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LEBANESE SHORT FILMS' NARRATIVE ON THE CIVIL WAR

by
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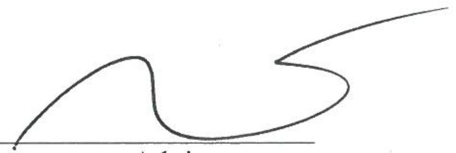

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An ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Rami Deeb for Master of Arts
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Title: Lebanese Short Films' Narrative On The Civil War

In this project, I set to explore alternative ways by which the Lebanese civil war has been narrated, imagined and remembered in postwar Lebanese short films. I examine discourses of the war and practices of memory in the narratives of these films, and in so doing I observe the impact of these artifacts in overcoming past tragedies on a societal scale. First, I look at the several factors that make the Lebanese conflict unique and difficult to narrate, which is elemental in every recovering post-conflict context. I study Lebanese short films made by postmemory filmmakers, to better understand how these individuals, who have not lived the war, tell its story and memorialize it, and whether there exists any recurring pattern among them. I aim to observe the discrepancies between the inherited narratives in those films and what happened, to analyze how such stories can pave the way towards a reconciliation project.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: LEAVE THE PAST WHERE IT BELONGS

"The moving finger writes; and, having writ, moves on. Not all thy piety nor wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line, nor all thy tears wash out a word of it." –*Omar Khayyam (1048 – 1131)*

From 1975 to 1990, Lebanon suffered from a long and bloody civil war that involved various national and international actors, mainly Syria, Palestine, Israel and the US. The Taif accord that followed and officially propelled the country into a peaceful "postwar" era, did not address most of the root causes of war, nor did it hold the main actors accountable. Instead, a prevailing politics of "no victor, no vanquished" was advocated for to remain as the basis in which the political elite agreed simply to consign the war to the past; put it on an institutionalized pause. However, since then, the Lebanese have found themselves still entangled in various forms of political violence, public distrust towards the government, and an ever-growing national identity crisis. Though, this is not to say that a 'national identity' particularly defines who the Lebanese are as a society, but instead should be considered as a stepping stone towards a new national myth which must be built upon a narrative of the civil war that truly resolves all remaining grievances.

Given the unresolved nature of the war and the general state of limbo that swung the country into an era of political and social instability, it is by no coincidence that postwar cultural production was also affected.

Narratives about the war remain highly contested within the realms of postwar cultural production, specifically when it comes to addressing questions like 'who started the war' or 'who won the war' or 'who to blame the war on'. Memorializing the war in a way that preserves the historical accuracy of events had proven to be a tedious task for cultural producers in various fields, be it theater, music, or film. Though, the recollection of events in an objective and unbiased manner was not the main concern of cultural producers or the state, which has been entrenched behind the idea that talking about the war would reignite any remaining enmities among once warring factions. As a matter of fact, the absence of a national narrative on the war enforces any remaining enmities which defined the war era. This process of enforced amnesia would, therefore, suppress any public memory of the war, exacerbate the sensation of detachment among various members of society, and hinder any progress towards social rejuvenation, public reconciliation, and overall redemption.

After the war, several elements made it difficult to establish a clear and comprehensible narrative, where the successive events could be recalled and debated within a pedagogical, political, historical, or even social framework. First, Lebanese postwar leaders were complicit in the perpetuation of violence by their several initiatives that aimed to drive all that relates to the war into oblivion and therefore washing their hands clean from all the bloodshed they caused. Priya Kumar once said that "what a culture chooses to remember or forget is inextricably tied to issues of power and hegemony" (Kumar, *Acts of Return: Literature and Post-partition memory*, 91), something that is particularly applicable in Lebanon given that militia warlords have entered the political establishment after the violence had ended. Moreover, many scholars like Sune Haugbole (Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon*, 50) argue that a sensation of 'collective guilt' among the Lebanese and an unannounced 'agreement to disagree' that the war was that of

the ‘others on Lebanon’ – knowing that to each his own definition of who that ‘other’ is, may have also contributed to the ongoing efforts to forget and not talk about the war. In general, there was a lack of willingness among the Lebanese to engage in such discussion due to remaining sensitivities and even, at times, fear of generating further violence as a result. On the other hand, any effort made by members of civil society to remember the past and know the fate of those who were lost in the violence was faced with inattentive reactions from both the public and political body.

In this research, I aim to highlight the need for a national narrative on the civil war, which could be materialized through a series of remembrance practices either in the form of film, music or theater, as means to communicate with various members of society and bring them together in the process.

In his book *War and Memory in Lebanon*, Sune Haugbolle says that “when the [civil] war ended in Lebanon it was like it never happened”, highlighting the idea that Lebanese national memory is “informed by the disparities, catastrophes, and traumas that cannot be captured by triumphant history” (Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon*, 8). This underscores the problematic way by which memories of social traumas will be transmitted to future generations into coherent understandable narratives. The process of incomplete, or in some cases absence of, transmission, could lead to creating a distorted or reimagined rendering of the past, perpetuating lingering enmities among members of society without a solid reasoning behind them.

To make things worse, the postwar Lebanese state had already initiated an undeclared project of public *amnesia*, where the whole notion of the war would be left in the past, never to be openly addressed again. Indeed, there was no pedagogical or institutional space in which differing narratives of the war could openly be discussed, and therefore reconciled. Each member

of the postwar political establishment, directly affiliated with a religious sect, constructed its own narrative about the war, specifically one the depicts it as the least guilty of violence. In that process, sectarian schisms among society were intensified under the banner of "no victor; no vanquished", with no means of addressing them or even fully acknowledging the fact that most of postwar Lebanese society is sectarian at the core of its identity. History started as narrative, and it is elemental in the creation of collective memory and identity, though in Lebanon that was not the case.

This project of amnesia had become highly visible in the public sphere with the rise of reconstruction plans across the downtown area, in hope of getting things back to the way they were in terms of socio-political stability and economic growth. Reconstruction was favored over remembrance in the postwar period when it was considered a progressive step towards recovery (Haugbolle, *Public and Private Memory*, 192). According to Samir Khalaf, Solidere (the private development company which rebuilt the downtown area of Beirut) is an attempt to "rediscover, or invent a state of bliss that has been lost" (Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*: *A History of Internationalization of Conflict*, 307). Moreover, Khalaf argues that the project itself has led to an erasure of cultural identity that is necessary for healing the wounds of a turbulent past, something which could be seen in the architecture and the "heritage crusade" of downtown Beirut for example. In his article "Reconstructing History in Central Beirut", Saree Makdisi demonstrated the demolition of the ruins as an attempt to physically rewrite Lebanese history from the ground up (Makdisi, *Middle East Report*, 23).

The institutionalized amnesia project did not stop there, in 1994 the government had signed a new audio-visual law which opened the market for illegal militia-owned television stations to be licensed within Lebanese territory. These television stations served interest groups

and acted as propaganda tools for the warring militias. Political parties in Lebanon, directly involved in the war, portrayed the violence from their own perspective, and propagated them through the newly licensed television stations, by which the viewing audience develops its narrative accordingly to what is being shown. In the postwar era, the narrative revolving around the civil war was blatantly represented on television, and was also characterized by a process of elimination of 'the other', where news bulletins would highlight stories of certain members of society, while disregarding others.

While most efforts of remembering and narrating the war were faced with institutionalized silencing, the visual arts in general, and the cinema, in particular, were able to somehow thrive within those limitations, though they had to face difficulties of a different nature.

In this thesis, I will be focusing on Lebanese postwar short films made by millennial filmmakers. These 'postmemory' filmmakers, who did not witness the events of the war, have been experiencing its impact on a day-to-day basis ever since it was declared over. Also, postmemory filmmakers have managed to form an image about the war from the process of hearing stories and narratives from their families and surrounding communities. It is interesting to see how these inherited narratives are translated into cultural products. For the sake of this research paper, I aim to look only at first generation postmemory filmmakers, meaning those who were born after or were too young to remember the happenings of the war. The argument to be made is that short films can overcome some the constraints facing feature filmmaking, such as funding, political influence, and censorship. Also, I aim to explore how the narrative has changed with time, in this case, it would be how filmmakers recreated their idea of the war in short films.

The films that I will be discussing are as follow: Ely Dagher's *Waves '98* (2015), Tony Elkhoury's *Lebanon Wins the World Cup* (2015), Wissam Charaf's *An Army of Ants* (2007), and Hany Tamba's *Aftershave* (2005).

As I go forward with the research, I will be asking the following questions to guide my thesis: Why was it so difficult to narrate the civil war in Lebanese cinema? Why study short films? What did Lebanese postmemory filmmakers do differently than those who have lived through the war? What was the overarching narrative in Lebanese short films (if there is any)? What predictions could be made about the cultural production that is paving the way towards a bigger redemption?

The fundamental purpose of this research project is to trace and analyze the impact which the short film industry in a place like Lebanon, given its sensitive post-conflict sectarian context, have had on public memory of the war. This research project will provide preliminary answers to these questions by studying the three elements at hand: the short film industry in postwar Lebanon, politics of representation of the civil war in the narratives and aesthetics of those films, the collective remembrance and commemoration considering Lebanon's highly sectarian society. Finally, I attempt to draw several predictions to how the short film industry might look like given the constantly developing cultural production scene considering the recent technological advancements that are paving the way towards a post-cinematic hyper-mediated era.

Due to lack of a substantial and coherent body of literature on the topic of the Lebanese short film industry, I have designed this research to be built upon fragmented information from various sources, as well as on my own interpretations from the films I will be analyzing. Structurally, this paper will be divided into six main chapters, starting with the introduction which already provided a historical background to understand Lebanon's precarious political,

social and cultural situation. The introductory chapter exposes the reader to the scope of research, the purpose behind it, and the importance of conducting it. Essentially, the study looks at the impact of memory and transmission (generation postmemory vs those who lived through it). In addition, the introduction provides an overall idea of how Lebanese society had dealt with the indelible memory of the war and how cultural producers, on the other hand, have contributed to overcoming, forgetting, and commemorating past traumas. The proposed thesis aims to understand how the short film industry in postwar Lebanon, relative to other forms of cultural expression, has narrated the civil war in a way that other forms of cultural expression have not been able to do, either because of regulatory or artistic limitations.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of how broadcast television and cinema were operating in the prewar era, and how they were affected by the violence. In addition, the chapter will expose how the civil war was narrated in postwar cinema, and how it was contested by the rise of satellite broadcasting and the advertising industry. In this section, I also highlight the factors which limited cultural producers' portrayal of the war in their works, and therefore having to resort to other forms of storytelling to convey their messages. There were several elements that, combined, have created an ecosystem where postwar media had to operate within highly charged socio-economic boundaries that were set based on a new regulatory framework which took into consideration the country's eighteen recognized religious sects, their representation, and inclusion. Moving forward, the chapter critically examines the overarching themes and characters that prevailed in postwar cinema, and I suggest that due to the financial risk involved in the production of these films, filmmakers did not enjoy the freedom to risk it with topics and approaches that might seem a bit on the edge for funders. Therefore, the chapter concludes on the

hypothesis that short films might offer a better understanding of how cultural producers would tell their story of the civil war.

Chapter 3 starts with the idea that short filmmaking had grown in postwar Lebanon due to the relatively low production cost involved, the rise in educational programs in universities and art institutes, and general interest from millennials as they saw it as a tool to express and grow as members of society. Moving forward, this chapter studies four Lebanese short films that were made by postmemory filmmakers and highlights the aesthetic and topical differences in the portrayal of the war and its effects. I continue the chapter by deconstructing the creative elements within those films, by trying to put them within a wider context, specifically the director's background, social upbringing, funding of the films, and themes. Moreover, I examine the potential of these films as artifacts of remembrance.

Chapter 4 explores the experiences of postwar millennials in dealing with memories of the war and stories they have heard about it. More specifically, I bring Marriane Hirsch's idea of postmemory to work and see how it could be applied in Lebanese youths' case. Moving forward, the chapter draws on the forces that shaped these millennials understanding of the war, which had left them with a contradictory narrative between reality and their imagined stories.

Chapter 5 delves into the topic of narrative identity and argues that due to Lebanese society's historic incapacity to establish a narrative about their history, they were also incapable of creating one that relates to the civil war. Instead, the chapter aims to argue that because of the fear of addressing the narrative of the war, there has been an unintended reinforcement of sectarian identities rather than national ones, due to the amnesiac view of history. Starting with the idea that identity and narrative complement each other, the chapter discovers the elements that stopped the Lebanese from re-establishing their narrative identity as a society after the war.

The chapter ends by highlighting the importance for societies to talk about their past as a form of communal psychological therapy.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of this research as well as predicts how narratives and identity creation are constructed in a post-cinematic era where everyone with a cellphone is capable creating their own ‘story’ or narrative about an event in real-time. Technological advancements had democratized narrative creation, enabling every user to convey their experience to the world. This might open new areas for research that have to do with questions of identity, nationalism, and belonging in the digital era.

