



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

VISIONS OF THE SOUTH:  
PRECARITY AND THE “GOOD LIFE” IN THE VISUAL  
CULTURE OF TYRE

by  
REEM TAYSEER JOUDI

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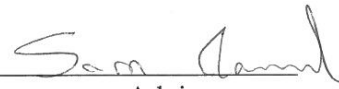
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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Reem Tayseer Joudi

for

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Title: Visions of the South: Precarity and the “Good Life” in the Visual Culture of Tyre

This thesis examines and unpacks the visual culture of Tyre, a city in south Lebanon, through three different sites: the material city-space; El-Buss refugee camp—a Palestinian camp that is part of the city’s urban fabric; and the online digital platform Instagram. It examines the ways in which the city and its visual landscape are imagined, re-imagined and re-assembled, highlighting two main vectors: precarity and the “good life”.

Building upon the work of Judith Naeff (2018) and Lauren Berlant (2011), the thesis argues that precarity emerges on three fronts: as an experience of war and insecurity, as an identitarian struggle *vis-à-vis* a contested Shia milieu in the city, and as an economic and labor condition symptomatic of postwar political-sectarian frameworks. The “good life” is a similarly multi-faceted notion: it is the fantasy of upward mobility; the fantasy of clean beaches and curated leisure spaces; and the fantasy of

The thesis examines elements of Tyre’s diverse visual landscape—its billboards, flags, posters, digital representations— through the vectors of precarity and the “good life”, looking at the narratives and imaginaries of the city that emerge. It finds that the city’s visual landscape is governed by complex power structures that re-shape the material and imagined space along identitarian and ideological lines. It also finds that the dialectic of the “good life” and precarity that shapes the city’s visual culture is symptomatic of a postwar, neoliberal moment in which the present feels suspended; trapped between an unresolved past and an uncertain future.

Keywords: Precarity, “Good Life”, Space, Visual Culture, Instagram, Refugee Camps, Palestine, Shia milieu

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*To my parents — my love, and immense gratitude for the “good life” and  
freedom you have given me*

*To Ali — your memory is in my heart, and in every corner of Tyre*



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The intellectual motivation for this project came about following a conversation with a friend. It was their first time visiting Lebanon and were looking forward to exploring as many of the country's different regions as they could. They were particularly keen on visiting Tyre, the southern Lebanese city located less than 20 kilometers from Lebanon's border with Occupied Palestine/Israel. The city is home to clean stretches of public beach, as well as important archaeological sites from Roman and Crusader times. However, the reason for their interest was attributed to Instagram; more specifically, they were following a page called "Live Love Tyre" that presented a curated gallery of the city. "The beaches look fantastic," they remarked.

As we drove toward the city from Beirut, the highway slowly transformed into a space dotted with billboards and flags displaying Shia political groups' Amal and Hezbollah's respective logos. As we entered Tyre, the ubiquity of these visual culture markers took my friend aback. "This is not what I expected," was the first remark that slipped out of their mouth. That moment of realization in which the city-space and its online representations did not map onto my friend's imaginaries of Tyre began my inquiry into the dynamics of the city's visual culture.

## **A. Studying Visual Culture**

The study of the visual culture of cities understands culture as a way of life and everyday experience. It refers to “the ethics and politics, aesthetics and epistemology of seeing and being seen” (Mitchell 2002: 166) on a microcosmic level, which consequently makes it an important lens to study how power shapes and structures cities, as well as individual interactions within them. Visual cultural production also stands as witness to and an expression of changing times. Cities can undergo traumatic experiences of war; have their landscape altered by globalization; contend with the tensions of diaspora, longing and belonging; and address shifting discourses on national identity and memory. These changes oftentimes express themselves in a visual manner, whether in public spaces, private quarters or on digital platforms.

The modern city is also plagued by inequalities regarding access to resources, wealth distribution, and questions of visibility and recognition. Certain spaces are seen as peripheral and liminal and are consequently rendered invisible in representations of the city, whilst other spaces - often those that present upscale neighborhoods or sanitized enclaves- are elevated. This dialectic of visibility also emerges in the city’s visual culture, as some markers are brought to the fore as desirable at the expense of others deemed less so. The way representations of the city are shaped and promoted reflects complex power hierarchies. Henri Lefebvre (1991) notes how authorities use their influence to shape cities in a way that reflects their ideologies and interests. That said, elite groups’ ability to control narratives is challenged by the emergence of media technologies that place the image-making process in the hands of citizens who are able to produce and circulate their representations of the city on various platforms. These

mediated representations can echo elite imaginaries of city space, diverge from them, or reflect a different dynamic along the spectrum.

## **B. Sites of Study**

This thesis interrogates and analyzes the various elements that color Tyre's visual landscape, namely flags, posters, billboards, and graffiti/street art. In light of the introductory anecdote, and in an effort to understand the city's visual culture practices from a holistic perspective, I examine three different sites of study: the city-space, El-Buss refugee camp, and the Instagram account "Live Love Tyre". The selection allows me to address and unpack various nuances and tensions that appear in a city's visual culture. First, in choosing Tyre, I am intellectually mapping out mediated visual practices in spaces beyond the capital city, Beirut. Tyre is seen as peripheral *vis-à-vis* the center Beirut for two, main reasons: its geographic proximity to the southernmost point of the Lebanese border; and second, its slow socioeconomic development relative to the capital, which was brought about following the civil war, Israeli occupation of south Lebanon (1982-2000) and the subsequent lack of government funds that were channeled to the region.

The center-periphery dynamic is one that I grapple with throughout the thesis. In *The Make Believe Space*, Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012) looks at the affective relationships that emerge in postwar environments, reconceptualizing the link between human beings and space. Navaro-Yashin employs the analytic category of the "make-believe space" for her ethnographic study on the Turkish Republic of northern Cyprus, an unrecognized state by official definitions. The make-believe for Navaro-Yashin refers to material

practices and political imagination, “the imagination that goes into fabricating something is part and parcel here of the materiality of this manufacture, a process of making-and-believing, or believing-and-making, at one and the same time” (2012:6).

The dynamic of center-and-periphery that I explore in the thesis is both a material and imaginative process that marks Tyre as peripheral due to its geography and sociopolitically imagines it as an abject part of the nation. The processes of mapping and re-mapping spatial imaginaries and putting together various elements of a space’s visual culture are exercises in making-and-believing. I am interested in exploring the narratives that emerge as a result, the nature of aesthetic practices in Tyre, what is made visible and what is rendered invisible as a result.

My second site of study is El-Buss Palestinian refugee camp, a space that is tied to Tyre’s urban and economic fabrics, but which is often seen as peripheral, removed from Lebanese state control and subject to a different identitarian logic. More specifically, it is a space that grapples with Palestinian-ness and what that means on political and ideological fronts. I examine the visual culture that is present in the camp as a way to understand the broader sociopolitical narratives that emerge. El-Buss becomes a periphery within a periphery; another iteration of a make-believe space.

My final site of study is the Instagram account “Live Love Tyre”. I focus on the images posted on the page, examining the ways in which they image and re-imagine the city; take it part and piece it back together for a virtual audience to consume. What does it mean for my friend to be surprised at the ubiquity of political flags and posters in the city? Are these visual markers absent from “Live Love Tyre’s” page, and if so, why?

What does it mean for a page to claim it “lives” and “loves” the city when placed in conversation with the city’s material space?

### **C. Precarity and the “Good Life”**

I argue that the various visual culture representations in Tyre, El-Buss, and on “Live Love Tyre” grapple with a dialectic of precarity and the “good life”. These two spatial-temporal vectors are at the center of the study, shaping Tyre’s visual culture. They are spatial because both impact how the city is imagined and experienced; they are temporal because they speak to or re-configure particular moments in time.

Precarity emerges in three distinct ways: as an experience of war and insecurity, as an exercise in identity-making, and as a descriptor for economic and labor conditions. The Lebanese civil war and Israeli occupation of south Lebanon are key events that I unpack, looking at the ways in which they shaped Tyre’s sociopolitical scene during and following the war and occupation.

The posters and flags that took my friend aback in the opening anecdote were expressly linked to Amal Movement and Hezbollah, the two prominent Shia political groups in the country. The link between sectarian (expressly Shia) identity and the city’s visual culture is an important dynamic that I unpack, arguing that the formation of a contested Shia milieu in the city is, in and of itself, a precarious process. What does it mean to have many photos displaying leaders from Amal and Hezbollah? What is the logic behind their occupation of Tyre’s public spaces? These are questions that I examine in detail.

Precarity also describes economic and labor conditions that are symptomatic of a postwar, sectarian power-sharing structure that hinder the pursuit of a good life and upward mobility. Sectarianism, as Judith Naeff (2018) argues, “denotes two interrelated phenomena. On the one hand, social sectarianism refers to the social system in which religious denomination...provides the most important basis for... community and identity. On the other hand, political sectarianism denotes a system of power sharing” (11). Both social and political sectarianism are mutually reinforcing, insofar as the former are organized within sectarian communities, re-establishing clientelist relations. How, then does Tyre’s visual culture reflect this logic of precarity?

The second spatial-temporal vector I look at is that of the “good life”. I build upon Lauren Berlant’s work in *Cruel Optimism* and examine what a good life means in the city’s visual culture and within a broader neoliberal context. I unpack the dialectic that emerges between precarity and the “good life” through the various sites of study. My aim is to complicate what a “good life” could mean: is it Tyre’s beaches; is it tied to particular spaces within the city, and if so, what are the visual markers that set them apart; is it the billboards, flags and posters that decorate the city’s public spaces, and if so, how do they define a “good life”?

My aim is to deconstruct a positivist view that precarity is inherently “bad” and “good life” is inherently “good”. The lines between both are decidedly blurry, particularly when it comes to the visual culture of a city beset with complex political, ideological, and identitarian narratives.

#### **D. A Note on Space**

The thesis builds upon the work of scholars like Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Rancière. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991) notes that social space is not a given nor a simple object, but the result of multiple factors and a sequence of events (73). While the city has been composed and fashioned by individuals, it is not an intentional object of art for Lefebvre, but a social space in which interactions are key. Moreover, the production of visual culture and materiality in the city also reflects the close relationship between state power and urbanization, as well as the influence of capital and how it shapes urban practices. Thus, the project will address how Tyre's visual culture reflect power relations, shifting urbanization trends, ideological orientations, and the influence of capital.

The process of imagining the city assumes a certain kind of thought experiment that transcends the physical elements of the space. James Donald ( 2003 ) argues that “the city is not a problem that can be solved. It is the eternal impossible question of how we strangers can live together” (180). Narratives about cities “conjure up the space of the city through the projection” of “narrative images”, thus the question becomes less about the accuracy of one's imagination and more concerned with what happens if one sees the city in a particular way. The production of Tyre on the Instagram account “Live Love Tyre” reflects a curatorial thought experiment that produces a visual narrative of the city that differs from representations within it. The thesis also interrogates the implications of viewing the city in the way that the account promotes.

## **E. Methodology**

I begin my project from an embedded perspective, as someone with close personal and familial ties to the city. This project was inspired by my desire to explore the seemingly paradoxical and contradictory elements of Tyre's visual culture, as pointed out by my friend. The advertisement billboards, the posters of martyrs, the political flags and politicians' posters — these form the main visual elements that overwhelm an untrained observer's eye. Yet, I often find myself skipping over the visual culture elements I referred to. Instead, I find myself clicking the city "on" and "off", acknowledging certain elements of Tyre's visual landscape while turning off others.

As a result, I find myself interrogating my role as a "native" observer. On the one hand, my role is to challenge western/"outsider" views of Tyre; views that either define it as a dangerous and abject space, or see it as a leisure space. On the other hand, my "nativeness" is influenced by my Western education, my time living abroad, and the ways in which I identify within Lebanon's complex political-sectarian makeup. Thus, rather than boxing the native observer into a limited category, I look to deconstruct it throughout the thesis.

Given the diversity of the three sites I am exploring, I employ a multi-method approach. First, I collected photographs of political party posters, flags, martyr posters, and billboards that were located around the city and within El-Buss camp between December 2017 and March 2018. I located the images geographically on a map of the city, focusing on the significance of their location, the figures they depict, the terminology they adopt, and their general aesthetics features, including style, font, and colors, in order to understand how they contend with precarity and the "good life".



Second, I looked at the images posted on “Live Love Tyre’s” Instagram page from June 2017 until March 2018, as June is considered a peak season in the summer and individuals tend to frequent Tyre more often. I analyzed the general themes that emerged, the images’ overall aesthetics, the discourse and linguistic style of captions, and how the dialectic of precarity and the “good life” emerges through account.

Since accounts are updated daily with multiple photos, it is difficult to assemble a manageable up-to-date sample of the images on the aforementioned account. Thus, I looked at “Live Love Tyre” from a holistic perspective within the given timeframe, and will analyze randomly selected photographs that reflected the emergent themes and discourses.

## **F. Roadmap**

This section offers a brief roadmap of the chapters to come. Chapter II lays the theoretical groundwork for the study, unpacking the various iterations of precarity that emerge. Chapter III analyzes the material city space, noting the various ideologies that mark Tyre’s visual landscape. Chapter IV shifts the lens to El-Buss refugee camp, examining its complex visual culture, the ways in which it is similar to or different to the rest of the city, and the ways in which precarity and the “good life” appear in the space. Chapter V deconstructs images on the Instagram account “Live Love Tyre”, highlighting the ways in which the curated gallery re-imagines the city space. The last chapter reflects upon the previous analyses, deconstructing the dialectic between the “good life”, precarity, and their implications.

## CHAPTER II

### VISUAL CULTURE IN THE PRECARIOUS CITY

#### **A. Framing Precarity:**

This study looks at the various ways in which the southern Lebanese city of Tyre is imagined and experienced through an exploration of its different visual culture elements in offline and online contexts. What are the visual objects that are found around the city? How can we read them as individual texts and in relation to the broader context of the city-space? What are the various narratives that emerge around them? How are they mediated and re-mediated through digital technologies? These are all questions that frame the following chapters and sites of study, acting as intellectual starting points from which to consider the visual and spatial characteristics of a city in south Lebanon.

The sites of study I look at require an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. I look at the city-space of Tyre, focusing on the visual elements—posters, billboards, and flags—that mark its space; the visual culture of El Buss Palestinian refugee camp within the city, an area ideologically demarcated as “other”; and online representations of the city on Instagram. A key text I am building upon is Judith Naeff’s (2018) *Precarious Imaginaries of Beirut*, a recent addition to a large corpus of work on cultural production in post-war Beirut. Using the Lebanese capital city as her site of study, Naeff traces the evolution of how the city is imagined, experienced, and represented over a 20 year period (1995-2015). Her argument rests on a theory she terms the “suspended now”, a

spatial-temporal vector that frames everyday practices in the city. The “suspended now” is a prolonged present moment that evokes delay and postponement, caused by an oscillation between past and future.

The past in postwar Beirut is marked by unresolvedness: lingering questions on the fate of the disappeared, an amnesty law that protects militiamen and political leaders from trial, and memories of violence and loss that have not been processed on collective and individual levels. As Naeff notes, “while this lack of closure means that the past seriously affects the present, it also paradoxically impedes present access to the past” (2018: 39). On the other hand, the future is shaped by volatility and uncertainty. Naeff explores a multitude of artistic and literary works that reflect this state such as Mona Hatoum’s installation *Balançoires*, Ghassan Salhab’s film *The Last Man* and Rayyane Tabet’s permanent installation *Fossils* in Amman, Jordan. She notes that a volatile “horizon of expectation...[creates] a condition of perpetually being on the verge of imminent violence” (Naeff 2018: 52).

Naeff goes on to add a spatial dimension to her notion of the “suspended now”, arguing that time, urban imaginaries and social spaces cannot exist separately from each other. Invoking Russian philosopher Michael Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope, she identifies two that frame Beirut’s experience: the city in transition and the precarious city. The former “tends to instigate modes of anticipation, waiting and distraction”, while the latter “is more likely to instigate modes of resilience and compassion” (Naeff 2018: 55). A precarious city is one that is constantly exposed to violence, impacting how individuals experience its space and how they relate to one another.

I find Naeff's discussion of the "suspended now" and precariousness productive for this project on Tyre. The "suspended now" is an accurate assessment not only of Beirut's present, but of that of the Lebanese nation as a whole as it attempts to negotiate an unresolved past and unknown future. It is a lived temporality that conditions how individuals negotiate their identities on personal and collective levels, as well as their relationship to the state. Much of the Civil War and post-Civil War scholarship has focused on the center—the capital Beirut—leaving many voices and conversations at the literal and metaphorical peripheries. However, the war affected the entire Lebanese nation to different degrees, and it is these various iterations that I am interested in exploring *vis-à-vis* the notion of precariousness. I look to unpack the term, identifying the different ways in which it is present in the city, along with the narratives that emerge and how they relate to visual practices. Together, the typologies of precariousness and their implications frame the discussion on visual culture in the chapters that follow.

I identify three iterations of precariousness that shape Tyre's sociopolitical context: the threat of war and insecurity; the formation of contested political-sectarian identities; and a precarious socio-economic makeup that conditions labor opportunities. These serve as an historical and political overview of the city, grounding analyses of its visual culture within existing temporal-spatial frameworks. In the following sections, I unpack how these manifestations of precarity shape and intersect with my observations of Tyre's visual culture. I interrogate the spatial aesthetics and experiences that arise as a result, identifying four main typologies: a dangerous south; an abject south; a Shia Tyre; and a Tyre of mutual coexistence. While these may appear to be paradoxical, they

overlap and converge at various points to imagine and condition representations of the city.

## **B. Manifestations of Precarity in the City:**

### **1. *Wars and Insecurity:***

Lebanon's recent history has been shaped by several experiences of war and insecurity that felt like massive disruptions of time, drastically reshaping how citizens and non-citizens, how individuals living within Lebanese borders related to their space and identities. In this section, I unpack a precariousness that emerged as a result of these experiences to violence, focusing on the Lebanese civil war as a key event. I map out several events that affected the south as a region and Tyre more specifically, followed by a discussion on the implications of this violence on imagined boundaries of space, place, and self.

The civil war is considered the most transformational event in the nation's recent history. It lasted between 1975 and 1990 (although its start and end dates remain contested), significantly crippling political, social, and economic activities and infrastructure in the country. The war came as a rupture to Lebanon's temporality, producing in its aftermath a "suspended now" and a complex political power structure. The country became a textbook case of sectarian violence and Civil War, with hundreds of thousands of lives lost and a similar, if not greater number of people disappeared and missing. Moreover, the physical infrastructure in the country was destroyed, necessitating an extensive postwar reconstruction plan that was not evenly distributed across the country (Leenders 2012).

The Israeli invasion and occupation of the south between 1982 and 2000 was a key turning point in the civil war and the region's history. The Litani River—a key water resource in south Lebanon—became a demarcation line that cut off the region from the rest of the country. Villages and cities past the river—Tyre included—were occupied by Israeli forces, thus creating a double exposure to violence that undoubtedly influenced how political subjectivities and identities were negotiated. Israel's occupation strategy established a security zone in the south, exploiting sectarian difference to gain local Lebanese collaborators—mainly Christian militia groups from various villages in the region (Meier 2015). Its main aim was to break down and eradicate Palestinian presence on Lebanese soil.

