Hariri's city center. This laid the foundations for the two competing, delegitimizing narratives adopted by the two camps against the *i'tisam*, whereby the March 14 framing as a Syro-Iranian-backed siege of the Lebanese economy and sovereignty, was challenged from the other side with that of the *i'tisam* as the popular outcry of Lebanon's social marginalities (Quilty 2007).

The political confrontation underwent a steady increase in scale in the first half of 2008, against the backdrop of the institutional vacuum left by the expiring of Emile Lahoud's mandate and the incapability to find a successor (Quilty 2008). The zenith was reached on May 7, 2008, as Hezbollah militiamen and their allies occupied by weapons the main Sunna and Druze neighborhoods of the capital. The decision to recur to weapons had been ultimately propelled by the attempt of Siniora's government to dismantle Hezbollah's clandestine communication network. To be targeted were first and foremost the political and media offices of the Mustaqbal Movement which, thanks to Hezbollah's undisputed military and organizational superiority, were fully taken over within the space of a few hours. Equally rapid was the capitulation of the rest of peripheral neighborhoods and regions where the conflict had spilled over, which likewise fell under Hezbollah's control within a couple

of days (Vloeberghs 2015:355–356). This impressive armed showdown came to an end 1 week later, as a Qatari diplomatic initiative managed to gather in Doha the main Lebanese political stakeholders who agreed on a new president, a new electoral law, and a new power-sharing arrangement informally incorporating the principle of the "blocking third" championed by the March 8 coalition as the blueprint for the formation of the next cabinets.

The brokerage of the Doha Agreement represented an outstanding political victory for Hezbollah which, by de facto imposing by force its agenda on Lebanese policy-making, reached the triple goal of securing veto power to its coalition regardless of the concrete balances of power expressed by the future electoral bailouts, safeguard its right to retain weapons, and unlocking the political stalemate which had been paralyzing the country since the Syrian withdrawal (Di Peri 2014). The unlocking was symbolized by the party's dismantlement of the *i'tisam* on May 25, within the framework of a broader discursive strategy countering the accusation of having staged a soft coup against the same Lebanese citizens by framing the May 7 events as an extreme but necessary escalation performed for the sake of Lebanon. This inaugurated a biennium of relative back to normality, sealed by the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2009, and a lavish tourist season as not seen in years (Deeb and Harb 2013:83–84). On the other hand, the May 7 events marked a crucial breakthrough in the remaking of the existing sectarian geographies of conflict and re-entrenchment along a new Sunna-Shia divide (Bou Akar 2018), as well as a traumatizing warning permanently impressed in the political memory of the Lebanese citizens as one of the darkest pages of sectarian strife of the post-war period.

The re-evocation of May 7 in its double role of specter and "glorious victory" came back to the forefront of Lebanese political confrontation in the last week of November 2019. Its surfacing builds upon an escalation of tensions between *thuwar* and Shia partisan constituencies coalesced since the end of October around the question of protestors' roadblocks. The question of the roadblocks was first addressed by Hezbollah's secretary general Hassan Nasrallah in a muscular televised speech delivered on October 25, 2019, in which he sought to delegitimize their function of powerful instruments of political pressure by framing them as an arrogant violation of the right of citizens to go to work, and a dangerous reminder of the militia checkpoints of the Civil War.[8] The argument resurged at the street level four days later, as a first violent clash in a long chain pitted the occupiers of the Ring Bridge against what the press labeled as the "youth of Khandaq al-Ghamiq," a low-income Shia neighborhood bordering the southern side of Martyrs Square. The occupation of the bridge had already sparked discontent among the residents well before Nasrallah's speech, being the thoroughfare the main link of communication between the neighborhood and the Eastern and Western side of the city. The sense of virtual siege was further amplified by the presence of the tent city in the bordering Azarite park, as well as by the profound social distance perceived between them and the highly educated, bilingual, middle-class occupiers, representing in their eyes little more than silly rich kids

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[8] https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1192605/nasrallah-la-contestation-nest-plus-un-mouvement-populaire-spontane.html

depriving the poor inhabitants of the neighborhood from their right to work and move (Chahine 2019b).

The confrontation started as a disordered skirmish between residents and *thuwar* to quickly escalate into a "war of slogans" between the rival political camps. The "war" was articulated according to a mirror game of binary oppositions pitting identity answers and counter-answers such as the triad *Shia! Shia! Shia!* versus *Thawra! Thawra! Thawra!*, or the national anthem opposed to the partisan slogans refraining the loyalty to their leaders. The confrontation underwent another scale shift about one hour later, as the Shia counter-demonstrators managed to sneak off the army lines and break into Martyrs Square, ushering the most brutal aggression the tent city ever experienced since the beginning of the Thawra (Al-Jadeed 2019).

The combination between the violent raid in the tent city and the slogan "*Shia! Shia!*" which accompanied it, brought many observers to associate the episode to the events of May 7, rising concerns about the consequences of an escalatory strategy (Al-Hashem 2019). The specter of a violent escalation surfaced in a more flagrant manner about one month later, as, on a same, tensed day, May 7 was elicited from the Shia side in two distinct, yet contiguous, counter-revolutionary mobilizations whose quasi-juxtaposition ended up creating an "evocation-scape" rising the worst sectarian fears. The first one occurred in the night between November 24 and November 25, 2019, during a new wave of clashes at the Ring bridge between "*Khandakhji*s" and *thuwar*, sparked yet again by the former's attempt to force a reopening. The confrontation lasted the entire night, with escalation dynamics similar to the October 29 ones, including the final irruption of Shia partisans in Martyrs Square and the subsequent storming of the tent city. The specter of May 7 surfaced in the preliminary moment of the "war of slogans," as a provocative, incremental extension of the spatial-identity claim on "their" neighborhood condensed in the slogan "*Allah, Nasrallah, w ad-Dahyeh killah*" ("God, Nassrallah, and the whole Dahyeh"), which had already represented one of the main leitmotivs of the previous clash (LBCI 2019; cf. Al-Jadeed 2019). To color the violence with collateral sectarian counter-meanings was rather the spillover of the vandalizations from Martyrs Square to the bordering Christian neighborhood of Monot, in Ashrafieh, amid the cat and mouse game engaged with the army in the attempt to keep them out from the tent city (Antonios 2019).