CHAPTER II

LEBANESE TELEVISION, CINEMA, AND NARRATIVE

The birth of Lebanese broadcast television marked a spur in economic growth during the early 1960's. The central purpose of television at that time was entertainment, which operated within the imposed limitations of the state, and ensured that it would not threaten social stability or moral behavior among society. Before the war, there were only two commercial television stations operating in Lebanon, *La Compagnie Libanaise de Television, SAL* (*CLT*) and *Compagnie de Television du Liban et du Proch-Orient* (*Tele Orient*), where they depended mainly on revenue from advertising, as well as profit from selling locally-made programs to Arab televisions, to achieve financial income.

Though, during the first two years of the war, Lebanese television stations had to face a series of difficult challenges:

> "The war seriously reduced advertising, and both companies incurred heavy losses. While both stations managed to maintain their technical equipment, and keep their transmitters operational, they could not keep their production studios functioning. New programs could not be produced and television officials were eagerly seeking programs to fill their broadcasting schedules…This situation continued until March 1976 when an unsuccessful coup d'état resulted in the occupation of both stations by militias representing the two warring factions… The split of the broadcast media also marked a serious escalation in the war. Broadcasting installations became targets for the warring groups. Television installations were bombed and badly damaged as each station had installations in the areas occupied by opposing factions. The transmission was also badly affected by power failures, which now became acute. Power supply became irregular and rationed" (Dajani, forthcoming).

To alleviate the situation facing Lebanese television, "a legislative decree (number 770) legalized the birth of a new television company, *The Lebanese Television Company*, *Tele Liban*"

(Dajani, forthcoming). The newly formed television would be owned by both, the government and members of the two private companies, where that structure would hopefully leverage the government's ability to provide what's best to the public, and the private sector's entrepreneurial mindset.

Though, unfortunately, what happened was that the conjoint management structure was mainly focused on generating profit, and pursuing private political goals, rather than improving the conditions for Lebanese broadcasting, or serving the public interest. As the country continued to become embroiled in further violence and became practically divided into several levels, *Tele Liban* had become under the authority of warring militias, where its purpose had turned to rationalizing the militants' actions and justifying their existence. After realizing the importance of broadcast media in perpetuating propaganda and narratives, warring militias were encouraged to seek foreign support to establish their own television platforms.

These new platforms, like *Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC)* which was founded by the Lebanese Forces to serve US and French interests in Lebanon, and *al-Mashrek Television*, which was established by politicians who were against the Lebanese forces. According to Nabil Dajani, during the 16 years of war, "no television serial was produced to feature a Moslem and a Christian cooperating and working together for a Lebanese cause" (Dajani, forthcoming).

Indirectly, the 1994 audiovisual law limited the ways filmmakers and other cultural producers in which they can create a narrative about the civil war. By levying high licensing fees to establish and operate a television station on Lebanese territory, not many television stations could afford to create content with social impact, instead, they focused their efforts on creating shows and series that could be sold and attract audiences for the purpose of selling ad spots.

Though, the law did provide an urgently needed framework to regulate the booming industry:

> "[The law] legalized private broadcasting and revoked Tele-Liban's monopoly on television in Lebanon, but maintained that channels were the exclusive property of the state and could only be leased. It re-affirmed media freedom within the framework of the constitution and mandated more local production. Broadcasting licenses were to be issued by the Council of Ministers, who set requirements and a two-month application deadline. Finally, the law established the National Council of Audio-Visual Media (NCOAVM) with the task of laying down technical conditions, monitoring broadcasting, and recommending the suspension and closure of the media violating the law" (*Arab Ad*, 1994, 37).

The problem with the law was being too market-driven, focused on creating profit through television, protecting private holdings, and therefore did not develop an environment where cultural producers could work toward a national bonding project. The law did not provide a strategy which prioritizes bringing Muslims and Christians together through television, let alone the cinema. The main focus was on generating more ad-revenue from television stations and attracting bigger audiences. Especially given the fact that in the immediate period after the war there was immense competition in the advertising industry over the limited Lebanese market consisting of a mere 3 million at the time. The editor of *Arab Ad* once commented that "greed overcame common sense in … a chaotic media market…in which [media] mushroomed out of all proportion to the country's real needs" (Azzi, 1994, 3).

Postwar Lebanese television stations were unintentionally fueling sectarian divisions among society by not putting much effort into bridging interreligious connections. Instead, these television stations were mainly driven by profit without a genuine sense of purpose that outlines their long-term strategy as media with a social purpose and impact. Searching for a consistent narrative on the civil war in postwar Lebanese television stations would, therefore, be futile and

rather useless. If anything, one can look at the advertising industry, where there was some effort to represent Lebanon as a unified entity: consumers in a newly formed neoliberal market.

Moreover, the 1994 audiovisual law stipulated that talking about the civil war in a way that might incite public uproar and national instability would be restricted, specifically banning commentary seeking to affect directly or indirectly the well-being of the nation's economy and finances, material that is propagandistic or promotional, or promotes a relationship with Israel. Any film, documentary, play, song, or even any form of public denouncement of the war was either faced with censorship, banning, or complete apprehension – given the government's plan to portray Lebanon as a booming market that is open for business.

There was nothing more important than the civil war to talk about in that period, knowing that the events remain relatively fresh in people's minds and imaginations. Cultural producers were forced to operate within a highly charged socio-political formation, where sectarianism, political and ideological affiliation to political leaders or *Za'im*, and various sectarian systems of identification were the answer to 'what a national Lebanese identity is.' You belong; therefore, you exist.

At this point, cultural producers and members of civil society who have attempted to document and memorialize the civil war can be considered to have been performing an act of insurgency and dissent against the established discourse of imposed amnesia. By enforcing the discussion around the civil war, members of civil society have managed to position themselves vis-à-vis both the state and the political body, through the continuation of the legacy of talking about the war either through workshops, discussion panels, or works of cultural expression.

Film exerts a powerful influence on people's notion of what counts as history and what does not. Though, unfortunately, the civil war does not constitute a national tragedy in the

imagination of the Lebanese public, as it could not find its way into the national ethos for several reasons. It is true that postwar filmmakers have leveraged the allegorical space provided by the audio-visual characteristic of film, but they have done so to an extent that viewers were unable to relate to their experiences of the war.

In other words, the way that postwar feature films have dealt with the civil war, and the way the public has received it, proved that the narratives and the approaches have done so inadequately. This highlights the fact that the public has not yet grasped the filmic knowledge and visual lexicon necessary to understand the phantasmic or the very symbolically loaded sequences shown on screen. Symbolism, a feature of European cinema, does not particularly work well in a dialogue-driven cinema such as in Lebanon and Egypt, where it usually revolves around topical clichés and themes of national pride and belonging.

Before the war, Lebanon rivaled Egypt at being the Middle East's champion in cinema (Khatib, *Lebanese Cinema,* 21). Because of the political situation in Egypt at the time and Gamal Abdel Nasser's decision to nationalize the Egyptian cinema industry, many of the country's film operations emigrated to neighboring Lebanon, where there's variety in scenery and an abundance of creative talent and equipment. Add that to the fact that Lebanon was witnessing an economic boom during that period, especially in the sixties and into the early seventies with the closure of the Suez Canal and the resulting flow of capital coming from the gulf and other affluent Arabs across the region who were seeking protection to their investments. Though according to Afif Arabi:

> "The adverse reaction of the factors which made Lebanon a large center for the production of Arab melodramatic films in the sixties, combined with various local factors led to the downfall of the Lebanese film industry in the seventies. These reasons were attributed to the following: the departure of the Egyptian cinema operations from Lebanon; the nature of Lebanese films; the new wave of Egyptian entertainment films;

> the change in audience taste locally and across the Arab World; the competition of foreign films locally; the absence of a Lebanese public sector to support the film industry; and the instability of the political situation in Lebanon.” (Arabi, *The History of Lebanese Cinema*, 152)

After the war ended, the Lebanese cinema industry was left in shambles, and no significant amount of money was invested in rebuilding it as it was not seen as profitable as it once was. The war completely decimated the infrastructure, from movie theaters, dubbing studios, cutting rooms, to film development facilities. As the country became divided across sectarian lines, the distribution of films in different areas became almost impossible (Soueid, 2000). Audiences from East Beirut were unable to access the cinemas in Hamra, as well as the ones in the downtown area and vice versa. Several smaller cinema theaters around the Maten and Keserwan areas were constructed as a result, though were also faced by the decline in attendance and low box office numbers. The war added to the scarcity of film producers and funders, who were mainly concerned with whether the films’ genres would appeal to a mainstream audience, which resulted in the increase in films revolving around action, sexual scenes and comedy (Soueid, 1983).

In 1997, George Ki’di, who is a Lebanese journalist, revisited his report on the state of Lebanese cinema and stated that: ‘We are continuing with no national cinema, and therefore no memory, no image, no presence’ (Ki’di, 1997). With no infrastructure or support to the industry, filmmakers were faced with the responsibility not only to create a film but to create a cinema.

In Lina Khatib’s book *Lebanese Cinema*, she argues that “the war sparked a string of films about its subject matter, yet it contributed to the destruction of the cinema industry in Lebanon” (Khatib, *Lebanese Cinema,* 21). During that period, filmmakers who have returned to Lebanon after receiving their education from Europe were seeking funding from foreign

investors and governments such as France and Belgium. This resulted in a particular representation of the war, knowing that these films were being made with the aim to be screened at international film festivals, whose attendees expect to see a pre-imagined rendering of the war which complies with their already set imagination of Lebanon being a backward and uncivilized country.

The long and unsettled history of Lebanese cinema is one marked by financial insecurity, unfulfilled potential, and imperialist hegemony of Western ideology. Although many efforts were made to rebuild the, once thriving, cinema infrastructure, all failed to overcome the issue of being overly dependent on foreign funding, both European and from the Lebanese diaspora (Westmoreland, *Crisis of Representation: Experimental Documentary in Postwar Lebanon*, 101). Lebanese films were mostly made by foreign funding, such as *Fonds Sud Cinema* in France and *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie,* which exoticised the topic at hand by approaching it through the lens of colonialism. This had led to the formation of an auteur cinema catered towards a Western audience and forced upon a devastated post-war Lebanese viewer.

Foreign funders do not want to see an original Lebanese comedy or a crime thriller, as they are abundantly available in Hollywood and Europe, they would rather fund films that deal with 'social' issues within post-conflict contexts that are struggling to overcome their troubled past. The only time locally-made films were capable of achieving box-office success while still travelling abroad for film festivals, is when these films are both entertaining and of artistic value, such as Nadine Labaki's *Caramel* (2007) and Ziad Doueiri's *West Beirut* (1998), which both addressed the war from their perspectives while still echoing the experiences and feelings of their broader Lebanese audience.

According to Khatib, the war had become the central theme in Lebanese cinema narrative for almost 35 years. Though, unfortunately, the Lebanese cinema industry was not able to play a major role in affecting public memory towards the war, and as a result the number of films made about the war decreased and producers were more willing to fund 'cheap' and culturally void films that merely fulfill the audience's fetishes and needs, while still serving as means to escape their daily perils and worries. The reason why I think Lebanese cinema did not have that much impact on public memory is that of the abstract manner through which the war was portrayed in those films, mainly to ensure that they would be screened in theaters. Another reason would be that most filmmakers simply used the subject matter as means to propel their careers as 'serious' filmmakers who make films about serious subjects. Also, during that period, the cinema was considered less a priority and more of a luxury that only a few could afford, therefore only a limited amount of people had access to these films (as is the case for people in the suburbs), as well as the fact that films were not being distributed equally across Lebanese territory, thus remaining relatively hidden from the public eye.

Films that evoked grim memories of death and destruction were not seen as attractive, as they were not as easily consumed by the audience and did not provide the entertainment needed by post-conflict societies to overcome past tragedies. In subsequent years, producers were particularly focused on providing what the audience was asking for, sex and laughter as a form of distraction and public therapy.

The narrative about the civil war in cinema was approached differently during the past 20 years, where it would be codified as 'al-ahdath' (*the events*), and only the effects of it were addressed rather than what directly caused it in the first place. It was only on rare occasions where actual fighting was shown on the screen. Filmmakers had to circle their way around the

subject of the war, otherwise, their films would not be screened. Therefore, they had to find alternative ways in which they could talk about it and avoid censorship (or even self-censorship at times). Through several observations, one can notice that once a movie about the war is made, it usually involves a love story (*Where Do We Go Now?,* Nadine Labaki), a fantasy world (*Zozo,* Joseph Fares), or even a completely absurd scenario that would never happen in reality (*Very Big Shot,* Mir-Jean Bou Chaaya).