At the heart of the struggle in the south, and the civil war more generally, was the Palestinian cause. The *Nakba* (“catastrophe”) of 1948 dispossessed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes to create the state of Israel. Many settled in refugee camps across Lebanon; in Tyre, Palestinians settled in El-Buss and Rashidiyyeh camps, which were originally created to welcome Armenian refugees in 1936 (Dorai 2006: 95), becoming spaces of refuge re-painted and re-configured with stories and experiences of loss. The loss of a homeland, the struggle to reclaim it from the Israeli occupier, and the fight for a right to return became the ideological *raison d'être* of Palestinian resistance. The 1960s-1980s witnessed the strengthening of a Palestinian political presence in Lebanon and other Arab nations (most notably Jordan) that was crystallized by the formation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization [PLO] in 1964 (Hudson 1978), a group that fought for the liberation of the Occupied Territories through armed resistance.

The PLO's resistance movement had "widespread popular support among Lebanese in the coastal cities, especially among the poor and middle classes conscious of their Arab identity" (Hudson 1978: 264). The notions of pan-Arab nationalism, Arab unity, and sympathy towards the Palestinian cause were similarly popular in south Lebanon, impacting the formation of several groups' political consciousness and banding them around a common ideological cause. I focus on the development and crystallization of Shia identity specifically, given the relatively large demographic presence of Shia in the south in general and Tyre more specifically. There was an undoubtedly complex overlap between Palestinian presence in Lebanon and Shia political development and the Shia "socio-political revival and transformation, intersected with the emergence of the Palestinian guerrillas in Lebanon and the Shi'ites were drawn to join the Palestinian militant groups and to experience the practicality of these Palestinian movements" (Siklawi 2012: 5).

The sociopolitical transformation of Shia groups began in the 1960s and witnessed a shift in their position from marginal to significant within the Lebanese political apparatus. This was an incredibly important change for a sectarian group that was largely marginalized on social and political levels by the Lebanese state and though its beginnings were very closely linked to Palestinian resistance, the religious group's sociopolitical development during and after the civil war witnessed many important changes that will be explored in subsequent sections; most notably the appearance of Imam Musa al Sadr in Tyre and the subsequent formation of Amal Movement and Hezbollah.

The experiences of the civil war and the complex web of sociopolitical and ideological formations it gave rise to were heightened by the physical threat Israel posed. Following its intervention in the south, the risks of instability and violence became a lived reality that threatened an already fragile region with increasingly precarious conditions. Fragility, in this context, is a twofold concept: on the one hand, it refers to the south's peripherality *vis-à-vis* the center, Beirut; on the other hand, it reflects the vulnerability of a Shia political identity that was, at the time of occupation, searching for a coherent and cohesive ground. Israel sought to rid the Lebanese nation of Palestinian groups, and many Shia communities fled the precarity in the south as a result, choosing to either emigrate from the country or move to the capital Beirut. Thus, the vicious cycle of displacement that began with the Palestinian *Nakba* returned full circle during the Lebanese civil war.

Tyre was a central space of conflict. The city was diverse in its sectarian makeup, home to a Shia majority and a Sunni and Christian minority (Ajami 1986). That said, the presence of Israeli forces, Palestinian organizations, Christian militia groups, and Shia political movements often resulted in violent clashes. Death became a part of everyday life in the city and the lived precariousness was heightened by the presence of at times continuous, at times interrupted fighting. It is important to note here that sectarian violence was not the main source of clashes in Tyre; rather, it was Palestinian-Israeli tensions that had the greatest impact on the city's experience of precariousness. Through these experiences, individual subjectivities were formed against a threatening "other", whether be it the external enemy (Israel) or internal political opponents.



I argue that the precarity that shaped the civil war and Israeli occupation of the south also had an impact on individual bodies. Hundreds of thousands died as a result of internal fighting and the Israeli invasion, and hundreds of thousands went missing, their fates still unknown. Judith Butler (2004) notes that individuals are “constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of [their] bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of publicity at once assertive and exposed” (20). The body becomes a site on and through which the precarity of violent wars is experienced; the body is conditioned by its vulnerability to harm and the realization that it is fragile and susceptible to loss.

This is a loss that is experienced on individual and group levels. As Butler continues, “loss and vulnerability seem to follow from [our] being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure” (2004:20). Thus, precarity exists on physical and ideological levels, impacting how people express their political identities, how they construct their relationships to others and to the city, and how they maneuver within various spaces. Lebanon’s proximity to violence, on both national and regional levels, creates an increased exposure to harm and violence that reshapes how individuals perceive their past, present, and future, as well as their relations to one another. How violence impacts a space and how this shapes individual identitarian and political subjectivities varies, and it is these nuances that I am interested in exploring *vis-à-vis* Tyre.

## ***2. Precarious Identities***

The city of Tyre was similarly shaped by identitarian struggles that began before the onset of war and occupation. This is particularly noticeable in the shaping of a Shia milieu in the city; an ideological and physical space imbued with social and political meaning by various actors. This can be the state, political parties, artists, writers or other creatives. I focus the majority of my study on Shia identity in Tyre because it is relatively the largest and most visible presence in the city. However, as the following chapters will show, I also highlight other identities that exist in the city, in particular the Palestinian presence.

As previously mentioned, the crystallization of a Shia political identity and ideology began in the 1960s, following the arrival of Iranian cleric and leader Musa al Sadr to Tyre in 1959. He came to occupy a very important role in the city and the country more generally, working to create legitimate Shia political representation through the establishment of the *Mahrumin* movement. Sadr sought to work within the boundaries of the Lebanese state, striving to weaken the Communist influence that was spreading within Shia society in the 1970s and during the Lebanese Civil War. Though this was not always achievable for Sadr, he managed to present “all Shi’is as one subaltern group, the ‘deprived’ or ‘dispossessed’, thus channeling class conflicts by guiding them into institutional forms offered originally by the state” (Abisaab 2015: 150/1).

It was important for Sadr to establish a militant group that could “defend the Shi’i community from both government neglect and deprivation, and from the Israeli aggressions against the South” (Siklawi 2012: 7). Amal Movement was established as

the military branch, but its theoretical origins date back to the Palestinian *fida'i* (resistance fighter/martyr) experience in south Lebanon in the 1960s and 70s. However, sectarian divisions and the Israeli invasion altered Amal Movement's dynamics (Siklawi 2012: 8). The party attempted to take over areas in southern Lebanon that were dominated by Palestinian groups, establishing itself as the legitimate representative of Shia communities in the south and thus provoking tension with the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

The Civil War also created an opportunity for Shias to strengthen their political position through Syrian support of Amal and the success of the Iranian revolution. In 1982, Israel launched the Operation Peace for Galilee and invaded southern Lebanon following many clashes between the Israeli Defense Forces and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (Bickerton 2012). This historical moment provided the context for the emergence of a culture of "resistance" in Tyre. It was a culture that re-produced and re-inscribed Muslim Shia identities *vis-à-vis* the Lebanese nation, becoming a key political ideology around which the Shia community coalesced (Deeb 2008 : 372).

In 1985, members from Amal branched off to form Hezbollah, a group that defined itself in terms of its Shia identity, relationship to Iran and resistance against the Israeli enemy, which was seen as a form of *jihad* (Avon, Khatchadourian et. al, 2012: 12). Hezbollah emerged as the key military group fighting against the oppressor, Israel, and called itself the *muqawama* (Resistance). Here, resistance was adopted as an official ideology *and* a branding strategy, hence the capitalization of the word.

Despite the fact that Hezbollah and Amal emerged as key Shia Muslim parties in the city, they did not always see eye to eye. In fact, both their religious and political

messages often differed. This rivalry appeared during the “War of the Camps” otherwise known as Amal’s fight against the Palestinians in Beirut’s refugee camps, which began on May 19, 1985 and lasted until April 1987 (Siklawi 2012: 18). Hezbollah did not agree with Amal’s stance on Palestinians in Lebanon, given that the group identified the liberation of Palestine and fight against Israel among its main political objectives. In 1986, Amal attacked Rashidiyeh refugee camp in Tyre and the chasm between the party and Hezbollah grew larger, ending in rounds of fighting between the parties that began in West Beirut and the Shia Dahiya in 1988 and moved to south Lebanon, ending in 1990. Following these events and the weakening of Palestinian forces in Lebanon, Amal strengthened its role within the government. Concurrently, Hezbollah became more open towards Syria and established political, economic, and religious links with Iran (Siklawi 2012: 20).

The different ideologies and political agendas adopted by Amal and Hezbollah reflect the parties’ attempts at shaping a Shia milieu; an ideological and physical space (demarcated by the city and imaginaries of it) that inscribes Shia identity. The two political groups are respectively headed by Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri and Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, two leaders whose image is incredibly powerful and prominent in Tyre’s visual culture and which will be explored in depth in the coming chapters.

The historical formation of a Shia milieu and crystallization of Shia political identities was a contested practice, filled with experiences of war and violence. Thus, they were conceived under precarious conditions. The end of the Civil War came with the Ta’if Agreement in 1989, which heralded the principle of mutual coexistence or *‘al*

*aysh al-mushtarak*. The aim with this accord was to move Lebanon towards a peace process that would eliminate political sectarianism in the country; however, no timeframe was provided. The Taif Accord and the new Lebanese constitution that was created out of it “were riddled with ambiguities about routine decision making, both triggered numerous conflicts and stalemates among participants. Accordingly, the fundamental and historical divisions between Lebanon’s political elites made their way into the daily decision-making process” (Leenders 2012: 124). Thus, even the political phase that followed the Civil War was precarious and riddled with moments of suspension, inaction, and corruption.

### ***3. Precarious Living Conditions***

The previous discussion of precariousness reflects how the vulnerability to harm conditions behavior and everyday life in Tyre. In addition to the experience of physical violence, economic vulnerability and the precaritization of labor became an important theme that frames experiences of Tyre and south Lebanon. David Harvey’s (2001) notion of the spatial fix is a productive way to think through these themes. He notes that fixing refers to “capitalism’s insatiable drive to resolve its inner crisis tendencies by geographical expansion and geographical restructuring” (Harvey 2001: 24). In Lebanon, it was the dangers and insecurity of war, the volatility of an unimaginable future, as well as the neoliberal expansion policies adopted in the postwar period that resulted in precarious labor conditions.

The total collapse of effective governance and functioning institutions during the Civil War hindered people’s prospects of employment, thus skilled labor sought to leave

the country in search of better opportunities. Judith Naeff (2018) notes in her chapter on the “suspended now” that the “motif of the packed suitcase proliferates, especially in war novels and memoirs, denoting [this] loss of confidence in Beirut, where the experience of emigration or internal displacement always hovers over even those who stay put” (48). I argue that this loss of confidence and volatile future is a lived reality that permeates the general atmosphere in Lebanon.

In Tyre, as in other cities and villages in south Lebanon, many Shia communities left their homes as a result of political instability, looking for economic opportunities elsewhere. The uneven development of the Lebanese economy centralized power and capital in Beirut, causing many working class populations from Tyre and other areas to migrate to the urban center (Siklawi 2012: 5). Thus, the relationship between center and periphery on both physical and ideological levels was established. Moreover, many of the rural communities that migrated to Beirut lived in precarious conditions on the outskirts of the city, making social class a precondition of a center-periphery dialectic.

The force of emigration was similarly felt in regions with relatively large Shia populations like south Lebanon. Fawwaz Traboulsi (2014) notes three great waves of Shia emigration : in 1948 (following the Nakba), 1975 (after the start of the Civil War) and 1982 (Israel’s occupation of the south) to various locations in Africa, the Americas, Australia, and the Arab world. They became historical moments that disrupted a linear flow of time and community formation, contributing to a large Lebanese diaspora that was essential for the rebuilding of a nation impacted by war. Remittances were key economic factors that made up a significant percentage of Lebanon’s GDP; moreover, Lebanese businessmen and women who (quite literally) set up shop abroad found

themselves negotiating their political presence in the country through business deals (Traboulsi 2014: 24).

It is worthwhile to note the general political-economic framework within which these changes were happening. Traboulsi (2014) notes that Lebanon has been globalized since the 1950s, building its economy on free-market principles, the financial sector, and the development of a service industry (25). As the Civil War came to an end, a massive reconstruction effort was initiated in the country and this project was inextricably linked with Rafic Hariri, Prime Minister who headed the Lebanese government from 1992-2000 and from 2004-2005, until his (still unresolved) assassination in February of 2005. Traboulsi notes that “the project was set in motion with absolutely no attention paid to the lessons that might be learned from the civil war: that social inequalities play a role in exacerbating sectarian hatred and fanning the flames of conflict” (25). Hariri's reconstruction project rested on two main foundations: a policy based on developing the state's debt; and repurposing downtown Beirut into Solidere. He formed a very delicate web of power relations between Syria and Hezbollah in order to ensure the vision was implemented. However, Hariri's neoliberal bent had severe structural economic consequences: “the growing rentierization of the economy; emigration of skilled labour; growing trade deficit; and the strengthening of the monopolistic structure of the economic system” (Traboulsi 2014: 28-29).

The Civil War created precarious labor conditions that existed as a constant threat to the urban fabric of communities across the country. For south Lebanon, the war and Israeli Occupation resulted in large migrations to the capital Beirut, creating a dialectic

of center and periphery that becomes important for our analysis of Tyre and its visual culture in the coming chapters. It also meant that a large percentage of the population in Tyre and other cities in the south emigrated to various locations across the globe. This was in no way a phenomenon unique to the Civil War, but the violence and danger the historical period introduced created a precarious environment insofar as a future resolution seemed bleak and impossible. The neoliberal reconstruction project that came following the war was similarly important in creating precarious labour conditions by re-instituting a political system of power-sharing rife with sectarian impulses, clientelism and corruption.

Here, it is useful to bring up Laurent Berlant's notion of the "impasse". In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), she notes that "capitalist activity always induces destabilizing scenes of productive destruction—of resources and of lives being made and unmade according to the dictates and whims of the market" (192). The impasse becomes a space where the "urgencies of livelihood are worked out all over again, without the assurances of futurity..." (200), an affective state symptomatic of late capitalism that is deeply intertwined with narratives of loss: loss of a fantasies of a good life, loss of opportunities for upward mobility in the present moment. I adopt and extend her understanding of precariousness as affective engagement to examine how the logic of neoliberal development in Tyre —largely conditioned by the political status quo that emerged out of the Civil War— shapes imaginaries and mediated representations of the city.



### C. Visual Narratives

In the previous section, I unpacked the various manifestations of precarity that shape Tyre's sociopolitical context. Through my analysis of them, as well as my observations of the city's visual landscape, I identified four visual narratives that frame experiences and understandings of the city, which are elaborated in the following chapters: a dangerous south; an abject south; a Shia Tyre; and a Tyre of mutual coexistence. I employ the term narrative in its broadest sense, as a means of describing the various ways in which the city is perceived and imagined. These are ideologies that condition spatial and visual practices, as well as understandings of them.

The dangerous south narrative reflects the region's exposure to Israeli occupation and Civil War violence, a dual precariousness that made bodies, homes, and livelihoods vulnerable to harm. It is a south that was liberated by Hezbollah's troops almost a decade after the Ta'if Accord, marking the region's belated entrance into a postwar era. Consequently, the south was a region whose socioeconomic development was hindered. This narrative ties into the idea of the abject south. This is a region that sits at the geographical peripheries of the Lebanese nation, home to a large Shia majority that were historically disenfranchised from the country's political formation (Traboulsi 2014 & Siklawi 2012). Its abjectness is a result of both these factors combined, creating a space that is "otherized" *vis-à-vis* imaginaries of the Lebanese nation (Gopinath 2017). Here, the interplay of center and periphery becomes important, acting as one spatial axis through which this abjectness appears.

Tyre is located within this imagined south and is, to a certain extent, imagined through the two aforementioned narratives. It is also a city that is shaped by a majority

Shia presence, both demographically and in terms of political representation (though in Lebanon, these two factors are almost always intertwined). As mentioned in the section on precarious identities, the presence of Amal Movement and Hezbollah in the city, the violent encounters between them, and their establishment as the only legitimate political representation for Shia communities within Lebanese politics creates a contested Shia milieu within and through which ideological negotiations between both parties take place.

The “Shia city” narrative is countered by the “Tyre of mutual coexistence” narrative, which paints the city as an idyllic microcosm of the country, home to Shia, Sunni, and Christian communities inscribed within the same urban space. To an extent, the latter narrative is correct. Tyre’s experience with violence was less sectarian, shaped as it was by the Palestinian political presence in the city and the Shia political parties’ stance towards it. The ideology of *‘aysh al-mustharak* was historically sewn into the city, and emerged frayed, but not completely torn following the Civil War and Israeli Occupation. After all, the entire city was exposed to violence from an external enemy; Israel. That said, the narrative of mutual coexistence is also reflective of a complex power structure that masks inequalities. In the following chapters, I unpack the narrative by highlighting the neoliberal economic practices (particularly tourism) and political conditions that reveal injustice and inequality on visual and spatial levels in the city.

#### **D. The Aesthetics of Urban Space**

I have spent the first part of the chapter highlighting and working through a theoretical framework of precariousness that frames lived experiences in the city of

Tyre, and the region of south Lebanon more generally. Several threads can be parsed out from the discussion; namely, the significance of Shia identity formation, the impact of neoliberal economic practices, and the logic of center and periphery. In this section, I look to map out how these animate a discussion on visual culture and urban space.

This thesis builds on the groundbreaking work of Henri Lefebvre (1974) in *The Production of Space*, in which he defines space as socially produced. It is not a vacuum, unaffected by the social processes within it, but constituted and re-constituted because of them. His work inspired other thinkers, spurring academic interest in the relation between space and power. Michel de Certeau (1984) looks at how practices of everyday life condition the city-space, noting a distinction between space and place. For de Certeau, space is a practiced place, that “exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables” (1984: 117), as a result of the intersection of and multi-dimensionality of mobile elements that work together to shape a space. Walking, for example, represents a lack of place for de Certeau insofar as walking the city becomes an “immense social experience of lacking a place” (1984:103). Street numbers and signs become equally important markers of a space, conditioning the subject’s directionality and disposition with regards to a space.

Power is similarly an important vector that both Lefebvre and de Certeau consider. The production of space and social practices that relate to it are imbricated in a complex set of power relations, which similarly produce conditions of precariousness in the city. Questions of how a space is produced, who consumes it, how its boundaries are demarcated, and which spaces are privileged over others are all reflective of such dynamics. I am attentive to power structures in this study, which underpin the previous

discussion on precariousness in the city. I am also interested in looking at the visual culture that exists in the city as a site of serious inquiry into spatial imaginaries.

Jacques Rancière's (2013) *Politics of Aesthetics* is particularly useful for my study. He notes that aesthetics are the "delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (35). In defining aesthetics as such, Rancière relates it to social space and the power structures that frame it. Moreover, he underscores the politics of visibility in his definition, which is a key lens through which I frame my thesis. I look at offline and online representations of Tyre as sites of study, both of which grapple with a dialectic of visibility and invisibility and the privileging of certain spaces over others.

Rancière (2013) goes on to note that aesthetic practices are "forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they 'do' or 'make' from the standpoint of what is common to the community". Artistic practices in turn reflect both ways of doing and making that also intervene in the "relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility" (35). This allows me to think of the visual culture of Tyre in a productive manner. I look at billboards, flags, and posters that decorate the city. These are less definite categories for visual texts in the city and more elements that serve several purposes at the same time and symbolically mark the city. My aim is not to provide an extensive catalogue of visual culture in the city. Instead, I am looking at what these elements say about the city, how they interact with its urban space, how they speak to each other, and what they reveal about power relations.

The politics of production and consumption become important to examine in this regard. It presents, admittedly, a weakness in the study, given that a comprehensive identification and analysis of Tyre's visual culture producers was not always possible, particularly in the case of online representations of the city. That said, an awareness of the dynamics between production and consumption, along with their impact on the city space presents a window into the power relations that exist.

