AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

RESIST, DISRUPT, REPRODUCE: THE COMPLICATIONS OF BEIRUT'S FEMINIST ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDERED VIOLENCE

by
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"Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
And on a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."
– Arundhati Roy (2003)

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This study explores how feminist activists in Beirut resist, disrupt, and reproduce gendered violence in their work and daily lives. Every day, activists navigate acts of violence, their own experiences, national institutions, and global forces that uphold patriarchal, neoliberal structures and norms. These forces raise complicated dilemmas for activists in their choice of tactics, forms of organization, acceptance of funding, and building of coalitions. This thesis thus investigates activists' tactics of resistance in personal lives and public protests, and the complicated impacts of attempting to disrupt individual acts of gendered violence and complicit legal, political, and social structures.

Primary data was gathered in 2017-18 through semi-structured interviews with 14 Lebanese, Palestinian, and Ethiopian feminist activists in Beirut to understand their experiences of organizing, theorizing, and fighting the status quo of gendered violence. Findings were triangulated by document analysis of primary and secondary sources relating to feminist community organizing in Beirut, produced in Arabic and English, from 2006-2018. Collaborators spoke to experiences as individuals and members of feminist collectives, informal groups, clubs, and NGOs.

The introduction includes a brief mapping of feminist movements in Beirut, based on a broader history of feminist organizing from the 20th century to present and explores conceptual frameworks of gendered violence, feminist activism and theory, and coloniality. The first chapter explores tensions around visibility in feminist activist work around gendered violence in Beirut, and the relationship of visibility to power and privilege. The second chapter explores the impacts and dilemmas of NGOization on feminist activist work and spaces in Beirut, including forms of organization, communication, and relationships. The third chapter defines various types of solidarity enacted by feminist activists, and the moments where activists are complicit in maintaining status quo structures of control, even as they aim for oppositional action. The conclusion, building on stories told throughout the thesis, reflects the many ways of "becoming" embedded within feminist activist work, and our lived disloyalty to patriarchal, capitalist, and neoliberal ways of being.

Overall, the study findings complicate traditional understandings: of activism as necessarily public, of solidarity as universally beneficial, and of tensions within organizing as unproductive. Instead, it argues that successful disruption of gendered violence focuses both on social and state institutions, as well as individual behaviors and ways of being.

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ACRONYMS

ARM	Anti-Racism Movement
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
GSC	Gender and Sexuality Club
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MCC	Migrant Community Center
MDW	Migrant Domestic Worker
MWTF	Migrant Worker Task Force
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
WHRD	Women's Human Rights Defender

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Overview, Research Questions, and Contribution

This thesis illustrates the challenges facing survivors, and the feminist activists working to change the status quo of gendered violence in Lebanon. There has been significant research mapping the personal, political, and structural forms of violence perpetuated on female, trans, and gender nonconforming bodies in Lebanon and the region (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mikdashi, 2014). Critiques of complicity with state and patriarchal structures have rightly been leveled against domestic NGOs, international donor agencies, and state ministries, particularly in relationship to the politics of humanitarian aid (Moghnieh, 2015) and the NGOization of Arab women's movements (Jad, 2016; Mitri, 2015). However, there is a lack of critical scholarship on the ways that feminist and queer activists simultaneously experience and work against these violations, and the physical and emotional toll that it takes. Traditional scholarship on the tools of activism and community organizing rarely intersects with critiques of embedded and gendered coloniality, heteropatriarchy, and privilege. It is not only the state and international donor agencies that can maintain the status quo; activists are also implicated and hold responsibility. Activist work that is oppositional to the state or global structures – whether led by Lebanese, Palestinian, migrant, or all; activist collective or NGO – is never free from the existing power structures.

This study aims to understand how feminist activists in Beirut resist, disrupt, and reproduce gendered violence through their work and daily lives. Every day, this study's activist collaborators navigate the needs of survivors, their own experiences of violence, national institutions, and global narratives about the brown/Arab/Muslim/Middle Eastern body. All of these tangibly impact funding streams, communication, visibility, and access to power. The intersections of these forces raise complicated dilemmas for activists in their choice of tactics and strategy, acceptance of funding, building of coalitions, management of personal resources, and partnerships with religious, state, and foreign actors. I thus ask: What are activists' tactics of resistance in their personal lives and public protests? When do activists succeed in disrupting

individual acts of gendered or sexual violence and the legal, political, and social structures that perpetuate gender discrimination? When does feminist activism unintentionally reproduce these structures, within and beyond activist movements, despite its aim to resist or disrupt individual, social, and systemic violence?