For example, if I look at Lebanese director Phillip Aracktingi's film '*Bosta*' (which means bus) it is obvious how he overstretches the topic of the civil war to its limits. In short, the film tells the story of Kamal, who returned from France after having left Lebanon for fifteen years and has become a composer and choreographer. Once in Lebanon, Kamal decides to form a dabkeh (Lebanon's traditional dance) group where they would tour the country in a pimped-out school bus. Various ideas and opinions were debated because of their adoption of a modern and cosmopolitan dabkeh rather than a traditional one, symbolizing Lebanon's internal conflict during the postwar era where some wanted to innovate and rebuild the country, abandoning all that identified Lebanon before the war, and others remained skeptic about what the future holds.

The film utilizes a number of elements that resembled prewar Lebanon: The travelling bus imbues a sense of constant mobility (instability) and several ins and outs, the techno-dabkeh dance critiques Lebanon's abrupt experience with modernity and its cosmopolitan composition; the bus in and of itself reminds us of the 'Ain El-Remmeneh bus' which was the main instigator of violence of the civil war; and the musical comedy genre which resembles that of the Rahbani brothers during the 50's and 60's from the previous century.

In an interview for Variety magazine, the film director and producer Phillip Aracktingi said that "people are tired of seeing war all the time", knowing that the film is the first privately

funded Lebanese film and had opened at number one at the box office, a first for a Lebanese film to achieve in seven years at the time (Jaafar, *Variety,* 8-12). '*Bosta'* is a hopeful attempt to imagine postwar Lebanon, where religious differences, social despair, the conflict between traditions and modernization are worked out (at times simplified) through dabkeh.

Each filmmaker experienced the war from his/her own perspective, and therefore several narratives and expressions of the war have emerged in a way which does not completely resonate with everybody's experience. Each filmmaker had a different story to narrate and a message they want to convey within the visual dimension.

How would one attempt to build a narrative of a civil war, knowing the multiplicity of events, the overlapping of accounts, the numerous actors involved in violence, and the unresolved nature of the way the war ended? Where would one even begin? The casualties? The ideological differences? Sectarian divisions? And, more importantly, when to create that narrative? If done too early, it would risk being too emotionally charged and therefore be counterproductive in overcoming (recent) past traumas, and if done too late, it would risk being both factually inaccurate and to some extent irrelevant (as is the case in most of today's youth who experience the war's impact, yet do not want to acknowledge or even address it).

Commenting on how he raised the $800,000 he needed to make *West Beyrouth*, Ziad Doueiry once said in an interview with The Guardian: "When I started looking for the money, in 1994, all the attention was shifting to the Bosnian War. Sarajevo was the new Beirut. All the Lebanese I approached said it was too early to make a film about the war, and all the Americans and Europeans said it was too late." (Viner, *Welcome To Beirut*, 1999)

To inscribe a bloody war that was so recent and so impactful had proven itself to be a difficult task facing artists, who have turned to creative modes of storytelling and surreal

expressions to overcome such limitations. Filmmakers critically questioned the normalization of violence and the way it was represented through the exploration of ‘everyday’ violence that permeates Lebanese society and holds it hostage to the uncertainties of the future. Of those moments we can mention how filmmakers and visual artists portrayed the ‘abaday’ (the strongman of every Beiruti neighborhood, who rose to positions of local authority during times of violence, as they were meant to be protecting the area, but instead perpetuated fear and violence among society by intimidation and a series of killings).

Moreover, the ongoing postwar narrative in many cultural products was generally defined by a class struggle that divided society between those who could or could not benefit from the illegal market created by the militias, and those who were leading the reconstruction project alongside the newly established government. Several narrative tropes emerged, as a result, especially that of ‘what is left of the old Lebanon’ and ‘what is authentic’ and the uncertainty of ‘where do we go now’; a power struggle between those who are calling for an embrace to all that is new and modern, and those who reminisce to a glorious past of prosperity and peace. In Najib Hourani’s article *The Militiaman Icon* (2008) he says:

> “In producing and reproducing images and narratives of the civil war, filmic treatments not only interact with more conventional histories – often rooted in western theoretical constructs – put forward by journalists and academics but draw their truth value from them, as well (White 1988). Thus, filmic narrations of the civil war are always already hybrid documents, or to borrow Schwenkel’s phrase, “recombinant histories” that weave together “diverse transnational memories, knowledge formations, and logic of representation” (2006, 5).”

What he meant is that narratives in film do not exist in a void where they can solely be understood within the duration of the film, but rather are in a constant conversation with their surrounding socio-political contexts, in his case he was discussing the narrative of the ‘poor’

being the anti-modern force within society where the elite could assert their identity and authority.

In terms of the topics and narrative that were being discussed in film, a varied mixture of Lebanese issues was being visualized through Western aesthetics and techniques of storytelling, which is only natural given that most filmmakers of that period received their education abroad. During the war, the films that were being made were characterized by a lack of closure and a reflective vision to the seemingly endless war at the time (Westmoreland, 2008, p.82), whereas after the war the approach shifted to one that shows the devastating destruction, return home from exile, and mourning of the (un)dead. Nevertheless, Lebanese cinema viewers were not drawn to the mainly war-themed films.

One could make the argument that postwar Lebanese audience could have simply been bored from all films talking about the war, but that would be too simplistic knowing the recent popularity of Ziad Doueiry's newest film *The Insult (2017)* which addresses the remaining resentments among all components of postwar Lebanese society. The Lebanese audience was not bored of the story of the war, it just could not recognize it on screen as it was portrayed (this was not the war they experienced or recalled); they could not relate to it.

Speaking of an overarching common narrative in cultural production would be a utopian concept to even consider. Although a consistent narrative would create a new public consensus around memories of the war, cultural producers would have to be able to recognize the victims, hold the criminals accountable for their actions, and create room to what Freud ([1917] 1957, 243) terms "the normal affect of mourning," which allows the audience to find a closure to the myriad tragedies of the war. Therefore, even when an overall 'common narrative' about the civil war is impossible to achieve, the shared elements visualized on the screen could evoke a

communal experience where the events do not necessarily have to be common but rather the feelings to be shared.

Every individual subscribes the war according to their first-hand experience, and would therefore only be able to imagine the war from that specific scope and relate to other people's experiences relative to his/her initial understanding. Though, that does not mean that one has to conform to the set of generated lies that have been codified and accepted in the public and political sphere. Militia leaders have built simplistic, patently false narratives in the name of national unity and stability.

With no state support in sight, the development of a Lebanese cinema remains elusive, given that there is no funding, tax breaks, or even public exhibition spaces dedicated for screenings or any form of cultural expression. My hypothesis is that there are two main elements that have directly shaped the narrative of the civil war in postwar Lebanese feature films: foreign financial support and the postwar socio-political atmosphere that impeded any efforts to unravel the war.

To understand the fate of postwar Lebanese cinema is simple and can be understood in material terms: there was no big money being made in Lebanese cinema. After the Taif accord, which brought the acts of violence to a halt, an immediate reconstruction project had emerged across the city and a set of neoliberal economic policies was adopted to attract foreign investment and big capital to the re-emerging market

In the period between 2004-2015, 168 Lebanese films were made on an average budget of $2.4M, and those same films brought a total sum of $1.5M from the local box office (Fondation Liban Cinema, 2015). Another study which looks at TV advertising revenues in national markets shows that in the period from 2010-2015, the total of revenue was estimated at

$329M (Media Industries in the Middle East, 2016). What the Lebanese cinema makes in 10 years, TV ad revenues make it in two. Money goes where the money is.

In 1996, Lebanese satellite broadcasting had taken the industry by a storm. Regardless of the numerous legal and bureaucratic hurdles faced by Lebanese television stations such as Future Television (owned by PM Rafiq Hariri) and LBCI (launched by the *Lebanese Forces*), money was pouring in from everywhere to invest in Lebanese Television, and specifically the entertainment industry. Ad-revenues were skyrocketing and business was booming.

Naturally, no television station would risk blocking its revenue streams for the sake of talking about the war and addressing the remaining traumas among the viewers, instead, various techniques of distraction were implemented. Although it is not within the scope of this research, it is worthy to mention the rise in game-show type of programs during the 90's, where people would participate either by phone or at the studio. After the war, many efforts were made to bring back Lebanon as the media leader in the region, such as the launching of many satellite televisions and numerous production houses that catered TV ads to the whole Middle East. Although, some might argue that this sudden emergence is a continued form of Western cultural imperialism, where TV channels simply emulated successful programs in a localized format, after getting the funders' approval on how and what gets to be made.

Lebanese postwar cinema, on the other hand, remained relatively nascent compared to other media. This is not to say that the Lebanese postwar cinema had complete freedom to operate, yet it enjoyed a relatively bigger space to narrate the war given the nature of the medium. For example, when Ziad Doueiri's film *West Beyrouth* was made in 1998, General Security told him that the film would have to be approved by a Muslim sheikh and a Christian priest before it could be distributed across the country. However, censorship of that kind was not

the main obstacle facing filmmakers, but it was funding. The Lebanese government provided little to no financial support to filmmakers, forcing them to resort to either personal funding schemes, or seeking funding from foreign investors mainly based in France and Belgium, and later Qatar and the UAE during the noughties. The reliance on foreign funding does present its problems. Knowing that European audiences were used to experimental and art house films under the title of 'world cinema', French funders demanded the usage of the French language in Lebanese films, as well as the fact that they looked at 'world cinema' as means to satisfy their fetish for what is exotic and weird, rather than a genuine exploration of the stories of these societies. The films that were being made about the civil war were made with French money to an international audience, and therefore have become oversimplified so that it does not cause a shock or obstruct the viewer's already skewed idea on Lebanon.

Furthermore, 'at least half of the directors of the twelve feature-length narratives released since the end of the war have lived full or part-time outside of Lebanon, and are thus accused by some of only coming to Lebanon to make their films' (Westmoreland, 2002). Also, the war had given rise to documentary filmmaking during the early years of it, which utilizes significantly different modes of storytelling techniques and visual language than that of feature filmmaking. Besides the fact that the generation of filmmakers that came directly after the war received its education abroad, these individuals have lived through the war and have their memories molded by its implications after they came back, what they heard from the media where they lived, and what they've heard from their parents.

Nostalgia resides within a liminal space in the minds of these filmmakers, where at times they desire returning to a pre-war Golden Age and others when they would want to return to the years of war because they felt more 'alive'; constantly shifting between making documentaries

or fictional pieces. An argument can be made on whether postwar filmmakers who have lived through the war could escape that topic and make a film that has nothing to do with the war or their impressions towards it. The façade of postwar peace could be seen to offer little but emptiness and melancholy to the filmmakers, who in many ways have attempted to mourn and revive the dead in their films.

Talking about the constant shifting between life and death in Lebanese postwar films, Kamran Rastegar's *Surviving Images* discusses how the cultural memory of the war was represented through 'haunting ghosts, vampires, and characters caught in a liminal space between life and death':

> "Social trauma is often allegorized through a series of haunting, of hallucinatory spaces between life and death and figures of the undead, for the memories and narratives that are productive of social trauma often exist in the shadows of prevailing cultural memory, emerging in unexpected moments with shocking or frightening effect." (Rastegar, 2015)

I believe that this type of representation has provided the filmmakers with the creative space to address the war without necessarily blaming it on anyone, but rather visualizing the sustained shell-shocked state that Lebanese society was going through during that period; leaving room for endless meanings and interpretations to be inferred to. While some might argue that the narrative posed by postwar feature films might have contributed to the 'selective amnesia' discourse, others like Ryan Westmoreland suggest that such 'reproductive media has enabled the articulation of an imaginary world' in which it attempts to revive 'phantoms and monstrous subjects' to subdue the ongoing silencing of the war (Westmoreland, 2010).

The time surrounding the civil war, cinema emerged as one of the primary arenas for confronting the legacies of the conflict or what some have vaguely called *al ahdath* (the happenings). Lina Khatib suggests in her book that many "seemed to choose to forget – the

memory of the war was deemed too painful and guilt-inducing to be resurrected…. Filmmakers … resisted the sidelining of the memory of the war, and continued to make films about their war experiences."

At times, the reality of a continuing flow of political and social conflict in society had driven cultural producers away from addressing core issues such as sectarianism and social differences, something which filmmakers were somewhat capable of doing. Despite the fact that some filmmakers have seen the war as a heavyweight that is preventing them from exploring other topics and themes, they were capable of articulating a cultural memory of the conflict, within what Khatib (2008, 179) terms "a memory project giving voice to a silenced past."

Artists like Mai Masri, Jean Chamoun, Jocelyn Saab, Samir Habchi, and Maroun Baghdadi were considered to be the first wave of filmmakers and documentarians who have emerged during and in the postwar era to deal with the representations of the war in their films. Documentaries mainly focused on acting as witnesses to the happenings of the war, whereas fictive nondocumentary narratives provided a more nuanced and complex view of the impact of the war.

One of the earliest films that came in the postwar period was *Suspended Dreams* (*Ahlam mu'alliqa*, 1991), where Masri and Chamoun follow a number of characters, coming from different social backgrounds, and show how their individual memories eliminate the possibility of having a common cultural memory. With each character, we witness what it means to them to live through the end of the war and how social forces are shaping their memories of it; the disjuncture between individual and communal memories is evident at that point.