Not only am I viewing space as a social production, but I am also interested in deconstructing it, reading it in a discursive and intertextual manner. In this context, it becomes useful to employ Andreas Huyssen's notion of the urban palimpsest. For Huyssen (2003), the trope of the palimpsest is literary but remains a useful way to discuss "configurations of urban space and their unfolding in time" (7). The relationship between past and present is important to Huyssen, for reading the city as palimpsest is looking at how its urban fabric has changed over time—what factors reshaped it, what is written and re-written. I find this particularly productive when thinking about Tyre, a city that experienced war and occupation in the past, resulting in a precarious lived experience and a distorted temporal experience of a prolonged present moment—as Judith Naeff (2018) notes, a "suspended now". Moreover, these experiences affected the urban fabric of the city: destruction by war, consequent rebuilding and development efforts; the transformation of city-space as a result of political power struggles.

The city-space is constantly re-inscribed with meaning which reshapes its aesthetics, as well as how it is perceived and experienced. Reading urban palimpsests is similarly a negotiation with the politics of visibility; certain spaces within the city are

highlighted to the observer's eyes whilst others disappear out of focus. This process is guided by a dual logic: first, it relates back to de Certeau's perception of the city as discursive and physical space; second, it is symptomatic of rapidly changing digital technologies that have reshaped experiences of the city. In her study on post-revolutionary Iran, Roxanne Varzi (2006) notes that "spatial reality in Tehran resembles the Internet: it is hyperreal, full of text, images and places to surf...but only at the click of the mouse" (129). In Varzi's work, Tehran is a space that can be clicked "on" and "off" in the minds of those who experience it, allowing them to pick and choose the elements of its complex visual landscape they wish to interact with. Thus, a logic that frames digital technologies similarly pervades cities.

The notions of hyperspace and hyperreality are undoubtedly present in Tyre. I focus my study on the visual culture in the city (billboards, flags, posters), yet what I choose to highlight in the upcoming chapters do not necessarily reflect people's perceived "true" experiences of the city. An anecdotal digression is productive here. In an informal discussion with family members on the proliferation of political posters in Tyre, one member noted that this was not "really reflective" of the city and was instead "propaganda". This viewpoint was similarly echoed in Varzi's fieldwork in Iran. The ability to separate propaganda and components of a "real Tyre" in observers' minds—whether they established belonging to the city or not—is an exercise in hyperreality; in turning on and off visual elements of the city. The logic of hyperreality similarly echoes the discussion on neoliberal economic practices and notions of inequality in the city. It is often the areas and groups considered undesirable—the socially disadvantaged neighborhoods—that are "clicked off" from imaginaries of the city, furthering these

communities' and spaces' experiences of precariousness and vulnerability. In addition to being an exercise in hyperreality, it is also one that mirrors Rancière's discussion on aesthetics. What is made visible and what remains invisible in the city's visual landscape is an exercise in power relations.

### **E. Conclusion: Precarity Unpacked**

This chapter has provided a theoretical exposition of the various threads that frame the upcoming chapters. I build upon Judith Naeff's (2018) temporal vector of the "suspended now"—an experience marked by an unresolved past and uncertain future—and her discussion of the precarious city, unpacking the different ways in which precariousness appears in the city of Tyre. It is a vulnerability to harm caused by war and insecurity; an identitarian struggle; and an economic condition of unstable labour conditions. From these understandings of precariousness emerge narratives that frame experiences of Tyre: a city in the dangerous south; a city in the abject south; a city branded by a majority Shia identity, and a city reflective of "mutual coexistence". These narratives overlap at times and diverge in other instances.

The section on aesthetics of urban space relates these understandings of precariousness and narratives of the city to visual culture. It looks at space as a social construct, highlighting the ways in which it can be read and experienced. Visual culture in the city is reflective of political and power structures that produce and re-produce conditions of precariousness. Moreover, considering the city-space as text reveals its palimpsestic nature, re-written and re-inscribed through experiences of precariousness. Lastly, a discussion on the logic of hyperreality is introduced to highlight the different

ways a city is read, and the experiences of precariousness—particularly in terms of urban inequality and invisible spaces—it produces.



## CHAPTER III

### CONSUMING THE POLITICAL

In this chapter, I look at the city-space of Tyre and the various elements that make up its visual culture, speaking to its identification as a precarious city. The billboards, political flags and posters that exist in Tyre are the main objects of study, and following their analysis I establish three main visual tropes that frame the city: the cult of the leader, death and martyrdom, and globalization practices, each corresponding to particular definitions of precariousness. First, precariousness emerges as an identity struggle, particularly with regard to the creation of a Shia milieu in the city; second it is a reflection of the city's constant exposure to death and violence; and third, it is a precariousness linked to the political-economic currents that shape globalization processes in the city-space.

Before delving further into the chapter, it is first necessary to highlight the differences in the visual texts that will be analyzed. As previously mentioned, I do not aim to establish fixed typologies and a detailed account of all "kinds" of visual culture elements in Tyre. My sites of study are symptomatic of a particular mode of seeing, a personal observation that marked political flags, posters, and billboards as visual elements which stand out. To understand the discursive role of these visual texts in the city, it is first important to highlight what is meant by "political" as a descriptor.

Paolo Gerbaudo (2013) looks at street media in Rome's neighborhoods, traditionally home to radical Left activists. He reads the act of fly-posting and the

meaning of fly-posters in connection to the spatial politics of the various movements they represented. These posters were not “simply a channel of political information...rather, these means of communication were also fundamentally connected with the symbolic construction of a sense of locality and territoriality within movement scenes” (Gerbaudo 2013: 239). Thus, “political” refers both to the ideological message of the posters and their demarcation of space. In Tyre, two political parties dominate the city-space: Amal Movement and Hezbollah. As noted in the previous chapter, these two parties represent the coming and crystallization of Shia political identity in the Lebanese government. Tyre was and remains a central seat of power, existing as both the ideological launchpad of both parties’ predecessor, the *Mahrumin* movement headed by Musa al Sadr, and a contemporary administrative district within the south.

Gerbaudo’s discussion also highlights public space as an important vector. In her study on the relationship between visibility, Islam, and social imaginaries, Nilüfer Göle (2002) notes that Islam “carves out a public space of its own as new Islamic language styles, corporal rituals, and spatial practices” (173). Religious ideology shapes the scriptural fabric of the city, taking private and individual bodily practices into the public realm. Amal Movement and Hezbollah’s presence in Tyre is largely constitutive of a Shia identity, one that is built on religious, social, political, and economic tenets. These are less distinct categories and more processes that reflect the vectors through which both parties inscribe public space with meaning. Though they are both Shia groups, their political agendas diverge often, they follow different religious references and schools of thought (called *marja*’ in Arabic), and were engaged in a violent war in the

mid-1980s (Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008: 37). Nevertheless, their political influence has largely constituted the public space in Tyre in ways that include modes of dress (for example the *chador* for some women), and to visual aesthetic, which includes Hezbollah and Amal posters and flags, posters of religious leaders Ayatollah Khomeini and Imam Moussa Al-Sadr, as well as those of martyred soldiers.

The process of marking public space with visual meaning is similarly an act of territorialization and demarcation. Chiara Brambilla's (2014) discussion on borderscapes is particularly useful. She defines the border as a “space that is not static but fluid and shifting; established and at the same time continuously traversed by a number of bodies, discourses, practices, and relationships...”(19). Political flags representing Amal Movement or Hezbollah’s party logos reflect the logic of borderscapes, transforming a symbol of national sovereignty into a marker of political identity within the abject south. The discussion on posters and flags is complemented by an analysis of billboards in Tyre, which reflect how the city grapples with processes of globalization and neoliberal economic policies. While some billboards re-emphasize political ideologies, the majority reflect advertisements for restaurants, shops, and real-estate projects in Tyre.

The chapter will subsequently unpack precariousness in relation to this visual culture. It will begin with an exposition of the “drive south” as a pre-emptive, ideological preparation to the visual culture one encounters in Tyre. It then looks at the three visual culture narratives that emerge: cult of the leader; death and martyrdom; and globalization practices, each of which reflect physical and affective experiences of precariousness.

## **A. Driving South**

Driving into Tyre prepares the observer for the visual aesthetics they will encounter upon entering and experiencing the city, thus the drive acts like an ideological preset to the city's visual culture. In discussing the "journey south", I am acknowledging that Tyre does not exist in isolation from the rest of the country and that its visual culture is part of a broader narrative that frames the south as a peripheral region in Lebanon. Moreover, I am emphasizing that the process of creating a Shia milieu in Tyre is not solely bound to the official geographical delineations of the city-space. These processes exist in a broader context that include the drive to the city and the various mental and physical negotiations it involves.

Directionality, just like positionality, is an important consideration in this case. If one is driving from north to south, from the center (Beirut) to the southern periphery, the change in the visual landscape is striking. Large areas of green pastures and agricultural fields become more common, bringing to light the periphery's historical relationship to farming. More importantly for this study, the drive to Tyre reveals a highway lined with flags, billboards, and posters. As shown in Fig. 1, yellow Hezbollah flags line lampposts on the highway alongside the Lebanese flag. I read this particular positioning of these visual texts in two ways: first, they represent a way Hezbollah asserts political dominance over the region, demarcating one's entrance into a politically-controlled, Shia part of the country; second, the placement of Hezbollah flags next to the Lebanese flag affirm the former's power over certain governmental bodies in the country, and in particular its military control over Lebanese borders.



*Fig. 1 - On the Road (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

The liberation of the south from Israeli occupation in 2000 was largely carried out by Hezbollah fighters. The historical moment was key in consolidating its status as the Resistance par-excellence, both in a military and ideological sense. Consequent requests for the group to disarm were ignored under the premise that Israel continued to be a threat to national security. The group's expanding role in politics and the Lebanese government was challenged following Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's death and the 2005 Independence Intifada or Cedar Revolution. Sectarian divides re-emerged in the country, and discourses on the Shia 'other' circulated widely (Deeb and Harb 2013). The call to resistance was ignited once again during the 2006 Lebanese war with Israel. The war was transformative, both in terms of Hezbollah and the Resistance's role in Lebanese politics and in its effect on Shia areas. Thus, the flags leading up to Tyre and the rest of the south reflect a symbolic process of border-making, marking the group's strongholds.

I look at borders from both an affective and physical perspective. In a precarious nation marked by violence and trauma, one that survived Israeli occupation and a devastating Civil War, the logic of creating borders to signify areas that are “dangerous” or non-enterable was frequently employed. The peripheral south, marked as dangerous due to the Israeli occupation, was cut off from the rest of the country in a physical and ideological manner. The presence of Hezbollah and Lebanese flags on the highway form a paradoxical border: on the one hand, they re-emphasize Civil War geographical demarcations of an abject south, marking the move from one sectarian-marked territory to the next; on the other hand, they create a narrative of harmony between Hezbollah and the Lebanese nation, marking the former as the unofficial protector of official borders.

Another important visual culture marker on the drive to Tyre is the checkpoint. It marks the end of the highway and the beginning of a smaller road that leads to Tyre as well as other cities and villages beyond it. The disruption in transport route is a result of unfinished construction and a lack of funding for infrastructural works in the country, yet it is a disruption that is felt on an experiential level, causing a shift in mental signification processes as well. It symbolizes the end of a state-built highway and ushers a more rugged path south, less sanitized and ordered for those in the driver and passenger seats. Moreover, it is a transition marked by the checkpoint.

In his study on queer life in Palestine, Jason Ritchie (2015) employs the metaphor of the checkpoint to demonstrate how queer Palestinians’ lives are constantly marked by violence. These checkpoints exist on both physical and ideological levels, regulating the real and virtual spaces that queer Palestinians can occupy. Similarly, checkpoints

leading to Tyre and other places in south Lebanon reflect a beginning and an end: the “end” of state control and “beginning” of various political parties’ influence. They exist as physical reminders of the violence that the country and region experienced, simultaneously pointing to the danger the latter *could* experience being in proximity with the “enemy state” Israel. Thus, the logic of the checkpoint feeds into the narrative of a dangerous south, and a south that is constantly threatened by external danger.

## **B. Cult of the Leader**

The previous section highlighted how the visual elements framing the drive south and the logic of the checkpoint prepare one for the visual culture they encounter in Tyre. Precariousness emerges through the narrative of a “dangerous” south; one that evokes the violence of Israeli Occupation and the Civil War. The flags lining the highway echoed Brambilla’s notion of the borderscape, demarcating entrance into a Shia “stronghold”—a territory largely controlled by political parties Amal and Hezbollah. I introduced the logic of the checkpoint as a means of affectively engaging with space and the “dangerous” and “abject” south. Moreover, these checkpoints represented, at least on a symbolic level, a way in which the state protected a south threatened by external enemies.

The logic of threat suggests the need for a savior, a protector against the danger and violence that surrounds Lebanon’s southern borders. Who are these saviours with respect to Tyre and how do they form part of its visual culture? Three dominant figures emerge in the research: Sayyid Musa al Sadr, Hezbollah secretary general Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, and Speaker of the Parliament and Amal Movement leader Nabih

Berri. Their mediated representations in the city reflect the formation of a contested Shia milieu.

### **1. *The Disappeared Imam***

In 1959, Sayyid Musa Al-Sadr, an Iranian Shia cleric, came and settled in Tyre from Qom. Described by scholars and biographers as a charismatic speaker and knowledgeable man, Sayyid Musa caught the eye of Sayyid Abdul Hussein Sharaf al Din, Tyre's *mufti*, on one of the latter's trips to Iran in the mid-1930s. In 1955, Sharaf al Din (who was in his 80s at the time) officially invited the young Sadr to visit Lebanon, in the hopes that he would inherit the *mufti's* clerical position (Ajami 1986: 42/3).

Sadr's arrival in Lebanon reversed the usual flow of traffic between both countries, moving from a "great center of the Shia world", Iran, to a "backwater", Lebanon (Ajami 1987: 31). He was an outsider to the city and country—he spoke Arabic with a Farsi accent and held an Iranian passport—yet he belonged to it, establishing legitimacy to the land through his Muslim Shia identity. Sayyid Musa came from a prestigious scholarly and clerical lineage in Shia Islam. He traced his ancestry back to an *alim* (scholar) from Jabal Amil (the region in south Lebanon that encompasses the cities Sidon, Tyre, Jezzine, Nabatieh, Bint Jbeil, and Tebnin), further creating a narrative of legitimate belonging to the land, the city of Tyre, and the south.

He came to occupy a very important role in the city and the country more generally, working to create legitimate Shia political representation through the establishment of the *Mahrumin* movement. Sadr attempted to work within the boundaries of the Lebanese state, striving to weaken the Communist influence that was



spreading within the Shia society in the 1970s and during the Lebanese Civil War.

Though this was not always achievable for Sadr, he managed to present “all Shi’is as one subaltern group, the ‘deprived’ or ‘dispossessed’, thus channeling class conflicts by guiding them into institutional forms offered originally by the state” (Abisaab 2015: 150/1).

By assigning the Shia in Lebanon the political label of “deprived”, Sayyid Musa created a powerful affective relationship between himself as leader and the Shia group that followed him. The Lebanese state had long neglected the peripheries, particularly the south, both prior to and during the region’s occupation by Israel in 1982. Thus, the condition of abjectness and seclusion from the Lebanese nation was reflected back to the people through al Sadr’s speech and political rhetoric, positioning him as the Shia community’s saviour.

When speaking about the establishment of Shia political representation in Lebanon, one is simultaneously referring to —whether consciously or otherwise—the creation of the cult of Musa Al Sadr. The charismatic leader drew his rhetoric “from the leading thematic tropes of Shi’ism, their (the followers of Ali or *ahl al bayt*) historical and ongoing dispossession at the hands of the power-hungry (Sunni) establishment and their subsequent massacre, suffering and impoverishment, exile and dispossession” (Khayyat 2013: 104).

On August 25th, 1978, Sadr departed to Libya to meet with Muammar Gaddafi in order to speak with the leader about future “plans” for Lebanon and acquire necessary funds, should any agenda be agreed upon. Sayyid Musa was no stranger to visiting

Arab capitals, and many Lebanese politicians at the time traveled to other lands to find the “social contract that eluded them at home” (Ajami 1986: 180).

On August 31st, Sadr was allegedly on his way to meet with the Libyan president. The day became an historic one, as it was the last the imam was seen alive. Since then, he has been officially declared as disappeared, his whereabouts and exact conditions of disappearance unknown.

I am interested in how Musa al Sadr is represented in Tyre’s visual culture. The conditions of his disappearance evoke Judith Naeff’s discussion on unresolvedness, a lack of closure *vis-à-vis* past events that frame present experiences as precarious. Sadr’s political work with the Shia community in south Lebanon positioned him as a great leader—“he had come into the world of insular men; he had walked with and for them out of their cloistered world” (Ajami 1986: 195). The ambiguity in the circumstances of his vanishing left things open to interpretation; rumors circulated about who was to blame and stories were created that embellished or downplayed Sadr’s influence in the country. More importantly, there was an ideological void that needed to be filled following his disappearance and the *mahrumin* party, the deprived and dispossessed, had to contend with the disappeared.

Fawwaz Traboulsi (2014) notes that al Sadr’s legacy was split between Amal Movement and Hezbollah: “Speaker Berri and Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah divided Al Sadr’s legacy between them, successfully positioning themselves as the sole political representatives of the Shia community in the political and social spheres” (24). The disappearance of Musa al Sadr left a large enough vacuum that could be tailored to the needs of contemporary political settings.



Fig. 2 - Welcome to Sadr City (Photo by Reem Joudi)



Fig. 3 - Tyre's northern entrance (Photo by Reem Joudi)



Fig. 4 - *The Promise of Resistance* (Photo by Reem Joudi)

a. Reclaiming Ownership of the Disappeared Imam

The disappeared imam's image is prominent in Tyre's visual culture. Large posters and banners of his face are placed at the northern and southern entrances of Tyre, often accompanied with the phrase "Imam al Sadr's city welcomes you". Sadr was Iranian, but claimed ancestral roots from the Jabal Amel region in south Lebanon. He was granted citizenship by former Lebanese president Fouad Shihab, further complicating his national belonging. In many ways, Sadr was a man that belonged to Shia groups everywhere; he was public property and his influence transcended physical boundaries of nation-states, impacting the rise of Shia political consciousness in several Arab regions. That said, in naming Tyre as Sadr's city and the place from which he launched his political project, the imam—in his physical and metaphysical presences—is grounded in the city space, shaping a Shia milieu that is partially built through reclamation and visual ownership of his image.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel de Certeau examines—among other things—the relationship between spatial practices and "urban text", the signs and

symbols that delimit and name a space. Moreover, placing these images at the entrance of Tyre becomes a practice of borderscaping; a way to re-inscribe the city within Sadr's overarching legacy. The question of who "owns" the imam's image is important in this context, particularly with regards to how precarious Shia identities and a contested Shia milieu are shaped. I use "ownership" in a metaphorical and symbolic sense, as a means of invoking political power and legitimacy within a Shia milieu. Both Amal movement and Hezbollah exert significant political influence in Tyre; at times seeing eye to eye, while at other times diverging in their proposed agendas. Musa al Sadr is seen as the father figure of both movements' religious-political ideologies and a consolidator of Shia power in the Lebanese government. The visual culture of Tyre reflects an instance in which both parties use imagery to negotiate "ownership" of Sadr's legacy and memory.

