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**Beyond Religion and the Law:
Love and Marriage in the Time of Sectarianism**

An empirical examination of everyday practices of love in contemporary Lebanon

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Abstract

The thesis fills a particular gap in the literature on gender in the Middle East: it examines love through an affective lens, beyond the religious and the legal frameworks from which the relationship between the Middle Eastern man and woman are often examined. The thesis is interdisciplinary. It draws on sexuality studies and gender theory mainly, whilst embracing an overall feminist approach towards knowledge production.

This thesis combines a Deleuzian (from French philosopher Gilles Deleuze) approach with a political economy framework in its examination of ‘everyday practices of love’ in contemporary Lebanon, namely gifting, ‘inclusive intimacy’, and leisure. Whereas most of my interlocutors insisted that their choice of a partner is based on feelings of love, they articulated their views within a strictly intra-sectarian framework. *How, then, can we conceptualize love as a feeling when its very definition is dependent upon a sectarian type of logic?* In order to overcome this conundrum, I conducted fieldwork during nine months in urban Lebanon, between January and September 2014 (in addition to additional shorter periods during November 2014, March 2015, and July 2015).

This thesis argues that love is a discourse that is taught and learned from an early age in Lebanon: it is regulated along normative *intra*-sectarian and heterosexual lines, in addition to confining women’s sexuality to the boundaries of marriage. The construction of love as a potential of excess and irrationality in Lebanon is necessary for the construction of love-marriage as its ideal form. This thesis thus views marriage as a ‘chrono-normative’ (Freeman, 2008) practice that regulates people’s lives towards maximum productivity. Additionally, the blurred boundaries between love, desire, and sex produce a hierarchy of desire where the intersection(s) of sect, gender, nationality, and class rank(s) bodies unequally. How the couple experience love is directly informed by the intersection of sect with further social categories, notably class and nationality. Depending on the practice and space in question, these categories can, at times, emerge in isolation.

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A note on transliteration

The system of transliteration used in this thesis is that recommended by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). I make no modification to it whatsoever.

All transliterated words are in italics throughout the thesis, except for those that are now part of the English vocabulary and found in a Standard English dictionary.

A note on data formatting

The interview extracts that I relate in my thesis include a transliteration of Arabic words. I immediately follow these words with a translation, which I place between parentheses ().

I also use square brackets [] in order to include additional information that helps clarify some expressions used by my interlocutors.

Prelude

Lebanese-ness, or the everyday as ill-living

A thesis that is invested in the ‘everyday’ is fluid, adaptive, and at times volatile. It is the assemblage of many moments and events where cognition, emotion, habits, spontaneity, and changing humours collide with what Deeb and Harb (2013) term ‘moralistic, religious, and social rubrics’.

In this thesis, the ‘everyday’ coincides with what I call ‘Lebanese-ness’. Lebanese-ness is threefold: 1. an imagined condition of living poorly where the present is lived as waiting; 2. a peculiar locus where protests and demands converge and concur; 3. in addition to evoking nostalgic effects. This imagined condition resonates throughout my thesis. We see how the feeling of love is constantly negotiated vis-à-vis what is perceived as a failed state and a relatively obliging society.

The concept of the ‘imagined community’ of the late Benedict Anderson allows me to frame Lebanese-ness as a notion that is capable of capturing the ‘imagined shared condition of ill-living’ that most of my interlocutors shared with me; a point of agreement, it seems, despite the sectarian cacophony that permeates Lebanon’s ‘everyday’. In addition to the concept of the ‘imagined community’ of Anderson, I draw on the work of Michael Herzfeld in order to enhance my conceptualization of Lebanese-ness. Unlike Benedict Anderson’s concept of the ‘imagined community’, which was immediately embraced by an array of disciplines, Herzfeld’s concept of ‘cultural intimacy’ did not prove to be as successful. I believe the reason lies in Herzfeld’s

poignant honesty. By arguing that the affect of embarrassment is constitutive to the production of culture, he reminds us of our tumultuous existence: embarrassing moments are best left behind and locked away forever.

Herzfeld conceives 'cultural intimacy' as the 'recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provides insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation' (Herzfeld, 2005: 3). For Herzfeld, 'embarrassment' and 'rueful self-recognition' are key to understanding how a community comes together. His attention to how citizens mock the very state they simultaneously conform to and challenge, in addition to deliberately hiding 'ugly truths' about them and the state from the prying eyes of outsiders, is a highly creative step towards understanding nationalism. Among the examples of 'rueful self-recognition' he cites are 'American folksiness', 'British stiff upper lip', and 'Israeli bluntness'. As we learn from these examples, and following Herzfeld himself, nationalism encompasses moments and feelings of embarrassment.

Herzfeld uses intimacy as an all-encompassing expression that refers to a particular type of knowledge that only those who are close enough to its production centre can discern. By mocking the failure of the Lebanese state, Lebanese citizens legitimize it by absolving themselves from a failed citizenship that is not capable of reclaiming its full rights. It was rare, during my fieldwork, not to hear the expression 'if I could, I would leave this place right now'. At the same time, Lebanon was 'the most beautiful country in the

world'. The concept of cultural intimacy, as posited by Herzfeld, allows us to reconcile these two opposing views.

In the context of Lebanon, there are several instances that Lebanese citizens are embarrassed about: the undecipherable structure of Lebanon's bureaucracy, which I detail hereafter, is one illustrative example. Other examples include the repeated re-election of a singular ruling class – despite it being perceived as 'corrupt to the bone' – since citizens benefit directly from the patrons they vote for, or the general lack of infrastructure and welfare, be it in terms of roads, transport, electricity, health, and education. I add to such 'ugly truths' the intimate cultivation of the Lebanese man in opposition to the Syrian 'foreign' other, a point I develop at length in chapter VI.

Lebanese-ness emphasizes a collective affect, whereby the present is akin to 'waiting', seeing the 'inevitability of migrating sooner or later'. It brings forth the concept of the 'elsewhere', as posited by Haraway (1991):

"We', in these discursive worlds, have routes to connection other than through the radical dismembering and dis-placing of our names and our bodies. We have no choice but to move through a harrowed and harrowing artifactualism to elsewhere' (Haraway, 1991: 25).

Easily put, the Elsewhere in Haraway (1991) is never entirely knowable. It is an imaginary leap of faith that we take, and which propels us into a world of novel possibilities. The 'elsewhere' was highly visible during my fieldwork, as interlocutors consistently contrasted the many failure(s) that inform their everyday with *barra*

(abroad), where *barra* is akin to ‘anywhere but here’, although the west was reiterated as an idealized space.

Lebanese-ness is the embodiment of a failed state and the emergence of intense personalized rhetoric as a result of this void. Lebanese-ness is more attuned to agency, subjectivity, and to the ‘everyday’, in addition to escaping the notions of nationalism, sovereignty, patriotism, and the like. It operates in and between the individual, the communal, and the plural, and thus encompasses the intimate, the private, the public, the national, the cosmopolitan, and the global. Lebanese-ness is the convergence of both protests and demands in a single locus in contemporary Lebanon, an ‘undetermined context’ so to speak. What one desires (Lebanon) is the very object that contributes to one’s ill-living (Lebanon). For the younger Lebanese population, Lebanese-ness is directly informed by generational narratives about Lebanon’s ‘glorious past’, in addition to being constructed in opposition to the geopolitical turmoil currently sweeping the region. In this sense, Lebanese-ness befits what Ouyang (2012) describes as ‘the politics of nostalgia’. Although Ouyang (2012) draws on poetry and literature in her work, in addition to engaging with an imagined Arab community on the whole, her argument is most suitable for the context of Lebanese-ness:

‘The ambivalence towards the past and the nation accentuates even more the need for history, or the necessity to tinker with memory, especially when the nation and the present are often seen as born out of a problematic cultural encounter between East and West (Ouyang, 2012: v).’

When I first started this project, my intention was to examine friendship in Lebanon. As a young woman in her thirties living in post-war Lebanon, in an everyday where the ghost of the civil war lingers still, my friendships' stories, like many others in Lebanon, are stories of rupture. Migration is a 'big thing' in Lebanon, and sooner or later, everyone leaves (this is true for those who are capable of acquiring a passport, something that is not possible for the many refugees or paper-less individuals who reside in Lebanon). Migration is the means through which many Lebanese people secure a foreign passport. Some leave for studies and it transpires that they stay, others acquire it through marriage, and some, like me, regret not investing their time and energy towards acquiring a foreign passport.

When I started my fieldwork, I was convinced that Love is a thing: a beautiful, wonderful, and many splendoured thing. I still believe in Love. I choose to believe in Love. However, the more I spoke to my interlocutors, the more we became disillusioned with Love. Unlike the existing literature on marriage, which has ignored the topic of love, it is my wish to add to it by examining the affective component of the couple-space during the time prior to marriage. What makes or breaks a love story in Lebanon? What is love? Is love compatible with institutional sectarianism? Does love inform marriage? In what ways? Is love contextually and historically specific? Is it naïve to research love in the first place? Perhaps the existing literature is right, and the road to marriage *is* forged along kin relations and financial negotiation mostly.

In what follows, I draw on my ethnography to illustrate the 'everyday'. The ethnography in question relates a day in the life of a young Lebanese man, as he races against Lebanon's bureaucratic labyrinth. I use his example as an analogy to illustrate the

chronic contradictions that we encounter at the very core of the love stories I relate throughout my thesis.

*'That's it! I've had it! B'ddī 'īsh!
(I've had enough! I want to live)¹*

K.'s words are very general, yet very specific. For many of us, they are words we repeat every now and then, or on 'one of those days' when nothing seems to work; when the future looks particularly bleak, or when the connection to the Internet is momentarily lost (at least for the extra-privileged among us). For K., every day is 'one of those days', and his case is not an isolated one. That K. wants 'to live' is not an exaggeration. He is not physically threatened, nor is he in dire living conditions. In his words, he is another young Lebanese man who has had enough of *sh'rī't al ghāb*, or the law of the jungle, in which he feels trapped.

Sh'rī't al ghāb is an expression that can be recollected in an endless number of narratives in contemporary Lebanon: in newspapers and magazines, on the news, on TV talk shows, and in everyday conversations. In many ways, it is the renewal of the expression 'like Beirut', a catchphrase used by ordinary people and world leaders alike to describe a scene of chaos and decay, and which stems from widespread TV footages of the city in ruins during the civil war. For some Lebanese citizens, the expression 'like Beirut' is an old cliché that is both misleading and pejorative. There is even a sarcastic blog run by someone going by the name of Joe Aoun (no date), which awards 'certificates' to

¹ Field notes/Interview with K., Beirut, July 2014.

bloggers, journalists, reporters, etc. who use the expression 'like Beirut' in their reporting, in an attempt to change this prevailing attitude.

Although Beirut has come a long way since its civil war days, with very few scenes of ruin and destruction remaining still, for the everyday citizen like K., it is still a chaotic and draining space where negotiation is constant, clientelism is prevalent, and bypassing the law is almost given.

K., in his frustration, is clearly protesting. On this particular day, he had already been to the Ministry of Education twice, where he sought to have his name on his Bachelor's degree in Law, awarded by the Lebanese University, corrected. K. needs to have his name correctly spelt (misspellings occur widely seeing that data is recorded manually in most of Lebanon's official institutions) in preparation for migrating to Australia.

Last week, when K. attended the Ministry of Education, a civil servant informed him that he must show his *ikhraj qayd*, a type of document with a short-term validity, which was widely used in Lebanon as a recognized form of ID until the issuing of national IDs in the late 1990s. In order to get an *ikhraj qayd*, one must be issued with one by a *mokhtar*, or a mayor. The mayor, in Lebanon, is most often a well-known personality who is elected by his (he is often a man) community. His administrative functions are limited to recording births, deaths, marriages, and divorces. He also issues the predecessor of the national ID, namely an *ikhraj al qayd*. Often, the mayor's office resembles a café, with coffee, cigarettes, and snacks being sold while customers/petitioners move between tables where an official or two are usually positioned. Their function resembles that of

scribes. They simply record citizens' petitions and provide them with a 'proof of petition'.

Once a 'proof' is acquired, one heads to *qalam al nufūs*, or the Civil Registry Office. In order to get to *qalam al nufūs*, K. had to rely on passers-by to direct the driver of his 'service', or shared taxi, since the driver was a Syrian national who had recently arrived in Beirut and had yet to familiarize himself with its avenues and streets. When K.'s taxi broke down halfway to its destination, passers-by rushed to 'give the car a push'. When K. finally made it to the right building, he was sent to three different 'guichets' (or counters), a French word whose use can be traced back to the days of the bureaucratization of Lebanon during the French mandate. When he finally arrived at the right counter, his application was turned down because he did not have the necessary 'stamps', another bureaucratic requirement inherited from the French, and since he did not have the necessary stamps, he had to leave the building and find a stamp vendor.

Depending on one's luck, such vendors can be immediately spotted, or not. With luck nowhere to be seen, K. started screaming and cursing. He did not scream or curse at anyone in particular. Rather, he targeted the whole of the Lebanese State, and its labyrinth-like bureaucracy. And whereas administrative 'mistakes', such as K.'s misspelt name, are not a rare occurrence in Lebanon, a systematic recurrence of such errors, over a period of time, does leave its toll.

K. overcame his outburst as soon as it had started. After all, as K. points out: 'This is Lebanon.'² Still, to ignore the impact of what could be seen as a minor bureaucratic

² Field notes/Interview with K., Beirut, July 2014.

mistake on the everyday, particularly since it costs time, money, and effort, not to mention Lebanon's draining summer heat, is to miss the whole point of an analysis that is focused on the 'everyday'.

K., in his words, 'wants to live'. Yes, he is very cynical when it comes to the future, but he is resolved to enjoying life. His example is not an isolated one. In my view, and following my fieldwork, I believe that K. is representative of a Middle Eastern generation who has 'had it' with geopolitics, militiamen, eternal leaders, religious dogmas, and inherited 'backwards mentality', an expression used exhaustively in my fieldwork. He might appear to be politically apathetic in the way in which he refuses to commit to political ideologies (be it those found in Lebanon's politico-sectarian parties, or those reiterated by its blossoming civil society), but the truth is that K. reflects Lebanese-ness par excellence, especially when it comes to the 'love of his life', a second-generation Lebanese-Australian girl he met two summers ago when she came to visit her native Lebanon with her family. Not only is she from a different religious sect, she is also financially well-off:

'We met in secret. I am sorting out my papers, including my BA degree, because I want to leave this place. This summer her family decided not to come [and rightly so, seeing the bombings in Beirut and the armed conflict in Tripoli]. I am miserable. She's the only thing that keeps me going'.³

³ Interview with K., Beirut, July 2014.

I asked K. whether the fact that the 'love of his life' was an Australian national made 'falling in love' with her 'easier', since she can provide him with a 'ticket out'. Unsurprisingly, he did not like my question:

'Shu, we'fet 'alayyeh? (You think I'm in this alone?) She just happened to be Australian. To me, she is still Lebanese. She loves Lebanon, and most importantly she loves me'.⁴

As we will see in the pages that follow, love, desire, and intimacy are not a given. Seen from the liberal myth of free and universal love, K could easily be accused of being manipulative. The disassociation between the inner and the outside realms is one of the many myths that this thesis refutes, in as much as it refutes the separation of the private from the public, or the pleasurable from the political.

Some might ask, at this stage, *why I am starting a thesis about love and desire by examining a day in the life of an ordinary citizen juggling Lebanon's stubborn bureaucracy*. My answer is simple. In order to understand the discourse of love, it is necessary to situate it within its context. By doing so, one can capture the entanglement of the discourse of love with the institutional character of marriage. Moreover, my fieldwork informed me about the meticulous ways in which nationhood is articulated in a context of desire, with the 'authentic' man, or woman, being constructed not only in opposition to foreign Others, but also along locally, and individually informed lines.

⁴ Ibid.

I end this opening with an extract from an interview with R., whose analogy of a clogged pipe system to describe Lebanon can approximate us nearer to the overall everyday climate faced by ordinary citizens in Lebanon:

‘I don’t know where to start. Everything is wrong: from the state of the roads to the quality of the food, to the corrupted *zu’mā* [colloquial for strong sectarian leader, plural for *za’im*]. It’s like a clogged pipe system. You try to rescue one plughole, you end up with another one flooding’.⁵

I am particularly fond of R.’s conceptualization of the political state of Lebanon because it resonates across a number of contexts, including love. As we will see throughout the chapters that follow, love is a highly volatile notion, and is informed by both the individual and the phantasmatic, the social and the material. At times, one recognizes ‘lines of flights’. Either way, marriage emerges as a ‘chrono-normative’ (Freeman, 2008), uninspiring and inevitable institution, much like the auto-renewable *za’im*.

5 Interview with R., Beirut, February 2014.

Chapter I. Why Love?

*'Should our spirits meet after death, with high ground separating our graves,
the echo of my voice will thrill to the echo of Layla's, though I be dust in the ground'*

*Majnūn Layla, also known as Qays Ibn Al-Mullawah
(in Allen and Allen, 2000: 106)*

The author of these verses is Qays Ibn Al-Mullawah, popularly known as *Majnūn Layla*, which literally translates as Layla's madman. The story of Qays and Layla is a story of unfulfilled love, and is one of the most lingering love stories in the Arab world. A vast number of works on modernity and love in the Middle East include the unfulfilled love between Qays and Layla (Racy, 1985; Skarżyńska-Bocheńska, 2009; Menin, 2015). According to the story, Layla Al-Ameriyyah of the Hozan tribe and Qays Ibn Al-Mulawwah of the Banu 'Amir tribe fell in love. Layla's father refused Qays' request to marry her, and Layla was sent to marry a wealthy merchant instead. Qays, in desperation, shunned society and roamed the desert, while reminiscing about his love for Layla in the form of poetry. Qays was not 'mad' per se, and his madness ought to be understood as a state of intense obsession and feeling of loss. Still, such was his level of obsession that society soon named him *majnūn*, or madman.

The tradition of *udhri ghazal*, or unfulfilled love poetry, is deeply embedded in the imagination of the Arab youth, and continues to be taught in schools in Lebanon. The verses above are taken from one such poem. The theme of unfulfilled love continues to

feature heavily in formal and informal registers, visual and auditory works, in songs and on the Internet, in television series and Egyptian melodramas.

The depth of *udhri* poetry is well illustrated in the work of Allen and Allen (2000). They explain *udhri* poetry in the following:

‘The poet-lover places his beloved on a pedestal and worships her from afar. He is obsessed and tormented; he becomes debilitated, ill, and is doomed to a love-death. The beloved in question becomes the personification of the ideal woman, a transcendental image of all that is beautiful and chaste. The cheek, the neck, the bosom, and, above all, the eyes – a mere glance – these are the cause of passion, longing, devastation, and exhaustion’ (Allen and Allen, 2000: 106).

Udhri love, along with further intimacies, is well-documented in the literature, which shows the highly privileged position of love (whether in a heterosexual or same-sex desire context) in Pre-Islamic and Islamic societies, and in the contemporary Arab world (Habib, 2009; Ouyang, 2012; Massad, 2008; Allen et al, 1995; Allen and Allen, 2000; Roscoe and Murray, 1997).

The enduring legacy of *udhri* poetry poses a puzzle at a time when satellite television, globalization, and the commodification of sex are leading to increasingly hegemonic western expressions of love: from celebrating Valentines, to ‘dating’, to choosing one’s partner, to conflating sex with love. It is important to stress that I do not mean to posit *udhri* love as something ideal, or western expressions of love along invasive terms. Rather, I believe there are enough contradictions and not enough literature when it comes to the notion of love in the contemporary Middle East.

Between parentheses, and unless I precise, I use the expression of love throughout this thesis in lieu of romantic love. Following my examination of love, I can safely argue that love as a feeling is a highly useful lens to understand the structurality of gender and sexuality in the Middle East; or, at least in my context, Lebanon. Additionally, the Middle East, as a context of study, would benefit greatly from the 'affective turn' (Clough and Halley, 2007), from which it has largely been omitted.

I.1. Romantic love and the existing literature

By reviewing the existing literature on romantic love, one finds great resonance between marriage patterns and other coupling processes in the Lebanese context, and beyond. Love, in its abstract form as a feeling, is rarely examined empirically in the contemporary Middle East (Davis and Davis, 1995). Most often, the relationship between men and women is examined through the lenses of kinship, gender, or marriage. Even when marriage is examined, the question of love is omitted, and marriage is examined through a purely political economy lens (Singerman, 1995; Singerman and Hoodfar, 1996; Hoodfar, 1997; Hasso, 2011). In Lebanon, marriage has been examined for its gendered and unequal core, namely the personal status code (Maksoud, 1996; Joseph, 1997, 2000; Khatib, 2008).

Three broad strands characterize the existing literature on love. I purposefully omit the literature where love is examined from an abstract, detached, and immaterial angle, seeing the 'lived reality' aspect that drives my examination of love in this work. The first strand can be found in anthropological works invested in assessing the universality of the notion of love, by asking questions such as 'is love universal', or 'does romantic love

exist elsewhere [outside of the West]? (Jankoviac, 1995; Lindholm, 2006). This strand is also interested in assessing the existence (or not) of romantic love outside of the west (Gottschall and Nordlund, 2006; Pinto, 2017). Unsurprisingly, western hegemonic patterns of love are taken as a referent-framework against which further cultures and contexts are measured, sometimes in 'inferior' terms (Enguix and Roca, 2005: 1).

A second strand recognizes the entanglement of love with global market forces, and thus theorizes love as a commodity. Illouz (2012: 4), for example, argues that modern love is unsustainable because it fuses the emotional with the economic, and she recommends that we acknowledge the role of 'social and cultural tensions and contradictions that have come to structure modern selves and identities'. In an earlier work, Illouz (1997) draws our attention to the 'romanticization of commodities, and the commodification of love', seeing how the notion of love has been appropriated by a capitalist structure, therefore rendering it susceptible to market forces.

The third strand of the literature on love works through a 'political economy' framework in its examination of love. It mostly adopts a cross-cultural examination, as is evident in the growing number of edited collections where distinct contexts are contrasted and placed in conversation (Enguix and Roca, 2005; Padilla et al, 2008). Such works converge in that the idealization of romantic love and the insistence on choosing one's life-partner in non-western contexts is the result of increasingly individual selves who emerge in conjunction with an increasingly borderless and globalized world.

In the context of the Middle East, the notion of love is often examined through a political economy framework, and in tandem with processes related to the question of

modernity. Najmabadi (1998; 2005) shows how love was relocated from a homo to a hetero setting in order to redeploy it as an ideal between husband and wife in a step towards reinforcing the model of the modern nuclear family during the era of nation-building in Iran. During the late 20th century, orientalist depictions of love practices in Egypt abounded in travelogues and in the writings of western missionaries and native Egyptian modernists (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Ahmad, 1992). Ahmad (1992: 157) notes how western missionaries to Egypt portrayed marriage in Islam as 'based on sensuality and not love', and regarded Muslim wives as 'prisoners and slaves rather than companions and helpmeets'. Conversely, Ahmed understands modern and Universalist understandings of love as 'rooted in the colonialist critique of Muslim societies'. In a similar vein, Abu-Lughod (1998: 11) critiques modernists' depictions of arranged marriages as lacking 'affection and companionability'. Through a minute analysis of the work of Qasim Amin, Egypt's quintessential modernist thinker, who argued (in Abu-Lughod, 1998: 257) that Egyptian women were 'incapable of truly loving their men', and that Islamic scholars have 'reduced marriage to a contract by which a man has the right to sleep with a woman', Abu-Lughod successfully shows how modernists' idealization of 'companionate marriage' or love-based marriage became a suitable vehicle for the instrumentalization of gender during the period of nation-building in Egypt (ibid). Similarly, Baron (1993) conceived love as a bourgeois ideal that bases itself on marriage in 1990s Egypt, whereas Shafik (2007), Abu-Lughod (2008), and Joubin (2013) drew respectively on Egyptian cinema, Egyptian television productions, and Syrian ones, in order to show how discourses related to love and sex are mediated through carefully-developed scripts that simultaneously uphold and contest larger societal paradigms related to gender, sexuality, and the nation. Where the question of marriage is

concerned, the existing literature approaches the topic from a political economy approach, with little regard to the notion of love. This has been the case in the works of Singerman and Hoodfar (1996) on Egypt and in the work of Hasso (2011) on Egypt and the UAE. On another note, recent works on love and sexuality in the region, perhaps too enthusiastic in their approach, have recast it through an Orientalist gaze, thus reinforcing sexuality in the Middle East as something 'exceptional' (El-Feki, 2013; Mahdavi, 2009; Maznavi and Mattu, 2012).

In Lebanon, marriage has been examined for its gendered and unequal core, namely personal status laws. In a more recent work, Drieskens (2008) dedicates four chapters to Lebanon in an edited volume. Although the chapters draw on empirical data, the work itself, like the majority of the existing literature on marriage in Lebanon, is mostly interested in the sectarian divisions that the institution of marriage (re)produces.

The scarcity of works examining love as a feeling in Middle Eastern contexts is in contrast to the rich heritage of love registers that ordinary Middle Eastern citizens draw on in their articulation of their love tribulations and anxieties, and which I relate in the section that follows. Undoubtedly, this reluctance is the result of the imminent geopolitics of the region, which ultimately shapes scholars' undertakings. Still, a number of recent initiatives demonstrate a renewed interest in the topic of love, notably its agentic potential.

An international workshop dedicated to the topic took place in 2012, with proceedings published in a special section entitled *Arab Studies Journal*.⁶ Further special issues

⁶ Special Section: Love in the Arab World, *Arab Studies Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2016)

examining the overlapping of the notion of intimacy with love and sexuality across a number of Middle Eastern contexts also saw the light in 2016.⁷

In 2015, Menin (2015) wrote a fascinating account of the love tribulations of the young Ghizlan in contemporary Morocco. Menin explicates the late Saba Mahmood's (2001) notion of the 'docile agent' by exploring agency in a context where Destiny plays an important in regulating people's daily lives. Similarly, a number of works sought an affectively-charged examination of agency by embedding it with practices of leisure, and pleasure (Deeb and Harb, 2013; Khalili, 2015). In the same vein, Mittermaier (2012) conceives agency as 'being acted upon' following her reading of dream interpretations in Egyptian society, and Sehlikoglu (2017: 87) relocates agency from the level of the individual to the level of the Social, and invites us stop ignoring the 'multiplicity of women's (and men's) subjectification, which inevitably embraces realms of aspiration, desire, and enjoyment.' Although the two latter works do not examine love as such, the authors' understandings of affects as being socio-culturally constructed, and of agency as concomitant with pleasure and divine intervention, render them applicable to this paper. Last but not least, narratives on love, intimacy, desire, and friendship constituted the theme of the most recent issue of the emerging academic platform *Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research*.⁸

⁷ Digital Intimacies, *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, Special Issue, vol. 9 (2016); Everyday Intimacies of the Middle East, *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Special Issue, vol. 12, no. 2 (2016).

⁸ Sex, Desire, and Intimacy, *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2017)

On a final note, we should bear in mind that Cultural Studies increasingly interpret love in political terms, which is not necessarily the angle from which I approach it. Lauren Berlant (2011b: 683), for instance, states that 'the conversion of a love into a properly political concept must induce attention to what to do with the freight the term ports with it: in this case, quite a huge dust ball'. This 'huge dust of ball' is best illustrated in feminists' response to Hardt's (in Wilkinson, 2016) conceptualization of love as a political concept. Hardt is particularly unreceptive to two forms of love: identity politics-as-'bad love', and 'self-love:' he views the first as a 'reactionary and divisive form of politics,' and the second as too 'individualized', perhaps 'even anti-political.' (Wilkinson, 2016: 5) His views reflect a limited understanding of how solidarity operates across difference (ibid: 8), or the empirically-supported fact that for marginalized bodies (particularly people of colour, and queer bodies), self-love is a 'survival' tool above all (ibid: 5). Feminist and queer scholars have questioned the ways in which love has been reduced to the 'couple form,' and often stress the importance of affective spaces in their work, including friendship, solidarity, and sisterhood, especially where identity politics and communal bonds are concerned (ibid: 3). As Wilkinson (ibid: 8) argues:

'Hardt is attempting to think affect beyond subjectivity, and to instead focus on the potential that emerges when bodies come together. Yet, this fails to address the uneven terrain on which bodies encounter each other to begin with'.

Scholar Lila Abu-Lughod's attention to the links between power and affectivities predates the 'affective turn'. In a way, one could argue that any work that has examined a Middle Eastern context through a gender and sexuality lens was indirectly engaging

with the emotions of men and women, even if the works do not necessarily articulate the notions of love, romance, or longing per se. Such is the extent of the patriarchal scripts that underpin love that, sooner or later, they emerge from the text. More recently, the 'affective turn' can also be found in the recent works of Inhorn (2012) and Naguib (2015). Both authors lament the stereotypical view of the 'Angry Arab Man', and invite us to break away from it, by casting a light on Middle Eastern men's conceptualization of intimacy and views on love, marriage, and family life.

I.2. Filling the gap

Unlike the existing literature that examines the institutional and functional underpinnings of marriage in Lebanon, this thesis is interested in the spaces beyond marriage, notably the couple's everyday practices of love, desire, and sex, which overlap greatly, and are largely absent from the literature. Like many of its Middle Eastern neighbours, Lebanon is no exception when it comes to widespread assumptions. Lebanon is often recounted in the popular imagery as a haven of sexual tolerance, where sex is rampant, and sex segregation is inexistent. Lebanon's 'sexy' image is often reiterated at the most official level, seeing the sexist nature and the depth of the male gaze which often accompanies the advertising campaigns of the country's ministry of tourism, which in its turn leads to a plethora of sexed and gendered misconceptions. Add to this Western media and travellers' anecdotes' and an emphasis on Lebanon's obsession with consumerism, body modifications, and its 'nightlife'. At the same time, Lebanon is ranked among the worst countries in the world in terms of gender equality.

Domestic violence is prevalent, and women's sexuality continues to be reiterated in strict traditional frames.

Where gender and sex are concerned, the majority of the literature relates in detail the political and legal struggles of women in Lebanon, and the history of women's political mobilization. In this sense, the personal status code, or the intersection of the law with sect, along with its unequal impacts on Lebanese citizens and its role in the institutionalization of marriage, has been examined to the point of exhaustion, whereas the affective component of the couple has been almost entirely neglected. Apart from the abundance of legal and theological works on the political dimensions and implications of/on gender in Lebanon, a number of works invested in queer subjectivities in Lebanon have recently seen the light.

Having said that, it is important that I situate my work vis-à-vis the existing literature on gender and sexuality in the Middle East. There are two ends that characterize the existing literature on gender and sexuality in Lebanon. The few works that have examined the timeline prior to marriage do so from a traditional, often outdated, and rather linear approach, where sect and class are interpreted instrumentally, in addition to restricting the discussion's framework to the binary of honour and shame. In addition, marriage constitutes the point of departure for most of the existing literature. Methodologically speaking, most of these works rely on legal and religious texts, and although highly critical, they remain oblivious to the invisible everyday practices that ultimately impact one's choice of partner or their conception of love. Where fieldwork is conducted, we are left with quantitative data that fall short of acting as indicators, and minutely examined religious and legal texts, wherein it is mostly the author's voice that

prevails. At the other end of the literature, the newly-emerging scholarship on queer subjectivities in Lebanon could be described as a proper examination of sexuality (desire and sexual practice) in the Lebanese context, which is a change from the previous literature where sexual practices are exclusively examined through the lens of gendered power relations. The new queer literature reflects a high level of creativity, in addition to relying on an often-immersed type of ethnography where stories, narratives, and the everyday are given more weight than legal and religious texts.

This thesis, in many ways, is an attempt to reconcile those two ends of the literature. It is an immersed ethnography, where heterosexual desires are examined at length and where the notion of love is empirically examined.

I. 3. The registers of love

This section conceives the registers of love and sex in Lebanon as the primary source for expressing feelings of love, in addition to acting as a moderating force, an anchor point; or a contentious one, depending on the context in question. Moreover, the registers of love and sexuality show how each is constructed in conjunction with the other. Registers must not be understood as strictly related to texts. I use the notion of registers as an umbrella term that is capable of encompassing the multitude of sources, whether formal or informal, sensory or imaginary where love and sexuality are explored, in addition to being assessed, and reacted to. Registers include television series, sexual scripts, and unscripted everyday conversations, to name a few, and are an inherent component of the larger discourse of love and sexuality in Lebanon.

If I were to give a detailed examination of the Arabic tradition related to love and sexuality, I would have to include hundreds of expressions. From passion to madness, weeping to reminiscing; no emotional state that could be related to love is left unaccounted for. Subtle, refined, and barely noticeable differences between one emotional state and another make all the difference when it comes to love and desire in the Arabic tradition. It would take the endeavours of a linguist and an etymologist to uncover the rich and diverse vocabulary related to matters of the heart in the Arabic language. I stated earlier how the Orientalist gaze insists on casting Middle Eastern societies in a particular light. Recent works have shown how attitudes towards sexuality in the modern-day Arab world have been largely instituted during the colonial period (El-Rouayheb, 2005; Massad, 2007; Murray, 2005; Najmabadi, 2005; Ze'evi, 2005). Such works follow an ethno-historic approach to reveal a pre-colonized culture that took matters related to the heart to its heart (pun intended), in addition to embedding love with a divine meaning.

Beyond mass culture: love registers as discursive

Following Silverstein and Urban (1996), there exists a dialectical relationship between 'entextualization', and 'contextualization' in the production of any discourse. Through the examination of the function of the written text, both authors challenge the limited view of texts as a by-product, or a residue of social life, and invite us instead to view social life as a product of textual practices. They (in Stokes 2007) define entextualization as 'the process by which social actors turn ongoing discourse and social interaction into text-artefacts', and contextualization as 'the often contested process by which it is

returned to discourse and social interaction, thereby generating newly entextualised text-artefacts' (Stokes, 2007:6).

The constant re-writing of texts, be they visuals, song lyrics, or cinematic productions, is telling of the dialectical tensions that inform both the general discourse and the smaller-scale everyday practices. In addition, by arguing that discourse and the everyday shape each other, I am emphasizing the mobility and non-fixity of 'culture', which is an important point in a Middle Eastern context like Lebanon, where Islam is often portrayed as a stubborn monolith that cannot be removed. Although the registers I explore could be labelled as mass cultural productions, it is important to be able to look beyond the view that reduces cultural productions aimed at the masses as something 'bad' and lacking in taste (Ang, 1985), or what Adorno and Horkheimer (in Storey 2006) term 'culture industry'.

For Adorno and Horkheimer (in Storey, 2006), the 'culture industry' or mass culture is 'uniform, predictable, and to the trained ear or eye, transparent' (Storey, 2006: 66). Adorno and Horkheimer (in Storey 2006) present the spectator in their work as constantly receptive, and although they identify 'authentic culture' as the anti-thesis to 'culture industry', the question of authenticity is a highly contentious one, and continues to be unresolved, especially in the context of the Middle East. Instead, it helps that we think of 'mass culture' along the notion of 'popular culture', as posited by Hall (2005):

'What is essential to the definition of popular culture is the relations which define 'popular culture' in a continuing tension (relationship, influence and antagonism) to the dominant culture' (Hall, 2005: 449).

Although Hall (1998) is more concerned with questions of hegemony and class, his view on culture, or should I say cultures, as being constantly challenged, in addition to competing ideologically with dominant knowledges, is highly suitable for grasping the full impact of the registers of love and sex in Lebanon on the psyche of ordinary citizens. In addition, the consumption of registers is never neutral, but is always entrenched in the socio-political and historical settings in which they are consumed. It is important to not limit our view of these registers as the natural synthesis of the intersection of the global and the local, modernity and tradition, religion and freedom. As Fu (2012) remarks, ‘in its own intervention, sexuality becomes a gauge of process, of the interface between westernization, modernization, orientalization, and globalization’ (Fu, 2012: 6). This complexity leads me to not analyse the content of these registers. Instead, I am more concerned with what these registers do.

In brief, registers do not operate in a vacuum, and their consumption, whether small or great, is not neutral; rather, they are constantly being weighed against larger discourses, and one is endlessly positioning the self in relation to them. For the purpose of this study, I recount the registers mostly mentioned during my fieldwork, and stress that they do not constitute an exhaustive list.

Poetry, and unfulfilled love

In her overall framing of love and sexuality in modern Arab literature, Kilpatrick (1995) states that:

‘The search for love is intimately connected with the individual’s desire for freedom and fulfilment, while the frank affirmation of sexuality, of whatever kind, represents a challenge to a rigid and

hypocritical social order. In both cases the act itself cannot be separated from its expression, and innovative attitudes to love and sexuality are bound up with literary renewal. Above all, the writer who takes up these issues knows that his or her handling of them is a social act, implicating the whole community. Much more than in most West European literatures, discussions of love and sexuality in modern Arabic literature are intricately connected with ideas about society and the individual's place in it' (Kilpatrick, 1995: 15).

As the writers hold an ambivalent position towards love and sexuality, so do their readers. The poet, as is the case with the novelist subsequently, often finds himself in contentious spaces. Although modern poetry differs from classic poetry in both its form and its capacity to penetrate, when it comes to love and sexuality, both have been approached as a commentary to social, moral, and religious barriers. Where poetry is concerned, be it classic or modern, the theme of unfulfilled love between lovers is undeniably its most distinct feature, and although the verses do imply familiar restraints, they focus on the couple-space and the unattainability of love; in contrast to the novel, where the author approaches love through a sexuality and power lens, and places lovers at the centre of socio-political tensions. My thesis echoes such conclusions, and is driven by the overall argument that love is discursively formed, i.e. produced in tandem with power.

For instance, one of the most lingering images in the imagination of a Lebanese secondary school student is that of the weeping poet who visits the ruins of a Bedouin camp and bemoans his lost love, either because her clan has moved on, or because she left the tribe to which she was forcibly married. This pre-Islamic tradition, known as

‘Crying in the ruins’, or *bukā’ ‘l’ al aṭlāl* in Arabic, is still largely taught in secondary schools across Lebanon. These poems were traditionally hung in the *Ka’ba* in Mecca for residents, travellers, and passing caravans to appreciate, hence their name of ‘hanged poems’.

The theme of unfulfilled love between man and woman, often due to family opposition, remained prevalent during the Islamic Umayyad period, and allowed both authors and the public to ‘convey criticism for social norms and constraints, and to express the individual’s longing for freedom’ (Kilpatrick 1995: 10). During the ‘Abbasid period, both erotic poetry – ranging from the witty to the obscene – and Islamic mystical poetry became popular. This prose literature reflects a society where the expression of love and sexuality ‘had become a refined art practised by both men and women’ (Kilpatrick 1995:10). Such foundations remained the main criteria that informed the works of the majority of Arab intellectuals and artists until the 17th century, when cultural contacts between Europe and the Arab world started taking place, and the novel gradually replaced poetry.

The novel, or facing patriarchy head-on

By the 19th century, the majority of the Arab world was witnessing a wave of anti-colonial movements calling for independence. At the core of the independence wave, crucial and existential questions prevailed. Among these questions are those concerned with nationalism and Pan-Arabism, the locally authentic, and the ‘question of woman’, in addition to those concerned with the reconciliation of Islam with modernity.

Where love and sexuality are concerned, the novel moved away from the theme of unfulfilled love towards a more aggressive engagement with sexuality. Unlike poetry, where love is unfulfilled, and the lover is longed for, the fictional novel functioned as a direct attack of deeply-rooted patriarchal interpretations of sexuality, and as a space to contest sexuality and to rewrite the limits of taboos.

A couple of interlocutors cited the works of Hanan al-Shaikh (1980), Najwa Barakat (2004), and Alawiyya Sobh (2016) among the authors they read. All three authors defied the limits of the novel genre by producing sexually explicit novels. In *The Story of Zahra* (1980), for example, Al-Shaikh goes as far as to kill her protagonist as an ultimate act of rebellion and freedom. Surprisingly, though, the novel genre meant little to the majority of my interlocutors compared to the passion and enthusiasm in which they described their love for poetry, and many of them could recite entire stanzas, in addition to sharing them heavily via WhatsApp with their friends. Equally surprising was their familiarity with the works of Danielle Steel. When I enquired with Layal, for example, she told me 'I don't really read. *Yalli fiyyi mkaffeni* (I have enough on my plate already). I don't know anyone who reads. Besides, books won't help us'.⁹ Layal was referring to the general atmosphere of life lived poorly that permeated throughout my fieldwork. Her words are telling of an intense political fatigue, where answers and identifications are sought in places that are already available: in her case social media, songs, and television. Moreover, her disengagement with literary works reflects further modern trends of consumption where audio-visual materials are vehemently consumed.

⁹ Interview with Layal, July 2014, Tripoli.

Turkish TV series

I wondered whether to include Egypt's TV series at this stage, seeing Egypt's long history as the Arab world's main producer of television and cinematic projects. After several reflections, and considering the nation's obsession with the misadventures of Mohannad and Samar, the protagonists of the Turkish series 'Forbidden Love' during my fieldwork, I decided to include Turkish productions first. I briefly explore one such series, namely Forbidden Love, in order to show their relevance to the discourse of love on sexuality, and vice versa. I chose Forbidden Love because I followed it closely. Moreover, 'Forbidden Love' is further examined in chapter VIII, and it makes sense to introduce it prior to that. *Aşk-ı Memnu*, or 'Forbidden Love', is one of dozens of Turkish TV series that have taken the Arab public by storm. They are generally dubbed into Arabic by Syrian actors who use the Damascene dialect in their work.

Samar is married to a rich businessman, Adnan Ziyagil, who is eleven years her senior. Muhannad is the foster child of Adnan, and a distant relative. He is young, attractive, and rich. Shortly after Samar marries Adnan, she begins an affair with Muhannad. Until the screening of the Turkish TV series 'Noor', in 2005, the Lebanese public, like its Arab counterparts, mainly watched Egyptian TV series, in addition to Western TV productions. Since 'Noor', there has been a considerable shift towards watching Turkish TV series. Still, many continue to follow Egyptian ones, notably during the month of Ramadan, when Egypt's premier productions are aired across the Arab world.

Egypt's TV series have been examined by Lila Abu-Lughod (2005) who recognizes their overall socially-conscious approach. Television melodramas are 'finite', 'come to a resolution', and are 'more emotional and forthright in their moral lessons than

contemporary Euro-American television dramas' (Abu-Lughod, 2005: 113). Moreover, they are 'seen by state officials and middle-class professional producers as particularly effective instruments of social development, national consolidation, and 'modernization', and, 'those who make melodrama see themselves as trying to produce modern citizens and subjects' (ibid: 112). Unlike the social messages that drive most Egyptian TV productions, *Forbidden Love* is informed by a cacophony of moral dilemmas, kin betrayal, and, most importantly, lusty feelings.

It is no doubt that the actor who plays Muhannad could be viewed as a 'sex symbol', in the Western sense of the word. However, as far as my analysis goes, he is not simply the 'hunk' or the 'archetypal lover'. Instead, I propose that we view Muhannad as a 'symbol for sexing', where sexing is the spontaneous, almost unconscious process of evaluating one's desires and intimate against the limits set by Lebanon's moral rubrics. Sexing would involve reactions and assumptions such as: 'What would my family think of me?', 'Would my friends cover for me?', or 'Do I even dare go this far?'

In 'Noor', the first Turkish series to be broadcast in the Arab world in 2005, the actor Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ portrayed a character named Muhannad. The series was a success to the point that the producers of 'Forbidden Love' decided to also name their character Muhannad. Renaming the actor Muhannad does not indicate the producers' laziness, nor does it reflect their deliberate capitalizing on the figure of Muhannad. The fact that the producers of 'Forbidden Love' decided to name a new character after one with whom he had no close connection whatsoever is telling of the fact that the character of Muhannad the 1st, his struggles, his melancholic personality, and his determination to win the heart of his beloved, meant little to the public compared to the emotional triggers

it found itself grappling with. In other words, the public was not as invested in Muhannad the character per se as it was acclimatizing its self to intense imageries whose possible materialization would require them to seriously question ‘matters of the heart’. Muhannad the 1st is simply the signifier of an intensely affective moment capable of triggering the very real anxieties and material barriers that cripple the love life, and by extension the sex life, of many men and women across the Arab world, not barring Lebanon. The viewer, unwillingly, is absorbed in an imagined intimate moment where tens of sexing possibilities are recorded. Muhannad becomes the site where married women vent their frustrations with their husbands, where young women imagine an ever-lasting love, and young men, in the same fashion as Malayalam’s young male cinemagoers find ‘helpful anchor points’ as they challenge the discourse of sexuality in Lebanon (Chopra et al, 2004:170). This is evident in the ‘media panic’ and ‘sex panic’ that accompanied the broadcasting of the series (Salamandra, 2012). Salamandra (2012) argues that the unattainability of the ideal partner portrayed by Muhannad, and the wave of domestic violence and divorce that accompanied the series, are telling of the perceived social threat that ensues from women’s sexual desire. Khaled, for example, mockingly objected to Lebanese women’s ‘impossible demands’ by asking me directly, ‘you too are awaiting your Muhannad? Wait then!’¹⁰

Egyptian melodramas

Poetry and fiction novels apart, Egyptian melodrama movies, also known as ‘women’s film’ in the literature resonated highly among my interlocutors. The literature on

10 Interview with Khaled, Beirut, August, 2014.

Egyptian cinema is vast. The majority of it follows a content analysis approach, in addition to stressing its relevance to nation-building in Egypt. Egypt's cinema has been conceived as a state-led and male-dominated film industry, despite the occasional women-led counter-productions (Buskirk, 2015).

A number of works have dealt directly with the ways in which gender has informed Egypt's cinematic works, in addition to linking it to wider socio-political debates. In her review of Egypt's cinematographic industry from the 1920's until 2008, Shafik (2008) shows how Egyptian women went from being portrayed as household servants during British colonial rule to servants of the nation, and is eager to challenge any views that insisted on viewing Egyptian women's portrayal along liberated lines. Where love and sexuality are concerned, women's roles in melodramatic works can be summed in three main characters: 'passivity, purity, and the ability to sacrifice'. Shafik (2007) goes on to add that 'the dramatic conflict of the film is generated through forbidden love in the first instance, but in a second and even more important one, through the virtue of the girl's character torn between faithfulness to her love and obedience to her parents' (Shafik, 2007: 140). Whereas melodramatic works depicted women's sexuality as particularly regulated, recent works in Egyptian cinema, known as 'mall cinema', and which centres around youth and urban life, takes a more drastic turn as it faces head-on highly contentious topics including men's sexual impotence, delayed marriage, and consummated love (Al-Zobaidi, 2010).

WhatsApp and the Internet

‘Sometimes I just want to destroy my phone! Enough already! If they are not sending me spinsterhood memes, they send me memes mocking married life! What am I to make of the two?’¹¹

Mou, who is currently single and secretly dating Ahmed is constantly bombarded by memes from her mother, her mother’s friends, and female relatives, which depict and mock the dreaded ‘*unūssa*’ (spinsterhood). Mou’s anxieties are real. Her love interest is not financially well-off, which is the main reason she keeps postponing telling her parents about him. The content of the memes that mock married life usually revolves around the routines of married life, of married women growing ‘old, fat, and ugly’, and of husbands eyeing younger women. Whereas such memes are extremely popular among married women, who often create WhatsApp groups with their female friends where they post jokes, anecdotes, and pictures of their weekly *sobḥiyyāt* (plural of *sobḥiyye*, or the tradition-institution of women’s informal gathering in the morning until lunchtime), single young women, especially university-educated ones, often remark the sexist and ‘backwards’ nature of said memes. I share below some of the memes that proved particularly popular among my interlocutors.

11 Interview with Mou, May 2014, Tripoli.



Meme 2, forwarded by Mona.



Meme 2, forwarded by Mou.



Meme 3, forwarded by Layal.

Wife to husband:

- You see that? Abu Mohammad was so in love with his wife that he built a mosque and named it after her following her passing!

Husband to wife:

- Well... I have bought the land for quite some time now... Any delay is from your side...

Wife to husband:

- If only I were a phone! It'd be nice to see the same level of attachment from you! (Notice the characterization of the wife, who is wearing a scholar's hat and carrying a diploma, a visual exercise that mocks her 'fasaha', or to speak out 'truths' despite lacking the skills to engage with the topic in question).

Husband to wife:

- If only you were a phone! At least there'd be a newer version of you every year!

In the first row of images, we see a thin hen (female) followed by the annotation 'before marriage', and a fat one followed by the annotation 'after marriage'.

In a reversed exercise, the lower row of images reveals a healthy-looking rooster (male) 'before marriage', and a rather depleted-looking one, plucked as if it were tortured 'after marriage'.

These memes visually reflect the highly corporeal component of marriage in Lebanon, in addition to reiterating what Hakim (2010) called women's 'erotic capital', especially when we consider the view that women are most likely to 'get fat' and 'neglect themselves' once they 'secure' a husband. This view, along with proverbs, anecdotes, and story-telling, constitute a considerable source of informal registers where love, sex, sexuality, and marriage are contested. In addition to memes themed around married life, romantic memes emphasizing unfulfilled love and the tragedy of love are also heavily circulated among groups of female friends in Lebanon, notably extracts from poetry, and short audio clips figuring classic Egyptian songs.

WhatsApp aside, online love forums, and dating applications are gaining tremendous ground, with many women finding a comforting and informative source in them, as opposed to the difficulty of sharing their intimate concerns with their family (see chapter VIII). In addition, the emerging counter-literary movement led by female bloggers (Gheytaichi and Moghadam, 2014; Skalli, 2006) often complicates romantic love by viewing it through a critical lens, in a fashion that is similar to women's novels.

Love scripts

Although scripts are not registers per se, and are more akin to learned behaviour, their relevance to the discourse of love compels me to include them. Love scripts are directly informed by the concept of Sexual scripts put forward by John Gagnon and William Simon (1973). Ze'evi (2005) draws on Gagnon in his explanation of scripts:

'We all have in our minds, like scripts for movies or plays, the outlines that suggest the 'right' kind of sexual attraction, the expected course of

action, and the anticipated outcome of our action. These scripts offer us a set of guidelines, which we do not necessarily follow but allows us to recognize the parameters, the borders, within which we act and the points at which we transgress prescribed boundaries' (Ze'evi, 2005: 10).

Love scripts inform us of the relegation of love to marriage in Lebanon. Any kind of love that is acted outside of the prospect of marriage is seen as transgressive, troublesome, and is soon rebuffed. Further to my brief overview of the registers of love and sexuality in Lebanon, I suggest that we catalogue them under three main labels:

- The abstract ideal of 'unfulfilled love', which can be traced to pre-Islamic Arabia, is widely cherished still, and is often used as a vehicle to comment on 'modern times';
- The production of non-conventional love (read inter-sectarian) as an irrational, selfish, or dishonourable act is necessary for the regulation of love along intra-sectarian lines, in addition to limiting sexual activities between the couple;
- Love-marriage (intra-sectarian) between official couples is highly valued since it is religiously, morally, and socially sanctioned. Love-marriage does not challenge Lebanon's sectarian order. On the contrary, it reinforces it. Through the construction of romantic love as an ideal relationship between man and woman, men and women in Lebanon are encouraged and expected to celebrate it and find pleasure in it, as long as it has been officialized, and as long as it is confined to the boundaries of one's sectarian community.

I. 4. The puzzle

In Lebanon, and like in many southern contexts, young adults increasingly imagine romantic love as the basis of their married life, in addition to conceiving the latter as a 'partnership' between man and woman rather than an alliance between two families, as my fieldwork informed me. Nevertheless, and although romantic love is seen as an elective, harmonious, and emotionally-filled space, it is strictly imagined and practiced within the confines of one's sect and class. Furthermore, and far from Lebanon's image as a place of sexual permissiveness, my examination of men and women's lived reality informed me that everyday practices of love concur with a considerable level of negotiation. The cacophony of the intermingling of love with the categories of sect, class, nationality, gender, and sexuality, leads me to combine a Deleuzien-inspired approach towards love with a political economy framework in my examination of 'everyday practices of love'.

I.5.Thesis interrogations

This thesis attempts to answer the following question: what makes or breaks a love story in Lebanon? A successful love story in this thesis is not necessarily one that ends in marriage, although this depends on the couple in question. If anything, the thesis shows how marriage is a mostly 'chrono-normative' (Freeman, 2010) practice that regulates Lebanese citizens' lives through the reproduction of pre-established politico-sectarian norms and institutions. Conversely, this thesis aims to understand how Lebanese citizens negotiate their love feelings when confronted with class or sect-based dilemmas.

Further interrogations related to my study include the societal construction of certain forms of love as passionate, immoral, and irresponsible, especially when contrasted with the view that love-marriage produces mature, adult, and responsible selves. As a result, further interrogations informed my study, notably: how do couples define love and marriage? To what extent does love trample over sect or class when choosing a partner?

In order to answer these interrogations, I first free the notion of love from the binary of material/phantasmatic by drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze, whilst highlighting the relation of love to power. In other words, I embed a Deleuzian reading of love with a political economy framework, seeing the relevance of class, sect, gender, nationality, and further social categories and societal practices in the love stories I collected throughout my fieldwork.

Love comes in a myriad of forms, many of which are ‘impossible’, and it is precisely these momentary stations that I am most interested in, especially since they exude a peculiar kind of agency, one ‘against all odds’, where pleasure is primordial, and where desire, sect, class, morality, religion, and the Divine, all intersect in the shaping of the discourse of love in Lebanon.

A Deleuzien-inspired approach to love posits it as an ‘assemblage’ that operates along a normalizing ‘territorializing’ axis, and a ‘deterritorializing’ one that tends towards ‘excess’ and ‘breaking away’. Having said that, three main lines of thinking drive this thesis. Firstly, in this thesis, marriage territorializes love, in the Deleuzian sense. Love is a highly gendered discourse in Lebanon that is both taught and learned from an early age: it is regulated along normative *intra*-sectarian and heterosexual lines, in addition to

confining women's sexuality to the boundaries of marriage. Love emerges at the intersection of desire, with sect, class, gender, and nationality. Conversely, the discourse of love produces a hierarchy of desirability where the intersection of sect, gender, nationality, and class ranks bodies unequally. The construction of love as a potential of excess and irrationality in Lebanon is necessary for the construction of the love-marriage as its ideal form. Secondly, and considering the deterritorializing potentiality of *inter*-sectarian love, this thesis invites us to conceive love as a rather queer affect in Lebanon, despite the heterosexual context in which it occurs. In this case, I use queer as a reading, not as identification or orientation as such. Thirdly, and seeing the ambivalence of both the notion of love, and love practices, this thesis conceives agency in holistic terms. As we will see, pleasure, the Divine, and 'emotional capital' are central to agency, and a view of agency that limits it to choice and resistance fails in capturing its full potential.

I.6. What is love?

In order to reconcile love as a feeling and love as lived reality, this thesis combines a Deleuzian reading with a political economy framework in its approach towards love. Such methodology allows me to ground the rather unquantifiable excess that accompanies feelings of love, especially when sect, class, or nationality come into the equation.

A 'political economy of love' framework is capable of linking 'macro-level political-economic transformations' with subjective experiences of love, sexuality, and intimacy (Padilla et al. 2007: xii). Moreover, it shows how individual attachments

and affective registers are almost impossible to distinguish from material decisions. It is a framework that is capable of showing the links between the economy and the cultural construction of love and marriage in ways that clarify their particular relations to capitalism and modernity.

Collier (1997), for instance, examines the village of Los Olivos in Andalusia over the duration of three decades to show how industrialization affected the lives of the villagers. In particular, she observes that women's needs for husbands, both in terms of love and money, made them look 'mercenary', in addition to making it difficult for them 'to attain the standard of pure love set by men' (Collier, 1997:109). In the context of Northeast Brazil, Rebhun (1999) shows how rapid urbanization and a rampant cash economy means that people increasingly link marriage to romance. In a transnational context, Constable (1995) dismantles the many myths surrounding 'mail-order brides' (between US men and Filipina women) and ethnographically shows the inadequate binary notions of 'women's oppression' on the one hand, and 'male domination' on the other (Constable, 1995: 5). Instead, she argues against a 'dichotomous view' of love and opportunism where pragmatic concerns are treated as incompatible with emotional ones (ibid: 11).

The notion of love, as a 'master trope' that is 'as pervasive as it is variable', is a highly productive tool for social analysis, especially gender relations, because it reveals some of the most basic ways that human societies organize social life, including marriage, as well as how individuals enact, resist, or transform social discourses of love (Padilla et al, 2008: ix). The existing literature abounds with context-focused works where transformations in the discourse of love and sexuality are meticulously recorded, and

which I include hereafter. Some works whose main goal is to contextualize the institution of marriage become entangled with those invested in the notion of love, and any examination of marriage or love requires us to unpack the many layers of the local, global, transnational, glocal, or cosmopolitan – and everything that falls in between.

A political economy approach is inter-disciplinary by its very nature. This is evident in the additional theoretical frameworks that I include in some of the chapters, and which are necessary for an optimum grasping of love as a feeling that is partly shaped by power. From an anthropological perspective, the topic of love and marriage is deserving of investigation because it reflects the ways in which family organizes itself in a particular context. Through a developmental lens, praxis related to dating and marriages inform policies related to family planning, reproduction politics, and the use of contraceptives. Last but not least, examining marriage patterns through a gender lens allows us to capture inequalities between men and women, including in those contexts where consent and intimacy supposedly prevail, namely love. In other words, ‘when, whom, and how one marries all have implications for gender relations within society’ (Mensch et al, 2006). Considerable shifts related to the process of marriage have occurred throughout much of the developing world over the last decades, including the Middle East. One of the most compelling works to have documented these shifts is the edited volume *The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries* (Lloyd et al, 2005). Despite its developmental lens and minimal focus on the ‘everyday’, the work draws on a multitude of contexts such as Pakistan, Mexico, Kenya, and Egypt, to show similar factors behind these shifts, namely: a rise in the age of first marriage, access to education for women, and women’s participation in the workforce. Also notable to

mention is that in most Asian societies and the Middle East, marriage is still considered a 'rite of passage' for young men and women, signalling their transition from childhood into adulthood (Manderson and Liamputtong, 2002; Joseph, 1999).