Though, in the background of all of these developments, short filmmaking industry offered an attractive alternative solution by which aspiring filmmakers and professionals alike

get to visualize their story, without heavily depending on foreign support or be limited by censorship. The short filmmaking industry offered filmmakers and amateurs alike, the opportunity to a new creative space where they get to make the films they have always wanted to make.

In order to isolate these factors and understand what effectively shapes the narrative, I am going to study short films that were financially supported through foreign funding (mainly due to the lack of feature-length films that were fully Lebanese funded). Also, I will attempt to understand how the subjectivity of the filmmakers towards the war affected the way they translated it into films. Meaning, postwar filmmakers who have lived through the war might have been too involved and deeply affected by its impact that their imaginative expression of it might not be as clear or as constructive to cinema's social project of overcoming past traumas.

CHAPTER III

SHORT FILMS NARRATIVE

For many, a film generally is perceived as being a feature-length narrative film, while 'shorts' are to be of a lesser grade. Though, with the rise of digital technology, short films have become more prominent and available as a tool for storytelling, cinema-making, and expression. It would be reductive to say that short filmmaking acts only as a stepping stone towards feature filmmaking, mainly because the industry had grown as a genre of its own that has its own audience, film festivals, and filmmakers who have chosen to solely make such films.

After the war, the short film industry in Lebanon was, like in other places, faced by a number of obstacles, where it did not enjoy that status and attention that feature filmmaking received; it rarely had screening time or venues or even the financial support needed to fund these films. Young filmmakers had to bootstrap their way to create their films that would, otherwise, have not been made. The particularity of the format created an aesthetic realm where filmmakers had to create a balance between form and concept; an idea and substance when every second of footage counts and reinforces the one that came before it.

Cinema first appeared in its short form: whether in the zoopraxiscope or the zoetrope. It was the spectacle of seeing a moving object on the screen, which in return created an impact on the viewer. The shortness of these early-day spectacles was the result of a series of technological constraints, particularly those related to the length of the film reels the cinematographe allowed. In Lebanon, technological constraints were imposed on the feature film industry, opening way for short films to become the main way filmmakers expressed their ideas and stories.

Several elements have led to the growth of the short film industry in postwar Lebanon. Mainly, it is the proliferation of film programs across Lebanese universities that caused the increase in the number of graduates in this field, especially that students did not have to travel abroad to get that sort of experience and education. Also, with the rise of online video platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo, anyone could seek the knowledge they need by simply searching for it. According to a recent study conducted by *Fondation Liban Cinema* (2014), around 220 students in the audio-visual field graduate and enter the job market on an annual basis. Also, postwar Lebanese youth were getting more exposed to international visual culture (by international I am referring to the multiplicity of sources, rather than the universality of visual culture), because of the growth of the broadband in Lebanon, satellite broadcasting, and the general ease of accessing films through pirated DVD copies. As a result to the globalization of information, Lebanese millennial filmmakers were getting exposed to endless streams of films from all around the world. In addition, there was a growing general acceptance that cinema could be a viable career choice, other than being a doctor or a Gulf-bound engineer.

Moreover, the region was gaining further international attention, especially with film festivals dedicated to short films becoming a staple event in almost every major Arab city. Of those, we can name the Beirut International Film Festival (inaugurated in 1998), the Dubai International Film Festival, and Carthage Film Festival. Such festivals encouraged more students and professionals to endeavor in making short films as their primary creative field, as they require less financial support, equipment, and face much less bureaucratic limitations (one can simply upload their film online to participate in a film festival). Lastly, the ease by which filmmakers can experiment on videotapes, DSLRs and pirated video editing software, have all allowed short filmmakers to explore new genres and modes of storytelling. Short films

constituted a smaller economic risk and they are screened to a smaller number of people who are composed of local intelligentsia and enthusiasts and are generally exposed to new ideas. In addition, the fact that short films in Lebanon do not get as much media attention as feature films, have allowed filmmakers to relatively remain ‘unknown’ in case they were persecuted for whatever trivial reason. Short filmmakers told the stories that they wouldn’t have been able to tell in feature films. Though, having the industry attaining this ‘underground’ feature, meant that it might not reach as many people as feature films do, and therefore have the same impact. Individuals who went and saw short films at underground closed venues were among members of society who realized the importance of addressing the traumas and memories of the war and were in that location driven by a personal urge to support such initiatives.

Studying postwar short films would allow us to see how the narrative and the cinema industry would have taken shape if it was ridden of all the economic, political, sectarian, and technical obstacles that are currently withholding the growth of a true cinema movement in Lebanon.

Ely Dagher’s *Waves’98* can be considered a meditative visual essay towards Beirut, where the main character is constantly attempting to locate himself within the gray canyons of the city. Set in the late 1990’s, the film tells the story of Omar who’s driving the narrative through his struggle which revolves around questions of belonging, identity formation, and the outlook for the future. Omar lives on the outskirts of Beirut, which means that he might have never visited parts of the once demarcated city or even crossed some of its imagined borders. In general, the film criticizes the state of indifference that most Lebanese were living during that period; becoming preoccupied with a consumerist culture that was driven by entertainment television and amnesiac politics. Interestingly, the film starts with two non-diegetic sounds that

are going in parallel, the first being of a newscaster telling a story about the garbage crisis (since 1998) and the second was of Omar who's talking over the phone to someone we do not know yet:

> "I'm tired of hearing the same story over and over again. It feels like everything is stuck in a loop. I'm tired of my house, my bed, tired of all these depressing stories. Everyone is fed up. They wake up to the same news, same chaos and mess. Nothing ever changes. I don't want to end up like them."

This outcry is not necessarily only that of Omar's; it represents the plead of an entire generation of Lebanese millennials who are worn out from the open-ended conflict that drags down any effort to create a nation to which they want to belong to. Visually, the director used a blend of real imagery and illustrated animations to emphasize how surreal living in postwar Beirut was. From another perspective, this could be seen as a way to emphasize the intricacy of the sociopolitical atmosphere in postwar Beirut, which appeared in the film through the usage of a color palette mainly consisting of shades of gray, brown, and light blue. The director's choice of visually neutral colors highlights the shell-shocked state Lebanese society was facing after the war, though in the film it is layered on top of the careless and inattentive attitude shown on the character's faces, among them Omar. Beirut, as shown in the film, was in a state of decay – eventually becoming both colorless and lifeless.

The story of the film starts with the viewer visually entering Omar's mind, who now appears to be a middle-aged man with an empty look on his face. It appears that the film might all be happening in Omar's head as he recalls the endless cycle that is living in postwar Beirut.

Beirut appears to exist without much of a temporal context either, meaning that there's no timeframe which defines the flow of events or one that the characters are aware of. Themes of memory and remembrance are briefly represented in two shots within the film: the first is when

Omar closes his eyes as he reminisces to a time from his childhood where he was swinging, and the second was when empty photo frames are shown. One thing I noticed while looking at the swing memory is that it resembles the ticking of a clock, implying the idea that nothing surrounding Omar seems to be changing.

The rhythm of the film is relatively slow relative to the life of a young adult like Omar, and the general state of reconstruction that overtook most of Beirut during that time. The film was occasionally marked by a series of chaotic or rather haphazard events that might seem as unnecessary to the flow of events: buildings stacked on top of each other, cars going in circles, and one giant golden elephant amidst the city. The shiny golden elephant that Omar witnesses from the rooftop of his apartment building where he contemplates lures him into a world he never knew existed. This 'social bubble' that Omar finds himself immersed in, allows him to lose sense of time and attachment to his surrounding world.

At this point in the film, Omar decides to do something about his life, and disrupt the cyclic routine, which seems to plague the city as a whole, by chasing the golden elephant in the city.

ELIE DAGHER'S WAVES '98

OMAR FINDS REFUGE WITH FRIENDS IN BEIRUT

Dagher showed postwar Lebanese youth as individuals who don't need much of a reason to celebrate and wander; they're alive and that's good enough. Omar forms a camaraderie with three people of his age, also attempting to escape their reality by belonging to this social bubble they've created around the usage of drugs. The youth appearing in the film don't seem to care much for their surrounding community, where they continuously roam the city not towards any destination, but to locate themselves as they experience love, hope, and broken dreams.

The film can be divided into two main parts, the first was being driven by an urge to create change, explore and belong with friends, and the second is one of escape from a reality that keeps haunting the minds and lives of youth. Towards the end of the film, there's a scene

where Omar is getting away from the shattering destruction of the elephant by jumping into the dark sea, when the same non-diegetic phone call that initiated the film reappears.

The film is a looping visual representation of what today's youth are facing, where any attempt to escape reality is faced by an opposing force that comes back chasing them. Personally, I believe this film is a reminder that for change to happen, there needs to be real action, rather than being stuck in an endless series of 'what-ifs' and 'nothing will ever change'.

The overarching narrative of *Waves '98* is defined by today's youth urge to belong and their unattainable dreams that can only be pursued abroad. Towards the end of the film, the golden elephant can be seen to hover atop the ocean facing Beirut. The lack of dialogue added to the gravitas of the situation, which was accentuated by the director's usage of a dreamy angelic soundtrack which, in a way, could also be referring to the sound of ghosts that continue to roam the streets of Beirut. In relation to the narrative provided by feature films about the civil war, *Waves '98* offers a rare glimpse to how today's youth are coping with the situation within the postwar context. Also, albeit being symbolically charged, Dagher's film can be easily watched and understood by any viewer, knowing that its story is relatively simple and relatable to the viewer's experience during that period.

Waves '98 won the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 2015, the Palm d'Or in the short film category. Dagher, born in 1985, received his undergraduate education from the Academie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts in 2007, and after that continued to do his MA in new media and contemporary art studies from Goldsmiths College in London. The film was initially funded from Dagher's own money until he had to accept the support of the Arab Culture Fund (AFAC, Beirut) and Doha Film Institute (DFI, Qatar) when he found himself incapable of continuing alone.

While funding feature-length films is mainly done to achieve financial profit, funding of short films is done for different purposes. Both funding entities resemble those that fund feature films (France and Belgium) in terms of structure and financing schemes, though in the case of short films, the funds have been coming from within the region which means they are driven more by empowering the regional cultural sector rather than achieving political or cultural goals. In return of funding short films (and other cultural projects from the region), organizations such as AFAC and DFI gain immense exposure and reputation when these films participate in festivals, as well as becoming regional hubs for creative production.

Before considering the purpose of funding short films, one must consider the reason behind making them in the first place. Besides film festivals and competitions, young filmmakers have to make a short film to graduate from university. Millennial film students, being taught by veteran filmmakers (who have studied abroad, and belong to the generation who lived through the war), graduate with the idea that having a DSLR camera and a laptop is all a filmmaker needs to produce a short film, and that all it takes is a great script. What happens is that film graduates from all universities enter the competitive job market, to realize that it already is saturated in terms of creative and technical talent. To make things worse, production companies and ad agencies hire these professionals on a freelance basis, without guaranteeing them any long-term contract or stability. Independent short filmmakers must depend on a personal effort to launch their projects, so they can eventually request financial support from funding entities. In a recent interview with 'Papercup' magazine, Ely Dagher mentions that he is currently working on his first feature-length film, which deals with 'issues of identity and belonging much like *Waves '98.* Therefore, if it wasn't for Dagher's success in *Waves '98*, he would have not received the financial support to start developing a feature film.

Film students have a number of options to seek funding from: either from their parents (who are usually paying their tuition in most cases), online crowdfunding campaigns (which have also been recently used to fund short film festivals in Baalbeck and Jounieh), bank loans (in some other cases banks do provide equity-free financial support, with the condition of giving credit), donations from international entities that support filmmaking in developing countries, or look out for sponsorship deals that provide free in-kind services like catering, licensing, and design solutions.

Funding a short film can be risky for investors, especially when filmmakers lack the experience and knowledge needed to produce a low-budget film. Funders, therefore, must consider supporting a short film by looking at how a film will make them appear as a funding entity, whether the filmmaker could potentially grow to become a feature filmmaker and thus make a profit. This funding process is not sustainable enough to develop an industry.

Ely Dagher belongs to a generation of filmmakers who have benefitted from the growing local and regional interest in funding short films and cultural philanthropy, though in reality funding opportunities for Lebanese short filmmakers are limited to those provided by AFAC, Beirut Screen Institute (which have also recently announced budget cuts), Doha Film Institute (with priority to Qatari filmmakers, providing production funding only, maximum $15K), and SANAD of Abu Dhabi Film Festival. In addition to private institutes and organizations, the Lebanese Ministry of Culture decided in 2006 to form a committee with the aim to foster 'film production and different cinematic activities in Lebanon' (Decree No. 12/2006). The fund would support films in various areas and has an annual budget of $80,000, which is not enough to build and sustain a film industry, especially in a place like Lebanon where the budget would most

probably be subsidized to films that beautify Lebanon's image in a shallow manner rather than have true cultural and cinematic value.