The politics of production are important to consider in this context. The poster in Figure 2 was produced by the Al Risala Al-Islamiyyah Scouts, which roughly translates to the "Islamic Message". This is a Shia cultural organization founded by Musa al Sadr in 1977 and whose current general director is Amal Movement leader Nabih Berri. The foundation is thus a physical and institutional part of the vanished imam's legacy, a contemporary initiative that seeks to fashion a Shia Muslim public space for sociocultural engagement. Reaffirming the scouts' ideological and symbolic allegiance to Sadr is simultaneously an affirmation of Amal Movement's powerful role in Tyre's political and cultural space. Not only is Sadr protecting and watching over the city, but he is also watching over Amal Movement and its leader, Nabih Berri, thus affirming their legitimacy.

b. Coexistence versus Resistance?

Amal Movement's reclamation of Sadr's image and legacy also support Nabih Berri's political outlook of mutual co-existence, which differs from Hezbollah's notion of religious resistance (muqawama). In Figure 3, the billboard shows a photograph of Amal leader and Speaker of the House Nabih Berri alongside Musa al Sadr. They are positioned side by side with the Amal logo between them, reflecting Amal's belonging to Sadr's original Mahrumin party and a continuation of a political narrative that began several decades prior. The billboard reads "Unity of a People, Resistance (or Stability) of a Nation: Imam Musa al Sadr's city welcomes you". The fact that the billboard is in Arabic is key, for it is intended either for Lebanese belonging to or visiting the city, or citizens of other Arab nations who come to Tyre. Those who cannot read the language are drawn to the image of the two figures and the logo on the billboard. Given that all three are seen frequently in various places around Tyre, they become familiar to the observer's eye, whether they are familiar with who these figures are or not. Thus, they are embedded as an inherent part of the city's visual culture, as "protectors" of the dangerous south and Tyre in particular.

The slogan under the images is also important. It reflects Amal Movement and its leader's, Nabih Berri's, stance on Shia political representation in the country. By invoking unity of a people and stability of a nation, the billboard refers to the concept of 'aysh al mushtaraq, the cornerstone of the post-Civil War Taif Agreement that promoted- at least on paper- the mutual coexistence of all religious sects in Lebanon (Salloukh, 2006).

At the other end of the mutual co-existence framework is the notion of Resistance, as exemplified by Hezbollah's *muqawama* or Religious Resistance. This is an admittedly simplified way to look at an otherwise complex power structure; however, the aim is to emphasize the nuances in Tyre's visual culture that reflect these different ideologies. Hezbollah's Islamic Resistance "(henceforth, the Resistance) eventually came to dominate the military resistance to Israel in the South, overshadowing Amal as well as leftist and other militia groups that were also fighting against the Israeli occupation." (Deeb and Harb 2013: 39). It was a broader movement that sought to develop social welfare networks in Shia-majority areas in the country. Following the end of the Civil War, the group transformed into a legitimate political party whose weapons and *hors*-state Resistance apparatus remained intact.

Figure 4 shows Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's Secretary General on the top right, Nabih Berri on the top left and three stenciled faces in the middle. On either side of the central trio are Arabic words that read "We kept the legacy/testament" and the edges of the banner read "An unbeatable resistance". This image reflects Hezbollah's "take" on Sadr's legacy, as well as the group's role in the south and Tyre more specifically. Here, the legacy is translated into armed resistance and Hezbollah's military wing, quite literally referred to as the Resistance (*al muqawama*) following its role in freeing the south from Israeli occupation in 2000.

The "we" in the phrase plastered on the billboard refers to the figures on it, but can also be read as an address to citizens of the south who uphold Sadr's legacy and the Shia political representation in Lebanon. While Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah and Nabih Berri may be familiar to the observer, the other three are difficult to determine without

context of the city's history and past. In the center of the trio is a younger Nasrallah, which looks to reflect Hezbollah's consistency in its political message and role as protector of Lebanese borders throughout the years. To the right is Imad Mughniyeh, a senior Hezbollah operative who died in Damascus on February 12, 2008. The circumstances surrounding his death remain ambiguous, although both Syrian officials and the Israeli Mossad were accused of plotting his assassination (Black 2010). To the left of younger Nasrallah is Ragheb Harb, a Muslim cleric, Lebanese resistance leader against the Israeli occupation and former member of Amal movement, who was assassinated in 1984 by Israelis. Figure 4, unlike Figures 2 and 3, reflects a visual negotiation between Hezbollah and Amal's role in protecting Sadr's legacy and the Muslim Shia project in Lebanon. Moreover, the legacy is defined in terms of resistance; and more specifically Hezbollah's armed struggle.

The notion of resistance also emerges as an ideological reflection of the various tensions that exist within the Lebanese state. As mentioned in the previous chapter, precariousness emerges in relation to an uncertain future and postwar political power structures that create volatile lived experiences of individuals. Following the Civil War, the former militiamen and warlords who found themselves in power created alliances with various countries to establish and ensure their presence in the Lebanese government. These relationships were largely based on economic interest and sectarian balance (Traboulsi 2014).





*Fig. 5 - In Khamenei We Trust (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

Iran is a central player in Lebanese politics, particularly with regards to Shia communities in the country. Religion is the main ideological tenet that forged a relationship between Shia political parties in Lebanon and the Iranian government; “both Iranian and Lebanese Shi’ite ethnic entrepreneurs debated and fought over the meaning of a Lebanese Shi’ite identity, and constantly negotiated and readjusted the boundaries between the local and the foreign” (Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2008: 86). Historically, Hezbollah had closer ties with Iran than Amal and this remains the case today. Thus, the process of shaping a Shia milieu in Tyre and the precariousness of contested Shia identities reflection of readjusted and renegotiated boundaries between local and foreign power players, enacting yet another iteration of the borderscape. The image of Ayatollah Khomeini in Figure 5 visually fashions Tyre’s public space according to tensions between Lebanon and Iran. Here, the trope of center and periphery which was discussed in the previous chapter re-emerges; this time referring to

an ideological relationship between Iran as the center of Shia Islam and Lebanon—particularly majority-Shia Tyre—as a peripheral space incorporated in this religious empire.

### **C. Death and Martyrdom**

An underlying theme that ties together the previous discussions of visual culture is death and martyrdom. This reflects precariousness as Tyre's and the country's constant exposure to harm, which conditions experiences of the present. Images of martyred soldiers, both from wars against Israel (in 1982-2000 and 2006), and more current conflicts such as the Syrian Civil War (in which Hezbollah has been involved since 2015) serve a threefold purpose: first, they transform public space in Tyre into one of mourning and commemoration; second, they legitimate martyrdom as an effective and ethical political strategy, particularly in contentious conflicts like Hezbollah's role in the Syrian civil war; and third, they inscribe public space along the lines of Shia religious identity.



*Fig. 6 - The Martyr Lives On (Photo by Reem Joudi)*



*Fig. 7 - The Martyr of Tyre (Photo by Reem Joudi)*



*Fig. 8 - Tyre's Martyrs (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

The visual display of martyred fighters from Hezbollah and Amal line various public spaces in Tyre, acting as constant, vociferous reminders of both parties' control over Shia politics in the country. Complex power relations constantly re-shape this

space, echoing Lefebvre's (1984) axiom on absolute space. He notes that said space, in its religious and political manifestations, is "made up of sacred or cursed locations: temples, palaces, commemorative or funerary monuments, places privileged or distinguished in one way or another" (240), yet one must understand them as part of a collective indistinguishable from one another. Together, these sites form an absolute space that is both mental and social, which is lived and experienced by individuals on a daily level.

The images of martyred soldiers, by virtue of their presence in public space, become places of commemoration and mourning. Pierre Nora's (1989) notion of *lieux de memoires* is useful in this context. He notes that these sites of memory "originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that [we] must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries..pronounce eulogies..." (12). Images of martyred fighters and soldiers become *lieux de mèmores*, reflecting both Amal movement and Hezbollah's attempt to shape memories of the precarious conditions of the past.

The aesthetic of these billboards are similarly important. Figures 6-8 show faces of martyred soldiers organized in columns and rows, their names written underneath each picture. Sometimes in black & white, other times in faded colors, the images of pale faces looking back at the observer are a haunting collective of lost youth. They are another form of watchful eyes; the guardian angels of a city that sacrificed its sons against an external enemy. In their list-like format, they reflect a curated gallery of lives lost and their positioning next to Lebanese flags, as well as Hezbollah and Amal flags further complicates an already-complex Shia milieu. It becomes a space that seeks

acknowledgement from the Lebanese state *through* the lives of young, martyred fighters.

The billboards reflect visual representations of precariousness as human vulnerability and exposure to harm. Despite their list-like aesthetic, the curated gallery creates an affective engagement between observer and image and it is on the basis of these affective relations that Hezbollah and Amal seek to legitimate their political and religious ideologies. The cult of martyrdom was adopted by Hezbollah and Amal during Lebanon's battle against Israel, reflecting a political strategy of resistance and the Shia religious theme of Imam Hussein's martyrdom in Karbala (Nasr 2006). In this context, the visual evocation of death and martyrdom in Tyre places the city within a para-national framework; it is a Shia milieu that exists outside the boundaries of the Lebanese center Beirut and operates within a unique religious and ideological framework of resistance. In Tyre, a city deeply scarred by Israeli occupation and the complexity of the Civil War, death is a noble form of resistance.

In her study on post-revolution Iran, Roxanne Varzi (2006) notes that "death [in Iran] is embedded in every thought, in every public image of a young man displayed" (107). It is, for Varzi, the result of revolutionary cultural policy that inscribes Islamic identity in the public sphere. Similarly in Tyre—a Shia-majority city in south Lebanon that has close ties with Iran on religious, ideological, and political levels—the project of creating an Islamic social space is manifested through visual reminders of power players (leaders of parties and organizations) and death through the photographs of martyred fighters.

Death in this context also evokes the martyrdom of Imam Husayn at Karbala—a foundational, historical moment of utmost importance for Shia Islam that is commemorated yearly during ‘Ashura, the 10th day of Muharram in the Islamic calendar. The commemoration of Husayn’s martyrdom is “a vehicle for patriotic sentiment even as it retained its soteriological function as a ritualistic act”, reflecting another way in which Shia Islamic practices reshape public space in Tyre (Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008: 147).

#### **D. Masculinities**

Thus far, the visual shaping of precarious identities in Tyre’s public space has been a gendered process. The narratives of “cult of the leader” and “death and martyrdom” show how precarious ideologies and identities visually appear as masculine. The resistance fighter and religious leader are figures whose presence in public space is conditioned by their gender performativity. In his study on the Islamic Republic of Iran, Shahin Gerami (2003) notes that a key component of the Islamic Revolution’s ideology included the reformulation of gender discourse around the concept of Islamic hypermasculinity. He notes that “masculinity is so standardized that most Iranians do not see it as a category. Ayatollah Khomeini’s manhood is taken-for-granted knowledge in the national consciousness” (258). He goes on to highlight several masculine prototypes that emerged in the wake of the Iranian revolution: the *mullahs* as leaders of revolution; martyrs as its soul and men as its beneficiaries.

I find Gerami’s typologies to be useful in the context of Tyre. The *mullahs* and religious clerics like Sayyid Musa al Sadr, Sayyid Abdul Hussein Sharaf al Din, Sayyid

Hasan Nasrallah and Ayatollah Khamenei are protectors of the Shia Islamic faith, as well as figures of resistance against oppression. The *martyrs*, as Gerami notes, are portrayed as the means through which the mechanism of the Islamic Republic operated: “it seemed that the revolution and Islam needed the blood of these young virgin men to thrive” (2003: 268).

The logic of commodification frames these visual representations of masculinity. The circulation and consumption of images of leaders and martyrs in Tyre’s public space was made possible by capitalist modes of production. In turn, they negotiated a particular gaze which conditioned relationships between the visual text and the observer. Looking at the Turkish public sphere, Esra Ozyurek (2006) notes a change in content and circulation practices of Ataturk’s imagery in the late 1990s. In opposition to older images “depicting him as serious, solemn and superhuman”, newer imagery “portrayed him as a smiling human happily engaged in social activities” (123). More importantly, the commodification of these images re-negotiated modes of public and private engagement. The discussion on the image’s shifting gaze is what interests me in this project on Tyre.

Rather than painting Shia leaders and religious figures as stern and solemn, the visual texts show them as smiling, looking directly at the observer or looking into the distance in a thoughtful manner. This, I argue, posits the ideal man as “paternal protector”. These men are represented as fatherly figures and protectors of the Lebanese Shia community, looking over the physical space of Tyre and the broader imagined Shia community in Lebanon and abroad.

There is something to be said about the ubiquity of images of leaders and fighters in the city, which I read as reflections of precarious Shia identities: on the one hand, it is an identity that needs constant affirmation *vis-à-vis* the Lebanese state and within the contested Shia milieu; on the other hand, it is a reflection of power and the ability to decorate Tyre's public space with posters and billboards of leaders and martyrs. Some of the images are "donated" by individuals and/or families as signs of support to Amal, Hezbollah, or their respective leaders; others are "officially" produced by organizations related to these two groups. In this context, the lines between public and private spaces, as well as public and private expressions of religious-political affiliation become blurred, compounding identitarian experiences of precarity on an individual and group level. Amal, Hezbollah, and their respective leaders and martyrs are always watching Tyre's public space.

### **E. A Globalized Tyre**

The third narrative that frames visual culture representations in Tyre is that of globalization practices. This is an admittedly broad term that encompasses various dynamics that shape the city; however, I focus on the postwar economic structures that condition investment opportunities in Tyre and consequently reshape its public space. I argue that these frameworks create conditions of precarious life, marked by volatile economic opportunities and complex power structures that make prospects of upward mobility difficult. These are states of being and existing in the city that arise as a result of capitalist expansion. This section explores the various visual culture markers that fall



under the broad heading of globalization practices, highlighting the particular sociocultural and political conditions that discursively position them in the city.

When driving into Tyre, one is bound to notice the presence of restaurants and boutiques lining either side of the road. Franchises like Popeye’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken are prominent in the city, existing side-by-side to political flags and posters (Figure 9 below). What explains the logic of these visual culture elements? The question aims to act as an intellectual inquiry into the various structures that make these elements of Tyre’s visual culture possible.



*Fig. 9 - Popeyes and Politics (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

Visual representations of globalization appear on billboards across the city that advertise avenues for consumption. Judith Naeff (2018) notes that “the realm of advertisement does not exist entirely separately from the realm of political and cultural contestations over urban territory. Advertisement visualizes an imaginary world with the aim of stimulating the desire to spend and consume” (173). This logic reflects that

of capitalist societies, and billboards exist as mechanisms through which this logic is mediated.

The development of Tyre's economic and industrial capacities is closely linked to Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri's role in government. As Fawaz Traboulsi (2014) notes, "Berri was the leader of a militia, chief of the Southern *zuama* (elite social class)...and the man who held the keys to employment in the civil service, the armed forces and the security services, responsible for bringing thousands of young Shia—and hundred others—into public service and promoting them within it" (85). His role presented a paradox for precarious labor conditions: he was part of a system that provided employment opportunities to the youth, but it was a system based on sectarian privilege, reinforcing clientelist relationships in the country.

More importantly, Nabih Berri's role as Speaker of the Parliament was key in furthering his economic interests, particularly in the fields of trade, banking and real estate. As Traboulsi (2014) notes, Berri formed what was called the "Shia Holding Company", which operated as a result of relations with Shia diaspora in Africa and other countries. Thus, Berri's economic outlook was key in shaping Tyre's spatial politics and practices. His interest in business development and investment was formed on an economic basis rather than religious ideology.

This logic of neoliberal development differed from other areas in Lebanon; particularly areas which Hezbollah has control over. These ideological divides (translated into economic practice) also reflect how precarious Shia identities shape a contested milieu. In *Leisurely Islam* (2013), Mona Harb and Lara Deeb argue that, following the liberation of the South in 2000 and Lebanese-Israeli war in 2006,

Hezbollah sought to create leisure spaces in Beirut's southern suburbs (*Dahiyeh*) that followed religious-moral considerations. They were places made for pious Shia Muslims by Shia authorities and followed particular restrictions such as the banning of alcohol or implementation of stricter dress codes. They were, in essence, a way in which the party circumscribed public space according to religious ideologies. In Tyre, public spaces are fashioned according to less strict codes of conduct, largely a result of Amal Movement's control over the city, its diverse sectarian makeup, and the presence of United Nations personnel (stationed in Tyre following the 2006 Lebanese-Israeli war). It caters to a diverse audience, and alcohol is permissible in most restaurants and cafes, thus creating a different type of consumption and leisure space to the one described by Harb and Deeb.

### **1. *Advertisements***

Visually shaping a public sphere along modes of behavior and codes of conduct similarly appears in advertisement billboards around the city. In Tyre, billboards advertising beauty services (like plastic surgery, hairdressers and makeup), newly opened restaurants and shopping destinations appear all over the city. Figure 10 below shows an image of two billboards placed side-by-side; one promoting a known jeweler family in the city and the other promoting a beauty institute that performs laser hair removal, botox and other aesthetic services.



*Fig. 10 - Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

Visual texts like those in Figure 9 are present all over the city, representing a luxury lifestyle that reflects particular standards of consumption. The logic guiding these visual texts is a gendered one. The billboards address the city's imagined female audience, dictating particular ideas of femininity that ideologically oppose the religiously-defined Shia milieu in the previous section, yet remain subject to the same logic of commodification and consumer culture.



*Fig. 11 - The Ideal Islamic Woman? (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

Islamic practices and modes of dress visually appear in the city as well. As Figure 11 above shows, several billboards advertising *hijab*, styled in a Shia Islamic mode of dress, appear around the city, in an effort to shape an Islamic public sphere. The seemingly competing visual imagery reflects how mediated representations of the female body become sites of ideological negotiations, symptomatic of sociopolitical and religious contexts (Wallach Scott, 2010). These tensions become a counterpart to the above discussion on masculinities, reflecting the way in which space is refracted and demarcates through gendered imaginaries.

The masculine advertorial space in the city is overwhelmingly occupied by images that reinforce Shia identity, insofar as other expressions and representations of masculinity are rendered invisible. Billboards targeted at women challenge the predominance of religious visuals in the public space, instead debating what an “ideal woman” should look like: does she conform to Shia mode of dress; does she choose to unveil and follow aesthetic bodily standards promoted by the billboards; is she a complex mix of both, or is she none of the above? These questions allow us to begin thinking about linkages between individual practices and visual culture, as well as the various logics through which they are expressed.

## **2. *Tourism***

It is similarly important to understand Tyre’s role as a tourist hub in order to analyze how different manifestations of visual culture practices emerge. Tourism is a manifestation of neoliberal practices that build upon tropes of globalization, consumption and leisure.

Tyre is divided into two areas: the peninsula, which juts out into the Mediterranean Sea, and the mainland. It is one of the oldest inhabited Phoenician cities in the world and was consequently witness to multiple civilizational encounters. Today, the city has several important archaeological sites : the Roman baths, the arena, the Roman triumphal arch, the two palaestrae, and the Roman colonnaded road, all of which are considered UNESCO World Heritage Sites (UNESCO).

Its role as a tourist hub started in the nineteenth century and was aimed toward Western elites; however, it was not until 1947 under the French Mandate that the archaeological sites were formally excavated (Rowbotham 2010 : 40, 42). In the 1950s and 1960s, Beirut was dubbed the ‘Paris of the Middle East’, attracting Western tourists who chose to explore cities outside Lebanon’s center, both for their archaeological heritage and for forms of leisure such as swimming (Rowbotham 2010: 45). Tyre, with its large stretch of sandy public beach and its clean waters, fit the bill.