To explore these questions, I interviewed 14 members of feminist collectives, NGOs, and other formations in Beirut that address gendered violence in fall and winter 2017. These interviews included collection of narratives to understand lived experiences of personal and structural forms of gendered violence, taking very broad definitions of both forms of violence and activist work aiming to disrupt it. I also conducted document analysis of activists' produced materials from 2006-2018. Because survivors of gendered violence – as well as activists – are all too often reduced to statistics and their identities condensed to victimhood, I aimed to ground this research in participant-led interviews to re-center those who have experienced violence as theory-makers (Geiger, 2003, p. 400; hooks, 1991).[1] I intentionally constructed my inquiries around acts of resistance, negotiation, and accommodation, also understanding that the sharing of stories of suffering can fit within these frameworks. Lived experiences and personal histories are essential tools in correcting gendered knowledge production that silences women and gender nonconforming people.

As much of the research and analysis was conducted in 2017 and 2018, encompassing discussion of activism from the twelve years before, I will limit my analysis to this time frame. As the writing has stretched into early 2020, my own perspective has been impacted by experiences of the events since, including the revolution starting in October 2019. This paper's conclusions may apply to activism since, and hopefully will resonate. However, the analysis of materials will not include major events from 2019 onward, with the exception of a few events that highlight ongoing trends.

1.2 Contribution

[1]Susan Geiger draws on the work of Gelya Frank and Elizabeth Hampsten to argue that oral history, while not inherently feminist, can position participants as collaborative producers of research, rather than its objects.
[2] Lebanon Support defines gender mainstreaming as "the assessment of the gender component of legislation, policies and programmes…from the design to the implementation…in order to attain gender equality…Today, it

Gendered violence is not in any way unique to Beirut, to Lebanon, or to the Arab world, nor is the instrumentalization of "sexual and gender-based violence" for political and financial gain. The acronym "SGBV has bubbled up into calls for proposals from international donors and the rhetoric of local NGOs as the project of gender mainstreaming does its work (Lebanon Support, 2016, p. 8).[2] Violence against Arab and Muslim women plays an important role in international relations, justification for Western military intervention, legal reformism, global immigration flows and policing of refugee bodies, and distribution of humanitarian aid (Abu-Lughod, 2002). The "fight" to govern or "eradicate" SGBV has become a political chessboard for both donor governments and receiving governments and international agencies, in ways that falsely paint SGBV as a series of singular events that happen in certain parts of the world, and not others. The use of vocabulary associated with violence and war does little to support a nuanced understanding of the multitude of factors that create and maintain violence, and does much to excuse state and imperial structures from their role.

Perceptions of efforts to eradicate of SGBV – rather than the strength of the efforts or of eradication itself – are also tied into understandings of "modernization" and "progress." Visible state efforts "combatting" SGBV are often tied to international donor funding. For example, the establishment of the Lebanese Ministry of Women's Affairs in January 2017 aimed to contribute to a particular image of the Lebanese nation as tolerant, modern, and "civilized" (Obeid, 2017). The reality was far more complicated: The original Minister for Women's Affairs was a man. The Ministry advocated primarily watered-down legal reforms, far weaker than what civil society and feminist groups recommended. It relied on funding and "technical support" from the United Nations Development Program to recruit staff, establish its website and social media communications, and draft proposed laws (UNDP, 2017). The instrumentalization and monetization of SGBV is thus partially responsible for the creation of the Ministry, and thus indirectly for the some of the material threats from the state toward activists in Lebanon today.

The creation of a ministry focused on women was also not lasting; in January 2019, Saad Hariri's government named Violet Khairallah Safadi as Minister of State for the Social and Economic Rehabilitation of Women and Youth – quickly renamed to the Ministry of State for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth after public criticism (Naharnet, 2018). In

[2] Lebanon Support defines gender mainstreaming as "the assessment of the gender component of legislation, policies and programmes…from the design to the implementation…in order to attain gender equality…Today, it generally refers to donor policy and how it inherently shapes organisations' agendas."