Among the widely noted changes in the process of marriage, an increasing number of works show how an emphasis on the ideal of romantic love and choosing one's partner is replacing the custom of arranged marriages in South Korea (Kendall, 1996; Baldacchino, 2008), or Japan (Tokuhiko, 2001). In the case of Kendall (1996), she critiques western views whereby arranged marriage and forced marriage are used and understood interchangeably.

The idealization of romantic love and the insistence on choosing one's life-partner in non-Western contexts is often explained as the result of increasingly individual selves, in conjunction with an increasingly borderless and globalized world (Padilla et. al 2008). Whereas such a theorization could be applicable to an urban, educated, middle class, the same cannot be said in a rural context. For instance, in his examination of the changing patterns of marriage in rural north China, Yan (2006) shows how a combination of changing consumption patterns and opportune legal reforms paved the way for women to resituate their status as spouse. Whereas women are increasingly likely to reject partners they deem unsuitable, improving as a result their chances of social mobility, men, in contrast, are relegated to marrying women who are economically worse off. Yan's work is interesting because it shows a reversed type of empowerment that benefits women mainly. Moreover, it shows how individual attachments and affective registers are almost impossible to distinguish from material decisions. Further authors have sought to show the links between the economy and the

cultural construction of love and marriage in ways that clarify their particular relations to capitalism and modernity.

Whereas a political economy framework allows me to 'ground' love by showing how feelings are conditioned by the lived reality, a Deleuzian approach allows me to conceptualize love by viewing it as an assemblage of abstract *and* material systems. Love is not abstract. Every time a young Lebanese falls in love with someone, they have to seriously consider the implications of their feelings on their kin and sectarian identity, not to mention the question of class, nationality, or sexuality in the case of queer desire. In this sense, love is a highly political affect. It is taught, learned, and practiced at the intersections of each of class, sect, nationality, race, and so on.

There is no canonical definition of the notion love. On the contrary, it is a mostly volatile notion where desire, sexuality, morality, religion, and sex overlap. Since love intersects with further social categories, including sect, race, gender and nationality, it is essential that we recognize its overall political economy framework. To think of love as an assemblage of two seemingly unrelated systems (abstract *and* concrete) is to approximate us to the ways in which its significance, meaning, relevance even, is concurrent along 'territorializing' and 'deterritorializing' forces that have a direct effect on personal agency, gender, and sexuality.

An assemblage is not a finite result if we are to follow Deleuze and Guattari, and despite the fact that two axes shape it, namely a 'territorializing' axis and a 'deterritorializing' one, it is not the intersection of these two axes that produce it. Rather, the two axes are in a constant state of becoming: one axis pulls it inwardly towards the norm

(territorialization), whilst the second axis pulls it outwardly (deterritorialization):

‘Territorialization functions through processes that organize and systematize social space and language production. These processes impose a certain kind of order and categorization on the world that become ‘fixed’ in conceptual structures; they include the categories we learn to live by [...] Such categories do not pre-exist society, but they do structure social space according to certain culture-specific values (Stivale, 2011: 143).

Love-marriage is a discourse that has a territorializing function on love since it swerves it towards a normalizing, adult, and a responsible logic, namely same-sex and heterosexual love. On the other hand, other forms of love, including rebellious love, passionate love, irrational love, inter-sectarian love, and further impossible forms of love, including same-sex desire, have a deterritorializing function on love because they embed it with an anti-normative stance. Either way, love is acknowledged, celebrated, upheld, and emphasized, as my fieldwork informed me.

By contrasting the discourse of love-marriage with further experiences and interpretations of love, I am relegating love to Deleuze’s ‘logic of sensation’:

‘Thinking with the concept of the logic of sensation deterritorializes, fractures and frees the flows of materials, forces, sensations and affects out of which we otherwise construct this edifice of subject and story. This logic invites us to make way for, to make space for, what is excluded, disregarded, minimized, relegated to a subjugated place in a story (Daryl Slack, 2011: 154).

Still, to relegate love to Deleuze's 'logic of sensation' is to elevate its phantasmatic character at the cost of removing it from the social, a pitfall I am cautious of. In the literature, the phantasmatic is often 'disassociated' from the material, which ought not to be necessarily the case, as Navaro (2012) informs us. The phantasmatic can be found in the imagination, and ought not to be confused with an idea, although they both share an abstract foundation. Ideas give meanings to the phantasm, which we construct in our imagination: we imagine 'man', 'woman', or 'love', but we speak of them, or verbalize them, as an idea. Like Navaro (2012), I maintain the unison of the phantasmatic with the material, and where the notion of love is concerned, Navaro's concept of 'make-believe' is highly relevant in this regard:

'While scholars in the social-constructionist vein have emphasized the imaginative aspects of social formation, the new materialists have upheld the agency of nonhuman objects in distinction from (and against) the work of the human imagination. The concept of the make-believe [...] challenges the opposition between [...] the social constructionist [approach] and the new materialist [one]—conceptualizing the phantasmatic and the tangible in unison by privileging neither one nor the other' (Navaro, 2012: 5).

The ambivalence of love implies we recognize it as a discourse that is co-concurrent with further systems of knowledge. The work of Navaro (2012) helps me situate myself in relation to the highly ambivalent notion of love, especially since I am convinced that no amount of empirical work can decisively and confidently evaluate each of the material, and the *idea-l* elements that inform love, notwithstanding how love overlaps with the

politics of each of gender, sexuality, and desire, including a fetishizing one. As far as this thesis goes, I can safely argue that for love-marriage to emerge as the privileged and preferred expression of love in Lebanon, it is necessary to view it as a construct, a space of rational thinking, responsibility, and maturity, and to situate itself within a 'chrononormative' (Freeman, 2008) reading of marriage. Such a position prevents me from making generalizations about marriage, all the while maintaining the potential of love as a force for social change, without romanticizing it.

Seeing the 'becoming' potential that we find at the heart of each of the territorializing and deterritorializing forces along which love operates, I find it important to clarify the expression 'becoming'. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming' permeates most of their works. Deleuze first conceived becoming following his examination of the work of Baruch Spinoza: '[Spinoza] solicits forces in thought that elude obedience as well as blame, and fashions the image of a life beyond good and evil, a rigorous innocence without merit or culpability (Deleuze in Surin, 2011: 21).

Becoming is not the end of something prior, rather it is an end in itself. There is no point A that progresses towards point B in Becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari define it:

'Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, 'appearing,' 'being,' 'equaling,' or 'producing' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 239).

If this definition is too abstract, it helps that I situate it within their analogy of language as a rhizome:

‘Deleuze and Guattari have described the movement of becoming as ‘rhizomatic’, a term that refers to underground root growth, the rampant, dense propagation of roots that characterizes such plants as mint or crabgrass. Each rhizomatic root may take off in its own singular direction and make its own connections with other roots, a molar configuration’ (Sotirin, 2009: 118).

In my own configuration, an assemblage brings several objects together. These objects are both organic and non-organic, in addition to being relational. Central to becoming are the notions of coherence and consistency. An assemblage is a multitude of objects that are ‘hanging together’. It is important to clarify that this ‘hanging together’ is not reflective of a harmonious order in the utopian sense per se. Instead, the ‘hanging together’ can be explained by the two axes along which an assemblage operates, according to Deleuze, namely a ‘territorializing’ one and a ‘deterritorializing’ one. In other words, a social space, including love, is ‘suffused by two different kinds of forces: forces that order social space, and forces that escape that order (in Stivale, 2011: 143).

In an interesting reading of Deleuze’s notion of assemblage, Puar (2012), draws on the theory of the performative metaphysics of Karen Barad in order to emphasize how an exercise of assemblage de-privileges the human body as a discrete organic thing, in addition to de-exceptionalizing it. If one reads Puar (2012) against the grain, one risks viewing her argument as a highly abstract and indecipherable *thing*. However, by de-privileging and de-exceptionalizing the human body, Puar is de facto opening up a space for an agency against all odds: considering the fact that this thesis examines love, and

considering the fact that the notion of love involves a number of actors, objects, and processes, I am interested not only in the relationship of love to each, but also in the space between them, and between them and love.

Reading love as an assemblage of an abstract and a material system requires me to engage with a multitude of objects: from the individual, to love registers such as television series, to the Divine. Moreover, love-as-assemblage is highly suitable for the very 'becoming' nature of the everyday in Lebanon, where the absence of basic services and welfare, the failure of the state, the rise of personalized politics, the intermingling of its population with thousands of displaced refugees from neighbouring Syria, the plurality of its societies, and its general postcolonial condition of 'in-betweeness', makes it notoriously difficult to 'pin down'.

Concurrent to my reading of love as an assemblage is my understanding of the subject as becoming. A subject emerges from their relationship to further subjects, objects, and subject-objects. A subject is always grounded, and prone to an empirical definition. This is in contrast to the notion of self, which is more abstract. One can imagine a self outside of their reality, but the degree of their subjectivity is always linked to the power structure that ultimately shapes them. This nuance is important.

At the level of the self, Joseph (1999) argues that there is no clear distinction between one's self and familial relationships in Lebanon; and unlike the western concept of the self, where the self is unbound, autonomous and, most importantly, separate from others, a Lebanese mature self is always 'in relation to' others. One's sense of self is always extended and in relation to Others. Still, Joseph (1999) reminds us that this sense

of extended self does not necessarily result in renouncing individual pursuits and goals. Whereas the concept of the extended self is particularly helpful in understanding how love is imagined in opposition to or in harmony with one's kin, it is the subject per se who makes decisions ultimately, and where agency can be located.

Since Deleuze and Guattari view the subject as being in a perpetual state of flux, the subject is never stable. In their own words, 'the subject itself is not at the centre, which is occupied by the machine, but on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentred, defined by the states through which it passes (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 20). In addition, they understand the individual outside of the determinist framing of the law, or of identity, for example, since 'indeterminate, floating, fluid, communicative, enveloping-enveloped are many positive characteristics affirmed by the individual' (Deleuze, 1994: 258).

Deleuze is not alone in his fluid conception of the individual. Grosz (in Stark, 2008: 5) cautions us against a stable model of subjectivity because 'by doing so we fail to acknowledge the infinite ways in which things can be connected outside currently policed identities, and beyond what is both visible and can be articulatable within our current systems of meaning and value'. In the same vein and in another work, Grosz (1994) adds corporeality for an enhanced understanding of the subject, since our bodies are constantly subjected to 'inside-out' and 'outside-in' configurations, and therefore contribute to re-writing the Social, and the while being written by it.

Compared to the existing literature on gender in the Middle East, a reading of subject as becoming and fluid could be seen as risky, because it diverts us from the precarious

existence in which many men and women find themselves, which results in clearly encapsulated social categories. Still, and as my fieldwork has informed me, affectivities are a space where one can ‘escape’, a ‘line of flight’ if we follow Deleuze, albeit temporary, especially when viewed in light of the concept of Lebanese-ness I developed earlier.

In brief, love is a notion, a discourse, and an assemblage. It is a notion that reiterates purity, choice, and longing. It is a discourse because it is confined and imagined within the tight boundaries of sect and further materialities. Viewing love as an assemblage that operates along a territorializing axis and a deterritorializing one allows us to capture its potentiality as a factor of social change (defiance), and a factor of stagnation (compliance). At the same time, since an assemblage is becoming, it becomes possible to examine the gap(s) between defiance and compliance, and to infuse agency with further dimensions, including pleasure, and the Elsewhere, as we will see throughout the thesis.

I.7. Thesis layout

In Chapter II, I relate the ethical concerns and research dilemmas that informed this work, in addition to detailing the fieldwork on which it bases its arguments.

In Chapter III, I seek to rid Lebanon from Orientalist depictions from an early stage by demystifying its ‘sexual permissiveness’. Most often, Lebanon’s everyday practices of love are eclipsed by Lebanon’s image as ‘sexy’. I show how the Lebanese state constructs Lebanon as a ‘public fetish’ following a neoliberal logic. Conversely, I draw on historical

antecedents of sexual dissent in Lebanon in order to argue, in line with my overall argument, that desire as discourse, is historically-specific and constantly shifting.

In Chapter IV, I explicate the relationship between the category of sect and love by examining two distinct affective practices, namely 'love-marriage' or *intra*-sectarian love, and non-conventional or *inter*-sectarian love. I also look at the tensions between love feelings, and marriage through what the example of 'strategic queer marriages'. Through my examination of each, I hope to show the temporal aspect of the agency of the subject of love in Lebanon. The idea of agency as temporal befits my overall view of the subject of love as becoming, especially since the timeline of love and its very shape are dependent on the intersectional condition(s) of the subject in question. In line with Deleuze's ontology, we see the subject of love contributing to the territorializing and deterritorializing of the institution of marriage, in addition to recognizing 'lines of flight' depending on the context in which they find themselves. Additionally, the chapter examines what I term 'sexo-sectarianism', which could be easily misread as love attachments.

Chapter V details the narratives of Layal and Om Zahra as they reflect on their love life. As we will see, the narratives of each of Layal and Om Zahra territorialize and deterritorialize love simultaneously. Disillusionment, longing, lust, and restraint are some of the notions that define their narratives. The chapter builds on the previous one in order to conceive agency as metaphysical, seeing the relevance of the Divine or the Elsewhere in the discourse of love.

Chapter VI goes beyond ethnographic delineations and bridges the gap between

anthropological writing and political analysis in order to show how invocations of masculine ideals, illustrated by my female interlocutors' narratives about the 'ideal partner', emerge at the intersection of perceptions about the nation's 'Other' – namely, Syrian refugees and 'lacking' men – and ongoing economic precarity. This is an important exercise since love, in this thesis, is seen along discursive lines. I develop my argument by showing the links between a precarious economy, and an affective rhetoric, and focus on two specific affects, namely hope and pity. Whereas chapter IV explicates the intersection of love with the social category of sect, this chapter explicates the intersection of love (read affect) with the social categories of class and nationality.

Chapter VII examines the couple-space by shedding light on two specific 'everyday practices of love', namely gifting and what I call 'inclusive intimacy'. Seen from a liberal interpretation of love, the conflation of love with material offerings could easily be misinterpreted as 'manipulation'. Similarly, 'inclusive intimacy', or the active inclusion of others in the couple-space, could be misinterpreted as familial constraints. On the contrary, as we will see, the channelling of love through others strengthens the affective bonds between the couple. Since most of the couples who feature in this chapter are already in conventional relationships (read intra-sectarian), the category of sect loses considerable importance to the category of class.

Chapter VIII accompanies couples as they navigate Lebanon's Public(s), including the household, the café, and the car. This chapter shows that the discourse of love and sexuality in Lebanon are constructed in conjunction with each other through the constant circulation of private intimacies into the public, and vice versa, thus reiterating gendered ideologies. The examination of space compels me to engage with a holistic view of the

female body, and to recognize the scope of leisure and pleasure in the activation of agency. As we will see, space is always 'produced' in relation to gender, and women embody it in conjunction with a personalized 'public intimacy'. Moreover, for many couples, the Public is seen as a safe place, since the private, or the household, is considered off-limit space, especially if they are not in an 'official' relationship.

The thesis concludes with a queer reading of (heterosexual) love in Lebanon, in addition to reflecting on the limits and the scope of this work. Additionally, the conclusion provides recommendations for future endeavours related to the discipline of gender and sexuality in the Middle East. Last but not least, the thesis concludes by arguing that when seen through the lens of love, the Middle East emerges as a rather 'ordinary' space. An ordinary view of the Middle East is in contrast to mainstream depictions of the Middle East as the ultimate Other.

Chapter II. Methodological Reflections

In this work, I fully adhere to the ethical recommendations outlined by SOAS, University of London, the AAA (American Anthropological Association), and the ASA (Association of Social Anthropologists in the UK and Commonwealth) in their guidelines. Such recommendations include the protection of both the researcher and her interlocutors, whose anonymity I preserve, and data I safeguard. Further ethical reflections arise in the remainder of this section.

II. 1. Sex, the media, and the duped viewer (me)

Lebanon's media is increasingly 'talking about sex'. Special programmes discussing the health benefits of sex via specially invited expert sexologists and psychologists abound. Another trend is the sensational talk shows that regularly host self-identified queer or non-normative individuals. In the printed press, and on online social media, anonymous testimonies implying widespread pre-marital sex, co-habitation without marriage, and disguised sex work give the impression that Lebanon is a space where 'anything goes', and where citizens date and practice 'love' openly. These publicized sex narratives are categorically contrasted with religious and moralistic views. Religious men, unsurprisingly, are often hostile and do not hesitate to issue on-the-spot fatwas in the case of Sunni religious men, or to express the urgent need to save these souls from 'sin' in the case of Christian ones.

The result is a highly 'sensational' debate, with an exclusive focus on the 'religious'. Any nuances, such as the political component of sexual rights or personal aspirations, are left entirely unaccounted for. The predominant voice that ensues is that of the religious authority, to the detriment of initiating a constructive debate with regard to sexual practices.

Intrigued by this increased publicization, I embarked on uncovering the intimate life (including my own) of Lebanon's post-war generation. One way to approach the fieldwork was to identify 'spaces of sex encounters' in Lebanon at an early stage. By 'spaces of sex encounters', I mean those spaces where ordinary men and women talk about love, sex, and lust. Among them are articles encountered in the press, YouTube videos, and online forums, in addition to dating websites, and TV talk shows.

Before travelling to Lebanon to start my fieldwork, I had contacted the authors and individuals behind these. Their work often relied on testimonies recounted anonymously. Most often, I was not capable of reaching the anonymous informants in question. At times, it seemed to me that the stories were 'almost made up'. These doubts resulted from the writers' unwillingness to 'get back to me', as I was often promised, and the cynicism that shaped my interaction with them, with many of them accusing me of 'being lazy', suggesting I 'ought to do the digging myself'.

Being new to Beirut, it turned out, unsurprisingly, to be a long and frustrating path to follow. I eventually received a reply from Zaven Koumoundjian, a leading TV host who regularly challenges taboos related to sex and sexuality on his show, '*Siri w' Infatahit*'. Luckily for me, he had just published a book about each episode, the majority of which dealt with desire and sexuality. The book related every episode predominantly through

a psychological lens, which often emphasized the women/men binary, and ultimately proved to be of little help to my work.

Eventually, I was able to contact a ‘head-hunter’ working for one TV talk show. To my disappointment, the impression I got from the head-hunter is that she thrives on the misery of the ‘freaks’ she meets. Often, a financial compensation is offered to the guests in return of their appearance. This realization made me recognize the extent to which I have been ‘duped’ by these publicized sex narratives. Clearly, an alternative approach was urgently needed. Believing myself to be well-equipped in recognizing the links between privilege and the quality of one’s love life, I set out to conduct my own fieldwork in Lebanon in 2013-2014.

II. 2. The non-plan planned fieldwork

The fieldwork lasted nine months and was conducted mainly in the city of Beirut. It was my wish to do a thorough session of fieldwork in Tripoli, but events throughout 2014 meant that the city was regularly shut down and mobility reduced. Further shorter periods of what could be described as follow-up fieldwork took place post-September 2014, whenever I left London and went to visit my family in Lebanon.

The first, if not the only, question I found myself struggling with was: Where and how do I find and convince random men and women to openly speak to me about their intimate lives? Unfortunately, my immediate company proved to be rather reluctant in addressing such sensitive topics with me, which is understandable seeing the rather distant relationship that would characterize my relationship to most members of my

extended family. Instead, I found myself spending considerable time around cafés and university campuses interrupting unaware couples. I was often seen ‘hanging around’ the same café or campus for hours, days in a row, in order to make my face familiar to the couples who frequent them during the day, as opposed to the evening when groups of friends gather.

My fieldwork combined a number of qualitative methods, mainly interviews and participant-observation, but also non-participant observation. Forty-two men and women were interviewed in total. Their ages ranged between 20 and 35 years old. Most hailed from middle or lower middle-class backgrounds. Most hailed from low-to-middle income backgrounds. In avoidance of any possible misunderstanding, the category of middle-to-low income in this thesis refers to a life that, albeit escaping prevailing definitions of poverty, is nevertheless lived in uncertainty. For instance, most of my interlocutors’ parents were, or had been, indebted over a prolonged period as a result of acquiring the necessary tuition fees for their children’s schooling and further education. Another example is that of Lina, whose family ‘were living it to a minimum’ at the time of my fieldwork since all their savings were being spent on covering her mother’s medical bills following her diagnosis of breast cancer.¹² With the exception of four women, all of my interlocutors had pursued some further level of education upon graduating from high school (either by following a vocational pathway or pursuing higher education).

12 Interview with Lina, March 2014, Beirut.

The single common characteristic that linked my interlocutors was their non-married status, with the exception of self-identified queer individuals who had married in order to escape kin pressure. The rest of my interlocutors were currently seeing someone from their own sect, and most were in 'official relationships' and preparing for marriage soon. Two points are important in this regard. As far as sect is concerned, it is clear from my interlocutors that any possibility of inter-sectarian love occurred *prior* to marriage; and many of them, sooner or later, had to abandon inter-sectarian love and revert to conventional and normative partners once marriage became imminent. Also, I distinguish between 'official relationships' and 'non-official' ones, considering the nuances that characterize each, especially where scrutiny and moral judgments are concerned.

My interviews were mostly semi-structured. I wonder if I can call them an interview at all since most of them were more akin to a chat. There comes a time when the researcher is no longer seen as such. I had never divulged my intimate life to anyone, apart from two of my closest friends, and from what I could gather, there is something cathartic about narrating one's love struggles in light of Lebanon's sectarian and normalizing ideologies. This is reflective of the extent to which I identified with my interlocutors' struggles, with many blaming the Lebanese state for their failed love relationships (usually with someone from a different sect).

Among the questions I asked: What does marriage mean to you? What are your criteria when choosing a partner? What about your previous partners? How did your love affairs impact your relationship with friends and families? How about sex, guilt, and redemption? What about the aftermath of 'engaging in sex'? Such questions required me

to engage with informants who were willing to share with me their desires, lived experiences, and feelings, in addition to narrating, often with tremendous caution or pain, the tensions they encounter when navigating a society that upholds a predominantly conservative view of women's (and men's) bodies, with diverging results.

Oftentimes, I would simply approach the couple and introduce myself as a researcher conducting research about love in Lebanon. Sometimes, I would receive the accusatory look of 'are you presuming we are having sex?' or 'do you think us immoral?' Needless to say, such a first impression meant 'total failure'. I am convinced of this because the couple in question would simply 'disappear' for the next few days. Fortunately for me, I was received with genuine curiosity too. I would be asked questions like, 'what exactly are you researching?' These are the couples that I eventually interviewed. Couples who accepted being interviewed passed my details to further friends of theirs, which was very helpful as the fieldwork progressed. Like any researcher who has conducted fieldwork knows, sooner or later, there comes the inevitable curious interlocutor whose politics converge with the researcher's, and who would get involved to the point of becoming a 'gatekeeper'. On a couple of occasions, though, I was met aggressively and told not to interfere in people's lives, especially in a public space.

In addition to 'interrupting' couples' joyous reunions, I set up profiles on OK Cupid (mostly hetero-normative sexualities) and Grindr (homo-sexualities/self-identified queer men / men who have sex with men), two social platforms widely used in Lebanon. In my profile, I clearly stated that I am a researcher currently based in Beirut for fieldwork purposes. These ad-hoc and spontaneous methods have their pros and cons.

On the positive side, they proved particularly useful during my ‘warming up’ period. Many times, my online chats provided me with an insight that I was not necessarily aware of, and which would eventually help me when conducting face-to-face interviews. On the negative side, it was not surprising that many mocked me, insisting that I was wasting my time and ‘inventing stories’, and using the pretext of being a researcher to glorify myself with cathartic sex stories. Still, my Grindr profile eventually led me to a number of self-identified queer men and women who use Grindr in order to find potential marriage partners, and I draw on my interviews with them in my reading of ‘strategic marriages’ between self-identified queer men and women. OK Cupid, unfortunately, proved to be a waste of time. As it turned out, most male OK cupid users were interested in talking about their ‘sex prowess’.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, my interlocutors eventually invited me to more intimate spaces, including *sobḥiyyāt*, the tradition of women neighbours and friends gathering and ‘gossiping’ until lunchtime, an extraordinary institution about which I relate later in the thesis. One of my male interlocutors, Walid, invited me to join him and his male friends at the café where they play cards, watch football, and smoke shisha on a regular, almost daily, basis. The *sobḥiyyāt* and the café are two highly gendered spaces, and I examine them both through the lens of what I call ‘public intimacy’ in the chapter on negotiating sex in public.

After months spent recollecting testimonies and personal narratives, it became increasingly clear to me that the realm of the personal, although not recognized as political by my interlocutors – and I am referring to the well-known contentious feminist motto of the ‘personal is political’, has direct consequences on the many debates that

branch out from a discussion on love and sex, notably on the discourse of sexual rights in Lebanon. Also, my position as a feminist scholar compels me to examine my data in the light of the larger socio-political landscape. This is why, and in addition to my interlocutors, I interviewed several men and women who were actively or professionally involved in gender activism in Lebanon. What struck me most was the disassociation between the sexual body and the social body in their work. This disassociation is not limited to the context of gender activists, with many of my interlocutors exhibiting anxiety, and sometimes fear, when negotiating between their lusty feelings and the religion/morality nexus of Lebanon.

II. 3. Writing 'on hold': research and positionality

Feminist research is often concerned with extracting new knowledge from lived experience (Brah 1996; Hill-Collins 2000). It does so without 'testing' a theory against a specific reality. Feminist research is interested, partly, in reversing the Eurocentric core of the knowledge that shapes our world. When we consider the challenges that come with extracting new knowledge from lived experience, feminist research often finds itself in conflict with the question of 'objective knowledge', and the supposed existence of universal truth. Latour (2004) heavily criticizes critical scholars who have appropriated knowledge in all its forms. He questions critique itself since the critic is somehow always right. The critic has the ability to denounce objectivity and empower us as much as he/she is capable of showing the limits of each of us because of our ignorance of objective reality (ibid). Furthermore, Latour (2004) distinguishes between 'thing,' an organic place of thought and argument, and 'object', a failed knowledge, and

laments the objectification of knowledge by realist scholars who are detached from reality and sucked into an academic vacuum, leaving knowledge at the mercy of conspiracy theorists. Instead, he proposes that we look for matter of concerns, as opposed to matter of facts or objective truth.

Moore (2007) has shown us the importance of considering people's desires and imagination by reviewing her own ethnographic work, in addition to exposing the limitations of classic psychoanalysis in examining emotions. In an earlier work (Moore, 1994), she cautions against a universal category of woman and its ultimate impact on research, and proposes, instead, the 'engendered subject' as the site where differences of race, class, gender, and ethnicity are shaped. Such an examination allows us to read between the lines and extract spaces of resistance that a non-feminist approach would miss. In my case, I see affect as a valid source of knowledge, and feelings as a matter of concern.

How my informants viewed me significantly impacted my research. My privileged position as an overseas student pursuing a doctoral degree in a London university, and in Gender Studies no less – not engineering or medicine – did not always play in my favour. Who, in their right mind, would devote all this time and money towards researching love?

The fact that I am from Tripoli, and 'Sunni', with reservations, led many interlocutors to inquire about my parental relationship with a Sunni member of parliament from Tripoli with the surname Allouche. The fact that I am from Tripoli, and 'Sunni', with reservations, led many to quickly assume that I was a partisan of a particular politico-

sectarian party. The fact that Lebanese people situate themselves in relation to others and their milieu by asking 'where are you from' is telling of how certain geographical spaces are associated with particular sects, and therefore with a particular politico-sectarian party.

Such dynamics between researcher and informants are not new. Early ethnographic methodological reflections have often explored the researcher's position from an either/or insider/outsider perspective. In a recent work, El-Kholy and Al-Ali (1999) reflected over this binary by showing how it inadvertently conflates the insider with the native, and the outsider with the foreigner or the 'halfie' (El-Kholy and Al-Ali, 1999: 14). In addition, and I agree with them, the researcher and the interlocutors' positions shift continuously throughout their interactions. There were moments of an inexpressible level of closeness and intimacy between my interlocutors and me, whenever we 'opened up' and 'came entirely clean' about our 'love issues'. Such moments were troubling, and often, I would 'wait' for days or weeks before even daring look at my notes, let alone transcribe them.

Scholars such as Oakly (in Blanche et al, 2006) celebrate feminist ethnography for its focus on lived experience and its capacity to induce a reciprocal relationship between researcher and informant. Davis and Gremmen (1998) recount how their feelings led them to either glorify or dismiss their informants. Mcnamara (2013) pushes this debate further by showing the limits caused by patriarchal boundaries when qualitatively researching sensitive issues (in her case immaturity and mental health). For Stacey (1988), an ethnographic research is more likely to put research subjects at risk than a

positivist, or scientific, one. And, whereas Wolf (in Panagakos, 2011) encourages feminist researchers to challenge conventional notions of what constitutes qualitative research, Kirsch (in Panagakos, 2011) shares her experience of simultaneous excitement and discomfort when interviewing her subjects.

When faced with ethical dilemmas, unexpected puzzles, or highly contradictory situations, I adopted 'interrupted writing', or putting my writing on hold, as a method of writing. This 'hold' is illustrated through bracketed passages, which I call [Intervals] where I reflect on what I have just seen, read, or heard. They are illustrative of the researcher's dilemma, too: To what extent do I simply observe? Is it bad to simply observe? How does the angry feminist in me comply with scenes of deliberate self-defeat? Like feminist scholars working on the Middle East before me, I, too, find myself caught between advancing women's rights at 'home', in addition to 'talking back' to Western scholarship (Abu-Lughod, 2001).

Feminist research in the Middle East conducted in the 1990s had imminent challenges to deal with. The cold war had just ended and neo-liberal agreements became the order of the day. Some of the immediate questions that needed addressing were apparent: namely the west/east binary, the steady rise of Islamic movements and the re-configuration of the role of Islam in relation to women, in addition to exploring the strange, and the sometimes surreal compatibility or not between the old and the new. This decade proved immensely fruitful, with the works of Deniz Kandiyoti (1991), Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), Leila Ahmad (1992), or Lila Abu-Lughod (1998) becoming instant classics.

Today, more than two decades later, feminist research in the Middle East is still, to a large extent, concerned with the question of Islam. Moreover, the disastrous interventions of the US in Iraq and Afghanistan, the continuous war on Gaza, and the dreaded, almost fatalist, outcome of what became known as the Arab spring, means that feminist researchers in the Middle East are increasingly forced to focus on violence – a notion with many connotations and interpretations. Conversely, much of their work is saturated with talks of increased militarization, or of a normalized violence. Meanwhile, in Western academia, feminist research had its fair share of what became known as the affective turn, the ontological turn, and more recently the post-human turn. For good or bad, and without dwelling over the novelties and the critiques that such turns brought along, it is not difficult to realize that very few studies explored Middle Eastern context from such perspectives. Why is that?

Feminist researchers in the Middle East have no choice but to engage empirically with their object of research. Theoretical writing speaks little to the precarity in which most of our interlocutors find themselves. If anything, feminist researchers in the Middle East must, and they do, re-examine gender in an increasingly militarized climate. Through the empirical examination of the discourse of love, this thesis works closer to home. At the same time, it draws on its ethnography in order to speak to the larger feminist dialogue.

II. 4. Binary views, and linguistic void

In Lebanon, the media concurrently reproduces femininity and masculinity in binary terms. Not only are masculinities and femininities hardly pluralized, men and women are often represented as sexed bodies whose biological difference is fixed, in addition to being 'natural, absolute, and unequivocal, based upon congenital ineluctability', if we are to follow Aghacy (2009: 1).

My theoretical grasping of gender and sexuality oftentimes found itself clashing with my interlocutors' binary and primordial views about gender, i.e. sex. It is no wonder, then, that the notions of men or women as clearly-defined social categories, are prominent throughout my thesis. However, and bearing in mind that my scholarship is aimed at both local and global audiences, and based on my own analysis where femininities and masculinities are thought of as a continuum, in addition to existing in a dialectical relationship, I approximate us to my interlocutors' binary views by embedding them in larger economic and socio-political structures in order to show the extent to which both categories are produced and constructed in seemingly oppositional trajectories. As Scott (1986) reminds us, to think about gender analytically is 'to treat the opposition between male and female as problematic rather than known, as something contextually defined, repeatedly constructed' (Scott, 1986: 1074). A similar view can be found in Najmabadi (2005) two decades later, to whom an analytical use of gender means that 'sources about men are also sources about women' (Najmabadi, 2005:1). Binary views aside, my fieldwork unveiled a series of existential dilemmas propelled by semiotics and linguistic challenges, which I develop hereafter.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I was invited to give a talk about my research by *Lebanon Support*, a non-profit, non-governmental, and non-religious information and research centre. It was the first time I had been invited (in contrast to submitting an abstract and being accepted) to give a talk. I was over the moon. I was so excited, indeed, that my mother became genuinely concerned. I took the invitation very seriously, and prepared what I believed to be an exemplary talk. On the day of the talk, I arrived ridiculously late. I had never driven around Beirut in the evening prior to that day, and I had no idea that I was going to be stuck in traffic for two hours for a 5 kilometres trip. When I neared the building in question, I couldn't help but notice my name printed in bold on a couple of flyers posted near the entrance of the meeting place in order to orientate guests. My name on a flyer! How fancy for an early academic!

When I entered the room, I apologized endlessly for my tardiness. There were no less than twenty people present. The fact that they waited for my arrival is telling of the immediacy for gender talk in Lebanon. I promptly sat and took out my duly ordered notes. Soon after I started giving my talk, Marie-Noëlle, the organizer, who is also the Head of Research in *Lebanon Support*, remarked that I was to give my talk in Arabic.

[Interval.

Ouch! No one said anything about Arabic! We communicated in English via email! (I kept such thoughts to myself). There I was, surrounded by a well-read and well-prepared crowd of LGBT activists, angry feminists, and cynical academics, about to give a talk

in Arabic about gender and sexuality. I felt naked. I was naked. No one handed me a cloak.

End of Interval].

This anecdote illustrates several important points. On the one hand, my position as a London-educated PhD candidate in gender studies does not necessarily enable me with the skills to discuss issues related to gender and sexuality in my mother tongue, Arabic. During the early stages of my fieldwork, my attempts at explaining my research to my interlocutors could easily be described as 'disastrous'. Some members from my extended family still tease me by remarking that as far as their understanding goes, they will continue to refer to my studies as '*mjaddrah*', a popular dish based on lentils, instead of '*jandarah*', the Arabic equivalent of the word gender. Such comments are boorish, cruel, and disheartening, to say the least. On a brighter note, it turned out I am not alone in my inability to articulate gender-related issues in Arabic. Throughout my fieldwork, I became accustomed to what I call 'language swap', or my interlocutors' practice of instinctively swapping Arabic for English or French whenever sex, gender, dating, and fun were involved.

Although my thesis is not necessarily concerned with the relationship between gender and language, the fact that I write about gender in Lebanon compels me to reflect on the limits and uses of the Arabic language in relation to gender and sexuality, and vice versa, from my position as a feminist researcher whose activism cannot be separated from her academic work.

Badran (2009) argues that what we term today ‘gender analysis’ or ‘gendering’ has long been practiced in the Arabophone world, especially within Islamic discourse. At the same time, Badran (2009) distinguishes between gender as a concept, and gender as a word, and argues that whereas the first has long been examined in the Arab-speaking world, it has today become anchored in a particular epistemological system, namely western feminist scholarship. Amer (2012), and in the context of queer subjectivity, argues that the creation of new labels to define one’s sexual identity obliterates the rich tradition of alternative sexual practices that has been prominent in the Islamicate world, and that Arab gays and lesbians would find an ‘empowering culturally specific and meaningful heritage’ in them (Amer, 2012: 390). Badran and Amer’s perspectives differ from the literature on language and gender in the Arab-speaking world, since both seek answers beyond the grammatical socio-linguistic lens through which the relationship between the Arabic language and gender has, and continues to be, examined (Vincente, 2009; Sadiqi, 2003; Al-Wer, 2014). Similarly, Mourad (2013) highlights the linguistic void when addressing specific queer feelings and practices in an Arab-speaking context, and argues that the challenges that present themselves for the gender analyst who works on such contexts lies in the ‘methodological challenges of translation’ that arise from writing about sex and intimacies in a globalized world, along with the ‘uneasiness with language that is expressed by activists and scholars’ (Mourad, 2013: 2534). All three authors are highlighting the gap between gender knowledge and gender practices, which I encountered during fieldwork. I turn to two events to illustrate this gap further: the limits of the Gender Dictionary initiative by *Lebanon Support*, and TV presenter Toni Khalifeh’s recent erratic attack on women, in particular gender activists.

Lebanon Support recently compiled the English-Arabic Gender Dictionary. The dictionary covers twenty-five gender-related expressions in total, including intersectionality, and queer, and is akin to a 101 course in gender studies. It is written in both English and Arabic. The work itself is remarkable, especially since it contributes to the wording in Arabic of otherwise complex English words related to gender, in addition to explaining them at length. Still, and regardless of its intentions, the dictionary is directly informed by western scholarship, and despite the relevance of said scholarship to the context of Lebanon, the dictionary's impact is not likely to occur outside the circle of those who are already invested in gender activism and gender knowledge production in Lebanon. For example, and whereas the dictionary relates gender 'as a spectrum', for the majority of men and women in Lebanon I interviewed, the categories of man and woman are not only biologically distinct, they are divinely defined.

As such, concepts such as gender as a spectrum, or gender identity as fluid, although increasingly embedded in the cognition of gender analysts, are oftentimes not capable of speaking to/of the lived reality of the men and women who facilitate their research. This is particularly true in my interaction with Nat. On one occasion during my fieldwork, I spoke to Bertho Makso, the manager of *Proud Lebanon*, one of Lebanon's several NGOs invested in LGBTQI rights. Bertho told me that many (wo)men approach him because they are eager to have their bodies operated on in order to 'become women'. For such (wo)men, the lack of knowledge of gender as spectrum translates in reality into being one of the two sexes: either female or male. When I was invited to a social event hosted in *Proud Lebanon's* headquarters, a couple of weeks later during Ramadan 2014, I had the occasion to speak to Nat, a transgender woman. Nat told me:

'I was going mental. I felt I had to change my body. I didn't know what else to do. We see these transwomen on TV and we hear of their stories and we feel we are doing the right thing by wanting to morph into a female body, but I wasn't convinced about the surgery. I don't know what I would have done if I have had it. I just think of myself as a queer man now'.¹³

For Nat, sex and gender are not distinct. Nat felt she had no choice but to be operated on. Nat was clearly satisfied with herself when we spoke, despite her not having a 'pair of boobs, a vagina, luscious hair, or manicured fingernails'.¹⁴ Nat attended a number of workshops in order 'to familiarize herself with alternative views related to sex and gender'.¹⁵ Although the English language 'proved rather unhelpful at times', she self-identified as '*quwayr*', the Arabic transliteration of queer.¹⁶ In her words, she is 'neither man nor woman, has a male body, and likes to have sex with biologically-born men'.¹⁷

In another example of the gap between gender knowledge and gendered practices, I turn, once more, to the recent explosion in 'sex talks' in Lebanon's media, and from which any nuanced reading of gender, sexuality, or the lived reality is removed. Although TV talk shows have always engaged in marital, sexual, and women-related topics, it is only recently that these debates are actually vocalizing notions such as *jandarah* (gender), or *zūkūriyya* (masculinity). For an audience that has never experienced such terminologies, the result is confusion and cynicism, especially since gender activists

13 Interview with Nat, July 2014, Beirut.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

are often seen as being co-opted by western foreign ideals. So alien is this new terminology that Toni Khalifeh, one TV presenter, mistook masculinity for machismo, and 'halted' a live show in order to declare that 'enough is enough', and that women 'have gone too far in their demands' (the topic of the episode was gender-based violence).¹⁸ Neither Khalifeh's reaction nor Nat's change of heart must be seen as episodic. Both examples recall the 'denigration' and 'trivializing' of gender when it was first introduced to Arab scholarship in the 1970's (Bardan, 2009). Moreover, both examples show the desperate need for re-introducing gender-as-knowledge to the Arab-speaking world.

II. 5. 'Sex talk' and Orientalism

Seeing how the notion of love encompasses notions such as subjectivity, desire, social mobility, migration, home, family, and the household, to name a few, it is no surprise that a lot of 'sex talk' occurred throughout my fieldwork. Sex talk is not reduced to the sexual act per se. Rather, it involves a whole array of narratives, including 'getting married', 'falling in love', 'sexual awakening', 'prohibited love', and 'physical attraction'.

Most often, these narratives reveal a spectrum of dissent vis-à-vis Lebanon's societal rules pertaining to sex and desire. It is very important to note that it is *I* – as opposed to my interlocutors - who frame my interlocutors' narratives on 'sex talk' as 'dissent', a

¹⁸ The show in question is *Moze' al-Arab*, which aired on the Egyptian satellite TV channel *Al-Hayah*. The episode in question ran on 5 June 2015, and a link to it can be found in the bibliography.

strategically applied analytical stance that allows me to situate the multitude of ‘sex talk’ I collected in relation to the plurality of Lebanon’s sectarian micro-contexts.

In this thesis, I use and define the expression ‘sexual agency’ as *a historically specific, mobile, ambivalent, and embodied kind of dissent that directly informs, and is informed by, specific socio-economic shifts that impact gender(ed) ideologies*. Sexual agency is directly informed by both the feminist motto of the ‘personal is political’, and a multi-layered interpretation of the notion of sexuality as encountered in the literature. It is an expression that holistically encapsulates the sexed and the gendered implications that accompany women's dissent. In the next chapter, I argue that ‘sexual agency’ is not modern, but has been present at different intervals throughout Lebanon’s modern history. Depending on the context in question, sexual agency acquires an array of forms: from conducting strike action to engaging in premarital sex. As we will see, ‘sexual agency’ intersects with the economy, sect, the personal status code, and geographical location, thus contributing to the (re)making of praxis and ethos related to the discourse(s) of sexuality and gender.

When writing about sex, sex talk, gender, women, or men – and/or any/everything in-between, in the Middle East, one must mind the pitfalls of Orientalism. As Ghiwa Sayegh (2015) argues:

‘Many of the (global) discourses around gender and sexuality in the region [Middle East, South West Asia, and North Africa] create a sense of exceptionalism when dealing with local feminists, queer women, and LGBT identities, especially when they intersect with other ‘marginalized’ identities. We are automatically perceived as

challenging or transgressing the status quo. While this might or might not always be the case, a plain reading of what local communities do or should do reflects a very narrow vision of the tropes of gender and sexuality in our countries. Ultimately, we watch ourselves being written off as the extras in our own stories, and our struggles hastily dissected to illustrate a ready-made argument' (Sayegh, 2015:2).

I take the words of Sayegh to heart. Although the absolute majority of my interlocutors are not involved in gender activism, in addition to being cis, and heterosexual, I am constantly 'on alert' when engaging with their narratives on sex, in the sense that I am constantly wary of the Orientalist trope of 'exceptionalizing' their narratives, as has been the case in recent works on sex and gender in a heterosexual context in the region (El-Feki, 2013; Mahdavi, 2009; Maznavi and Mattu, 2012). Further, the very fact that Lebanon is 'exceptionalized' in mainstream narratives and media as a haven of personal and sexual freedom compared to its Arab neighbours makes me extra cautious in this regard. Having said that, the chapter that follows directly builds on the words of Sayegh (2015), and pursues a number of venues in order to de-exceptionalize Lebanon from an early stage, notably by relocating its misread attitude towards sexuality from the realm of the state, to the realm of the 'everyday'.

Chapter III. Not the Paris of the Middle East¹⁹

This chapter draws on Marx's notion of 'commodity fetishism' in order to argue that the Lebanese state constructs Lebanon as a public fetish for all to see. Through the deliberate conflation of progress with sex, Lebanon emerges as a 'civil and modern nation', the quintessential refrain of any political leader in Lebanon. This point is illustrated in my discussion on the links between gender, sexuality, and the nation on the one hand, and the links between gender, sect, and the Lebanese state on the other hand. What becomes clear is that the myth of Lebanon as a haven of sexual permissiveness is the result of the intersection of its cis heterosexual and male ruling class with an aggressive neo-liberal economy.

Conversely, I remedy this misconception through the concept of 'sexual agency' – a historically specific, mobile, ambivalent, and embodied kind of dissent that directly informs and is informed by a shifting socio-political and economic landscape. In other words, I draw on historical antecedents of sexual dissent in order to argue, in line with my overall argument, that desire is produced. Sexual agency is cumulative, and always adapts itself to its context. This exercise allows me to de-exceptionalize Lebanon's myth of sexual freedom from an early stage by contextualizing sexual dissent and relegating it to specific socio-political and economic instances. This step is important since my fieldwork informed me that the said myth speaks little to and of the lived reality of

19 The expression 'Paris of the Middle East' became a signifier of Lebanon's 'dolce vita', largely shaped by the 'modernization of public spaces and influence of the French mandate (1920-1943)' until the advent of the civil war in 1975 (Deeb and Harb, 2013: 12). Other expressions include 'The Switzerland of the Middle East', or the 'Arab Riviera'.

ordinary men and women, and that sexual practices, including love practices, are neither free nor linear, rather unequal even when consensual, in addition to necessitating lengthy negotiations.

III. 1. Lebanon as a 'public fetish'

A public fetish is not to be confused with pornographic examples of a 'fetish in public'. *Is a public fetish an oxymoron?* Seen through a Freudian lens, where fetishism occurs in particular cases, a fetish on the scale of 'public' is easily discarded. However, seen through a Marxian lens, where commodities intervene in social patterns and one value is substituted for another, it is possible, then, to think about the visual contradictions that characterize sexuality in Lebanon as a 'public fetish'. *How does a fetish become public?* One way to do it is to stop at the eroticization of bodies in Lebanon, and juxtapose it with a similar eroticization process that occurs in everyday economy and commodities exchange.

Marx defines commodity fetishism as a 'mysterious thing' in which the 'social character of men's labour appears to be stamped on the very products of that labour' (in Williams, 2003:508). The 'social character', depending on the commodity in question, shifts from hyper-visible to absent. In other words, commodity fetishism is the disavowal of 'locating the source of value in labour power' (Mulvey, 1993:10). What remains is a product from which all signs of labour have been erased. This is in direct contrast to a Freudian fetish, characterized by *over-valuation* of the fetish. Although contradictory, both the Marxian and Freudian fetish reflect a dysfunction in the system of referencing

– in Lebanon, the gap(s) between moralistic, social, and religious rubrics when negotiating sexuality. Commodity fetishism approximates us to the way that ‘objects and images, in their spectacular manifestations, figure in the process of disavowal’ (Mulvey, 1993:11). The hyper-visible femininities and masculinities in Lebanon, as fetish, are a substitute for a missing ‘thing’ – in my view, *a dialogical space where it is possible to negotiate sexuality in Lebanon*.

The emphasis on masculine and feminine sexual and aesthetic attributes in Lebanon functions as a signifier of Lebanon’s elite’s discourse of sexuality. They are a reflection of an erotic economy where commodities, according to Marx, transform the ‘social relations between men’ into ‘the fantastic form of a relation between things’ (in Williams, 2003:58). When bodies are commodified and objectified, they become the signifiers around which a debate proliferates. In Lebanon, the commodification and objectification of social bodies are evident at the level of the state, and its laissez-faire economy.

The extent of western modernity on the post-independence Lebanon is maintained through the colonial institutions that outgrew the French mandate over Lebanon. That the colonizer is physically not present does not absolve him from his legacy. The colonizer’s legacy cannot be reduced to occupying, dividing and conquering. The extent of the colonial legacy is made clear by Fanon (2007) to whom ‘colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content [...] The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives’ heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality’ (Fanon, 2007: 210-11).

Fanon's point is valid in the context of Lebanon. There is something sublime *and* subliminal about the colonizer. Western modernity, or neo-colonialism, works through the subliminal logic of a comfortable, better, and eventually sublime Western life. Neo-colonialism, an abstract concept, is legitimated by neo-liberal practices, whereby the same colonial powers reproduce an imperialist relationship of dependency defined by the entrenchment of economic processes with Western values, such as narratives related to human rights, gender equality, or sexual rights. The prevalence of Lebanon's sex industry, which accommodates both normative and non-normative desires, is reflective of a legitimated discourse whereby bodies, especially Others' bodies, are permitted to be consumed under the guise of what appears to be a permissive state, and ought not to be confused with a progressive attitude vis-à-vis sexuality.

The male modernity of Lebanon results in the production of highly sexualized bodies, where sex-as-modernity is conflated with sex-as-progress. This translates into a male subject who 'dresses' and 'undresses' women at his discretion. Lebanon's peculiarity, following mainstream assumptions, is the liberated appeal of its women, and the highly entrepreneurial character of its masculinity. This state of affairs is captured by Mikdashi (2014a), who draws on a number of moral panics that have swept Lebanon over the past few years to argue that 'nudity is not the issue [...] Female nudity – outside the confines of consumerism or state driven tourism – is' (Mikdashi, 2014a: par. 3), and that 'it is the (masculinist) state and the economy, both of which are said to be in service of 'the nation' that decides the form and content of that representation' (ibid: par. 4).

Seeing how nudity and accessible bodies are allowed to proliferate within the confines of consumerism, it is fair to argue that non-normative desires constitute a veritable

dilemma for the Lebanese state. Based on the law itself, Lebanon would score rather low on what Puar (2013a) calls 'homonationalism', an analytic category she deploys 'in order to understand the complexities of how 'acceptance' and 'tolerance' for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated' (Puar, 2013a: 336). At the same time, Beirut is constructed as a highly progressive place in terms of LGBT rights and lifestyle (Moussawi, 2013). This construct, as Moussawi (2013) rightly points out, results from a double Orientalist exercise, which he terms 'fractal Orientalism', where fractal notions 'repeat themselves in the form of 'nested dichotomies'' (Moussawi, 2013: 863). Not only does Lebanon become *more* 'progressive' than other Arab Middle Eastern countries, as Moussawi (2013) points out, Beirut becomes *more* 'gay-friendly' than the rest of Lebanon (ibid) (*my emphasis*). It is important to note that the visibility of LGBT identities is important for the Lebanese's state overall rhetoric of Lebanon as 'modern' and 'civilized'. And although this visibility occurs along 'fractal Orientalism', and what McCormick (2011) calls the 'Orientalized Arab man', it is important to remind ourselves that the Lebanese state will and does 'clamp down' on spaces of non-normative desires as soon as its Elite is threatened (Mandour, 2013). My examination of Lebanon as a public fetish is telling of the relevance of each of gender to the nation, of sexuality to the nation, and the relevance of sexuality to gender and to nation. Mayer (2000) argues that 'nation, gender, and sexuality are all constructed in opposition, or at least in relation to, an(O)ther, they are all part of culturally-constructed hierarchies, and all of them involve power' (Mayer, 2000: 5).

III. 2. Gender, sexuality, and the nation

One of the pitfalls of researching gender and nation is the reiteration of women as representatives of the nation and men as its protectors, without pushing the argument any further. For instance, McClintock (1997) argues that 'women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition', whereas 'men represent the progressive agent of national modernity' (McClintock, 1997: 92). It is this reading of women as 'fixed' agents which propels me to add sexuality to my examination of the relationship between gender and the nation.

The instrumentalization of gender during the era of nation-building across the Arab world (and elsewhere) is well-documented in the literature (Kandiyoti, 1991; McClintock, 1993; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Abu-Lughod, 1998). For the sake of the nation, women are constructed as 'culturally authentic' – a 'burden of representation', as Yuval-Davis (1997) defines it, since women are seen as the 'symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 17). Najmabadi (2005) states that 'feminist history has inadvertently contributed to this historical amnesia [omitting the discourse of sexuality in their gender analysis] by doing gender analysis without regard for the historical transformations of sexuality' (Najmabadi, 2005: 235).

I agree with Najmabadi. At the same time, I am aware that such an exercise requires us to examine both sex and gender, and to reflect over their usage, conflation, or even existence, in a way that is similar to the linguistic difficulties I encountered while writing this thesis. Where the relationship between nation and sexuality is concerned, the

reduction of sexuality to a set of learned gender behaviours has led to widespread assumptions about sexual practices in Lebanon.

The relationship between nation and sexuality brings forth Foucault (1978), to whom sexuality serves as the cultural marker for desire, and in order to understand the relevance of sexuality to gender and to nation, we must understand that sexuality is a 'domain of restriction, repression, [...] danger, and agency' (Vance 1984:1), and is an 'actively contested political and social terrain in which groups struggle to [...] alter sexual arrangements and ideologies (Vance 1995:41).

Both Foucault and Vance clarify the relationship between gender, nation, and sexuality. I illustrate this relationship through the example of the right to citizenship, for instance. As per the Law, Lebanese women have no right to pass their Lebanese citizenship to their children in case they marry a non-Lebanese man; the same does not apply to men who marry non-Lebanese women. This 'fact' has been critiqued endless times in the context of women's political mobilization in Lebanon, and in critical works on gender in Lebanon. When viewed through a sexuality lens, this law dictates that Lebanese women can and must desire Lebanese men exclusively, whereas Lebanese men can, and they do, desire whomever they wish. Where women are concerned, marriage emerges as a space from which non-normative (non-Lebanese) sexual desires are omitted.

Desire, then, is a social construct, and is constructed in conjunction with the nation-state, love, marriage, and the nuclear family. Desire is reflective of how a nation imagines itself through the desiring of certain bodies over other bodies, which translates into the erection of barriers around bodies deemed too 'honourable' or too 'precious' to access.

Paradoxically, and in contrast to its Arab neighbours, the Lebanese state actively deploys Lebanese women's bodies as something desirable *and* accessible; however, they can only be reached within the boundaries of the nation-state. This is evident in the blatant male gaze that accompanies most of the state-sponsored campaigns about Lebanon, be it in the financial or the touristic realms. These campaigns fetishize Lebanese women's bodies and portray them as signifiers of wealth and success, and as a reward worth aspiring for. As Posel (2005: 56) argues, the 'cultural logic of late capitalism [...] articulates closely with national trajectories [...] and consumption is 'closely coupled with sex, making for the overt sexualisation of style, status and power'.

This leads me to argue that the cis white and male gender of modernity in Lebanon interprets women's bodies according to a neo-liberal logic, which results in the excessive eroticization of its publics. As Hennessey (2000) argues in her conceptualization of the links between 'pleasure' and 'profit':

'Sensations (including 'pleasurable' sensations) never speak for themselves but are always made sense of by the ways of knowing that circulate within a particular social organization or community; pleasures are never entirely outside the 'structures of meaning-making.' When they are recruited by ideology, sensations and pleasures can be powerful ways to naturalize the historical social relations identities rely on' (Hennessey, 2000: 72).

In a similar vein, Altman (2002) writes that 'globalization does not abolish difference as much as it redistributes it', so that certain styles and consumer fashions are 'internationalized while class divides are strengthened, often across national

boundaries' (Altman, 2002: 21). This is particularly true for Lebanon, since the state differentiates itself through the publicization of women's bodies, in addition to embedding them in a neo-liberal type of logic.

Still, I find it important to note that unlike its neighbours, Lebanon's affair with globalization, in its current aesthetic and capitalist forms, can be traced back to the 18th century, at least one century before the rise of the neoliberal economy in the mid-1970's – a remarkably early stage for most recent nation-states in the Middle East – when migrants from the Mountains migrated to the Americas following the collapse of its silk industry. This segment of Lebanon's history is important to relate, because it encapsulates the historical specificity of sexual agency, in addition to clearly showing the links between the economy, the Social, and the state (see section III. 4.)

III. 3. Gender, sect, and the state

Sectarianism, like nationalism, is a mostly gendered discourse, and women are instrumentally utilized in order to distinguish one camp from another. Yuval-Davis (1993) in her focus on the *boundaries* of communities states that:

'While it is important to look at the historical specificity of the construction of collectivities, there is no inherent difference between them, whether they are constructed as ethnic, national racial co-religious (although sometimes there is a difference in scale): they are both Andersonian 'imagined communities' (p. 186).

The intersection between sect and gender in Lebanon has been widely examined by scholars to show how the personal status code, which deals with matters related to

marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, reproduces unequal patterns of citizenship between and among men and women in Lebanon, depending on their sect (Maksoud, 1996; Sabagh, 1996; Joseph, 1997, 2000; Khatib, 2008).

These unequal patterns result from the rulings of the different sects within each religious group. There are three religion-groups in Lebanon (Muslim, Christian, and Druze), which are constituted of eighteen recognized sects. In other words, there are eighteen different ways to deal with each of the matters related to in the personal status code. If we add the intersectionality of class and gender, we are left with dozens of possibilities. If, like Maya Mikdashi (2014b), we add the category of sex, or differentiate between “*madhab*” and ‘sect’, we are left with hundreds, perhaps thousands of different possibilities.

The literature on personal status laws in Lebanon offers a nuanced interpretation of the taken-as-given notion of patriarchy. Further, the concept of ‘kin contract’, as posited by Suad Joseph (2000), is highly illustrative in this regard:

‘It [kin contract] is the mobilization of patriarchal extended kinship (which elevates the males and the elders, including female elders), as a venue of social control, and the state’s mobilization of religion to sanctify extended kinship that has been the most significant deterrent to citizenship equality for women in Lebanon’ (Joseph, 2000: 110) (my emphasis).

Scholars who concur with Joseph show that social categories such as ‘male’, and ‘female’, ‘old’, and ‘young’, ‘sect’, and ‘religion’ are embedded in wider socio-political practices, and that men and women, despite the inequalities that arise from said practices, both

ultimately shape Lebanon's gendered power relations, including those that relegate them to a subordinate position. Still, although these works' primary goal is to reclaim full citizenship for all members of Lebanese society, they remain somewhat political in their approach and overly-invested in the notion of citizenship. Thankfully, Maya Mikdashi (2014b) spotted a peculiar gap in their analysis.