Thus, it is a city promoted and curated for tourist consumption as well. At the entrance of the city, right by billboards of martyrs and political party flags, one finds an “I [heart] Sour” (the Arabized version of the city’s name), colorful stand where visitors and locals stop to take photographs. The fixture is similar to others in cities all over the world, a mark of globalized culture that makes a stark visual impact on the city’s urban space, and is additionally used to resist narratives of Tyre as part of a “dangerous” south or an underdeveloped region. Sour can also participate in the logic of contemporary, neoliberal tourist practices, challenging its role as periphery in the national imaginary.



*Fig. 12 - I [Heart] Sour (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

## **F. Conclusion: Cruel Optimism**

The three narratives discussed above reflect the multiple faces of a neoliberal economy and the multiple, simultaneous interpolations of divided neoliberal subjects. In *Faces of the State*, Yael Navaro-Yashin (2002) looks at “the production of the political in the public life of Turkey in the 1990s” (2) in the aftermath of an Islamist victory in the country. The conceptual center of her book examines the dialectic between Islamists and secularists, focusing on how the state and fantasies of it are re-created through public life. Navaro-Yashin aims to show the overlaps rather than differences between both ideologies, especially when it comes to their presence in public spaces. In her chapter, “The Market for Identities: Buying and Selling of Secularity and Islam”, she notes that “secularists and Islamists in contemporary Turkey are implicated in the same capitalist market of consumption” (2002: 113). Images of leaders and symbolic markers of both ideological camps flow freely in public space,

reflecting the shared political-economic context and global market of commodities they both circulate in.

Tyre's visual culture mirrors the various ideologies that circulate within a neoliberal market. The images of Shia leaders, the billboards advertising beauty services, and the "I Love Sour" signage reflect the city's multifaceted visual identity; one that is constantly reshaped along ideological lines within a capitalist economy, and one that is imbricated in complex power structures.

In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Lauren Berlant notes that capitalism creates fantasies of upward mobility and a "good life" that individuals strive for. This is an affective state that conditions individuals to consume more, in the hopes of achieving a fantasy of a comfortable mode of life. The reality is a moment of cruel optimism, relation of "attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic" (Berlant, 2011: 33). She describes a resulting experience of precariousness as an affective and lived reality.

The logic of neoliberal expansion and economic policy that visually frames Tyre is a practice in cruel optimism. It promotes a lifestyle based on capitalist economies; images of a "good life" that aim to resist Tyre's spatial fixing in an abject south and counter precarious narratives of a dangerous and threatened south. Yet, the sectarian power structures that underly these neoliberal practices, the very same ones that visually shape a contested Shia milieu, reinforce precariousness as a lived reality. Thus, Tyre finds itself suspended in a cruelly optimistic trap.



## CHAPTER IV

### EL-BUSS REFUGEE CAMP

The previous chapter looked at the various visual representations of precariousness that emerge in Tyre, highlighting three main narratives: cult of the leader, death and martyrdom, and globalization practices. It focused on the city's public space: the street lamps, roundabouts and walls on which the flags, billboards, and posters are found. This chapter extends space to include the area of El-Buss, a Palestinian refugee camp located at the north entrance of Tyre.

In looking at El-Buss, I am challenging an ideological center-periphery dialectic. Though very much a part of the city's urban fabric, El-Buss remains a peripheral space in the city whose 'otherness' is symptomatic of it being a Palestinian refugee camp. The notion of liminal spaces is useful to employ as an analytical tool. The origin of the term is attributed to anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (1909), who used it to describe the rituals that cause changes in social status within primitive societies. Liminality, according to Van Gennep, corresponds to a phase of uncertainty or transition when one separates from an initial social group and looks to incorporate into a new one. It is both a temporal and physical categorization that circumscribes the absence of a fixed identity, an analytical state that speaks to the experience of a "suspended now".

The trope of liminality has been extended, debated, and contested by scholars in different disciplines. This chapter looks specifically at the refugee camp as a liminal space, theorizing this liminality through visual culture. Giorgio Agamben's (1998)

work *Homo Sacer* has become a key text when talking about spaces of refuge. The *homo sacer*, a person who is denied rights and banned from society, and the camp become a body and space whose conditions of inclusion in the socio-political order are determined and defined by exclusion. Moreover, the camp becomes a space where the rule of law and state control are virtually non-existent, and thus, left to the formulate their own modes of sovereignty.

Adam Ramadan (2013) grapples with Agamben's "spaces of exception" through his work on Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. He notes that "while Agamben's notion of the camp as a 'space of exception is useful, understanding how, why and by whom the law is suspended requires a nuanced... approach, sensitive to the particular characteristics of real camps..." (Ramadan 2013: 69-70). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge and identify the differences between Palestinian camps in Lebanon, which are not homogenous entities but diverse in their spatial makeup.

El-Buss camp in Tyre provides an interesting site of study *vis-à-vis* the notions of liminality and 'space of exception'. As previously noted, it is a camp that is tied into the city's urban fabric, hosting both Palestinian refugees and a small population of Lebanese. Its liminality functions through a logic of precariousness based on the lack of adequate job opportunities, the impossibility of upward mobility, and the remnants of a violent past that condition the present.

The camp is not merely an important spatial element of the city, but also at the center of Tyre's experience with precarity. The Palestinian cause was at the heart of the civil war, the Israeli Occupation of the south, and the formation of official ideologies of resistance in the city. The city is full of visual reminders of the *muqawama*, its leaders,

and its fallen soldiers. How does El-Buss compare? What are the elements of its visual culture?

The chapter will first highlight the history of Palestinian presence and El-Buss in Tyre, followed by a broader discussion on visual culture within the camp. It will then analyze the visual elements present in El-Buss camp: posters, graffiti and street art that decorate the camp's walls. I argue that these texts reflect a sense of precariousness as vulnerability to an unknown future that is compounded by liminal status as refugees. Three tropes emerge through my analysis: walls as script; leaders and martyrs; and emigration. Another aim of the chapter is to identify visual nuances within the camp, which position it as "other" *vis-à-vis* street representations in Tyre (chapter 3). What are the similarities and differences that exist, and how do they create a different narrative of precariousness (if at all)?

### **A. Positionality**

Before delving into the historical background and in-depth analysis of visual culture in El-Buss, it is first important to acknowledge my status as an outsider in the camp. My visits were carried out with a friend who calls El-Buss home; a member of the community who knew many of the camp's locals and was familiar with its streets and alleways, and was thus able to navigate the camp's geography. My role as a researcher and outsider to El-Buss is made more complex by the fact that I am tied to the city of Tyre through familial relations. Thus, my perception and positionality was guided by a logic of "center and periphery" that spatially 'othered' the camp.

The discussion on positionality is important for the academic insights it inspired, particularly with regards to modes of experiencing El-Buss. The camp has one entrance that is controlled by the Lebanese army, which demarcates the limits of the host state's role. Re-introducing the notion of the borderscape, the checkpoint acts as a symbolic marker of liminality, denoting the entrance into a territory seen as precarious and "other". The checkpoint is also a mode of control, managing which bodies and vehicles enter and exit the camp. As Mohamed Kamel Dorai (2010) notes in his story on El-Buss, for many years, material for construction were not allowed entry. This, in turn, impeded the renovation and development of the space (Dorai 2010: 99).

These spatial constraints were not rigid; they shift and change according to decisions taken by the Lebanese state. According to Dorai, El-Buss witnessed a densification in its buildings following the spring of 2005, after the Lebanese government lifted certain spatial restrictions. Several families took the opportunity to add a floor to their homes or expand the rooms, thus affirming these structures' permanence within a broader context of suspended time.

These expansions also condition experiences of the camp. As an outsider walking in the camp with one of its locals, the physical space felt heavy. Buildings of varying heights—some with floors haphazardly built in different color brick and concrete—were imposing on the body, which felt small in comparison. This affective mode of engagement with the camp's space is a reflection of a precarious temporality and liminality: a space that feels permanent yet unfinished, suspended in time.



*Fig. 13 - A Camp Alleyway (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

## **B. Historical Overview**

The previous section highlighted one mode of engagement with the camp's space as a context to the visual culture in El-Buss. Just as the checkpoint and the flags on the drive to Tyre conditioned a particular mode of observation on what to visually expect in the city, so too does the military checkpoint and affective engagement with El-Buss. This section traces the history of the camp's establishment and the violence that marked its past, as a context to frame its visual culture.

Following the Palestinian Nakba in 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees fled to south Lebanon in search of security. In Tyre, they settled in the camps of El-Buss and Rashidiyyeh, which were originally created to welcome Armenian

refugees in 1936 (Dorai 2006: 95). The Nakba was a traumatic event in Palestinians' collective memory, a moment of uprooting, violence, and precariousness that reshaped and continues to shape the Palestinian community's past, present and future.

The crystallization of Palestinian political identity was a process that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed following the Six-Day War (or the Arab-Israeli War) in 1967 as a nationalist movement that fought for the liberation of Palestine from Israeli Occupation. It found fertile soil in host countries that were home to large populations of Palestinian refugees, including Lebanon, where its leadership relocated in 1970. The PLO established itself as the chief leadership cadre that operated within camps, creating a state within a state that, at times, challenged the authority of the Lebanese government (Dorai 2010). More importantly, south Lebanon became an important region for recruiting young fighters from refugee camps, known as *fida'iyin*, into PLO factions.

Siklawi (2012) notes that a Shia social and political presence did not emerge until the early 1960s and Palestinian movements played a key role in this ideological shift. Many Shia communities in the south found the PLO and other organizations that called for Arab Nationalism and the liberation of the Occupied Territories appealing. Many Shi'ites "were drawn to join the Palestinian militant groups and to experience the practicality of these...movements" (Siklawi 2012: 5). However, the constant "presence" and threat of Israel in the region—whose purpose was to break down pockets of Palestinian resistance—propelled many to seek other forms of identification.

The answer came with the arrival of Sayyid Musa al Sadr, who sought the organization of the Shia community as a legitimate political entity. In addition to his

work within the Lebanese government, he established a militia, known as the Amal movement, which could constitute an armed resistance to Israeli occupation (Abisaab 2015). In 1975, Amal “consisted of no more than 800 mainly unpaid or poorly paid volunteers” (Siklawi 2012:8), whose tactical and military training was carried out by Palestinian group Fatah. Yet, as Amal’s role grew larger, so too did its desire to promote its interests in areas across south Lebanon, which had been controlled by Palestinian groups since the late 1960s.

The struggle within Shia organizations in south Lebanon is key to understand how a camp like El-Buss could become a site of precarious and traumatic events. In 1978 Israel invaded south Lebanon and fully occupied the region south of the Litani River in 1982. These incursions were focused on Shia agricultural areas in the south, causing many to break away from Palestinian organizations and join the Amal movement. The power struggle between both parties was affected by several other events such as Amal’s growing ties to Iran following the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, whereas the PLO supported Saddam Hussein’s camp. The polarization between both sides resulted in several violent clashes between them in Beirut.

A turning point in Amal’s and the Palestinian movement’s diverging paths came during the War of the Camps between 1985-1987. By then, Israelis had partly withdrawn from Tyre in south Lebanon, and Amal sought to capitalize on this moment by seizing control of the liberated area (Siklawi 2012). The party waged war against Palestinian refugee camps in West Beirut, sparking a violent confrontation between the groups that escalated in 1986, when the fighting moved south to Rashidiyah camp in Tyre and Ain al Helweh in Saida.

Although El-Buss was not physically destroyed by the assaults that took place between Palestinian factions and the Amal movement, the logic of violence that pervaded the atmosphere at the time remained palpable, conditioning socioeconomic and political vectors of life. Mohamed Kemal Dorai (2010) notes that the camp today can be divided into two different spaces: the first subdivision points to the area developed around the former Armenian camp in which building is dense; the second, western part of the camp is developed in an informal manner. Moreover, the camp plays an important role in the socioeconomic organization of the city. El-Buss roundabout is situated at the northern limit of the camp where different travelers' routes converge, various commercial businesses operate and a bus station and taxi stop is located (Dorai 2010: 15-16).

This section aimed to show how past tensions between Palestinian and Shia movements threatened refugee camps' existence in the city of Tyre. While al-Buss was not destroyed during the War of the Camps, the violent clashes created a precarious environment that added to a lived experience of uncertainty. It is a volatility *vis-à-vis* an unknown future and one symptomatic of an experience of statelessness.

### **C. Art in the Camps**

Visual representations within El-Buss capture the various narratives of precariousness that emerge within this urban space. As previously mentioned, four narratives will be analyzed: walls as palimpsest; leaders and martyrs; and street art and murals. This section explores existing literature on visual expressions in Palestinian camps in Lebanon, underscoring the main themes that emerge.



Graffiti in Lebanese Palestinian camps has been studied by several scholars, with particular focus on Beirut. Rasha Salti (2008) looks at the changing face of graffiti in the city during and following the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). She notes that postwar graffiti reflected Lebanon's "reconfiguration of publicness" - while some took to Beirut's walls to express allegiance to or rejection of Syrian hegemony, others reclaimed the walls as their own, writing personal love notes instead. Her study is heavily centered on Sabra and Shatila camp in Beirut, where she notes that questions of Palestinian identity were often contested on the camp's walls. This chapter extends the study southward, looking at what visual expressions of identity and politics emerge in El-Buss.

More than a site for identity-making, graffiti and street murals can also be a visual space to express anger and frustration at political leaders, thus becoming a way to counter a hegemonic order, whether it be national or otherwise. In *The Naked Blogger of Cairo* (2016), Marwan Kraidy reflects on the role of artists in the Arab Spring, analyzing the various forms of creative insurgency that arose during the uprisings. Political graffiti is not only a method of political participation and protest, but also a form of contentious politics and micro-level activism that "is often used by marginalized persons who lack access to institutionalized forms of political participation" (Waldner and Dobratz 2013 : 387).

The existing literature thus highlights camp walls as sites of identity-making and negotiation. They become means of political participation in a space marked by statelessness and contentious political formations. In El-Buss, the camp walls express

political identity, questions of exile and diaspora, as well mediations on what Palestinian-ness means.

In El-Buss, the most common symbol of Palestinian identity that is reproduced on the camp walls is that of the Palestinian flag. The spray-painted images stand in contrast to the flags of Hezbollah and Amal that appear outside the camp space. I read them as a visual means of demarcating the camp as a site of resistance, different to the various identitarian negotiations that exist outside its walls. In Figure 14 below, the two flags are placed under an arrow that points residents and/or visitors of the camp towards the various residential neighborhoods and alleyways within El-Buss. Next to the arrow is written “Palestine” in Arabic, and the juxtaposition of the various visual elements tells observers that Palestine is “this way”. This visual practice reflects a way of re-drawing borders between camp and city, connecting El-Buss to a broader network of Palestinian identity, whether be it refugee camps elsewhere in Lebanon or abroad, the Palestinian diaspora, or the Occupied Territories. It is also a visual-spatial expression of resistance within a broader political and urban landscape that labels the camp as other.



*Fig. 14- Palestine is this way (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

## D. Visual Tropes

### 1. *Palimpsestic Walls*

This section explores visual culture as a means of space-making and marking. El-Buss camp is saturated with talking walls; walls populated with paradoxical signs that appear both permanent and impermanent in the camp's physical space. Sydney Shep (2015) employs the concept of urban palimpsest to look at the contemporary semioscape of New Zealand, focusing on the vestiges of the print industry in its capital Wellington. She terms the phrase “ghost signs” to point to “typographical traces that both reveal and hide their identity” (Shep 2015: 209). More importantly, Shep notes that ghost signs work according to a double logic: they operate as a palimpsest, marking changes over time and like graffiti, marking sites of contestation.

Her theoretical exposition proves particularly useful for El-Buss camp in Tyre. Walking around its streets, one cannot but notice spray-painted names and phone numbers advertising different services on the walls. Figures 15 and 16 below show examples of these visual practices.



*Fig. 15- Abu Ghaleb's Winch (Photo by Reem Joudi)*



*Fig. 16 - Khalil Mourad's Paint Supplies (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

Amin Ash and Nigel Thrift (2002) note that cities can be visualized as forms of writing, reflecting communication practices between individuals. Architecture becomes the medium through which these conversations occur and the texts become markers of past and present modes of knowledge. Figure 16 shows an advertisement for painting services with a phone number for contact; similarly Figure 15 represents another advertisement for a winch service. Two things become important to note here: the personal nature of the announcements and their mode of advertising.

Rather than advertising an establishment, both images advertise people by name, creating a very personal repertoire between the observer and the advertiser. Although El-Buss is integrated in Tyre's urban fabric, it remains less socioeconomically developed than the rest of the city, given the precariousness and inequality that condition Palestinian refugees' experience in Lebanon. The question of targeted

audience is also important to consider. Are these signs written for the inhabitants *only*, or are they targeted for members of the city outside the camp? Given that they are produced quite inexpensively on a localized scale, it is safe to assume that these visual texts are aimed at inhabitants of the camp, reinforcing the logics of the checkpoint and borderscape that mark El-Buss as “other” *vis-à-vis* Tyre.

Moreover, the large advertising billboards that line Tyre’s streets and neighborhoods appear mirrored by the spray painted messages in El-Buss. While Tyre’s colorful displays are symptomatic of neoliberal practices that pervade the city, the visual texts in El-Buss are a means of overcoming the absence of advertising capacities within the camp. Thus, they become their own forms of resisting the socioeconomic repercussions of “othering”.

In the previous chapter, I highlighted the various visual ways through which globalization practices appear in Tyre. In El-Buss, the most prominent visual marker of globalized experience is related to football. As shown in Figure 17 below, drawings of famous footballers’ names (Lionel Messi) and scoreboards of matches like Germany versus Italy decorate several corners of the camp.

I read these visual texts as a means of managing the precarious conditions of camp life. Whether they are records of past matches that took place or a method of score-keeping in a match within the camp, they reflect both a commodified form of consumption and a means of passing the time within the camp’s “suspended now”. They become records of what is termed as important in El-Buss, providing a momentary escape from the camp’s confines and what it entails in terms of identitarian struggle. These visual texts are often complemented by scenarios of young children playing

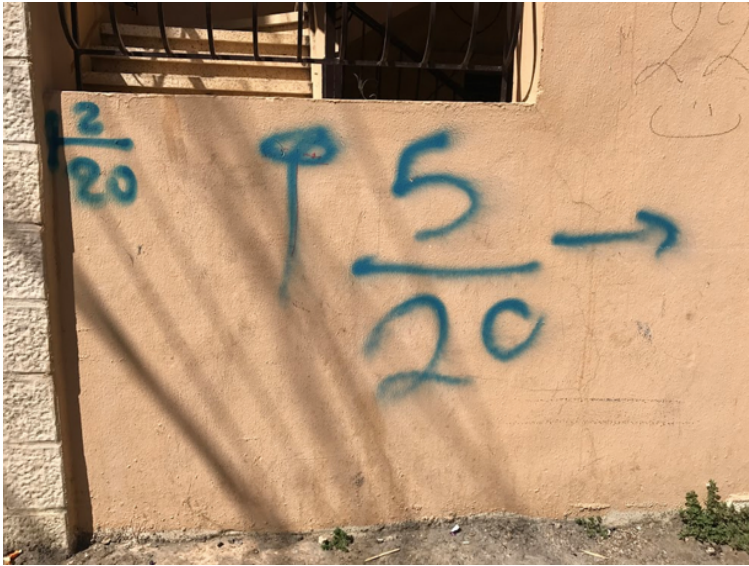
football in the alleyways of El-Buss, and in their juxtaposition they reflect a means of grappling with a volatile future through re-imagining the uses of the space in the present.