January 2020, Hassan Diab's government, formed amidst the revolution that started October 17, 2019, eliminated this ministry, when he named a slimmed-down Cabinet that failed to meet even the most basic demands of revolutionaries. Both of these governments have significantly cracked down on public protests and targeted individual activists, including many feminist activists responsible for shaping discourse and energy in the protests (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

When much of the funding and thus institutionalized intervention comes from outside the country, the "projects" of women's rights, feminism, and queer activism can be easily seen as enmeshed in the politics of development and Western involvement in Lebanon's social, economic, and political ecosystems, an oversimplified analysis that has been widely critiqued (Makarem, 2009).[3] The criticism ignores several key realities: First, activists can and do use outside funding to pursue their own agendas. Second, paid work around women's rights and feminism often is sustained only within NGOized frameworks, which impacts the work but does not wholly define it, as will be discussed in the second chapter. Third, both donors and activists are not monoliths, and neither are their politics.

Activists must thus deal not only with the reality of gendered violence, but also instrumentalization of their work, the individual politics of donors and local organizations, and the resulting discourses. They exist in a system of states, government agencies, embassies, and INGOs that funds approaches and initiatives aiming to protect women as objects – but rarely protect women's rights and agency.[4] Besides strategic and tactical decisions of collectives, this also produces individual dilemmas for many of the collaborators in this paper, about their roles, their place, their capacity to influence systems of power, and their responsibility to community.

In exploring feminist resistance, disruption, and reproduction of gendered violence both in daily life and in related state and social structures, I seek to contribute to the work of my activist collaborators and to scholarship at the intersections of gender studies, coloniality, and activist practice. I add to the limited literature on feminist community organizing in Lebanon and the intentionality of activists working within and outside of the systems they oppose. Understanding the complexity of my own positionality as a white foreigner in Beirut, I aim to write back against colonial and mainstreamed white feminisms, which reduce the non-white

[3] See Makarem's rebuttal to Joseph Massad's critique of the Gay International.
[4] I draw on discussion from the summer 2018 CREA Sexuality, Gender, and Rights Institute.

body to an object of study, a target of domination, and a cultural symbol, and are complicit in imperial projects of objectification and violence.

1.3 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Grounded in the context of Lebanese feminist activism in 2017-18 Beirut, this work lies at the nexus of gender studies, coloniality, activist practice, discursive violence, and studies of Western cultural, economic, and military imperialism in the Arab world.[5] The interdisciplinary nature of this research reflects the fragmented nature of scholarship on these themes and their existence at the edges of the academy. My literature review focuses on the history of feminist activism in Beirut, via broader theoretical lenses of feminist resistance, activist tactics, and gendered coloniality. I follow the decolonial feminism of María Lugones (2007, 2010), in order to situate Arab women's movements and regional feminist activism in the gendered coloniality produced by a history of physical, economic, and epistemological colonization. A decolonial frame is particularly valuable both because of the impact of coloniality on daily life in Lebanon, but also because of the impact of decolonial and postcolonial discourse on transnational feminist movements, and the raising of various forms of racial and class consciousness.

1.3.1 Defining Gendered Violence

I explicitly choose not to use "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence" as the key term analysis. This is the vocabulary of funders, donor agencies, service-providers, medical professionals, and some researchers, much less that of activists and feminists. It is also the vocabulary of the United Nations and related conventions, which are used in some activists' arguments when a human rights framework is strategically beneficial, but also rarely are the actual foundation for activism.

The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defines gender-based violence as "violence directed at a woman because she is a

[5] For scholarship on this last category, I look to Guyatri Spivak's exploration of the subaltern, Lila Abu-Lughod's work on the figure of the Muslim woman in US military discourse, and Jasbir Puar's critique of homonationalism.

woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty" (Wetheridge et al., 2012, p. 16). This definition does not include violence against men and gender nonconforming people. It is not all-encompassing, but it does at least include a semi-comprehensive understanding of violence, which allows a human rights approach to move beyond physical and sexual forms of violence.

In contrast, I use gendered violence to refer to an intersecting web of social norms, state structures, racial capitalist practices (Robinson, 2019), and daily life that target the bodies, minds, psyches, abilities, mobilities, and experiences of women, trans, and gender nonconforming people. This allows for an exploration of activism that combats verbal and online harassment, gender-based discrimination, rape culture, homophobia, transphobia, and policing of women's roles – not only egregious physical and sexual acts of violence. These forms of violence work together, as partners, to police, control, and define.

What are the systems and structures that produce gendered violence in Beirut? I refer here to the intersecting legal, security, political, and social institutions and norms that must be navigated by those experiencing violence, their advocates, and activists. On the level of physical space, this violence inhabits regulatory institutions like the home, school, workplace, and street. This violence is manifested explicitly in the police station, hospital, courtroom, General Security, and waiting room – although survivors rarely reach these marked places. These physical institutions intersect with social factors: familial responsibility and shame, social expectations, reputation, marriageability, political affiliation, economic status, and power. This study does not seek to fully explain each system and structure, but to map them when relevant to activists' work on gendered violence.