Another reason why short films can be made in Lebanon is to raise awareness to certain topics or issues, through the funding of international NGOs. Lastly, during the past few years there has been a surge in the online content created from Lebanon, whether in the form of vlogs or social media content that caters to a wider audience, though it is only on rare occasions where these productions are monetized.

On the other hand, Hany Tamba, the director of *After Shave* (2005) which won the French "Cesar" for Best Short Feature in 2006, narrated the war differently. The story of *Aftershave* takes place in Beirut, where an old street barber is hired to shave a rich widower, but the latter's deceased wife gets in the way. The opening scene starts with a blind lottery seller who guides us into the local coffee shop where men are gathered for hookah and a game of backgammon. Abu Milad (played by Mahmoud Mabsout), the local barber, is trying to shave a customer's beard as he's constantly stifling around in his chair. The poor barber does not have a set price and is usually paid an honorarium for every shave he does.

On his way back home, the barber is stopped by the local grocer who tells him to head to Mr. Raymond's palace where he had lived inside ever since his wife died during the war. Afterward, we witness a few cutscenes where 'Sukleen' (the garbage collection company) workers are dusting off the empty streets of the downtown area as well as the street lights.

Mr. Raymond (performed by Rafiq Ali Ahmad) is a rich aristocrat who is also a painter with his deceased wife as his muse. Ever since his wife's death, Mr. Raymond had spent his days in seclusion, painting nothing but his wife and embracing her obsession with turtles as his own. Throughout the course of the film, he is visited by the ghost of his wife, who has a cynical tone

to her character. The ghost is constantly reminding Mr. Raymond of the good old times when she would be dancing with him and he would keep stepping on her feet while doing so. The first disruptive moment in the film is when the cassette tape that Mr. Raymond plays while having a haircut gets destroyed after being played for almost the millionth time. The connection to the past can be seen as being partially severed.

Abu Milad was being paid generously for his services and saw no reason why Mr. Raymond should ever leave the house. One day, Mr. Raymond's pet turtle *Isabelle,* which used to belong to his wife, is lost. At this point, Mr. Raymond decides to leave the house towards Nejmeh Square where he first met his wife back when they were younger.

On his way out, Mr. Raymond decides to buy a lottery ticket from the same blind seller seen at the beginning of the film. Unfortunately, Mr. Raymond gets hit by a car just as he crosses the street and the lottery ticket he bought flies off his hand and lands into Abu Milad's, who is interrupted by the return of Isabelle, the turtle. The last scene of the film shows Mr. Raymond reuniting with his wife as they walk toward Nejmeh Square.

In Tamba's *Aftershave*, the undead character is that of Mr. Raymond's. He had been in a sustained state of shell shock after the death of his wife, where it wasn't until Isabelle (turtles are generally considered a good omen in Lebanese folk culture) had left that he decided to do something about it. Unlike postwar feature films, the undead character in *Aftershave* was not seeking justice or accountability, but rather to escape living within the liminalities of life and death. Mr. Raymond wanted redemption from all the memories that have held him hostage in his own house all these years. This can be seen by looking at the film from a different scope, that of the struggle of letting go of the past and embracing the uncertainty of the future.

If Mr. Raymond wanted to completely shut himself out of society, he would not have invited a barber to his palace. Abu Milad is Mr. Raymond's connection to the real world: he brings him groceries to his palace (products to consume) and he is driven by the $50 per cut price (capital) that Mr. Raymond gives him. Interestingly, Mr. Raymond had invited a barber and not a doctor to his palace. Not to say that Mr. Raymond was sick, but instead that he wanted to remain young and to look good for his dead wife's ghost, which he constantly conversed with. Another thing to be noticed is that Mr. Raymond had left his wife's belongings exactly the way they were left on the dresser and the bathroom.

The only time the civil war is mentioned during the film is when the local grocer is telling Abu Milad to go to Mr. Raymond's palace, and the barber exclaims widely at the idea that Mr. Raymond didn't leave his house since the war. This brief incident makes it sound like the war is ancient history or this surreal occurrence might have not even happened in the first place. The war is used as a non-diegetic element within the narrative of the film, where it is only implied to by the usage of two cutscenes showing Sukleen cleaners dusting off the streets of the downtown area and the street light even, which shows the diligence in removing every single trace of the war. Somehow similar to what Ziad Doueiry did when he placed the war in the background of the narrative of *West Beyrouth*, by framing it as an ongoing background conflict rather than the main driver of events.

Aftershave skims around the topic of the civil war by overstretching the everydayness of daily life and dramatizing the struggles faced by individuals in postwar society, something which had been done in other feature films such as *A Perfect Day* (Hadjithomas, Joreige) and *The Last Man* (Ghassan Salhab). Note that *Aftershave* was made with the financial support of *Fonds Francophone de Production Audiovisuelle du Sud*, which has "an annual amount of at least

900,000 euros divided equally between cinema and audiovisual production”, strictly coming from a ‘Southern’ French-speaking country, embodying power relations in society and international relations (in the case postcolonialism).

Overall, what Tamba did in terms of the narrative is that he provided a shorter version of what had already been done in feature films. Although being a well-made film, I don’t believe that *Aftershave* offers a refreshing view on the civil war, where people could find closure and redemption.

In comparison, if I look at *Lebanon Wins the World Cup*, which is a Lebanese funded documentary short-film, I am confronted with a different narrative of the civil war, one that is shaped by reconciliation and forgiveness. The story is driven by two main protagonists who were once fierce enemies: Hussein who fought alongside the Lebanese Communist Party driven by an ideology, and Edward fought alongside the Lebanese Forces who thought he was on a crusade to protect the Christians of his area. Both characters are engulfed by a sense of guilt of what they’ve done and the need to ‘forget everything.’

As a matter of fact, the first scene starts with Edward, the ex-Lebanese Forces fighter, saying: “When I go swimming, I forget everything.” In an interview for ‘35mm from Beirut, the filmmaker, Tony Elkhoury, answers the question of whether forgetting wars is the right way for forgiveness:

> “The phrase translates our protagonist’s view on life and his need to forget, even for a moment, an old trauma that still haunts him. It is not to be taken as if the film offers forgetting as a solution; On the contrary, the film goes into the direction of opening up the past and having the courage to face it. It’s sad that we still haven’t reconciled on a social level with the horrors of the Lebanese civil war even though it ended since about 25 years ago.” (Elkhoury, 2017)

Their passion for football had brought these two fighters together to reminisce and share their memories of the war. Throughout the course of the film, the main characters remind the viewers of the futility of the differences that were exacerbated by the effects of the war. Edward and Hussein comment on how 'the Lebanese are more royal than the king himself', and that they can't come up with an original idea themselves. In a symbolic analogy to the civil war and its chaos, many scenes throughout the film show the Lebanese public as absolute fanatics towards football, whether it was the German team or the Brazilian team: 'Lebanese are always searching for a hero' says Hussein Bazzi as he comments on the lack of Lebanese identity and originality.

The film tells the story of how a 1982 World Cup match between Brazil and Italy had temporarily stopped the fighting (even the Israelis would stop the shelling), only to be resumed heavily afterward. 'Suddenly football made us forget everything for a while,' says Edward after meeting Hussein for the first time and watching a game together during 2014's Soccer World Cup. At one point during the film, Hussein Bazzi commented how Nelson Mandela could bring two races to put aside their differences through a process of truth and reconciliation in a game of rugby.

Though this is not to say that everything can simply be forgotten through a game of football, but rather it helps in bringing people together and create a space for shared interest and tolerance. Knowing the film was made with Lebanese funding, it could be argued that, while given the opportunity, Lebanese filmmakers would tell a different story than when it is funded by foreign agencies.

Short films, as much as football, have taken the shape they have due to the absence of a true industry that would create limitations as much as opportunities ahead of them. That is not necessarily a bad thing, especially that they have the potential to overcome the regime of silence,

denial, and repression. I am not calling here for a complete loss of memory of the war through the redundant articulation of past events, but rather to find a middle ground between forgetting and forgiving and the right for remembering.

The last film I aim to study for this research is Wissam Charaf's *Army of Ants* (2008), which is a depiction of the haunting memories of the Lebanese civil war, illustrated with shots of scenery, weapon smuggling, and instances filled with the dark hilarity of the war.

The film follows a group of three young men in their quest for a Kalashnikov, in a precarious prewar atmosphere. The war that these men are preparing for is not actually the civil war, but rather one they anticipate happening because of its remaining enmities. Starting the film is the sound of an alarm trying to wake Wissam, who appears to be in deep sleep. Moving on, Wissam appears to have arrived late for work, which involves using an excavator to prepare for a construction project. Though, later his coworker must have hit something while unearthing the field, and suddenly fled the scene fearing for his life: an undetonated bomb appears, as well as a picture of a dead martyr, which Wissam later hangs on his bedroom wall. While attempting to safely diffuse the bomb, military experts accidentally blew up the entire excavator, and with it creating a giant hole in the ground.

In most Arab films excavators symbolize the evil of modernity and Western imperialism, and in this case, it could either mean that foreign powers are digging up the buried past of the civil war, or that the next war will also be one of the 'others' on Lebanese soil.

WISSAM CHARAF'S ARMY OF ANTS

WISSAM PREPARES FOR WAR

Army of Ants (2008) resembles *Waves '98* in the sense that they both portray the youth as individuals trying to locate themselves and their position within the mess of postwar Lebanese community. Though, in Charaf's depiction, the youth lead a more active role in defining their future, which meant buying an AK47 from an arms dealer.

The difference between the two films is that Dagher's film offers a more positive outlook for the future, whereas Charaf's depicted the future as being threatened by the past haunting it all over again. This could be explained by the fact that Dagher's film was funded by mainly Arab money, and Charaf's with French, which aims to serve a similar purpose as to what it did in

feature films: portray post-conflict societies as they continue to struggle to overcome past tragedies.

At this point, it could be understood that the motive behind making these short films was not necessarily a remaining sense of anger or revenge to the ongoing situation, but rather one that is driven by the urge to bring warring factions to address their remaining enmities, an attempt by the filmmakers to locate themselves within Lebanon's post-war society, or an act of revolt against conforming with cultural norms of 'forgetting and forgiving' (particularly when Wissam and his friends started shooting the AK-47 directly towards the viewer). Though, what brings those short films together is a common feeling of abandonment and loss that was shared by all main protagonists. The main protagonists were constantly seeking clues and signals to identify themselves within the narratives of the films, also, the filmmakers made sure not to give them much historic or personal background, that way the viewer can bring his/her own interpretation about the protagonist's position. This highlights an additional issue which had long hindered Lebanese filmmakers' ability to visualize a fully established story, which is their incapacity to develop a narrative identity to their characters within a bigger social context, and in return reflecting their incapacity to know who they really are in postwar Lebanon. Knowing one's self is critical in the process of establishing a narrative. Filmmakers, among cultural producers and broader postwar Lebanese society, were faced with the inherent matter of not being able to tell a story, which goes back to the fact there isn't a clear-cut understanding of what constitute the Lebanese identity and what is its historic root.

The question that I address in the following chapter aims to understand who the Lebanese are as a society, and why have they not been able to tell their story before?

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE IDENTITY: WHO ARE WE AND WHAT'S OUR STORY

Cultural identities are created in narrative form, where they would agree to converge multiple elements in a way that fits within the socio-political contexts of that culture. A common narrative would not convey an ultimate truth or a deceiving lie about a historical happening, but rather assimilates a communal understanding to one's identity as a member of a bigger societal circle. In short, a narrative would allow for an abstraction to events, which would guarantee a communality of experience through the 'simplified' iteration of sequential events, *without* necessarily compromising the specificity of individual episodes. Having a narrative on historic events gives post-conflict societies both the emotional and political anchor, through which they converge and overcome past tragedies. Also, having a narrative provides cultural producers with the framework needed to establish relatable content about the civil war, as well as paving the way towards content that is beyond the conflict itself.

Narratives about historic events must be simple enough for the public to grasp and transmit for future generations, while risking that they might serve dual and conflicted purposes. On one hand, a narrative creates a common assimilation of events, while on the other, it creates room for alternate understandings that might be diffused or distant from reality. Therefore, it is important to realize how a narrative of a historical event is recreated in cultural production, within the processes of remembrance, amnesia, and cultural memory. That way, I'd be able to realize the impact of transmission of stories on the creation of short films.

It is critical to understand the relationship between the process of remembering and narrative if I am to realize how collective cultural memory towards a social trauma occurs. An important aspect of collective memory is that it is a "living history" (Halbwachs, 1980, p.89) with two foundational elements: temporality and continuity through time. According to Halbwachs, collective memory is "a continuous current of thought, of a continuity that is by no means artificial, because it conserves nothing from the past except the parts which still live, or are capable of living in the conscience of the group" (Halbwachs, 1980, 89). Re-worked in the present, depictions of the past allow people to project themselves into the future (Haas and Jodelet, 2000). Therefore, the collective memory comprises of narrated recollection of remembrances organized around temporal references (Jedlowski, 2001). In Lebanon's case, the war ended (or continued) at different times for different people. There wasn't a specific moment in time where memories of pain could be attached to, therefore rendering the ability to have a collective memory impossible to achieve. Lebanese society is not necessarily one that is 'post-conflict', mainly because the conflict resumes until this day, even when it had taken a different form.