*Fig. 17 - The World Cup Final (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

The walls of El-Buss’s camps are also marked by numbers and arrows. To the outside observer’s eyes, these numbers do not make much sense at first glance. Yet their presence at various intervals within the camp set them apart as important visual markers. I asked my friend who showed me around the camp what these numbers and arrows signify and he noted they were the numbers of streets and neighborhoods, but that “most people here don’t need them anyway”.





*Fig. 18 - Which Way To Go? (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

The numbers recall de Certeau's (1984) notion of urban text, where he evokes street signs as means of place and space-making. In El-Buss, the numbered walls exist in the same logic, representing a way of making sense of the camp's many alleyways and streets. They are similarly a means of countering the absurdity of the "suspended now" and the precarious conditions that bring it to life; the socioeconomic inequality that mark refugee life. What is also interesting to notes with regards to these signs is their mode of production. Rather than being officially-made and state-sponsored, they are hand-drawn and spray painted on the walls, constituting a testament to the logic of "otherness" and absence that marks the camp. Moreover, these scriptural walls reflect a survival mechanism, whereby Palestinians make do with the bare minimum that is provided to them. Walls as make-shift billboards fill in for the absence of officially-sanctioned communication technologies, creating a particular visual culture vernacular that is unique to El-Buss and removed from the visual aesthetic that marks Tyre. In the liminal space that is the refugee camp—the periphery within the periphery— inscription

becomes a way to fight the fleetingness of the camp as a make-shift home and the transience of a space constituted, reconstituted and threatened by precarious conditions.

## ***2. Leaders and Martyrs***

El-Buss reflects the experiences of being a refugee and the violence it entails on social, economic, political and physical levels. These combine to form an experience of precariousness that is linked to the individual's exposure to harm. This section explores the various ways in which the camp's visual culture reflects the process of identity-making *vis-à-vis* Palestinian-ness: what does it mean on cultural and political levels and how does it emerge?

Before delving into the analysis, it is important to note that the previous section does contend with Palestinian-ness as well. In a way, all four narratives that will be looked into are means of negotiating identity with regards to space, self, and nation. When I speak about Palestinian-ness in this section, I am looking at practices of activism that invoke the Palestinian cause and the broad headings that encompass it: the Right of Return, the Nakba, martyred soldiers and armed resistance.

Figure 19 shows a picture of Yasser Arafat, former leader of the PLO and a figure of hope and resistance to many Palestinians in Lebanon and abroad. His image is ubiquitous in the camp, at times multiple images of Arafat are placed next to one another as in Figure 19 below, creating a makeshift gallery of the leader for passersby to admire and examine. Two elements are important to note regarding the photos: the way in which Arafat is presented and the images' position on the wall.





Fig. 19- Yasser Arafat (Photo by Reem Joudi)



Fig. 20- Kamal, the Martyr (Photo by Reem Joudi)

Arafat's gaze in the image on the left is personable and approachable. He is looking directly at the viewer, smiling, creating a personal relationship between observer and observed. On the image is a long text that frames Arafat's image within an ideological viewpoint. It states, "...his name was one of the names of a rising new Palestine. From the ashes of the Nakba to the flame of Resistance to the idea of a state and in every one of us, a piece of him lives." The text addresses the broad headings under which Palestinian identity is often grouped: the Nakba and its violent aftermath; the rise of Palestinian Resistance and nationalist sentiment; and the fight against Israeli Occupation. The poster evokes these themes through Arafat's image and memory, positioning him at the heart of the Palestinian struggle. Moreover, in saying that a part of him lives in every Palestinian, the poster visually articulates Arafat's political figure as a response to a political identity in limbo, to statelessness and the precariousness of life in the camp.

Figure 19 displays another image of Arafat that portrays him in a more authoritative manner, mid-conversation, looking into the distance and pointing with his index finger. The image of his face is placed above an image of Al Aqsa mosque in Palestine, occupying a much larger space in comparison. The visual composition symbolically marks Arafat as the protector of Al Aqsa and the Palestinian cause more generally. The placement of both posters next to one another creates a gallery of Arafat that attests to a broad spectrum of roles: he is the paternal protector and the authoritative leader who guards the Palestinian identity and struggle.

Shep's (2015) conversation on "ghost signs" is also useful in this context. The posters of Arafat are worn out at the edges; at times the vibrant colors are washed out by exposure to sunlight. They appear like remnants of a distant past, reflecting the logic of the palimpsest that records change over time. Moreover, the posters are juxtaposed on a wall that is scribbled with names and personal messages, creating narratives of past and present, as well as private and public memory that reflect a site of contestation and identity-making. Yasser Arafat's image of the leader is one that is publicly recognized and shared by Palestinians but is re-appropriated on El-Buss's walls as part of a collective gallery.

The negotiation of Palestinian identity also occurs through images of martyrs in the camp, as shown in Figure 20. In his study on the visual representations of martyrdom in Palestine, Mahmoud Abu Hashhash (2006) notes that the word "martyr" has become an indispensable word in the Palestinian vocabulary, evoking both sacred and secular meanings. Martyrdom is seen as one mechanism of Palestinian resistance against the Israeli enemy and is therefore considered a welcome means of negotiating identity. Abu Hashhash's analysis of martyr posters in the Gaza Strip provides a useful way of looking at the aesthetic of posters in El-Buss. He notes that the "the photograph of a martyr in a poster is the image of an image" that is appropriated twice: first, when it is 'taken' and second when it is removed from the family album and collaged onto other images to form the poster (Abu-Hashhash 2006: 396).

This two-step appropriation is similarly a means of merging the boundaries between public and private memory, whereby the private image becomes appropriated as part of a broader public history of Palestinian resistance. The poster in Figure 20

shows a photograph of Kamal Abu Sahyoun, who could have been martyred in Palestine or Lebanon. As my friend remarked while walking around El-Buss, images of soldiers martyred in the Occupied Territories were common in El-Buss, creating a temporal-spatial connection between the camp-in-Lebanon and the Occupied Territories that transcends physical boundaries.

The image of the Dome of the Rock is ubiquitous in the aesthetic of Palestinian martyrs' posters. Abu-Hashhash (2006) notes that if the martyr's image is "floating behind the Dome of the Rock [it] gives him an appearance of being the guardian of Jerusalem. But when the photograph is collaged in front of the Dome, the martyr remains anchored to a recognisable world" (396-397). The martyr's photo in Figure 20 is positioned in front of the Dome of the Rock, anchoring him to a present marked by the logic of the "suspended now"—a limbo between an unresolved past and volatile future. On the top lefthand corner is a photograph of a smiling Yasser Arafat, and his floating image re-inscribes Arafat's role as protector of Jerusalem and the Palestinian cause.

The image was produced by the PLO, whose logo is placed under a phrase that reads "All of Palestine is my homeland". This symbolic juxtaposition is a means of re-emphasizing the idea of liberation in territorial terms. Lastly, the poster of martyr Kamal Abu Sahyoun is imbued with religious meaning. On the righthand margin is a sentence that reads "to eternal Paradise", a reference to the meaning of martyrdom and its reward in the Islamic faith. Moreover, as Abu-Hashhash (2006) notes, "representations of martyrdom conceal and dissimulate death as a grim fact and

assimilate it to eternity and the infinite”, highlighting it instead as positive experience that is essential to the Palestinian struggle (400).

### ***3. Leaving the Camp***

On our tour of the camp, I noticed an image of Angela Merkel glued to a closed door. It belonged to the baker, who was a fan of the German chancellor. The image seemed quite out of place in the camp, where the visual culture of leaders and martyrs was expressly linked to Palestinian identity. Underneath her image was a note in “Arabizi”— a Romanized version of the Arabic language that uses numbers and English letters—which says: *Latasal a7san min al3rabi*, translating to: “She remains better than the Arab”. The message refers to Merkel’s refugee policy, which welcomed Palestinians from Lebanon and other host countries, as opposed to Arab countries that did not offer equal rights to Palestinian refugees. This is compounded by the the precariousness invoked by a restricted job market in many Arab countries which makes it difficult for refugees to move up the social ladder. Through his fieldwork in Tyre, Sylvain Perdigon (2011) notes that these precarious labor conditions make emigration to Germany the only “thinkable, desirable route” away from a dead-end future (50).

Judith Naeff (2018) highlights the packed suitcase as a common motif in Lebanese post-war cultural production (48). It reflects a readiness to leave the country at any point, as a result of unstable and precarious conditions. Emigration and a desire to escape the confines of the camp pervade life in El-Buss. It is a topic that occupies most conversations and is the ultimate goal of the youth that live in the camp. “This is why

the camp is not very lively; most of its people live abroad,” my friend remarked as we traversed El-Buss’s empty streets.



*Fig. 21- Chancellor Merkel (Photo by Reem Joudi)*

The image of Merkel was, on the one hand, a visual expression of a political viewpoint and on the other hand, symptomatic of a broader theme of emigration that permeates the camp’s atmosphere. It is a motif that similarly exists in murals and paintings located around El-Buss.

Figures 22 and 23 below show a large mural located by a main road in the camp, where cars are allowed to drive on. Certain areas in El-Buss are designated pedestrian only as a security measure, another reminder of the camp’s precarious past and present conditions. Spanning an impressive length of the wall, the mural combines themes of Palestinian identity; the Nakba and its trauma; diaspora and emigration. It represents the Nakba, showing men, women and children leaving villages set on fire. The final



scene of the mural shows an older man and a drawing of cartoonist Najji al-Ali's "Handala", the refugee child that became al-Ali's signature. Handala asks the older man, named Abu-Saleh, to "tell him about the Nakba". The man in the mural replies, "the British brought the Jews to our country and gave them money and weapons and the Arab regimes conspired against us and the Nakba happened on the 15th of May 1948 and we fled...ask my sister Um-Atef in Burj al Shamali camp, she will tell you about our refuge. The rest of the story is with her..."



Fig. 22 - The Mural, Part I (Photo by Reem Joudi)



Fig. 23- The Mural, Part II (Photo by Reem Joudi)

The statement is incredibly powerful for many reasons. The Nakba, the traumatic event of 1948 that established the Israeli state and led to Palestinians leaving their homeland and fleeing to neighboring countries as refugees, is depicted as being caused by the British and the Arab regimes that betrayed the Palestinian cause. Moreover, as Abu-Saleh's figure narrates the Nakba, he stops at discussing the Palestinian refugee plight, noting that the "rest of the story" is in Burj al Shamali camp, which is located on Tyre's eastern border. Thus, the mural serves to establish both a narrative of a traumatic event that is commemorated by Palestinians and a narrative that links the different refugee camps in Tyre together as part of a broader network of resistance and struggle.

The producers of the mural are similarly important to consider. As Figure 22 shows, the mural begins with a message "Palestine is our belonging and our identity and our compass", followed by a dedication: "from Denmark's Palestinians to our family in El-Buss camp". The juxtaposition of both messages encompasses El-Buss within a broader Palestinian identity that transcends geographical boundaries. Moreover, the dedication invokes the logic of emigration and diaspora that pervades the camp's atmosphere, establishing a link between those who escaped the precariousness of camp life and those who remain trapped within it.

It is worthwhile to make a quick note about ways of reading the mural. While it is assumed that the mural is to be read from right to left, given that it is written in Arabic, directionality remains an important consideration. If one approaches it from left to right, reading Abu-Saleh's narration on the Nakba first, then it appears as though the



mural plays the scene backwards, showing a flashback into the past. If read from right to left, it is as though the scene is unfolding in real-time in front of the viewer's eyes.

### **E. Conclusion: Precarious Life in the Camp**

The influx of refugees to Lebanon following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War has added another dimension of precarity to life in the camp. As Are John Knudsen (2018) notes, “unlike the Palestinian refugees who arrived *en masse* in Lebanon during the winter of 1947-1948, the Syrian refugees have come in waves” (100), depending on the events that were unfolding in their hometowns and villages. Knudsen examines how Palestinian-Syrian refugees assimilated in camps in Tyre, specifically El-Buss and Jall al-Bahar, an informal settlement on the outskirts of the city, noting that Palestinian-Syrian refugees in Tyre were generally from the “first wave” that left Syria in 2012. The low-cost housing and empty rooms from absentee owners made El-Buss a prime choice for incoming refugees (Knudsen 2018: 102), showing how emigration from the camp re-shapes its contemporary demographic makeup. Thus, where instability and volatile economic conditions prompts many Palestinians in El-Buss to seek better opportunities abroad, the instability and violence of war in neighboring Syria has brought in new waves of refugees to El-Buss. Thus, the camp falls victim to a vicious cycle of precarity that constantly re-inscribes boundaries and borders, the space's aesthetic qualities, and understandings of Palestinian-ness and Palestinian identity.

This chapter explored El-Buss's visual culture as well as mediated representations of the camp. Building on the logic of center and periphery that placed Tyre as city in the abject south, removed from the center Beirut, this chapter explored a space that is

seen as peripheral within the periphery. Moreover, an analysis of what is visible in the camp also highlighted the silences that exist. The absence of basic services and adequate housing are among the first things one notices, followed by the lack of billboards and advertorial spaces in the camp. This latter reflects a way in which the camp is rendered peripheral *vis-à-vis* the city.

The previous chapter revealed images of leaders and martyrs, political flags and posters, and advertisements as key visual markers within Tyre. In El-Buss, the images of leaders and martyrs are explicitly tied to the Palestinian cause, rendering the faces of Sayyid Musa al Sadr, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, and Nabih Berri invisible within the camp. Instead, the image of Arafat was pervasive, along with the photographs of young Palestinian martyrs, reflecting an exercise in power negotiation. The camp's visual culture becomes a way to challenge and critique the political-sectarian powers that dominate Tyre's public space, documenting instead the images of leaders that are seen as symbols of or sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

Moreover, the logic of exile and emigration pervaded the camp's atmosphere and visual culture; something that the study of Tyre's visual landscape did not reveal. Thus, I argue that the precariousness of life in the camp is experienced more acutely than in the city of Tyre, visually marked by difficult socioeconomic conditions that can only be escaped by leaving the country. How can imaginaries of a good—even better—life be visually expressed in Tyre? What do “good” and “better” mean in this context? The next chapter explores these questions *vis-à-vis* digital platforms.

## CHAPTER V

### DIGITAL IMAGINARIES

The previous two chapters highlighted how various expressions of precariousness emerge in the visual culture of Tyre and El-Buss refugee camp. It looked at the physical space of the city and the streets and alleyways that make up its geography. This chapter extends the notion of space to the digital sphere, looking at how the city is represented and imagined online. In invoking the digital, I am acknowledging that the “ubiquity of communication technologies and the acceleration of image-sharing are changing relationships between urban dwellers...and their environments” (Boy et al. 2017: 612). How the city is represented, which images are chosen, and which spaces are privileged create narratives of the city that are consumed by different audiences.

I look at the Instagram account “Live Love Tyre” as my site of study. The proliferation of location-based media objects like smart phones, coupled with the popularity of photo sharing applications like Instagram, has expanded what counts within cities’ visual culture and urban aesthetics. With a click of a button, users snap, edit, then upload photographs on a social networking site for the world — or select followers — to browse through, “like”, and comment on. Applications like Instagram have enabled engagement to become a more democratic process. The argument is not one in favour of technological determinism, but an acknowledgement that a platform like Instagram has made artistic photography accessible to those interested. What

remains debatable, however, is the meaning of “artistic”, as well as who the producers and consumers of such “art” are.

How, then, do images of the city on Instagram compare to the visual culture analyses discussed in the previous chapters? How do they shape, re-shape, and interact with offline imaginaries of the city? These questions frame this chapter in an effort to understand how contemporary cultural media is created and experienced online in a city like Tyre. Whilst posters of martyred soldiers and flags of political parties dot the neighborhoods and streets of the southern Lebanese city, these images do not appear on “Live Love Tyre’s” account. These apparent silences and resultant online imaginaries of the city enable us to unwrap several complex and at times opposing dynamics. First, they reveal tensions between online and offline visual representations of the city, shedding light on the neighborhoods, practices, and ideologies that are favoured or omitted in either space. Second, they illuminate how individuals within and outside Tyre are using a photo-sharing app like Instagram, initiating an important discussion about the contemporary cultural practices that emerge within Lebanon. Finally, an inquiry into “city life on Instagram” when compared to its offline counterpart can illuminate how image producers on the platform re-imagine Tyre.

The last point is particularly important for our study of precariousness and its visual manifestations in the city. I argue that the images online are a response to the precariousness of life in Tyre and Lebanon more generally. Any representations of explicitly Shia identity is removed: martyr’s posters, political flags and posters disappear from “Live Love Tyre’s” account. In their place are images of Tyre’s beaches and the “good life” they invoke, which, on the most basic level, are mediated

representations of tourist practices. As noted in previous chapters, Tyre has a history with tourism given the presence of archaeological sites within its boundaries, as well as a long stretch of public beach that has been a destination for tourists over the years.

I am interested in taking this seemingly simple formulation a step further, looking at how online representations speak to broader imaginaries of the city-space. I argue that the images re-imagine Tyre through three affective registers: aspirational cosmopolitanism; authenticity; and the “good life”. Each of the three registers responds to a perceived precariousness—a sectarian sociopolitical makeup, a nostalgic return to a pre-Civil War past or Lebanon’s “golden ages”, and the precariousness of economic conditions.

The first three sections outline Instagram’s architecture and creative practices, as well as “Live Love Tyre’s” background in order to lay down the framework of producer and consumer practices. The following sections provide an exposition of each of the affective registers.

### **A. Platform Architecture**

Since this chapter is concerned with visual and aesthetic practices online, Instagram is the ideal vantage point from and through which to explore these dynamics. The platform was launched in 2010, making it a relative newcomer on the social media scene. In principle, Instagram did not offer anything extraordinary; it was mainly focused on images: taking them, editing them, and uploading them. Originally used by digital photography enthusiasts, the application has quickly become one of the most popular social networking sites. According to the 2017 edition of the Arab Social

Media report, there are a total of 7.1 million active Instagram users in the Arab world, with top countries being the United Arab Emirates (13% of population active), Bahrain (10%), and Lebanon (9.5%) (Salem 2017: 59). For these reasons, Instagram emerges as a compelling platform to examine how the spread of social media technologies and the increasing popularity of image-sharing platforms are re-shaping individuals' relationships to their cities and surroundings.

The platform is a site for both production and consumption on multiple levels. It allows users to upload photographs to their private or public accounts for consumption by select or global audiences. Yet these processes are in and of themselves bound by the large-scale technologies that structure Instagram as an image-sharing platform: geo-tagging, hashtagging, frame sizes, filters, and chronology. A brief outline of each of these features is necessary in order to visualize how a city like Tyre could be assembled and re-assembled on Instagram. My study focuses on the images, rather than user experiences per se; however, I find an understanding of the platform's architecture important to contextualize the broader framework these images exist in.

First, both the geo-tagging and hashtagging features allow the images to be located in a particular time and space. Users select the location their photo was taken at and tag it accordingly, adding it to a virtual map of thousands upon thousands of other photographs that were also taken at the selected place. In doing so, the images come to form a transnational online map that exists apart from the physical locations themselves, reconfiguring the recognized borders of these places.

The hashtag feature works in a similar fashion. When users choose to hashtag their photographs with a known word such as #igers or #outfitoftheday, they are willingly

joining a global community of photographs portraying similar or different content, depending on the specificity of the term chosen. More importantly, the images are made discoverable to a global or select audience, forming an imagined community of common interest. As Hochman and Manovich (2013) argue, Instagram favors spatial connectivities as opposed to temporal, vertical structures; time is always user-centric and measured relative to the contemporary moment of opening the application and the photograph's original date of creation/upload. As a result of this temporal logic, the images themselves become reflections of a "suspended now": not fixed by the date of posting; can be assembled and re-assembled into different narratives; appear on the Instagram homepage and "Explore" page as a result of the platform's algorithm.