Gender and sexuality are consolidations, rather than singular concepts describing singular objects. They are webs of multiple identity and experience that define some aspects of a person's being, but certainly not all of it. Gender and sexuality are of course complicated by intersecting identities of class, nationality, race, religion, education access, ability, and age, which shift in relation to the person's environment, as defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and Linda Martín Alcoff. Defining violence thus must also take into account the intersections and matrices of multiple aspects of identity *and* domination (Collins, 1990, pp. 221–238). All women are not subject to the same forms of violence, and are not equal targets. Many forms of feminist activism in Beirut

addressing gendered violence understand this and take an intersectional and multi-dimensional approach, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

1.3.2 Theoretical Understanding of Feminist Activism

Feminism cannot be defined in the singular, nor can feminist activism. Feminisms are contextually specific and often grounded in the local, even as they may share an opposition to systemic heteropatriarchal power. The feminism I choose to examine here is that which moves beyond a single lens of gender to work against multiple forms of oppression. Manisha Desai and Nancy Naples define feminism in a globalized world as inherently counterhegemonic, decolonial, and anticapitalist, working for concrete alternatives to economic, political, and social inequity (2002, p. 32). In her dissertation on queer feminist thought in Lebanon, Deema Kaedbey draws a distinction between the mainstream feminism of women's rights in Lebanon and the more inclusive, critical approach that she titles "queer feminism," which "stands for a transnational, interconnecting, anti-racist queer feminist thought" (2014a, p. 13). Not all of the collaborators in this study operate with these definitions of feminism, but they represent the theoretical frame against which I seek to understand feminist activist work. I am deeply indebted to Deema for distilling this lived framework into words.

Feminism has long been defined in reference to its white Western variation, in theoretical writings and on-the-street practice. Partially because of this association, "feminist," as a word and label, is often controversial in the history of women's organizing in Lebanon and beyond. In a 2003 interview with *al-raida*, Suad Joseph speaks to the stigmatization of feminism, but also cautions against avoiding the term because of its cooptation and limits. Instead, she states, "As long as we do not collapse all Arab women into a homogenous category and as long as we are aware of the strategic use of all our terms…that is all we can do. Language cannot perfectly reflect our understanding of the world" (Al-raida, 2003, p. 77). To follow the examples of Joseph and Seteney Shami (2017), I seek neither to universalize feminism nor to build feminisms that fortify the barriers between us.[6] Feminisms are plural for a reason.

[6]In discussing forms of anthropology, Shami rejects nativist approaches that fracture an already-divided field and "prevent us from talking to one another," while also working against colonial forms of anthropology. Her approach can be translated to theoretical and activist feminisms.

Activism is traditionally defined by visible actions of protest, lobbying, and collective action, according to theories of social movements, community organizing, and nonviolent resistance. In this study, I use the work of Naples and Desai (2002) to embrace a broader definition of feminist activisms, which includes transformation of daily life alongside grassroots resistance and the activities of NGOs. Similarly, Wendy Harcourt, in her analysis of post-2010 feminist activisms, argues that daily practices embodying "alternative ways of being, seeing and doing that in themselves serve to transform unequal power relations" are a form of activism (2013, p. 635). Lugones advocates a resistant subjectivity of "infra-politics," which speaks to a particular understanding of activism that locates resistance within the body, present in daily acts (2010, p. 746). Following Kaedbey's footsteps, this activism of daily life contrasts more mainstream narratives of Arab women's movements, which focus on associations, public protest, and NGOs. However, it speaks to the reality of activists' individual lives and the tactics of a younger generation of feminist collectives. As Maya Mikdashi's work shows, feminist and queer organizing in Lebanon "interrogat[es] normative practices of and assumptions about race, class, the state, and the body" within daily life, because of the unevenness, violence, and inequity of sectarianism and the personal status law (2013, p. 350). Kaedbey's work to unearth alternative feminist history centers an often-neglected "shadow feminism," which comprises the feminisms of "women in Lebanon who are not Lebanese, for example, such as refugees and migrant workers, as well as Lebanese women who do not identify as activists or feminists" and are excluded from mainstream narratives (2014b).