In a minute analysis of a prior legal cases, Mikdashi (2014b) shows that if and when the Lebanese state intervenes in decisions made by personal status courts, it is strictly to 'protect the rights of the citizen' from 'procedural (or administrative) abuses' (Mikdashi, 2014b: 280) (my emphasis). As a result, Mikdashi (2014b) concludes, and rightly so, that the Lebanese state 'already is' a secular space (ibid: 281). Theoretically speaking, Mikdashi distinguishes between the '*madhab*' (the State's *legal* form of recognition, or the personal status code) and the 'sect' (the socio-politically perceived form of belonging).

Her distinction is crucial because it challenges mainstream portrayals of Lebanon as 'stuck' in a sectarian deadlock. In this thesis, and in line with Mikdashi, sect must be thought of along feminist interpretations of embodiment. Following Mikdashi (2014b), Lebanese historiography and political science 'often neglect' the fact that:

'the state's recognition of a citizen's sectarian affiliation (through her personal status) may not be the same as (1) what that citizen identifies herself, (2) or what society recognizes her as, or (3) what political party she votes for or leads' (Mikdashi, 2014b: 283).

Mikdashi (2014b) supports her argument through several examples of 'strategic sectarian conversion' – a surprisingly straightforward, and uncomplicated procedure

when juxtaposed with Lebanon's 'sectarian mess'. Following Mikdashi (2014b), 'neither sect nor personal status necessarily reflects one's religious beliefs and practices' (ibid). Moreover, if a citizen chooses not to identify with their sect, or with their gender vis-à-vis wider society, they will still be socially and legally recognized by the State as per their personal status and sex, the two very 'technologies of recognition that the Lebanese census and the state follow' (ibid). Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that despite the simplicity of sectarian conversion in Lebanon, the reality is considerably more complex. Whereas strategic conversions allow us to recognize the rather secular character of the Lebanese state, most of my interlocutors opposed them, with many of them stating 'feelings of guilt', or 'identity loss' as deterrents. This point is further discussed in chapter IV, where I examine at length the intersection of sect with feelings of love. In the remainder of the chapter, I continue with my remedying exercise by relegating sexual agency to the realm of the everyday. I do so through relating historical antecedents of sexual agency.

III. 4. Sexual agency and historical antecedents

Lebanon's silk industry played a major role in its rapid urbanization, and in the emergence of an urban class of entrepreneurs who became crucial for the development of Lebanon's banking industry and service economy, in addition to emphasizing a primarily financial relationship between Lebanon and foreign Western powers (Tarazi Fawaz, 1983). This financial relationship provided the Lebanese with considerable bargaining powers vis-à-vis the Western powers, in addition to cementing the cult of the

za'im, the strong political sectarian leader, seeing that they were capable of 'mediating between their communities and the alien outside world', namely the Ottomans, followed by the Europeans, and the national central government of Beirut eventually (Hottinger, 1966: 89). In other words, and as early as the 1800's, Beirut's entrepreneurial class was laying the foundation of Lebanese capitalism, which would ultimately produce its class of 'business oligarchs', with Rafik Hariri being the archetype of said oligarchy.

In the 1890's, and following the collapse of the silk industry – the over-exploitation of land, mechanization, and intense competition from Indian, Japanese, and Chinese manufacturers being cited as the immediate cause (Firro, 1990; Abisaab, 2010), Maronite Christian peasants from the Mountains region were searching for ways to reclaim the prosperity they had briefly tasted, and emigration was perceived as the best way to 'make enough money quickly to guarantee their status as landowners and not slip into the ranks of the landless labourers' (Khater, 2001:61). The bi-directional movement between the Mountains and the *mahjar*, or abroad, meant that 'unlike [...] in Iran, Egypt, and Turkey – where modernity was the preserve primarily of the elites and the upper class, in Mount Lebanon [the Mountains] it was the peasants for the greater part who engaged in the processes of 'modernity' (ibid: 187).

In the Mountains, returnee emigrants immediately started redefining 'home' through 'everyday' practices that ranged from style of clothing and educational systems, to novel architecture and further aesthetics. As Khater (2001) remarks, 'in the *mahjar* [the Americas], they [the emigrants] had elevated peasant life to romantic heights, but upon their return they shunned its 'traditional' reality for their version of 'modernity' (ibid: 125). Where gender is concerned, the returnee emigrants increasingly embraced a

‘scientized’ cult of domesticity’ (ibid: 4). A ‘scientized cult of domesticity’ disrupts local patterns of socialization and kin relationality through the reproduction of the nuclear family as *the* basic component of the nation. This has been the case in each of Egypt (Singerman, 1995), Turkey (Kandiyoti, 1991), and Iran (Najmabadi, 1998) during the period of nation-building following independence in each.

Returning emigrants supported their new lifestyle by reproducing the boundaries of the *mahjar*, including the construction of a highly private household centred on the ideal of a nuclear family. This is in sharp contrast to the extended family and communal living that characterized their larger community. Where women are concerned, many took to writing in the press as their primary way to participate in public life. Khater (2001) offers rich material from archives to lay out the main concerns brought forward by women at the time. However, these attempts, despite concurring with my definition of ‘sexual agency’, contributed to elevating middle-class women from ‘housebound’ to ‘goddess[es]’ of the house (ibid: 159), since ‘rearing good sons for the nation became integral to “modernity”’ (ibid: 5).

We learn from the brief overview of Lebanon’s silk industry that historical antecedents of sexual agency did, and continue to, shape the discourse of gender and sexuality in Lebanon. For a reminder, I define sexual agency as a historically specific, mobile, ambivalent, and embodied kind of dissent that directly informs, and is informed by, shifting gender(ed) ideologies. The purpose of the next few pages is to show that Lebanese women’s sexuality has continuously been linked to both nation and state formation. By sharing further historical antecedents of women’s sexual agency, I hope to add to the exercise of de-exceptionalizing Lebanon as I started earlier, by showing that

sexuality is always historical and social, and ought not to be thought of in purely modern terms, or along strictly western interpretations.

During the heydays of the silk industry in the 19th century, Christian Maronite women from the Mountains constituted the absolute majority of factory workers. The very nature of their labour meant that they had to endure a particularly harsh and hazardous work environment. Known as *'āmilāt*, or factory girls, these women were already resorting to strikes in the 1890's, as a way of claiming control over their labour. Marxist feminists would argue that the *'āmilāt* were already challenging the myth of the 'docile' female worker (Elson and Pearson, 1981; MacKinnon, 1982; Phillips and Taylor, 1980; Kabeer, 2004).

Still, to argue that Lebanese women were already mobilizing for political demands as early as 1890's is an overstatement. First of all, the *'āmilāt*, as a gendered social group, was comprised exclusively of poor Christian Maronite women from the Mountains; moreover, their demands were specifically centred on wages, with little regard to further political aspirations. This is in contrast to the coastal cities of Lebanon, notably Beirut, and to a lesser extent Tripoli, where, since the 1870's, a 'multiplicity' of Leftist movements were heavily invested in the circulation of 'selective adaptations of socialist and anarchist principals, including specific calls for social justice, workers' rights, mass secular education, and anticlericalism' (Khuri-Makdisi, 2010: 1).

Where sexual agency is concerned, the *'āmilāt* were perpetually caught in an impossible situation: on the one hand, their families, notably their fathers, became increasingly dependent on their salary; on the other hand, and as a direct result of their status as

factory workers, the '*āmilāt* had to endure a henceforth 'tainted' reputation, seeing how they were constantly in contact with, in addition to being contracted by, 'male strangers' (Khater, 2001: 37). Still, and as Khater (2001) rightly points out, the silk industry, by disturbing Lebanon's politics of gender and confusing its gender roles, irreversibly changed Lebanon's 'classical patriarchal contract' (Khater, 2001: 38). As far as my argument is concerned, the example of the '*āmilāt* is illustrative of 'sexual agency' – a mobile and shifting embodied dissent that both informs and is informed by larger socio-economic settings. Seen through a contemporary lens, sexual dissent is neither modern nor exceptional. If anything, it is discursive; or as Khater points out, 'money was needed and honour was malleable' (ibid: 33).

The example of the '*āmilāt* betrays the myth of the Maronite as a crystallized sectarian community in Lebanon. According to Khater (2001), the '*āmilāt*, in their thousands, were immensely stigmatized by their community, including the Maronite clergy, and many ended up settling in Beirut, or took to emigrating on their own. In a similar vein, Abisaab (2010) rejects the view that assumes a mono-linear, or causal relationship between kinship, religion, ethnicity, and gender on the one hand, and between 'the determination of a working-class 'consciousness''; instead Abisaab (2010) states that 'workingwomen lived through *multiple experiences* of class, sect, and gender, and that these categories were neither constantly nor inherently in contradiction with each other', and 'neither class nor gender constitutes an independent or exclusive source of group identity' (Abisaab, 2010: xxii - xxiii) (*my emphasis*).

Khuri-Makdisi (2010) notes how the new category of *al-sha'b* (the people), for instance, became increasingly visible in newspapers, in addition to raising issues ranging from

unemployment to anti-imperialism. Likewise, theatre plays were abundant and served mainly to include the illiterates in the city's political life (Khuri-Makdisi, 2010). Women, and equally-marginalized social groups, became increasingly visible not only in theatres, but also in cinemas, coffeehouses, and public squares (Hanssen, 2005; Thompson, 2000). Thompson (2000) shows how women's access to the cinema was countered by both Christian and Muslim authorities, and although gender represented a 'site of solidarity and compromise that muted class and religious tensions' (Thompson, 2000: 289), it did, nevertheless, contribute to the crystallisation of further gender hierarchies in Lebanon, as such depriving women from suffrage, in addition to strengthening the personal status code.

The collapse of the silk industry occurred at the height of the French mandate. The French mandate period was accompanied by a fierce competition between Lebanon's 'subaltern' social fractions. Thompson (2000) defines the subalterns as those who did not have direct access to the state. Despite their divergence on a number of issues, all of these fractions converged in their deployment of gender as a discourse to access power during the French mandate. The period of French mandate resulted in what Thompson (2000) calls a 'crisis of paternity', or 'the disintegration of definitions of family and community during the period between WWI and WWII' (Thompson, 2000:38). Following Thompson (2000), famine and the conscription of men into the military meant that more women headed households, displacing as such men from their traditional roles as providers.

Last but not least, the collapse of the silk industry was followed by a sharp rise in tobacco manufacturing. Like the silk industry, local religious and political leaders were directly involved in tobacco manufacturing; add to that, the French administration. Tobacco

manufacturing lasted until the breakout of the civil war in 1975. Abisaab (2010) is one of the few scholars to re-write history by reinserting agency of those who have been silenced. Abisaab (2010) laments the fact that working women's contributions to the labour movement in Lebanon are scarcely acknowledged, despite the fact that a number of them were injured or killed because of police brutality. Similarly, and although workingwomen combined their labour demands with the anti-colonial struggle, they are largely absent in the post-Independence rhetoric that 'embraced solely the rich Lebanese and their families and sects' (Abisaab, 2010:68).

The strikes and mobilizations carried out by the tobacco workingwomen betray the view of an idle and passive Middle Eastern woman. Initially, tobacco workingwomen mobilized for fear of 'mechanization' and 'unemployment', which had been the case with the food and the clothing industries (ibid: 71). They channelled their 'labor and hunger protests' with the 'greater anticolonial struggle', all the while demanding 'fairer labour laws and regulations' (ibid: 33). The most important element we learn from Abisaab (2010) is the schism between elite women, and working women. Abisaab (2010) remarks that 'many middle-class rather than peasant or working-class women were told that nondomestic labour, if undertaken, should not be at the expense of their families' interests (Abisaab, 2010: 52). Such views were in line with the 'modernization' of the household, to which I referred earlier. However, they made little sense to the working women, who, as a direct result of their mobilization, had secured full medical coverage for themselves and their families, and thus were reluctant to abandon their work after marriage (ibid: 131).

Following this brief overview of historical antecedents of women's sexual agency in Lebanon, I end my exercise of de-exceptionalizing Lebanon, where I showed that the 'exceptional' status of Lebanon as a tolerant space towards sex in general, be it in a heterosexual or homosexual context, is the result of the co-opting of the discourse of sexuality by the state, in addition to aligning it with the state's capitalist interests. Similarly, I showed that outside of the state's appropriation of the discourse of sexuality, a subtle sexual agency continues to operate in opposition to the state, and is largely shaped by larger socio-political and economic shifts.

In the chapter that follows, I distinguish between conventional love and further forms of love, and discuss what I term 'strategic queer marriages', in order to argue that the chrono-normativity of marriage devalues certain love practices. Whereas adolescence and university allow for the proliferation of love stories outside of one's sect, such desires are quickly abandoned at the time of marriage. In addition, the chapter pays attention to context when addressing practices of love, and uses notions such as 'coupling', and 'uncoupling' in order to refer to the specific practices of love in Lebanon, freeing them as such of dominant and non-representative western practices and notions related to love, including 'dating', 'breaking up', or 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend'.

Chapter IV. The Times and Subject(s) of Love

In this chapter, I explicate the relationship between sect and love by examining two distinct affective practices, namely 'love-marriage' or *intra*-sectarian love, and non-conventional or *inter*-sectarian love. I also look at the tensions between love feelings and marriage through the example of 'strategic queer marriages'. Through my examination of each, I hope to show the temporal aspect of the agency of the subject of love in Lebanon. The idea of agency as temporal befits my overall view of the subject of love as becoming, especially since the timeline of love and its very shape are dependent on the intersectional condition(s) of the subject in question. In line with Deleuze's ontology, we see the subject of love contributing to the territorializing and deterritorializing of the institution of marriage, in addition to recognizing 'lines of flight', depending on the context in which they find themselves. Additionally, the chapter examines what I term 'sexo-sectarianism', which could be easily misread as love attachments.

I stated in my methodological chapter that viewing my interlocutors as subjects-becoming is a move away from mainstream interpretations of gender in the Middle East, which often reiterates men and women as static identities, in addition to 'fixating' them within their religious and political contexts. By focusing on the subject as becoming, I deliberately 'let go' of identity as static. Such an endeavour is not without its challenges. On the one hand, I very much want to infuse the Middle Eastern subject with a potential to become, and to show the full scope of their agency, where pleasure and affectivities, in addition to defiance and resistance, matter; at the same time, I must not lose sight of the political economy they are subjected to, mainly sect, and class in my thesis. As we

will see, the subject-becoming is often at odds with the identity that society ascribes to them. It is important that I clarify that it is not my intention, nor am I in a position, to measure love in each of the concepts I relate hereafter. However, what is clear to me is that marriage is an institution that territorializes affectivities along sectarian and heterosexual lines, and construct them alongside a highly gendered praxis. At the same time, practices of 'sexo-sectarianism' reproduce Others as fetishized bodies.

IV. 1. Love-marriage, or intra-sectarian love

As I argued earlier, the territorializing axis on which love operates in Lebanon propels it towards heterosexual and intra-sectarian norms, and ultimately, marriage. In this sense, marriage is a 'chrono-normative' (Freeman, 2008) practice that is deeply rooted in the everyday, since one develops feelings for familiar others from an early age. The familiar other is in contrast to the foreign other. This distinction occurs along sectarian lines mostly, but class and kin are likewise involved. This is the case of 'conventional love', a peculiar affect that is discursively taught from an early age, where love produces non-loveable bodies. Conventional love, or love-marriage does not challenge Lebanon's sectarian order; although it reinforces the latter, it does cross the barrier of class (see chapter VII). Through the construction of love-marriage as an ideal relationship between man and woman, men and women in Lebanon are encouraged and expected to celebrate it and find pleasure in it, as long as it has been officialised, and as long as it is confined to the boundaries of one's sectarian community.

Through an anthropological exercise, I draw the timeline of love in the life of a Lebanese citizen. Whereas early adulthood abounds with impossible, or non-conventional love stories, such feelings are quickly abandoned at the time of marriage, where one reverses to strictly intra-sectarian coupling. I use the expressions of ‘coupling’ and ‘uncoupling’ in order to refer to the functionality and normative core of marriage, and in order to infuse everyday practices of love with a local character, as opposed to expressions borrowed from a western lexicon, namely ‘dating’, ‘breaking-up’, ‘boyfriend’, ‘girlfriend’. This is not to say that feelings of love do not exist in couples geared towards intra-sectarian marriage. At times, I am almost compelled to refer to this type of love as ‘pragmatic love’, especially since more than one interlocutor referred to inter-sectarian love as a ‘headache’ that is ‘best avoided’. I base such argument on ‘reminiscent narratives’ collected throughout my fieldwork.

I met Lubna, twenty-seven, in March 2013. At the time, she was working as a graphic designer, and was preparing to marry Ismail, thirty-two, a customer service manager for a bank (they celebrated their wedding in September 2015). Lubna and Ismail were both from the Sunni faith. Their love story, following Lubna, was rather ‘straightforward.’²⁰ They met through family members, became an ‘official couple’ in the eyes of society through *khutūbah*, followed by *katb* ‘*l-kitāb*’ a year later. The *khutūbah* is the step that precedes marriage in Lebanon. It is a social event that is not marked by civil or religious legislations, and is found across all sects. Most often, *khutūbah* marks the event from which the couple emerges as ‘official’ in the eyes of society. It is not religiously sanctioned and is not necessarily an indication that marriage is imminent.

20 Interview with Lubna, March 2013, Jbeil.

For many young couples, *khutūbah* allows them to navigate Lebanon's public(s) without infringing (some of) its 'religious, social, and moral rubrics,' to borrow from Lara Deeb and Mona Harb (2013). Although the *khutūbah* period allows the couple to navigate the public more or less freely, sexual intercourse is postponed until marriage, which is always officiated by a religious authority in Lebanon. As for those who wish to marry under civil laws, they must do so abroad. Whereas the Lebanese state does not provide the means for its citizens to marry under civil laws as such, it does recognize civil marriages conducted outside of its borders.

Lubna and Ismail first met through their parents. Their mothers are colleagues who work in a public school near Furn al-shebbāk. Once a year, the staff at their school meets over a dinner to which partners and children are invited. According to Lubna, she was surprised when her mother insisted that she accompanied her:

'I was not a child anymore! I remember accompanying her when I was younger, but it had been a few years since I went along.'²¹

It turned out her father had deliberately 'missed out' on the gathering that particular year in order for Lubna to accompany her mother. Lubna was sat next to Ismail, who was accompanying both his parents:

'We were the only 'adult children.' It was mayhem. There were dozens of children running around. At first, I was happy I was sat next to someone my age, but it didn't take long for me to figure out my parents' plan.'²²

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

Lubna knew of Ismail, since both their mothers were friends who regularly socialized outside of work. A week 'or so' after the annual dinner, Ismail phoned Lubna's house and asked to 'speak to her.'

'He said he really liked me and would love for us to meet again. Since I was single, I thought why not. He seemed nice enough. He came from a good family, and our mothers knew each other.'²³

To come from a 'good family' is an important criterion when choosing a partner. A good family is not necessarily measured in terms of wealth; rather, it is a family that is known to upkeep good morals and values, or *akhlāq*, in addition to evoking the importance of having ancestry that can be traced. I once remarked to Lubna that her relationship with Ismail was 'perhaps too straightforward,' compared to some of the love-stories I had come across. Lubna told me that it is 'very important to be careful whom one dates these days because times are difficult.'²⁴ According to Lubna, there are 'too many strange faces roaming the city, and one should be wary of passionate encounters. Respect is more important, and if you have your family's and your husband's support, then you needn't worry about anything.'²⁵ When I remarked that her views are rather 'pragmatic,' she repeated my very words: 'of course! It is important to not only be pragmatic, but also realistic. This is the reality we live in Lebanon. There are great things to be enjoyed, but to each their own [referring to Lebanon's distinct sectarian communities].'²⁶

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

Lubna's rather pragmatic views were prevalent during my fieldwork. Izza, a young woman in her late twenties who was working at a textile factory in the Dāhiyeh neighbourhood of Beirut, remarked that 'to marry a man is to marry his entire family,' and that she would 'marry anyone, as long as he is Shi'a like [her].'²⁷ When I asked her why she distinguishes between the Sunni and the Shi'a branches of Islam, she answered 'where do you live? Do you follow the news? Could you imagine a supporter of Hezbollah (Shi'a political party) living side by side with a Hariri (Sunni political party) supporter?'²⁸ When I said yes, she told me to 'get real,' and 'to not act smart,' before adding 'it might taste like honey in the beginning, but everything will turn sour soon. I'm telling you!'²⁹

Izza stretches the boundaries of the couple-space to include the extended family. Moreover, her narrative highlights an additional layer where sect and love are concerned, namely politico-sectarian allegiance. Joseph (2000) conceptualizes the enmeshment of kin relations with the apparatus of the state, including political affiliation as is the case with Izza, through what she terms a 'care/control paradigm' whereby men care (love) *and* control (power) women. The intersection of relationality with a patriarchal order results in an affective paradox in Lebanon: love becomes entangled with power. According to Suad Joseph, the Lebanese self is best understood in relational terms. This self recognizes itself as 'extended,' since it sees itself as part of 'significant others' (Joseph, 1999: 11-13). At the same time, this connectivity is informed

27 Interview with Izza, July 2014, Beirut.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

by strict patriarchal underpinnings, namely the privileging of the males and the elders over women and the youth (Ibid).

On the evening I met Lubna and Ismail, they were dining out with a number of family members and friends. Among them were Lubna's sister, Fatima, and her 'best friend ever' Nūr.³⁰ Both Fatima and Nūr were in their second year studying business management. Before entering university, Nūr's parents insisted that she wore the veil. Although Nūr ignored her parents' request at first, she eventually started veiling once they threatened to stop paying her university fees.³¹

Nūr's parents, like many parents, are aware that university, oftentimes, is young people's first interaction with the 'outside world.' For many students, university allows them to interact closely with people from other sects. By insisting that Nūr wore the veil, her parents were hoping that she would not 'drift', and that the veil, as a signifier, would help restrict her friendships to equally 'pious' and 'God-fearing students.'³² It was clear from my interaction with Nūr that she did not support her parents' views. In her views, they were being 'paranoid but not without reason,' before adding that 'one ought to see what happens on university campuses to believe such [referring to pre-marital sex] stories.'³³ Whereas the example of Lubna, Nūr, and Izza show how parents and close family members participate in the conditioning of desire, I came across 'moments of caesuras'³⁴ where this conditioning is interrupted. In such cases, personal freedom

30 Interview with Fatima and Nūr, March 2014.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 In a recent ethnographic work, Khalili (2015) examined the pleasures of young Palestinian women from refugee camps in Beirut, notably the activities of promenading and beachgoing.

emerged alongside destiny, in the sense of 'being acted upon' (see Mittermaier 2012), and disillusionment with Lebanon's politico-sectarian governance became apparent.

IV. 2. Inter-sectarian love, or the 'headache'

Inter-sectarian love refers to love stories between heterosexual couples from different sects that did not end in marriage. They deterritorialize love in Lebanon because they push it away from the norms of inter-sectarian marriage; in addition they are perceived as passionate, irrational, and non-practical.

Carla sweetly reminisces about her high school days. Every Friday afternoon, she used to go to her school's 'ciné-club,' a space where students watched and discussed movies, and she would sit next to Fello:

'No one cared that we were from different sects. I mean, of course people did comment, but it wasn't like it is today. Today, it is just ugly. Everyone used to cooperate and help me sit next to Fello. They would book the seats for us in advance or offer us their place in the last row... and then you get older, and you discover that love is just a lie...'³⁵

Clara sighed several times whilst recalling her feelings for Fello. Carla is one of many interlocutors who lamented the prevalence of sectarian rhetoric in love narratives. Clara

Mindful of her privileged position as researcher, Khalili carefully unpacks the power configurations underpinning said narratives in her reading of pleasure and stops short of referring to promenading and beachgoing as resistance. Instead, Khalili (2015: 584) recommends that we view such activities as 'moments of pleasure' or 'caesuras in the massive apparatus of power – welded from strands of wage labour, nationalist certitudes and political exclusion – which constricts these women.'

35 Interview with Carla, September 2014, Jbeil.

told me that she continued to meet with Fello until he insisted that she converted to his sect in order for them to marry, a reality that 'hit [her] in the face.'³⁶ Still, she is not angry with Fello:

'I totally understand him. I see it around me all the time. So many people convert for the sake of getting married. This is wrong. We should all refrain from getting married until civil marriage is permitted in Lebanon. Not everyone can afford the trip to Cyprus, you know? Also, some of us are more sensitive than others. It is absolutely out of the question for me to convert to something else, even if it was simply in ink form. It would break my mother's heart!'³⁷

It is important that I clarify that, despite the simplicity of sect conversion in Lebanon, the reality is considerably more complex. As Maya Mikdashi (2014b) alerts us, we must distinguish between sect, and *madhab* or personal status code. Sect conversions occur within the strict parameter of personal status law, and ought not to be confused with sect, in the politico-religious sense. In Mikdashi words, 'the practice of 'conversion' occurs at (and plays on) the jagged line of disambiguation between sect and personal status (Mikdashi, 2014b: 282). In addition, there is a gap between the sect that one converts to, and the sect that their community, and the larger society ascribe to them. Conversely, courtship periods reveal minute processes of negotiations, particularly where politico-sectarian allegiance arises, even in the context of intra-sectarian couples, in addition to being directly impacted by one's kin support (or not). Sometimes, couples prefer eloping altogether when confronted with their kin's refusal, despite running the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

risks of being ‘shunned.’ What’s more, eloped marriages could be explained by their very genera: they are ‘low-maintenance’ compared to the financial negotiations and material consolidations that generally accompany marriage (Drieskens, 2008: 111-112).

Also relevant in Clara’s narrative is her remark about Cyprus. There exist today Lebanese and Cypriot businesses that specialize in arranging travel to Cyprus for Lebanese nationals who wish to marry civilly. While the Lebanese state does not itself conduct civil marriages, it does recognize those obtained elsewhere. The literature on civil marriage in Lebanon is steadily gaining ground, and its critical tone resonates throughout its examination of the gendered and racialized characters of the institution of marriage there. Such arguments are not unlike those I include in my work. However, I do not limit myself to them, and propose that we recognize the potential of inter-sectarian love to challenge supposedly fixed and supposedly ‘cultural’ forms of desire.

I met Aline during the first week of February 2014. The week prior, Aline and Wael had had their *khutūbah*. I spent many hours with Aline talking about love, men, and life in general. Before Wael, Aline met secretly with Diya for six years. Unlike Wael, who is an Orthodox Christian like her, Diya was Shi’a. Aline and Diya met during their first year in law school. For Aline, it was ‘love at first sight.’³⁸

‘We clicked on every level. He was from a very good family. He was polite, keen, and kind. Although he was Shi’a, he was not obsessed with Hezbollah and their politics.’³⁹

38 Interview with Aline, February 2014, El-Mina, Tripoli.

39 Ibid.

When Aline and Diya decided it was time to disclose their relationship to their kin, Aline, unlike Diya, felt 'particularly anxious':

'I did not introduce him to my mother. Or my father. Or anyone, for that matter. I spoke to my uncle [paternal] about him at first. My uncle never married. He is well-travelled and has plenty of experience in life. He always struck me as open-minded. My parents are not *met'assbīn* (highly religious in an almost fundamentalist way), but they are very traditional people.'⁴⁰

Aline's narrative draws a line between fundamentalist views about the other, and a traditional view of the other. This distinction has been recently highlighted by Nadine M. (no date) in her deconstruction of religious fundamentalism in Lebanon, by stressing the intersection of sect with class and economic precarity:

'In the particular case of Lebanon, religion mainly becomes fundamentalist when several factors take their toll on a community, such as poverty, a negligent or corrupt state, sectarian feuds and wars, and a general socio-economic inability to adjust to this post-modern, globalized world. Religion thus intervenes and becomes more political, speaking out against what it perceives as the threat of secularism and providing services for impoverished communities that the state has long neglected. And so, fundamentalism rises and takes on a sectarian face.'

Aline's views are further highlighted in the following:

⁴⁰ Ibid.

‘He [Aline’s father] wouldn’t take it well. It would break his heart. Everything he ever did in life, he did for me and my sister. He is very protective of us. To see me abandon my kin and move to a non-familiar one would make him eternally worried. Our society is toxic. It takes away everything that is beautiful.’⁴¹

Following Aline, there is no place for ‘beautiful’ things outside the realms of one’s sectarian community.⁴² Although Aline had long overcome her uncoupling from Diya, she couldn’t help but admit that ‘she still feels angry with her mother at times.’⁴³ According to Aline, when her uncle finally broke the news to her family about Diya, it was around the same time that her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. According to Aline, her mother ‘entirely ignored her condition,’ and became ‘overly fixated’ with her daughter’s life.⁴⁴ At some point, her mother told her that ‘she’d rather die soon from cancer than see her married to a non-Orthodox.’

It is difficult for the outside reader to be receptive to the views of Aline’s mother. Depending on the angle from which the outsider tackles the topic, Aline’s mother could be seen as a puritan who purposefully draws binaries between her community and *any* other; as a righteous mother who is safeguarding her daughter from a *specific* other;; or as a fundamentalist who is strictly motivated by politico-sectarian beliefs. However, and as I pointed out earlier, the enmeshment of relationality with politico-sectarian

41 Interview with Aline, February 2014, El-Mina, Tripoli.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

allegiance in Lebanon produces strict patterns of sociability that trump individual desire and privilege communal ties. As we might have guessed at this stage, Aline soon uncoupled from Diya. Theirs was not a break-up per se. Seeing the tenacity of Aline mother's, they found it best to uncouple and to resume a rather ordinary life. Still, Aline made it very clear that she was 'beyond fed up with everything in this country', and was eagerly awaiting her student visa for a Master's degree in France.⁴⁵

Another couple, Eli and Jomana, were 'secretly' meeting at the time of my fieldwork. I place the expression secretly between double quotes because although their relationship was made secret to their close kin and nuclear family, they both relied on friends and members of their extended families in order to facilitate their outings and meetings. When I met Jomana, a Sunni, she was becoming increasingly disillusioned with her love for Eli, a Christian Maronite. On one particular afternoon, she remarked:

'I don't know where this is going. After the evening prayer yesterday, I broke down and cried for hours. I was thinking to myself. What am I doing? How could I possibly think that my relationship with Eli is going to go anywhere? It will break my mother's heart.'⁴⁶

Feelings of guilt are equally present in the case of Mireille. Mireille, a Maronite Christian, told me how she felt the urge to go and 'confess' the day following her university entrance exams:

'The exam went badly. All I could think of was that God was punishing me for lying to my parents. I hated everyone at that

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Interview with Jomana, May 2014, Gemmayzeh, Beirut.

moment, especially my friends. How could they not have stopped me?'⁴⁷

As it turned out, Mireille was referring to her 'love affair with Gowda,' a Sunni colleague. When I enquired if they had consummated their relationship, she immediately stopped me, almost scolding me:

'*Akid la'*! (of course not!). This is not London. You don't simply fall in love. There are rules (*ma'roof*) and traditions (*takalid*) to respect. I don't regret falling in love. I truly loved him. I regret my naivety and believing that our love was actually going to progress somewhere.'⁴⁸

When I told Mireille that rules and traditions are man-made, she added:

'You don't understand. There is *something* that is constantly weighing down on you. It's not the dating and the sneaking out. I guess it's knowing that deep down you are doing something wrong!'⁴⁹

Although a decade had passed since her love affair with Gowad, her bodily reactions still conveyed discomfort, despite her 'having confessed several times' since. Also, Mireille points out that 'this is not London.' It is one of the many binaries that informed my fieldwork, where the west itself is seen in monolithic terms and imagined through a Hollywoodian lens. Equally important is to note that by blaming her friends, Mireille is projecting her agency onto them. To some extent, she exhibits a connective type of agency whereby one's agency is channelled through others. She willingly accepts to have her individual choice reversed. By willingly submitting herself to her friends'

47 Interview with Mireille, June 2014, near Beirut.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

dictations, she finds a moral reference in them. In the context of Lebanon, one's agency, like most notions, practices, institutions, whether formal or not, operates through 'patriarchal connectivity.'

Still, and despite, the dilemmas that riddle their everyday, one must not make assumptions about Mireille and Jomana's love life. For Mireille, she was adamant that she would never date someone from a different sect because she 'couldn't possibly cope with the magnitude of the headache' she had previously experienced. Equally, and when I contacted Jomana to follow up on her relationship with Eli, she told me they decided to 'uncouple.'⁵⁰ Her mother had introduced her to a distant relative whom she had agreed to marry. When I asked Jomana what memories she would keep from her relationship with Eli, she answered, without hesitating, '*waja' rās*,' or headache.⁵¹

The headache that my interlocutors refer to is telling of the general atmosphere that Lebanese-ness exudes. Lebanese-ness, if we recall, is a shared condition of ill-living characterized, in part, by a disdain for the ruling class, in addition to living 'on hold', or spending the present as waiting. In many ways, Lebanese-ness brings forth what could be termed 'political fatigue'. Such is the socio-political fabric of Lebanese society, that when it comes to a choice of love or else, one opts for the safer and less dangerous road, i.e. the one that causes the least headache.

50 Skype Interview with Jomana, May 2016.

51 Ibid.

IV. 3. Strategic queer marriages, or the chrono-normativity of marriage

Whereas my discussion above shows how the subjects of love in Lebanon experience love in tandem with sect, I am yet to show the full scale of the chrono-normativity of marriage, and for that I turn to the (rather) limited examples of strategic queer marriages encountered during my fieldwork. I now proceed with a somewhat detailed theoretical discussion.⁵²

The examples of strategic queer marriages (SQMs) show the hetero and chrono-normativity of marriage. 'Strategic queer marriages' is the expression I use to refer to the legal marriage between one or more self-identified queer individuals, who perform marriage for a number of years in order to escape kin pressure, all the while pursuing same-sex desire elsewhere.

I met self-identified married queers through the Grindr application, an increasingly-used 'dating' tool, where men who seek sex with men, gay men, homosexual men, or to seek a same-sex partner, to summarize, can contact each other. My Grindr profile clearly presented me as a researcher in sexuality studies, and I was surprised with the diversity of interlocutors who showed interest in my work. Grindr, alongside several other 'dating' apps, was a tool I used in the first months of fieldwork, and which I quickly abandoned for reason I stated earlier.

52 Since the completion of my thesis, I have been in contact with nineteen couples who have entered strategic queer marriages. This number is in contrast to the four couples I was capable of interviewing during my fieldwork. Conversely, my discussion hereafter is an attempt to understand the prevalence of SQMs throughout my fieldwork, especially since a large number of my interlocutors insisted they knew (of) someone who has entered such partnership. In any case, I distinguish between SQMs and the case of MSM, or men who have sex with men, in order to clarify any doubt.

Until Grindr, I have only read about such strategic marriages in a Chinese context, where practices of *tonghun*, and *xinghun* are increasingly gaining ground (Engebretsen, 2014). In a non-queer setting, I was well aware of MSM, or men who have sex with men. Strategic queer marriages can be easily conflated with MSM. With little research done on the topic of MSM in Lebanon, I find the work of Joseph Massad (2008) extremely helpful in this regard.

In *Desiring Arabs* (2008), Massad argues that privileged Western LGBT activist groups, which he terms 'Gay International', function as a 'neo-imperialist' group that forces a hegemonic conception of sexuality on the Middle East, and further non-western contexts (Massad 2008: 162-163). The Orientalist foundations of Gay Internationalists' logic can be captured through their imposition of a singular understanding of sexuality that is predicated upon Euro-American histories and social formations: 'a Euro-American 'cultural' category that is not universal or necessarily universalizable' (Massad 2009).

A Euro-American understanding of sexuality conflates sexual behavior and/or practice, with sexual identity, or as akshay khanna puts it, 'who I fuck or am attracted to says something about the type of person I am' (khanna 2007: 169). Rao argues that 'this distinction has made it possible to assert both the universality of homosexual behavior and the cultural specificity of sexual minority identities' (Rao 2014: 176).

What remains absent from a Euro-American configuration of sexuality is its oblivious attitude to the materialist processes that has led to the production of such precise sexual identities in the first place. As D'Emilio (1983: 102) argues,

‘Gay men and lesbians have not always existed. Instead, they are a product of history, and have come into existence in a specific historical era. Their emergence is associated with the relations of capitalism; it has been the historical development of capitalism--more specifically, its free labor system--that has allowed large numbers of men and women in the late twentieth century to call themselves gay, to see themselves as part of a community of similar men and women, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity’.

In the Middle East, MSM brings forth the well-documented homo-sociability and homo-erotica of the pre-modern Middle East (Ze’evi, 2005; Najmabadi, 2005). Oftentimes, these men display a rather fluid sexual identity, and do not necessarily label themselves gay. If we follow Dunnes (1998: 10) ‘the articulation of sexual relations in conformity to social hierarchies represents an ideological framework within which individuals negotiated varied lives under changing historical conditions’. Dunnes (1998) draws on an array of contexts to show how masculinity in the Middle East is reproduced alongside particular sexual relations, in addition to producing a hierarchy of masculinities that distinguishes between a hyper masculine ‘top,’ and a lacking in masculinity or ‘bottom’.

We learn from these authors that contemporary hegemonic understandings of what it means to be ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ are historically-specific, in addition to being concomitant with larger economical, and socio-political shifts. The act of labelling, or self-identifying as gay, lesbian, or else, ought not to be read distinctly from its historical context. Whereas same-sex relations had undoubtedly existed before the development of capitalist economies, it was only throughout, and in their immediate aftermath, that the

verbal articulation of sexual practices came to signify a politically-defined identity. Conversely, Massad (2009) argues that outside the United States and Western Europe, no such developments occurred, and sexual practice was not read as an identity of the sort. In his words, 'while different societies had different forms of social (and sometimes juridical) sanctions to penalize sexual practices that fall outside the purview of the socially acceptable, they did not identify the practitioners of these forms of sex with the sexual act itself, nor did the practitioners form social groups that identified themselves on the basis of their sexual acts.' (Massad, 2009: par. 4). Ultimately, power is an important factor in the normalization of same-sex among men. As Dunnes (1998: 10-11) argues:

'In Turkey, Egypt and the Maghreb, men who are 'active' in sexual relations with other men are not considered homosexual; the sexual domination of other men may even confer a status of hyper-masculinity. The anthropologist Malek Chebel, describing the Maghreb as marked by an 'exaggerated machismo,' claims that most men who engage in homosexual acts are functional bisexuals; they use other men as substitutes for women and have great contempt for them. He adds that most Maghribis would consider far worse than participation in homosexual acts the presence of love, affection or equality among participants. Equality in sexual relations, whether heterosexual or homosexual, threatens the 'hyper-masculine' order'.

It remains to be said that the work of Massad (2007) and the observation of Dunnes (1998) shed an important light on same-sex practices in the Middle East. However, it is important that we acknowledge that Massad (2007) has been oftentimes critiqued for his reductionist and binary view of non-normative sexualities in the Middle East. As far

as my reading of Massad goes, I believe he '[neglects] the subjectivity and agency of self-defined LGBT individuals in the Middle East, [and although] LGBT identities in the Middle East are informed locally in a way that distinguishes them from the western conceptions, [by dismissing them entirely], Massad is merely reiterating an East vs. West discourse, which induces the rhetoric of a Middle Eastern masculinity in crisis' (Allouche 2017: 66). This point is particularly important seeing the nuances that emerged from my conversations with self-identified queer men.

For instance, I consistently came across categorical exclusions based on the degree to which queerness is embodied, in the sense that the more a body behaves in a queer way, or the more queerness it exudes, the more it was deemed 'embarrassing'. An example of a hyper-embodied queerness can be found in the work of Merabet (2015), who relates an extract from a WhatsApp conversation to show the 'often explicitly sexual' (Merabet, 2015: location 1252) nature of cyber 'sex talk' in a same-sex setting. Moreover, and following the extract he shares, the conversation reveals a pre-existing willingness to engage in sex, and directly deals with logistical complications instead, notably the 'problem of finding a place to have sex' (Merabet, 2015: location 1309).

Moe, for instance, told me that young queer men, when they first come to terms with their sexuality, are caught in the existential binary of 'hope/despair'.⁵³ This binary could result in a hyper-expression of queerness, a sort of 'societal defiance'.⁵⁴ In addition, and as a sexual health therapist informed me, it is the phase where sex is 'reckless', and 'safe-sex is rarely practiced'. Following Moe, 'hyper-queerness' diminishes over time,

⁵³ Interview with Moe, July 2014, Beirut.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

especially when 'one's professional career becomes increasingly important'.⁵⁵ In addition, there is a clear cut between older queer individuals and younger ones, with the latter seen as 'embarrassing'.⁵⁶ Still, when we add class to these divisions, younger queer men from poorer backgrounds are 'taken advantage of', according to Moe, and are exclusively 'used' for 'sexual intercourse'.⁵⁷

A hyper-embodied queerness is also lamented by Gi. For Gi, 'us queers do not need hyper-bodies. Why should we draw attention to ourselves?'⁵⁸ His views are echoed by Mark, a self-identified LGBTQ activist. For Mark, a hyper embodiment of queerness is 'hindering' for his work, because a lot of his work is invested in teaching society that 'not all gays act gay'.⁵⁹ Whereas I agree with Mark that it is important to raise awareness that 'not all gays act gay', and to maintain a nuanced view regarding queer corporealities, I had major disagreements with him. During our interview, he repeatedly linked 'acting gay' to 'poorer men', and to 'foreign Syrian queers'.⁶⁰

In a similar vein, intersections of sexuality, race, and nationality were found by Gagné in his examination of GayRomeo.com, an online platform widely used in the same-sex community in Lebanon. Following Gagné (2012:129):

'National and ethnic identity becomes particularly salient, given the transnational scope of the web site, in eliding global scales and narratives of postcolonial gender and sexuality. These movements of

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Interview with Gi, March 2014, Gemmayzeh, Beirut.

59 Interview with Mark, June 2014, Beirut.

60 Ibid.

global culture into the local afford new possibilities for social relations, while also reifying territorialized identity boundaries’.

Still, and despite the differences of opinion that arise from the discussion of hyper-embodied queerness, ‘internalized homophobia’ was almost unanimously critique.⁶¹ When I interviewed M. and K., I almost ‘touched’ the anger they exuded as they lamented how some of their acquaintances deliberately express homophobic views in order to project a heterosexuality. Whereas the rest of my self-identified queer interlocutors acknowledged that they, too, hide their sexuality depending on the situation in which they find themselves, they all found it unnecessary to express homophobic views, or to ‘exaggerate’ them.⁶²

On another note, it is important to highlight the transparency that accompanies the narratives of the interlocutors who seek SQMs. They are open about their desires and, for the most part, avoid sexual intercourse with their spouse (from the opposite sex). This point merits further research. Whereas I deploy the example of SQMs for the specific aim of showcasing the hetero and chrono normativity of marriage mostly, further research is necessary to further explicate sexual practices and sexual identities in Lebanon. This is true for those SQM-couples who decide to have children, for instance: do they opt for artificial insemination? Do they engage in intercourse? How do we conceptualize intercourse in this case? Such remarks aside, the immediate question that arises from ‘strategic queer marriages’ is whether they enforce their doers’ agency

61 Interview with M. and K., May 2014, Gemmayzeh, Beirut.

62 Ibid.

or whether they subvert it. What does it mean when a self-identified queer individual resorts to pre-established norms in order to be able to pursue anti-normative same-sex desire? Can we think of agency as being both temporal and spatial, in the sense that it is constantly on 'stand by' and constantly 'becoming'? In addition to the concept of the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990), Jose Muñoz's work on 'disidentification' will prove highly useful in this regard. Butler (1990: 151) defines the heterosexual matrix as:

'that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized [...] a hegemonic discursive/epistemological model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality'.

Butler's views can be illustrated in the very capitalist economic system that propels society towards heterosexual desire, in addition to reiterating the nuclear family as its basic unit (Hennessey, 2000; Altman, 2002; D'Emilio, 1983). By positing heterosexuality as the ultimate adequate model against which other desires are measured, the latter ought to fashion themselves in order to work through and around it.

Still, heterosexuality is but one power structure that contributes to the production of a particular type of desire. In order to understand the full extent of desire, it is important that we relate it to further structures of power, notably race, class, and in my case, sect. Butler's views echo those of Rich (1983), who coined the expression 'compulsory heterosexuality' in order to emphasize the institutional character of heterosexuality as

something that is 'imposed, managed, organised, propagandised and maintained by force' (Rich, 1983: 21). For Rich, it is not enough to acknowledge the existence of non-heterosexual desires, in her case lesbianism, or to recognize them simply as 'choice', or 'preference' (ibid). Instead, we must question the variety of forces and mechanisms that contribute to the production of a system of sexualities that primarily sustains heterosexuality. For Rich (1983), 'compulsory heterosexuality' results in us never questioning our sexuality in the first place. For women in particular, the non-questioning of their sexuality forces them to succumb to, or simply embrace, albeit inadvertently, an inherently male interpretation of pleasure.

A third scholar, Wittig (in Crowder, 2007) goes as far as advocating for a 'sexless society' that emphasizes a rather abstract conception of the individual over an identity of sex or gender. What's more, for Wittig (2010), the lesbian cannot be a woman because her desires are not acknowledged in relation to a man. Wittig's understanding of heterosexuality as a 'totalitarian regime' (in Crowder, 2007: 491) forces humanity into one of the two sexes/genders 'through the daily repetition of mental and physical acts' (ibid).

For Wittig, along with Butler and Rich, it is clear that desire does not, and cannot rely solely on an inner self. By locating desire outside of the realms of an inner self, I am relegating it to culturally and socio-politically constructed systems of truth. In order to fathom the idea of desire as something that is discursively taught, and since desire brings forth notions and practices of femininities, masculinities, gender, and sex, it is important to frame these, as well. What is clear from all three authors is that heterosexuality eventually becomes the norm against which all other sexualities are

measured. It is along these lines of normativity that conventional love is best understood in this thesis. Inter-sectarian love is seen as an anomaly since it removes love from its sectarian milieu, and despite the legal venues that permit Lebanese citizens to 'convert' to other sects, such conversions remain limited in number, since, as Mikdashi (2014b) rightly points out, society distinguishes between sectarian identity and sectarian affiliation. For example, even if a woman converts to a Muslim sect for marriage's sake, she will not necessarily be perceived as such by her kin, or her larger social milieu.

Compulsory heterosexuality aside, strategic queer marriages blur the boundary between parody and subversion. Following Butler (1990), the performance of gender is subject-less. Although we reproduce on a daily basis what it means to behave as a woman or man, these reproductions are not the result of actions initiated by us as subjects. We are merely reproducing pre-constituted acts that preceded our coming into the world. A gender identity, then, is not an identity per se; it is action, since gender identities are reproduced through acts not through subjects. In Butler's words, 'gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed' (1990:25). In other words, the natural body does not exist prior to it being culturally inscribed as such:

'Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 1990:33).

For Butler, a 'political genealogy of gender ontologies', or the historical emergence of gender as knowledge, is needed in order to 'locate those [constitutive] [gender] acts within the compulsory frame set by the various forces that police the social appearance

of gender' (Butler, 1990:33). Where 'strategic queer marriages' are concerned, similar questions were raised by Butler who sought to distinguish between parody and subversion in her examination of drag acts. In her words, '*in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*', and 'part of the pleasure, the giddiness of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender' (Butler, 1990: 137-8). The imitative structure of gender is clearly explained by Butler, who conceives gender as 'a regulated process of repetition' (ibid: 145). For Butler, the subject does not perform gender, and the subject can only emerge once it performs gender. In other words, the subject is the effect of the discourse of gender, rather than its cause. She clearly sums up her view when she argues 'that the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' (ibid: 136).

Still, the example of 'strategic queer marriages' escapes Butler's work. There is definitely a parody element in the example of strategic queer marriages. However, the difference between them and between the drag acts that Butler draws on in her analysis is the absence of an audience per se. As far as 'strategic queer marriages' go, its audience is not witnessing a parody, and the parody is only known to the married couple and the one friend or two who have been informed. Seeing these discrepancies, I turn to the concept of disidentification, as presented by José Muñoz.

A theory of disidentification was first presented by French linguist Michel Pêcheux (in Muñoz, 1999). For Pêcheux, there exist three modes in which a subject is constructed by ideological practices: 'identification', where the 'good subject' identifies with the prevalent norms; 'counteridentification', where the 'bad subject' rebels against the

dominant ideology; and 'disidentification', where the subject neither conforms nor rejects the dominant ideology. Disidentifiaction then, is a 'strategy that works on and against dominant ideology' (Muñoz, 1999:11). This 'working on and against dominant ideology' has been empirically applied by Malanansan (2003), for instance, in his examination of Filipino Baklas who have migrated to the city of New York. Malanansan shows how Baklas constantly negotiate their 'in-between' identity by 'working on' prevalent same-sex practices in New York, all the while distancing themselves from them through the appropriation of unlikely scenarios where their marginalised condition is both celebrated and lamented. In Malanansan's words, 'we find a configuration of possible scripts of self/selves that shift according to the situation' (2003: x).

IV. 4. Sexo-sectarianism, or the intersection of sect with desire

My fieldwork brought forth what I term 'sexo-sectarianism', or the shaming and desiring of others based on sex stereotypes that serve to reiterate the moral superiority of one's own sect. In this case, the Other is fetishized, imagined, and reinterpreted. In this case, desire acquires a Lacanian (from Jacques Lacan, in Leland, 1989) meaning, i.e. lack. Stories of 'sexo-sectarianism' came unexpectedly during fieldwork. Since desire could be easily misread as a love attachment, I find it important to develop this point. A desired body is not necessary loved. On the contrary, the desired body is taboo, fetish, and Other. It is included, or excluded as per the gendered, sexed, or racialized logic of the gazing subject.

In addition to being embodied, sexo-sectarianism distinguishes one community from another in Lebanon because it encompasses sexual behaviour, desire (as in erotica), and further moralistic values related to sex and behaviour in public spaces. One example of 'sexo-sectarianism' is the popular depiction of the Shi'a population as 'backward', and 'not fun' by the general Lebanese population (Deeb and Harb, 2013). I found similar practices throughout my fieldwork. Many Muslim Sunni interlocutors voiced their concern over what I name 'veiled promiscuity', or 'the hypocrisy' that results from the non-correlation between 'wearing a veil', and 'abstaining from sex'; similarly, many of them mocked the religiously upheld practice of 'temporary marriage' among Shi'as. In a similar vein, one female Orthodox Christian interlocutor repeated the rather sinister popular proverb: *'el mara el marūniyyeh, bas tchūf el fakkeh, bteftah el dakkeh'* (a Maronite woman would 'spread her legs' at the slightest mention of money (!)).

[Interval.

Oh my! Engaging with sexo-sectarianism is a horrid, horrid affair! I cannot recount the number of times I came across situations of 'sexo-sectarianism' during my fieldwork.

Lara Deeb penned an excellent piece in 2010 to explain that 'her decision to write less about temporary marriage has to do with [her] hesitance to contribute to an ever-growing body of sensationalist representations of Islam, and Shi'i Islam in particular, in Lebanon or elsewhere'. Deeb (2010) was speaking in the context of the tensions that arise between local, and European knowledge production, an inevitable point of contention that arises from the study of sex, sexuality, or gender in the Middle East considering how Orientalist

depictions about the region result in enduring stereotypes that are consumed and reproduced both locally and globally (Alloula, 1986; Ahmed, 1992; Naber, 2006; Abu-Lughod, 2013). Still, and although anxieties related to sexo-sectarianism accompanied the writing of this thesis, equally present was a determined choice to free Lebanon from the burden of sectarianism. I can understand the position of Lara Deeb wholeheartedly. After all, writing about the lives of others is no easy task. Still, 'every generation has its way', as the late Joe Cocker (in Cregan and Kunkel, 1997) sang. As far as I am concerned, I see myself as an introspective feminist thinker whose priority is to engage with the immediate space in which I find myself, i.e. Lebanon. This does not mean that I turn a blind eye to classic Orientalist, Imperialist, and essentialist depictions of sex and gender in the region. Nevertheless, I belong to a generation that cannot recall a single moment in their life without the backdrop of War. Like many of my interlocutors, 'I've had enough!'

To put it bluntly, I have 'more problems' with practices of sexo-sectarianism in Lebanon, than with the rhetoric of 'Do Muslim women need saving', for instance. Is it uncomfortable? Does it flirt with ethical complications? Does it push me, and my reader outside of our comfort zone? Most probably yes. Still, I believe that after years of scholarship, I am equipped enough to speak about sexo-sectarianism without an essentialist outcome.

End of Interval.]

Sexo-sectarianism is different from institutional sectarianism. There are no written laws, or bureaucratic practices that reinforce it. It is a mostly embodied, and increasingly so

on social media, type of propaganda that, despite being projected onto an entire group, finds its legitimacy in the behaviour of women, though not exclusively. Institutionalized sectarianism translates into an easy fix, be it to accuse the other, or to make one's point valid. As Khalaf remarks, 'it is only when an individual is placed within a confessional context that assertions are rendered meaningful' (Khalaf, 2012:225).

Sexo-sectarianism is a highly gendered practice since it legitimizes itself through the specific targeting of women's bodies. This brings forth previously mentioned works about women's 'representational burden' (chapter III). Not only is sexo-sectarianism gendered in the sense that it targets women's bodies, it is gendered in the sense that it desexualizes women. De-sexualizing refers to the societal construct whereby women have their sexual agency 'removed' in addition to having it relegated to the realms of reproduction. To own one's body is a distant reality for most women (and men) in Lebanon. In the case of men, for instance, homosexual men in Lebanon are presented as both 'discreet' and 'willing' in gay travelogues (Moussawi, 2011).

Who and when one counts as a sexual being in Lebanon is directly informed by where and when one is placed. Although women are expected to preserve their 'purity' or 'virginity' until marriage, my fieldwork informed me of a sexual agency that ought not to be thought of in terms of intercourse exclusively. Oftentimes, it is women themselves who situate their bodies beyond the grasp of a public that they perceive as highly sexualized (chapter VIII). In addition, who and when one counts as a sexual being is directly linked to one's orientation. Whereas cis and straight women have their sexuality reduced to reproductive purposes, homosexuality is often depicted as a space that is inhabited by overly sexual object-beings. To be counted as a sexual being, nevertheless,

does not imply that one is a sexual agent. Instead, sexuality produces both subjects and objects of desire, where the subject is cis, straight, and male.

Žižek (in Sheehan, 2012) draws on the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in order to maintain that desire never reaches its goal. Unlike the biological instinct, where the aim and the goal conflate with each other, desire is unfulfilled. Instead, desire circles its object of desire. Desire, seen from a Lacanian perspective, fetishizes the Other. For Lacan (in Leland, 1989), we are beings who are always lacking, or experience 'lack of being', in his own words. We lose 'something' as soon as we realize the possibility of castration. This loss remains with us throughout life as we seek to 'fill the hole'. However, and following Lacan (*ibid*), this pursuit, or drive, is limited since it is always confined to the limits of language.

Building on Lacan, Žižek (1991) states that we live in a fantasy-reality. We construct reality as something fantastic since at the core of our existence lays an unfulfilled 'lack'. He maintains that 'the fundamental point of psychoanalysis is that desire is not something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed – and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire, to specify its object' (Žižek, 1991: 6). By stating that desire is constructed, Žižek is relegating it to the Social. Desire is always embedded in the social structures that surround it, and its unattainability lays at the intersection of the power structures that produce it in the first place, namely gender, race, religion, and so on. This extract from Felluga (2015) summarizes well my discussion so far:

‘To come too close to our object of desire threatens to uncover the lack that is, in fact, necessary for our desire to persist, so that, ultimately, desire is most interested not in fully attaining the object of desire but in keeping our distance, thus allowing desire to persist. Because desire is articulated through fantasy, it is driven to some extent by its own impossibility’ (Felluga, 2015: 199).

How sect intersects with desire has been recently examined in a right-wing Hindu context in India. We learn from Gupta (2009) that the Hindu right in India capitalizes on what has become known as ‘Love Jihad’ in its anti-Muslim deployment. Love Jihad, following Gupta, consists of a movement ‘allegedly’ launched by Muslim fundamentalists and youthful Muslim men ‘to convert Hindu and Christian women to Islam through trickery and expressions of false love.’ Another author, Rao (2011) points out how ‘Love Jihad’ operates along nation-wide ‘anxieties’ generated about ‘Muslim fertility rates,’ in addition to being reiterated along the logic of ‘a kind of penis envy and anxiety about emasculation that can only be overcome by violence.’

Similar anxieties related to fertility rates can be captured in the context of Lebanon. The myth of Lebanon’s delicate Muslim/Christian balance, which can be traced back to the 1932 Census under the French mandate (Maktabi, 1999), or the fear of Hezbollah’s partisans’ high fertility rate are common conversation topics in Lebanese society, in addition to impacting the bio-politics of local-sectarian authorities (Deeb et al, 2012). For instance, and since most Lebanese women who are married to non-Lebanese men (low-income women who marry paperless Palestinian refugees, or Syrian nationals) are Sunni, to allow them to pass their citizenship to their children would lead to an inflation

of the Sunni population, which is seen as threatening for Lebanon's demographic balance. In any case, and between parentheses, Lebanon has yet to conduct a census since 1932.

We see how women's sexual agency is easily absorbed by a national rhetoric. Whereas 'Love Jihad' contributes to the exclusion of Muslims from a Hindu-majority India, in addition to operating at the national level, sexo-sectarianism is more 'intimate', in the sense that it juxtaposes a specific community against another. In addition, 'sexo-sectarianism' is not projected towards national supremacy; rather, it is a practice that both results from and sustains the plurality of Lebanese society. 'Sexo-sectarianism', in many ways, reproduces the Orientalist gaze. In order to clarify this argument, it is important that I remind us of the Orientalist gaze through which sexuality in the Middle East has been globally constructed, essentialized, and exceptionalized. Theory aside, my data grounds 'sexo-sectarianism' by showing it in practice.