The presentation of images on the application is also key in conceptualizing Instagram's role in the production and consumption of visual culture. The photographs on each account are organized chronologically, with the most recent photograph shown at the top. The images are in square frames, viewed in rows of threes or in an image-by-image sequence, depending on viewer preference. For some accounts, the way in which the images are ordered creates an aesthetic narrative, a visually pleasing array of color and image content that appears like a well-curated digital museum. Yet this image-ordering on Instagram profiles is countered by a non-chronological sequence that appears to users when they browse their homepage. Images from accounts they follow appear on the screen in a seemingly disorganized manner, image by image, carefully fashioned by Instagram's algorithms.

The duality of the temporal experiences is one way in which Instagram distorts our conception of a temporal image. As Hochman and Manovich (2013) rightly argue, the

platform transforms the temporal image into an atemporal media object; “as images become *timeless* (or better, time-thickened), we are all in the same times together” (8). This feature is further established by the platform’s instant photo sharing function that promises individual photographs taken from a plethora of personal vantage points, along with filters, which manipulate the images’ saturation, hues, contrast etc... changing the message communicated by an image and its overall atmosphere or feel.

## **B. Creative Practices on Instagram**

The above section lays out the architecture of Instagram in order to understand how the platform’s technologies shape the way images are produced and consumed online. Unlike earlier photo-sharing platforms like Flickr, Instagram was created for mobile use in a “post-Facebook, post-iPhone moment” (Fallon 2014: 57). The very appeal of the medium lies in its ability to translate everyday lived experiences —those occurring in real time — to the digital sphere in a quick manner; the act of creating, reproducing and publishing a photo can happen in the street (MacDowall and de Souza 2018: 9).

This undoubtedly reshapes the way individuals represent and experience the city. Questions on what to display online come into play, as users negotiate what photographs are deemed “Instagram-worthy” and which are not. In these processes, particular areas and neighborhoods within the city will be represented at the expense of others; the worthiness of urban landscapes become dependent on various social, political, economic, and cultural factors that the image-producer must take into consideration when curating the city for online consumption. Within this framework,



do digital representations of the city on Instagram reflect the visual culture that exists offline?

These questions guide my inquiry into online representations of Tyre. Jon D Boy and Justus Uitermark (2017) examine the very same questions in relation to Amsterdam. Based on interviews and a large dataset of geotagged Instagram images, they find that social media practices feed on and perpetuate socio-spatial inequalities. Areas and groups considered undesirable “are frequently degraded or rendered invisible, while spaces of upscale consumption and sanitised tourist havens are elevated” (Boy and Uitermark 2017: 612). In the sections that follow, an analysis of two Instagram accounts about Tyre reflect similar offline/online tendencies to those discovered in Amsterdam. What is even more fascinating about the southern Lebanese city is the coexistence of seemingly conflicting real and virtual visual cultures that simultaneously pull imaginaries of the city in opposite directions.

Throughout this study, I consider Instagram as a public platform that mediates representations of the city’s visual culture. Zizi Papacharissi (2002) notes that “the most plausible manner of perceiving the virtual sphere consists of several culturally fragmented cyberspheres that occupy a common virtual public space. Groups of ‘netizens’ brought together by common interests will debate and perhaps strive for the attainment of cultural goals” (22). Instagram, both in its architecture and practices, is a platform that brings together image producers and consumers — users that wear both hats — under a common digital umbrella. These interactions with the medium give rise to creative cultural practices that redefine our understandings of visual culture and our role within it.

Gibbs et al. (2014) describe the various logics and styles that shape a social media platform's communication style as "platform vernacular", a convincing conceptual starting point to begin understanding what a platform like Instagram *does*. The term builds upon Jean Burgess's concept of vernacular creativity, which represents a way of looking at and making sense of everyday cultural production amid changes in media technologies. Burgess (2006) notes that vernacular creativity transcends 'amateur' as an identity category, as 'amateur' is easily appended to pre-existing fields of cultural practice that presume professional as the default arrangement and amateur as a lesser categorization (29). More importantly, Burgess argues that new media technologies have given rise to complex forms of communication processes in which such denominations become inadequate. She notes, "vernacular creativity is not so much a neologism as it is an achieved concept: it marries two ordinary words that cut across several domains of culture" (29-30).

The type of photography that emerges on Instagram fits within Burgess's conceptualization of vernacular creativity to an extent. She notes that the term fits cultural productions that are ordinary, not elite or institutionalized, but identified on the basis of their commonness (Burgess 2006: 32). While Instagram is imbricated in the ordinary insofar as it speaks to and re-formulates imaginaries of everyday experiences within the city, its ordinariness is not completely removed from elite or institutionalized settings. "Elite" art institutions — famous museums from around the world — have used the app as a marketing tool to reach out to a broader audience; artists in the formal sense have chosen the platform as a communicative tool with their audiences; and lastly,

Instagram itself is a corporate institution within a capitalist system, operating through codes and algorithms that control what photographs are seen by whom and when.

Instagram is also a platform used for branding by large corporations, small enterprises, and individuals. The square layout follows a reductionist logic that limits visual experiences to a pre-set frame, creating a gallery of images that are packaged for consumption. One implication of this practice is that both the images and their subject matter become commodified representations of the brand they espouse and the visual scenes they capture.

### **C. To Live and Love Tyre**

The above mapping out of Instagram's architecture is one way to begin understanding how the platform navigates artistic and cultural boundaries. This section presents an overview of "Live Love Tyre" and the complex political-economic structure it is symptomatic of, in an effort to highlight how the brand "live love" emerged.

"Live Love Tyre" is part of a larger organization called "Live Love Beirut", a crowdfunded and volunteer-run campaign launched in 2012. On their website ([www.liveloovebeirut.com](http://www.liveloovebeirut.com)), the group states that "Live Love Beirut" was initiated by the youth for the youth to showcase the "real" Lebanon on digital platforms. The group never names any individuals behind the campaign, making it appear like a coherent collective working toward a common goal: presenting the "authentic" Lebanon.

Before delving into the question of what an authentic Lebanon means, it is worth spending a little time unpacking "Live Love Beirut's" mission and website. At the heart of its work are images. The self-professed movement began with sharing images on

Facebook and Instagram, introducing viewers to a visual experience of Lebanon's different regions. Though Beirut was chosen as part of the name, the ambition was much broader, encompassing various towns and cities in the country.

Today, the website header reads "Live Love", less of an affirmation to Beirut and more of a mission statement: the aim is to "live" and "love" through images, creating online imagined communities through affect. Today, there are multiple "sister" accounts under the "Live Love" heading of cities within Lebanon and globally. There is an app that can be downloaded which details exciting tourist locations to discover in Lebanon, tours that people can join and bracelets that one could buy.

The "Live Love" transformed into a brand. "Live Love Tyre" unequivocally became part of the brand at its early stages, more specifically in 2013. The Instagram account was launched by Jubran Elias, a Syrian-Lebanese who was fascinated and "in love" with Tyre. His account aligned with "Live Love Beirut's" broader mission of zooming in on Lebanon's cities and bringing what is perceived as "authentic" about them to the fore. Elias selects photographs for the account in two ways: first, individuals who are from the city or who have visited it take a photograph, upload it to their account (which is set on public view for anyone to see), and tag "Live Love Tyre"; second, individuals hashtag their photographs with #livelovetyre, #humansoftyre, or #tyrestories, three phrases associated with the "Live Love Tyre" account. These methods of exploring and categorizing Instagram photos differs from hierarchical subject categories, allowing users to browse across various spatio-temporal and visual productions, as well as multiple contexts (Hochman and Manovich 2013: 19).

The curatorial role of Instagram users was explored by Danielle Becker (2016) in the case of South Africa, who noted that “the Instagrammer can, in this sense, be seen as a virtual curator who frequently expects images to be read as part of a larger narrative” (107). Elias become a curator in the online digital museum of Instagram, responsible for selecting, captioning and organizing the images on the “Live Love Tyre” account in a way that is both aesthetically pleasing to himself, the viewer, and that fits within the “Live Love” mission. His status as a self-professed outsider to the city is likely to color his perceptions and experiences of Tyre and the places he visits within it. That said, I argue that using the intentionality of the curator as a framework for analysis limits our understanding of how the city is produced and consumed on a digital platform like Instagram, and the effects of such representations. Thus, while the curator’s subjectivity is acknowledged, it is placed within the context of broader sociocultural visual practices; what I am interested in is Becker’s “larger narrative”, in the ways in which these images speak to the broader sociopolitical context they represent.

#### **D. Affect and Instagram**

I examine photographs posted on “Live Love Tyre” between June 2017 until February 2018, as June is seen as peak summer season when individuals frequent Tyre more, to identify the salient narratives of the city. I analyze the account in terms of general themes that emerge from the images, their overall aesthetic, as well as their captions. Since the account is updated daily with multiple photographs, it is difficult to assemble a manageable up-to-date sample of images. Thus, the account is considered from a holistic perspective within the given timeframe. The idea is to understand how

the city is assembled, renegotiated and re-imagined online, making a holistic approach the best way to understand how Tyre is constructed on Instagram.

In a study of art curators' Instagram accounts, Jennifer Fisher (2016) finds that the platform "extends curatorial relationality and modalities of affective engagement" (101). Though her research looks at Instagram accounts of art curators in particular, she is right in giving the platform and the photographs posted on it affective power. Fisher notes that the "frequency of rapid, almost immediate, transmission" of images characterizes this power, which helps generate a 'buzz' surrounding particular contexts and experiences (2016: 102). This 'buzz', she argues, carries hegemonic force, translating into questions like "where should one be?" and "who should they know" in order to be 'in touch' and connected to everything that is happening.

This relationship between Instagram and affective relationality is not solely confined to the formation of personal subjectivities. The study extends this concept by looking at how visual representations of the city on Instagram re-imagine its space online. In looking at "Live Love Tyre" I find that they re-imagine the city through three affective registers: aspired cosmopolitanism, the 'good life', and authenticity.

## **E. Affective Registers**

### **1. *Aspired Cosmopolitanism***

Cosmopolitanism, as a subjective outlook, entails an openness to cultural difference (Beck and Sznaider, 2006), whether real or aspired. Images on "Live Love Tyre" exemplify this cosmopolitanism by reflecting an openness to religious diversity. As mentioned in previous chapters, Tyre's sectarian makeup is quite diverse in comparison

to other cities in Lebanon as it is home to Shia, Sunni and Christian communities. The notion of mutual coexistence, or *aysh al-mushtaraq* is not as fragmented in Tyre as it is in other Lebanese cities, largely due to the fact that the Civil War was fought between Palestinian movements and Shia militia organizations. That said, “Live Love Tyre” re-imagines the city online as a space of coexistence devoid of any political flags, billboards or posters.



*Fig. 24 - #Mosque (Photo retrieved from “Live Love Tyre’s” [ @livelove.tyre ] Instagram account on December 1st, 2017)*



*Fig. 25- The Virgin Mary (Photo retrieved from “Live Love Tyre’s” [ @livelove.tyre ] Instagram account on December 1st, 2017)*

Instead, we find typical symbols of religious unity, as shown in Figures 36 and 37 above. Viewers can see the mosque at the back of the photograph framed by bougainvillea and the statue of the Virgin Mary —located at Tyre’s harbor—against a backdrop of bright blue skies. The captions on both images: “Have a blessed Friday” and “Have a blessed Sunday”, refer to holy days in the week for Muslims and Christians, respectively. The images adopt a similar aesthetic: the saturation is quite pronounced, the colors are vivid and the main symbols of religious diversity are set against a blue backdrop. This aesthetic practice is not limited to the two figures above, but is a common trope that runs throughout the “Live Love Tyre” account.

I argue that this creative practice reflects the commodification of symbolic markers of religion in order to present the city online as a space for mutual coexistence. It is another expression of globalization practices that reshape imaginaries of the city, this



time, on digital platforms. They are commodified for consumption by users who scroll through “Live Love Tyre’s” account, appearing as though they are postcards of the city. Two logics guide this process: first, “Live Love Tyre” operates partly as a touristic account. The success of “Live Love Beirut” and its sister organizations prompted the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism to initiate a “Live Love Lebanon” campaign in 2014; thus, “Live Love” became a brand synonymous with a touristic project on national and sub-national levels.

Second, these commodified images become simulated versions of a particular reality. Jean Baudrillard notes that simulation is “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (453). It is not a question of imitating the real that he is concerned with; rather, Baudrillard sees simulacrum as the substitution of the real with the image of the real so that it comes to stand in for the former. Thus, cosmopolitanism on “Live Love Tyre’s” account becomes a hyperreal and aspirational representation of Tyre.

This process, however, comes at a cost. In reducing openness to religious diversity and mutual coexistence to commodifiable symbols of religion, the various ideological markers in Tyre’s offline city-space are effaced. I read this visual act as a way of erasing sectarianism from the city’s imaginary, instead constructing religious unity as a utopian ideal. In this context, “Live Love Tyre’s” cosmopolitanism becomes a response to the precariousness of sectarianism in Lebanon and the political power structures it gives rise to, making the images sites upon which future sociopolitical aspirations for Tyre are constructed.

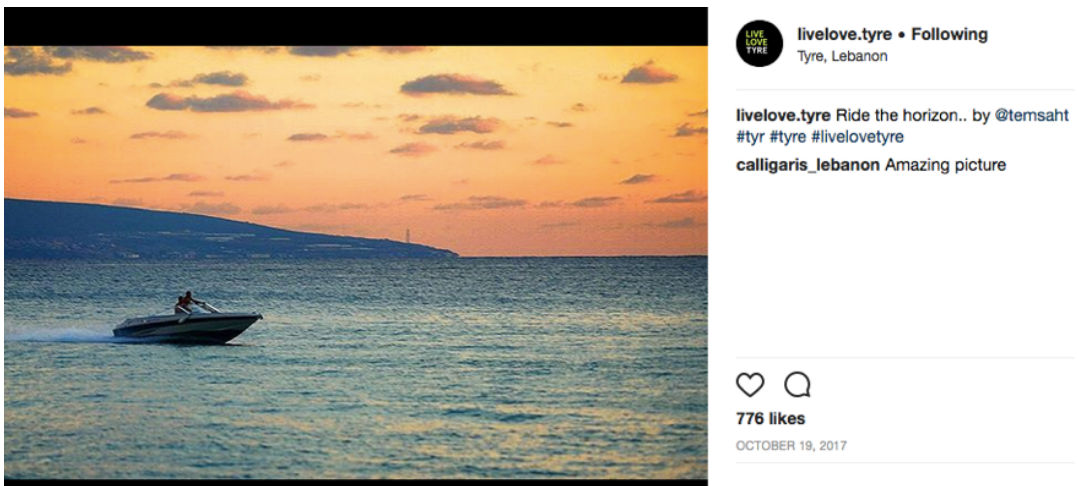
Yet, in building mutual coexistence on imagined religious unity, the hyperreal online space becomes further trapped in the experience of a suspended now, creating a disassociation between what exists offline and its online simulation. Users can quite literally click in and out of images of the city on Instagram that were taken at various geographical locations and at various times, which in itself becomes an exercise in temporal disassociation. For some, the fantasy of religious diversity and mutual coexistence—as depicted on “Live Love Tyre”—comes to reflect the ‘real’ dynamics of the city. For others, online representations of the city reflect ideals that one can escape or aspire to. In either case, these creative practices on Instagram happen at the expense of particular people, identities and ideologies.

## **2. *The “Good Life”***

The logic of borderscapes similarly guides online imaginaries of Tyre. Which areas appear on “Live Love Tyre” and which spaces are deliberately left out reshape the city for its digital audiences. This section looks at how the city is re-imagined and its areas re-mapped online, through an affective register I call “the good life”. I follow Lauren Berlant’s (2011) understanding of a good life, which is “the attrition of a fantasy, a collectively invested form of life” (11). The attachment to this object of desire is harmful precisely when the possibility of its achievement is deemed sheer fantasy or impossible. Berlant (2011) continues: “As that fantasy has become *more* fantasmatic, with less and less relation to how people can live— as the blueprint has faded—its attrition manifests itself in an emerging set of aesthetic conventions that make a claim to affective realism derived from embodied, affective rhythms of survival” (11). Thus, as

precarious conditions of living make the “good life” more difficult to achieve, the fantasy of its attention is increasingly represented through aesthetic practices.

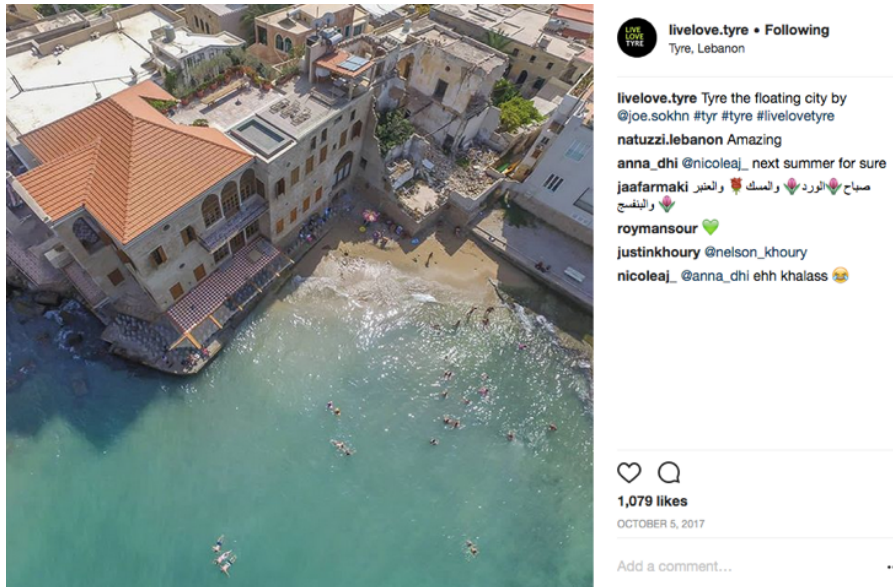
I argue that the fantasies of a good life presented on “Live Love Tyre’s” account are symptomatic of precarious conditions of life in Tyre and Lebanon more generally. Images of the sea are prevalent on the account, referring to the important historical role the sea plays in the city’s tourism industry. More importantly for this study, the sea becomes a utopian escape from precariousness upon which imaginaries of a “good life” can be drawn.



*Fig. 26 - Beyond the Horizon (Photo retrieved from “Live Love Tyre’s” [ @livelove.tyre ] Instagram account on December 12th, 2017)*

An image of the sea, a boat, and sunset with the caption “Ride the Horizon” reflects, on the most basic level, the endless opportunities the sea provides. It is a space that is “owned” by no one, one that can be re-written with imaginaries of a “good life”. Here, “horizon” also evokes Judith Naeff’s (2018) discussion on volatile horizons of expectation, or unstable futures that are a result of postwar socioeconomic and political

conditions. On “Live Love Tyre”, the unstable horizon is reshaped into one of possibility, holding the potential for change.