While understanding narrative function in relation to memory, I arrive at the question of identity. "The past of each individual, is in some respects, what makes people what they are […] it is true that identity is made up of memory, but if memory is narrative, identity is also narrative, and it is also subject to the same multiple narrations", argues Jedlowski (2001). Knowing that we cannot establish a collective memory of the civil war, it can also be said that Lebanese collective identity in relation to the war could also not be established.

Lebanon is a country where the notion of having a 'common Lebanese identity' remains highly contested on several political, historical and religious levels. Enforced sectarianism

among society had led to the collapse of any form of social cohesiveness which brings communities and individuals around a collective affiliation to the nation, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language. The war, despite being a bloody event which resulted in the death of thousands, could have been an opportunity to bring members of Lebanese society around one narrative identity that is built around overcoming the trauma and its memories.

Though, the remnants of the war remained stagnant in the imagination of the Lebanese public, even after the acts of violence were declared over by a series of political deliberations.

Each political party that represented a religious sect developed its own rhetoric towards the war in a way which validates its political aspirations in the postwar era. Militias who were once warring against each other were embedded into the political system, around which they developed a confessional representational system which allegedly would "sustain national unity and security." The political system saw economic and political benefit in enforcing a project of amnesia, and therefore did not promote or even support any effort to address it in a manner that would memorialize it, in hope of bridging lanes of communal rejuvenation and national redemption. The civil war did not have the opportunity to become a national tragedy in the minds of the Lebanese, on par with other post-conflict contexts such as Germany after WW2.

From that perspective, postwar Lebanese identity on an individual level was muddled with whatever narrative that individual adopted or was raised to adopt, depending on his/her geographic location, religion, parents' involvement in the war, and overall experience by the surrounding community.

If I look at the members of generation postmemory within the short films studied, I realize that they were silenced, or it could be assumed that they did not have much to say

anyway. Members of generation postmemory did not know where to look to start the process of identity formation, especially that their parents were still traumatized of the events, and were told to better not talk about *al ahdath*. In Ely Dagher's *Waves '98*, the protagonist is called Omar (a Muslim name, whereas the filmmaker named after a Christian saint), though the name itself is not mentioned at any point throughout the film. The name of the character is only mentioned during media interviews with the filmmaker, and even on the website of the film, which could be a mechanism by which the filmmaker distances himself from what Omar embodies. Omar does not interact with anyone from the older generation, neither does he seem concerned to his surrounding community. At times, it is noticeable that Omar's parents were practically glued to the TV screen and to some point numbed to what was happening to their son; Omar couldn't seek refuge from his own parents. Though, what really drove Omar to do something and go seek his identity within the concrete jungle that is Beirut, was really a sensation of anger and despair especially as he threw a rock into the distance from the top of his building, which could symbolize a symbolic act of rebellion against society. On the other hand, the youth in Charaf's *Army of Ants* identified themselves by the Kalashnikov they bought from the arms dealer, whose car had written on it '*al Silah Zeenat al Shabab'*, which translate to 'guns decorate young men'. Also, looking at the behavior of the young men, it is noticeable that they are worried, and that they do not know exactly what or why they are doing what they are doing, which is living in the outdoors and preparing for a war in the middle of nowhere. Several shots of *Army of Ants* shows the youth (Wissam and his friends) communicating through a walkie-talkie, though they don't really have one – which could symbolize the fact that once they were kids, they used to play such a game within the context of the Lebanese civil war. The identity of the protagonist reflects that of the filmmaker himself, by being worried for the future, ready for it, and finally deciding to

escape (the filmmaker is based in Paris now). As for Tony Elkhoury's youth in *Lebanon Wins the World Cup*, he portrays the youth as problematic members of society that have been desensitized to caring about who they are. Meaning, the young people shown on screen were driven by sensation and their fanatic support to their soccer team. I consider Elkhoury's film to be more of an apology letter to the city that was ruined by its own people, and hopes that the youth will realize the importance of addressing past enmities and trivial differences.

In public discourse, the war was considered to be a shameful event that must be erased from history, and instead demanded everyone to either look back at the glories of the pre-1975 era or forward towards the future of reconstructed Beirut under the banner of PM Rafiq Hariri and Solidere (*Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction du Centre-ville de Beyrouth*, French for "The Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District").

Along similar lines, the Lebanese theorist and videographer Jalal Toufic (2003, 72) says, "The demolition of many of the ruined buildings…was war by other means; the war on the traces of the war is part of the traces of the war, hence signals that the war is still continuing."

Though, some might argue against remembering the war as it might risk reigniting the violence instantly, given the relatively short period of time that has passed since it was 'declared over'. Something which Ghassan Salame once announced to attendees of a conference titled "Memory for the Future" that if "we fail to keep our collective memory" of the country's wars "we would be preparing the way to ignite the same wars again." According to Haugbolle, "forgetting the [Lebanese Civil] war might make it repeat itself at some point, but remembering it will most likely make it happen right away. What good will it do to look the beast in the eye if it is going to bite your head off?" (Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 197). Also, Roger Simon

contended that practices of remembrance run the risk of “reproducing forms of enmity in which one’s identity is enhanced by the removal and annihilation of another” (Simon, 2005). Within this prospect of remembrance, hate is engendered by memory and returns recursively to simplify memory because of fear of further violence. Though, how would one explain the short bursts of civil violence that occurred in Lebanon ever since? What kept such enmities alive?

It is the process of normalizing violence and conflict in public discourse that allowed for the construction of these narratives as part of Lebanese identity, given that the Lebanese are portrayed as ‘resilient’ enough to handle it. In this process, violence had become normalized and essentially became an inextricable part of our collective national identity and to some extent a bit of a folkloric practice, where a short burst of occasional killing is necessary to diffuse any ticking bomb that might bring the country to another watershed.

In an article written by Michael Young of *The Daily Star* titled “*The Sneer of Memory*”, he says:

> “The delicate balance of the country’s confessional politics makes any critical examination of the past extremely sensitive. In a way, silence and forgetfulness have become part of the national culture. Truth is usually sacrificed at the altar of compromise: since various versions of Lebanon’s history cannot be reconciled, they are better ignored.”

This argument had been echoed by many scholars among them Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi in his book *A House of Many Mansions the History of Lebanon Reconsidered* where he comments that “there are as many narratives of the country’s history as there were communities.” Each community, sect, and political party had its own regime of truth and history that it abided and lived by.

Samir Khalaf once commented that Lebanon was once considered a “bold cultural experiment, and ‘miraculous’ pluralistic society sustained by resourcefulness, [and] resilience.”

Though, if one was to look and analyze the brutality of events during the civil war, that would ultimately challenge any conceptualizing of “the common Lebanese self-image as a particularly civilized Arab people, a mission of peace and coexistence among religions in the Middle East (Haugbolle, *War and Memory in Lebanon*, 14).

Therefore, sectarianism, which was the main instigator of violence and source of identification among most of the Lebanese, was promoted during the postwar era as something that has become “un-Lebanese”. Knowing that there was no way of getting around the fact that it was a sectarian war par excellence, the ruling elite that consisted of war-era militias insisted on denying that rhetoric, as a shorthand way to maintain a status quo in the political system and enforce amnesia on a societal level.

Various forms of cultural expression offer the flexibility for post-conflict societies to confront and address the traumas of the war, especially that they are representative of broad experiences and could offer a real opportunity for social healing through storytelling. Claiming responsibility and holding accountability, as well as seeking justice were the mainframes within which postwar cultural production operated, in opposition to the mainstream discourse propagated by the state.

Here comes the role of the arts and cultural production, overcoming some of those obstacles put forward by facades and fears over national security, as well as providing possible solutions to unresolved enmities.

However, before I unravel the narrative of the civil war in public discourse, I will attempt to understand the construction of a Lebanese identity through a narrative view during the postwar era. The purpose here is to understand how Lebanese society’s inability to conceive a unifying historical narrative has stopped it from finding a narrative identity in relation to the civil war.

According to Dan McAdams and Kate McLean, this is the definition of narrative identity:

> ‘Narrative identity reconstructs the autobiographical past and imagines the future in such a way to provide a person’s life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning. Thus, a person’s life story synthesizes episodic memories with envisioned goals, creating a coherent account of identity in time. Through narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future.’ (McAdams and McLean, 2013)

Essentially, a narrative identity is being able to realize one’s self within a particular moment in time, one that it is directly shaped by what preceded it and where it is headed to.

In his book *Homo Narrans: The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature,* John Niles talks about the idea that people and civilizations can possess a past only through the process of storytelling and sharing myths, legends, or even jokes around the dinner table. In addition to exploring the social function of narrative, Niles argues that oral narrative is at the basis of culture itself, which makes humans special among other living beings. His idea is that humans are fundamentally sense-making creatures *homonarrans*, tellers instead of homo sapiens (knowers); who I am is given by the stories I tell about myself.

In Lebanon’s case, a country that has long been occupied and conquered by many civilizations, there have only been rare occasions where the public could tell its own version of the story. I am not particularly referring to the historic idea of Lebanon being the melting pot of cultures or crossroad for merchants and scholars, but a rather military presence that long influenced society’s own perception through several methods: language, cultural expression, music, food, and even wardrobe.

Paul Ricoeur also endorses the narrative view of personal identity. In *The Rule of Metaphor,* he argues that we, as humans, construct our idea of identity through the narratives we wish to put together through the elements that ‘define’ us and surround us. Moreover, in another

book of his *Memory, History, Forgetting*, he argues that the 'self' is contingent and constructed by the collective social memory; we are what society chooses to forget and remember. Though one thing to clarify is that antonym to 'forgetting' is not necessarily 'remembering', but rather it is "the prospect of justice" (Roger Simon), where a certain balance between the two could be achieved. Looking at Lebanon's postwar era, when the state practically disregarded any effort to remember the war, the 'choice' was made by the same people who started the war, and therefore the identity was inherently attached to those individuals who have put it in a state of limbo.

Ernest Renan says that forgetting is elemental to the creation of a nation, "where all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things" (Ernest Renan, *What is a Nation*?, 1992, 41-42). Also, as Haugbolle says, historical memory is largely informed by "a list of omissions" that would otherwise "complicate national myths" pertaining to discourses on nationalism (*War and Memory, 14*). The reason that forgetting is viewed as a pre-requisite to the emergence of a nation and to the creation of discourses about national identity can be traced to the nature of events that lead to the creation of a certain nation-state. Also, some might even argue that forgetting is a defense mechanism to repress shameful events, or even as part of a bigger healing process which contributes to assimilating society's identity. On the other hand, forgetting the civil war in such a manner is problematic for two major reasons: it was still relatively fresh within people's imaginations, consisted a big part of modern-day Lebanon's history as a sovereign nation, and the public was practically forced to simply leave it unaddressed.

However, narrative view of identity focuses on the particularities of individual stories and their specific places at given moments in time. A narrative, alone, can be episodic and therefore does not convey the whole picture of what societal identity is. The narrative view of identity

gives so much significance to 'lives', rather than 'selves'. Meaning, a society can have several traits and characteristics that constitute its story, yet they do not necessarily define it as a collectivity. Postwar Lebanese society was forced to be out of place and out of time, and this has led to problematically memorializing the war and therefore inheriting it for future generations.

Therefore, a narrative must not be mistaken to a mere recollection of events based on one's memories of the past, but rather it is the expression of one's 'suffering' in relation to those events. These expressions are built around stories and are constitutive of one's identity.

Lebanese postwar identity was constructed based on an amnesiac view of history.

I want to distinguish between two 'selves' that are characterized by a temporal dimension: the experiencing self and the remembering self. The 'experiencing self' lives in the present moment, knows that it is living in this particular period of time, and is also capable of recalling the past as an overall feeling. On the other hand, the 'remembering self' is where a certain 'curation' process occurs, where an individual or society selects and chooses what to keep from previous experiences, in order to tell a story. The stories told by the 'remembering self' are what residues from past experiences.

A vital element of every good story is its ending. The ending of a certain experience, in a way, defines how one remembers that experience, and therefore feels towards it in the future. Also, for a story to be complete, there needs to be a plot, a cliffhanger, an ending, and most importantly: change of events. Ironically, this idea would not be applicable if I am to consider the progress of events of the civil war, mainly because it had no closure, no changing actors, or even a proper memory of it.