In order to understand how Orientalism fetishizes and constructs Othered bodies, I turn to the work of Said (2006):

'The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. [...] Unlike the Americans, the French and the British...have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its

deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience' (Said, 2006: 1-2).

Although Said (2006) laid the foundation for Orientalism as an analytic tool, he did not examine sexuality per se. He did stress the overall 'feminine' character of the Orient though: 'its [the Orient] riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem, and the despotic- but curiously attractive – ruler' (Said, 2006: 225). Further authors built on Said's theory of Orientalism in order to show how the Orientalist gaze constructs the non-western exotic Other in sexual and gendered terms. Yegenoglu (1998), for instance, argues that in order to understand the 'sexualized nature of Orientalism', we ought to examine its 'unconscious structure' (Yegenoglu, 1998: 2). During colonial times, women's bodies served as a visual vehicle for the consolidation of Orientalist fantasies (Alloula, 1987; Grewal, 1996). The extent of this projection is still relevant in what Ahmad (1992) calls 'colonial feminism'. bell hooks (1992) shows the extent of a difference based on race in the context of Black women's bodies. She remarks that:

'The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture' (hooks, 1992: 365).

Although hooks (1992) investigates the context of mass culture in the US, the dynamics she identifies are highly applicable to 'sexo-sectarianism'. Following hooks (1992):

‘Whether or not desire for contact with the Other, for connection rooted in the longing for pleasure, can act as a critical intervention challenging and subverting racist domination, inviting and enabling critical resistance, is an unrealized political possibility’ (ibid: 367).

Clearly, in the case of hooks (1992), desire acquires a negative meaning. It is a pretext that reiterates a pre-existing hierarchy of masculinities and femininities, and which contributes to the fetishisation of Others. Similar implications have been observed throughout my fieldwork. For instance, I accompanied Jomana and Eli on a night out. Both Jomana and Eli were third-year university students. Eli was a Maronite; Jomana a Sunni. On the night of the outing, Eli and Jomana had joined a group of friends to celebrate a birthday. After a hearty dinner at Lord of the Wings, whose menu consists of chicken wings mostly, we headed to the neighbourhood of Mar-Mikhael where the ‘birthday girl’ had booked an area for her guests in one of the many clubs in the neighbourhood. As far as Jomana’s parents were concerned, she was staying over at a female friend’s house in order to finalize an important group work project that was due to be submitted the week after.

‘I don’t go out much to clubs. My parents don’t mind me going to dinners, to the cinema, or to the theatre, but they have always set their limits when it came to clubbing. They say it is a space for ‘bad people’. Everyone here is a friend or a colleague from university. Do you think they are ‘bad people’?’⁶³

63 Interview with Jomana, May 2014, Gemmayzeh, Beirut.

When I asked Jomana to explain to me what her parents meant by ‘bad people’, or who they considered to be ‘bad’, she eyed Eli, who was ordering drinks from the bar, and whispered to me:

‘My parents believe that Christians’ share of pleasure is on earth,
whereas us Muslims’ share of pleasure is in Jannah (paradise)’.⁶⁴

Jomana’s rhetoric highly encapsulates my concept of ‘sexo-sectarianism’. By stating that Christians’ share of pleasure in ‘on earth’, her parents recognize their inferior morality. At the same time, they elevate Muslims as superior moral beings. What is particularly important to retain from their view is the reduction of morality to sexual behaviour strictly, not to add its overall essentializing character.

Another example of sexo-sectarianism can be found in the person of Denise. Denise is a twenty-two years old university student, originally from Al-Qobayyat, in the Akkar district in the North Governorate of Lebanon, a predominantly Maronite community. She is specializing in business administration. She is single, and Maronite, and currently resides with her family in Baabda. Her family had moved to Baabda ‘more than two decades ago’. According to Denise, she dreads the occasional journey to Al-Qobayyat where her extended family lives because her parents usually make a detour onto Tripoli in order to visit ‘old acquaintances’, before resuming their journey through equally ‘conservative’, and ‘backward’ towns and villages in Akkar:

‘I will never change how I dress, how I wear my make-up, or how I style my hair. No way (in English). I can’t stand the stares, but at the

⁶⁴ Ibid.

same time I think it's their problem, not mine. It's not my problem if they have unresolved complexes [m'akkadīn]. If they don't like it, let them look elsewhere!'⁶⁵

Sexo-sectarianism is evident in Denise's narrative. By describing the city of Tripoli, whose population is predominantly Sunni as 'backward', Denise is emphasizing the cognitive and emotional maturity of the largely Christian regions of Al-Qobayyat and Baabda. The criteria that she uses in this case are informed by the relationship between her body-context and her physical surrounding. In each of Baabda or Al-Qobayyat, her sexy look is '*adi*' (not out of the ordinary).⁶⁶

Denise feels that her body is overly-sexed, depending on the physical space in which she finds herself (Tripoli); and although her words imply a least concerned attitude (if they don't like it, let them look elsewhere!), the very fact that she dreads 'the few steps it takes me [her] from the car'⁶⁷ to the gate of the residential building where her parents' acquaintances live is reflective of the level to which she embodies the negative affect that Tripoli is.

Sexo-sectarianism is one of the many practices in Lebanon that contributes to our/their view of the world. A binary-based type of thinking translates into sharp and well-defined categories, including those of man-woman, elder-young, and so forth. Having said that, sexo-sectarianism is not limited to inter-sectarian accusations and assumptions, but operates inwardly too. Khaled, a single Sunni young man with 'no

63 Interview with Denise, Baabda, January 2014.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

intention' of marrying anytime soon, remarked to me that you only find '*shramit*' (a colloquial for 'whore') or veiled women these days:

'There's nothing in between. And don't be fooled by veiled women, bya'emlo aktar (literally translates as they do more) than non-veiled women'.⁶⁸

Khaled was particularly hostile towards my research. He is the same Khaled who referred to 'Muhannad' in order to mock me (see I.3.). When I remarked to Khaled that his use of the expression '*shramit*' is excessive, he retaliated:

'Are you one of them? (Referring to gender activists – I never introduced myself as one, by the way). *Shou badkom bel balad* (what do you want from this country?) Let it be! *Ma ha yetla' bi idkon* (there's nothing you can do about it). *Arraftuna ya!* (We are sick of you!) It is because of your demands that women are either *shramit* or veiled! You force them to choose. *W bala siri 'an el rjal* (and don't get me started on men! You make them sound like the sons of the devil!'⁶⁹

The example of Khaled is illustrative of an internally projected type of sexo-sectarianism, one that occurs within the boundaries of one's sect. Khaled is a Sunni himself, and his narrative was aimed at Sunni women specifically. Khaled had long stopped dating 'Lebanese women', whether Sunni or something else, because 'they bleed you dry, and they're never happy'.⁷⁰ Khaled, who insists on remaining single,

68 Interview with Khaled, Beirut, August, 2014.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

seeks Filipina women instead. In his words, 'at least I know exactly where I stand. There's no hypocrisy'.⁷¹ When I asked Khaled whether he has had relationships with other nationalities, he stated: 'Filipina women are for Lebanese men. Ethiopian ones are for the Syrian'.⁷²

I have heard similar stories throughout my fieldwork, especially during *sobhiyyāt* which I relate in chapter VIII. The visibility of the migrant female domestic worker (MFDW) in Lebanon's public(s) compels me to write about her in my work. Still, this is not a thesis about MFDW per se, but the sexed narratives about them clearly illustrate how desire is racialized in Lebanon. By relegating Ethiopian MFDW to the Syrian male, Khaled is reiterating the idea that Lebanese men are superior to Syrian men. How a novel ideal Lebanese masculinity is produced, in opposition to the non-sophisticated Syrian masculinity, is explored at length in chapter VI, where I argue that novel affective narratives about marriage are constructed along a forcibly elevated Lebanese masculinity that originates from an increasingly precarious existence. Whites more, the desire for Filipina MFDW lies precisely in their 'non-black skin', and their 'good' English skills, according to my fieldwork. Such findings have previously been documented by Lee (2016). In addition, and even in a non-sex context, housewives in Lebanon desire Filipina MFDW because they perceive them as 'less ugly', and more 'sophisticated' and 'cosmopolitan' than other MFDW (Lee, 2016).

Khaled's frustration is in part the result of the complexities and minute negotiations between self and others that occur during 'courtship', a locally informed notion to

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

distinguish it from western hegemonic modes of 'dating'. Like many young men, Khaled finds the rules and norms that accompany the period of 'courtship' both 'expensive', and debilitating (see chapter VII).

Equally important to note about 'sexo-sectarianism' is how targeted communities cope with it. At the time of my fieldwork, the neighbourhood of Tebbaneh in the city of Tripoli was witnessing round after round of armed clashes between Sunni and Alawite militiamen on the one side, and between them and the Lebanese army on the other side. The media, in its usual 'quick fix' approach, referred to these armed clashes as the 'spillover' from Syria, and a result of the participation of Hezbollah alongside Bashaar Al Assad's forces in Syria, in addition to endowing them with misrepresentative narratives limited to 'sectarianism', and a 'security crisis'. Such misrepresentations have been criticized by the likes of Milligan (2014) and Abi Nayel (2015). Tripoli's militiamen are not to be confused with the popular definition of the Militiaman, Lebanon's infamous civil war icon. Far from safeguarding some ideological ideal, Tripoli's militiamen can be likened to 'entrepreneurs' who carve a surviving strategy for themselves through the construction of 'semi-durable, unequal, and bartering-based relationships with local leaders' (Milligan 2014). They are 'elusive' by nature, in the sense that they 'shift their allegiance' to local patrons in non-gradual patterns (ibid). Instead of recognizing the coercive cycle in which these men find themselves, the media labelled them *ze'rān* (thugs) and *shabbīḥa* (named after Hafez Al-Assad's militiamen especially deployed to crack down on popular upheavals).

Following fieldwork in Tripoli, Ali Nayel (2015) successfully captures the burdened, and zombie-like, masculinity of young Tripolitan men from the Tebbaneh

neighbourhood, far from the *ze'rān* and *shabbīḥa* types that the media relentlessly portrays. He cites their 'widespread feelings of disdain' towards local patrons who move them around like a 'piece of chess', according to one informant (ibid). Abi Nayel (2015) recounts how a new generation of youngsters questions the utility of school since a violent attitude, not a diploma, will earn them respect. As for the men who do not take up arms or exhibit political apathy, they run the risk of being disdained and threatened by their community. Indeed, ever since the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005, Lebanon's Sunni poor have been finding themselves gradually excluded from the care/control paradigm that characterizes political life in Lebanon. In Lebanon, there is a general agreement that the Sunni community is 'in crises since large parts of it, particularly in rural areas and in poor urban neighbourhoods including Tebbaneh, are being seriously neglected by their community leaders.

Brah (1996) points out that 'structures of class, racism, gender and sexuality cannot be treated as 'independent variables' because the oppression of each is inscribed within the other — [it] is constituted by and is constitutive of the other' (Brah, 1996: 109). Moreover, Brah points out 'how class contradictions may be worked through and 'resolved' ideologically within the racialized structuration of gender' (ibid: 110). Her views resonate highly with the lived reality of Tripoli's militiamen. Where 'sexo-sectarianism' is concerned, it is useless trying to conceive of it, all the while regarding each of class, race, gender, and sexuality as 'independent variables'. Empirically speaking, I relate the testimony of Ahmed, a young Sunni man residing in the neighbourhood of Tebbaneh, which was broadcast on the TV network LBCI. By many standards, LBCI is Lebanon's 'most progressive' TV network, and often collaborates with activists (Mandour, 2013).

In his testimony, Ahmed is aware of the ways in which Tripoli has been cast as a 'backward' space that is best avoided, and his choice of words prove that this backwardness has been constructed specifically along gendered and sexed perceptions – a point he is aware of:

'Everything is *zift* [zefat, if we are to follow Ahmed's strong Tripolitan accent. *Zift* literally translates as 'asphalt', and is used colloquially in Lebanon to refer to that which can be stepped upon, i.e., without any real value]. Politicians are *zift*. The government is *zift*. The presidency is *zift* [...] Where is Saad Al Hariri? He is in Saudi Arabia! [...] There is poverty here, real poverty [...] We are good people. You have such misconceptions about Tebbaneh. Terrorism, heh? Go anywhere in Tripoli. Explore the city street by street, and then tell me, where do you find terrorism? Have you ever been harassed during your visits to Tripoli? [The journalist shakes her head to point out a negative answer]. If a woman walks around Tebbaneh in a bikini, if she walks around in beachwear, no one would bat an eyelid. Where is the terrorism the media is speaking about? [...]'

Some would argue that class alone could explain Ahmed's 'anti-establishment' attitude. Such an analysis is a mistaken one, especially since Ahmed deploys gender along with class in order to challenge Tripoli's image as 'backward' and as harbouring 'terrorists'. Gendered ideologies construct masculinities and femininities as cumulative: they gain and lose different forms of privileges, depending on the context in which they are operating. None is an 'independent variable' as Brah (1996) suggests, and none is fixed. If anything, masculinities (and femininities), in all their forms, be they racialized, classified, or ethnicized, must be viewed as 'a complex phenomenon, a mercurial and

overflowing category fraught with ambivalence and equivocation, and operating within particular historical settings and discursive formations' (Brittan 1989:36).

In their exploration of leisure spaces in the mostly Shi'a Dāḥiya neighbourhood, Deeb and Harb (2013) lament widespread views about Dāḥiya as 'backward'. During my fieldwork, I repeatedly 'lied' to my mother whenever I was going to meet interlocutors near or around Dāḥiya, and I ashamedly admit that I was 'blown away' the first time I realized its abundance of leisure spaces. Still, it would be wrong to deduce from my analysis that predominantly Christian areas are more 'progressive' than Tripoli (Sunni), or Dāḥiya (Shi'a). Whereas the relatively enhanced infrastructure in majority Christian areas can be explained by high levels of clientelism, we must caution ourselves against the conflation of such visible progress with a progressive gendered rhetoric. Lebanon's Christian population is wrongly perceived as being more 'women-friendly' and 'gay-friendly' than the rest of Lebanon's populations. In an excellent piece, Nadine M. (no date) reminds us that when it comes to sexuality, Lebanon's potentials (tolerance towards non-conforming sexualities) and limits (intolerance and division) can both be located in its pluralistic society. Moreover, 'sexo-sectarianism' reveals an array of narratives where sects construct Others' sexualities.

IV. 5. Concluding remarks

We can see clearly how marriage territorializes love along sectarian lines in Lebanon. Based on my discussion above, I can safely argue that it helps that we view love as a rather queer feeling, even when placed in a heterosexual context, in the sense that it

challenges the sectarian and gendered structures that underpin Lebanese society. Browne and Nash (2010) argue that “‘queer research’ can be any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations’ (Browne, and Nash, 2010: 4). It is in this sense that I use queer theory in my discussion. Inter-sectarian love queers the norms of love in Lebanon by being projected towards impossible others, and we recognize in them a temporary agency, where pleasure is primordial, and the institutional foundations of marriage are resisted. In other words, love is a queer affect despite it occurring in a heterosexual context.

Between the guilt of inter-sectarian love and the excess of inter-sectarian love, conventional love, or love-marriage, presents itself as an acceptable compromise between the multitude of actors and generations involved in the regulation and production of the discourse of love in contemporary Lebanon. The paradoxes that arise regarding agency can be found in both the examples of ‘non-conventional love’ and ‘strategic queer marriages’. Whereas the first is most likely to queer the norms of love in Lebanon, despite it occurring in a heterosexual setting, the latter normalizes it, despite it occurring in a homosexual setting. In both cases, however, romantic love reveals itself as a highly useful arena to examine gender and sexuality, especially when we consider its ‘becoming’, or potential in disrupting, or not Lebanon’s rigid sectarian barriers.

Clearly, getting married, is a mostly ‘chrono-normative’ practice that ‘uses time and organizes individual human bodies toward maximum productivity’, in addition to making people ‘feel coherently collective, through particular orchestrations of time’ (Freeman, 2008: 3). Following my fieldwork, there is a place and time where one can

experiment with non-conventional forms of love. It is my belief that *something* remains from inter-sectarian love, despite the triumph of marriage. Had it not been for the scope and topic of this work, I would have stretched my ethnography in order to show how everyday practices of love contribute to Lebanon's co-sectarian living.

Chapter V. Love and its Discontents

An ethnographic exploration of Layal and Om Zahra's views on love and sex

This chapter is dedicated to Om Zahra (1945? - 2015).

In this chapter, I contrast the views of 28-year-old Layal, with those of Om Zahra, who is approaching 70, on love. Through an analysis of their engagement with the registers of love and sex that are available to them, both Layal and Om Zahra critique modernity, and vent their frustration with Lebanon's sexual order. My ethnography clearly illustrates my Deleuzian-inspired reading of love, prioritizing as such its ambivalence. It is the nearest I could get to the notion of love as pure, free, and elective. The partly phantasmatic nature of love invites us to contemplate agency to its fullest, and the chapter shows the impact of the Divine and the Elsewhere on subject-making, and calls for a metaphysical view of agency instead of relegating it to decision and choice-making. This line of thinking befits my overall view of love as an assemblage of both abstract and material systems.

V. 1. Meeting Layal

The first time I spoke to Layal intimately was on the day my mother sent me to have some legal documents 'testified' at the notary office where Layal works. Layal was the only cleric assisting the notary in question, a rather grumpy and clearly 'fed up' man in his seventies. The notary, Mostapha, was contemplating retirement soon, and at this

stage of his career, 'he just doesn't care anymore', according to Layal. Like most 'businesses' in Lebanon, my mother dealt with this particular notary because her late father had introduced her to him, not because of his professional reputation per se. I personally dreaded the visits to the notary in question. It is a particularly bleak place. It lacks air conditioning. It is always crowded, and it provides a single two-seater sofa for its customers. Oftentimes, the two-seater is occupied by a single man, an 'up and coming businessman' undoubtedly, who despite not dominating the entire space for himself, makes it particularly uninviting to sit next to him.

For better or worse, the day my mother sent me was a ludicrously hot day. Feeling myself about to faint, I approached Layal, and informed her that I was feeling 'funny'. She remarked that I was 'too pale', and immediately invited me to a back room where she sat me near a window and offered me a glass of water. She soon disappeared into the main office, only to return a few minutes later to check on me. Although I did feel better almost instantly, I prolonged my stay in order to take full advantage of the breeze coming through the window. When Layal returned, I thanked her, and asked her 'how she manages to work all day in such a minuscule and crowded place?' to which she replied, '*adi, kello 'adi*' (out of habit, habit makes everything possible). Soon, a male voice erupted. As soon as I heard it, I jumped: 'Layal! Who are you talking to?' It turned out it was her fiancé, Mahmood.

When Mahmood entered and saw me, I couldn't help but notice a sign of relief on his face (at least, this is the impression I had). He spoke to Layal about something, and soon left. I then confessed to Layal that Mahmood's voice startled me. She said something along the lines of 'were you expecting him to meow instead'? Her reply made me realize

that I was many miles away from 'home', although I was at a notary office which was less than a five minutes' walk from my house. Her wittiness, combined with a mocking tone, revealed a rather deep knowledge about embodied masculinities in Lebanon, unlike me, who felt rather threatened by Mahmood's tone. One thing led to the next, and soon we started meeting regularly in Tripoli on Friday afternoons, afternoon prayer, when the city becomes particularly quiet, and most businesses close for the remainder of the day.

Layal and mother, or life/death after marriage

According to Layal, marriage must be based on love, and must not restrict her career and her social life. She sighs whenever she speaks about her mother:

'My mother is so bored all the time. I feel so sorry for her. She is a housewife. She never worked in her life. Sometimes she assists my father with his shop, but apart from that, her life is quite empty. My father keeps himself busy. He knows lots of people. He meets his friends every night for a game of *Tawlah* (a board game). My mother doesn't have any friends'.⁷³

Layal contrasts her own aspirations in life with her mother's lived reality. Layal's mother pertains to a generation of women for whom marriage acted as the benchmark from which one emerges as an adult. Oftentimes, this emergence was accompanied by what Shaefer-Davis (in Menin, 2015: 893) describes as a 'painful fracture'.

⁷³ Interview with Layal, Tripoli, June 2014.

[*Interval.*

I felt intensely sad when Layal shared with me her views about her mother. Based on my fieldwork, most of my female interlocutors were dreading 'life after marriage', and oftentimes projected such anxieties by narrating their mother's lived reality. In this sense, I felt particularly close to my female interlocutors, which was particularly difficult as far as my work goes, seeing the probability of identifying too much with them (Fearne, in Visweswaran, 1997).

End of interval.]

For Layal, as with many young women and men in Lebanon, the myth of reaching adulthood at the time of marriage is increasingly seen as a 'joke':

'What a *maskhara* (joke). I've been working for six years now, and I contribute to the finances of the household. I am paying for my own car, and I help with my grandmother's medical bills. No one is going to treat me like a child anymore'.⁷⁴

Still, to joke about this myth is easier said than done. Layal told me how her colleagues in her previous work did not take her seriously, and how one of them went as far as to comment that she is a '*walad* (child) still':

'I was furious. Everyone took me for granted. All the married women could phone in sick whenever they wanted and it was always I (me) who ended up with all the work. People think that if you are not

74 Ibid.

married you are not doing anything with your life. No one listened to me at work. It was always the married women who got approvals from others. I know for a fact that I am more qualified, and better at my job, but what can I do?’⁷⁵

The links between maturity and marriage are very present in Lebanon, and Layal’s narrative is well illustrative of that. She is accurate when she says that society equates non-married life with an empty life. For Layal’s generation, adulthood can no longer be restrained to the confines of marriage, especially since she views employment along empowering lines. According to Layal, work is important, and both Mahmood and she are planning their future as equal partners who will contribute to the finances of the household. Personal choice and emotional fulfilment when choosing a partner/mate have become the focus of a large number of studies that deal with marriage in southern, non-western contexts. Most of these works imply, and at times conclude, that an increasing number of non-western youth embody modern selves by opting for unions that are ‘based on love’, without the familial restraints that come with traditional marriages.

When I asked Layal if she would consider leaving work once she gets married, as the existing literature implies (see chapter VI), she categorically refuted such a possibility. On the contrary, she remarked that ‘marriage leads to misery’:

‘Look at all the married women! They give birth, and soon ‘quit life’. I do not intend to quit life. I want to enjoy life along with Mahmood and our children. Did you know that my aunt hasn’t left her house

⁷⁵ Ibid

since 2013? Ever since her husband passed away, she has confined herself to her house!’⁷⁶

For Layal, marriage is not synonymous with ‘death’. She is representative of a new generation of women for whom marriage is one aspect of a fulfilled life. Unlike her mother, who most probably experienced marriage as a ‘painful fracture’, Layal views marriage in a positive light. Her views are telling of new ways of being and feeling that are embodied by young Middle Eastern men and women.

Classic studies of kinship have approached marriage as a system of rules that revolve around descendancy, kinship, and the unit of the family. In addition, marriage has been examined as a legal institution where state laws, customs, and religious requirements concur. In Lebanon, the institution of marriage contributes to the regulation of women’s sexuality by embedding it with a reproductive logic. Other works have approached marriage through a purely political economy lens, and this has been the case of most works conducted in the Middle East, by emphasizing its material meanings and implications not only for the couple, but for the wider kin (Singerman and Hoodfar, 1996; Hoodfar, 1997; Hasso, 2011).

Following Layal, marriage is seen as a venue to explore the world, and to venture outside of the household, since she links her own agency to that of her children:

‘I am almost thirty now. I have spent many years developing my professional skills, and I do not intend to stop here. I don’t want to become a CEO, but I definitely do not intend to have children, put on

⁷⁶ Ibid.

weight, and restrict myself to mothering. Besides, what mothering am I going to do if I myself am removed from the world and do not experience it myself? What advice am I going to give to my children? What example am I going to set for them?'⁷⁷

Layal constructs the public in conjunction with the private. Her narrative differs from traditional views whereby the household is seen as the quintessential space for women and children. For Layal, there is little to learn from the household, and an exteriorized outlook on life is seen as necessary for one's development.

Women, sex, and the sublime

In terms of gender and sexuality, maturity is linked to women's experiencing of sex. As long as a woman has not had sexual intercourse, she is presumed to be lacking. At the same time, sexual intercourse is confined to the boundaries of married life. It is safe to argue that Lebanese society constructs women's experience with sex as something sublime. Like magic, women's first experience with sex is a zealously guarded secret that only insiders (married women) can fully appreciate. At the same time, this state of affairs concurs with the rampant consumption of pornographic material, and a public that is accepted as highly sexualized.

A similar sublime reading of women's experience with sex can be found in the western tradition, where women's orgasm is often constructed as something 'immeasurable'

⁷⁷ Interview with Layal, May 2014, Tripoli.

according to science, as something hysterical in Freudian interpretations, or something sublime, if we are to follow Lacan (see Leland, 1989).

Once women unlock the secret of sex, they are capable of fully comprehending the extent of pleasure, and of men's 'insatiable appetite for sex', therefore contributing to the gendered social order, through the internalizing of the inequality of the sexes, and the reproduction of hyper-femininities that succumb to, and legitimize, the male gaze. This particular kind of knowledge is rooted in power since once it is acquired, women emerge as powerful beings, in the sense that they are no longer perceived as children. With sex being embedded in knowledge and power, in addition to being confined to the boundaries of married life, love is rationalized, and as long as it is channelled towards marriage, it is encouraged.

Through the rationalization of love-marriage, excessive love is seen as something troublesome and best avoided, in addition to it reflecting a childish and immature state. Between parentheses, I reiterate that excessive love is the anti-thesis of love-marriage in this thesis, and although most of my interlocutors did perceive love to be a fundamental component when choosing a partner, they were clear in distinguishing between love-marriage and excessive love. At some point, I remarked to Layal that our parents' generation is most probably traumatized from the civil war, and is too immobilized by its anxieties to know or do otherwise. I was surprised when she remarked that 'no one cares about the civil war anymore! People want to live! We are tired!' Her words resonated with those of K. (*I want to live!*).

Indeed, on one occasion, I met Layal at the height of Tripoli's clashes. We were in one of the many cafés in the Dam-w-al-farz neighbourhood, and we could hear the fighting from our location. Moreover, the café had plenty of patrons who were smoking shishas while watching live reports about Tripoli on TV. I admitted to Layal that had it not been for my fieldwork, I would not have accompanied her to a café on that particular day. I felt mostly ashamed about being in a café whilst heavy fighting was taking place less than a ten minutes' drive away. She told me that I ought to check the Corniche (in El-Mina, which is not to be confused with Beirut's Corniche), Al-Ma'rad (a large, though neglected, work by famed Brazilian architect Oscar Niyemer), and Kosba (a village in El-Kora famed for an ice cream outlet), and that 'everyone was living their life'.⁷⁸

Due to the fighting on that particular day, Layal's fiancé, Mahmood, insisted on driving us to and from the café. It was the first time I had seen him since he startled me at the notary's office, and despite the awkwardness (as usual, I felt like a third wheel), I finally felt confident enough to tackle the topic of love with Layal, especially since I could 'visualize' her with him henceforth.

Modernity, and the romanticization of 'unfulfilled love'

On one of my meetings with Layal, the café we went to was showing music videos on a large flat TV screen (although muted). Once we settled properly, and before engaging in our conversation, we both looked at the TV screen, which was showing the music video of the song *As'ab Kelmeh* (the most difficult word) by Mo'in Shreif.

⁷⁸ Interview with Layal, June 2014, Tripoli.

‘I like this singer, and I like all his songs. *Ma byestafezzneh* (He doesn’t anger me nor does he make me cringe). He simply sings about love.’ After a long pause and a somewhat dreamy look on her face, Layal said ‘Look at Ragheb Alameh! All his videos are about him being surrounded by a group of women dancing. Did you see his newest video? He gets out of the car and removes his sunglasses. It’s not even daylight!’⁷⁹

Luckily for me, I was familiar with Ragheb Alameh, and although I had not seen the video in question, it was clear to me that his embodiment of superstardom did not resonate well with Layal. She added that music videos are terrible and often convey the message that Lebanese women are ‘*feltaneen*’ (loose).⁸⁰ When I told Layal that the sexualisation of music videos is most probably for selling purposes, she became angry and told me that I ‘ought not encourage them’, before adding that ‘they are wreaking havoc with the minds of young men’.⁸¹

‘Only men?’ I asked, to which Layal replied, ‘Women think that falling in love equates (to) sex!’⁸² When I remarked to Layal that it is difficult for most people to conceive love without bodily attachment, she said that I had misunderstood her, before explaining to me that:

‘I am not saying that sex and love are two different things, but nowadays, men expect you to show them love by letting them access

⁷⁹ Interview with Layal, May 2014, Tripoli.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

your body. In the old days, they would wait. Everyone waited back then. Why is everyone in such a hurry nowadays?’⁸³

By contrasting the love-only setting of Mo’in Schreif’s music video with the highly sexualized works of Ragheb Alameh, Layal is expressing her longing for what could be described as a pre-modernity conceptualization of love, namely ‘unfulfilled love’. Unsurprisingly, and like many young women in Lebanon, she is finding it increasingly difficult to find a balance between her feelings of love, and society’s expectations of women’s bodies. ‘What about Mahmood? Is he in a hurry too?’ I asked. Layal smiled at me in a way that only a woman that identifies with her struggles could understand, before telling me that she is making sure that ‘he waits’.⁸⁴

Mahmood was not Layal’s first love. Before Mahmood, there was Issam, and Hisham, and I relate Layal’s love affair with each to illustrate the demonization of excessive love, and the intersection of the discourse of love with sect in Lebanon, respectively.

Layal and Hisham, or excessive love

Like many young women, Layal was wary of herself the first time she experienced feelings of love.

‘I don't know how to describe it. I felt something. I didn’t know whether it was real or whether my mind was playing tricks on me. I felt immensely guilty too. I had only caught a glimpse of him but I was feeling guilty! I felt I was doing something wrong!’⁸⁵

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Interview with Layal, June 2014, Tripoli.

These are the words Layal used as she reminisced about her love affair with Hisham. Although Layal did not use the expression 'physical attraction', she was clearly exhibiting a peculiar embodied state where emotions, the body, the mind, and the social must be read as one. Her feelings of guilt emerged from her feeling attracted to Hisham, and feeling attracted is a dangerous feeling because one risks becoming uninhibited, and uninhibited behaviour is largely frowned upon by society. Her narrative clearly illustrated the extent to which she had internalized society's demonization of sex outside marriage. Around the same time, Layal's cousin was getting married, and along with her cousin, they concocted a scenario to make it look as if the latter had arranged for them to meet, by inviting him to the wedding, and asking the female cousin to publically acknowledge what a great match Layal and Hisham are.

'When I first started seeing Hisham, my parents insisted that we meet in cafés, and they were particularly averse to late activities, such as late-night cinema screenings, or dinners. They did not mind as long as I was accompanied by a group of friends, though'.⁸⁶

The spatial dimension of everyday practices of dating and coupling, along with their intersection with gender, are developed in chapter VIII. According to Layal, Hisham was 'perfect in many ways'.⁸⁷ When I asked her to clarify what she meant by 'perfect in many ways', she gave the following example:

'Layal: *He goes mental if I am 'online' and ignore him!*

Me: What would happen then?

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Layal: He would be angry!

Me: Surely you can see that he was being controlling?

Layal: “*Am yethakkam fiyyeh?* (He’s controlling me?) *Mghalta ktir!*

(You are so wrong!) *Shababna bigharu ‘alayyna!* (Our men feel jealous about us)’.⁸⁸

The English equivalent of my translation ‘our men are jealous’ is tantamount to the infamous idea that a little jealousy is healthy for a relationship. I certainly do not intend to go about introducing a new discussion related to jealousy, or whether a little jealousy is indeed healthy for a relationship, but as a Lebanese single woman with no intention to marry soon, I can only view the expression as highly patriarchal rhetoric.

[*Interval.*

The expression *bighar alayyeh* is well-known in Lebanon, and is often related in the context of couples. Less often, the expression is used to evoke the love of overly protective male relatives, notably fathers and brothers. Although I was familiar with this fact, I was surprised when Layal mentioned it to me. I genuinely did not expect her, a university-educated, independent-thinking, and financially savvy woman, to view such an expression in a positive light. Perhaps such surprises are telling of my status as an outsider researcher after all? Was I too naïve when I undertook my fieldwork?

End of Interval].

⁸⁸ Ibid.

This naivety became increasingly pronounced when I told Layal that as far as my reading goes, I can only see Hisham as a controlling man, to which she replied '*walaw* (an expression to voice disbelief and disappointment) Sabiha, where do you live? It sounds like France is brainwashing you!'⁸⁹ I interrupted her to remind her that I was pursuing my studies in London, not in France, a clarification she did not register at all, before adding that:

'There is something about love *bi mojtama'atna* (our societies, referring to the Arab world) that people elsewhere will never experience! Who can sing about love like Om Kalthūm, or Abd El-Halim? No one! Not even Mariah Carey! In the west, people do not know how to love. They only have sex'.⁹⁰

Based on my fieldwork, Layal's views are not integral to her. Like many young men and women who are exposed to western registers of love and sexuality, she often finds herself in situations of 'in-betweeness', at the intersection of the global with the local, so to speak. Further, there are two points in Layal's narrative that merit scrutiny. Firstly, when it comes to the question of whether Hisham is controlling or not, Layal, like many female interlocutors condemned those men that she viewed as *m'attarin* or, prompting feelings of pity. I develop the discourse of the *m'attar* in chapter VI in order to show how affective rhetoric about the ideal partner is constructed, following an othering/excluding logic.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

By linking love to power, Layal is contributing to the idealization of a rather aggressive type of masculinity, even in the context of love. Her views are telling of the direct links between one's intimacy and the 'outside', in addition to betraying those analyses that view them as separate spheres. Still, it would be erroneous to conclude that she is simply being manipulated by Hisham. By embedding love with power, Layal indirectly constructs spaces and opportunities for negotiation, and is therefore strengthening her sexual agency.

The second point refers to her binary view of the world, where she juxtaposes her context with what seems to be a monolithic view of the West, in addition to reducing sex to love in western contexts. Far from seeing her views as a 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington, 1993), I believe that Layal finds solace in her love struggles by constructing love as a platonic space, in addition to contrasting them with an 'immoral West' that does not know how to love, if we follow her logic. According to Layal, the first few months with Hisham were 'more like a dream'.⁹¹ In a reminiscing exercise, Layal said 'I should have known this wasn't going to go anywhere. It was too good to be true. I loved his little bouts of jealousy every now and then, but things became really ugly in the end'.⁹²

It turned out that Hisham had no limits when it came to expressing his feelings for Layal. Following a disagreement almost a year into their relationship, he thought it convenient to apologize to her by blasting Hani Shaker's song *Wahashteeni* (I miss you) to her for half a day from his car stereo:

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

'Everyone was so embarrassed. Everyone in the building was complaining. I was so embarrassed. *Ya sheh̄hari* (what a disaster). What was I to do? I couldn't hide anywhere. I missed work that day. The one time I ever skipped work'.⁹³

Layal then told me that at the time of the car episode, her father was away at work, and although several old men did approach Hisham to complain to him, he simply would not stop. When I asked her how her neighbours and other passers-by reacted, she said she had no idea because she didn't leave her room. When Layal's father arrived around lunchtime, he recognized Hisham's car, and immediately went to speak to him. Although Layal did not witness the scene, the wife of the concierge told her that her father had to be restrained by several men:

'Layal: Like *Majnoon Layla*!

Me: You mean *Majnoon Layal*?'⁹⁴

Layal laughed loudly before adding 'I have never seen him since, and according to my cousin, he has married and moved to Irbil.' Although Hisham and Layal belonged to the same network of friends, were from the same sect, and had never consummated their relationship, Layal informed me that on that fateful day she felt 'violated' (rather than using the word 'violated', Layla explained her feelings through the articulation of an imaginative scenario whereby Hisham storms into her family's flat, walks straight past her mother, sister, and father, and ends up imprisoning her in her room). In other words,

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

and although Hisham was not physically present, Layal felt her intimacy breached; how women construct their intimacy in relation to space is examined in the following chapter.

By acknowledging that Hisham's actions made her uncomfortable, Layal informs us of the limits of public displays of love. In addition to being primarily channelled through existing registers, notably Egyptian classical songs, love is often celebrated openly in Lebanon. My fieldwork informed me that expressions of love are often concealed within other articulations, notably respect and admiration for the beloved, and is rarely interpreted in relation to sexual desires. Young men often play loud music from their cars in order to make their feelings known to others. However, unlike Hisham, this practice usually triggers reactions of amusement, not discomfort, as was the case with Layal, in addition to comments reiterating the city's jungle-ness and out-of-control-ness. However, the downfall of Hisham was the fact that he ignored the pleas of neighbours, passers-by, and Layal's father, which reflected a state of mental imbalance somehow, in addition to crystallizing the view that he disrespected elder males.

Layal after Hisham

After the end of her love affair with Hisham, Layal 'cried a lot'.⁹⁵ She sought refuge in her female friends, who were facing their own struggles of balancing between their feelings of love, and societal expectations. One of them had recently 'uncoupled' from her fiancé because the more serious their relationship had become, the more 'religious and controlling' he turned out to be.

95 Interview with Layal, August 2014, Tripoli.

Religion and piety are distinct; so is sectarian identity. Their relevance to the discourse of love and sexuality was evident to me during fieldwork, and I lay out the distinction in the ultimate section of my examination of Layal's tribulations with love:

'Only women can understand other women, you know. There is such pressure on us. I was so angry with Hisham, and life, and everyone! I needed to *fish khel'i* (vent off) as soon as possible. My mother blamed me 100%! *Ma'ul?* (how can that be possible?)'⁹⁶

According to Layal, her mother's reaction to Hisham's infamous car episode was immense anger at her for 'not knowing better'. By blaming her, her mother reiterates the idea that it is a woman's responsibility to 'control' and 'restrict' her lover. In addition, her mother was angry at the cousin who had 'introduced' her to him, and went so far as to phone her and 'scream at her'. The phone call almost resulted in familial conflict between her mother's kin and her father's (the cousin was from the father's side).

Layal, in return, did little to 'speak up for herself'.⁹⁷ In her words, 'what was the point in debating with them? They'll never get it. For weeks, my mother would remind me of 'the scene I made', and how 'I was responsible for putting my family on display for others (*'khallet kol al hara tetfarraj'*)'.⁹⁸ Unlike her mother, for Layal's father, life went on as usual the next day, and today, when they remember that fateful day, he 'laughs', whereas her mother 'still feels ashamed'.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

This narrative betrays the reductive view of the myth of honour/shame in the Middle East, whereby men supposedly uphold their 'honour' as long as women do not engage in 'shameful' behaviour. This is evident in Layal's father's rather 'relaxed attitude'. Moreover, it reflects the active participation of women (Layal's mother) in the reproduction of gendered ideologies in Lebanon. Still, and rather than concluding that Layal's mother is simply not capable of supporting her daughter, we must remember that for Layal's mother, her status as a married woman is her 'only' asset, as Layal remarked earlier. By stressing her disappointment in Layal, in addition to blaming her, her mother is situating herself in relation to her husband, the main male protector in her life, through the display of a virtuous wife. This display makes full sense considering the fact that Layal does not have any brothers, and her mother will never be a mother-in-law to someone else's daughter (for a full understanding of women's cycle of power, see the chapter VII; Kandiyoti, 1988).

Layal and Issam, or the impasse of sect

Almost a year had passed since Hisham's infamous love declaration when Layal met Issam. Issam was introduced to Layal by a colleague, whom her mother 'knew well', and with whom they often had *sobḥiyyāt*.¹⁰⁰ According to Layal, she was [understandably] 'cautious', and she didn't want another '*majnoon*' (madman) in her life.¹⁰¹ According to Layal, Issam was 'OK... It definitely was not love at first sight, but he came from a 'good family', and 'if anything went wrong, I could blame my mother this time!'¹⁰² – a declaration that made us both laugh. Layal and Issam's relationship

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

could be viewed as a rather conventional love-marriage story: it is rather linear in form, and has an almost fixed script of conduct and codes (see IV.1.)

When I asked Layal to tell me the ins and outs of her relationship with Issam, she said ‘*Ya hazzi!* (What luck!) I only attract ‘weirdoes’.¹⁰³ She also suggested that we have another coffee in order for me to brace myself.

‘We were at a restaurant in Ehden. It was a Sunday. You know how restaurants are on Sundays. There were hundreds of patrons. There were families, children, and large groups of friends. He seemed to be ‘on edge’ that day. He wasn’t particularly talkative, and he constantly eyed the table next to us. There was a large group of young men, who were drinking Arak and whiskey, and were debating politics loudly. They were really loud, and those around them could clearly hear their conversation. At some point, they started to make jokes about Saad Al-Hariri (the son of Rafik Hariri and leader of the mostly Sunni politico-sectarian party *Al-Mostakbal*)’.¹⁰⁴

I could already tell where Layal’s story was heading. As it turned out, and following a few interventions from Issam to ask the ‘*shabāb*’ (youngmen) nearby to speak lower, what started as a ‘polite request’ soon turned into a massive sectarian brawl, especially since Issam was ‘100% committed’ to the legacy of Rafik Hariri, as Layal informed me:

‘He became like a car without brakes! There was nothing anyone could do! There were a dozen of them, and he was all alone. *Ya jersa!* (how shameful). He forgot I existed! What an idiot! What was he

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

thinking? That I would be impressed with his *rujula*? What class of *rujula* is this? I don't want a *m'attar* but I don't want a *jagal* either!'¹⁰⁵

Me: What did you do? Layal replied:

'I was screaming. I kept asking him to stop. I asked everyone to stop! The older men intervened and everyone was trying to restrain everyone. Glasses were being thrown, and a chair was broken... and the 'yatt (loud shouting) was deafening. I could feel myself about to faint. A couple of women pulled me aside and told me to 'relax'. Who can relax in a situation like this?'¹⁰⁶

Layal had to pause at this stage. I could tell she was becoming upset by the second. I told her that 'I got the message', and that she did not have to go into further details. Like many of my interlocutors, Layal has had enough with 'political talk'. Needless to say, and as Layal had joked earlier, she did indeed blame her mother, who consoled her for weeks by telling her that there was no '*nassib*' (fortune), and that it was her '*qadar*' (destiny) to not marry Issam.¹⁰⁷

'She said nothing about the brawl. It's like it never happened. As far as my mother is concerned, it was *iradit Allah* (God's will), which is totally true, but Issam was equally to blame'.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

Eventually, I asked her if she would consider meeting someone from outside her sect, to which she replied with a great degree of excitement: ‘No way! Why would I bring such a headache upon myself?’¹⁰⁸

Layal, love, and the Divine: the metaphysics of agency

Following Layal’s narrative about Issam, we spent the rest of our days together analyzing more music videos. Having met early on one particular Friday, before noon prayer, the café was next to empty, and we asked the manager to unmute the television so we could listen to the lyrics and add a textual dimension to our visual analysis. We were both in a ‘romanticizing mood’, and she showed me dozens of poetry verses on her WhatsApp, in addition to many memes showcasing lost love, and mocking both married life and Lebanon’s politicians. When Mahmood joined us after noon prayer, I could not help but notice a rather grateful kind of smile on Layal’s face.

Although I have organized the transcripts from my interviews with Layal thematically, our chats were too fluid to be related as they happened without confusing the reader. Having said that, and although I specifically analyze the role of the Divine in the discourse of love in Lebanon in this section, Layal often expressed her ‘Thanks to God’ for meeting Mahmood.

Throughout my fieldwork, love was repeatedly reiterated in conjunction with the Divine, the Elsewhere, or the Unknown. Each could be understood as a *thing* that acts upon the self, as a resignation-acceptance of the limits of knowing, and as a vast space that allows for ‘lines of flight’, and for escaping the harsh realities of the everyday. The

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

greatest unknown, following my fieldwork, was Destiny, or *qadar*. Destiny was the culprit in the making and dissolution of love stories. Following my interlocutors, just like destiny had 'brought them together', it was their destiny to go separate ways, as shown in the expressions '*ma kan fi nassib*', or '*ma kan maktebelna*', which translate as 'it wasn't written', or 'it wasn't meant to be'. That one's destiny has *already* been written is a direct reiteration of the Elsewhere, in addition to the embodiment of an existence where both the invisible and the visible collide and contribute to production of subjectivities.

Having said that, very few works have engaged empirically with Muslim women's articulation of destiny (Knott, 2011; Menin, 2015; Mittermaier, 2012). Affectivities, including love, are evoked because they are capable of responding to 'relations of power' that 'operate through bodies in ways that are both more direct than theories of discourse, ideology, and deliberative reason', in addition to being 'more elusive from the perspective of conventional analytic and critical strategies' (Garlick, 2016: 48). Similar conclusions can be found in the emerging 'anthropology of ethics and freedom' which emphasizes context when describing how 'human freedom' is exercised (Laidlaw, 2002), and in recent works where Destiny (Menin 2015) and 'being acted upon' (Mittermaier, 2012) are highlighted. Anthropology's 'ethical turn' draws our attention to 'the fundamental roles of human passions and transcendental powers in shaping people's [...] existential journeys' (Menin, 2015:894). The interplay between destiny, piety, and individual and collective body-reflexive practices encountered in my ethnography forces us to reflect on 'modalities of agency and (inter)subjectivity' that 'rational understanding' falls short of capturing fully (ibid). For instance, Mittermaier (2012)

distinguishes between deliberate actions and 'being acted upon' in order to highlight the relevance of the Unknown (read Divine) in a Muslim setting. In her own words:

'[Saba Mahmood's] concept of self-cultivation takes us 'beyond the confines of the binary model of enacting and subverting norms', but it says little about other modes of religiosity that centre neither on acting against nor on acting within but on being acted upon' (Mittermaier, 2012:252).

To understand love in the context of Lebanon is to surrender to ambivalence. However, this surrendering is not akin to a 'lost game'. On the contrary, it is telling of the spaces of knowledges that are yet to be. As a discourse, love is inevitably taught, as we saw in the prior chapter. Still, the politics of love do not necessarily strip it from its 'out-of-body' meaning. I argued earlier that I view subjects and selves as 'becoming', and as always reinventing themselves and adapting. In practice, this view resonates with Deleuze, to whom 'philosophy should not seek to fill the world with secure truths and norms' (William, 2013: 31). Instead, and since philosophy is an inherently ontological endeavour, it allows itself to 'experiment' with the 'impersonal', and with the 'pre-individual', and will always 'work with an obscure edge that it can only experiment with, rather than grasp' (ibid).

By situating love in the realm of the impersonal, and the pre-individual, I am emphasizing its potential as affect. In this sense, love operates on the deterritorializing axis that moves it away from the Social to the point of stripping it of any material meaning. Returning to Deleuze, and through a careful re-reading of Spinoza, he re-assigns each of the expressions of *affectio*, *affectus*, and affect to their intended place, by

remedying the mistakes committed by Spinoza's original translator, Charles Appuhn. *Affectio*, is 'the state of a body as it affects or is affected by another body', *affectus* refers to 'the body's continuous, intensive variation [...] in its capacity for acting', and affect, a 'pure immanence at its most concrete abstraction from all becomings and states of things. The autonomy of affect as outside any distinction of interiority or exteriority: 'soul' or 'a life' (in Seigworth, 2011: 184).

Despite the distinctions between each of these expressions, they all converge in their propensity towards 'becoming'. Where love is concerned, it is safe to argue that it operates as an affect, as described by Deleuze. As an affect that has potential to induce action, to various intensities, love reinforces the 'virtual', not the 'actual': Deleuze draws on the work of Michel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, in order to establish the virtual as 'real without being actual, ideal without being abstract' (in Seigworth, 2011: 185). The virtual, according to Deleuze, is 'the becoming actual of a potential' (Houle and Vernon, 2013: 76), and it is its 'actualization', or its passage from the 'virtual' to the 'actual', which brings forth both intuition and memory. By positing the virtual over the actual, we recognize in Deleuze a 'sensitivity that is in many respects more closely aligned with the romantic ideal of infinite potentiality' (ibid).

I must admit that a rather 'good' feeling permeates me whenever I read Deleuze: by ascribing potential and intensity to forces unseen, he almost restores hope when 'all hope is gone'. However, and although the feeling of love, as described by my interlocutors, does indeed resonate with the 'impersonal', and the 'pre-individual', in addition to invoking the Divine as an unseen force that acts upon them, I must be careful in my analysis to not get too carried away by entirely removing it from the Social. Whereas the

abstract and impersonal component of love contributes to its deterritorializing, and to reinforcing its myth of freedom and universality, the Social inevitably 'puts it back in its place'.

In the context of this thesis, the Social is the arena that informs the discourse of love. Religion, sect, class, and nationality are the essential categories that limit the potentials-intensities of love. At the same time, the Divine, as an undetermined force, contributes to its intensification. The distinction between religion and the Divine is clear in my interlocutors' views on 'destiny': destiny leads them to 'falling in love' in as much as it prevents them from pursuing their love interests. Moreover, destiny is 'blamed' whenever they make 'bad choices'. Their reliance on the Divine, in this case, allows them to find solace when faced with society's accusations of immaturity and irresponsibility.

[Interval.

It is a difficult and not envious position when the researcher finds little identification with her interlocutors. I do not mean to turn my thesis into an exclusively philosophical discussion, but the question of destiny compels me to reflect on my own positionality. I do not believe in destiny. I am not likely to believe in it soon. However, it is the quintessential expression that my interlocutors used whenever they measured the long-term success of their love interests. Still, the Divine shares many of Deleuze's notion of the 'virtual'. It is the space where potentials intensify before their actualization. Moreover, the uncertainty of the Divine itself brings forth the 'incomplete' work of the philosopher, who will always 'work with an obscure edge that it can only experiment with, rather than grasp' (William, 2013: 31).

End of Interval.]

Ghizlan and Layal: two faces of the same coin

In her compelling ethnography about Ghizlan, a professional woman in her thirties from the 'middle-class neighbourhood' of Al-Azaliyya, Menin (2015) successfully shows how Ghizlan reveals 'a perspective on agency and (inter)subjectivity that exceeds intentionality, desire, and rational understanding'. I came across the text of Menin (2015) rather late, while updating my literature review. While reading her work, I couldn't help but imagine her with Ghizlan, sat at a café somewhere, watching the crowd go by, while they talk about love, marriage, the future, and a precarious life. Menin (2015) is the sole author I have come up with who has engaged head-on with love – not with marriage, the 'question of woman', or woman's sexuality – love, pure and simple. The result is an eloquent and accurate conceptualization of Ghizlane's agency, which echoes Layal's.

Menin (2015) hopes that her work will contribute to the emerging literature on the 'anthropology of ethics and freedom'. This emerging literature has been summed up as the 'ethical turn'. A 'turn' in the literature is not the result of purely abstract thinking. Most often, our endeavour to produce knowledge is limited by the paradigm in which we operate. When the paradigm is no longer capable of supporting our work, we look for answers elsewhere. The affective turn, for instance, did not result from a vacuum. It was the offspring of a modernity conceived on the myth of the good life. This myth drives the capitalist system in which we wrestle, and the more we fight it, the more distant the happiness we were originally promised becomes (Berlant, 2011a). Despite the promises of the 'affective turn', as an approach that is capable of containing knowledges that are yet to be, seeing its attention to potentiality and intensity, Hemmings (2005) rightfully reminds us of the importance of not stripping our work from a Social purpose.

An affect, in theory, is an all-encompassing vehicle for social change, but its 'impersonality' has direct consequences on the lived reality and, sooner or later, we realize that the 'impersonal' has its limits.

Similarly, the 'ethical turn' allows us to capture contradictory and seemingly incomprehensible practices for the western rational man, in the Kantian sense. When Mahmood (2005) conceives obedience as agency, she is more likely to raise eyebrows. Similarly, when Menin (2015) conceives agency as something that 'exceeds intentionality, desire, and rational understanding', many are likely to dismiss her views. At the same time, both authors are celebrated for including previously ignored subjectivities and selves. I cannot help but agree with Menin's views on agency, because it fits my overall view of the world as always 'becoming'. Furthermore, my work is concerned with love, a highly ambivalent and notorious theme to work with. Following my fieldwork, and although I do ascribe to love a nature of 'becoming', in addition to a 'pre-individual' an 'impersonal' element, I situate this affect in the Social by arguing that the construction of love as an abstract, passionate, and aimless affect is necessary for the production of love-marriage as an alliance built on love and respect, in addition to signalling mature and responsible selves. The tensions between love and love-marriage are recurrent throughout my thesis, which remains careful to set its conceptualization of love along simultaneously territorializing and deterritorializing forces.

Having said that, and although my understanding of agency along metaphysical lines allows me to refrain from speaking on behalf of my interlocutors, and to offer an alternative view of the world, one which does not conflate being enlightened with being

rational and knowing, I find it important to say something about the limits of the 'ethical turn'.

Kamboureli (2007) confirms my own views that the 'ethical turn' legitimates the other, and prevents us from succumbing to a 'dominant order':

'The desire to produce criticism that is politically relevant, registers, in part, the political unconscious already embedded in critical acts that are responsive to the disciplinary logic informing many sectors of the academy' (Kamboureli, 2007: 940).

However, Kamboureli (2007) cautions us against the limits of the 'ethical turn'. For all our good intentions, the ethical turn is 'a symptom of a [Western] culture aware of the stains on the ideological and material forces that constitute it, anxious to show that the *bildung* of its members, no matter its flaws, can unfold and progress in ways that can rehabilitate it (Kamboureli, 2007: 942). In other words, the ethical turn could, inadvertently, reiterate the dominant order by placing its new-found subjectivities in relation to it, therefore reducing itself to a 'spectacle of a morality play' (Guillory, in Kamboureli, 2007). Kamboureli's cautions aside, I stand by metaphysical conception of agency. At the same time, I am attentive to the limits of such a configuration. As we will see in the chapter on space, agency can never be fully framed since pleasure becomes an essential part of determining one's agency, and contributing to the emerging of selves.

Having said that, and whereas Layal's overall profile echoed those of most of my female interlocutors, and reflected the views on love of a lower-middle/middle class, Om Zahra's understanding of love are akin to a subaltern view, which is characterized by a

highly pragmatic self, and where sexuality is directly discussed, without the 'shame' and 'embarrassment' that usually accompanies it in the more 'enlightened' circles (pun intended).

V. 2. Om Zahra, or a subaltern view of love and sex

I met Om Zahra on the day I went to visit a tailor woman in order to have some adjustments made to my favourite pair of jeans. It was in Tripoli, on a Friday, when the majority of businesses had closed for the remainder of the day following noon prayer. The sewing atelier was on the fifth floor of an old building located at the northern entry of the neighbourhood of Al-Tall.

When I arrived, it was too late, and the business had already closed for the day. I was exhausted from climbing the stairs, and the summer heat did not help. The building was in a desolate state. There was a strong smell of urine, and I wondered when the last time the interior of the building had been cleaned. The lift was out of order, and the staircase was almost entirely covered with litter. Exposed and semi-exposed electric cables emerged from the electricity box located on each floor. I wondered how they had not caught fire yet.

It was there and then that I met Om Zahra. I could hear her breathing getting louder as she climbed up the stairs. Thankfully it was daylight, and despite the absence of the power current, I could see the details of my surroundings.

Om Zahra looked well-built and strong. She was carrying two large piles, one on each

side. I was not in my 'research mode' when I met her, seeing that my primary focus was the rescuing of my favourite pair of jeans. As I am writing these words, I perfectly recall our *impromptu* meeting, some of the exact expressions she used, and the brief exchange we had on our way to her flat, and later in her flat.

'Come here and give me a hand. I live on the rooftop. Come and help *khaltek*' (your auntie).¹⁰⁹

I did not think twice. Om Zahra exuded such confidence and '*azeema* (verve) to the point I felt intimidated by her. I took one of the two piles and proceeded to following her. Despite her heavy breathing, she spoke without a break. At some point, I had to explain to her that I smoke and was finding it hard to speak.

'So what if you smoke? Everybody smokes. I will make us some coffee and I will take some cigarettes from you.'¹¹⁰

And so it was that on an unlikely day, I ended up sipping coffee with Om Zahra on the rooftop of an old building near the Al-Tall neighbourhood. The piles we carried to her flat consisted of some five kilograms of vine leaves, in addition to five kilograms of minced beef and Egyptian round rice. Om Zahra was going to stuff the vine leaves with a mixture of minced beef and rice. It is a lengthy task, which would require many hours of work. Many middle-class women in Lebanon rely on women like Om Zahra, who make a living by completing manual and lengthy tasks related to food preparation, such as stuffing leaves and vegetables, shaping *kebbeh*, or pulling the leaves out from fresh

109 Interview with Om Zahra, August 2014, Tripoli.

110 Ibid.

Molukhiya stems.

‘You know the S. family? They live in the Dam-w-al-farz area. Their son just returned from *ameyrkah* (America, or the US) and they are celebrating with *aklet war*’ (stuffed vine leaves). *Ya latif ma abkhala* Madame S. (Madame S. is so stingy) *wley mella* Madame (what a ‘Madame’!)’¹¹¹

Both Om Zahra and I laughed loudly. There she was, making fun of the quintessential face of Tripoli’s ‘bourgeoisie’. I follow Zahra’s logic and use the expression bourgeoisie in its vulgar sense, in this particular context, in the same way that French dramatist Molière (1985 [1670]) mocked and ridiculed the French industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie’s obsession with social climbing and its mimicry of the aristocracy in 17th Century France, in his play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. Madame is the expression commonly used to address married women in Lebanon. It is also used when addressing mature-looking women. In fact, many non-married women, including those in their late-thirties, would correct someone who addresses them as ‘Madame’, by referring to themselves as ‘Demoiselle’ (or Miss, in English) in order to publically assert their single status. Past that age, they usually accept it as a sign of respect, and may I add, a kind of resignation, seeing that they are well beyond the years that society considers suitable for marriage. The use of the expressions *Madame* and *Demoiselle* are reflective of the legacy of the French heritage in Lebanon, and how the colonial French project of modernization infiltrated local idioms and strongly established itself in the imaginary of the emerging urban bourgeoisie. Moreover, both expressions have a social function in that a woman

111 Ibid.

can immediately situate herself in relation to the men found at her proximity, particularly if she is single still.