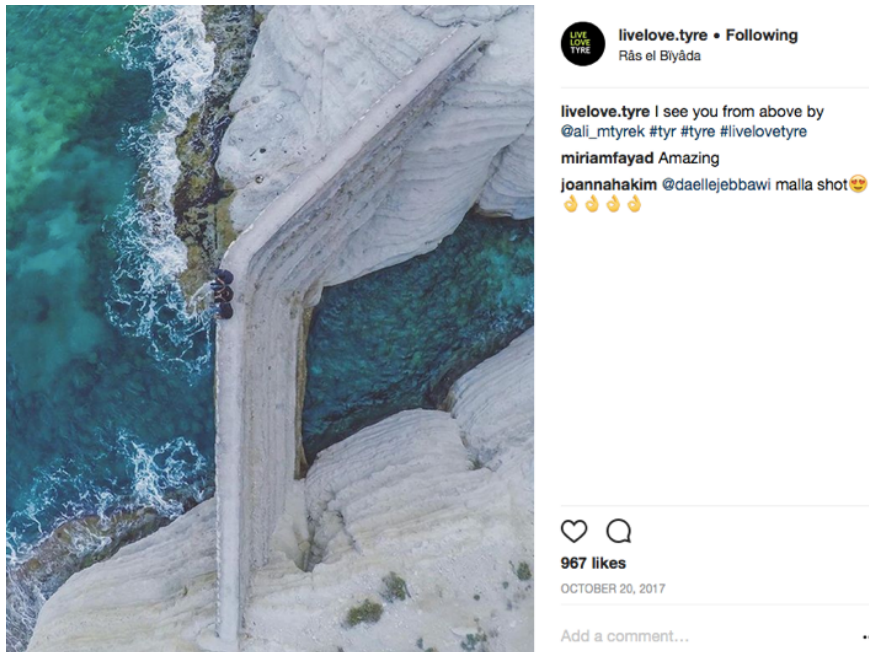
*Fig. 27 - The Floating City (Photo retrieved from “Live Love Tyre’s” [ @livelove.tyre ] Instagram account on December 12th, 2017)*

Figure 27 shows an aerial view of one of Tyre’s beaches, with a caption reading “Tyre the floating city”. It is an image that appears multiple times on the account, referring to Tyre’s geography as a peninsula with direct access to multiple shores. Through these images, the borders of Tyre, a city in the “abject” south, are re-negotiated, challenging narratives of center and periphery that color perceptions of the city; thus its borders are “floating”. Moreover, “floating” also emerges as an expression of the “suspended now”; an experience of temporal oscillation. Rather than being represented in a negative light, the “suspended now” is seen as a vector of the “good life”, where one can enjoy the slower passing of time in Tyre.

Images of clear blue waters flood the account, insofar as the color blue becomes a shade associated with “Live Love Tyre”. The presence of public beaches in the city make it an important tourist destination, bringing in visitors from other Lebanese cities and foreigners. They are a response to a privatization crisis overtaking Beirut’s shores that makes it increasingly more difficult and expensive for individuals to enjoy Mediterranean waters. Moreover, the aspiration for a “good life” is symptomatic of sectarianism’s negative effects on Lebanon. I read images of the sea in relation to the 2015 trash “crisis”, which made the precariousness of waste and its environmental consequences a lived reality in Beirut. What began as a breakdown in the garbage disposal system due to its intertwining with economic and political sectarianism in the country soon turned into a lived, social experience for people of Beirut. The relationship between center and periphery is negotiated to make Tyre the escape from the center’s precariousness; yet in its framing as such, the periphery’s (Tyre’s) precarious conditions are overlooked.

The process of re-negotiating Tyre’s geographic borders on Instagram occurs when images of spaces outside the city are also included. Figure 28 below shows an image taken at Ras Al-Bayada in Naqoura, the southernmost point on the Lebanese border. The location is only accessible to Lebanese citizens, and foreign passport holders must get permission to visit. The beaches are among the cleanest in the country, and have become a hit spot in the summer for young and old alike to enjoy the sea. Al-Naqoura is marked by a checkpoint that monitors the flow of people who enter and exit the location. On Instagram, the checkpoint disappears, making the space accessible to

visitors. Thus, “Live Love Tyre” becomes a space on which both Tyre and the south are re-mapped and re-configured.



*Fig. 28- Ras Al Bayada (Photo retrieved from “Live Love Tyre’s” [ @livelove.tyre ] Instagram account on January 3rd, 2018)*

### **3. Authenticity**

The account focuses on Tyre’s alleged authenticity as a space relatively unspoiled by urban life. Authenticity reflects the logic of a neoliberal tourism economy that tourists can seek and consume. This is clear with images of “traditional” Lebanese breakfasts that make frequent appearances, reflecting a commodified consumer experiences online. It is also evident in Tyre’s boutique hotels and guesthouses that walk the tightrope between tradition and modernity, a sign of the city’s constant tango between “authenticity” and “cosmopolitanism”, in the pursuit of the “good life”.

These hotels are located in the city’s Christian quarter, a neighborhood characterized by colorful, picturesque homes. What makes this area significant is that it was largely constructed, both physically and ideologically, in juxtaposition to the ‘Muslim’ quarter, though only a street separates them. The latter appears a lot less frequently on the accounts, reflecting one way in which spatial citizenship is digitally negotiated based on aesthetic considerations, defining areas of the city deemed suitable for Instagram and the virtual sphere.



*Fig. 29- The Colorful Quarter (Photo retrieved from “Live Love Tyre’s” [@livelove.tyre] Instagram account on January 3rd, 2018)*

The Christian quarter, which was made to look more “Instagrammable” over time through painting more houses in bright colors, as well as composing street art murals locals and visitors could take photos with. Authenticity becomes an imagined affective relationship that differentiates Tyre from other cities, but one that is paradoxically linked to a growing tourism industry as well. Richard Voase (2006) notes the appeal of the ‘hidden’ in creating urban and rural destinations that tourists want to visit. The



‘undiscovered’ carries great appeal, and tourists embark on their missions convinced there must be something “really authentic to discover” behind the obvious sites (Voase 2006: 288). Thus, the winding alleyways of the Christian quarter in all their photographable glory are staged on the Instagram accounts as authentic areas to be discovered and experienced.

Authenticity is also constructed through nostalgia, as a means of countering precariousness of everyday life. Svetlana Boym (2001) identifies two kinds of nostalgia: reflective and restorative. The former is a mediation on the past and “dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging”, whilst the latter is a reconstruction of the past and sees itself as the “absolute truth” (Boym 2001: XVIII).



*Fig. 30 - The Salesman (Photo retrieved from “Live Love Tyre’s” [ @livelove.tyre ] Instagram account on February 15th, 2018)*

The images on “Live Love Tyre” look at the past through a restorative lens, imagining Tyre as a space where connections to the past can be lived and experienced. This refers to the archaeological sites in the city, which are literal vestiges of an historical past that can be visited and re-imagined in Tyre. They are also represented through images of older citizens in the city, branded as its authentic citizens.



Figures 30 and 31 show an older man selling food out of his food cart and an older fisherman whose image appears multiple times on the account. Fishing is considered the quintessential way of life on the account, predominantly carried out by an older generation and rooted in Tyre's history as a Phoenician port city, while the food cart is a staple in Lebanese streets that has been around for many years. Thus, nostalgia for the past becomes a reflection on a past lifestyle that is being rendered increasingly precarious in a fast-changing neoliberal environment.



*Fig. 31- The Fisherman (Photo retrieved from “Live Love Tyre’s” [ @livelove.tyre ] Instagram account on February 15th, 2018)*

The past becomes a refuge from what Berlant (2011) terms the “impasse” and Naeff (2018) calls the “suspended now”. It is imagined as an affective engagement with practices that characterized childhood in Tyre (as in Figure 33), as a way to bind together Instagram users who engage with these photographs through a particular “structure of feeling”.



Fig. 32- The Vestiges (Photo retrieved from “Live Love Tyre’s” [ @livelove.tyre ] Instagram account on March 21st, 2018)



Fig. 33- Cotton Candy Man (Photo retrieved from “Live Love Tyre’s” [ @livelove.tyre ] Instagram account on March 21st, 2018)

## **F. Conclusion: What's A Good Life Anyway?**

The affective relations that emerge on Instagram through “Live Love Tyre” reflect how the city is reassembled online by locals and outsiders. Instagram provides a platform — one that I consider a public virtual space — on and through which identity-making and creative cultural practices can be negotiated. Much literature has emphasized that social media results in democratic practices, widespread accessibility and horizontal networks. The case of the two Instagram accounts under study paints a more complex picture. John D Boy and Justus Uitermark (2017) found that Instagram users in Amsterdam “act out aesthetic and lifestyle ideals as they craft images and strategically display aspects of their life-worlds” (622). Instagram offers a space to curate an idealized image of the city, a trend I observed in the case of Tyre.

Boy and Uitermark similarly note that Instagram users produce and re-produce inequality in the city, which occurs on “Live Love Tyre”. The neighborhoods considered unsightly, abject or inaccessible like El-Buss are erased from online imaginaries of the city, rendering them doubly abject in both offline and online spaces. It is incorrect to dismiss or categorize these changes as merely “tourist” practices. While some affective registers noted the important role that a growing neoliberal tourism industry played in fashioning online visual culture representations, I view the situation as much more complex and context-based. Online image-making in the accounts under study was devoid of any expressly and outwardly political and Muslim Shiite markers, despite their proliferation within the city. This is a conscious effort on the part of the curators to disassociate Tyre from its present condition. The question, of course, is why?

On the one hand, Tyre's offline visual culture representing Hezbollah and Amal are considered express political ideology that reflects sectarianism. This system of rule is seen by many Lebanese as the reason for the country's inability to make real progress on social, cultural, and economic fronts. There is a desire, particularly among the youth, to rid themselves of past political chains and leaders that have done little to advance and address the country's needs. The strictly positive photographs posted on "Live Love Tyre" can be seen as a form of digital activism that uses aestheticism and affective relations to fashion a utopian idea of the city, devoid of the ideological and political markers and barriers that hinder its progress. Moreover, it is not just progress that is alluded to in these images; it is also a romanticized past that fits within a broader and neatly packaged national imaginary of a Phoenician, pre-Civil War Lebanon.

What, then, to make of the many photographs on both accounts that show very Christian religious symbols? On the one hand, these practices are an effort to emphasize an existing religious diversity, contrary to what offline visual culture representations might show. Beyond this, however, tolerance appears to be a quality aspired to and a marker of a developed, and for lack of a better term, "civilized" city. It is as if the photographs are affirming that even the peripheral south, one formerly seen as underdeveloped and rural, can be cosmopolitan.

The study shows how mediated representations of the city can challenge the labels of center and periphery by providing a sanitized and aesthetically pleasing visual representation of the periphery. Despite masking inequalities present in the city, the Instagram accounts are able to assemble and imagine the city in a way that begins to chip away at the center/periphery borders and categorizations. The lines that separate

the two become more blurred on a mediated platform that aestheticizes neoliberal urbanism. This has had very real implications. Lebanese who are not from Tyre or who feared to visit the “dangerous south” (branded as such following Israeli Occupation from 1982-2000) are more willing to venture towards the “Phoenician city-by-the-sea” to enjoy its public beaches, boutique hotels, and increasing leisure spaces. It provides an experience of the periphery that is seen as authentic.

The local image-maker in this case aspires to be part of a broader collective that has a clear purpose; he/she fashions their images in a way that gets absorbed within a broader trend of visually sanitized cities devoid of negativity. “Live Love Tyre’s” Instagram page bio asks individuals to “Share your stories, memories and your experiences with us”; it is an invitation to reassemble and reshape the city as a collaborative effort, rewriting a narrative of Tyre online.

The “Live Love” movement brands itself as having a mission: to visually excavate the “real” Lebanon. The question of what a “real” Lebanon entails was asked at the beginning of this chapter. It is unlikely that a concrete response will be arrived at; “real” is a product of a particular context, time, space, and sociocultural practices. In Tyre’s case, a “real” Tyre is a juxtaposition of various iterations of a “good life”: online, it is a carefully curated space that passes off as authentic and ideal for the pursuit of a “good life” removed from the precarity of political sectarianism; offline, it is visually saturated with political and religious markers, as well as lifestyle advertisements that similarly reflect a “good life”—one that is enabled by the sectarian power structure that emerged following the Civil War. The question begs an answer is which is real, and more importantly, what are the implications of these different visual representations?

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

I have argued throughout this thesis that precarity, in its multiple iterations, shapes the visual culture of Tyre to a large extent. In Chapter II, I unpack what I mean by the term and link it to Tyre's sociopolitical context. I find a three-fold definition for precarity. First, it refers to the south's experience of the civil war and Israeli occupation that conditioned spaces and bodies, re-imagining the region (and Tyre) as dangerous and abject. At the center of these violent experiences is the Palestinian cause and the struggle for a liberated Palestine that physically and ideologically took place on Lebanese soil. Second, precarity emerges as an identitarian struggle in Tyre, particularly with regard to the Shia community. The different ideologies and agendas that were adopted by Hezbollah and Amal Movement following the disappearance of Sayyid Musa al Sadr created a contested Shia milieu that is negotiated within the city's visual culture. Lastly, I define precarity as economic vulnerability that emerged as a result of the war, caused by the migrations from south Lebanon to the center Beirut due to the violence of the Israeli occupation and symptomatic of postwar sectarian power-sharing structures that conditioned labor opportunities.

Chapters III to V grapple with these various iterations of precarity by looking at the visual culture of three different sites: Tyre's city-space; El-Buss refugee camp; and on the online Instagram account "Live Love Tyre". In Chapter III, I find that Tyre's public space is marked with political flags, posters, billboards, and advertisements that reflect a

contested Shia milieu and globalization practices. The findings reflect the inherent multiplicity of the neoliberal subject: it is both the commodified image of the Shia leader or martyr that is produced, re-produced and circulated in the streets, as well as the advertisement that sells luxury products and fashion.

As previously mentioned, the Palestinian cause was central to the experience of war in south Lebanon. It embodied the ideological and political notion of resistance; a resistance to an occupied homeland and a militarized resistance through the PLO and *fida'yeen* (resistance fighters). The nascent Shia political groups in the 1960s and 1970s were influenced by Palestinian resistance, insofar as both Amal Movement and Hezbollah fought against Israeli occupation. Hezbollah made resistance part of its official political ideology and agenda, taking on the name of *al-muqawama* (the Resistance). In Chapter IV, I grapple with this notion of resistance and examine the visual culture of El-Buss, a Palestinian refugee camp that is integrated in the urban fabric of the city. Though very much a part of Tyre, I find that the camp and its visual culture are rendered peripheral and removed from the broader visual conversations that are happening outside its walls.

I find that visual representations of precarity in El-Buss most clearly emerge through the trope of emigration and exile. The lack of basic services, employment opportunities, and prospects for upward mobility force many Palestinians to seek refuge and a better life outside Lebanon. In Chapter V, I grapple with what mediated representations of a “good life” in Tyre look like on the Instagram account “Live Love Tyre”. I question what it means to live and love the city, which spaces and visual markers are rendered invisible as a result, and how imaginaries of the city are re-shaped

through the images. The “good life” emerges as an affective relationship to the city and its sea, sanitized of any sectarian markers. On the one hand, the curated gallery of images on “Live Love Tyre” reflects a tourism branding effort that aims to bring visitors to the city; on the other hand, it can be read as a counter to the experiences of precarity that condition life in the city.

In the final chapter, I pose the question of what a “real” Tyre is, given the different visual representations I found in offline and online contexts, moreover, I grapple with what is meant by a “good life” in the context of the southern Lebanese city. I argue that the “good life” is a multifaceted ideology: it is the fantasy of achieving better standards of living and upward mobility; it is the fantasy of clean beaches and waste-free cities; and, it is the fantasy of a powerful and protected city-space that political posters and flags embody. At the center of all three iterations is the notion of fantasy, which I define as Lauren Berlant does in *Cruel Optimism* (2011): the result of an optimistic attachment to something that appears unattainable. Optimism is rooted in desire, yet does not always denote a positive relationship; as Berlant argues, the unattainability of certain outcomes is a cruel exercise.

What, then, accounts for the unattainability of a “good life” in Tyre and why do the narratives that emerge out of the city’s visual culture reflect a practice of cruel optimism? Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted several understandings of precarity as the main theoretical framework that underpins the visual culture of Tyre. The awareness of these precarious conditions of life become the ideological barriers that render a “good life” unattainable. They exist as constant reminders of the vulnerability of human life, the city space individuals occupy, and the identities they hold dear. As



such, the relationship between precarity and the “good life” becomes a dialectic one. They mutually constitute and re-constitute one another, imbricated in a complex web of power structures that, at times, underscore the former and at other times, highlight the latter.

What, then, accounts for the prevalence of precarity over the “good life”, or vice versa? Berlant (2011) argues that the:

“neoliberal present is a space of transition, not only between modes of production and modes of life, but between different animating, sustaining fantasies. This shift generates in-tensities so present that they impose historical consciousness on its subjects as a moment without edges, and recent pasts and near futures blend into a stretched-out time that people move around in to collect evidence and find a nonsovereign footing. For the time being, the atmospheres and encounters of the new ordinary orchestrate political time by reinventing sovereignty in the interval between crisis and response...” (262).

Her analysis echoes Judith Naeff’s (2018) discussion the “suspended now”, highlighting the ways in which neoliberalism and capitalist societies create a present that oscillates between an unresolved past and a volatile future. Butler suggests that this experience of uncertainty that produces, animates, and sustains fantasies is symptomatic of the neoliberal present, and is thus susceptible to the ebbs and flows of a broader power structure. I employ and extend her analysis to frame precarity and fantasies of the “good life” as two visual-spatial experiences in Tyre that are bound within a stretched-out moment in time. The visual representations of both in the physical and virtual city-space reflect the competing structures of feeling that appear at a particular historical moment.

There are several implications to the above discussion. First, the relationship between precarity and the “good life” in Tyre is not fixed; rather, it is dynamic across

space and time. Second, I argue that both frameworks are inter-dependent in Tyre; one cannot exist without the other. Berlant (2011) notes that in order for one to produce better conditions of living that do not reproduce the precarity of detaching from “a waning fantasy of the good life”, it is necessary to examine and dissect what is “halting, stuttering, and aching” about such experiences (262). Thus, the process of undoing a world and creating a new one necessitates fantasy.

In Tyre, the fantasies of a “good life” are the “surrealistic affectsphere” that counter precarity. I read Berlant’s affectsphere as the space in which various affective relationships to objects of possibility are carried out. These affectspheres are many things, depending on how and who is defining precarity. Hezbollah and Amal leaders view precariousness as a south threatened by war from neighboring Israel. They are similarly imbricated in a complex sectarian power-sharing system that benefits them politically and economically; thus, the loss of this structure is seen as precarious and the political flags and posters that line Tyre’s streets become fantasies to hold on to.

Symbols and markers of Palestinian identity are ubiquitous in El-Buss, creating an affectsphere that differs from what exists outside the camp walls. The fantasy of a good life is represented as a way out, a means to escape the precarity of the camp and seek a better living abroad. The commitment to this fantasy is one way of negotiating experiences of statelessness— a literal depiction of Berlant’s “nonsovereign footing” (262). Once again, the affectsphere of El-Buss differs from the “good life” presented on “Live Love Tyre”. The latter creates a fantasy that visually erases representations of both aforementioned affectspheres. Instead, the Instagram page

curates a world that is free of sectarian difference, a world of sun, sea, and sand that can be consumed at the tap of a finger.

How does one manage the existence of all three affectspheres at once? On the one hand, it is a process of clicking “on” and “off” the various elements of Tyre’s visual culture. This echoes the discussion on hyperreality that was introduced in earlier chapters and refers to one’s ability to cognitively pick and choose the elements of visual culture they wish to see, and which they wish to render invisible: I think, therefore I *do not* see. On the other hand, it reflects precarity and the “good life’s” double bind: even when one can see representations of a better “good life”, it is often threatening (whether this threat comes from internal hesitation or an external source) to detach from the power structures that sustain both.

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