Haideh Moghissi argues that it is not possible to fully separate the local from the global when it comes to Arab women's activism (2010, p. 126), and this certainly applies to feminisms in Beirut and Lebanon. Using Lugones' understanding of the legacy of colonialism, we cannot extricate the impact of gendered coloniality on Arab feminist movements, and those in Beirut, as will be discussed later in the introduction. The colonial redefining of gender and continued experiences of coloniality mean that many activists – and survivors of violence – counter both local and global discourses predicated on these norms, whether or not they have an explicit focus on discourse.

This leaves us with feminist action that, to take the words of Adrienne Rich and Lillian Smith, becomes "disloyal to civilization," in all that it must oppose and in all that it seeks to create (Geiger, 2003, p. 404). Throughout this process, I have been particularly interested in

radical feminism and activism. In its simplest form, I define the radical as that which gets to structural change, to the roots, rather an approach working on the symptoms of oppression. However, in pursuing the radical in the context of this research, I also incorporate an element of that disloyalty – to social expectations and structures of power.

1.3.3 Feminisms and Feminist Activism in Beirut

Understanding feminist activism in Beirut requires a historical review of feminism and women's movements Lebanon and the Arab World, as thought and action are not contained within the borders of current nation-states (Khater, 1996).[7] In the case of Lebanese feminisms, as with that of many other places and times, there is a false conflation between feminism and a women's movement. Laure Moghaizel, a prominent Lebanese lawyer and women's rights advocate in the 1950s and 1960s, tackled this directly in a 1997 interview with Amal Dibo: "The struggle for women's rights in Lebanon should be viewed as neither feminist nor as activist; it was rather founded as a bourgeois feminine movement that relied on families, salons, and sects" (Stephan, 2012).

Most of the (limited) accounts of feminist history in Lebanon follow this path: Nicole Khoury (2015) tracks the history of Middle East feminism back to the 1860s, focusing primarily on privileged Egyptian, Syrian, and Lebanese women. Rita Stephan (2014) identifies Lebanese feminism as starting in the 1920s with elite-led liberal reforms. Influenced by discourses of women's emancipation from Egypt, Ottoman Turkey, and Europe, Lebanese women launched charitable projects and associations relating to education, journalism, and women's rights and sought to increase female political participation. The 1960s started an intellectual-led post-colonial phase of women's organizing, which focused on a nationalist agenda, equality, and women's rights within peace processes. Political parties in the 1960s and 1970s formed women's committees, which gave birth to organizations including the Women's Democratic Gathering and the League of Lebanese Women's Rights. The 1975 start of the civil war shifted their work from rights-based advocacy to service provision for those affected by the war; this shift was later replicated in the 2006 Israeli war (Naber & Zaatari, 2014).

[7] Khater's work inspired this philosophy of a historiography not entirely bounded by place

This history and its sources of documentation, however, refer to the more visible movements and moments, and much has been left out. Kaedbey critiques simplified and typological narratives like Stephan's and devotes much of her work to unearthing "shadow history [of feminism in Lebanon] to learn from and contend with," hidden not by chance but also because "dominant knowledge was built on a repression and marginalization of multiple histories," including dominant feminist knowledge (Kaedbey, 2014a, p. 31). For example, despite the elitism of membership in the associations mentioned above, Kaedbey argues that the early twentieth century was intersectional, in a nascent way. Gender equity struggles overlapped with fights for national liberation, labor, and Palestinian rights. In other words, Kaedbey writes, "it is impossible to write about women's rights in Lebanon as an isolated movement" (2014a, p. 31). Zeina Ammar and Catherine Moughalian build on her critique to say that mainstream "accounts of feminist history have been critiqued as being too limiting and [falsely] reducing feminism to upper-class women's organizing or within self-identified feminist circles" (Moughalian & Ammar, 2019, p. 13).

The more mainstream narrative continues: Beginning the 1980s, global attention to women's rights fundamentally altered feminist organizing in Lebanon and the region, contributing to NGOization[8] in the 1990s (Jad, 2016, p. 38). Prompted by the 1979 UN adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), women's rights became part of a broader human rights discourse (Mitri, 2015). The Lebanese government ratified CEDAW in 1996, with the exception of Article 16, which governs marriage and family law. This refusal institutionalized the tension between international law and the Lebanese penal code. Partially because of CEDAW's influence on lobbying, funding, and services, NGOs began leading a global gender agenda that included development programs, legal reforms, and gender mainstreaming. NGOs in Lebanon offered a mixed-methods approach of service provision and advocacy, navigating clientalist relationships both with the Lebanese state and international donors (Mitri, 2015). NGOs have also been instrumentalized in the fight against SGBV in the Arab world, with pushes toward state-administered punishment and judicial accountability strengthening state control, rather than addressing underlying social, economic, and political structures that create violence.