What's love got to do with it?

Om Zahra (OZ) was very outspoken. She was in her late sixties, and exhibited all the signs of a strong and confident woman who was knowledgeable about the 'ins and outs' of life. She showed no hesitation whatsoever in ridiculing the women on whom she relies to make a living, and it was not long before she started 'cursing' the ruling class. When I explained to her what my research consisted of, she told me that 'I was thinking things too much'.

'Om Zahra (OZ): 'People get married. *Khalas* (end of discussion).

There's nothing more to it'.

Me: 'But this is exactly what I am trying to find out. Surely not everyone marries for the same reasons, and people fall in love for many different reasons.'

OZ: Listen *ya benti* (my daughter), you youngsters think too much. You are too selfish, and this TV is seriously wreaking havoc with your brains. There aren't twenty reasons why people marry. They just do.

Me: Well, I'm trying to understand intimacy [*elfeh*], more than marriage per se.

OZ: What??? What are these new words you keep bringing up?
Stop watching TV!¹¹²

When I tried to explain to Om Zahra what I meant by *elfeh*, or intimacy, she said:

112 Ibid.

'OZ: *Bala efleh, bala battikh* (No efleh [sic], no watermelon). When I was your age, women simply got married. Sometimes to tease their girlfriends.

Me: You mean to tell me that you got married just to tease your girlfriends?

OZ: Of course! A suitor approached my parents. He had a good job. You should have seen my friends' faces. Everyone was envious. I was the first to marry in my village because I was the prettiest.

Me: How old were you?

OZ: I married my first husband when I was fifteen.

Me: Wow, that is early compared to nowadays.

OZ: Maybe early for you. Everyone got married by fifteen. And no one died.

Me: What happened to your first husband?

OZ: He divorced me.

Me: Oh, why is that? Is it OK if we speak about it?

OZ (laughing): Don't pull this face! *Khayfeh 'layyeh?* (you're worried about me?)

Me: Well, euh... I don't want you to think that I am interfering in your life...

OZ (still laughing): Don't worry about *masha'ri* (my feelings). He divorced me because I asked him to. I told the Sheikh that he couldn't satisfy me.¹¹³

Oh, my! That was not what I expected. After six years of communal life, Om Zahra, then aged twenty-two, repeatedly confronted her husband about his incapacity to satisfy her sexually. If I understood Om Zahra well, her husband suffered from some sort of erectile dysfunction. I could not tell whether it was physical or psychological, and from what I

113 Ibid.

could fathom, she did not seem to care. After all, Om Zahra saw marriage as a 'fact of life': a step in the life of men and women, sooner or later. I then asked Om Zahra to tell me more about her first husband, and how she the divorce unfolded:

'Well, it was only after my sister and my cousin got married that I started talking about *sekaas* (sex) with them. Ha! That's what you call it, *sekaas*, right? My cousin told me how her husband was satisfying her although it hurts sometimes.'¹¹⁴

Om Zahra, intrigued by her cousin, started asking the female elders in her family (not those from her husband's side) about sex. She recalled how she overheard a woman tell her mother, or her aunt, she wasn't sure, about the importance of satisfying one's wife according to the Islamic tradition. Om Zahra then explained how religion made her feel confident enough to challenge her husband.

'Min abl, ma kain eli 'ein (Until that point, I was too ashamed of confronting him), but when I found out that it was my right as a wife, I started telling other women in my family.'¹¹⁵

It is interesting how Om Zahra sought the cover of religion in order to discuss her husband's sexual shortcomings. In addition, religion allowed her to overcome her shyness, and to finally confront her in-laws. Om Zahra laments the fact that younger women today are reluctant to follow her example, and that women and men find it acceptable to 'remain in a childless marriage':

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.

'I wasn't the only one. We all spoke about *mujama't* (the terminology used by Om Zahra to refer to sex in Arabic). Sex is important for pregnancy. It is good for the husband and the wife. All we had to do was speak to the *sheikh* if you were a man, or speak to the elderly women if you were a woman. There was nothing *'ayb* (shameful) nor *bikhajjel* (embarrassing) about it.'¹¹⁶

Indeed, the Islamic tradition places a high importance on sexual pleasure, and both husbands and wives are encouraged to please one another. Whereas although the new generation, as I gathered from fieldwork, is very aware of this tradition, they view it through a romantic lens, in that it strengthens marriage, and helps them shift the focus from becoming parents to becoming life partners. Most of my interlocutors were yet to marry, but their views highly reiterated the findings of Inhorn (2014), who has examined the private lives of men and women who find themselves in a childless marriage. Inhorn (2009; 2012) successfully shows the impact of changing moral commitments in Lebanon over the course of man's life. She shows how married infertile men negotiate Lebanon's emphasis on parental lineage by drawing thin lines between their religiosity, their own masculinity, and social expectations. In Inhorn's study, like in my work, the focus shifts from becoming parents to becoming life partners. Equally important in Om Zahra's narrative is the 'ease' in which 'sex talk' was addressed within the confines of one's family, which is no longer the case, as we see in chapter VIII. Even where her daughters or granddaughters are concerned, Om Zahra laments the commodification of marriage, and the discourse of love as the basis of marriage:

'Everything teaches you how to practice *gharam* (romance) these days. Where are the days when we accepted our men? Today, the wedding is more important than the marriage itself! *La Ilah ill'Allah*

116 Ibid.

(There is no deity but God, an expression often articulated when no solution is in sight). And what can you do? I try to talk my daughters out of these *kharafat* (absurdities), they tell you 'their cousin did this', and 'their friend did that'. They believe everything they hear and everything they see on television. We didn't even have a radio! And we were proud of our husbands!¹¹⁷

The *kharafat* (absurdities) that Om Zahara is referring to are television series, movies, and songs. When I asked her if she followed the adventures of Mohannad and Samar, she jumped at me, almost screaming:

'*A'ouz' bil allah!* (I seek refuge in Allah). Ten years ago, I thought television couldn't get any worse! But nowadays, it is '*al mshabrah* (everything is on display!). What a shame! All morals are gone. We used to spend hours narrating love tales. That's how we used to control our men. Love had a purpose back in our time: marriage. Nowadays, it's all about showing off'.¹¹⁸

Following Om Zahra, the registers of love she had access to, namely love tales, had a function. Although they were consumed, the end was to propagate a discourse: marriage is important, despite its 'hiccups', and its success relies on the endeavours of the woman. Unlike Layal, who consumes such registers because she identifies with the heroine and with the tribulations of the couple in question, for Om Zahra, the abundant display of sentimentality reflects a 'weak woman', who will not be able to defend her household from the excesses of her husband. In many ways, Om Zahra's embodiment of sentimentality echoes that encountered by Abu-Lughod (1987) among the Awlad 'Ali

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

Bedouin tribe, to whom an excessive display of emotions signifies weakness, in addition to breaching their 'honour code'. At the same time, members of the *Awlad 'Ali* tribe relied on *ghinnawas*, a type of short rhyming song, in order to 'vent off', and share their emotions with close others.

I tried to convince Om Zahra that for many young women, television is not representative of their lived reality, but to no avail. For Om Zahra, morality was not limited to sexuality. She told me that she had been working since she was sixteen years old, and unlike today's youth, who 'moan a lot', her generation used to 'respect their men, and hold them in esteem'.¹¹⁹

For Om Zahra, marriage was simply a fact of life. Love, in the way that Layal articulates it, is a rather distant and alien practice. Om Zahra did not care about intimacy at all. She even mispronounced it as *efleh*. Instead, marriage, for Om Zahra, operated along the lines of mutual respect. When I asked Om Zahra about her second husband, she said '*Allah yerhamo w ysamho*' (may his soul rest in peace, and may Allah forgive him).¹²⁰ I don't know whether Om Zahra simply repeated this otherwise widely-used expression, or if she actually meant to say, 'may Allah forgive him', which indirectly demonstrates flaws in her second husband that impacted negatively on her life. According to Om Zahra, she married her second husband less than two years after divorcing her first one: 'Whatever Allah wished. It wasn't meant to be with the first one'.¹²¹ When I enquired how she felt after her divorce, she asked what I meant by my question. It turned out, that she simply

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

was 'relieved', and was looking forward to 'being married off again'.¹²²

Although Om Zahra's marriages were arranged, in the sense that she was being 'married off', she insists that she was not forced into marriage:

'Forced marriages are wrong. What's the point of them? I'm not saying that one must be head over heels for the other, but forcing someone into marrying is simply wrong'.¹²³

Although Om Zahra eventually remarried and had eight children in total, disclosing her husband's impotency constituted a veritable dilemma to her:

'He was very good to me. He was handsome too. He never did anything bad to me. He never abused me verbally, and he never beat me. I felt I was 'betraying' him when I decided that I no longer wanted to stay married to him. But when there is no '*nassib*' (no luck, i.e. it wasn't meant to be), then there simply is no '*nassib*'.¹²⁴

By stating that her first husband had never abused her, nor beaten her, Om Zahra unveils him as an 'exception to the rule'. In a deductive exercise, we learn that Om Zahra, like many women from her time, saw abusive treatment as something quite 'normal'. On another note, and although Om Zahra never used the word love when speaking of either of her husbands, she clearly was conscious of it in pursuing a divorce with the least damaging outcome. In fact, Om Zahra told me that it was only after her mother-in-law started pressuring her into having a child that she finally confronted her, and other

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid.

women from her husband's side, about the dysfunctions of their sexual life. Her mother, whom she had told earlier, repeatedly asked her to 'be patient with her husband'.¹²⁵ When Om Zahra finally asked him for a divorce, he refused at first, and 'everyone kept recommending magicians, potions, and special recipes'.¹²⁶ Eventually, her husband agreed to divorce her, as long as he initiated the divorce.

'Me: Was it because you didn't get pregnant or because of the sex?

OZ: *Ya'neh* (you know), they're both the same thing.

Me: If you got pregnant but still weren't satisfied, would you have stayed with him?

OZ: *Ma ba'ref* (I don't know). All I know is you can't have one without the other.'¹²⁷

Om Zahra's comments are very interesting. She does not distinguish between sexual pleasure and pregnancy. Perhaps they are not that interesting once we consider how she views marriage itself: a simple fact of life. Om Zahra is not stating that sexual satisfaction guarantees pregnancy, or that pregnancy is a result of sexual satisfaction.

By failing to make her pregnant, she sees her husband *and* herself as lacking. She made no attempts to 'stay with him'. It is not that Om Zahra is some sort of monster who cannot appreciate a man's physical condition. Neither is she stating that love and sex are mutual.

Om Zahra belongs to a generation strongly manifested by the cycle of power within the household. Kandiyoti (1988) explains the different stages of this cycle. A woman's

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

‘place’ in the household is ranked higher once she becomes a mother-in-law, to the extent that ‘the cyclical nature of women’s power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourages a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves’ (Kandiyoti, 1988:279). Since the condition of Om Zahra’s husband prevented her from having children, she was unlikely to achieve the ‘anticipated’ position of a mother-in-law.

Conversely, the example of Om Zahra refutes totalitarian misconceptions of a patriarchy operating as an absolute, where men continuously oppress women. If anything, her example shows how both men and women reproduce specific practices of gender inequality, in addition to gender-specific modes of inequality. By viewing her husband as lacking, she too runs the risk of a life that is lacking, once she is older.

As I stated earlier, my meeting with Om Zahra was not planned. She does not fulfil the criteria of my interlocutors: mostly lower to upper-middle-class, urban young men and women aged between 20 and 35 years. However, I find myself compelled to include my exchange with her in my research because it is very telling of the generational shifts related to courting, marriage, and love currently seen in Lebanon.

I cannot help but view Om Zahra’s outlook on love as a subaltern one, in the sense that it occurs in the margins of society. Love as an ideal is a mostly bourgeois construct where feelings are commodified, and where Others are excluded. Seen through a subaltern lens, marriage becomes a necessity that can contribute to their survival. Such findings have previously been expressed by Hoodfar (1997) who includes the following statement by one of her female interlocutors:

‘Marriage negotiation is just like a plan for a building. You have to realistically assess your resources and think of every little detail that is important for your comfort and the safety of the flat. If parents conduct a good and smart marriage negotiation for their children, it is most unlikely that the marriage would end in disaster.’ (Hoodfar, 1997: 66).

By critiquing modern love, Om Zahra is showing concern for her daughters, although she does not articulate it *per se*. What does it mean for her daughters to imagine love along the lines of romance when they daily face precarity? In the movies, the rich heir falls in love with the kitchen maid. For Om Zahra, marriage is a survival strategy, and a refuge from spinsterhood, divorce, widowhood, or possible barrenness (at least for women). Her categorical refusal to engage with modern registers of love is her way of preserving her beliefs, and her long-term survival.

In addition to prioritizing materiality over sentimentality, a subaltern view of love removes it from its bourgeois-embellished setting and relinquishes it to the realms of parenthood, and the household’s cycle of power. This belief allows Om Zahra, and other women from the same class and age as her, to speak about ‘*sekaas*’ (sex) rather openly, unlike Layal and the majority of my interlocutors, who often feel isolated and unaided when encountering a situation of ‘sex’, as I show in chapter VIII. The gradual modernization of love, or the process of conferring love to marriage as a signifier for modernity, is symptomatic of further global processes that impact local practices, including the discourses of each of love, marriage, and sexuality.

Chapter VI. The Cultural Production of Affect

Drawing on a feminist reading of hope and nation-building, I argue in this chapter that current articulations of masculine ideals are akin to the concept of ‘make-believe’ as posited by Navaro (2012): They produce marriage as an illusionary space of equality between husband and wife since the shift towards ‘becoming partners’ still very much reproduces pre-existing masculine societal privileges, albeit in an increasingly precarious economy, and anti-Syrian context. I develop my argument by showing the links between a precarious economy, and an affective rhetoric, notably by drawing on my female interlocutors’ conceptions of the ‘ideal partner’. As we will see, the ideal partner is constructed in conjunction with the ‘other’. The other, in this case, is understood within the framework of a lacking or pitiful masculinity, and in opposition to foreign men, notably Syrian and Palestinian refugees. Furthermore, and under an increasingly virulent neoliberal economy, the elevation of the Lebanese man ‘above all other men’ emerges from the broader realization that traditional gendered household responsibilities – husbands as ‘breadwinners’ and wives as ‘good wives/mothers’ – have become unattainable.

This chapter reiterates the importance of viewing feelings in conjunction with the wider socio-political landscape from which they emerge. This is an important aspect of my thesis, where love emerges as a construct that echoes religious, nationalist, classed, and sexed ideologies. In addition, I recommend that we view this chapter as a transitional discussion where I crystallize my conceptualization of love as an assemblage of both abstract and material praxes.

Since I have drawn on my female interlocutors' conceptualizations of the 'ideal partner', I turn now to the literature on Middle Eastern masculinities throughout the chapter, and examine two specific affects, namely hope and pity.¹²⁸ Gender, nationality, and class are some of the power structures that we can detect in each. As was the case in the previous chapter, we see, again, the blurred boundaries between the phantasmatic and the material dimensions of love. Whereas chapter IV explicated the intersection of love with the social category of sect, this chapter explicates the intersection of love (read affect) with the social categories of class, and nationality.

VI. 1. Hope, class, and the nation

The intersection of relationality with a patriarchal order results in an affective paradox in Lebanon: love becomes entangled with power. Joseph (1999) has previously examined this paradox whilst examining brother/sister relationships to show the affective interplays between patriarchally-informed connections to others and the self. In a later work, Joseph (2000) shows the enmeshment of kin relations with the apparatus of the state through what she terms a 'care/control paradigm', whereby men care (love) *and* control (power) women. In this chapter, the excesses of the appropriation of the slogan of 'Lebanon is for the Lebanese' by its ruling elite are best captured in my female interlocutors' understandings of ideal Lebanese masculinity. Desire contributes to the gendering of each of the nation-state, love, marriage, and the nuclear family. Desire is reflective of how a nation imagines itself through the desiring of certain bodies over

128 In this thesis, I use the expressions feelings, emotions, and affects interchangeably.

other bodies. This is evident in the way in which my interlocutors celebrate love and articulate it whilst injecting it with a highly nationalistic lexicon. This leads me to frame desire within the concept of ‘make-believe’. Navaro (2012: 5) maintains the unison of the ‘phantasmatic’ with the ‘material’:

‘The concept of the make-believe ... challenges the opposition between ... the social constructionist [approach] and the new materialist [one]—conceptualizing the phantasmatic and the tangible in unison by privileging neither one nor the other.’

The data related in this chapter pertain mainly to my female interlocutors. Based on my fieldwork, we can discern a shift in the discourse of marriage in Lebanon from ‘becoming parents’ to ‘becoming partners’. Whereas this partnership is not to be confused with gender equality, it surely challenges traditional affectivities associated with the household. More emphasis is placed on ‘partnership’ and ‘empathy’ than on fulfilling one’s marital duties, namely husbands as ‘breadwinners’ and wives as ‘good wives/mothers’. Whereas traditional expectations associated with marriage are still very much present, equally important is making decisions jointly, and being supportive of each other. Such narratives offer us the opportunity to explore Lebanese masculinity beyond the control/care paradigm that has—for too long—limited our view to that of breadwinner *and* household authority. At the same time, my fieldwork informed me that the ideal husband is constructed along strongly nationalistic lines defined in opposition to a/the Syrian Other. Such findings are troubling, seeing the long history of kin alliances and transnational links between Lebanese and Syrians citizens.

Lebanese masculinity as an ideal masculinity encompasses both immaterial and tangible

concepts. How an affect emerges has to do with material underpinnings that shape it in the first place. Every day, we are faced with objects and places that are engulfed with particular affects, which allow them to produce specific feelings in us. Following my interlocutors, marriage is seen as a space of mutual care and synchronicity. This ‘make-believe’, I argue, and far from emerging from a renewed consciousness, is the result of an increasingly neoliberal climate where a better future is imagined along masculine lines, a hopeful type of a hopeless hope, or ‘stupid optimism’ to borrow from Berlant (2011a).

Hope is often linked to concepts of futurity. This is not necessarily the case. The postcolonial condition of Lebanon is reflected in the co-concurrency of protests with demands, and in the dialectical and often contentious relationships between the present, the past, and the future (see Lebanese-ness earlier). Zournazi introduces her edited anthology on hope by stating that ‘hope can be what sustains life in the face of despair.’ Like most critical affect scholars, she maintains the link between hope and the lived reality. Following Zournazi (2002: 14-15), hope cannot be disassociated from happiness or optimism; at the same time, she argues that the visions of happiness one might experience are but an ‘imagined reality’ that works towards attenuating one’s sense of ‘instability’—an argument that echoes the concept of ‘ontological security.’

To speak of hope as a universal concept is to strip it from its economical and material meanings, in addition to eliminating the ‘social’ entirely from it. It is akin to viewing the world through a gender-neutral lens, or from a colour-blind one, or to ignore the intersection of gender or race in the production of uneven bodies. Speaking of hope, Duggan and Muñoz (2009: 276) states: ‘When I think about *hope*, I set it alongside

happiness and *optimism*, which I immediately associate with race and class privilege, with imperial hubris, with gender and sexual conventions, with mal-distributed forms of security both national and personal. They can operate as the affective reward for conformity, the privatized emotional bonus for the right kind of investments in the family, private property and the state.'

Seen through a feminist lens, hope itself becomes increasingly difficult to summon—a state of affairs cultural theorists refer to as a 'crisis of hope'. Kompridis (2006:247) goes as far as to argue that whatever 'change' we experience; it is but 'a symptom of our powerlessness rather than ... the product of our own agency.' In brief, hope is a highly grounded affect that must not be seen as free-floating. As we will see, it is an anticipated 'make-believe' where the future unfolds along gendered lines, and where particular masculinities forge a hegemonic space for themselves at the expense of potential futurities and further masculinities and femininities.

My discussion so far is best illustrated in the 'breadwinner' puzzle that emerged from the fieldwork. Following my fieldwork, most of my female interlocutors put more emphasis on 'attitude' than on one's level of providing financially, when I asked them to elaborate on their views on the 'ideal partner'. I mostly expected them to emphasize the breadwinner as *the* ultimate criterion. My female interlocutors did not, neither primarily nor exclusively, propose the idea of the man as the 'breadwinner'. Their views can be partly explained by the fact that women are increasingly more able to access the workforce, and are therefore capable of securing some level of income. Instead, many women insisted on the importance of a man that is not 'lacking', in the pitiful sense.

Recent quantitative works about employment in Lebanon (e.g., Blau and Kahn, 2000; Sidani et al 2000; Jamali et al, 2005; Sugita, 2010; Hejase and Dah, 2014; Hejase et al, 2015) concur that women are remunerated considerably less than men. Moreover, whereas women occupy jobs that are clearly delineated geographically and time-wise, for those men who do not work in the public sector, or whose close relatives do not own a business, securing an income follows highly irregular patterns. Shehadeh (1999: 67-68) remarks that work constitutes a 'means of financial support' for women in Lebanon, rather than 'an avenue for self-expression and stimulation', and is discarded once economic stability is achieved, either through marriage or inheritance. Consider the case of Farah, for instance. For Farah, work is simply a temporary occupation. She shows no sign of progressing career-wise, and would rather text her fiancé all day on WhatsApp than work on the interminable case files piling up on her desk: a decades-old and heavily chipped piece of furniture occupying a dimly-lit corner in a bleak-looking office within an unassuming building in the Burj Hammūd neighbourhood.

When I asked Farah what work meant to her she said:

'Pfff [venting]. I couldn't care less about my work! So what? Life does not depend on my work! It's not like I am solving the crisis of the Middle East!'¹²⁹

Farah's views on her career echo the work of Shehadeh (1999). However, Farah expressed her view that although men are expected to be the primary breadwinner, it surely was not their responsibility alone:

129 Interview with Farah, May 2014, Burj Hammūd.

‘I want to contribute to the household. The salary is important. But it doesn’t mean that I want to become a manager of the sort. Who can afford not to work nowadays? All I have to do is retrieve whatever folder my boss is looking for. I don’t want to get involved a tiny bit more, and I couldn’t care less’.¹³⁰

Whereas Farah showed little enthusiasm towards her career, Layal exhibited a highly positive attitude vis-à-vis work, as we saw in the previous chapter. For Layal, as was the case for many of my interlocutors both male and female, the traditional view that holds that adulthood emerges alongside marriage is increasingly seen as ‘ludicrous’. This novel rapprochement between wife and husband deviates from widespread depictions of the Arab woman as zealously confined to her household. At the same time, we should avoid understanding it outside of its context, or viewing it from a ‘celebratory’ stance exclusively. After all, most of my interlocutors had at least one relative living and working abroad, and all lamented the distance between them and their loved ones. Moreover, many of my female interlocutors could not help but reflect on the financial difficulties in which their male relatives, including their fathers, but most importantly their brothers, often found themselves.

As Jana remarked:

‘The other day we [her brother and herself] saw a Filipina [referring to a migrant female domestic worker from the Philippines] walking a dog. My brother envied the dog so much. My brother hasn’t had a

130 Ibid.

job for two years now. The jobs he comes across are too demeaning, and he is undoubtedly better off without them.’¹³¹

There are two points in Jana’s narrative that merit scrutiny. First, work is a highly gendered arena in Lebanon. It is gendered in the sense that work and societal understandings of masculinity are mutually constitutive of one another: *a man does not exist outside of his work*; and the nature of one’s work—regardless of his level of expertise—directly contributes to him being placed in the echelon of a particular masculinity. Disdain for manual labour characterizes the view of the majority of the young Lebanese men I spoke to, most aspired to occupy jobs with the title of *mudīr*, or manager.

For many Lebanese men, the title of *mudīr* distinguishes them from lesser masculinities that verge on the definition of the *m‘ attar*, which I develop hereafter. Still, this title is a mere performance: it does not necessarily imply sitting ‘behind a desk’ or working a nine-to-five job. If anything, the *mudīr*, despite the title, often finds himself doing all sort of manual work, in addition to general administrative tasks: from organizing shelves as a supermarket manager, or attending customers as a café manager, to minding the petrol transfer pumps as a petrol station manager. At the same time, Jana’s own admission that her brother ‘is better off’ without a job as opposed to a ‘demeaning’ one is telling of how both men and women contribute to the consolidation of systems of masculinities and femininities. The *mudīr*, then, is an embodied state of a hegemonic masculinity whereby ‘one does not receive orders’. Whereas giving direct orders is very much frowned upon,

131 Interview with Jana, August 2014, Beirut.

in addition to stirring controversies, productivity and teamwork are less likely to materialize within a purely hierarchical setting. Instead, loyalty and embellished chatter are most likely going to 'get the work done'. Most of my male interlocutors remarked how a boss that is '*ādami*' is important to them. Many pointed out that they would not think twice about leaving their job if their boss did not treat them 'respectfully', even at the cost of remaining jobless. As we learn from the discourse of the *mudīr*, or manager, for most Lebanese men, the title of *mudīr* has come to encompass quick success and social recognition, both of which have come to symbolize the essence of Lebanon's neo-liberal economy, and both can be traced back to the 'political economy of militia control' (Traboulsi, 2007) that characterized the civil war, and whose impact can still be felt on today's economy.

After the *Taïf* accords in 1989, Beirut came under the control of the monopoly of Rafik Hariri's reconstruction project, *Solidère*. His monopoly was accompanied by serious ethical dilemmas. Not only were a vast number of properties acquired for minute prices, in many cases, occupants were forced to vacate these properties involuntarily. With the support of ex-militias and indirect agreements with militia leaders, most of whom had representatives in the parliament following the *Taïf* accords, *Solidère* could de facto advance unchallenged. At the same time, an aggressive marketing campaign depicting a bright future for Lebanon, and highlighting Rafik Hariri's business savvy and international contacts, led many to turn a blind eye from such occurrences, and to invest in *Solidère's* shares. Whereas *Solidère* focused solely on Beirut, smaller reconstruction projects flourished elsewhere. However, none of them compared to the magnitude of *Solidère*. Some of the areas that were seriously affected by the civil war, such as the

Tebbaneh neighbourhood in Tripoli, never benefitted from any reconstruction plan, and its inhabitants had to, and continue to, rely on the occasional donations and patronage of local leaders.

In many ways, *Solidère* is one example of the neo-liberal boom in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region during the 1990s: from Egypt, to Jordan, to Dubai, or Istanbul, the MENA, like elsewhere, saw its economy adjusting to, and accommodating, freshly-established global practices such as free trade agreements, outsourcing, and overseas investments. Such economic shifts are naturally geared towards self-governance, individualization, and entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, and when viewed in the context of Lebanon, entrepreneurship and commerce, along with a solid middle class, have been well-embedded in its economy since the late 18th century (Tarazi-Fawaz, 1983; Khater, 2001), a fact that distinguishes it from its Arab neighbours.

With goods and technology becoming increasingly accessible, many men started distancing themselves from jobs they deemed 'not respectable' enough, namely most manual labour. Moreover, manual labour has often been historically confined to the poor populations migrating from the villages to the city, and to foreign workers. Whereas Syrian workers constitute the majority of construction workers in Lebanon, lighter tasks such as cleaning and attending cars at petrol stations have been reserved for Sudanese (in an earlier decade), Egyptian, and South Asian migrants. There is nothing hazardous about the compartmentalizing of these jobs per nationality. Compared to his Lebanese counterpart, the Syrian worker is seen as both strong and resilient, and therefore suitable for construction work. However, a Syrian worker is rarely allowed to access a household on his own. This is because the Syrian worker is

seen as a fully sexual being, and is therefore deemed a threat to the gendered social order in Lebanon. Egyptians and South Asian migrants, on the other hand, are seen as a lesser threat in this regard.

It is not strange to witness South Asian male migrant workers cleaning bathrooms in malls and cinemas. South Asian male migrants are often hired in hypermarkets at tills where they 'bag' customers' shopping. Once more, their perceived asexuality allows them to 'peek' into the private affairs of Lebanese shoppers. Most often, they are indifferent to the content of the shopping carts they handle, contrary to Lebanese workers who would not think twice before commenting on, or initiating small talk with regard to one's shopping cart.

Like South Asian migrant male workers, Sudanese and Egyptian men, although not perceived as fully asexual, are conceived in rather feminine terms. This feminization stems from the stereotypes associated with each. Whereas Sudanese men have long been caricatured in popular jokes, in addition to being portrayed as particularly obedient in Egyptian cinema, Egyptian men consciously perform their hospitable self, and display an easy-living attitude, both of which has been made popular by classic Egyptian cinema's depictions of the urban bourgeois gentleman, and the 'simple' *Sa'idi* (from the *Sa'id* region) who has recently moved to the city.

Still, it would be naïve to posit that non-Lebanese men residing in Lebanon occupy an essentially subordinate position. Most often, we find male subcultures operating on the margins of Lebanon's hegemonic masculinity, in addition to constructing their own hegemonic discourses. Such views have already been put forward by Coles (2009), who

argues that 'hegemonic masculinity may have a marginal impact upon the lives of men who choose to disassociate themselves from the mainstream and operate in a social milieu where their masculinity is dominant in relation to other men' (Coles, 2009: 30-31).

Like F., women often occupy jobs that are poorly remunerated and, in most cases, are not capable, for logistical reasons, to take on more than one job at a time, seeing that the organization of the household, along with care in general, falls almost exclusively on them. I say almost exclusively, because, as my fieldwork informed me, in addition to expecting a male partner to contribute financially to the household, my female interlocutors also expected them to help organize the household. This help was not related in terms of domestic chores. Rather, it was related in rather affective terms, with the recurring expression '*y'hess ma'i*', which literally translates as 'to feel with me' consistently pouring through my fieldwork.

The expression '*y'hess ma'i*' reflects a heightened degree of synchronicity and empathy, and both my male and female interlocutors reiterated it throughout our chats and interviews. My fieldwork provided me with rich narratives that are filled with affectivities, kindness, and care, something we rarely find in the existing literature on the Arab man, as Inhorn et al (2008) points out. Not only does the existing literature prominently link women to 'ethics of care', it unintentionally sites women in opposition to men by doing so (Gilligan, 1982). I was also surprised by the transparency of my male interlocutors whenever they discussed their financial difficulties. The entanglement of Lebanon's political-sectarian system with the economy produces a vulnerable

masculinity, which the literature approaches through a precarity and security lens – and rightly so (Amar, 2011; Ghannam, 2013; Salwa, 2006; 2009).

When I asked Jeena to elaborate on her choice of the words *y'hess ma'i*, she immediately contrasted them with 'selfishness' and 'absenteeism', in addition to contrasting them with Lebanon's obsession with 'political talk'.¹³² In this case, the expression *y'hess ma'i* is a mostly gendered one. Jeena expects her partner to be 'in tune' with her, in addition to appreciating her work (be it inside or outside the household). By pointing out 'absenteeism', she is indirectly referring to Lebanon's patterns of homo-socializing, where men are encouraged and expected to spend a considerable time socializing with their male friends. Such patterns result in strict and gendered temporal and spatial patterns, often informed by work schedules, whereby women, or housewives, more precisely, socialize with their female friends during the day, and men socialize with their male friends in the evening. Jeena dismissed 'men's obsession with 'political talk', and remarked how 'unnecessary' it was: '*la shū*'? (what's the point of it).¹³³ There's nothing they can do anyway'. By dismissing 'political talk' Jeena is far from reiterating women's supposed indifference to politics. Such a belief contributes to the reiteration of women as 'followers' in Lebanon, in addition to dismissing them easily through their not seeing the 'importance' of 'political talk'. By insisting on a partner that is not absent from the household, and by lamenting the extent of 'political talk', which often results in spontaneous sectarian clashes, as we saw in an earlier chapter, Jeena is indirectly reiterating the work of Lara A. Ring (2006:3) who argues that 'peace is the product of a

¹³² Interview with Jeena, September 2015, Jbeil.

¹³³ Ibid.

relentless daily labour', or 'micro-mechanisms of co-existence', that are mostly carried out by women. We saw in the previous chapter how Layal had 'had enough' of her fiancé, who repeatedly found himself in verbal and physical fights triggered by 'political talk'. Like Ring (2006), and based on my own fieldwork, I cannot help but think that women's apparent disinterest in politics is anything but political. By insisting on a partner that is emotionally invested in the household, not only are they challenging Lebanon's existing homo-socializing patterns, they are indirectly contributing to 'peace-building' in general.

VI. 2. Masculinity and its other(s)

Jana, like many of my female interlocutors, imagines Lebanese men to be sophisticated. Her view was regularly captured throughout my fieldwork. Jana relocates the state of the *m'attar* to non-Lebanese men, thus endowing *te'tir* with a nationalistic layer. Not only is her narrative highly classed, 'it neglects and negates the transnational endurance between those communities [Syrian and Lebanese] that reside alongside Lebanon and Syria's borders and have 'long invested in transnational processes of kin alliances, i.e. marriage, entrepreneurial ventures, and further practices' (Allouche 2017: 65).

Jana: I'm not going to marry a Palestinian man, let alone a Syrian one, am I now?

Me: Why not?

Jana: Come on now! Unbelievable. Look around! Who do you see? There are only Syrians and God-knows-what in this country.

Me: But surely not all Syrian and Palestinian men are 'bad'...

Jana: Come on! Our men are special. They are educated, clean, and

they've seen the world! [In the sense that they are sophisticated].'¹³⁴

Similar views were reiterated by Talal, a forty-something, still single man, and owner of a female fashion store in Tripoli:

'Where are the good men? They have all gone. This country is being ruled by *ze'rān* (thugs)... *te'tīr*! Utter *te'tīr*! Thugs and *m'attaraīn*, who else do you find when you look around?'¹³⁵

When I asked Talal if he would consider moving abroad, he answered:

'I am almost fifty. I am single. This store is all I have. You think one can simply pack and go? And for what? To live in the Gulf?'¹³⁶

Talal's narrative encompasses two important points. On the one hand, economic hardship is causing an endless number of Lebanese citizens to look for work opportunities elsewhere. Those who 'fall behind' or are not capable of migrating remain in a least-desired situation. On the other hand, that the 'good men' have gone is an indicator of a shift in the productions of femininities and masculinities in Lebanon. Femininities and masculinities do not emerge independently of each other; on the contrary, they are mutually constitutive. Having said that, and if we are to follow Talal's logic, if the 'good men' are gone, then the particular femininity/ies that co-produce 'good men' must be gone, too.

Conversely, it is important to remind ourselves that one's 'good men' (and women) are

134 Interview with Jana, August 2014, Beirut.

135 Interview with Talal, February 2014, Tripoli.

136 Ibid.

distinct from another's. Patriarchally-informed connectivity in Lebanon dictates particular patterns for forging relationships with others, and despite my interlocutors' romanticization of the 'Lebanese man', it is imperative that we recognize that the 'Lebanese man' is always situated within one's own sect. Clearly, not only are affectivities gendered, they also succumb to further societal constructs. Pratt (2007) remarks that 'a focus on men and their relationships also reveals the ways in which national sovereignty and security are constituted through notions of gender identities and relations and vice versa' (Pratt, 2007:130). Let us consider this extract from an ad hoc conversation I had with two Lebanese women in their fifties near the entrance of a homeware store in central Beirut. Both women were commenting on the situation of 'shabābna' (our young men), by pointing out that '*ma fi shighl*' (there is no work), and that 'we should be thankful for whatever work they do:

'Woman 1: It's been two years since my nephew graduated from University and he is still unable to find work.

Woman 2: *yī*, you should see our apartment block! It abounds with jobless young men.

Woman 1: *ma fi shighl ya 'ammi, ma fi shighl* (there is no work, I'm telling you... there is no work...)¹³⁷

The expression '*ma fi shighl*' has come to symbolize the 'crisis of masculinity' in contemporary Lebanon. The expression '*ma fi shighl*' is not straightforward though, and it certainly is more accurate to point out that there are not enough jobs that befit our *shabāb*'s conception of themselves. Both women echo the anxiety and fears of male

137 Field notes, June 2014, Beirut.

Lebanese citizens, as I witnessed them during my fieldwork. Such fears are well captured in the example of Rami.

Rami is a young laboratory technician. He is 25 years old, and has finally found a job, three years after graduating. He is from Beirut, where he has spent his entire life. He is the youngest of three siblings, in total. His sister is married to a Lebanese man with whom she migrated to Abu Dhabi, and his brother works at a bank in Dubai.

‘Between the boredom and the cynicism I was going mental. I was literally begging for work using my connections and my family’s. I felt humiliated. I was among the top three in my class. What is there not to like about me? God be at the mercy of those who aren’t connected to powerful people’¹³⁸

Rami was clearly on edge on the day we met at a bakery/café near Jdaideh. His right leg was continuously shaking, and his smoking was rather erratic. His nervousness is not unique. If anything, I noticed an atmosphere of constant anxiety weighing on the cities of Beirut and Tripoli. For some reason, less-crowded urban spaces felt more ‘chilled’. Unsurprisingly, my interlocutors regularly referred to the increase in the number of ‘strange faces’ they come across. The specific word they used is *gherbeh*. Literally translated, *gherbeh* is foreignness. This ‘foreignness’, though, is not to be understood along xenophobic or racist lines, although such attitudes do exist. If anything, this perceived foreignness is the direct result of the rapid changes witnessed in Tripoli and Beirut in the last decade. Internal migration from rural areas to the cities, combined with

138 Interview with Rami, Tripoli, March 2014.

increasingly embodied modes of consumption resulting from transnational migrants who work in the Gulf, have led to considerable shifts in people's relationality. According to Talal, the store owner, these changes mean he is no longer capable of sustaining his business. In his words,

'No one is here. Everyone has moved to the Gulf. Cursed be the Gulf!
All my customers have moved abroad'.¹³⁹

Talal's remarks are not to be taken at just face value. Losing customers is a particularly painful truth for any business. However, in the Lebanese context, shop owners often build long-lasting relationships with their customers. This is not to be confused with a personalized service, or as part of 'the shopping experience'. Connectivity to others is crucial for Lebanon's socio-political and economic life. Storeowners like Talal rely on their direct interaction with their customers, in Talal's case: female young adults. In most cases, Talal is also acquainted with their male kin and their larger circle of friends. Talal laments the old days where he personally interfered on behalf of his clients in order to 'sort things out' for them, usually by arbitrating between two sides who are in dispute:

'Ya Allah. How the days and the years run. There's nothing now! All those *gherabah*, (foreigners) are taking over the city. W mella bada'a (what class of people, in disgust). They bring their Gulf remittance and splash it around. They have no respect for anything and anyone'.¹⁴⁰

139 Interview with Talal, February 2014, Tripoli.

140 Ibid.

The case of Talal is unique. He is a single man in his late forties. He was very close to getting married once to a '*bint 'ayleh*' – an expression used locally in Lebanon to refer to a girl who comes from a 'good family', whose lineage can be traced. However, she ended up getting married in Abu Dhabi to an Indian colleague:

'To an Indian! Can you believe that? I didn't know where to hide my face!'¹⁴¹

Talal, like many of my interlocutors, is lamenting the 'end of the Lebanese man as we knew him'. Judging by my fieldwork, men are increasingly classified as either thugs, *ze'ran*, or as pathetic, *m'attarīn*, in Lebanon, and it is one of the many dichotomies that repeatedly surfaced during my fieldwork. That the 'good men' have gone is an indicator of a shift in the social production of masculinities in Lebanon. I say social production because masculinities are undeniably a product of society, along with femininities. Moreover, different masculinities emerge in a specific context in conjunction with particular types of femininities. If we are to follow Talal's logic, the particular femininity/ies that co-produced 'good men' must also have gone. The extent of migration in Lebanon continues to be under-researched from an anthropological viewpoint. The existing literature, bar a few works, is mostly concerned with linear narratives, economic forecasts, and remittance impact. There are hardly any studies exploring the impact of migration on the household. I do, however, briefly examine the absence of the father from the household in my chapter on space (chapter VIII).

Throughout my fieldwork, men were particularly articulate in their views on marriage,

141 Ibid.

and three major points continuously saturated my data: the ‘miasmic cynicism’ displayed vis-à-vis the ruling class: an interesting choice of words seeing the analogical connotations between their views and the actual ‘trash crisis’ that the city of Beirut witnessed during the summer of 2015; the inevitability of migrating in order to secure work and an additional nationality; and a highly affective state, whereby they simply ‘wish to live’, (*baddi ‘ish*). Still, and despite the critique and belittling of Lebanon’s class of *za’ims*, or political leaders, it was clear to me that the *za’im*’s aggression and display of power in public was still very much relevant for the production of an ideal masculinity.

Whereas Talal views Lebanon as ‘better’ than the Gulf, which constitutes for thousands of Lebanese nationals a financial and professional nest, Jana elevates Lebanese men above other men. Seen through a feminist lens, Jana’s views are particularly problematic. Firstly, Jana contributes to the hegemonizing of certain masculinities at the expense of others. Although Jana puts little weight on wealth, she nonetheless insists on the importance of a Lebanese man that is not ‘*m’attar*’. Secondly, and by elevating the Lebanese man, she reiterates the specific gendered, and thus unequal, praxis and ethos of Lebanon, which elevates the men and the elders at the expense of women and children. Thirdly, and by incapacitating Lebanese men, she reproduces the ‘control/care paradigm’ in Lebanon (where men simultaneously control and care for women).

VI. 3. The lesser man, or the *m'attar*

The Arab man is oftentimes reproduced as effeminate (Najmabadi 2005), violent (Accad 1992; Ghassub and Sinclair-Webb 2000; Aghacy 2009; Ghannam 2013), and emotionally inferior (Massad 2008; Allouche 2015). This chapter introduces another concept—namely, masculinity of the *m' attar*. The discourse on the *m' attar* is almost entirely absent from the literature on masculinity or on gender in the Middle East. This omission reveals how certain affects are deemed more important to explore, and are therefore more likely to be exported, than others (for example, the topics of securitization, or violence in the Middle East, and their impact on gender relations). In addition, and by virtue of its very ontology, the *m' attar* directly challenges the globally produced and consumed stereotype of the Arab man as inherently violent. The discourse surrounding the *m' attar* compels me to view him from a multiple of layers: the individual, the national, and the geopolitical.

M' attar, in the Lebanese context, is understood as he who lags behind. Primarily, the *m' attar* is overall content. He is highly impressionable, and rarely challenges the situation in which he finds himself. The *m' attar* is a mostly gendered construct, as he who is deemed *m'attar* is usually understood as occupying a subordinate position vis-à-vis his wife, first and foremost. On one occasion, I joined Suha and her female friends for a coffee and a chat at her house.¹⁴² Suha informed us that her fiancé, Qassem, had had his loan application rejected by a multitude of banks: '*ya m'attar ya Qassem* (how pitiful of you, Qassem), *ma byetla' bi idak shi* (you don't succeed in anything)', to which one of

¹⁴² Breakfast gathering with Suha and her friends, May 2014, Tripoli.

her friends replied, 'Qassem is too *ādami* (the local equivalent of the gentleman), perhaps too much'.

When surrounded by his wife and daughters, the *m'attar* is easily eclipsed as he leaves most of the talking and the decision-making to them. His daughters, if unmarried still, are likely to wear revealing attire, in addition to carrying themselves in a highly flirty manner, which is often interpreted as a clear shortcoming of the *m'attar's* authority as head of the household. The *m'attar*, then, is a mostly docile figure, and is primarily positioned in opposition to a wife who is deemed 'strong', *awiyyeh*, or *shallūf* in Lebanese dialect.

The *m'attar* is also constructed in relation to other masculinities. A man who succeeds in businesses in particular or in life more generally is deemed *shāter*, a positive designation for what could be otherwise perceived as a conman, their 'victims' are described as *m'attareen*, the plural of *m'attar*. Despite implying some level of cunning and dishonesty, *shātara* also embraces desired and positive connotations such as high intelligence and an exceptionally adaptive nature, which allows one to overcome tricky situations, notably Lebanon's labyrinth-al bureaucracy. A man who is *shāter* is one who successfully navigates the bureaucratic, logistical, and socio-political dilemmas in which he finds himself. If we remember, K., in the ministry of education, who, in order to avoid standing in the long queue, bartered by offering 15,000 Lebanese Pounds (US\$9.95) to the person standing at the front of the queue (see *Prélude*). Opinions about his actions ranged from 'unethical' to 'clever', as seen by the array of reactions observed; he did, nevertheless, 'get the work done.'

Moreover, *shatāra*, is a gendered concept. For instance, women who succeed in finding a wealthy husband are qualified as *shettār*. Seen through a feminist lens, *shatāra* is a mostly uncomfortable notion seeing how it reproduces women as ‘manipulative’ beings (Constable 2003, 2014), who capitalize on their ‘erotic power’ (Hakim 2010), and whose sexual prowess ought to be regulated for the sake of social order (Mernissi 1987).

Conversely, when the *m’attar* finds himself in precarious situations, he is understood to have brought it upon himself because of his own lack of scrutiny. Working class men who rely on side jobs in order to maximize their income often find themselves ‘cheated’, or ‘abused’. However, this construction is not straightforward. For instance, many men from the urban bourgeoisie could well fall under the designation of *m’attar*. Often, they hold onto their permanently allocated civil servant jobs, and show little interest in climbing the social order. In this sense, the *m’attar* exists among wider society without necessarily being marginalized, at least financially and politically speaking.

Te’tir, the substantive form of *m’attar*, or the state of being *m’attar*, is also reiterated in everyday vulgar geopolitical debates, whereby Lebanon is reproduced as *m’attar*, with regard to the lack of its sovereignty, and the fact that its internal politics are dictated by neighbouring hegemonic powers, namely Saudi Arabia, Iran, and, more recently, Turkey. In this sense, Lebanon, as *m’attar*, brings forth my earlier conceptualization of Lebanese-ness, where the present is lived as waiting. Moreover, *te’tir* is expressed in relation to the Syrian refugee; in this case, its meaning can be stretched to absolute wretchedness and desolation. In what follows, I show how the racialization of the *m’attar*, exemplified by the intersection of a precarious economy and nationalism, produces affective, hegemonizing and oftentimes imaginary narratives surrounding

Lebanese masculinity.

The *m'attar* is often contrasted with the *ādami*, or the gentleman. The *ādami* is someone who 'does not throw others under the bus' in his pursuit of upper social mobility, something that the *shāter* often does. The *ādami* carries a pious meaning too, seeing that the *ādami* is someone who upholds moralistic values typically found in religious discourses, notably kindness, and fairness. The *ādami*, it seems, is a 'dying breed' in Lebanon. In popular discourse, the *ādami* is nostalgically expressed, often in contrast to the insatiable appetite of Lebanon's elite and its class of business oligarchs. It is no wonder then that Suha's friend remarked that perhaps Qassem is 'too *ādami*'.

This insatiable appetite is not characteristic of a neoliberal economy strictly speaking, although it does pave the way for an increasingly individualized masculinity that constructs itself on the basis of business savvy, with ex-prime minister Rafik Hariri being its unrivalled poster child. If anything, the monopoly over the economy of modern Lebanon, which itself falls under the banner of a neoliberal economy, can be traced to what Fawwaz Trabulsi (2007) calls 'the political economy of militia control' during the civil war:

'Not only did militias 'exchange services' with sections of the bourgeoisie (protection money in return for import and export quotas or sheer profiteering), but they soon became large business enterprises in their own right and an integral part of that class, entering into close business partnerships with many of its members, especially in the flour and fuel trade. And as war neared its final phase, the warlords had 'laundered' a part of their capital into privately owned companies' (Traboulsi, 2007: 237).

VI. 4. Concluding remarks

This chapter examined the discourse of love through a masculinity lens by showing how the production of the discourse of the Lebanese man as a highly desired partner is concurrent with the demonization of the Syrian Other. Although this chapter solely examined the interplay between a Lebanese masculinity and a Syrian one, it is important to note, in this regard, that similar mechanisms of hierarchization occur among other nationalities.

Just like the nation-state regulates citizens' everyday, in addition to inscribing its biopolitics on men and women's bodies, the Lebanese-ing of the 'ideal husband' contributes to the gendering of both hope and futurity. My reading of my interlocutors' narratives brings forth the work of Sabbagh (1996), who argued that the Lebanese civil war resulted in the breakdown of the social order, which, in its turn, led to the intensification of family ties. Khatib (2008: 448) builds on the work of Sabbagh to argue that 'the increased adherence to the family can be understood in the context of a society lacking an official protector.'

In a similar vein, I view the renewed interest in the Lebanese man as a neo control/care paradigm that reinforces the paradox of the entanglement of love with power in Lebanon. Today in Lebanon, the concern with the *m'attar* bespeaks a masculinity in crisis—as men struggle to come to terms with a plunging economy, increased unemployment, and a high immigration rate. When the Lebanese male is defeated, an 'ethic of purity', defined by Cynthia Cockburn (1990: 9) as a reminder of women's cultural authenticity that is deeply rooted in patriarchal assumptions of women's roles,

prevails. Further, this renewed interest in Lebanese manhood occurs in an increasingly militarized climate, where women and marginalized selves become a tool to distinguish one community from another (ibid: 16). This is seen in the renewal of racial confrontations between the Lebanese population and Syrian refugee 'Others' (Gagné and Qubaia, 2013; and Saleh and Qubaia, 2015).

Current articulations of masculine ideals, it seems then, are the result of Lebanon's crumbling economy and the Lebanese state's failure in fostering a national home. Seen through the lens of 'make-believe,' it is an affect that narrows Lebanese citizens' scope of opportunities and limits women's 'lines of flight,' to borrow from Deleuze, by relegating them to a seemingly 'alternative' though highly masculinized futurity. In other words, it is the re-fashioning of the aesthetics of the very same patriarchal social order that has governed their life so far, and appears to be shaping the future.

By emphasizing the importance of Lebanese-ness, Jana, in her own way, is working towards embodying a Lebanese identity, which, I reiterate, is still in the making. She perceives marriage as a space of shared affectivities and long-term partnership. Still, and despite the positive connotations that her narrative implies, I cannot help but argue that Jana, in many ways, is reiterating Lebanon's 'connective patriarchy', which elevates the men and the elders at the expense of women and children. However, what distinguishes it from its earlier form is its emphasis on Lebanese-ness as a shared condition, which is different from a Lebanese nationality. Moreover, Lebanese-ness as a shared condition paved the way for a particular neoliberal economy that is highly embedded with what appears to be 'patriotic' feelings on the surface, in addition to reinforcing Lebanon's 'infatuation with consumption' (Khalaf, 2002; 2012).

Assem Nasr (2010) argues that during the ‘cedar revolution’, the Lebanese flag came to symbolize a ‘Lebanese Identity Brand’, in addition to conveying the message of a country that is both ‘cosmopolitan *and* unified’ (Nasr, 2010: 13) (my emphasis). The aggressive marketing campaign that accompanied the ‘cedar revolution’, along with the aesthetics and visuals displayed, in addition to the memorabilia being sold – each (and all) of which reflect (a) typical neoliberal tactic(s), sustain the idea of ‘consumption as resistance’ (Kates and Belk, 2001).

In the Lebanese context, and following Nasr, ‘accumulating goods gives the illusion of a cosmopolitan sphere’ (Nasr, 2010: 30) that is reminiscent of Lebanon’s heydays during the 1960’s and the 1970’s. The discourse of the inevitable ‘return’ to this golden era can be found in the majority of political speeches in post-war Lebanon, be they formal or not, and is often reiterated by the ruling class, in its justification of its ‘modern’, neoliberally informed, and socially stratifying post-war ‘reconstruction projects’.

Seen through a gender lens, the ‘cedar revolution’, far from being celebratory, led to the crystallization of traditional gendered power relations within a neoliberal economy that is henceforward primarily informed by Lebanese-ness as an imagined shared condition of a unique type of precarity. Not only were the mobilizations on 21 February 2005 led by privileged males from the existing political class, it was planned and orchestrated by privileged members of the society who had direct access to them. Whereas male politicians gave one speech after the next, women, who were highly visible during the mobilizations, were captured by cameramen and journalists alike through a flagrant, almost blatant ‘male gaze’. Having said that, I cannot emphasize enough the gendered

component of Lebanese-ness, despite the fact that many female interlocutors held dearly to it. Just like the nation itself results in the regulating of the everyday, and in the hierarchizing of men and women's bodies, Lebanese-ness, too, contributes to gendered longing, where hope and the future are also conceived of along unequal gendered power relations.

To summarise, the 'ideal partner' is becoming increasingly imagined in relation to class, and there is only 'so much' bargaining and negotiation one can endure. I am almost tempted to argue that rigid societal constructs of masculinities and femininities are first and foremost hindering to men (I can also predict the backlash from die-hard feminists regarding this). While my own academic privilege and expertise allow me to challenge the rigidity of social categories, including those of men and women, and to opt for a fluid methodology instead, when faced with the material core of my fieldwork, I often feel the urge to 'let go' of theoretical sophistication at times, especially when it comes to fixed social categories, *the* very source of my existential anxiety.

How can I write on women and men as social categories without essentializing them? Are social categories ultimately linked to identity politics? Is an intersectional analysis *really* helpful in this case? Doesn't class collapse the notion of intersectionality? If I am to trust my fieldwork, and there is something inherently life-changing when one scrutinizes the life of others, I cannot help but notice how class 'changes everything'. At the same time, and as the narrative of Jana implies, class is not everything. Such ambiguities ultimately lead me to argue that the renewed political mobilizations of women in Lebanon, in which I took part during the summer of 2014, are akin to an 'accidental feminism' which, despite its focus on novel narratives of empathy towards

our *shabāb*, in addition to conceiving marriage as a partnership that is informed by a shared condition, is inherently linked to notions of precarity, and anti-foreign-ness.

In a similar vein, and although most of my interlocutors identified as straight and cis, many of the homosexual Lebanese men I spoke to reiterated their Syrian counterparts as ‘necessarily bottom’. By doing so, they are adding an additional layer of sexuality to Lebanese-ness, where the Lebanese man, in a same-sex context, reproduces what Chebel calls ‘exaggerated machismo’, seeing that he substitutes women for men for whom they have ‘great contempt’ (in Dunnes 1998: 10).

Many of my female contributors made it clear that financial stability was the responsibility of both partners, with Layal’s narrative in the previous chapter perfectly capturing such views. Such views are not necessarily reflective of a position that is concerned with gender equality. In most cases, both my male and female interlocutors had at least one close parental relation living and working abroad, with many lamenting the distance between them and their loved ones. Moreover, many of my female interlocutors could not help but reflect on the financial difficulties in which their male relatives, including their fathers, but most importantly their brothers, often find themselves. In this sense, one can detect a degree of rapprochement between the figures of ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ in contemporary Lebanon, a particular type of empathy enabled by the realization that traditional gendered expectations have become increasingly unrealistic under an aggressive neoliberal economy.

In the next chapter, I continue with what could be seen as a political economy approach in order to relate two quintessential practices of love, namely ‘gifting’ and ‘inclusive

intimacy'. As we will see, love is expressed not only in affective terms, but also material ones. In addition, the couple-space is not exclusive to them, but rather calls for the active inclusion of others. Both practices, when seen from a western liberal sense, appear to be incompatible with the notion of love as free, pure, and strictly abstract – an assumption I challenge directly through my continuous exercise of grounding the notion of love.

Chapter VII Love, Lebanese Style: Gifting, and 'Inclusive Intimacy'

VII. 1. Mon Bijoux, Mon Droit

I find it appropriate to start this chapter with the slogan of the 2010 marketing campaign of the jewellery company Joaillerie Moukarzel, entitled *Mon Bijoux, Mon Droit* (My Jewel, My Right). The campaign's slogan must have made quite an impact, considering the fact that it continued to figure, at least during the time of my fieldwork in 2014, on some of their billboards along the not-really-highway highway between Tripoli and Beirut. In any case, its most recent campaign, which goes back to 2014, is entitled *J'ai envie*, also in French, which translates as I Want.

When I first saw the televised advertisement of the *Mon Bijoux, Mon Droit* campaign, I immediately perceived it as vulgar. Considering the fact that Lebanese citizens have to constantly negotiate and fight for rather basic rights, from having decent roads or running water, to having a reliable power supply, I found it rather condescending that a nation-wide campaign by a well-established company considered it acceptable and creative to equate owning a jewel with a basic right. Seen through a feminist lens, I found the campaign even more distasteful because it centred exclusively on women making a claim to this 'right', in addition to implying that men must acquiesce to their request.

Visually speaking, the ad featured a single woman putting the final touches to her immaculate makeup. She sensually slides some perfume down her neck, before clipping diamond earrings to her ears and adorning her neck with a diamond-encrusted necklace. The genre of the music used can be described as ambient music – the artist Enya is associated with this genre. Another level of acoustics features a female voice slowly whispering '*mon bijoux... mon droit*'. We then hear a doorbell, and the woman swiftly exits the room. Aesthetically speaking, she is wearing the typical make-up and hairstyle associated with hegemonic femininity in Lebanon. The female model featured in the ad has Lebanese features, not Caucasian, a strategic choice no doubt aimed at local and regional customers by the jewellery company. She is wearing a long white dress that *could* be worn by a bride, perhaps an indirect reference to her status as future wife.

Regardless of all this, my fieldwork informed me that my initial reaction to the campaign reflected my very own ignorance where gifts, women, men, and 'love' in Lebanon are concerned. Although I still perceive the campaign as shady and arrogant, I can at least appreciate its meaning. Having said that, the questions I address here include: What does it mean that a jewel is equated with a basic right? What does it mean when men are more than happy to oblige? How does gifting shape the discourse of 'love' in Lebanon, and what is its impact on the couple-space?