Incidentally, short films made by millennials also ended abruptly, without providing closure of events to both the viewers and protagonists themselves. In Ely Dagher's *Waves '98*

(2015), the film ends on Omar waking up from his living dream to find himself looking towards Beirut through a hole in the golden elephant, which now floats on top of the Mediterranean sea opposite to the shore. The elephant, representing a beacon for a brighter and more promising future, houses the memory of Beirut's glory for those who want to remember and cut through prejudices that have long demarcated the city. Hanging mid-air, the elephant highlights Beirut's call that for true change to happen, there needs to be direct and imminent action. Overall, it could be said that Dagher's film was influenced by David Lynch's surrealism in the way that it is both symbolically charged, and, most importantly, leaving things open for all sorts of interpretations. Moreover, Wissam Charaf's ending sequence was also open-ended, when the protagonists returned to the sight of explosion of the excavator, where now an ant colony thrives and the following dialogue occurs:

> Friend: *Are you making that noise* (no noise is heard)*? I thought it was a frog. Do it again.*
> Wissam: (While staring at the ants) *Do they ever come back up?*
> Friend: *Who?*
> Wissam: *The dead. When there's no more room in hell, the dead walk the earth.*

The scene before the last shows Wissam's bedroom just as the electricity goes out before heading to sleep. The next day, Wissam's friends arrive to his house to take him along on their 'war', but instead he decides to wait inside and let them go on their own.

Lastly, if I consider Tony Khoury's ending in *Lebanon Wins the World Cup*, I realize a similar pattern to what Elie Dagher did, and that is returning to the introductory scene, where I see Edward jumping back into the sea. The ending of the film could be understood in two ways, either it's an act of self-cleansing from all the crimes committed or a way to shed off all memories of the war, especially as he reiterates: "When I go swimming, I forget everything."

The Lebanese postwar public was left to figure things out alone, without any sense of closure, prospect of justice, or accountability, same thing as the protagonists in short films had to face.

At this point, I aim to distinguish between the two populations I am considering for this study: those who have lived through the civil war, and those who have not and are only experiencing its aftermath.

Some might assume that the dividing factor between the two populations is the moment the acts of violence were declared over, because for many that constitute war, where in fact its repercussions pursue until today. It is not violence that separates these two populations because a war of a different kind is still raging. Nothing has changed in the story: same militia leaders are still in power, sectarianism among society continues strong, same imagined borders across the city, and same memories of the war. The only thing that has changed is the dynamics by which these acts of 'soft-violence' are enacted. A person who lived through the war remembers the shooting and bombs, whereas a millennial is petrified by the idea of dating someone from 'the opposite' sect or religion.

Given that Lebanon's civil war was felt and experienced differently across sects, areas, social classes, and genders, the story that was told and felt by a millennial who is born in Achrafieh (previously East Beirut) differs incredibly from someone who is from Hamra (previously West Beirut).

The Lebanese narrative identity of these two millennials is completely different, their understanding of how the war happened differs on various levels.

The result of the war was a state of cautious coexistence among members of society, that is shaped by a deeply held resentment and mistrust. As the public attempted to bury the past,

sectarian schisms remained deeply entrenched. The postwar regime was driven by continuing the amnesia project, to maintain an unjust status quo where they would remain in a powerful hegemonic position.

The difficulty of establishing a narrative of the civil war lies not only on the complexities of the conflict and the overlapping of events, but rather on the fact that we have yet to know ourselves as a society which exists within temporal and spatial contexts and is directly shaped by a series of political, economic, and cultural forces. Lebanese society must identify itself through history, and with that overcome its past traumas.

It might sound like a vicious cycle where for a society to know itself it must first know its history, and vice versa, but rather what I am arguing here is not only for a historical account of events, but to unravel a narrative that allows for an understanding on how major events are spoken about and distributed in public discourse that would give a narrative identity to society.

A narrative in public discourse cannot exist on its own, as it is constantly being reworked through overlapping processes of remembrance, recollection, and transmission. Therefore, the value of having a narrative on historical events is gained not necessarily only by measuring its accuracy and ability of meaning-making, but rather by realizing what society had done with it to overcome past traumas and create the platform upon which future generations can heal and 'not do the same mistakes' their parents have previously done.

The war, not necessarily the violence, is what defined the narrative identity of Lebanese society during that era: one's relationship to those events and how they affected public social interaction. The narrative memory of the war goes beyond the process of providing closure to a traumatic past but also constitutes the narrative identity of a nation, or as what is called the performative making of the nation.

Narrative as Communal Therapy: Why care about the narrative anyway?

Most of the Lebanese who lived through the war are in a state of sustained trauma and shell shock. Haugbolle explains that "trauma develops in cases when the affect exceeds the emotional weight that allows the individual to grasp an event and incorporate it into his or her personal narrative in the form of one or more symbols" (Public and Private Memory, 192). Any private memory of the civil war was mostly confined within closed circles, unable to be negotiated or even shared across various members of society.

Psychotherapists across the world work with patients to ensure they re-tell their story, an effort towards self-exploration which eventually could lead to lessons learned and a positive resolution to negative past events. The idea is that patients get to talk about their past and how it affected them, and the more they do it, the more they reiterate on the story and therefore reclaim their personal agency. Conversations about a traumatic past allow for the creation of meaning and possible redemption, starting from an individual level, and ending in communal.

Stories and narratives are not mere representations of past events, rather they constitute the individual as much as they shape human relationships.

The main issue with commemorating the war in Lebanon is knowing exactly *what* to remember. It was a messy war that tore communities apart and caused violence and brutal fighting for over 15 years. This issue becomes visible when comparing between those who lived through the war and those who were too young to remember. The older generation's feelings are consumed with suffering and guilt while the younger ones are crystallized through inherited images and symbols from their parents in order "to express their cultural, religious, and political beliefs" (Haugbolle, 2005). Also, while romanticized images of prewar Beirut that are found in postcards and advertisements might serve as a comforting mechanism to those who lived through

the war, yet they offer little to nothing to those who haven't, other than feeding their imagination about a prewar glory era.

Saree Makdisi argues "the danger […] in taking the place of historical narrative, makes the task or even the possibility of historical understanding, let alone reconciliation, that much more remote. In being frozen in visual form, history threatens to become an aesthetic object, a commodity, a spectacle, a fetish, rather than a narrative, a process, a struggle" (Makdisi, 2006).

Therefore, it is critical to understand the processes of narrative memory beyond the cultural products themselves (the image and story) and study them in light of how the public consumes, makes sense of, and reiterate them for future generations.

In what follows, I aim to understand the concept of postmemory and how millenial's experience of the civil war was shaped by what they've heard, felt, and saw.

CHAPTER V

GENERATION POSTMEMORY: OUT OF TIME; OUT OF PLACE

"War! War makes one feel alive!"

The above quote belongs to uncle Riad, the main character in Myriam El-Hajj's feature documentary "*A Time to Rest"* or "*Hudna*" (which means truce in Arabic). Hajj belongs to a generation who did not see the war in Beirut, but continues to face it in the daily pursuit of identity and belonging in society. Hajj questions and confronts her uncle's involvement in the war. The uncle seems to be unashamed of killing the Palestinian 'other', especially as he believes he was fighting for a cause, whereas Hajj's father was obviously uncomfortable with the subject and appeared to be afraid to continue the conversation; fearing for his daughter's safety. In this particular scene, the viewers are put face fronting two men who have opposing memories of the war, and a younger female who took it upon herself to reinvigorate these memories and create her own narrative around their events. Not many members of generation postmemory have the luxury that Myriam had, as they have been told that it is 'better to forgive and forget'. This scene had been happening across Lebanon in various ways and degrees ever since the war had ended.

Overall, the documentary is driven by Hajj's investigation on how could we, as a society, turn our back to such a bloody legacy in such short and abrupt manner, and how is she supposed to build her identity in a society that is so gregarious. The film does not necessarily open any lanes for discussion and analysis; rather *Truce* invites the viewer to inform him or herself and live the history, so as not to be at odds.

The title of this chapter indicates to the state facing many of Lebanon's youth during the immediate postwar era, where they felt like they did not belong to a nation that was built on values such as peace, prosperity, beauty, and progress. All elements of nationhood and 'being Lebanese' were sacrificed at the altar of keeping the country safe from any future civil wars. The continuation of time and space was (metaphorically) held still by the bureaucracy and politics which tries to keep every member of the ruling elite happy and rich; endlessly exploiting the status quo they have long established. The only serious change that was advocated for by the political elite was when it related to 'the other', namely Syria's evacuation after a series of protests led by the 14 March movement, and the opposing masses of the 8 March movement that supported the role Syria played in Lebanon. When it's a matter of internal political stability, any form of protest and civil disobedience was faced by strong opposition from the state. Most recently, the 'You Stink' movement which was driven by the government's incompetence to find a solution to the garbage crisis that affected almost every single member of society, regardless of religion, political affiliation, and region.

Through several means, members of generation postmemory were told that change in Lebanon is practically impossible, and that it's better to leave things the way they are because that's how the country was built. The reality of today's youth is directly shaped by a past they had no control over. One can assume that individuals of generation postmemory have mostly re-appropriated ideas of change and reformation from their education or experience abroad, which is why many have accused them of working for foreign governments, though this falls outside the scope of this research and would be a better fit for an in-depth anthropological study on that matter. For many of Lebanon's youth, the idea of change and disturbing the status quo is foreign and at times even impossible to achieve.

On the other hand, some individuals from generation postmemory have had a better experience growing up in terms of dealing with the remnants of the war in their homes, as they were lucky enough to be born and raised into families that allowed such discussion to occur at home. Though, as mentioned earlier, this process could be very episodic and reductive in the way it describes the war, especially that it is highly specific to the parents' involvement and the way they transmit their memories to their children.

Looking at how the filmmakers narrated the civil war, I realize that none of them (except for *Lebanon Wins the Worldcup*) directly addresses the war or even the violence, but rather they managed to develop an atmosphere where the viewer is questioning what really had happened in that film that made the protagonists act that way. Meaning, the symbolically charged films could easily be viewed and understood by anyone from around the world, but the character of the civil war will remain visible to Lebanese viewer.

Another thing that was noticeable was the recurring pattern of adults being preoccupied with watching television.

POSTWAR LEBANESE ADULTS WATCHING TELEVISION

This highlights the importance of the television set in bringing the average Lebanese family together during the immediate postwar era, as well as its role in distracting viewers from the memories of the war either by misinformation, elimination, or simply ingrown indifference. It could be assumed that the memories of the parents were indirectly shaped by the narrative provided by whichever television station they watched.

Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory talks about the experiences of those who grow up dominated by the narratives they have heard of events that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can neither be fully understood nor recreated. In Lebanon, the condition of postmemory is

impoverished by the collective amnesia that surrounds the civil war and by the fragmented public sphere in which narratives consolidating group identification circulate. Postmemory allows us to think about a generational structure of memory, and how it is transmitted across time and space, where it shapes and inflicts who we are as individuals and as members of a bigger societal circle.

According to Hirsch, postmemory is a "powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object source is mediated, not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation." (Hirsch, 2016, YouTube) This mediation process acts simultaneously to both, connect future generations to their collective past and to distance them from it. The reason why this happens is that it helps solidify one's conceptions about their social identity, traditions, and temporal continuity within history, while at the same time it can imprison them within historical discourses that have "silenced them verbally" and "can be neither understood nor re-created." Lebanese youth are constantly trying to realize their identity in the present, while being stuck with what they've been told about their past, and not sure about who they'll be in the future.

Generation of postmemory relies on a number of sources to develop a narrative on the civil war: stories they have heard from their surrounding social circle, private communications, media and documents, museums, memorials, monuments, history books, and the bullet holes that still live in most Beiruti buildings. There are also many nuanced ways in which postmemory individuals learn about the civil war, like when they are named after a martyr or a political leader as a form of commemorating the heroism and sacrifice that person represents to their parents and thus becomes attached to that 'martyr' through a socio-political bond that affects the individual's relationship with others. One could recall those who are named 'Bachir' after the late president Bachir Gemayel, and all who are named 'Kamal' after socialist leader Kamal Jumblatt. The

dynamic production of memoryscapes relies heavily on the visual landscapes and oral narratives surrounding these individuals, in their “search for meaning, historical truth, and identity” as they continue to form everyday perceptions, conversations, and spatial practices (Larkin, 2010).

History is not linear, as it is constantly being negotiated, reconstructed and challenged. In Craig Larkin’s *Beyond the War? The Lebanese Postmemory Experience* he argues that most academic research did not quite “engage critically with everyday processes of social transmission and internalization,” (Larkin, 2010) and insists on the idea that “traumatic historical events, whether distanced by time or obfuscated by political design, cannot be easily buried, erased, or forgotten but instead are reworked and renegotiated within present contexts, discursive spheres, and everyday encounters.” Thus, the idea of a complete shutdown of memory is challenged, where social anthropologist Iwona Irwin-Zarecka talks of ‘displaced versions of the past’ rather than process of forgetting or social amnesia, recognizing that “when we set out to listen to historical silences, we are forced to listen to a great deal of noise” (Irwin-Zarecka, 2017). In the case of Lebanon, it was the noise of modernization of all sectors, economic stability, reconstruction, and a very bright future for everyone. There was a widening gap between a state-sanctioned policy of amnesia and private memories of individuals and memories that are still filled with hatred, vengeance, pain, and trauma.