As most of the public opinion was still recovering from the shock of the night of violence, on the same evening the specter of May 7 resurged in an even more spectacular manner. Its evocation was performed under the Musharfieh bridge, in Beurt's Dahyeh, where, on the margin of a massive scooter rally staged all across the Muslim side of the capital, hundreds of militants chanted the slogan "*ash-Sha'ab yurid 7 Ayar jdid*" ("The people want a new May 7") (IMLebanon 2019). The rally unfolded according to the typical repertoire of the parties, coupling the displaying of the party flags with the omnipresent identity slogans "*Shia Shia*" and "*Bil-ruh, bil-damm, labbeik ya Nabih* (Berri)/(Hassan) *Nasrallah*" ("With the soul, with the blood, I am at your service oh Nabih/Hassan"), the latter partially borrowed from the formulas refrained during ritual Shia celebrations of the Ashura (Al-Hadath 2019). The theatrical showdown was part of a wave of counter-mobilizations organized by the tandem throughout the day in the attempt to seize the opportunity of a deadly car

accident occurred at dawn in the proximity of a revolutionary roadblock on the Jiyeh highway, 20 km south of Beirut, to raise the bar of its anti-roadblock campaign.[9] The atmosphere was further burdened overnight by the explosion of sectarian clashes between the Shia and the Christian partisan street at the border between the neighborhoods of Chiah and Ain el-Remmaneh, where the Lebanese Civil War had begun.[10] The reasons for the eruption of the clashes were never clarified. However, the timing and the site raised the specter of a sectarian degradation of the Uprising as never before. Furthermore, heavy attacks against the thuwar occurred in the Shia provinces, most notably in Baalbak and Tyre, where the local revolution camp was stormed and set on fire. These fears were exorcised by two touching women's marches against sectarian strife which, in a powerful act of reconciliation from below, in the following days connected first the neighborhoods of Chiah and Ain el-Remmaneh, and then the ones of Ashrafieh and Khandaq al-Ghamiq.[11]

Amid these heavy feelings, the calls for a new May 7 did not reveal a harbinger of an armed escalation of the tandem's counter-revolutionary strategy. Rather, more than a claim over vanquishing the capital, they ultimately represented a violent, yet still symbolic, act of reaffirmation of their compromised political space within it.

CONCLUSION

Summarizing, we have looked at nostalgia within a social movement frame in times of intense change, combining attention to emotions and memory. While nostalgia is, in fact, still a gap in the reflection on contentious politics, an increasing attention on passions has recently balanced the tendency to consider social movements as normal actors in the political arena. Observing that movements are full of emotions, which are however not separated from cognition but rather contribute to making sense of movements' claims as well as to the building of collective identities, we have in particular reflected on how nostalgic feelings are mobilized especially by revisitations of places in which the memory of an (often imagined) past are most visible. As movements leave in the constant tensions between consolidating their roots in the past and constructing a utopian vision of the future, we have suggested that nostalgia is not typical of specific movements but rather important for all of them. This is all the more true in intense times as critical moments push for the activation of emotional and cognitive mechanisms that strengthen solidarity and sense of empowerment as well as collective resonance (della Porta 2017).

Looking at different eventful protests during the Lebanon Uprisings of 2019, we have however noted that the nostalgia attached to some places had quite different characteristics. Not only the focus of the memories changed, but also the emotions attached to them. The choice of the places but also the form and the choreography of the protests enacted nostalgia in various ways. In the case of the *thuwar*, the social

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[9] https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1196361/un-tragique-accident-de-la-route-a-jiye-exploite-a-des-fins-politico-confessionnelles.html

[10] https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1196574/les-femmes-de-ain-el-remmaneh-et-de-chiyah-unies-contre-la-violence.html

[11] https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1196901/les-femmes-de-khandak-el-ghamik-et-de-tabaris-se-retrouvent-aujourdhui-a-bourj-el-ghazal.html

nostalgia of pre-war Beirut, enacted through the revivification of Downtown as the vibrant social and cultural heart of the capital, was located into a broader process of claim-making and identity-construction seeking to find, in the absence of a past of civil nationhood and social justice to hook on, the new shared coordinates upon which to build the Lebanon of the future by subversively acting on its present. What was subverted was first and foremost its segregating neoliberal urban politics; this was done by enacting and strategizing spatial practices which, for four months, put into existence a brand new, alternative counter-society. There, the dominant feelings of joy, pride, and healing did not solely act as sheer background for action, but were consciously articulated at the cognitive level and operated by the activists to build their own collective self. Against the profound alteration of the dominant norms and forms engendered by these subversions, the Sunna and the Shia partisans answered by pitting the memory of the two landmark events epitomizing their respective ascension to the forefront of the post-war political landscape, according to reactive, sectarian and confrontational dynamics which sedimented in the shadow of the profound sense of outrage, alienation, and frustration triggered by the Uprising's outbreak and its political discourse. In their case, heavy emotions acted as a powerful detonator for violence, according to circumstantial and escalatory dynamics amplifying or voicing for the first time a looming sense of marginalization.

These substantial differences notwithstanding, in all the three cases nostalgia was enacted to make claims on the present, may it be to build an (im)possible future, or to exorcize, from the opposite side of the barricade, its emergence.

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