This chapter's main goal is to examine two specific everyday practices of love, namely gifting, and what I call 'inclusive intimacy'. The reason I focus on these two practices is their scope. Both practices operate at the individual and the collective level, which allows for an extended analysis that is capable of encompassing each of the notions of gender, sexuality, sect, and class, in addition to their intersection(s). This chapter draws

heavily on my ethnography. The majority of the interlocutors who figure in this chapter consist of 'official couples' who were to soon marry a partner from a similar sect to theirs. As a result, it is the social category of class that becomes apparent. In other words, this chapter deals with the intersection of class with love. It is the chapter that best encapsulates love within a political economy framework. Yet, there are contradictions and tensions, and unexpected 'detours' that accompany courtship, even in the case of intra-sectarian love, and we recognize, once more, the blurred boundaries between the abstract and material aspects of love.

Following my fieldwork, 'love' in Lebanon encompasses both material and affective practices. By material, I mean the gifting of material things to potential partners. Most of this gifting is mono-directional: men gift potential wives. At the same time, women are expected to 'accept' their gifts. It seems that there is a correlation between 'accepting' gifts, and the materialization of marriage. Moreover, 'love' is informed by affective bonds that are outside of the couple-space, in the sense that 'being in love' is, to a certain extent, irrelevant if it risks destabilizing one's existing kin relationships.

The value of the material gift is generally understood to be proportional to the degree of the 'seriousness' of the man, and of the affective bond between a man and a woman, to a lesser extent. In this sense, there is no distinction between feelings and materiality, which is considerably different from a western understanding of love, where women who 'accept' gifts are seen as manipulative and opportunistic (Constable, 2003, 2006). Moreover, men too are expected to receive gifts and favours. However, it is usually the father of the woman who gifts them, rather than the woman herself. Also, the gift in this case is not personal; rather, it is akin to a favour, such as facilitating bureaucratic work,

or being introduced to significant others, in line with Lebanon's overall connective patriarchy.

As we will see, both men and women, and their relatives, reproduce the specific praxis of 'love' in Lebanon. As such, I argue that intimacy between a man and a woman in Lebanon is a mostly inclusive project, seeing that men and women who are in 'love' act as mediators and regulators between their couple-space and their larger network, and vice versa. In other words, the success of the relationship is directly linked to the preserving and reproduction of Lebanon's classic connective patriarchy, where both men and women strive towards upholding the status of their significant connections.

There are two main mechanisms in this regard: as we will see, 'love' is expressed through the gifting of material goods, in addition to being at the other's service. The repeated gifting of goods consolidates the affective bonds between a man and a woman. Concurrently, the man and the woman negotiate their couple-space with their larger network. In this sense, the boundaries between the couple and others are blurred, in addition to being porous. I refer to this blurriness as 'inclusive intimacy', or *the inclusion of proximate others (close kin and friends) by the couple, and the forging of long-lasting relationships with them, thus stretching the boundaries of their intimate couple-space; in addition, channelling desires and affections through those proximate others is equally necessary to crystallize the affective bond between the couple.*

Methodologically speaking, I start by reviewing the literature on the gift. I then embed the practice of gifting with Pierre Bourdieu's notions of *habitus*, and 'forms of capitals' (1986). Whereas the work of Bourdieu allows me to show the Structural (see Levi-Strauss

shortly) character of the practice of gifting, it is important that I review it through a feminist lens in order to liberate it from any accusatory stances, especially since the work of Bourdieu has proven to be too deterministic and antagonistic to feminists' understandings of the subject as fluid. For that, I add two capitals to his, namely the 'erotic capital' (Hakim, 2010), and 'emotional capital' (Reay, 2000; 2004). Empirically, and in addition to drawing on interviews, I relate ethnography where I describe Ahmed and Salwa's visit to an event planner in the city of Tripoli in preparation for their wedding.

All throughout, we will see how 'gifting' in a 'love' setting does not always concur with Suad Joseph's control/care paradigm (Joseph, 2000) where men protect women and women care for men. Gifts are mostly symbolic of the level of protection and comfort that the man will potentially provide during the couple's married life, and they serve first and foremost to consolidate the man's relationship with the male kin of his wife-to-be. Still, and despite it being embedded in deeply rooted patriarchal interpretations of married life, the gift is also an occasion for couples to foster their couple-space in a purely affective sense, and it is important to acknowledge them for their emotional potential. As we will see, the gift comes in many forms, and it would be wrong to assume that the 'more expensive' the gift, the 'deeper the 'love''.

VII. 2. The gift and the existing literature

In western anthropological endeavours, Marcel Mauss (2002) is considered the godfather of the research on gift-exchange. Although Mauss never conducted fieldwork in this regard, he relied on existing works while writing *The Gift* in 1925. Following

Mauss, it is unlikely that a free gift exists. Rather, gifting is embedded in economic, religious, and mythological processes, to name a few. For Mauss, gift-exchange is threefold: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to repay. This threefold cycle contracts the parties involved in a 'state of perpetual dependence' towards one another (Mauss, 2002: 82).

Building on Mauss, Lévi-Strauss (1949) examined gift-exchange by embedding it in kinship. Drawing on post-Saussurean Structuralist linguistics, Lévi-Strauss sought to prove the 'identical unconscious structures' behind seemingly different systems of communication such as kinship, the Law, the Arts, or, in the case of this thesis, love-marriage, or the supremacy of inter-sectarian marriage in Lebanon. For Lévi-Strauss, Language, or *langue*, is a Structure, and it cannot be reduced to its spoken form or *parole*. Consequently, gift-exchange, according to Lévi-Strauss is akin to a system of communication whose aim is to hold the social organization together.

After a stalling period, the literature on gift-giving re-emerged alongside an increasingly consumer-driven economy, with several authors seeking to evaluate and understand consumer behaviour. A number of works sought to show the applicability of the theories of Mauss and Lévi-Strauss in non-Western contexts. Lowes et al (1968), for instance, conducted extensive fieldwork in a qualitative work targeting Christmas gift-giving in order to show that the economic anthropologist underpinnings of gift-giving are equally applicable to a UK context. In addition, these works emphasized the pleasure component that accompanies gift-giving, without neglecting its social meaning (Lowes et al, 1968; Belk, 1976). In the case of Belk (1976), he sought to show how buyers project their own views and tastes on the recipients of their gifts through purchasing

gifts that they personally identify with. Following my fieldwork, the truth could not be any further from Belk's findings, since the gift is almost always channelled through others, and one's views and tastes are irrelevant.

In a later work, Belk (1979) identified four stages of gift-giving: purchasing the gift, exchanging the gift (the moment where the buyer interacts with the recipients of the gift), consuming the gift, evaluating the gift (giving feedback, and commenting on it). Although Belk (1979) is more interested in marketing strategies, the four stages of gift-giving that he identifies are highly applicable to this chapter. However, as we will see, accepting a gift is always preceded by a display of modesty, and a hesitance in accepting it. In fact, accepting a gift directly is seen as immodest and greedy. Such 'rules of the game' echo the concept of *habitus* of Bourdieu.

In a similar vein to Belk, a large number of works examined gifting from a psychological or a marketing approach. Their relevance is little to this chapter because of their simplistic conceptualization of the Social, such as limiting gender to a variable between male and female, in addition to being invested in qualitative research mostly. Still, the work of Steidlmeier (1999) on corporate gifting practices in China shows how the interpretation of these practices outside of their context can lead to viewing them as a form of 'bribery', from a western perspective. Such cultural nuances are highly important in the context of this thesis, especially since it deals with love, a supposedly free from materiality and universal type of attachment, if we follow a western rationale.

The embeddedness of material gifting in the larger structure of kin has been well examined by Hoodfar (1997) in a Cairene setting. Hoodfar (1997) distinguishes between

gifts, and obligations. Kin marriages, or marriages between cousins, for instance, are seen as 'less expensive', and therefore do not require as 'many gifts' (Hoodfar, 1997: 55). In addition, and since a family's honor and self-respect is tightly linked to that of daughters, parents might sometimes withdraw their involvement in their son's marriage preparations, but rarely in their daughters', and whereas the daughter's trousseau is seen as an 'obligation', any additional contributions amount to a 'gift' (ibid: 66). Hoodfar (1997) investigates marriage preparation in a lower-class setting, where marriage is seen as a strategy for survival in a view that is similar to that of Om Zahra (see chapter IV). This clarification is important because the majority of my interlocutors are university-educated (or similar), and their class status is best described as lower-middle/middle class. Elsewhere, and similar to the work of Hoodfar, a number of ethnographic works have examined the relevance of gift-exchange during marriage negotiation in Japan (Rupp, 2003), China (Zang and Zhao, 2017); the Middle East (Rashad et al, 2005; Nashat and Tucker, 1999; Assad and Krafft, 2015), Egypt (Singerman, 2007; Hasso, 2010), the Gulf (Hasso, 2010), Turkey (Hart, 2007); cross-culturally (Charlsey and Shaw, 2006), and in a transnational setting (Werbner, 1990; Charsley, 2006).

There are several important points to address regarding the literature cited above. Firstly, these works often post-traditional marriage against love marriage, as if the two do not meet. If anything, my own fieldwork has informed me of the importance of contextualizing notions that we take for granted, including love. Secondly, these works are invested in the intersection of class and gender (and further categories) in the reproduction of class and gender as unequal spaces. In this sense, marriage becomes a

venue to climb the social ladder. As we will see, the impact of women's 'erotic capital' allows them to successfully marry into wealthier families, something that men do not benefit from. Thirdly, and with few exceptions, marriage is examined through a predominantly economic lens. In this sense, its functionality, or Structurality, to borrow from Lévi-Strauss, is highlighted. Fourthly, and barring the most recent works, the emotive component of the space-couple is entirely unaccounted for. Still, this literature is highly relevant to this chapter because of the tensions that arise between the supremacy of class (Bourdieu, 1986; Skeggs, 1997, 2004), and its intersections with further social categories on the making of selves. These tensions clearly arise in the works of Constable (2003). Although she does not cite 'gifting' as the framework of her work, her studies on 'mail brides' inform us about the reductionist views of western conceptualization of love as an abstract notion that is inherently detached from materiality, which leads to the demonization of these brides in popular culture, in addition to viewing them as highly material in nature, and manipulative.

Last but not least, it is important to highlight the relevance of the quality of generosity in the reproduction of an ideal masculinity in Lebanon. Giving, and putting one's self forward, are highly appreciated, even if one's endeavour has not been reciprocated or returned, as we saw in the prior chapter. Still, it would be naïve to assume that generosity is a virtue in itself. Through the reproduction of men as inherently generous, women can legitimately reproduce men as protectors, therefore contributing to the problematic care/control paradigm of Suad Joseph (2000).

Having said that, this chapter will at times confirm, and at times challenge existing interpretations of gift-giving. Whereas gift-giving does reiterate the functionality of

marriage, it is equally important for the consolidation of 'inclusive intimacy', and for the crystallization of the affective bond between the couple.

In what follows, I situate the practice of gift-giving in relation to the work of Bourdieu, notably his concept of *habitus*, and his 'forms of capital' (Bourdieu, 1990). I supplement this exercise with a feminist critique of his work, in order to remedy its deterministic tendencies and to restore a fluid sense to the subject of love, or the subject of love as becoming, as I argued earlier.

VII. 3. Gifting and the 'rules of the game'

I turn to the work of Bourdieu in my examination of the gift because it helps us understand how one channels their desires and tastes through others in Lebanon. In this sense, the gift is not an end in itself. It is a symbolic gesture that encompasses affectivities, sociabilities, and power relations at once. The channelling of one's desire through others is a crucial element of gift-giving. How desire is channelled through others has to do with how 'habitus', as conceived by Bourdieu, results in the valuing of certain tastes over others. The devaluing of certain tastes is concurrent with his overall exploration of habitus as the domineering force.

Habitus, following Bourdieu, operates dually: both social relations and the self constitute each other. Habitus manifests itself in 'styles of standing and moving, taking up space, in ways of speaking (idioms, as well accent), in styles of dress', and so on (Lawler, 2004: 111). Habitus has been theorized as 'second skin' by Entwistle (2000: 138), and like a 'fish in the water' by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992):

‘Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside social agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a ‘fish in water’: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:127).

Since Bourdieu conceives the habitus as the foundation of his social theory, he develops it within further concepts, notably the ‘social field’, which he likens to the field of a sports game that has its own set of rules and regulations. Still, Bourdieu distinguishes between the ‘rules of the game’, and the ‘feel for the game’:

‘Social fields, which are the products of a long, slow process of autonomization, and are therefore, so to speak, games ‘in themselves’ and not ‘for themselves’, one does not embark on the game by a conscious act, one is born into the game, with the game; and the relation of investment is made more total and unconditional by the fact that it is unaware of what it is (Bourdieu, 1990: 67).

In other words, habitus is the result of both conscious and unconscious elements, in addition to encompassing what could be described as memory that is both embodied and collective:

‘The habitus-embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product [...] It is a spontaneity without consciousness or will, opposed as much to the mechanical necessity of things without history in mechanistic theories as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects ‘without inertia’ in rationalist theories’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 56).

Conversely, to feel like a 'fish out of water' is to feel inadequate. This happens when one's circumstances are at odds with the 'social field', or the game that they are playing. Since the gift plays a primordial role in fostering 'inclusive intimacy', it is approached both cautiously and surely, since inclusive intimacy disturbs the pre-existing social networks. This is evident in the reiteration of the expression '*Alhamdulillah*', or Thanks be to Allah, whenever wealth, gifts, and things are mentioned, and exhibiting one's wealth without bowing to the Divine is seen as selfish. Whereas Bourdieu's concept of habitus helps us understand why and how intimacy between the couple calls for the inclusion of others, it remains too strict in the sense that it ignores the emotional component of the couple. This brings me to my critique of the work of Bourdieu.

VI. 4. The limits of Bourdieu: emotional capital

For Bourdieu, habitus is concurrent with the accumulation of symbolic capital, a synthesis of economic, social, and cultural capitals. Crucial to Bourdieu's logic is that each of these capitals can be invested in so as to accumulate further ones. When applied to this thesis, the notion of habitus allows us to understand how certain tastes are valued over others since Bourdieu views individuals' agency as linked to that of the group.

However, Bourdieu's concept of the habitus remains overly deterministic, in my view, and it would be limiting, and almost naïve, to state that capitals are simply exchanged, as my ethnography hereafter shows. In addition, Bourdieu's structural work is at odds with my overall ambivalent and unstable view of love, and negates the fluidity of the

subject, or the subject as becoming. Having said that, I am not the first to contend such views; other feminist scholars share this view.

For instance, Entwistle (2000) maintains that 'the potential of the habitus as a concept for thinking through embodiment is that it provides a link between the individual and the social: the way we live in our bodies is structured by our social position in the world, but these structures are reproduced through the embodied actions of the individuals' (Entwistle, 2000: 36). Similarly, Ashall (2010) states that Bourdieu's concept of 'gendered habitus' 'successfully addresses the inferior status of women, providing a useful tool for the unequal power relations between the sexes' (Ashall, 2010: 21).

It is clear, I hope, at this stage of my work, that I am reluctant to adhere to universal assumptions about women's 'inferiority' and men's 'domination'. I maintain the production of femininities and masculinities within a specific context rather than using the categories of women and men, in addition to maintaining how both systems produce internal unequal systems. Hakim (2010), by emphasizing women's deliberate cultivation of their 'erotic capital', reproduces Bourdieu's argument of masculine domination. For Hakim (2010), 'erotic capital' is a 'combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness to other members of your society, and especially to members of the opposite sex, in all social contexts [...] and it includes skills that can be learnt and developed, as well as advantages fixed at birth' (Hakim, 2010: 501).

Whereas the work of Hakim is mostly uncomfortable for feminist thinkers, including myself, who often invest in countering what Laura Mulvey summed up as the 'male

gaze' (Mulvey, 1975). I could not help but notice how valid it is in the context of Lebanon since many female interlocutors found it essential to display hyper-feminine aesthetics. At the same time, many of my female interlocutors clashed with their male partners whenever the latter viewed them as 'too erotic', and hence asked them to 'tone it down' (see chapter VIII).

Still, whereas the debate continues as to whether 'erotic capital' is indeed empowering to women, my fieldwork informed me that whereas women are capable of taking full advantage of their 'erotic capital' in order to improve their living conditions, usually by marrying men from wealthier backgrounds, for men, this possibility is mostly absent. If anything, many men found themselves easily discarded and marginalised, with many opting for migration in order to improve their material conditions. Clearly, 'erotic capital' is hindering if we are to consider its long-term impact on gender relations in Lebanon. If anything, 'erotic capital', despite gearing towards empowering women 'in theory', also contributes to new social hierarchies informed by class. As such, it is both a catalyst and a contributor to the gendered inequalities that result from neoliberal economics.

The limits of Bourdieu's 'gendered habitus' has been explored by an array of feminist scholars. McNay (2004), for instance, notes that 'by producing an account of power that is structurally committed to the status quo, Bourdieu forecloses the possibility of agency emerging from the margins' (McNay, 2004: 180), and that his 'deployment of a rather functionalist notion of adaptation in which habitus adjusts to the exigencies of the field [and which] re-inscribes a dualism between the objective and the subjective where the former remains determining in the last instance' (ibid: 181).

Approaching Bourdieu through a gender and sexuality lens, Skeggs (2004) argues similar views when she maintains the limits of Bourdieu's concept of the habitus since it is not capable of accounting for the 'the contradictions, plays, experimentations, swappings, ambiguities and passings both within gender and gender and sexuality' (Skeggs 2004: 27). In addition to identifying gaps in the work of Bourdieu, some feminist scholars embraced his work to their advantage. Lawler (2004), for instance, reads Bourdieu against the grain in order to conceive the habitus as 'generative' instead of 'determining' (Lawler, 2004: 112):

'Because habitus are profoundly social, they carry the traces of the lines of division and distinction along which the social is organized. That is, class, race, gender, sexuality, and so on, are all marked within the habitus. Further, and because these social distinctions are hierarchical, not all habitus are worth the same. Some are normalized, while others are pathological. In this sense, habitus clash, as well as class. Part of the 'second sense' embodied in habitus entails a judgment of other habitus' (Lawler, 2004: 112).

How certain habitus are normalized and others are pathologized will become clear throughout the remainder of the chapter, where I draw on my ethnography and on my interlocutors' views. Another way feminist scholars have reclaimed the work of Bourdieu to their advantage can be found in the work of Reay (2004). Reay (2004) conceives 'emotional capital' as a capital that can be invested in the accumulation of further capitals: in her case, working mothers invest emotionally in their children's education for the latter's cultural benefit. Reay's unique perspective is important, in my view, because she links emotional capital to precarity, and although she relegates it to

the specific realm of women-mothers, she does it through an empowering lens that critiques women's irrationality and supposedly highly emotive state. Her views resonate with my overall view of agency as metaphysical and always becoming (chapter IV) since emotions play an important role in the production of novel ways of feeling, and of being in the world. Yet, emotional capital is equally invested by both men and women in addition to further significant actors who impact their space-couple. By ascribing to emotions a status of capital, I am capable of countering Bourdieu's rather linear conceptualization of the subject. Still, it is important that I distinguish between emotional capital, and emotions per se. Whereas the concept of emotional capital allows us to recognize the contributing role of emotions in shaping both the individual and the social, it is important that I situate emotions in relation to the practice of gift-giving.

VI. 5. The many intersections of class and sect

As we will see, how couples and their extended kin act and behave around gifts is crucial in constituting the couple-space. As I stated earlier, an excessive display of emotions is seen as immodest, or as 'lacking'. To judge someone as 'lacking' is to suggest that they are inadequate since they do not correspond to the social field in which they find themselves.

In this chapter, lacking ought to be mostly understood in relation to class, especially since class seems to operate as an independent social variable at times, which is problematic for my overall intersectional feminism beliefs. An excessive display of emotions upon gift-receiving is seen as 'vulgar', and becomes instrumental for the

reproduction of a classed view of society. The gift, then, becomes the object around which the rules of the game of gift-giving are played. Since my interlocutors are in same-sect relationships, class is the variable around which narratives on love differentiate. The prevalence of class over an intersectional understanding of power relations is problematic for my analysis. Intersectional feminists view the subject as emerging from the intersections of concurrent powers of privilege and oppression. However, and as my fieldwork informed me, class at times overrides the sectarian barriers generally imposed on couples, and results in the dichotomous narrative of 'well done for her, she bagged a millionaire', or 'she is a manipulative bitch who will never be happy'. At the same time, class emerged as a category to distinguish one's values, with many female interlocutors insisting that they could never bring themselves to date a non-Lebanese man 'no matter how rich he is'.

An excessive display of emotions reveals a rather materialist self whose sole concern is the accumulation of wealth, in addition to breaching the societal norms of modest behaviour (Deeb and Harb, 2013). In addition, and in line with the general demonization of excessive emotional display, as is the case with excessive feelings of love, an excessive display of emotions reveals a rather immature self, which is contrary to the assumption of marriage as the benchmark from which one emerges as an adult. This is why, and regardless of one's taste, a gift is always channelled through the tastes of others. This unconventional way of communicating, where one speaks the other's language without necessarily adhering to it, which is very much in line with the automatized and unconscious pattern in which Bourdieu's habitus reproduces itself, is crucial to understanding the Structural foundations of gift-giving, therefore freeing them from

manipulative and opportunist accusations. In addition, it helps us view emotions as posited by Ahmed (2004), who argues that emotions are non-residential, i.e. do not reside in a subject per se; however, 'they still work to bind subjects together. Indeed, to put it more strongly, the non-residence of emotions is what makes them binding' (Ahmed, 2004: 114).

The gift, in addition to fostering the affective bond between the couple, becomes the vehicle through which self and other are articulated along sectarian and classed lines. Moreover, and in addition to adhering to strict rules, notably the devaluing of certain tastes and the channelling of one's desire and taste through others, gifts also act as a reference whereby others can situate themselves in relation to the couple.

Following this lengthy theoretical framing of gift-giving, I now relate my ethnography. I draw on the narratives and experiences of several couples in order to empirically showcase the links between gift-giving and 'inclusive intimacy'.

VI. 6. No gift? No love!

Najwa was one of the earliest interlocutors I met during my fieldwork. A young woman I met at random at a dermatologist's clinic put me in contact with Najwa. For some reason, I had developed a stubborn rash during my first week in Beirut, which prompted me to see a dermatologist at one point. The official diagnosis was 'stress', which didn't make much sense to me (it does now, in hindsight). As is the custom in Lebanon, those present in a doctor's waiting room sooner or later engage in small talk. At some point, I shared my research with those present, before adding that if they knew

of any couples who are to be married and who would not mind being interviewed by me, please would they not hesitate to contact me. Apart from the sixty-something immaculately dressed and styled woman who looked at me with a great level of suspicion, everyone else (we were four women in total) seemed rather excited. I would not have shared my research had there been a single man in the waiting room. This is because, like my female interlocutors, I construct my intimacy by regulating it, to the best of my ability, in relation to a Public that I view as highly sexualized (see chapter VIII).

Najwa is twenty-eight and works in a women's clothing boutique in Dbayyeh. She has recently been promoted to the position of assistant manager. She was 'ecstatic' about it because she no longer had to 'fold' clothes 'from morning till evening', but could 'interact with customers more, in addition to doing administrative work'.¹⁴³

Najwa met Selim through an acquaintance of hers. Her acquaintance told her that Selim was *ādami*, and would be a great match for her. Selim had a 'stable' life, and had been looking for a partner, according to Najwa's acquaintance.¹⁴⁴ Selim had been working as a clerk in the Dbayeh branch of an important bank that is located, like many other banks, along the not-really-highway highway between Tripoli and Beirut. He was in his sixth year already, and although the bank had not moved him between branches, he came 'recommended', in the sense that his network, by virtue of Lebanon's connective patriarchy, played a direct role in him being hired.¹⁴⁵

143 Interview with Najwa, Dbayeh, February 2014

144 Ibid.

145 Ibid.

Najwa and Selim had had 'known' each other for almost a year now.¹⁴⁶ The first time Selim saw Najwa was on the day he accompanied his younger sister to the boutique where Najwa works. Such 'disguised' visits are widely practiced, and both men and women take part in them. Oftentimes, mothers accompany their daughters in order to catch a glimpse of their future-potential sons-in-law. The main goal of the visit is to 'physically assess' the other, and to ensure that they are not 'too ugly', 'too fat', or 'too offish' (*ghalizīn*). In addition, these visits are seen as a 'safe' method that does not invade the other's boundaries of privacy.

On our first face-to-face interview since she had agreed to meet with me, Najwa proudly showed me a necklace that Selim had gifted her a couple of weeks prior. It was a simple yet elegant necklace, consisting of a thin chain with a hollowed cylindrical charm enclosed with sparkly stones. I commented to Najwa that it was a pretty necklace, and she straightaway informed me that it was a 'Swarovski'.¹⁴⁷ I asked Najwa if Selim has made the 'right guess' or whether she considered 'exchanging it for something else'.¹⁴⁸ Najwa looked at me somewhat in disbelief. I could even sense some degree of anger:

'Of course I like it! It's from Selim. I think if I were choosing the necklace myself I would have chosen something else, something more visible (*shi ybayyen aktar*), but I like it a lot, and it would be '*ayb*' (rude) to exchange it. What will I tell him if he asks me about it? That I exchanged it? Do you realize how bad that would make me look?'¹⁴⁹

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid.

Although Najwa might have considered something else had she had the chance to choose the necklace herself, it is clear that aesthetics were not her sole criterion for evaluating the beauty of the necklace. There are two important points in her narrative: her use of the expression '*shi ybayyen aktar*', and the social morals associated with gifts, as seen in her use of the notion of '*ayb*'.

The expression '*shi ybayyen aktar*' is rampant in everyday talk in Lebanon. It literally translates as 'something that is more visible'. It is informative of how Lebanese consumers channel their aesthetics through the tastes of others. Needless to say, this constant channelling results in a specific interpretation of market value, where value is not restricted to the object in question per se, but by how society perceives it, which is in line with Bourdieu's concept of the habitus.

For instance, when choosing a dress, a watch, a phone, or a car, one constantly weighs the price against how it will be perceived by others. A minimalist designer dress or a Jaguar car, for example, although recognized as luxury items, are not likely to be consumed widely, seeing that they 'don't fill the eye enough' [*ma bi'abbou el 'ayn*], compared to a dress with a more eye-catching pattern or a Mercedes. I actually visited the Jaguar branch in Achrafieh, and one of the salesmen present told me the following:

'Most of our customers are from the Elite. Who else is going to buy a Jaguar? In Lebanon, people who want to show off buy Mercedes cars. A Jaguar re-sells for peanuts. Everyone else would much rather invest in a Mercedes because it 'keeps' its price. When you buy a Jaguar, you don't think about reselling it'.¹⁵⁰

150 Field notes, Achrafieh, July 2014.

I then remarked that I increasingly see Jaguar cars circulating around the not-really-highway highway. Interestingly, he pointed out that ‘most, if not all [Jaguar cars], are second hand’, and that ‘they are an acquired taste’, bought by migrant workers in the Gulf who try to imitate the practices of luxury they encounter in the Gulf.¹⁵¹

As for ‘*ayb*’, it is *the* keyword in Najwa’s narrative. The expression ‘*ayb*’ in Lebanon encompasses a whole array of meanings, and can be found in each of the ‘social’, ‘moral’, and ‘religious’ ‘rubrics’ of Lebanon, to borrow from Deeb and Harb (2013). Deeb and Harb (2013) distinguish between ‘*ayb*’, and *haram*, for example, where the first is socially frowned upon, whereas the second is systematically prohibited by religion (Deeb and Harb, 2013: 21). Where ‘*ayb*’ is concerned, Deeb and Harb (2013: 12) argue that:

‘There is another dimension to the concept that specifically refers to gendered behavior that is considered shameful either because it marks women as sexually available or ‘loose’ [*faltaneh*] or because it marks men as incapable. Here ‘*ayb*’ includes acts like a woman kissing her boyfriend in public, women smoking in public, and a man borrowing money from a woman.’

Still, some gendered behaviours considered ‘*ayb*’, such as a woman smoking in public, are not considered as such if the woman in question is accompanied by a male. This is because it is understood that the male accepts the woman’s behaviour, and the woman is thus spared immediate commentaries. ‘*Ayb*’, then, is ranked. In addition to relating specifically to women’s conduct in public, ‘*ayb*’ is evoked when someone, whether male or female, breaches societal conventions, including the exchanging of a gift for a

151 Ibid.

different item. Still, if the parties involved are bound closely, then the gift can be exchanged without concern. However, this is not likely to happen anyway, seeing that the practice of gifting female partners considerably drops following marriage. After marriage, gifts are extended to further family members, and include dinner invitations, financial assistance, and generally helping others by relying on one's own contacts. Having said that, not only are aesthetics channelled through the taste of others; a gift, too, is interpreted along wider societal rubrics:

'What will they [Selim's family] think of me if I exchange the necklace? I don't want them to say that I am taking advantage of him, or to think that I am *sa'eeleh* (difficult to please). You know, last week was Selim's mother birthday. I brought her a kilo of chocolate from a confectionary near where I live. You know what she told me? She said *shoo 'am betwaffreh?* (oh! are you trying to save money?) She thought she was being funny but she wasn't! *Sammetleh badani!* (She poisoned my entire body, an expression used to evoke feelings of intense upset), but what can I do? She's my mother-in-law'.¹⁵²

Interestingly, Najwa was already referring to Selim's mother as her 'mother-in-law', although they were still in the *ta'arof* (getting to know each other) period. This is reflective of her *already* identifying with Selim's kin. I asked her if she referred to Selim's mother as such all the time. She had to pause and think for a few seconds. She seemed puzzled, and could not remember when she started referring to her as such. Still, she clarified that whenever she was with Selim, she referred to her as 'your mother'. I cannot confirm whether Najwa used her words 'on a whim'. Still, it

152 Interview with Najwa, Dbayeh, February 2014

is interesting that she strategically 'chooses her camp', depending on the situation in which she finds herself. When with Selim, she keeps her distance by referring to her as 'your mother', as if not to impose herself between Selim and his mother. When she is not with Selim, she simply calls her 'mother-in-law', and by doing so, she is slowly introducing her wider circle to her future married life.

Najwa: 'you're not going to include that, right?'

Me: 'what?'

Najwa: 'The bit with the chocolate'.

Me: 'Of course I will! That's the whole point of my research.'

Najwa: *Ya Allah...*

Me: Najwa, don't worry. You can ask me to take out whatever information you are not comfortable with. Heck, I'll cancel the whole thing if you are not comfortable with it.

Najwa: *Ma hal add!* (It doesn't have to go this far), but you're sure no one can tell it is me?

Me: 100%. I am changing your name, the place where you work, Selim's name.

Najwa: *D'accord, d'accord* (Ok, Ok, in French)... *ça va* (it's fine, in French)¹⁵³.

[Interval.

Not all my interlocutors were as apprehensive as Najwa. In fact, most of them were genuinely interested in my research and were more than happy to take part in it. Najwa was equally interested. She only showed concern whenever my data risked hindering her relationship with her future mother-in-law. Still, I find it important to relate Najwa's fears because they are reflective of the importance of the negotiations that accompany 'love' in Lebanon. Najwa and Selim are not an independent couple per se. Considering the degree to which connective patriarchy in Lebanon permeates the everyday, their coupledness is part of a significant network of others. In any case, this will be highly visible in each of the narratives and ethnographic passages I further relate.

End of Interval.]

153 Ibid.

The kilo of chocolate in question, which is a most conventionally accepted formal gift, hit a wrong note with Selim's mother because it was not bought from an upmarket confectionery. Most people in Lebanon would agree that upmarket, or fancy, brands are not necessarily tantamount to most delicious. Whereas most would shop from their favourite local shop for personal consumption, when it comes to formal events that require gifts, they would opt for more fancy brands instead. Najwa told me that she was trying to 'get closer' to Selim's mother by gifting her 'her favourite assortment of chocolate ever!'¹⁵⁴ Sadly for her, she fell flat on her face. One could argue that for the younger generation, gifting others following one's personal taste is becoming increasingly accepted, but if I am to trust my fieldwork, such shifts are yet to be widely accepted. When I asked her about Selim's position, she said he told her in private soon after that '*zra'eyya bi da'nī*', she's my mother, *baddik ettawli bālik 'alayyah*', which literally translates as 'plant it in my chin, she's my mother, you should prolong your patience with her', (blame it on me, she's my mother, you know you ought to be patient with her).¹⁵⁵

By asking Najwa to 'blame it on him', Selim is being a reasonable adult who is arbitrating between his mother and his wife-to-be. After all, his mother is soon to be a mother-in-law, and the status of mother-in-law in the context of the Middle East is a powerful status that many women anticipate, considering the 'cycle of power of the household' from daughter, to wife, to mother, to mother-in-law (Kandiyoti, 1988). Moreover, connective patriarchy elevates the 'elders', regardless of their gender.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Interestingly, both Najwa and Selim's mother are already interacting like daughter and mother-in-law; Najwa by referring to her as such, and Selim's mother by exerting her power on her. Having said that, Najwa's narrative is reflective of how Najwa and Selim cultivate their intimacy by including outsiders. Should Najwa exchange the gift, she would be sending the message that she is ignoring Selim's entourage of significant others. In some ways, couples in Lebanon often find themselves compartmentalizing their intimacy between their couple-space and their larger network. In addition, their intimacy, as a space of shared affectivities, is directly linked to further spaces of intimacy, and one cannot be undone from the other. Unlike Najwa, Mireille's fiancé, Bilal, was becoming increasingly 'stingy', or *bakhil*, when it came to gifts.

'In the last two months, he [Bilal] didn't buy me a single thing. He didn't even offer to refill my phone with credits! What is next? ... If he is no longer interested, he should let me know! He can't play games with me! It's *'ayb* for him not to tell me if he no longer is interested.'¹⁵⁶

Mireille and Bilal had only known each other for six months when I interviewed Mireille. Bilal is six years older than Mireille, and owns and manage a *MoneyGram* franchise shop. Mireille was in her final year studying for a BTS degree in Accounting. Regarding Mireille, the fact that Bilal was no longer buying her gifts was tantamount to her no longer being desired by him. When I asked her if she could think of an explanation for his behaviour, she said that it had been two months exactly since she had turned down an outing with him because she had had an exam

156 Interview with Najwa, Dbayeh, February 2014

to prepare for. When I suggested that he might be in financial difficulty, she replied that 'he's more than fine' in this regard. Regardless of Bilal's reasons or intentions, Mireille's narrative clearly links the practice of giving with being desired. As soon as Bilal stopped gifting her things, she started having doubts about his level of interest in her.

Equally important in Mireille's narrative is her use of the expression '*ayb*'. In this case, '*ayb*', is used to evoke both social and moral rubrics. If it is the case that Bilal is indeed no longer interested in Mireille, not informing her of his decision promptly makes him 'dishonest', according to Mireille, because she has already been 'linked' to Bilal, despite the absence of formalities.¹⁵⁷ Once a woman is linked to a man, and vice versa, admirers deliberately keep themselves 'out of the picture'. As such, and by not telling her, Bilal is still making a claim on her, so to speak. Still, close friends and family members continue to inform women like Mireille of suitors and potential partners, without necessarily introducing them directly, as long as the couple has not become 'official'.

Bilal aside, Mireille's reaction is the result of her very own milieu, where men are expected to gift potential partners, and women are expected to accept such gifts. Moreover, Mireille's reaction is reflective of the hybrid nature of intimacy in the context of Lebanon. Intimacy is part-material, part-affective, and part-others, and it would simply be silly to attempt to measure the importance or weight of each, seeing how they occupy different degrees of relevance depending on: the person in

157 Ibid.

question; the gift itself; the man and woman's larger network; and, not to forget, the very nature of the circumstances that accompanied the gifting. In addition, although gifts are the primary method that men use in order to announce their seriousness, their full meaning cannot be appreciated outside of Lebanon's societal and moralistic rubrics. Consider the following objection by Najwa:

'I don't know what took him! He said I must accompany him to a dinner organized by his bank. *Accompany him as what?* [Najwa became considerably emotional]. We barely knew each other at that time! We were not engaged! Our parents had just started to know each other!'¹⁵⁸

According to Najwa, Selim was very insistent that she accompanied him, and at some point, he *'ayyat 'layyeh* (raised his voice).¹⁵⁹ That was the first time, and last time, according to Najwa, that Selim had raised his voice at her. Equally important to note is Najwa reflecting on her status. As we will see in chapter VIII, women in non-official couples are sometimes frowned upon in public, and are assumed to be sexually active outside of marriage:

'He was so repentant, and so sorry. The next day, he went down to visit my dad at his shop, and he said to him, 'I am here to apologize, I have upset Najwa. I am here to ask for your forgiveness. I hadn't even told my parents about our fight!'¹⁶⁰

Najwa told me that it was Selim's actions on that day that crystallized her feelings for

158 Interview with Najwa, Dbayeh, February 2014.

159 Ibid.

160 Ibid.

him. The fact that he put himself in a vulnerable situation by admitting his actions to Najwa's father was, according to Najwa, '*the moment that changed everything*'.¹⁶¹ Najwa's narrative is illustrative of how official couples include others in their couple-space. By bypassing Najwa and apologizing to her father instead, Selim took a considerable risk. Seeing that this particular episode occurred during the first months into their relationship, Selim was eager to atone for himself, and he did it by 'admitting' his shortcoming to Najwa's father, the 'original' male protector. At the same time, and seen through a masculinity lens, Selim reiterated the fact that he was a man that is *ādami* and trustworthy (see chapter VI). In addition to material gifts, many men put themselves forward as part of consolidating their couple-space. In this sense, they are perceived as a 'son' by the woman's parents and elder kin. A 'son' is trustworthy, and holds the wellbeing of the woman's larger kin dearly. This is evident in the example of Samer and Fadwa, whom I met and interviewed in my hometown, Tripoli.

Fadwa is in her late twenties. She would not tell me her precise age, but it was 'less than thirty for sure'.¹⁶² Fadwa was from a lower-middle class family, and was 'grateful to Allah for everything'.¹⁶³ She was highly pious, wore the veil, and loved going to the café with her friends 'above everything else'.¹⁶⁴ In many ways, she echoed the figure of the modern and pious Muslim youth, as portrayed by Deeb and Harb (2013). She had a degree in Arabic Literature, and taught Arabic grammar in a number of primary schools around Tripoli. She has one brother who is 'doing well' in Abu-Dhabi, and who

161 Ibid.

162 Interview with Fadwa, Tripoli, August 2014

163 Ibid.

164 Ibid.

regularly sends remittances to her family.¹⁶⁵ Her father had recently decided to invest some of this remittance money into buying her a car because, according to Fadwa, 'he wants me [Fadwa] to be strong and self- reliant':¹⁶⁶

'Samer didn't like the fact that I was getting a car at all! He kept asking me why I needed a car when he could drive me anywhere I want. He said he would teach me how to drive, but he would not let me drive him. He says it's *'ayb*. He doesn't mind that I drive, he is not prohibiting me from driving. It's just that he takes it personally if I do not ask him to. He thinks it is important that I know how to drive, but that I should only drive in situations of emergency'.¹⁶⁷

There are two important points that are worthy of an in-depth analysis in Fadwa's narrative. The first one relates to the shame, or *'ayb*, that Samer associates with being seen being driven by Fadwa, which would, in many ways, diminish his male presence. The second point relates to Samer insisting on driving Fadwa. Before jumping into Orientalist conclusions such as Samer is an overly jealous Arab man who wants to control Fadwa's mobility, and based on my own interactions with Samer, it seems to me that Samer genuinely feels a 'loss of intimacy' when Fadwa does not ask him for favors.

'I am not the richest man in the world. There is only this much I can give her. *Alhamdulillah* she is accepting me for who I am and what I have. And I give thanks to Allah for bringing us together. I can't take her out every other day, but I sure can do little things for her'.¹⁶⁸

Samer expects to be 'prompted' for favours by Fadwa. For Samer, if Fadwa does not ask

165 Ibid.

166 Ibid.

167 Ibid.

168 Interview with Fadwa and Samer, Tripoli, August 2014

him for favors, she is indirectly telling him that she no longer is interested in him. Perhaps Samer is not capable of buying Fadwa a Swarovski necklace, but he still expects himself to 'give', and Fadwa to 'receive' from him. When I eventually got to interview them together, I mentioned the 'car episode'. Fadwa wrapped her left arm around Samer's right arm, and lightly spanked him with the right one:

'Ma baddi 'azbak' (I don't want to burden you) I am not going to interrupt your work so that you drop me at Fida [her best friend whom she visits on a daily basis]. Fida can wait, your work cannot'.¹⁶⁹

[Interval.

Yes, Love is a construct. Or is it? Don't we all wish for a pure form of Love that transcends every little thing? There is something indescribably human when listening to couples talk. I have always been fascinated by couples; perhaps because I have been single all my life, and am quite sure that I wish to remain so. No wonder I am engaging with this very topic for my thesis! Listening to each of Samer, Fadwa, Najwa, Selim, and the rest of my interlocutors talk about their lives, their hopes, the challenges they face, their goodwill and others' is simply fascinating. It takes such emotional labour, and they are constantly thinking of themselves through others. I am not sure I could handle this myself.

End of Interval.]

As was the case with Samer, Elias, too, felt a loss of intimacy when his fiancée, Carmen, turned down a gift. According to Elias, when Carmen turned down some Givenchy

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

perfume ('I still remember') he had bought her, 'it was the beginning of the end'.¹⁷⁰ When I interviewed Elias, he and Carmen had 'uncoupled' about a year earlier. They were at the early stage of *ta'arof*, and nothing was '*rasmi*' (official). I was put in contact with Elias by one of the gender activists whose office I often stopped by to 'catch my breath' during fieldwork. My interaction with Elias was relatively short. He clearly was not happy talking about Carmen, and although I remarked to him that he did not have to share any information with me in this regard, he said that 'it had nothing to me', and since C. [his friend] had recommended me to him, he did not mind being interviewed:

'What else could it mean? Clearly, she was no longer interested in me. It's not like she justified her choice. She simply said '*heik*' (just like that). What class of answer is that? There are *ossūl* (customs), you don't just say '*heik*'. If you are not interested, you say it. I am not a puppet for her to toy with. *Bta'erfeh labal el 'asfūr? Kint jebtella yeh* (I would have brought her milk from birds had she asked for it!')¹⁷¹

Elias' narrative reflects a broken ego, which is entirely understandable considering that Carmen, it turned out, had declined his gift because she had made up her mind about a new man she had recently met. For Elias, there are '*ussūl*', or conventions. Just like Mireille was appalled by Bilal's treatment of her, Elias, thought it disrespectful that Carmen did not tell him promptly that she no longer was interested in him.

Seen through a gender lens, *ussūl* applies to both men and women, and both are expected to adhere to it. Of course, I can only engage with the expression *ossūl* within the strict frame of my interlocutors' narratives. After all, I almost exclusively interviewed 'couples' that were in 'official relationships', in the sense that they were

170 Interview with Elias, Beirut, March 2014.

171 Ibid.

expecting to marry. Likewise, *ussūl* is crucial during periods of *ta'arof*, with many places and activities considered shameful and utterly unacceptable, depending on the phase of the couple's relationship. Elias said he would have brought Carmen '*laban al 'asfūr*' had she asked for it. The expression '*laban al 'asfūr*' is very much present in everyday talk. It literally translates as birds' milk, as in milk from cows. Unlike cows though, birds do not produce milk.

Having said that, the expression is used to express the length to which one is willing to go in order to please the other. It is also representative of being deeply in love. Likewise, the expression is used to condemn those who are constantly demanding new things, in addition to being difficult to please. As far as the political economy of love goes, women who expect to be constantly gifted things that are beyond the means of their man are seen to be asking for *laban el asfūr*, or the impossible. In this case, they are condemned as being 'manipulative' and 'selfish', and strictly interested only in the man's wealth. It is very rare to hear the expression being reiterated in the context of a man, he who gives; at least I never came across such a situation during my own fieldwork. In the case of Veronique, however, it was a man's duty to 'buy her everything [a woman] wants':

'Of course it is my right. Why else would I marry? All this talk of love and romance, that's wishful thinking. Don't believe a word of it! You're still single, right?'¹⁷²

I met Veronique at a beauty parlour. At the time of my fieldwork, I visited beauty parlours at least once every fortnight. Seeing that no men were present, I used to speak

172 Field notes and unscheduled interview with Veronique, at a 'beauty' parlour near Hamra, June 2014

freely about my research. I met many interlocutors, like Veronique, in women-only places, namely gyms, and beauty parlours. Veronique was simply 'over the top' in everything she said and did, and she surely was not apologetic about it. She was a regular in the beauty parlour, a middle-range salon that was accessed by a wide range of women, and which she considered as her 'second home':

*'Shou baddik ta'erfeh? (What do you need to know?) I can tell you about everything and everyone. I know everything that is happening in Beirut, and I am telling you, it's all about masāri (money) these days.'*¹⁷³

When I interviewed Veronique, she was having her nails done. I suggested that we go to a café nearby so that she could be more comfortable when speaking to me. She said that 'there's nothing to hide', and that 'everyone here knows me', before jokingly saying 'why pay for the coffee if we can have it here [at the beauty parlour] for free?' Veronique had such a strong presence, and in many ways, she was leading the conversation.

Veronique was in her forties and had separated from her husband more than ten years earlier. Her Maronite faith did not allow her to divorce from her husband. Instead, they had been living separate lives since. They have one daughter who is of a 'marriageable' age:

'I am always telling my daughter to find herself a wealthy husband. If he can't buy her a house, and a car, and 'spend on her' (yosrof 'alayah), bala hal shaghleh (better not [referring to marriage]). Look at me. I had no house, no nothing after I divorced, bas ykatter kheir Allah,

173 Ibid.

meshi el hāl (but thanks to Allah, things have worked out).¹⁷⁴

Amazingly, all the women present nodded in agreement with Veronique. For Veronique and the rest of the women, a man was expected to provide for his woman. In return, a woman had to please her man. This scene left me particularly perplexed, especially when contrasted with the 'breadwinner puzzle' that I discussed earlier (see Chapter VI). It is possible that Veronique's views are representative of her generation, especially since she displayed an overall 'pragmatic' view of marriage, which reminded me of both Layal's mother and Om Zahra? It is also plausible that out of respect for Veronique's age, or in order to avoid what could turn into a serious debate, those present simply agreed with her?

Veronique was forward to the point that she remarked to me that my hair was 'too short', and that 'knowledge is not everything'.¹⁷⁵ As far as 'knowledge' is concerned, a number of interlocutors told me that although a degree is important, life was not strictly about knowledge in the sense of education (*'elem*). Most often, they stated such views when I shared with them my age – thirty-four at the time of writing my thesis - with no intention of marrying anytime soon:

'Look, we get it that a college or a university degree is important, it sure comes in handy. A man is happy when his wife is an educated one, but she surely doesn't have to overdo it.'¹⁷⁶

174 Ibid.

175 Ibid.

176 Ibid.

When I asked Veronique to elaborate more on what she meant, she said that a 'shehadeh' (diploma) is nothing more than 'prestige', and that it was all about the university from which one graduates.¹⁷⁷ I was not entirely convinced by Veronique's view, although I did come across similar ones on several occasions during my fieldwork. Perhaps the fact that Veronique was a regular led those present to agree with her. I cannot tell. I can, nevertheless, relate the experience of Layla.

Layla was in her final year towards a degree in nursing when she got engaged to one of her distant cousins. As I have argued earlier, once a couple becomes official, they start negotiating their partnership about the long-term. At some point, Layla's fiancé remarked that she would not need to work once they married:

'In the beginning, he used to say it jokingly, in addition to disguising it in romantic talk. He'd say things like 'you'll never have to work a single day in your life', because I am his *malakeh* (queen). *Ya te'teereh!* (oh silly and naïve me!) It turned out he meant it. It made me so sad. *Kif ya'ni innou* (how and why) I wasn't going to work? My father worked really hard to pay for my degree!¹⁷⁸

Soon after, Layla returned the gifts to her fiancé. Although her fiancé insisted that she kept them, her father made sure she did not. By insisting that Layla keep the gifts, her fiancé was upholding his 'good relationship' with her extended network, particularly her father. Moreover, he was sending a message to possible new partners that he is *ādami*.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Layla, Beirut, August 2014.

Following the narratives of both Veronique and Layla, education can be thought of as a multi-faceted bargaining tool in the context of 'love' in Lebanon. For Veronique, the most important element of a degree is the educational body from which it is issued, which would reflect one's larger network's level of affluence. In many ways, it is reminiscent of 'erotic capital', in the sense that it contributes to improving one's chances of finding a partner from an upper echelon. For Layla, a degree is a tool she can bargain with when mediating with her partner about the long-term. Although cases such as her fiancé were rare, in the sense that most of the couples I spoke to expected both partners to contribute financially to the household (see chapter VI), it is clear that for some, access to work continues to constitute a point of contention.

For Layla's fiancé, a 'well-off'¹⁷⁹ man in his thirties, the status of Layla as a working woman runs contrary to the ethos of his upward social mobility. According to Layla, her fiancé had 'nothing' when he started his trade business eight years earlier. Today, his business had branched out to four of Lebanon's main coastal cities. For Layla's fiancé (she never told me his name), to be able to provide fully for her is a 'privilege' that few men can experience. Again, and before jumping to the conclusion that Layla's partner was a 'control freak' who insisted on regulating his wife's movements and restricting her mobility, Layla's partner felt a 'loss of intimacy' when Layla insisted on working. His position allows me to critique the control/care paradigm, as posited by Suad Joseph (2000). After all, Layla's fiancé simply resigned himself to 'accepting' her choice. There was no forcing her into giving up her degree. To this day, her father continues to trade with him, and they remain on 'good terms'. As Layla says, '*ma fi nassib*' (it wasn't my

179 Ibid.

destiny).¹⁸⁰

So far, we have seen how the gift is linked to feelings of 'love', and how material offerings are seen as necessary for the consolidation of those feelings. In addition, we have seen how one's feelings are often channelled through others. I continue to draw on my fieldwork to further highlight my concept of 'inclusive intimacy'.

I relate the story of Ghassan and Maria to showcase how men embody care, at least in the context of 'love'. According to Ghassan, he and Maria had been engaged for a year and a half. It was a difficult period because Maria's mother had been ill, and Maria had been her sole carer. Maria's only sister lived in Ghana with her husband and two children. Her father had passed away four years earlier.

According to Ghassan, it was his uncle who introduced him to Maria. Like Maria, he is Orthodox Christian. His uncle knew Maria's father from a business they had run together until the latter passed away. According to Ghassan, his uncle had told him that Maria was a 'good woman' from a 'good house', and that he would make the right choice by marrying her, 'especially since she no longer has a male to rely on'.¹⁸¹

'I was very close to getting engaged once, but then I got a job in Kuwait and soon left. She wasn't very young and didn't want to wait till I finished my contract (a three-year contract). We tried to get married but it wasn't that easy. We had to take care of many things at once, so when my uncle told me about Maria, I told myself why not? I am doing Ok. Besides, I knew Maria from when we're children.

180 Ibid.

181 Interview with Ghassan, Beirut, May 2014.

We used to live in the same neighbourhood.’¹⁸²

Ghassan’s decision could be misinterpreted as compassion, mercy, or pity. Such a view is understandable in the context of a nuance-less approach. However, when intimacy itself is related to one’s wider circle of connectivity, as we have already seen, then care itself becomes informed by patriarchally-informed paradigms of care and control. Furthermore, the example of Ghassan and Maria shows that intimacy itself is not limited to physicality, romance, and the space-couple; rather, the way in which a man and a woman interact with others highly impacts their opinion of each other. In this sense, ‘falling in love’ is not in absolute; instead, it is always linked to further societal practices and expectations.

The example of Ghassan is highly illustrative in this sense because it shows how Lebanese men and women, by virtue of Lebanon’s connective patriarchy, channel their desires through others. By marrying Maria, Ghassan is reinforcing his community’s connective patriarchy. After all, it was his elder uncle who recommended he marry Maria. In the case of Ghassan, he took it badly – and rightly so – when I asked him if he is marrying Maria because he ‘felt sorry for her’:

‘What is it exactly that you’re saying? Really? Like, really? You think marriage is a game? What class of question is this? This is so wrong...’¹⁸³

I felt embarrassed when Ghassan reprehended me. I explained to him that part of my

182 Ibid.

183 Ibid.

research was to understand the affective registers that accompany 'love' in Lebanon, in addition to situating intimacy in the context of Lebanon, and I apologized for being abrupt. He was entirely receptive and, like Veronique, remarked that one must not be blinded by love, and that 'we are lucky in Lebanon' because 'marriage preserves familial bonds' unlike '*barra*' (in the west), where '*ma fi 'ayleh*' (families are dysfunctional and cut off from each other.) However, unlike Veronique who entirely dismissed the romantic component of 'love', for Ghassan marriage consisted of 'many things', not only romance, including 'caring for one's family and extended network'.¹⁸⁴ The narrative of Ghassan illustrates intimacy as inclusive in Lebanon, in addition to not being restricted to romantic coupling.

Inclusive intimacy is also present in the narrative of Imad, from Tripoli. Among the most memorable 'romantics' I met during my fieldwork was Imad. I met Imad through the friend of a cousin of mine. Imad was a well-established investment banker who works in Bahrain, and who has made a name for himself. On the day we were supposed to meet, he arrived three hours late because he was finalizing the contract for a flat he had bought in the Dam-w-al-farz area, an up-and-coming neighbourhood in Tripoli, famed for its leisure activities. We saw at the opening of the thesis how daunting bureaucracy is in Lebanon, which turned out to be the reason he arrived late to our meeting.

'I met Siba in university. We were both doing a degree in Business Administration. We had to work on a team project together and it wasn't long before I fell head over heel for her. She comes from a

184 Ibid.

good family. Despite the fact that *ahwalha* (her finances) were better than mine, she was humble. We both loved each other. I immediately went to see her parents to ask for her hand. Although we got along rather well from the start, it was clear that when it came to my finances, not everyone was impressed. After several meetings, they accepted that we become 'engaged' whilst I sort out my finances'.¹⁸⁵

Imad and Siba met in 2009, roughly five years before I interviewed Imad. Like many young men from Tripoli, he soon migrated to the Gulf. His first job was working as a project manager, and soon 'things took off from there':

'I had one thing on my mind, and that was to *barhen hāli* (prove myself) to Siba's family. We stayed in contact via Skype, mostly. Whenever I got promoted or was offered a considerable commission, I immediately informed her. I continued to visit her family every time I came to Tripoli.'¹⁸⁶

Imad was over the moon on the day we met. He was happy, proud, emotional, and cathartic. He was going to ask Siba for marriage that very same evening, and he was going to gift her the flat he had just paid no less than four hundred and seventy thousand US dollars in cash for (he showed me the contract).

'She had so many suitors come and ask for her hand, but she didn't change her mind. I would give her my soul (*ba'tīha rūhi*) if she wants me to.'¹⁸⁷

185 Interview with Imad, Tripoli, April 2014.

186 Ibid.

187 Ibid.

Imad and Siba's 'love' story is not exceptional. Many young men from Lebanon migrate to the Gulf in order to 'make money quickly', just like Lebanon's early Maronites did when they left the Mountains for the Americas. Many of them succeed, which is evident from the thousands of exotic and luxury cars with a Gulf number plate that invade Beirut, Tripoli, and the not-really-highway highway during the months of summer. When they return, they display their newly acquired wealth whenever possible.

Their impact on the city of Tripoli is extremely significant, as seen in the new modes of consumption in the city, where many seek to imitate their life in the Gulf. Leisure is undoubtedly the most visible area in this regard, with no less than a dozen new cafés and restaurants 'popping up' during my fieldwork. Even the national dress of Emirati women, the *abaya*, is being worn by Tripolitan women, who often opt for models that are lavishly embroidered. Some emigrants to the Gulf go as far as to eulogize the Emirati sheikhs, or crown princes, on their Facebook page, as if to 'give thanks' to their newfound 'home', especially when juxtaposed with the failures of the Lebanese state.

Imad: 'Do you think she will like it? [Imad was showing me a key ring with Siba's name engraved on it].

Me: It's very pretty! [It really was. I do not usually like 'bling', but the key ring was beautifully crafted].

Imad: The stones are handcrafted, but the name is engraved with laser.

Me: I am sure she will like it. How do you feel?

Imad: *Alhamdulillah... Alhamdulillah...* (I give thanks to Allah).

Moment of silence.

Imad: It is soon *meghreb* (evening prayer) time; I am going to the mosque, and will then head to Siba's place. I have already told her brother, and everyone is expecting me.

Me: Do they know about the flat?

Imad: Only the brother.

Me: Well, good luck Imad. *Inshallah dayman mwaffak* (May God always bring you fortune). Let me know how it goes. All the best to Siba and you!¹⁸⁸

[Interval.

I admit that at times during my fieldwork I so wanted to be in a relationship! What sort of a partner would I be? I do not think I could deal with any of this pressure. Is it the feminist in me who over-emphasizes the artificial and institutional components of marriage over agreement and affection? Regardless, there is part of me, like most of us that inevitably wants to believe in 'pure love'. Perhaps, 'pure love' does exist. As far as my fieldwork has shown me, romance does not lose its value even when being materially practiced.

End of Interval.]

Siba had been patiently waiting to get married to Imad for six years. Such a duration is a long time by Lebanese standards. Siba could have married any of the suitors who had approached her family. Would it be fair, in this case, to hypothesize that by virtue of her financial comfort, she was able to experience *real* love, if such a thing exists. In any case, each of the narratives is reflective of a particular context, and although negotiation

188 Ibid.

between couples and their larger kin is omnipresent, it would be wrong to assume that women are devoid of agency when choosing a partner. Surely, their larger network does 'interfere' from time to time, but the ultimate decision is left to the couple.