Therefore, the official policy of ‘silence’ that marked the postwar era must not be mistaken with collective amnesia, but rather represents “one discursive approach to the past among competing and conflicting historical narratives.” (Larkin, 2010) Also, Larkin describes postmemory as a “residual form of memory which carries and connects with the pain of others, suffusing temporal frames and liminal positions”. No one simply forgets their dead, they learn

how to deal with the idea of their absence, but that does not mean that the enmity towards the opposite side is resolved, instead, it survives and is taught and inherited.

In an attempt to distract the public from the war, many narratives and stories were aimed towards reinvigorating a sense of common national patriotism, specifically aimed at the youth. For example, there was an attempt to highlight Lebanon's Phoenician legacy, especially after UNESCO announced in 2005 that it will recognize Nahr El Kaleb as a global cultural heritage site, upon which Lebanese Minister of Culture Tarek Mitri said: "Instead of always reflecting on a fragmented past based on the Civil War, Lebanese can now look further back and realize a far deeper and common history that unites them all."

Another narrative employed was Hizbollah's rhetoric of resistance and the triad of the army, people, and resistance (*Al Jaysh, Al Shaeb, Wa Al Muqawama*). In that, the Islamic party had grown to become a vanguard of Lebanese nationalism, something which had led anyone to criticize the party's actions to be rendered and labeled as 'un-Lebanese' or unpatriotic.

One of the main arenas through which postwar government aimed to strengthen national affiliation is education. The Ta'if accord called for "reconsidering the developing curricula so they would strengthen national affiliation, the national melting-pot and spiritual and cultural openness" and for achieving "uniformity in books in the fields of history and national education." The result was a monotonous and predetermined formal history found in Lebanon's sanctioned history books, where they attempt to convey ultimate truths, rather than show the complexities of the happenings of the conflict. The books were too diplomatic in the way they narrate Lebanese history, especially as they create this imaginary land where Lebanese people live in peace and coexist with their differences, and sectarian conflicts are easily attributed to foreign interventions. In the words of Howard Zinn (2010): "What we call the rise of democracy

in the world means that force is replaced by deception (education) as the chief method for keeping society the way it is”.

One moment when this becomes visible is at the ‘end of history’, where the curriculum literally ends on the 1943 independence of Lebanon, and thus no mention of events afterward. There simply is no agreement over the question of who won or lost in the civil war, therefore the schools were only allowed to teach up until the remote past of Lebanon.

These students were left with an incomplete national narrative, one that does not unify and give them a sense of self as citizens of one nation. The result was a gap between ‘imagined postwar recovery’ and the reality of ‘simmering sectarian resentments and communal grievances’ (Larkin), or as Haughbolle says: “The war and its unresolved memories have created a disjuncture between personal experience and national history and left them suspended in time, afraid of looking back and wary of the future” (Haugbolle, 2010).

As for learning about the war through media, one could recall the 15-part documentary series produced by Qatari news network Al-Jazeera titled *The War of Lebanon*. The documentary offered Lebanese viewers a rare opportunity where they get to hear and learn about the civil war not from the politicians or militia warlords, but rather from historians, academics, researchers, and members of the political body who weren’t part of the violence. The Qatari funded documentary took 2 years to finish and cost several hundred thousand dollars, and was exclusively screened on Al-Jazeera, then later on the National Broadcast Network (NBN, a Lebanese television station that is affiliated with the Lebanese Shiite AMAL movement and is owned by the Speaker of the Parliament of Lebanon since 1992, Nabih Berri), as well as being illegally distributed on YouTube and pirated DVDs. The documentary contains a wealth of never-seen archive material, whether televised footage, still photographs, historical documents,

as well as a series of interviews and testimonies from some who took direct and active part of the military and political conflict. In addition, the documentary also included the testimonies of independent observers, victims, journalists, academics, historians, and researchers. Interestingly, the documentary did not cause any major waves of uproar and objection from the viewers, mainly because it was able to convey a somewhat complete picture of Lebanon's modern history and convey it in a relatively objective and unbiased manner (each episode ran for around 45 minutes, giving it the time needed to explore and elaborate on multiple aspects of the story; something which would not be possible in cinema). Though, I did not have access to the version of the documentary that NBN screened, to compare and see whether any parts that include AMAL movement's involvement in the war have been removed or altered. There were several other attempts to document the war, namely Al-Manar (television station affiliated with Hizbollah) and Al-Mayadeen News Network, though none were as immersive and broad as *War of Lebanon*.

Though, while researching, something interesting came up which are the comments found underneath the 15-part documentary found on YouTube. There are three things that stood out in particular: the frequency of comments (latest one was posted a month ago), the type of discussion, and the aliases of users. The comments section (which can be moderated by the original poster of the video) contains posts that were put around a month ago, meaning that new users are continuously visiting this video to learn more about the civil war and bring their own understanding from the current sociopolitical situation to make interpretations about what caused the war or to reply to someone who has previously commented. Even when some agree that the Lebanese sectarian identity is at the root of the conflict, it is important to note the variety of interpretations to what caused the wars: the Shiite's attachment to Iran, the Sunni-Wahhabi

involvement, the Palestinians, the Christians being too West oriented, and the Muslims VS Christians rhetoric. The demographic study of those commenters could be the topic of another research, but it goes to show that, to some extent, publicly broadcasting documentaries and films about the war does not reignite the war itself, but rather reinitiate the discussion needed to bring members of society together (even when it is done through anonymous aliases).

Another film that informed most of the postwar millennials about the war would be Ziad Doueiry's *West Beyrouth*, which was the first Arabic film to be released worldwide. The film is not strictly a war film, but rather a semi-autobiographical account that tells the story of two teenage boys, Tariq and Omar, growing up during the early stages of the war and throughout its development. The overarching narrative is driven by the mundane every-day life of those two kids and how they have come to terms with the religious schisms that manifest in the division of Beirut. The director made sure to portray the Lebanese as victims of this tragedy rather than perpetrators. What Doueiry did was, essentially, "retrieve innocent moments of the war and delete burdensome ones, showing a 'war without blood' like the 'characters of a cartoon strip'" (Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 129). For the most part of the film, Doueiry placed the war in the background where only its echo affects the dwellings of Tarek and Omar as they interact with Beirut and get on with their daily life. The war was represented as more of a trauma than a conflict with active players who are committing murders and leaving unhealed scars on all society.

By channeling sympathy towards the protagonists, Lebanese viewers saw themselves in the confusion and uneasiness that Tarek and Omar were facing as the conflict escalated, triggering in the process an affective memory for them. The main cause for the conflict remained muddled within the aesthetics and narrative of the film, and at times it seems that they don't even

matter for the progress of the events. What the director chose to do instead is to create an overwhelming tragedy that affected all members of society, Christians, and Muslims, in an effort to unify them. Many argue that grief and mourning are far more effective at bringing the public around a unifying identity, like for example Ernest Renan who once pointed out that "suffering in common unifies more than joy does". Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort". By positing the war in the background of the film and focusing more on the suffering, *West Beyrouth* has created its own process of memory making, one that is highly dependent on amnesia (more specifically a nostalgia to a past that is not particularly well defined or known). Another moment when Doueiry brings the audience to communal tragedy rather than conflict is the shelter scene. Lastly, there's Um Walid, another character in the film who rejects the sectarian face of the war, where she reminisces to the good old days of the city: "Your great days are missed Beirut." Therefore, it could be said that *West Beyrouth* does not serve its purpose as a remembrance artifact as its narrative is constructed around Lebanon's cultural history aesthetically embedded with national pride. In that sense, the narrative of the film has replaced political history with cultural history "in an attempt to conjure up a new nationalism for Lebanon" (Haugbolle, *War and Memory*, 198).

Another way millennials could have learned about the civil war is through Ziad Rahbani's postwar plays, namely "*Bikhsous el Karameh wel Shaab el Aaneed*" (1993) and "*Lawla Fas'hat el Amal*" (1994), where they address the postwar context in a somewhat absurd and comedic way, offering a satirical view to the banality of the war and the causes that people who were involved fought for.

By now, it could be said that the main way through which Lebanese postwar millennials formed a story around the civil war is from what they heard from their parents and immediate social circle. Whether through a martyr's picture on the wall, a physical wound or through imagined geographical borders, their imagination is more intimate, immediate, and leaves a long-lasting impact.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: MEMORY ON DEMAND

While none of the studied films provide a detailed and historiographic account of the civil war, they all must be looked at as “documents that put forth claims regarding a particular historical truth, which may then be subjected to verification, explanation, and judgment” (Roger Simon, 8). To imagine the potential for social transformation in Lebanon, these films must create the pedagogical space needed to limit the barriers of identity politics and forge new ones. Also, there needs to be a fundamental mindset change to establish policies and initiatives that encourage speaking out loud about the war. Society must be given the legal framework through which it enables it to claim responsibility for its own wrongdoings during the war. It is through cultural expression that societies transition from being labeled as ‘post-conflict’ societies just because the violence ended, to truly becoming ‘post-conflict’ in the sense that individuals have learned to accept the other and cooperate for the future.

Reclaiming the narrative of the story through means of filming and documenting, equips citizens of postwar societies with the civic power needed to subvert the established discourse of amnesia, which enforced the status quo on several levels. The original 1888 Kodak camera had once empowered regular citizens to document and memorialize their lives, where, according to Nancy Martha, the author of *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, it “allowed people…to arrange their lives in such a way that painful or unpleasant aspects were systematically erased.” In Lebanon’s case, media technology can potentially allow the ‘powerless’ to tell their stories and tales from their own perspective, where they would position themselves vis-à-vis the state when

they enter the battle for legitimacy, identity formation, and authority. Recuperating the narrative among society would give a new sense of 'us' and identity, where every citizen becomes that 'hero' they are looking for to change the status quo: stories bring people together around one affiliation and purpose. Media technology promises to not only revolutionize the way societies recall the past, but also live their present, and create their future.

If a system is corrupt, then the people who adhere to the system and are incentivized by this system are not criminals they are victims and the system itself must be tried. Considering how the system works through a series of compartmentalized functions as far as information, media, and education, the only way to figure out what and how the system exists is if everybody said what they did, by acknowledging their participation in violence and sharing it.

It appears that short films that were made by postmemory filmmakers might not have established the groundbreaking narrative that will help fix society's ails, after all, the filmmakers were being taught and influenced by the same feature filmmakers who fell into the trap of foreign funding. Though, this proves there is promising potential in investing in the short filmmaking industry. The relatively limited sample that was studied for this research shows that creative ecosystem allows for the democratization of narrative in post-conflict societies, where multiple voices can be visualized and consumed at ease.

The narrative provided by postmemory filmmakers could be seen to be a reaction either towards previous films that have been made, or the postwar socio-political atmosphere that put the country in a sociopolitical gridlock and drove it to a vicious cycle of identity crisis and denial. As a matter of fact, the narrative provided by postmemory filmmakers is not one that is seeking the 'truth' of what really happened, but instead highlights millennials' sensation of loss and non-belonging in a country still embroiled in violence.

Media technology will transform the way we create, recall, and experience memories, forgettance, and nostalgia. In the not so distant past, feeling nostalgic to a certain memory required an external trigger to invigorate buried emotions and feelings: a photograph, a smell, or even a song. Though, in today's technologically enabled society we can summon our memories and feel nostalgic towards them, on demand. The social media platform Facebook reminds you every day with notification about a memory you've shared with a friend, even when you don't explicitly ask to be reminded. Though, while most of today's technologies and services allow users to have a look back at the past, some have been developed to put the user right inside of the memory. Ironically, forgetting will soon be a thing of the past.

The visual arts were long constricted to 2-dimensional perspective, as well as being limited to portraying a single point of view, though with the rise of 3-D graphics, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), viewers can now experience old photographs/videos in a whole new manner. Moreover, Virtual Reality technology promises to democratize perspective just as much as technological devices such as smartphones do to democratizing the narrative. As VR technology becomes more efficient, cheaper, and reliable, more of us would be able to recreate memories exactly the way we remember them – in this case it would be prewar Beirut. Also, as scientists continue to make strides towards mapping brain activity triggered by particular memories, more of those are becoming digitized and therefore could be replicated, stored, shared, inherited, and even manipulated.

In this utopian future, where memories no longer are prone to deterioration and mental decay, we must be aware of the dangers that come with it, both for the sake of our psychological state and the fact that we live in the present.

In conclusion, I would say that creating a narrative around a particular historical event does not require a common consensus around the details of that happening, but instead it is the multiplicity of voices and the ability to express which paves the way towards creating the space needed for social rejuvenation.

It could be predicted that the next conflict will be narrated from a very personal point of view, and in real-time. Meaning, future conflicts will be viewed and shared from a first-person point of view, along with the ability to document any moment of history for eternity, so that future generations can visually and audibly experience it firsthand.

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