VI. 7. 'I don't care if they taste bitter! They look bigger!'¹⁸⁹

Ahmed and Salwa had had their *katb ketāb* ten months prior. Both Salwa and Ahmed are Muslim Sunni from Tripoli. They each reside with their family in Tripoli, but are originally from Denneyyeh, an infamous area whose mountainous and inner lands are rampant with Islamists militias, according to the media. The 'urban' part of Denneyyeh though, in addition to neighbouring Sīr, constitute a summer residency for many conservative Sunni Tripolitans, who spend the summer in their original 'village'. Denneyyeh and Sīr are known for their beautiful nature, and their refreshing climate as they are situated well above sea level.

Salwa and Ahmed's families have been living in Tripoli since the 1990s. Both of their mothers are housewives, and both of their fathers work in the Internal Security services. They are distant cousins, and had been encouraged to 'give it a go' by both their families. Salwa is twenty-four years old and holds a degree in English literature from the Lebanese University, and Ahmed is twenty-nine years old and currently works as a food and beverage manager for a catering company in Jaddah in Saudi Arabia.

They both lament the current situation in Denneyyeh, and bemoan the media's

¹⁸⁹ All the data related in this section was collected on 17 May 2014 in Tripoli, on the day I accompanied Salwa and Ahmed on their visit to a wedding planner.

obsession with portraying it as a haven for terrorists.

‘There’s nothing to worry about, it’s all lies. Everything is normal in Denneyyeh. If it’s not Denneyyeh, it’s Tripoli. Why don’t they [the media] show the restaurants and the cafés and the *haflāt* (music concerts)? It’s always Beirut. It’s not fair!’

Salwa and Ahmed had been repeatedly postponing their wedding because of the intense armed conflict that took place in Tripoli for most of 2013 and 2014. The clashes in Tripoli during 2014 had been intermittently intensifying and receding throughout the year. The month of May was more or less peaceful, and that’s when I accompanied them.

It is important to note that Salwa and Ahmed are illustrative of a young generation of pious and modern Muslims, who in many ways reiterate the concept of the ‘pious Modern’ (Deeb, 2006). Ahmed told me that he had recently declined a ‘great’ job opportunity in Dubai because it involved alcohol and ‘bad behaviour’. In Jeddah, he doesn’t have to compromise his beliefs with his work:

‘There’s no drinking and no debauchery (*khale’*) in my workplace. Everyone is respectful. It’s a lot of work, but it pays well. After we get married, I am going to move into a bigger place, which is paid for by the company’.

Indeed, many young Lebanese men who migrate to the Gulf for work benefit from many incentives, including paid accommodation and the use of a private car. This is the case, at least, for those working in managerial positions. Like Ahmed, many pious modern men prefer to migrate to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, instead of Dubai for instance,

because they feel that the lifestyle there does not contradict their faith. But faith aside, Ahmed and Salwa were finally going to be able to plan their wedding, which was going to take place in August 2014.

Ahmed and Salwa picked me up from my place at 9.30 in the morning. I had insisted that I meet them at the event planner as it would be easier for them, and especially since my house is located on one of the busiest streets in Tripoli and traffic becomes heavy from early morning. That morning, I had to spend no less than 15 minutes assuring my mother, who found it difficult at times to appreciate the full meaning of my fieldwork, that 'nothing bad will happen to me' [her point being 'do we know these two?'] I told Ahmed and Salwa about my discussion with mother, and Salwa remarked that her 'mother would do the same'. Ahmed simply remarked '*allah ykhalīlek el māma*' (May Allah protect your mother).

Salwa chose the event planner because she was familiar with their services, having attended her cousin's wedding the previous year. Although the main goal of our visit was to decide on the menu, the conversation covered almost every aspect of the wedding.

The event planner's office consisted of a large room and an upper mezzanine. It was located on the ground floor and had large glass panels making its interior visible to passers-by. Portraits of wedded couples adorned the walls. There were at least two dozen of them. Although most of the portraits showed veiled brides, there were also a number of non-veiled ones. The event planner, a man named Ahmed, told me afterwards that since starting his business six years ago, he had not planned a single

Christian wedding. This was because Christian weddings involved alcohol and were often held outside of Tripoli. Many Sunni Tripolitans seek restaurants, clubs, and leisure places outside of Tripoli whenever they want to consume alcohol. Although no official decree prevents food and beverage businesses in Tripoli from serving alcohol, most businesses refrain from doing so.¹⁹⁰ This has been the case since the civil war, when the *Tawhid* party reigned over Tripoli for two years with the aim of converting it into a Sunni emirate (Lefèvre, 2014), thereafter crystallizing the image of Tripoli as a city with a seemingly strict Islamic conduct. Without going into details, like elsewhere in Lebanon, the end of the civil war was accompanied by the indirect legitimization of the very same regional militia-rulers who had participated in the war; and not forgetting the gradual Islamification of the region since the 1990's, thanks to what became known as the Muslim revival movement.

In addition to the portraits of wedded couples, a large wooden exhibit of heavily ornamented, individually-wrapped sweets, chocolates, and further confectionaries occupied the middle of the room. A number of low tables were scattered in front of two large dark leather sofas, and on top of them were catalogues where every service was filed and priced. A large desk occupied the right side of the room. That is where Ahmed-the-planner sat. He had a laptop that was connected to a large screen that customers could look at from where they were sitting on the sofas.

Ahmed-the-planner's work could be described as a glamorous commission-based type of work. Ahmed relied on his network of photographers, chefs, waiters, florists,

190 Tripoli's municipality did ban the advertisement of alcohol on billboards in the summer of 2014.

hairdressers, make-up artists, bridal dressmakers, and the rest. His role was to act as a link between them and his paying customers. Apart from Ahmed, a young woman, his assistant, remained standing most of the time behind his desk. Her posture reflected a mostly uninterested attitude: she was making popping sounds while chewing gum, and she kept her arms mostly crossed. She regularly eyed Salwa from head to toe, as if evaluating her aesthetics in order to assess them with a final mark. She wore a thick layer of foundation, despite the quenching heat, which is not strange to Lebanon, seeing how women invest heavily in reproducing the aesthetics associated with its hegemonic femininity, regardless of the weather.

As we entered the shop, Ahmed-the-planner was welcoming. He shook our hands, starting with Ahmed the groom, then Salwa, then me. He seemed puzzled about my presence since my aesthetics screamed unconventionality. I had the shortest hair ever at the time, something I came to regret eventually. As we sat, Ahmed the groom put his left arm around Salwa as they took their place on the sofa. He initiated the conversation, before adding that ‘everything was to go according to Salwa’s wishes’.

The first thing Salwa asked about was the full cost of her cousin’s wedding. ‘I liked everything about it, especially the *barzeh* [an elevated platform occupied by the groom and the bride throughout the wedding, in addition to serving as the centrepiece of the wedding venue], before adding ‘how much did it cost in total?’ Ahmed-the-planner replied that he could not recall the price, and that plenty of weddings had taken place since the cousin’s wedding. Salwa then said ‘*ya’ni, ta’rīban*’ (you know, like more or less).

Ahmed-the-planner knew that Salwa had attended her cousin’s wedding. Not only did

she mention it to him when she phoned to book her appointment, but also, often, cousins 'imitate' each other's weddings, often seeking the very same planners and businesses involved. This is at least the case with my lower-middle-class interlocutors, who invest a considerable amount of emotional labour in preserving their network of kin and significant others, and as such often channel their desires through others. Consequently, individual taste is frowned upon, and is more likely to occur among urban communities that have lost their ties to their 'village'. By expressing her wish to imitate her cousin's wedding, Salwa was acknowledging her ties to her wider kin, and her views must not be mistaken for feelings of simple envy.

Still, consumption-as-mimicking also encompasses the centrality of upward social mobility in Lebanese social life, and is reproduced at a rapid rate because of the very tight nature of connectivity to others in Lebanon, where the economy (read businesses) and the Social are intrinsically intertwined. The business of Ahmed the planner, in a way, would lose significantly if his clients' networks decide to go elsewhere. This is why, and unlike big businesses that are standardized and whose price list is fixed, Ahmed-the-planner, like many small and middle business owners, relies on his bargaining skills when closing deals with clients. The catalogues with the fixed price are a mere façade of a business that is well-planned; still, they allow him to make extra income from those clients who do little bargaining with him.

When Ahmed-the-planner remarked that the cost of Salwa's cousin's wedding amounted to 'roughly fifteen thousand US dollars', Salwa immediately looked at Ahmed. Clearly, they had expected a lower amount. Ahmed-the-groom remarked to Salwa that 'it was too early to speak about the price', and that the price could be

‘arranged later’ (*byetzabbat*). But Salwa would not have it, ‘*ouf, leish hal ad*’ (oh my! Why so much?). It was a nice wedding but it was ‘*adeh* (normal) too’.

Ahmed the planner was well-versed in bargaining and negotiating. What struck me most were seemingly obvious questions that Salwa repeatedly asked, such as ‘is there going to be enough food and drinks for those present?’ or ‘do you have a backup power generator in case the power current shuts down?’ or ‘is the photographer going to have enough storage space for the full duration of the wedding?’

Far from being naïve, Salwa was reinforcing her power of presence by reminding Ahmed-the-planner that she expected him to deliver fully. In addition, she rarely opted for things that she liked; rather it was all about how they would be received by their guests. For instance, when Ahmed the planner offered a degustation of the individually wrapped sweets available, to be offered to the guests at the end of the wedding on their way out, Salwa insisted on a rather bitter choice [I personally struggled to swallow it, although I like dark chocolate]. Ahmed the groom ‘hated it’, and remarked that it was ‘inedible’. At this point, Salwa became highly agitated and loudly said, ‘I don’t care if they are bitter! They look bigger!’

Similarly, when viewing the slides of the mezzeh on a large screen, Salwa asked about the precise number of plates per table of each of the *hummus*, *tabbouleh*, *kofteh*, and the rest. If I were a chef, I would feel rather ‘injured’ by her questions and remarks, because they imply a lack of savoir-faire on my part. Ahmed-the-planner seemed little occupied with her precise questions, undoubtedly due to him having to deal with them on a daily basis. Ahmed-the-groom confirmed Salwa’s anxieties by remarking that ‘we don’t want

to lose face in front of our guests. There will be important ones, including members of parliaments’.

What Lebanon’s Members of Parliament lack in terms of fulfilling political duties and responsibilities, they make up for by attending social events, particularly weddings. Connectivity to significant others is essential for social mobility in Lebanon, and many Lebanese citizens invite politicians to their weddings in order to reiterate their strong connections, in addition to reinforcing their links to their sectarian leader. Ahmed-the-groom told Ahmed-the-planner that he would hand him a CD of pre-recorded ‘political songs’ (*aghāni siyāsiyyeh*), whose lyrics celebrate important political figures, and Ahmed-the-planner confirmed that he would make sure to pass it on to the DJ.

Politicians aside, Salwa brought forth similar concerns in relation to each of the chairs (‘Are they going to be wooden chairs or plastic ones? And if so, will they be wrapped?’), the length of the *zaffeh* (*zaffeh* is a musical procession accompanied by heavy percussion and chants celebrating the wedded, and where swords are used in the re-enactment of duels; they usually precede the ‘entrance’ of the groom and the bride), and how many waiters would there be in total.

It is important to remember that Salwa was not organizing *her* wedding per se. Salwa was not going to turn into a ‘*bride-zilla*’ should something go wrong. Her wedding day was not about her per se; rather, it was about her kin and community. Any shortcoming would be mostly blamed on her, and she would most likely feel embarrassed that she had not provided for her guests as generously as her cousin had, for instance. For both Salwa and Ahmed, it was important their wedding ‘fills the eye’, and that food and

drinks were plentiful. After all, generosity, as we saw earlier with the gift, is embedded within 'inclusive intimacy', in addition to being a reiteration of the affective bond between husband and wife. Salwa's obsession with details is reflective of the importance of including others, and is not simply a reflection of her aesthetics and tastes. Likewise, Ahmed-the-groom's rare interventions related almost exclusively to 'important' topics, such as emphasizing the presence of influential figures in their wedding, or single-handedly picking the songs that would be played throughout, some songs being considered 'too rude', in addition to not being from '*jawna*' (our environment, or ways of being).

Salwa and Ahmed's concerns show how the politics of intimacy are gendered. I stated earlier that intimacy is not to be understood in a romantic sense exclusively; rather, it is the regulation of the Public, which is perceived as highly sexualized in Lebanon. Whereas women navigate this Public by opting for segregated spaces, or spaces that are seen as 'safe' from the Male gaze (the Male gaze is not only in relation to men, but also in relation to religion, and to politics), men regulate it by upholding it or transforming it. Salwa and Ahmed's interaction with the wedding planner clearly shows that weddings are not strictly a celebration of the couple-space. Rather, they are celebrations that recognize the coming together of two distinct clans, in addition to consolidating their political ideologies. In this sense, gift-giving, in addition to extravagant weddings, operate along 'identical unconscious structures', to borrow from Levi-Strauss, which contribute to the reproduction of existing structures such as kin, and political networks.

Following my examination of gift-giving, it is clear that everyday practices of love in Lebanon require a contextual analysis that is capable of situating affectivities in a

specific space and time. In the case of Lebanon, everyday practices of love involve the active inclusion of significant others, and the enacting of values accordingly. Both gifting and inclusive intimacy inform us of the importance of engaging empirically with the seemingly universal notion of love. An empirical examination grounds love in the material world. The tensions between one's affection, their precarity, in addition to societal practices or habitus, all interact in the fashioning of specific practices that ought not to be judged without a thorough examination. This point is important, because, as I said earlier, love in a Middle Eastern context is often seen as 'inexistent', in addition to being reiterated along the lines of 'financial negotiation', 'arrangements', and 'social climbing'. I hope that this chapter has succeeded in showing that the ambivalence of love is not limited to a conflicting inner self, but is equally related to equally important external factors.

Having said that, I continue with my exercise of 'grounding' the notion of love by examining the spatial dimension of love practices. I examine an array of spaces in order to show how love and sex are mediated in public, to borrow from Berlant (1998).

Chapter VIII. Negotiating Sexuality in Public:

'Give a little, Take a little'

This chapter is driven by the belief that women, and further marginalized bodies, have an intuitive knowledge of their bodies, a point I showcase in my ethnography hereafter. Having said that, in this chapter I focus on a particular type of intimacy, namely 'public intimacy'. By 'public intimacy', I do not mean the enacting of close contact in public. For women especially, 'public intimacy' is a particular type of intimacy that they learn, acquire, and cultivate from an early age. Public intimacy is the conscious erection of morality-informed boundaries around one's body vis-à-vis what is perceived to be a highly sexualized public. This is why most of my female interlocutors preferred women-spaces exclusively, which is often misinterpreted as a forced segregation of the sexes.

For couples, women in particular, being seen with someone without being 'officially' linked to them is particularly difficult. At the same time, the private is constructed as an off-limits space for most couples, and most of them prefer to be seen in public, as opposed to being caught 'red handed' in a private space, for instance. These contradictions result in a highly corporeal reality, where the body is constantly 'on guard'. As we will see, different public spaces lead to unequal, and highly personalized embodied existences. Religious, moral, and social rubrics aside, one's class has direct impacts on one's mobility. As the ethnography shows, public intimacy is saturated with subliminal dialogues, jerky bodily movements, wandering eyes, and an overall ambivalent attitude. Ultimately, we see how practices of love are conditioned and

shaped by larger social moralities and modalities of being, which contribute to my overall view of love as both tangible and immaterial, in addition to functioning through a political economy framework.

Whereas chapter IV complicated the relationship between love and sect, this chapter explicates the relationships between practices of love (namely leisure) and the social categories of sect and class.

Berlant and Warner (1998) have long argued that 'intimacy is itself publicly mediated' (Berlant and Warner, 1998:553), and her statement is highly valuable for the purpose of this chapter. I examine public intimacy as defined above in three deeply-rooted institutions in Lebanon, namely the café, the household, and the street. I refer to these spaces as institutions because of the rules and codes of conduct that characterize each. The myth of the public/private divide holds little in my examination. Whereas the traditional café, and the household, function as the primary space for men and women's socialization, respectively, the narratives encountered within each cannot be confined to their fixed boundaries. If anything, both spaces show the continuity of these narratives, and contribute to reinforcing pre-existing gendered concepts. Most importantly, they challenge the assumption that men are responsible for women's oppression, and instead show how both men and women, and further actors and factors, contribute to the construction of the discourse of sexuality in Lebanon. Whereas the café, the household, and the street are highly codified, further 'make-believe' spaces (Navaro, 2012), notably the car, are constructed in relation to the discourse of sexuality in Lebanon. The car shows how a space can be reclaimed, and how space ought to be thought of as political, seeing how it stimulates public debate. Both spaces are telling of

the intersection of class with the production of gendered spaces in Lebanon. Whereas bodies and physical spaces dialectically inform each other, my ethnographic work revealed the relevance of non-material spaces, including television and online communication tools, in the construction of gendered ideologies in Lebanon. Such spaces constitute contentious points of debate and act as a point of reference where one can anchor their views on sex, love, and dating.

I first briefly relate the existing literature on space, notably on Lebanon. I then follow with a theoretical discussion in order to situate the body in relation to space. As we will see, one's reality, notably regarding women, is always embodied, and it is futile to conceive the body as 'outside' space, and vice versa. This discussion is two-fold. In addition to pushing the limits of the notion of 'embodiment', and therefore the potentiality of the body to produce novel meanings attached to particular spaces, I show the subject in unison with its surrounding by drawing on the concept of 'make-believe' (Navaro, 2012).

I then follow with an ethnography that illustrates public intimacy in a number of spaces. As we will see, a descriptive kind of analysis is highly useful in my examination of public intimacy. I draw heavily on my participation in social outings with groups of men, women, and mixed company. I also relate extracts from interviews, and from notes taken during hours of watching, of recording the comings and goings of individuals, and of inadvertently staring at times.¹⁹¹

191 See Ch. II for a detailed account of my research methods.

VIII. 1. Writing about/from space

New scholarship on geography laments the overly descriptive nature of previous works on space. Early works infused certain spaces with an almost natural meaning, and thus reiterated gender inequality, often inadvertently, by relegating each gender to its supposed natural space. Gillian Rose is one of the earliest feminist thinkers who sought to challenge the 'masculinist', as she describes it, underpinnings of the discipline of geography. Her work reconstructs the discipline of geography by embedding it with a feminist view of the world. Although her aim is to reclaim the discipline, her language is binary-informed, and rarely captures the continuity between male and female spaces.

Still, Rose paved the way for an increasing number of works that invite us to view space in terms of power relations. By filtering their work through the critical lenses of gender, race, and class (and the intersections among them), places are no longer 'inert containers', but 'local and multiple', politicized, culturally relative, historically specific 'constructions', as Rodman argues (2003:205).

Such novel views refute the subject-object divide between body and space. Seeing the fluidity of social bodies and the constructed nature of space, I use the expression 'embodied space' in order to show how space and social bodies intersect in the production of spatial and bodily meanings. Csordas (1993) defines embodiment as an 'indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement with the world' (Csordas, 1993: 12). In other words, there is no divide between the subject (body) and the object (space), and the two are dialectally-formed. To view space as embodied is to recognize that space, far from being an

independent material reality existing 'in itself', is always 'produced' as Henri Lefebvre famously argued (in Schmid, 2008:28).

Another less obvious divide can be found in the very person of the geographer; in this case, me. Berdoulay (1989) states that 'a place comes explicitly into being in the discourse of its inhabitants, and particularly in the rhetoric it promotes. Thus, the geographer's discourse uses the same ways as the people who define their own place' (Berdoulay, 1989: 135). Some methodological reflections are in order here. In the 1988 special issue of *Cultural Anthropology*, for instance, many of the featured authors were concerned about the ethnographer's 'voice', and how their voice could at times obscure or reduce the relationship between residents and space. Appadurai (1988), for instance, distinguishes between 'the problem of voice', and 'the problem of space' in anthropology. Whereas the first is concerned with political representation and questions related to 'speaking for' others, the second entails the not so easily discerned challenges that come from 'speaking from' a certain place (Appadurai, 1988:17).

To 'speak from' Lebanon is to be predestined to a cascade of ill-informed curiosities: its 'mythical' nightlife, its women's obsession with cosmetic surgery, its handsome male actors and singers, the civil war, its jungle laws, the anything-goes reputation of Beirut, to name a few. In other words, to 'speak from' Lebanon is to anticipate Orientalist preconceptions, and to prevent any such excesses from materializing in my writing.

A growing body of literature on the political meaning of space in Lebanon has recently exhibited a new awareness. The socio-political boundaries of Palestinian refugee camps, and the more recent Syrian ones, have constituted, and continue to do so, the focus of

most studies. The space between home and abroad has been examined in both a Maronite (Khater, 2001) and a Shi'a (Peleikis, 2003) setting. The relationship between space, sectarian affiliation, and aesthetics has been the subject of a number of works focusing on post-war Lebanon (Nagel, 2002; Haugbolle, 2010, Volk, 2010). Post-war reconstruction projects, the question of security, and its links to urban isolation have been examined by Sawalha (2010), Fawaz (2009), and more recently, Monroe (2016); whereas Humphreys (2015) applies a spatial lens to the modernity/tradition debate as he ponders the future of Beirut's cultural heritage. The relevance of public spaces to the cultivation of identity can be found in the work of Deeb (2006), who shows how space is thought of both conceptually and physically by the residents of the Dāhiya neighbourhood; whereas Sofian Morabet navigates through Beirut's uneven pavements, semi-renovated edifices, and *ad hoc* businesses in his mapping of its queer spaces. Last but not least, a number of works have engaged with Lefebvre's concept of 'the right to the city', by linking leisure (Deeb and Harb, 2013) and pleasure (Khalil, 2015) to mobility and agency. What links these cited is their recognition of space as embodied, and the blurring of boundaries that separate bodies from their surroundings.

Although I do not lose sight of the intersection(s) of space, with each of gender, sect, and class, to name a few, it seems to me that sect, when examined from a sexuality viewpoint, had little impact on Lebanon's spatial public order, and instead gender, more than any other category, followed closely by class, influenced mobility. The existing literature aside, non-official couples, or couples that have not yet been officially recognized as such, easily fall prey to gossip, moral judgment, and public scrutiny. Their constant negotiation with their surroundings, whether at home, the workplace,

university, or elsewhere, could easily be interpreted as hypocritical. This is particularly true for women who often have to singlehandedly negotiate their outings and their whereabouts. In this regard, the existing literature has often contrasted accusations of women as 'manipulative' and 'opportunistic' (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Kandiyoti, 1988; El-Kholy, 2002; Macleod, 1992) with the scarcity of spaces and opportunities that women can capitalize on.

VIII. 2. Embodiment, and space as 'make-believe'

Embodiment is an intrinsically feminist notion, and its roots can be traced to classic western philosophy. Grosz (1994) argues that western philosophy's dichotomous thinking has correlated and associated the mind/body binary with the opposition between male and female. How women's bodies become a signifier for lacking things has to do with the ways in which women live in their bodies, internalize the male gaze, and consciously objectify their bodies. In this regard, de Beauvoir offers a phenomenological account of the body as she examines it throughout a woman's life. Feminist scholars have examined embodied realities from several angles, and have reappraised their work with the recent 'new materialism'. Regardless of the approach they adopt, a reading of the self as embodied requires us to acknowledge the disconnect between body, self, and context, or to think through them holistically.

Embodiment has direct consequences on action, agency, decision-making, defiance, rebellion, and compliance. Embodiment is the answer to a situation that could have been otherwise. It is the shaping of bodies according to specific meanings to the extent they

remain so even when everything else has been erased. Concurrently, an embodied self allows one to challenge, question, and to not only defy, but also reassert and reconsolidate. Since the body behaves in a holistic fashion, its venues for escaping are varied, unconventional, and unpredictable. The embodied self sings, dances, flirts, and teases, as she carefully positions her body in the space that confines her.

Embodiment refers to the idea that 'perception, understanding and consciousness are materialised by practice, and exist primarily within a membrane of flesh and blood' (Harrison in Griffen, 2004:7). The cognitive, pre-cognitive, emotional, and unconscious: they, too, are embodied, and emerge differently according to the discursive contexts in which they find themselves, and through human and non-human relations.

The political nature of embodiment is evident in the work of Van Wolputte (2004) who traces the shifts in the notion of embodiment over the past two decades. Van Wolputte (2004) distinguishes the 'natural body' as an organic entity, the 'social body' as where social relationships such as gender or kinship are embodied, and the 'body politic', where power and control are embodied. According to Van Wolputte, the 'body politic' is both a tool and a weapon of 'domestication, disciplination and of identification, subjection, and resistance, (Van Wolputte, 2004: 257). Van Wolputte's examination of embodiment adds a political dimension, in which the body can find itself anywhere from disciplined and punished to initiating resistance. Another relevant work on embodiment situates it 'on the level of lived experience and not on that of discourse' (Csordas in Van Wolputte, 2004:258). It precedes objectivation and representation and 'collapses the difference between subjective and objective, cognition and emotion, or mind and body' (ibid).

Early feminists questioned the ‘unity, neutrality, transparency, universality, and objectivity of the human organism’ (Van Wolputte, 2004:251). Fortunately, many breakthroughs have occurred in the study of embodiment thanks to the work of feminists, cultural theorists, and affect theorists. Mackenzie states that ‘we experience our bodies not as objects in the world, but as the perspective from which we perceive the world and as our mode of engagement with it’ (Mackenzie, 2009:115). In this sense, space is also relational, in the sense that the meanings we ascribe to certain places are directly informed not only by our interaction with said space, but also by who else interacts with it, and how we position ourselves vis-à-vis them. Equally, Maclaren (2009) argues that our emotional tensions with other people ‘can propel us toward existential transformations’ (Maclaren, 2009: 26).

Such views bring forth the concept of ‘make-believe’ (Navaro, 2012), on which I drew earlier whilst infusing the notion of love with a working definition. It is highly applicable to physical spaces as well. Following Navaro (2012), borders are mentally and emotionally constructed:

‘But a border is no border in and of itself [...] what interests me is the mark of the material border (or the border as a tangibility) in the subjectivities and imagination [...]—the side, covert, or unseen effects of a specific kind of sovereignty’ (Navaro, 2012: 62).

Feminist scholarship on space concerns itself with a holistic reading of both space and body. Certain notions, notably borders, have their physicality enhanced because a border is constructed along the narrative of ‘how to cross it’. In her classic work, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa (1987) remarks that ‘[t]he work of the *mestiza*

consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show, in the flesh and through the images in her work, how duality is transcended' (Anzaldúa, 1987: 80). The *mestiza* is an expression that describes a Latin American woman with a dual heritage, namely European *and* Native American, and finds its roots in the systematic racialization and gendering of bodies that accompanied colonial rules in Latin America, and is used to refer solely to women.

Elenes (in Chilisa, 2012), who draws on the 'new mestiza' theory, defines the border, in addition to its literal meaning, as the 'symbolic barrier that divide communities along race, class, gender and sexual orientation lines, academic disciplines, political ideologies, and organizational structures' (Elenes, in Chilisa 2012: 270). These barriers are not exclusive to the context of the *mestiza*. In fact, Anzaldúa (1987) herself states that her theory seeks social transformation to anyone who has been '*deslenguada(o)s*', which translates as 'having one's tongue removed', an analogy to refer to those who have been silenced by androcentric, nationalistic, and homophobic ideologies. This silencing is reflective of colonized '*mentes y cuerpos*' (minds and bodies), exposing the extent of a colonial-based pedagogy.

As we will see throughout the ethnography hereafter, Lebanese citizens, depending on the intersection of class, sect, gender, and sexuality, 'juggle' between all sorts of contradictions in their navigation of multiple publics. Like Anzaldúa's *mestiza*, they 'learn to juggle cultures [Other sects]'. Like her, they have a 'plural personality (not to be confused with multiple personalities), she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad, and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else'

(Anzaldúa, 1987:78) (my emphasis). In this sense, the outside and the inside are constructed conjointly, and one directly informs the other:

‘Transformations in the outer (spatial, physical, built, material) environment through political means provoke qualified forms of inside (interior, inner, subjective) experience that are expressed in embodied and metaphorical forms’ (Navaro, 2012: 77).

In this the chapter, I navigate a number of public(s) in order to show how men and women embody space unequally, and how an embodiment shapes the couple-space. Not only will we realize that the myth of public/private binary speaks little to women’s, men’s, and marginalized bodies’ lived reality, the intimate, too, produces public discourse.

VIII. 3. The café, the waiter, and the paradox of Muhannad

Today, when I reminisce about it from the confines of my study space at a library in central London, it all seems rather distant.

*‘Before I knew it, the chatter stopped. Tens of chairs moved simultaneously, their squeaking noise crawling under my skin. Hands were shaken, and kisses exchanged. Mothers authoritatively ordered their children to wrap up quickly, and shisha smokers erratically took a succession of whatever amount of puffs they still could gather. Outside of the café, a group of valets systematically and promptly ushered the patrons’ cars’.*¹⁹²

192 Field notes, Tripoli, March 2014.

Before long, I realized it was *salat al-’isha*, the last prayer of Islam’s five daily prayers. In the city of Tripoli, it is the signal that indicates the end of outdoor activities. Women and girls are particularly expected to abide by this custom.

‘It must be *’isha* already, should we head back home? I can give you a lift if you want’.¹⁹³ As I said these words, Leena looked at me in disbelief, with eyes wide open, and a cringe on her face, ‘what do you mean it is *’isha* already? In which era do you live? Some people still think like this? *Ya haram!*’¹⁹⁴

Oh no! You know you have missed the mark of being seen as ‘cool’ among Lebanon’s vanguard youth when they reduce your condition to ‘*ya haram*’. The notion of *haram* is becoming increasingly known around the world as the Islamic equivalent of certain forbidden behaviours, such as eating pork, or drinking alcohol. However, in Lebanon, it has further uses in the colloquial language, irrelevant of one’s faith or level of religiosity. For instance, when parents scold their children to point out incidents of injustice, such as bullying, they would say ‘*don’t be a bully! Haram!*’ Additionally, *haram* is articulated in order to reflect feelings that range from empathy, to compassion, or if we are to follow Leena, to utter pity.

Leena has agreed to meet me during one of her weekends in Tripoli. She is a student in her early twenties at the AUT University in Jbeil, where she resides during the week. She visits her family in Tripoli every weekend, ‘no matter what’. She has recently

193 Interview with Leena, Tripoli, March 2014.

194 Ibid.

coupled with a young Lebanese man, ‘with my parents’ blessings’¹⁹⁵ as she points out, who will be leaving for work in Dubai at the end of the summer.

Following her verdict, I put my best face on, earnestly hoping that her opinion of me will not make her lose interest in my research, and before I could speak, one of the waiters approached us and semi-mockingly asked us, ‘*shū? Ma fi Muhannad el yawm*, which literally translates as, So? No Muhannad for you today?’¹⁹⁶

Silly me! How could I overlook such an important detail? It is not the ‘*isha prayer* per se. How could I forget that every day, from Sunday to Thursday, thousands of Lebanese women (and men), no matter what, are tuned to their TV screens, at nine o’clock sharp, eager to follow the adulterous adventures of Muhannad and Samar (see chapter I).

I did not know what to make of the waiter’s question. After all, it was more like a rhetorical one. The fact that he assumed that Leena and I were interested in Muhannad and Samar’s scandalous ways made me cringe – I admit that I am an avid follower of the series. However, I felt a particular kind of discomfort about the familiarity, and the degree of nonchalance in which he spoke to us. In many ways, I felt he breached my intimate barriers. I remarked to Leena that I found his intrusion ‘rather rude’.¹⁹⁷ She disagreed, and explained to me that he is barely ‘being friendly’. In the Lebanese vernacular, her exact words were ‘‘ *m yethadman, mitel kel al shabab*’, which literally translates as ‘he is being funny (in a flirtatious sense), like most guys’.¹⁹⁸

195 Ibid.

196 Field notes, March 2014, Tripoli.

197 Interview with Leena, March 2014, Tripoli.

198 Ibid.

Oh No! Not only am I not cool enough, she must think I am a prude who cannot handle a joke from a male stranger.

Unlike Leena, I cannot bring myself to view our waiter's impromptu intervention as an innocent one. Perhaps my background in gender studies compels me to detect even the subtlest processes of gendering. The timing of our waiter's intrusion, its exact content, and the tone in which it was delivered are reflective of men's need to control women's sexuality in Lebanon.

Our waiter's intervention is contrary to the customary logic, where, when in a public space, it is women who signal the men first, usually by returning their smile, or gesture. Deeb and Harb (2013) show in their study of leisurely spaces in the Shi'a neighbourhood on southern Beirut how young men and women who date are constantly negotiating the religious, social, and moral rubrics of Lebanon, and there is a strong emphasis on enforcing 'morally appropriate and respectful' ways. How can we understand the waiter's interruption, then?

I respond by following our waiter's logic, a logic seen from my perspective as a researcher in gender studies. Through his 'guessing' game, our waiter is reiterating the widespread belief that women's sexuality is ferocious and ought to be controlled, with Samar the character in 'Forbidden Love' being one such example. By 'inquiring' about our interest in the series, he is actually evaluating our moral values with regard to sex, and the possible 'kick' we might get from an adulterous scenario. At the same time, the fact that the series is particularly explicit in its portrayal of Muhannad and Samar's carnal relations, our waiter, as a male, is undertaking the role of the moral police,

especially since Leena and I showed no sign of preparing to leave, despite the *'isha* prayer. I would go as far as to add that the combination of his murky smile with his overly familiar attitude is his way of portraying the upper hand as a public order surveyor, in addition to showing a 'cool' and modern self, where he allows himself to experiment with a sexual topic, namely 'Forbidden Love', without transgressing any of the religious, moral, and social limits, *technically speaking*.

Still, we should give our waiter some credit in that his remark single handily captures the country's fascination with 'Forbidden Love'. After all, it is mostly the women who have left the café – clearly not for the sole purpose of watching the series, especially since many of them were mothers, in addition to the fact that, as I pointed out earlier, the *'isha* prayer is often synonymous with 'being at home'.

Apart from Leena and me, I counted three other women who were being rather casual with their surroundings, which implies that the men who are part of their group are most likely to be close relatives. On the other hand, I can see groups of young men steadily forming. They are smoking shisha and playing cards. Those who went to the nearby mosque to pray have soon returned and joined their peers.

It is no wonder, then, that our waiter's actions could be interpreted as almost natural. The example of our brief exchange with our waiter is one of the many possible publics that could be examined.

Leena, unlike me, took on our waiter's challenge, *'la', ma fi Mohannad el yawm... shoo daroori ykun fi Mohannad kel yawm ya'ni?* (No, there's no Mohannad today... is it

compulsory that there be Mohannad every day?)¹⁹⁹ Leena is positioning herself in relation to our waiter's assumptions. By entertaining him with an answer, she, too, is positioning herself in relation to the moral dilemmas that plague the intimate imaginaries of Lebanon's youth, despite the fact that she views it as innocent flirting. She did not react aggressively to his remark, like I did, neither did she ignore it. When I was her age, I used to blush whenever a situation barely insinuated a sexual or intimate connotation.

Leena, too, is mediating her intimacy publically. She might not admit to it directly, let alone recognize it, but the fact that she challenged our waiter's assumption is telling of her wanting to stand out from the crowd, and to challenge the idea that every girl in Tripoli dreams of a 'hunk' like Muhannad. After all, sexed and gendered assumptions about the Other appeared strongly throughout my interviews with my interlocutors. Our waiter, clearly playing the devil's advocate, then said 'Muhannad is going to be sad', to which Leena replied, 'well, let him be sad, *shou ba'melloh?* (Why should I care?).²⁰⁰

Leena then looked towards me with a smile. I could not help but return it. I even giggled. Anyone could see that my face showed a sign of satisfaction. Leena did, after all, 'win' the debate.

What is particularly fascinating about this brief exchange between our waiter and L. is its subliminal nature. It is a strange dialogue where intentions, rather than words, are

199 Field notes, March 2014, Tripoli.

200 Ibid.

mediated through the use of metaphors, and the careful scrutiny of one's body language. There is a constant 'guessing' about the Other's intentions when it comes to the ways in which young men and women mediate intimacy in Lebanon, undoubtedly due to public intimacy.

Deeb and Harb (2013), in a survey of the cafés in the neighbourhood of Dāhiya, show how ideas about morality in relation to place are 'a critical component of people's spatial practices and everyday lives' and 'the morality of ordinary people's everyday practices is inscribed in space' (Deeb and Harb, 2013: 25-26).

Unlike the café, which is seen as a somewhat safe place to 'hang', clubbing constituted a rather contentious space. Consider the words of Jomana:

'I totally understand my parents. If I were a mother, I am not sure I would want my daughter to go out to these clubs. They can be dangerous. People get drunk and have fights at times, but it's not about the place you know, I am surrounded by Eli and by friends, and we are having fun. We are not doing anything wrong'.²⁰¹

By sympathizing with her parents, Jomana is reinforcing the morality that is ascribed to nightclubs. Unlike her parents, though, Jomana does not feel 'out of place', especially since she feels well surrounded by Eli, the young man she was dating at the time, and her friends. By 'sneaking' into the club, Jomana actively chose to ignore the geographical limits set to her by her parents. Still, she emphasized that if it had been up

201 Interview with Jomana, Gemmayzeh, May 2014.

to her, she would have chosen a different setting, and that she would not have thrust herself into a nightclub had it not been for her being protected by Eli.

Jomana's narrative is puzzling to me: on the one hand, she displays an agency that is inherently individualistic, seeing how she brought her body to an off-limits space that signifies a moral 'low' to her kin; at the same time, she is reinforcing the notion of men as protectors, since she would not visit certain places without being accompanied by a male.

The narrative of Jomana shows how the production of moralizing discourses are produced in conjunction with certain places. Moreover, it shows how the physical presence of a male eases women's discomfort. Jomana stated clearly that had it not been for Eli, she would not have joined her friends. This is because she would not feel 'comfortable' (*ma bertah*) otherwise.²⁰² Comfort, or *raha*, is a notion that resonated throughout my entire fieldwork. In many ways, women cultivate their own version of public intimacy and continuously assess their surroundings according to the level of 'comfort' or *raha* that they experience. Similar findings have been published in a recent special issue in the Journal of Middle Eastern Women's Studies (July, 2016), where women's narratives and practices of *raha* were examined at length in the context of Istanbul (Sehlikoglu, 2016).

Najwa tells me how she 'uncoupled' from her ex-fiancé after he kept taking her to 'wrong' places.

202 Ibid.

‘I couldn’t understand what he was about. He would take me to really expensive places, but they looked shady to me. The women would be wearing very provocative clothes. It wasn’t sexy you know. It was as if they were [whispering] *shrāmīt* (colloquial term for ‘whores’). When I told him, he totally dismissed me, and told me that I ought not worry about how I dress when I am with him. I think that like many men, he associates a short skirt with an open mind.’²⁰³

Although Najwa was accompanied by her fiancé, she did not feel comfortable. The fact that she likened some of the female patrons to ‘prostitutes’ is a clear indication of that. The fact that her ex-fiancé showed no concern reveals the masculinist politics of courtship. Najwa tells me that apart from her ex-fiancé’s choice of venues, she found ‘little fault’ in him, and although she ‘accepts that men like to stare’, the level of discomfort was ‘too much for her to handle’. In Najwa’s case, her evaluation of her fiancé’s choice of venues convinced her to terminate their relationship. Clearly, a space is constructed differently, especially since, as Najwa tells me, she knows of several friends who have been to some of the same venues and none of them felt the same level of discomfort.

Najwa’s narrative shows how feeling ‘out of space’ is morally-constructed in Lebanon. Rather than the music, the setting, the menu, the company, or the location, Najwa felt her public intimacy ‘invaded’. For Najwa, a place is telling of her own views of modesty.

Equally interesting to note is her ex-fiancé’s understanding of an ‘open mind’. Whereas he welcomes short skirts, he wrongly associates them with an ‘open mind’, according to

203 Interview with Najwa, Dbayeh, February 2014.

Najwa. Najwa was one of the rare interlocutors who shared with me directly the details of her sex life, unlike most interlocutors who would share with me episodes related to 'their friends' and 'close relatives'. Today, Najwa believes that her ex used to take her to 'questionable' places because he had no respect for her:

'I am sure he was laughing behind my back all the time we were together. I think he viewed me as easy and *faltaneh* (loose). I thought I loved him. *Ya Najwa ya m'attrah* (Oh Najwa, poor you) It never occurred to me that he was taking advantage of me (*yestaghellni*).'²⁰⁴

Najwa's views are not isolated. Considering the number of couples that I 'interrupted' and eventually accompanied on their outings, the question of 'where to go', or 'where to meet' constituted a contentious space in itself. Most often, it was the women who would raise their concerns about a particular space. The level of concern they displayed often correlated with their love status, and depended on whether they were accompanied by a 'date', i.e. as an unofficial couple, or a fiancé, i.e. an official couple. In the latter case, there were hardly any negotiations, and the atmosphere and choice of food and drinks were seen as more important than location, time, access, and type of business. Still, when I accompanied Dalia and Issa one day to a café in Jbeil, I could not help but notice how nervous Dalia felt:

'We celebrated our *khotūbah* a week ago. I still feel I am doing something wrong, although Issa and I have become officially engaged. On our way to the café, I suddenly recognized my cousin's

204 Ibid.

car. I almost had a heart attack. The first thought that popped in my head was “I hope she didn’t see me””.²⁰⁵

Dalia’s words are highly illustrative of public intimacy. Although Dalia and Issa have become officially engaged, and ought no longer to worry about commentaries and moral judgments, Dalia feels she is doing ‘something wrong’. Dalia’s rather strict upbringing remains deeply carved in her consciousness, her body, and her sub-consciousness, and no amount of writing can truthfully convey the depth of the buried societal and gendered ideologies that her body almost uncontrollably finds itself abiding by.

Public intimacy is not strictly embodied by women. For men, too, public spaces are politically constructed. Although I sat with and observed groups of men in cafés during my fieldwork on a few occasions, such observations always occurred in middle and upper-middle types of venues. Such businesses have a mixed clientele, and male and female patrons gather together. Unsurprisingly, there was little novelty to record in these settings, and such observations have been well-documented by Deeb and Harb (2013), albeit in a Shi’a-only setting.

I therefore braced myself to join Walid and his friends one evening in what could be described as a popular café, a dying breed of cafés in the light of what could be described as rampant gentrification. The café in question was located in one of the inner narrow streets that can be found between the Manara and the Raouché section of the Corniche. There was a number of similar cafés, but the fact that I had become somewhat familiar

205 Interview with Dalia, near Jbeil, May 2014.

with Walid led me to that café in particular. Needless to say, the owner/manager of the café could not make sense of my presence.

I entirely understand the anxieties of the manager. A popular café is almost always exclusively male. It is a traditionally homo-social space in character that is being increasingly lost to hetero patterns of sociability. Unknown to the owner, I had been to his café previously, but during the day, and although a couple of patrons would stare at me, most remained oblivious. Unlike many popular cafés that exhibit a particular political ideology, which in turn, draw a particular clientèle, this one café was 'secular', according to its owner, Abu Hassan. A Sunni himself, Abu Hassan said that political banners and posters of politicians would give his café a fixed identity, which he did not particularly aspire to.

The café, as an institution, has been examined widely in the contexts of Istanbul and Cairo, and to a lesser extent in Beirut. Prior to the ethnographic work of Deeb and Harb (2013), most works examined Beirut's cafés through a socio-historical lens, often pointing out how geopolitical events and shifting consumerist behaviours impacted the clientèle of the café. One work in particular, by Al-Duwaihi (2005) laments the gradual erasure of Beirut's intelligentsia from its cafés. Similar approaches can be found in the contexts of Cairo (Depaule, 2007), and of Algeria (Carlier, 1990).

The café has been conceived as a symbol of enlightenment in 18th century Beirut (Hanssen, 2005), as a signifier of socio-political shifts (Al-Duwaihi, 2005 in Fidaoui and Bahous, 2013), as religiously and morally constructed (Deeb and Harb, 2013), and as gendered (Fidaoui and Bahous, 2013). Although the majority of the literature on the

institution of the café in the Middle East centres on Cairo (Singerman and Amar, 2006; Bayat, 2007; Ghannam, 2012, 2013; Kreil, 2016), I draw on it, when appropriate, in my analysis of my observation of Walid's interaction with his friends (and other male patrons).

Watching a group of young Lebanese men go about their life felt as surreal and exciting as much as it felt daunting and haunting:

'Selim: Look, look, look! Isn't that Clarissa (borrowed name)? George's ex?'
[Selim was pointing out at an immaculately polished and expensive looking Mercedes passing by the café].

Friend 2: No way *ya zalameh* (mate)! You are so wrong'

Selim: Oh yes it is mate. It is her!' '*Kiss ikhit hal hawajeb!*' (Damned be those eyebrows!) You can't tell your mother from your sister these days! [Selim was referring to the recent trend of tattooed eyebrows, and whether for good or bad, most tattooed eyebrows look identical]. '*Wlik akh min Clarissa akh* (O Clarissa). You surely ruined George!

Me: Why? What did Clarissa do? [I was dying to know].

Friend 2: Clarissa remained glued to George until she married a shmuck. Her parents were impossible! Whatever he did was never enough!²⁰⁶

Soon Gergis showed me Clarissa's Facebook profile. She looked pretty, and seemed to be enjoying her expat life in Dubai. According to Gergis, George 'hit bottom' when Clarissa uncoupled from him and she ended up marrying a wealthy man in his fifties with a questionable reputation. Although Clarissa 'unfriended' George on Facebook,

206 Notes from the Field, Beirut, June 2014.

along with many of his friends, she remained 'friends' with a few of them, including Bashir.

Me: Why are you still friends with her?

Gergis: We went to school together and her mom and my mom are close friends, and we have this whole network of friends.'

Me: How close are your moms?

Gergis: Rather close. They live on the same street, have a similar circle of friends, and go to pretty much the same social events. Besides, George asks me to keep him updated about her life. I wish he didn't...'

Bashir: I agree mate. Fuck this! [No offence intended to my reader].

Me: Is there any chance I can speak to this George?

Gergis: Wait a minute there, Sabiha. Chill. We already gave you access to us.'²⁰⁷

I never got to meet George.

Some time later, Gergis received a meme mocking Lebanese women's 'material nature'. The meme that Gergis received caused an array of reactions on his phone. Most of his male contacts seemed to agree with it. A married male friend of his remarked that 'you ought to see it' (now that the latter was married). The most interesting reply came from one of his female friends who pointed out 'so what', before adding that '*wein el ghalat*', or 'what is wrong with that?'²⁰⁸ Gergis rolled his eyes and puffed his disagreement away, before stating 'that's why you should keep your female friends and your male friends in separate groups'.²⁰⁹ I then pointed out to Gergis that it's just a meme, and that it is merely symptomatic of a toxic system, to which he replied '*bala fasaḥa, iza betride* (don't

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

act smart, if you would be so kind).²¹⁰ He sounded angry. In any case, and for the record, Gergis was particularly cynical about my research.

Unlike Najwa, I did not necessarily feel uncomfortable when I accompanied Walid and his friends. I did feel guilty though because my mother would entirely be opposed to it. Still, I did feel ‘out of place’ after a certain point when I had become ‘invisible’ to them. Their talk became increasingly offensive. Explicit language was abundant, and homophobic slurs were used to tease each other and question their masculinity. They would regularly tell me to ‘ignore’ what they said, and at times they would ‘apologize’ to me.²¹¹ At some point, and in a rather friendly and affective manner, Gergis said: ‘well, this is what you wanted, and now you got it’.²¹²

Such talk did not surprise me. It is a well-documented fact that men avoid talking openly about their weaknesses and their doubts in cafés (Kreil 2016; Fidaoui and Bahous, 2013). However, it was clear to me that they do channel them via readily available vehicles, such as reacting to songs, or commenting on the TV display. The TV in Abu Hassan’s café was muted, and was showing a channel specializing in classic Egyptian songs; the speakers echoed classic singers such Mohammad ‘Abd El-Wahāb and Om Kalthūm. One of the elder patrons, reacting to Om Kalthūm’s song, and sighing loudly, suddenly remarked: ‘what a cruel life it is!’ to which everyone nodded in agreement.²¹³

210 Ibid.

211 Ibid.

212 Ibid.

213 Ibid.

What struck me most about my evening with Walid and his friends is the multi-functionality of the café for the young Lebanese male. Most often, Lebanese youth, like Egypt's (Bayat, 2007), is accused of 'wasting their time in cafés', and of 'indulging too much in shishas'. Underneath these superficial consumerist behaviours, though, the café struck me as a highly intimate space where men reflect on the societal pressures put on them. A traditional café is deeply embedded in the urban life. Most often, it is designated instead of a street, and thus acts as a geographical reference; in addition, it is highly gendered seeing that men *always* socialize outside of the household (Depaule, 2007). The café also serves to extend one's informal networks (Kreil, 2016), in addition to making sense of the opaque bureaucracies that the patrons encounter in their day to day work, and 'to separate fact from fiction' (Carlier, 1990).

The traditional café, like the one I accompanied Walid and his friend to, ought not to be confused with the newly emerging trendy cafés. A traditional café consists of a male clientele mostly. Political talk and household anecdotes generally prevail. In a recent work, Kreil (2016) shows how working-class men in Cairo construct the café as an intimate space outside of the family. The café is seen as a safe place where one can share intimate household-related stories, including those about parental pressures and blessings, younger sisters, and current or ex-girlfriends. Gergis, for instance, was currently in a serious relationship, and on that particular evening, he told his friends how anxious he was about his imminent *khutūbah*.

'Her mother is so unlikable *ya zalameh* (mate)! She asked me to bring some *gateaux* [in a mocking French accent] with me the other day from La Cigale. Couldn't she just ask for *gateaux*? It costs twice from

La Cigale! I went to my regular *helwanji* and I switched the sweets to a Cigale box I borrowed from my cousin. I'm not going to indulge her with sweets from La Cigale. We're saving every penny for the *khutūbah*.²¹⁴

Approving words, combined with laughter, were soon heard. An elder man sitting on a nearby table remarked: 'that's the way to do it... bravo!'²¹⁵

The proximity of tables in traditional cafés greatly impacts the overall atmosphere. Patrons are always 'on the listen', and opinions are shared in a loud voice, and are therefore expected to be overheard and be commented on. As Kreil (2016) states 'the sense of intimacy shaped around the coffee shop has a deep impact on imaginaries of manhood and provides an important path for desire' (Kreil, 2016: 174). By being loud, men affirm their presence.

Selim, who was the last to join this particular circle of friends, teased Gergis by pinpointing that 'he is often missed these days', referring to the considerable time Gergis spends with his soon to be fiancée.²¹⁶ Unlike Gergis, Selim was 'unfortunate' in love, according to Bashir.²¹⁷ Out of the group, Selim was the one constantly checking his phone. On this particular evening, he was exchanging flirty texts with his 'latest crush'. Walid, unimpressed, scolded him:

214 Ibid.

215 Ibid.

216 Ibid.

217 Ibid.

‘You ought to stop playing games with *banāt el-‘ālam* (people’s daughters)...’*Ayb*... Every other day you meet someone new... it’s not right.’²¹⁸

Walid’s words are worth investigating. He is displaying a cautious morality whereby he accuses Selim of breaking the rules of conduct of a respectable man. Selim was unaffected, and quickly pointed out that ‘it’s just a cup of coffee’ and that Walid ought to ‘stop exaggerating’.²¹⁹ I quickly learned from Gergis that Selim is the most flirtatious of them, and constantly boasts about his numerous girlfriends. Perhaps he refrained from doing so on that particular evening because of my presence.

In many ways, it is undoubtedly me who was making Walid and his friends ‘uncomfortable’. My foreign status as a woman is clearly an invasion of what is seen as a strictly male intimate space. The relatively ‘tuned down’ discussion I witnessed, compared to the literature on men’s interactions in popular coffee shops is very telling in this regard. Shielke (in Kreil, 2016), remarks that ‘the inconsistency of moral ideals is always bound to particular situations in the efforts of persons to do right’, and that ‘actors compartmentalize their ethical standards according to situations’ (in Kreil, 2016: 176).

Shielke’s views can be found in the examples of each of Jomana, Najwa, my interaction with Walid and his friends, but also during my lengthy observations of couples’ interactions in cafés. Mohammad, for instance, was the on-duty manager of one café in

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

Tripoli, located in the newly-emerging, and mostly leisure-based, Dam-w-al-farz district:

‘I’ve seen it all in this café. Sometimes, when I get enough, I ask them to leave. Most days though, I turn a blind eye. The daytime is very slow for business, so any revenue we make is welcomed.’²²⁰

When Mohammad catches a couple kissing, for instance, he would deliberately ‘eye them angrily’ once, or twice, before finally intervening. Unsurprisingly, couples *always* sit in the back of the café, on the side that is furthest from the bathrooms, in order to avoid being seen by patrons using them. Moreover, Mohammad made it clear that most often, his interventions vary according to those present at the café.

‘If there are elders, I am stricter, but usually the couples would ‘control’ themselves in this case. You know, more and more *sobḥiyyāt* are held in cafés, and that helps to keep the couples from going all over each other’.²²¹

Unlike the loud and strong presence we encounter in homo-social settings, such as in male-only cafés, or women’s *sobḥiyyāt*, which I detail hereafter in the section concerned with the household, mixed cafés operate along Lebanon’s moralistic codes of conduct. The non-written agreement between Mohammad and his young coupled customers is one of many examples that illustrate the subtlety of negotiating sexual agency in Lebanon.

220 Field Notes/Interview with Mohamad, Tripoli, May 2014.

221 Ibid.

Mohammad's café, as I said, is located in the Dam-w-al-farz area of Tripoli, and although his couple-customers are constantly under his scrutiny, the café allows them to experience their intimacy in a public setting. Hoda, for instance, told me that the café 'liberates' her from the pressures that result from the possibility of being caught.²²² In her words, she does not have to 'constantly watch over her shoulder' since the café *byestor* (it is both 'respectable and sealed enough'):

'Where else would I go? My friend used to meet her boyfriend in unknown buildings, usually on the staircase between two floors. It's Ok when the electricity is on, and everyone is using the lift. But on the days there's no electricity, they risk being 'caught' by these residents'.²²³

Hoda's narrative is very telling. For young women like Hoda, finding a safe space where they can spend quality time with their 'boyfriend' can be a daunting experience. This seemed to be the case for most of my female interlocutors who were not in an official relationship. Although the café in itself is not ideal, as young couples are constantly under the scrutiny of the manager on duty, it is, in many ways, a generally accepted, though indirectly acknowledged, compromise. Anyone who has stepped into a café in Lebanon during the day realizes the prevalence of young couples.

Still, the café is not without its limits. Nancy told me:

'I want to be able to kiss my boyfriend when I feel like it. I'm sick and tired of playing it safe. Do you know how much money I spend at those 'cool' [usually upscale] cafés where it is OK for couples to kiss and

²²² Interview with Hoda, Tripoli, April 2014.

²²³ Ibid.

cuddle? They cost me a fortune! And they're so far from where my boyfriend and I live'.²²⁴

Nancy's words add a class dimension to the question of space and morality. A hasty analysis would conclude that the more upscale the place, the more tolerant it is in terms of sexual conduct. Following my fieldwork, I partially agree with Nancy. However, such places are usually frequented by what could be described as closed social bubbles of highly privileged individuals, and to argue that an upscale space is one where leisure and modernity are co-constitutive of each other is to make incorrect generalizations. The tight social bubbles allow those within them to exclude 'non-desired' patrons. They generally know the owners personally, and their frequenting of the place is akin to a club. One knows one is not welcome because of the constant eyeing and whispering, in addition to the familiar interaction with the staff, who often accommodate a patron's demands. Such exclusionary practices become more noticeable whenever a VIP, often a member of parliament, their entourage, and clients enter a place. Whenever the staff asks those present to change seat, or to leave the premises if need be, most of those present oblige.

VIII. 4. The household

As with the case of Mohamad, the café manager, a concealed dialogue seems to be the general rule of thumb when parents inquire about their children's intimate life. When I went to visit Mou at her house for an interview, at some point during our meeting Mou

224 Interview with Nancy, Zalka, June 2014.

reminded her mother that she would be seeing her friend 'Diala' later during the day.²²⁵

In fact, she was going to meet Ghais, a man she had been seeing regularly for six months, for a date in one of Tripoli's many cafés. Mou asked her mother if she wanted her to bring something for the house or to run some errands while she was out. Her mother sarcastically asked, 'Diala, heh? I wonder when we're going to meet [*hal*] this Diala.'²²⁶

Clearly, Mou's mother is aware that Diala is a cover name. Mou is a 26-year-old woman who works for a dentistry clinic as a secretary. She has recently decided to wear the veil because, in her words, 'it seems that most men want veiled women these days'.²²⁷ At least, this seems to be the case with Ghais, the young salesman she recently met through her work. Following his many appointments, and the many chats that followed during his waiting time, Ghais told her that he is interested in *yet'arraḥ* 'alaya (getting to know her). On their first date, Ahmed told her that her only flaw was that she did not wear the veil. After three months, as their encounters became more frequent, she decided to wear the veil:

'It's just a piece of cloth. I don't make a fuss about it. I'm twenty-six already. *Ma ba'ani sabiyyeh* (I am not that young anymore), and he seems to be genuinely interested. He is always scolding me about not being open with my parents about him'.²²⁸

'Me: Why don't you tell them, then? I think your mother knows about 'Diala'.

225 Field notes / Interview with Mou, Tripoli, September 2014.

226 Ibid.

227 Ibid.

228 Ibid.

Mou: I know, but I'm scared. I don't know how to speak to them about it. I'm not like you, you travel and you live alone and you talk about such things to your parents.

Me [Interrupting her]: Euh, no, I don't. Not really...

Mou: So why don't *you* speak to them, then?

Me: Well, I am not interested in anybody at the moment, but I think I would speak to them now. I mean, my mom, since my dad passed away recently. I just never thought seriously about getting married. I feel comfortable to speak to my female friends about it though.²²⁹

After a somewhat long pause, Mou asked, 'is it easier without a man in the house?'²³⁰

[Interval.

Oh my. I was not expecting such a question. I am not sure, really. I guess it depends. All I can say is that ever since my father passed away, my uncles and aunts have been increasingly asking me *when* I was planning on getting married, and telling me that 'there is more to life than studies'. In fact, prior to my father's death, I had hardly had any contact with them. If anything, I viewed them as 'strangers'. Surely, this is a partial answer, and whereas an auto-ethnographic methodology is clearly suitable for my work, I limit my views to the intervals.

End of Interval].

Mou's remark about the impact of the absence of a father on discussing intimacy with parents is in its right place. The household, like the café, is an intricate space when it

229 Ibid.

230 Ibid.

comes to sexuality and intimacy in Lebanon. The household is often assumed to offer privacy, and to a certain extent, personal liberties. However, my fieldwork informed me that most couples create intimate spaces outside of the household, be it in cafés, cinemas, or cars, since the household is seen as 'off-limits'. Still, I came across several examples of households where the fathers worked abroad, and depending on the household in question, women were capable of exploring their sexuality at greater liberty.

Salma's family moved into their apartment block at the same time as Jean's family. Both families had moved to Jbeil from the South of Lebanon in the early 1990s. Both families maintained an ethic of caring for their neighbours. Such ethics are common and residents often did, and continue to, rely on their neighbours, especially when the power and the water supply are interrupted. Asking for water, or sharing each other's alternative power supply is the norm for many households. Whereas such logistics have become increasingly less pressing nowadays, mostly due to the emergence of private services, most households, at some point, had to rely on each other's mutual support.

Salma is in her late twenties today, and had had her *katb ketāb* recently. She is one of many informants whose road to marriage could be described as conventional. Like many interlocutors, Salma told me about the many 'sex encounters' she experienced in her life. I define sex encounter as a moment of sexual excess, in the sense that one is forcibly reminded of one's sexual potential. One such 'sex encounter' was in her late teens, when she decided to prepare for her end of year school exams with her neighbours' son, Jean:

‘We were both preparing for the *baccalauréat* (the official examination to graduate from high school), and we spent a lot of time together preparing for the exams. Jean was in charge of explaining the scientific disciplines to me, and he would recite to me whatever he had learnt by heart. *Toz ‘a hal baccalauréat*’ [Toz, which translates as ‘fart’, in an expression used to point out the ridiculousness or the unimportance of something; Salma was pointing out the ‘memorize and repeat’ approach of the *baccalauréat*, as opposed to critical thinking]’.²³¹

Needless to say, Salma and Jean were expected to meet in Salma’s house, as per her mother’s instruction. Initially, they opted for the ‘dining room’ as the quarters for their studies. The ‘dining room’ is an extension of the ‘salon’. The ‘salon’ is the most spacious and expansive, and the least used room in the Lebanese household. It is usually reserved for ‘important guests’, such as distant relatives, in addition to ‘formal’ social events, such as *khotūba*, *katb el ketāb*. The salon is usually furnished with grandiose furniture, massive chandeliers, crystal ornaments, and meticulously overlaid curtains. A respectable salon has large cupboards where special china and silverware are displayed. The ‘salon’ is always connected to the ‘dining room’. Like the ‘salon’, it is occupied by heavy furniture, usually a substantial wooden table with seats that match the table’s carved decorations.

It was no surprise, then, that Salma and Jean opted for the ‘dining room’. The large table allowed them to organize their many books, documents, files, and notes. However, the ‘dining room’, as it turned out, was ‘too far’ for Salma’s mother:

231 Interview with Salma, Beirut, March 2014.

‘In the beginning, she [Salma’s mother] used to come and go every hour or so bringing us food and drinks. It was funny, and it was nice to have snacks all around, but after a while, her visits started to affect the flow of our work. When I told her to limit her visits, she made it clear to me that she was not comfortable with us staying in the ‘dining room’ and insisted that we move to the ‘living room’. I couldn’t understand her paranoia. It was *Jean*, our neighbour’s son, *ma ḥada gharib* (not a stranger, and then all hell was set loose when she said that it was *ḥarām*, and that whenever a man and a woman are alone together, the devil is *thālithuhumā* [the third presence]).’²³²

According to Salma, Jean was the ‘neighbours’ son’. He was kind, helpful, and very respectable. There had never been any romantic feelings between them. Nowadays, Jean lives in France, is married to a French woman, and has no intention of returning to Lebanon. Salma, whose love stories are strictly conventional, learned from an early age that falling in love and getting married was reserved for males from her own sect. Salma told me that it was the ‘devil episode’ with her mother that made her realize that she was a woman, in the sense of a mature sexual being, and thus marriageable:

‘Me: Really? How about when you had your periods? I was terrified! I had no idea what was going on. Mine came early! And no one told me anything!’

Salma: Oh my! Don’t remind me! When I had my periods, my mom told me that from now on, I will be bleeding once a month, and that I should always use hygienic pads, and that tampons were *haram*. She said that God loves me, and that I will be able to have babies.

232 Ibid.

Me: How old were you?

Salma: Twelve, you?'²³³

From then onwards, Salma became obsessive with removing any sign of her periods, following her mother's insistence.

'She made such a big deal of it. She said it was *'ayb* for my brothers and father. She wouldn't even let me keep the pads in the bathroom, and if so, she would place them on the very top of the bathroom cupboard, and every time I needed one, I had to stand on the edge of the bathtub. I fell once and I hurt myself badly! But there was no point negotiating with her'.²³⁴

Salma's narrative is very representative of how an ethic of fear develops. Menstruation has always been associated with impurity, especially in Muslim households. Women, for instance, are not supposed to hold the Quran, or to fast during menstruation. Her mother's reaction is telling of how women, often unintentionally, infuse their daughters with indiscernible feelings of shame. Moreover, these feelings develop in a rather solitary setting. Salma told me that whenever her mother inquired about her periods, she would simply state *neshkor Allah*, or Thanks be to Allah. Like many young girls, Salma found out from older girlfriends and playground gossip about the full meaning of periods, about reproduction, and sex.

'When that girl from the 3ème grade told me about sex, I wanted to kill her! All I could think of was 'how dare you say that my mother

233 Ibid.

234 Ibid.

and father got naked in front of each other??' That was *ḥarām* and my parents are very pious people'.²³⁵

Salma shook her head, smiled, and then laughed: 'I wish things were different, but that's the way it is!' I then asked her if she would be more open with her children:

'This is the age of the Internet. If anything, I expect my daughter to explain it to me! My sister caught her [12-year-old] son watching porn the other day, and she lost it! She kept telling him that it's *ḥarām*. She invited the local Imam to dine at their house, and to have a chat with him'.²³⁶

I was stunned when Salma told me about the Imam. Most often, Imams are sought among the poorer classes, a reality that does not speak for Salma. Imams are valued for their opinions on moral dilemmas, for reconciling between disagreeing family members, or to inquire about the respectability and reputation of potential partners, to name a few.

The example of Salma's sister shows that the household is not a place to discuss sexuality, lust, or matters of the heart. By inviting the Imam, Salma's sister is de facto relegating certain talks to certain spaces. The household, in her case, is not a safe surrounding where she can engage in an open conversation with her son. Similarly, her husband made no attempt to initiate such conversations with him. For an outsider,

235 Ibid.

236 Ibid.

Salma's sister and her husband could be easily accused of 'bad parenting'. Instead, it is clear from their example that the household is no place for sex talk. Moreover, it is clear that the concept of privacy in this case does not equal safety. Instead, safety is sought *elsewhere*, outside the privacy of the household.

Equally important to bring forth in this analysis is women's cycle of power in the household. Women in Lebanon gradually climb the gendered ladder of womanhood: from daughter, to wife and daughter-in-law, then mother, and finally mother-in-law. A mother-in-law will have considerable influence over her daughters-in-law, and will often interfere in their day-to-day activities and decisions. Moreover, mothers-in-law, by virtue of their age, are privileged by Lebanon's standards of connective patriarchy, which favours the elders and the males, over the youngsters and the females.

A mother-in-law does not interfere because of psychoanalytically discernible insecurities, although such an analysis could be probable. Instead, by positioning herself between her son and her daughter-in-law, a mother-in-law safeguards her son's allegiance to her, and his long-term investment in her well-being and survival. This is particularly true in financially compromised households, which goes to show that gendered practices are context-specific, structurally-constructed, and do not operate in a vacuum or succumb to 'naturalizing' discourses.

The narrative of Salma shows how everyday practices in the household are produced according to locally-specific knowledge related to sexuality. In many ways, I found her narrative, like most of my interlocutors', to betray the stereotypical view that sex in the Middle East happens behind closed doors. Such assumptions presuppose a sharp

distinction between the inside and the outside. Since this chapter is concerned first and foremost with the political meaning of space, it is fair to ask: Since the household is not a safe space for sex talk and practices (outside of marriage), where, then, can we locate the spaces where sex talk and practices take place?

Mou's remark about the absence of the father is quite foretelling in this regard. Fatima, for instance, whose father was often abroad (Erbil) for work, felt little pressure when it came to the politics of the household.

'Many of my friends envy me. Whenever there is a party or a late night event, I don't have to go through the parental negotiation. My mother is very open in this regard, and my father is rarely present'.²³⁷

Still, and after further enquiries, Fatima admitted that whenever her father returns, her outings are considerably reduced.

'When my father is home, I have to be content with going to the cinema, or to having dinners with my friends. I stop going to clubs, unless it is a university-sponsored event'.²³⁸

When I enquired further, she told me about one episode when her father visited unexpectedly:

'He wasn't supposed to return Friday. I remember it was a Thursday before the Christmas holidays. Everyone was expecting him on Friday. I was at a party at a friend's dorm. I realized I had several

²³⁷ Interview with Fatima, May 2014, Achrafieh.

²³⁸ Ibid.

missed calls from home. There were also SMS texts sent by my mother. She said that my father was here, that my sister Lubna and her fiancé Ismail are on their way to pick me up. All three of us came up with a story to tell my father, in case he asked, but he didn't, since I was accompanied by my sister and her fiancé'.²³⁹

According to Lubna, Fatima's older sister, their mother had become increasingly tolerant with her younger sister since she herself had become engaged to Ismail.

'We don't have older brothers, and Ismail fills that part in many ways. She is very lucky. My university days were very different to hers'.²⁴⁰

The older brother is, in many ways, a contentious figure when it comes to the politics of the household. The older brother comes in very handy for going out, since he can accompany his sisters, drop them off, and enquire about their friends and their surroundings. Similarly, the older brother is often expected to take on the duties of the father whenever the latter is absent. When I visited Gilda in Jbeil, for instance, her mother had prepared lunch for us. Like many housewives, her mother took pride in her household. Not only did she prepare a feast for lunch for us, she also spoke at length about her daily routines, her cooking expertise, and her household managerial skills. The lunch consisted of no less than six kinds of mezzeh, grilled fish, and two kinds of dessert. But before we could dig into our plates, Gilda's mother called out her eldest

239 Ibid.

240 Ibid.

son, 10-year-old Michael, sat him at the head of the table, and poured a glass of arak for him. Soon, the rest of her children took a seat.

‘My husband is never home for lunch. Michael is the man of the house in this case’.²⁴¹

When I asked Gilda if this was a one-time thing, she said ‘No, Michael takes his substitute role very seriously’.²⁴² I must admit that the sight of a ten-year-old sipping Arak made me uncomfortable. Michael sat proudly at the head of the table, and pointed out to his mother what he wanted to eat. She duly obliged. I could not help but feel the deliberately submissive attitude of Gilda’s mother. The way she smiled, the way she bent, and her overall clumsy attitude were very telling of her relationship with Michael. Michael definitely acted like an authority, and his mother encouraged it, and greatly facilitated it. When Michael’s younger brother was being picky and refusing to eat, Michael scolded him, and insisted that he eat his food. Their mother simply watched, and took no part in their interaction, despite the fact that Michael was overly dominant.

The scene I witnessed at Gilda’s house is very illustrative of how a household without a father is seen as a ‘lacking’ household in Lebanon. This lack, though, is sooner or later filled with father figures, or should I say a male authority. Lubna’s fiancé, Ismail, allows Fatima to experience leisure outside of her household, whereas Michael re-enacts his father’s behaviour during his absence. In many ways, both are filling the role of the male authority of the house. This authority is practiced from an early age. Similarly, girls are

241 Interview with Gilda, July 2014, Jbeil.

242 Ibid.

taught to accept this authority, and to erase their very personhood at times, as is the case with Salma's monthly battles with her periods.

Still, the household is not only gendered. The Lebanese household is becoming increasingly racialized as well. In a rather daring work, Jureidini (2006) shows how the exoticized body of foreign female domestic workers in Lebanon lead Lebanese men to 'experiment sexually' with them from an early age. Jureidini (2006) argues, following ethnographic research in Lebanon, that foreign female domestic workers are constructed concurrently as asexual and sexual beings (Jureidini, 2006: 131). One gets the feeling that they are desired in the household so that young males can be initiated into sex. Moreover, Jureidini shows how different nationalities of women occupy different levels in the imagination of Lebanese men. I find Jureidini's work particularly fascinating because he digs into an area that many Lebanese men and women avoid talking about. He looks beyond the injustices faced by domestic workers, and beyond the trafficking and sponsorship narratives that characterize most of the literature on them. Instead, he delves into the 'intimate', and captures a lived reality that is often hidden in both mainstream news and in the literature. At the same time, I am somewhat frustrated by Jureidini's reluctance to cross the T's and dot the I's: he acknowledges that rape does occur, but he refers to existing studies and statistics while doing so, instead of raising the possibility that members of the household deliberately 'turn a blind eye' to cases of sexual harassment and rape. Unfortunately, I do not have primary sources that support my thinking, but the studies that have been published so far strongly supports it (Jureidini, 2002; Ferretti, 2006; Hamill, 2011; Ferguson, 2012).

Although I could not get gold of a single interlocutor who would discuss with me ‘sex encounters’²⁴³ between domestic workers and the male residents of the household. I did, however, have the opportunity to speak to two foreign domestic workers, one from Nepal, and another from The Philippines, who confirmed my doubts. In addition, many of the *sobhiyyats* to which I was invited to included ‘maid talks’.

Sobhiyye is the singular form of *sobhiyyat*. The *sobhiyye* is an institution in itself. The *sobhiyye* is often evoked in everyday talk in order to signal, but also to judge women’s ‘free time’. A woman who spends a considerable part of her time in *sobhiyyāt* is often accused of neglecting her household duties. *Sobhiyyāt* often involves a tight group of women, which usually includes close friends, close colleagues, but also close neighbours. The place of the *sobhiyye* usually rotates between the members’ households. The host is usually expected to offer coffee. Depending on the host, and the gathering in question, food is sometimes served. Whereas miniature cakes, and home-made foods are welcomed, excessive offerings are seen as ‘rude’ and as ‘showing off’.

It helps to distinguish between daily *sobhiyyāt* that usually involve neighbours residing in the same building block, and larger ones, where close friends and colleagues who live elsewhere gather in one household. Unfortunately, I had no access to neighbours-only *sobhiyyāt*, mostly due to the fact that apartments in my building block are being increasingly rented to businesses. I did however have access to several large *sobhiyyāt* involving close friends and relatives. Despite my mother’s reluctance to have me record

243 Although I recognize the prevalence of rape, I am also aware that there exists ‘consensual’ sexual relations between MDFW and Lebanese men (see, for example, the example of Khaled in Ch. III., who was dating a Filipina MDFW at the time of my fieldwork).

her *sobhiyyāt*, I relied on her guests to introduce me to further ones. Also, a number of my interlocutors who have no links to my mother and her friends whatsoever invited me on several occasions.

One of the gatherings I least identified with included the following exchange:

Woman 1: 'The other day I walked into her [referring to the resident MDFW] room. She was wearing sexy clothes and taking selfies of herself! What on earth was she thinking?'

Women 2: 'Oh my God! How is that even possible?'

Women 3: 'If I were you, I would immediately send her back to the office'

Women 1: 'Right? Why does she have to take selfies in the first place?'

The general consensus was that the 'maid' in question had no right to take sexy selfies despite the fact that the worker in question was in her room. As one woman remarked, 'that's why they should never get their own room ... You never know what they will be up to'.

No one raised any questions about the 'madame' walking into the worker's room without knocking. If anything, everyone present seemed oblivious to the fact that domestic workers, too, have a life. Clearly, the analysis of Jureidini (2006) is highly applicable in this case: the maid is constructed as both asexual *and* hypersexual at once. Housewives' extreme practices of regulating the morality of their household is racially-informed and is highly illustrative about the intersection of sex with race, since certain bodies, in this case foreign ethnic women, are incessantly scrutinized.

Stories about maids receiving their male lovers whenever the ‘madame is out’ are pandemic in the *sobhiyyāt*. Oftentimes, unsurprisingly, the male lover is a Syrian worker. Walid told me at some point during fieldwork that Lebanese men prefer Nepalese and Filipina women, whereas Syrian workers are more likely to pay for sex with Ethiopian domestic workers, who generally charge less.

The reproduction of Lebanese-ness through sexually conflating narratives about domestic workers shows how sexuality is constructed along national and racial lines. In the many *sobhiyyāt* I attended, I never came across a single narrative about a Lebanese man ‘sneaking in’. Whether this is true or not, and far from being the goal of my argument, it is difficult to ignore the supremacist nature of the discourse around domestic migrant workers. In any case, it is clear that the politics of sex in the Lebanese household merit their own scrutiny.

Despite the politics of sexuality that regulate women’s day to day lives, the household constitutes for women a space to articulate their views on Lebanon’s contentious politics of sex. Hoodfar (1997) has previously examined morning reunions among women in a Cairene setting. She relates the sexually-charged conversations women share during these reunions (Hoodfar 1997). Hoodfar (1997) examined a low-income setting. If we remember my conversation with Om Zahra, who also came from a low-income setting, she spoke openly about sex. My fieldwork, on the other hand, was conducted in a middle-class setting, where upward mobility, in the bourgeois sense, prevailed. Although I did encounter ‘sex talk’ during the *sobhiyyāt*, very rarely did I witness extremely explicit talk.

If anything, 'sex talk' is highly codified, and the level of explicit language is directly linked to the marital status of the women present. On one occasion, I was invited by Fariha²⁴⁴ to a *sobḥiyye*. Fariha had been married for three months, and everyone wanted to 'hear about the honeymoon'. Unluckily for us, Fariha's mother stayed for the majority of the *sobḥiyye*. When she left, Fariha stated that she wasn't expecting her mother, but 'that's what mothers do'. In the thirty minutes or so remaining, before everyone had to leave so that Fariha could prepare lunch for her husband, question after question related to the 'honeymoon' and to the 'action' that took place during the honeymoon followed. At first, Fariha blushed and smiled, and desperately tried to find a place to hide. Her friends' constant giggling and teasing only exacerbated her blushing. Interestingly, Fariha did not go into any detail, and when one of her friend challenged her, another one stepped in and asked her to 'leave Fariha alone! If you want porn, go and watch some!' - at which point everyone laughed loudly.

In another *sobḥiyye*, Marie was lamenting her sex life.²⁴⁵ According to Marie, her husband had been ignoring her lately, and she was desperate to make him desire her again. Advice ranged from cooking his favourite food, to 'belly-dance' for him. A third guest remarked that 'men sometimes drift away', and that 'sooner or later, her husband will return to her'. There was a general consensus among the women, with one of them stating that, 'you're the wife. You needn't worry', before the neighbour bluntly stating: 'between you and me, you have been neglecting yourself lately, Marie. When was the last time you had your hair dyed? It's time to go to the hairdresser'.

244 Field notes from a morning gathering at Fariha's house, September 2014, Tripoli.

245 Field notes from a morning gathering at Marie's house, July 2014, Jbeil.

The *sobhiyye* at Marie's house was expressing a degree of internalized gendered epistemology, where the women actively reiterated men's appetite for sex. Interestingly, the notion of 'betrayal' did not appear once. Marie was more concerned about her husband abandoning her as a wife, in the institutional sense, not as his significant other.

When I joined Jomana's *sobhiyye*, the sex talk I encountered was different.²⁴⁶ Unlike Marie and Fariha, Jomana, a Sunni, was not married and was dating Elie, a Maronite Christian at the time. Jomana and Eli were sexually active, something that was exclusively known to me. When one of her friends brought forward the topic of sex, with her current partner insisting they consummate their relationship, Jomana remained largely quiet. At some point, I caught her glimpsing at me. I don't know how else Jomana would have reacted had I not been present; however, as I related earlier, she was becoming increasingly regretful of her relationship with Elie. Still, the conversation revealed some degree of tolerance towards sex talk. There were no immediate judgments. Interestingly though, and as was the case with inter-sectarian love, one friend remarked, 'sex is not worth it. It will only bring you a headache'. Sex is approached rather pragmatically, especially since women oftentimes find themselves alone in the aftermath of sex, especially in cases of unwanted pregnancy. Abortions are costly, and many gynaecologists in Lebanon have had their careers terminated once accused of conducting them. In addition, it is not unheard of for gynaecologists to directly contact women's parents in order to inform them about their daughters' pregnancy. Just like 'our waiter' earlier, many medical doctors take on the task of policing the private lives of others, in addition to moralizing about them. On another

246 Field notes from a morning gathering at Jomana's house, January 2015, Beirut.

note, clearly, sex is not conflated with love in the context of Jomana's friend, unlike in a western hegemonic interpretation of love, where the two are often conflated.

The *sobḥiyye* is not only limited to 'sex talk'. Oftentimes, and whenever the conversations involve men, including male relatives, those present displayed a highly gendered understanding of men's roles. When Suha's fiancé had his request for credit rejected, Suha remarked '*ya m'attar ya Qassem*' (how pitiful of you, Qassem [her fiancé]), *ma byetla' bi idak shi'* (you aren't capable of anything), to which her friend replied, 'Qassem is too *ādami*, perhaps too much'.²⁴⁷ If we remember chapter VI, to be *ādami* (the local equivalent of the gentleman) is a highly valuable masculine attribute, which is often contrasted with the *m'attar* (the pitiful man), and with the *shāter* (the smart and cunning man who succeeds). By remarking that Suha's fiancé is too *ādami*, her friend is situating Qassem in the realm of the *m'attar*, the antithesis of Lebanon's ideal masculinity.

Clearly, and be it in the case of each of Marie, Fariha, Jomana, or Suha's *sobḥiyye*, their narratives show how women actively, though unknowingly, reproduce the very masculine ideals in Lebanon that could be seen as oppressive. Moreover, their narratives, despite taking place in the safe surrounding of the household, have clear repercussion on public enactments of masculinity. In this sense, not only is the public/private divide a limited understanding of space, intimacy, too, which could be viewed as the minutest level of the private, also plays a role in the construction of a gendered public out there.

247 Field notes from a breakfast gathering with Suha and her friends, May 2014, Tripoli.

VIII. 5. The car

Lefebvre (in Purcell, 2003: 577) defines the right to the city as ‘the right to information, the rights to use multiple services, the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in urban areas; it would also cover the right to the use of the center’.

Still, the right to the city is not a given right. As Marcuse (2012) states:

‘It is crucially important to be clear that it is not everyone’s right to the city with which we are concerned, but that there is in fact a conflict among rights that needs to be faced and resolved, rather than wished away’ Marcuse (Marcuse, 2012: 32).

This above point resonates throughout this entire chapter. In what follows, I show how couples, particularly non-official ones, are constantly negotiating their ‘right to the city’, and use the car as a space to illustrate my point.

In a highly original work, Menoret (2014) examines joyriding in Riyadh, and invites us to view it as resistance, not as criminality as Saudi authorities often portray it, and as a claim to one’s right to the city, especially when we view the wide urban highways of Riyadh and Jeddah in their context: ‘a spatial symbol of the new landed bourgeoisie and a manifestation of heightened class warfare’, whose gradual expansion went hand in hand with the steady and gradual expansion of the Saudi kingdom (Menoret, 2014: 7). Menoret convincingly shows how marginalized masculinities in Saudi Arabia resort to ‘confronting the state in its most basic operations: managing public spaces, protecting private property, and enforcing the law’ (Menoret, 2014: 11). The car, in Menoret’s

ethnography, reflects its owner's ambitions and success and is a symbol of individual freedom, technical mastery, and masculinity (Menoret, 2014: 7).

We saw earlier how young men blast love songs through their car speakers while cruising around their beloved's residency. Instead of viewing such activities as futile, I propose that we see them as political. In this sense, space is also occupied alongside auditory practices. We saw how Issam's irrational behaviour eventually cost him his relationship with Layal. Like Issam, many young men cruise the city in their cars whilst playing loud music. However, unlike Issam, they postpone such practices to the night time. Cruising the city at night is a young and marginalized men's preferred activity. It allows them to occupy spaces and venues that are otherwise prohibited to them.

In what follows, and taking direct inspiration from Menoret, I argue that where gender and sex are concerned, the car is both a physical object and a conceptual one. Not only does the car increase one's mobility, the car itself functions as a 'safe haven', where the couple can move away from society's prying eyes.

For Melhem, for instance, his car is his 'baby', and he can't imagine life without it.²⁴⁸

Whenever he takes Elissar out, they avoid the highway and cruise along the coastal route instead. Melhem's car, like many young men's, has its windows blackened. When I told Melhem that his car looked like a thug's car, he replied that: 'not every man who has blackened windows is a thug'.²⁴⁹ Like many couples, Melhem and Elissar spend

²⁴⁸ Interview with Melhem and Elissar, August 2014, somewhere on the not-really highway between Cheka near Tripoli.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

considerable time in the car. We saw earlier how certain cafés, particularly ‘hip’ ones where couples are more likely to feel at ease, can be expensive. According to Elissar: ‘e often drive along the sea, then stop somewhere to buy ice cream or a [fruit] juice. The car has everything we need. The only problem is when I need to use the loo. Melhem does not have a problem as such.’²⁵⁰

Like many couples, Melhem and Elissa experience the household as off-limit space. Not only does the car provide my couples with a certain degree of escape, it also allows them to escape society’s policing gaze. Whereas Melhem and Elissar have not had full penetrative sex, Jomana, for instance, told me that ‘even if she could afford hotels, she wouldn’t go there because she can’t be bothered with the stares of the managers on duty’.²⁵¹ This is in contrast to Elissar, who admitted that she is growing tired of Melhem’s car, especially since it keeps ‘breaking down’.²⁵² Still, Elissar remarked ‘*neshkor Allah ‘ala hal siyyarah*’ (I am thankful to God for the car after all).²⁵³

The degree of intimacy permitted by the car ranges from physical closeness, to non-penetrative sex, to full intercourse. Still, the point I am mostly interested in is to showcase the car as a compromise between the couple and the larger society.

‘Sometimes, we get told off by the residents. It used to be the case, this is why I had my car’s windows blackened. It doesn’t always work though. Once, my car wouldn’t start, and before we could escape, this woman stood in front of the car and started insulting us.

250 Ibid.

251 Interview with Jomana, May 2014, Gemmayzeh, Beirut.

252 Interview with Melhem and Elissar, August 2014, somewhere on the not-really highway between Cheka near Tripoli.

253 Ibid.

All kinds of insults! We didn't care, because we weren't from the area.'²⁵⁴

Following Melhem's narratives, the car allows the couple to physically transport themselves from one geographical location to another. In the new location, they are simply perceived as 'strangers', and the chance of running into familiar others is minute, especially when we take into account the fact that Lebanon's sectarian communities are delimited along precise geographical borders. This is applicable to the region of El-Kura, for instance, where Christian and Muslim villages can be found side by side.²⁵⁵ On this topic, Melhem and Elissar told me that they prefer cruising in Christian areas, and avoid Muslim ones whenever possible.²⁵⁶ For Melhem, the avoidance of Muslim villages is the result of his conviction that it is 'disrespectful to the local residents,' who might be 'too sensitive' to some of 'the things we [him and Elissar] do'. I challenged Melhem by asking him whether the moral values of the Christian villages' residents differ from Muslims'; he said: 'probably not ... but still ... The Christian village speaks our language [referring to his and Elissar's Christian faith]'.²⁵⁷

I can't help but notice the contradiction in Melhem's account: whilst he seeks those destinations where he is perceived as an unfamiliar face, he would rather be 'caught red-handed' in a familiar environment, in this case an overall Christian one. I view his reasoning as a more 'subtle' form of 'sexo-sectarianism', compared to Denise's (in IV.

254 Ibid.

255 El-Kura is also the region where many of Tripoli's residents escape to in order to take a break from the hustle and bustle of the city.

256 Interview with Melhem and Elissar, August 2014, somewhere on the not-really highway between Cheka near Tripoli.

257 Ibid.

4.), for instance. Both Denise and Melhem make assumptions about the sectarian-other through the deployment of sexed stereotypes. Where the intersection of sect and space are concerned, it is clear that the relationship between the body and the external environment is a multifarious and shifting one, and one is constantly repositioning oneself in relation to the milieu.

Sect is not the only element that informs Melhem and Elissar's car cruises. Finding a perfect spot brings additional logistical complexities.

'Even with the car, it is not easy to find a perfect place. You have to think about the noise, the proximity of the resident, and the bloody valet parking. You can't park anywhere these days, and the best thing to do is to leave the city altogether, but that would be expensive too.'²⁵⁸

As it turned out, most couples prefer to use the costal road, which has become gradually less used since the erection of the not-really-highway highway between Tripoli, and Beirut (and further to the South). The not-really-highway highway is constantly interrupted by 'sudden exits' that render exiting it and entering it highly dangerous. In addition, businesses, malls, cinemas, and kiosks are scattered all along it. The coastal road aside, most couples I spoke to preferred to drive around rural areas, which can be reached quickly, seeing their geographical proximity to the coast, where we encounter Lebanon's major cities. In contrast to the rural areas, the city is a 'jungle'. It is bleak, opaque, hostile, and merciless. Following my fieldwork, the city is characterized by the

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

increased visibility of *gho'rabā* (unfamiliar faces), of 'strange accents', and 'weird customs'. As we saw in the case of Melhem and Elissar, strangeness allows them to blend with their new surrounding with relative ease.

Still, the city does not present itself equally. The city is a mostly gendered, and at times, sexed arena, which makes the negotiation of sexuality in public spaces both challenging and innovative. Security, including checkpoints, sexo-sectarianism, highly visible politico-sectarian markers (in terms of architecture or political posters), and unaffordable leisure goods result in unequal experiences, depending on the intersection of one's sex with gender, sect, personal status code, age, status. Even in the case of the car, and although the car allows most couples to experience some level of intimacy, other flirting activities involving the car can only be experienced by certain individuals. The *kazdūra*, or the cruise, for instance is a particular local activity that young individuals regularly practise.

The *kazdūra* consists of driving one's car slowly, so that one is seeing, all the while being seen. In addition to being highly illustrative of the intersection of class with space, the *kazdūra*, for the middle-class, is a quintessential flirting tool.

In Tripoli, middle-class young men and women driving slowly can be seen every afternoon around 'isha prayer time. Although most of the cars are relatively new, some are particularly expensive. The *kazdūra* takes place along El-Mina road, the road that links the neighbourhood of El-Mina, to the centre of Tripoli. In more recent years, the up-and-coming neighbourhood of Dam-w-al-farz, known for its leisure spaces, notably cafés and restaurants, is increasingly gaining ground. Unlike El-Mina road, which is

frequented by clearly middle-class youngsters, the Dam-w-al-farz neighbourhood is frequented by people from all walks of life. For the least privileged, they are most likely to be found cruising along the Corniche in El-Mina.

The *kazdūra* is a popular activity that is considered safe by Lebanon's moral rubrics. Since no one leaves their car, there is no physical contact between the men and the women. In addition, one can simply abandon the *kazdūra* and return home when they feel 'threatened'. The *kazdūra*, when taken out of context, can be seen as a highly futile activity. It merely consists of driving up and down the same road a number of times. The *kazdūra* often causes the traffic to become immobile. For those who do not participate in it but somehow find themselves trapped in it, it can take them an hour at least to go over a trip that would have taken them ten minutes easily otherwise. During my fieldwork, I took part in the *kazdūra* as a passenger, while I was driven by Cynthia and her group of friends.²⁵⁹

The goal of the *kazdūra* is to see and be seen. It is an end in itself, and the first rule of the *kazdūra* is to 'chill'. The 'chilling' rule during the *kazdūra* is in contrast to the road rage that prevails during the day, when drivers, particularly male drivers, excessively operate the car's horn. In contrast, if and when used during the *kazdūra*, a quick 'beep' suffices to signal passers-by that someone in the car recognizes them. In this case,

259 I rode with Cynthia and her friends on one occasion during the month of August (2014), and on two occasions during the month of September (2014). September is the month when Tripoli's residents return to the city after having spent the summer away (either in the mountains nearby, or on the beach). It is also the month when the *kazdūra*'s momentum 'picks up'. The data I relate hereafter took place on the first Saturday of September 2014.

pedestrians turn around and eye the occupants of the car. If they do not recognize anyone, they simply turn around again and continue walking.

One must drive slowly during the *kazdūra*. With cafés on both sides of the road, in addition to the occasional pedestrians, one is almost always likely to meet at least one familiar face. In this case, the car slows down, and the driver and the rest of the occupants of the car 'wave' to those they recognize. Sometimes, the car makes a complete stop, and patrons from the café make their way to the car to shake hands and briefly chat with the car's occupants.

Since the first rule of the *kazdūra* is to chill, those stationed behind the car that stops are expected to 'chill', and to not interrupt the small talk taking place. When our car stopped in front of *Brunch*²⁶⁰ café, and this is where the second rule of the *kazdūra* comes in, namely 'look but don't look', Cynthia's best friend, Mirna, remarked that the 'café is not very busy today'. She quickly gazed at the patrons, in an attempt to locate a familiar face. Unluckily for her, she did not meet anyone on that occasion. It wasn't only women who gazed in a subtle way. Men, too, exhibited a rather controlled pattern of gazing. The best way to describe it is to refer to Cynthia's words 'just pretend you are looking at the car. You want to look, but without looking. Do you understand what I mean?' 'I do,' I answered.

260 Whereas I refer to the rest of the cafés in my thesis simply as a café, I explicitly name *Brunch* café in Tripoli because it constituted a socio-political paradigm shift when it opened to patrons in the mid-1990. It was the first 'modern' café (in contrast to traditional ones) to open in Tripoli after the reign of the Tawhid party during the civil war. Unlike other well-established cafés that were frequented by a male clientele and a so-called class of intelligentsia, *Brunch* became a meeting place for young men and women who were not necessarily related, but were connected by virtue of Lebanon's connective system.

Whereas gazing at people for long is considered ‘rude’, admiring others’ cars by eyeing them for a length of time was perfectly acceptable. For instance, at some point during the *kazdūra*, Roula said, ‘Wow! Look at this! I see this car every single day. Is it a Ferrari? [It was a Nissan 350Z, a perfectly respectable sports car by my standards].’ Maha replied that the driver of the car was John Smith [concealed name], and that he was studying at Balamand University. Upon mentioning the Smith surname, the girls attempted to ‘guess’ who this John Smith was, through a lengthy exercise in remembering and recalling every significant social connection they could think of. I could not keep up with the names they came up with. This is because the *kazdūra* consisted mostly of me taking field notes, and participating through observation. I did not envisage interviewing anyone per se. Still, John Smith was only one semi-familiar name that my interlocutors recognized. For the hour and a half that followed, name after name was mentioned, and every name was recognized whilst being associated with a particular car. When an expensive-looking Mercedes passed by, Mirna remarked that she could not recognize the driver, and that the driver on that day was not the ‘usual’ one. When I told the girls that I was stunned by their capacity to memorize all that data, Maha and Mirna let out a long ‘yiii!’ ‘adi!’ (Poor you! This is very ordinary). As it was, they found it difficult to believe that I had never taken part in a *kazdūra* before.

Another striking element of the *kazdūra* is ‘volume control’. During the *kazdūra*, pop music by both local and international artists is played. The volume must be kept at a particular level whereby those in the proximity of the car can perceive the song being played. Even though I witnessed the *kazdūra* during the month of May, when the climate

is relatively hot, I could not help but notice that the cars' windows were kept open, despite the air conditioning being activated.

The song, in the context of the *kazdūra*, acts as a signifier. The song paves the way for indirect flirting through signalling recognition of the song. Although it did not occur on the day I accompanied Cynthia, she told me that sometimes, when one recognizes a car or a driver they like, they can throw a written note through the window with one's name, or phone number. Still, it is the women who must initiate this practice, since it would be considered as 'crossing the line' should a man initiate it.

The *kazdūra* is not simply a leisurely activity; it is a highly political and gendered one. The *kazdūra* allows a great number of young men and women from the same class and sect (in the case of Tripoli, it is mostly Sunni Islam) to come together. The daily repetition of the *kazdūra* brings familiar faces together, in addition to linking them to a specific part of the city. The *kazdūra* operates at the threshold that separates tradition from modernity. Better still, it shows the dialectic relationship between tradition and modernity, and the uselessness of viewing them separately. The *kazdūra* happens late in the afternoon, but before night-time. When the mosque calls for prayer, the young men head to their usual mosque, and the *kazdūra* quickly dissipates. The *kazdūra* allows flirting, without flirting as such. According to Cynthia, she has not tired of the *kazdūra* yet, despite the fact she has been participating in it for two years, ever since she obtained her driving license at the age of eighteen. For Cynthia, she would be 'really bored' without the *kazdūra*, and the best thing about the *kazdūra* is that it takes place when it is 'dark enough', and the city's hush infrastructure and its little imperfections become 'invisible'.

Seen through the lens of the ‘right to the city’, the *kazdūra* allows young men and women to socialize without breaking any of the social, religious, and moral rubrics of Lebanon. Unlike the cafés, where usually a particular kind of clientèle is most likely to be found, the *kazdūra* brings together a multitude of intersectionalities. The young men and women who participate in the *kazdūra* contribute to the reiteration of Tripoli’s societal patterns as highly connected, along with class and sect-based patterns. Whereas women, as we saw earlier, often worry about the spaces in which they find themselves, the *kazdūra* endows them with a degree of freedom where they can experience the city freely. For the young men, the *kazdūra* allows them to experience the city as space of flirtation, although subtle.

This brings me to the end of this chapter, where I showed how practices of love are corporeal, and how they contribute to the shaping of both public and private spaces. In addition, the chapter showed how even in the case of sex-segregation, women and men constructs public narratives about love and sex in seemingly intimate, non-public spaces.

Conclusion

In a 2013 paper published in the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Maya Mikdashi (2013: 350) called for the 'queering' of Middle Eastern studies, and for the embracing of queer theory as a methodology, or a way of interrogating normative practices of and assumptions about race, class, the state, and the body. Mikdashi (2013) developed her argument from the critique of the myth of the 'universal unmarked citizen' (ibid). Following Mikdashi, this myth reproduces the space between state and citizens as equal, 'ungendered,' and 'unclassed' (ibid). On the contrary, Mikdashi (2014b) captures the rather uneven relationship between the Lebanese state and its citizens in her ethnographic examination of 'strategic [sect] conversions' in Lebanon, a largely gendered, sexed, classed, and religious (read sect) practice, which draws on the 18 personal status laws available to Lebanese women and men, thus resulting in almost thirty variations of Lebanese citizenship.

Mikdashi's 'queer' reading of Lebanese citizenship is undoubtedly puzzling to western liberal formulation of citizenship: the entanglement of personal status laws with further practices related to citizenship in the context of state-backed strategic conversions allow Lebanese citizens to (almost) personalize their relationship to both state and society, a quite unfathomable paradigm in the realm of the 'universal citizen,' where the personal is deliberately downgraded for the sake of the linear state. In many ways, Mikdashi's meta-theory of queering citizenship is one example of a 'theory from the South' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012). It is an alternative model of thinking that privileges

intersectional analysis when thinking through citizenship and exploring the space between citizen and state, in addition to widening our understanding of what constitutes democratic citizenship and participation in the first place. In another work, Mikdashi and Puar (2016: 217) raise the overdue question: 'Can queer theory be recognizable as such when it emerges from elsewhere?' Theirs is a call for 'a politics in queer theory that works to displace the United States as the prehensive force for everyone else's future' (ibid). Mikdashi and Puar (2016) work through a framework that is capable of closing the gap between area studies, in their case a 'transnational Middle East' marked by a 'permanent state of war,' and queer studies (ibid: 215). They do so through their assertion of the direct links between the 'debilitating' and 'maiming' biopolitics-outcomes of the Global War on Terror on the one hand, and the 'sexualized, gendered, classed, and racialized transnational discourses about Islam, Arab, and the Middle East,' on the other (ibid: 221). Ultimately, Mikdashi and Puar's aim is to approximate us to the possibility of producing a queer type of knowledge that does not necessarily 'speak back' – to borrow from Gayatri Spivak – to US Queer scholarship, and to think through 'disciplinary and archival locations of knowledge production [...] that animate both queer theory and the study of the Middle East' (Mikdashi and Puar, 2016: 215), a task this thesis attempted to accomplish.

Seeing its projection towards 'impossible' others, this thesis conceives (heterosexual) love as a queer affect in Lebanon. Since love as a feeling has the potential to destabilize intra-sectarian connectivity, this thesis views it as a queer affect despite the heterosexual context in which it takes place. Such a conceptualization is possible because this thesis embraces queer theory as 'emerging from elsewhere,' namely Lebanon.

This thesis bases its findings on a yearlong fieldwork project, conducted between 2014 and 2015, where I examined 'everyday practices of (heterosexual) love' in Lebanon. The larger aim of my research is to move beyond the legal and religious textual analysis from which the institution of marriage – notably its entanglement with personal status laws – has been examined in Lebanon, and to contribute to the emerging 'anthropology of ethics and freedom' (Laidlaw, 2002), where selfhood is examined in affective spaces that escape the 'structures, rules, systems, and discursive limits of life but captures imaginations, aspirations, desires, yearnings, and longings' (Sehlikoglu, 2017: 73).

This thesis has attempted to chase the ever-volatile notion of love. Love entails a multitude of notions and systems of knowledge, namely intimacy, sex, desire, longing, lust, innocence, purity, or choice, to name a few. Love, like all notions, acquires its meanings through the ways we consume it, produce it, and reproduce it. The very myth of the universality of love, in many ways, is a phantasm of our making. Regardless, we 'cling to' love, whatever our class, sect, gender, or orientation. Whereas love has the potential to gear our becoming towards new horizons and new possibilities, it is considerably attenuated by the 'heavyweight' societal constructs of class, sect, or gender. All throughout the chapters, we have seen how the very possibility of love shapes the hopes, aspirations, and futures of my interlocutors. At the same time, love has weighed heavily on them, especially when one's sectarian beliefs came in the way.

The adoption of a multi-disciplinary theoretical framework proved particularly helpful in this regard: in order to reconcile between love-as-feeling and love-as-lived reality, this thesis combined a Deleuzian reading, with a political economy framework in its approach towards love. Such methodology allows me to ground the rather

unquantifiable excesses that accompany feelings of love, especially when sect, class, or nationality come into the equation. Whereas the work of Deleuze allows me to conceptualize love in relation to marriage (and vice versa), the political economy framework allows me to write about love without the pitfall of romanticizing it. In addition, the political economy framework contributes to widening the scope of my analysis, by paying attention to the interplay between seemingly separate socio-political and economic categories, including the nation-state, the economy, or the media.

In addition to emerging as a rather queer affect, I have argued in this thesis that the feeling of love is best viewed along discursive lines. My examination of the patriarchal bargains and sectarian rhetoric that accompany Lebanese young adults' narratives on love uncovers deeply-rooted praxes about the other. At the same time, my examination of couples' everyday practices of love reflects deeply-rooted scripts that are as diverse as the intersectional underpinnings that inform them. Among the practices examined I name gifting, 'inclusive intimacy', and leisure – all of which fall under the larger rubrics of what I term 'public intimacy'.

'Public intimacy' refers to the conscious erection of morality-informed boundaries around one's body vis-à-vis what is perceived to be a highly sexualized public. Intimacy, in this thesis, echoes the words of Judith Butler (1993) on the notion of matter, which she defines as 'not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface' (Butler, 1993: 9). Intimacy involves a great degree of performativity and repetition, and in many ways constitutes the matter through which certain bodies come to be viewed, and to operate as such. 'Official' couples who are to marry soon, for instance, navigate the Public

following societal understandings of what is deemed acceptable or not. This is because the courting period involves complex relations that involve one's kin, elders, and larger network, which in itself results in an 'inclusive intimacy' where the space-couple is secondary to the couple's rationality with their larger networks.

Although most of my interlocutors insisted that their choice of a partner was based on feelings of love, it is evident that the very notion of love acquires different meanings during one's lifetime. For instance, while many of my interlocutors had fallen in love with someone from a different sect at some point in their life, many resigned themselves 'to reality' at the time of marriage. Such nuances led me to argue that love, far from operating from an inner-self, is discursively taught. This is evident in the views of my interlocutors who likened falling in love with someone from another sect to a 'headache that is best avoided'; and although they did not mind inter-sectarian marriages, the density of the logistics that come with it render them least receptive to it.

The overlapping of love with desire produces specific subjects, in the Foucauldian sense (see Foucault 1978), who emerge from the timely intersections of several power structures. Not only are these subjects bound by the power structures that limit their potential (read: becoming), their very condition is dependent on the latter's classed, sexed, and sectarian logic, which deny their existence in the first place. I examined subjectivity in relation to three distinct notions in this thesis, namely 1. sexo-sectarianism; 2. strategic queer marriages; and 3. agency.

The intersection(s) of race, nationality, ethnicity, sect, or class intersecting with gender and/or sexuality produce multiple desires in Lebanon. These intersections occur both

vertically and horizontally. We saw how the Lebanese state produces Lebanon as a 'public fetish for all to see' as long practices of sex, including racialized and gendered ones, consolidate the state's interest. We also saw how these intersections contribute to what I termed 'sexo-sectarianism', or the shaming and desiring of Others based on sex stereotypes that serve to reiterate the moral superiority of one's own sect.

Whereas sex-sectarianism shows the sectarian dimension of desire in Lebanon, 'strategic queer marriages' show the hetero-normative character of Lebanon's state and society. I define 'strategic queer marriages' as a legal marriage between one self-identified queer cis- man, and one self-identified queer cis- woman, who perform marriage for a number of years in order to escape kin pressure, all the while pursuing same-sex desire elsewhere. The conundrum that arises from strategic queer marriages (SQMs) is best captured when we contrast them with inter-sectarian love. Whereas inter-sectarian heterosexual love queers the notion of love in Lebanon by challenging its sectarian barriers, SQMs contribute to the solidification of the heteronormativity of the institution of marriage. What does this contrasting exercise tell us about the relationship between body and society, body and state, and so on?

Last but not least, in this thesis I recommended that we adopt a holistic view of agency – one that is capable of taking into account questions related to choice, habitus (see Bourdieu 1990) and collective aesthetics, and divine intervention. This line of thinking developed from the conflictive narratives that my interlocutors shared with me. At the same time, I recommended that we think of agency as temporal. This is because the links between power structures and time directly impact our potential to act. Despite the rigidity and binaries that saturated my fieldwork, my interlocutors revealed a highly

fluid, and at times unexpected, kind of agency. One could argue that inter-sectarian love stories constitute reconciliatory instances in Lebanon's discursively-taught (dis-) affectivities, where attachments to specific others is taught and conditioned from an early age along *intra*-sectarian and hetero-normative lines. At the same time, inter-sectarian love emerges as a losing game that rarely materializes in long-term commitment. Moreover, love is lived unevenly throughout one's life. Whereas early adulthood abounds with non-conventional inter-sectarian love stories, as evident in the reminiscing narratives I collected, such feelings are quickly abandoned at the time of marriage, where one reverses to strictly *intra*-sectarian marriage patterns.

In addition to writing about love within/beyond its context, my thesis sought to remedy widely-held assumptions about love in a Middle Eastern context. For instance, both chapters V and VI offer enough material to help the reader distinguish between forced marriages and arranged ones. The conflation of the two is one example of Orientalist views about marriage in the Global South, especially the Middle East. Secondly, I expect some of my readers to point out the scarcity of narratives related to the 'sex life' of my interlocutors. Considering the fact that the notion of love overlaps with questions related to gender, sex, desire, and sexuality, a lot of 'sex talk' took place throughout my fieldwork. Sex talk is not reduced to the sexual act per se. Rather, it involves a whole array of narratives, including 'getting married', 'falling in love', 'sexual awakening', 'prohibited love', and 'physical attraction'. Most often, these narratives reveal a spectrum of dissent vis-à-vis Lebanon's societal rules pertaining to sex and desire, in addition to reiterating each of 'love', 'desire', and 'intimacy' within a local context. Still, I deliberately 'shun' such narratives, in line with my overall approach of de-

exceptionalizing sexuality in the Middle East (chapter II), and in avoidance of a voyeuristic tone, as has been the case in recent studies of the region (El-Feki, 2013; Mahdavi, 2009; Maznavi and Mattu, 2012).

The construction of Middle Eastern sexualities as victims, deviants, or else, poses a veritable dilemma for the scholar who finds herself torn between speaking back/against these depictions, whilst simultaneously writing on/for local knowledge. In *Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies*, Abu-Lughod (2001) draws on Deniz Kandiyoti's three-fold evaluation of the impact of the work of Edward Said (2006), *Orientalism*, on the scholarship on gender in the Middle East, being: [a.] social analysis has been devalued in favor of analysis of representations; [b.] binary thinking about East and West has trained us to focus too much on the West and not enough on the internal heterogeneity of Middle Eastern societies; and, finally, [c.] it has also drawn attention away from 'local institutions and cultural processes that are implicated in the production of gender hierarchies and in forms of subordination based on gender' (Abu-Lughod 2001: 112). I hope that my work has been able to overcome some of these methodological reflections.

The purpose of this thesis is not limited to de-colonizing the discourse of sex and gender in the Middle East from Orientalist tropes and sensationalist depictions. I sought to engage with a theoretical framework that is rarely used in a Middle Eastern context, by emphasizing the relevance of processes of 'make-believe', or of 'being acted upon', thus stretching our analysis of the Middle Eastern subject beyond a resistance/compliance framework.

One important question arises at this stage: am I being forceful in my choice of methodology?

Feminist philosophers have and continue to inform us about the volatility and artificiality of social constructs, notably gender and sexuality. At the core of their scholarship lies an inherent tendency to ‘reinvent the wheel’, seeing that they are concerned with the impact of both ontological and epistemic knowledges. Whereas ontology primarily concerns itself with the question of ‘what constitutes knowledge in the first place’, epistemology allows us to capture the gradual crystallization of certain knowledges at the expense of others. As far as feminist philosophers are concerned, they invite us to ask the basic question of ‘what is knowledge?’

Their interrogations stem from the deeply rooted and globally impacting Eurocentric tradition of knowledge-producing, which has elevated the status of certain knowledges, and shaped the world according to the White, Western, Cis, Male, over other knowledges. These feminist philosophers’ biggest impact has been the critiquing of a binary-based view of the world. Instead, they pay attention to the spaces in between binaries. In addition, feminist philosophers have successfully inserted certain notions, notably emotions and agency, at the top of their priorities. By departing from the validity of emotions as a source of knowledge, rather than merely engaging with the genealogies of emotions, for instance, they have opened up a space for rethinking our view of the world.

At this stage of the thesis, I would like to relate my observations regarding the following two points. Both points result from the many binaries that saturated my fieldwork, and on which I reflected earlier (see chapter II.). Firstly, and where gender activists are concerned, the recognition of the fundamental flaws (read: sectarian character) of the state’s institutions can allow them to unpack the simultaneity of the oppressive

structures at work, which do not limit themselves to gender, but rather intersect with further societal structures including sect, age, class, and so on. As Chávez (2013: 59) argues, such a level of activism allows for the materialization of coalitional politics:

‘A form of rhetorical confrontation that begins critique from the roots of a problem or crisis and methodically reveals how systems of power and oppression interact with one another in ways that produce subjects, institutions, and ideologies and that enable and constrain political response’.

The recognition of the intersection of gender with further axes of power must not be interpreted as a gender-blind kind of activism. This point is particularly important since gender activism has become synonymous with women’s rights in Lebanon, in addition to positing women against a ‘rampant and violent’ masculinity. This rhetoric is highly classed since it targets men from the lower classes mostly; at the same time, it offers the Lebanese state an opportunity to co-opt and vilify certain masculinities. In this sense, Lebanon ought to learn from the Egyptian case (see Ismail 2006, 2009).

We learn from Amar (2011) that the Egyptian security state re-gendered, as in restructured its gendered security logic, following women’s public critique of both military and political leaders during the 2011 demonstrations. This ‘re-gendering’ is best captured in the now infamous incident of the ‘girl in the blue bra,’ (Hafez, 2014) since it renders ‘impossible the figure of the respectable, pious woman who is a legitimate protestor against the police rather than a victim protected or rescued by the police’ (Amar, 2011: 209). In addition, Amar (2011:308) argues that the Egyptian security state deliberately ‘deployed and revived the Islamophobic, gendered and working-class

phobic metaphor of the 'Arab street' (time-bomb, predator and the slum), rendering peaceful political movements with overwhelming public support into hypervisible, but utterly unrecognizable, mobs'.

Secondly, I find it important to reflect on some of the East/West binary that my interlocutors drew on in relation to love, where love in a western context is imagined as 'free from'. Not only do I remedy their views by drawing on existing works where love is examined in tandem with global processes, I term this state of affairs 'affective neo-colonialism'. Affective neo-colonialism is two-fold: it forces an aesthetic and affective corporeality informed by western views about the other; at the same time, it is a neo-colonial mechanism whereby the other can only be approved of if they model themselves after western ways of feeling, being, and seeing. Affective neo-colonialism is corporeal in the sense that our everyday affective registers are becoming increasingly informed by western ways of being, seeing, and feeling. These ways of being, seeing, and feeling can be genealogically traced to neo-liberal economies that indubitably result in the mimicking of western societies' (false) promise of the good life (see Berlant 2011a).

Affective neo-colonialism reinforces the Eurocentric gaze, which insists on casting Middle Eastern societies as sexually repressed, too preoccupied with religion, and incapable of experiencing 'true love', especially when we contrast it with its condition of 'permanent war' (Mikdashi and Puar, 2016). Recent studies have shown how attitudes towards sexuality in the modern-day Arab world have been largely instituted during the colonial period (for example, Najmabadi, 2005; Ze'evi, 2005). Similarly, today's affective neo-colonialism re-colonises the discourse of sexuality and love in the Middle East through the imposition of a mono-directional monologue on the 'good life'

where marriage and love follow a Eurocentric logic. This monologue reiterates the good state/bad state binary, and becomes the basis for the distinction between loveable bodies that merit saving and barbaric ones that ought to be punished, a repeat of Leila Ahmed's take on Universalist understandings of love as 'rooted in the colonialist critique of Muslim societies' (Ahmad, 1992: 157).

Having said that, it is also important to reflect on the limits of this work. My findings are reflective of the data gathered through my fieldwork. In other words, the data gathered is limited to the very interlocutors who agreed to be interviewed by me. As I stated in chapter II, I have a limited network in Lebanon, which is indirectly the result of residing abroad since 1998. This 'distance' has resulted in a considerable period of 'rapport-building', which could have been prevented had family members been more receptive towards my work, and introducing me to potential interlocutors, for instance. Additionally, and since my thesis examines love from a political economy framework, its analysis is limited to the very intersectional identity of my interlocutors. In other words, my examination of love is restricted to the ways in which the intersectionality of sect, class, gender, nationality, and else impacted my interlocutors' lived reality, and their views on love. Further, being a 'halfie' - a Lebanese national who resides abroad – produced diverging outcomes. This point is examined in chapter II, along with further implications related to my gender (female), status (single), sect (Sunni), and place of residence (split between Tripoli and London). Logistically speaking, my fieldwork consisted of moving constantly between Tripoli and Beirut, since the summer of 2014 saw bombings in Beirut and armed clashes in Tripoli. This resulted in many interlocutors cancelling and rescheduling our meetings. Having said that, I did manage

to meet a number of interlocutors in alternative locations (for example, Jbeil, Zalka, or Chekka).

Whereas I examine the notion of love, I limit my analysis to the context of heterosexual desire. My encounter with what I term strategic queer marriages is, in many ways, accidental, and the sole purpose of drawing on them is to emphasize the heteronormativity and chrono-normativity of marriage in Lebanon. Having said that, the notion of love merits scrutiny in a same-sex desire context. Still, and as I pointed out in chapter I, the ‘explosion’ of works on queer subjectivities in Lebanon ultimately convinced me to examine heterosexual desire.

Although I show how the ‘ideal partner’ is constructed in opposition to the Syrian Other in Lebanon (in chapter VI), I did not include non-Lebanese nationals in my analysis. In this sense, the discourse on love, as I examined it, is ‘lacking’ at times. At the time of my fieldwork, I was mostly concerned with the question of ‘sect’. At the same time, it would be interesting to carry this work further and examine affective practices at the level of the community, including Syrian, Palestinian, and Iraqi. This is particularly important at a time when migrants are easily conflated with refugees.

Another limitation related to this thesis is that it did not examine love through a transnational lens, which is highly applicable to the context of Lebanon, considering the many communities that reside between Lebanon and abroad. Although some interlocutors did share with me the implications of having a member of family reside and work abroad, such interventions are minimal, and a study with a wider scope is definitely recommended. Last but not least, future studies that could be undertaken in

relation to this thesis include an analysis of the texts of the love registers I draw on. Whereas several have already done so in the context of TV series and movies, very few have approached love songs, for instance.

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