[8] Jad defines NGOization as the "steady increase in Arab women's NGOs," It is the professionalization of social movements into organizational structures defined by non-governmental organizations, funding organizations, and their negotiations with state structures.

Many components of today's women's rights and feminist movements in Beirut – and the theoretical understandings of the work – still largely exist within and around the NGO structure. There is a composite of issue-based organizations, whose missions separately address a more traditional definition of gender-based violence, LGBTQ+ rights, the parliamentary quota, women in business, the exploitation of migrant domestic workers, and beyond. While some do work intersectionally and take more complicated approaches to feminism and activism, it is easy to blame NGOization for this fragmentation and argue that it impedes social change (Hodžić, 2014; Jad, 2016). Much of this critique is true, although the criticism often ignores ways in which networks form, coalitions are built, and collectives and organizations seek partners within and outside of civil society.[9] As Ammar and Moughalian point out, activists also build off this discourse to define "feminist players into a binary: NGOs and unregistered groups. They write:

> This distinction is sometimes accompanied by a distinction between women's rights defenders and feminists, whereby the former often refers to employees of WROs [women's rights organizations] and the latter to members of smaller or more informal collectives. Members of smaller or informal collectives critique the work of WROs on the grounds of it being un-feminist or apolitical, while WROs often attribute this to a false sense of ideological superiority on behalf of these smaller unregistered groups. The NGO/non-NGO dichotomy is sometimes made to emphasize differences in commitment between those that are referred to as "activists with a cause" as opposed to employees of WROs who work on projects. (Moughalian & Ammar, 2019, pp. 13–14)

Drawing on Ammar and Moughalian, I argue that certain feminisms today in Lebanon and Beirut are characterized by an intentional intersectionality, and in some cases a particular transnational consciousness. Women in Lebanon have long been engaged in political activism around liberation struggles, from the nationalist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, to the 2005 Cedar Revolution (Stephan, 2012), to Hezbollah's role after the 2006 Israeli war, to the 2011 uprisings across the region (Pratt, 2016), to the 2015 trash protests (Moghnieh & Nayel, 2015), and today to the ongoing October 2019 revolution. The 2006 war in particular had a profound impact on feminist and queer organizing in Lebanon. Many young activists spearheading feminist and LGBTQ rights movements, including in formalized groups such as Helem, stepped into the role of service provision during the crisis, which gained visibility for their work and

[9] Coalitions are frequently formed of collectives like Dammeh, feminist organizations and groups like the Knowledge Workshop and Sawt al-Niswa, university clubs, and some activist-focused NGOs such as the A Project, Anti-Racism Movement, and KAFA. Some, but certainly not all, organizing also includes identity-based groups of migrant domestic workers, Syrian women refugees, Palestinian women's collectives, and trans people.

linked feminist and queer issues to a collective struggle for survival (Naber & Zaatari, 2014). Many of these activists went on to found collectives like Meem and Nasawiya. Their work also was very conscious of NGOized structures and their limitations. Naber and Zaatari write: "Around the time of the invasion, left-leaning young people had been critiquing the elitism of many Lebanese feminist organizations and refusing to allow the NGO funding structure to define their work" (2014, p. 93).

Ammar and Moughalian highlight the "emergence of a feminist discourse, since the 2000s, which is defined as adopting a broader and more systemic approach than that of women's rights, tackling issues like heterosexism and racism, and adopting an intersectional discourse on the liberation of women" (2019, pp. 13–14). Today, the primary issues of feminist and women's rights movements thus remain diverse and intersectional: family violence, the devaluation of and violence toward migrant domestic workers, class conflict, the environment, refugee rights, sexual harassment, gender identity, sexuality, and beyond. Discourse around race and class, particularly in feminist approaches to migrant worker, refugee, and LGBTQ rights, also have exchanged vocabulary with both regional and transnational discussions. This intersectionality is not universal across women's rights and feminist organizing spaces, but is part of widespread discourse within feminist communities. It is noteworthy that there is a gap in intersectionality around religion at least in academic analysis; while more mainstream literature on the history of Lebanese feminisms mentions Christian associations, Islamic feminisms are often placed in a separate sphere (Kaedbey, 2014a, p. 15).[10]

Feminist activisms in Lebanon also focus on production of alternatives to the local and global status quo. For example, radical organizing around gender identities and sexual rights opposes NGOization and globalization. Groups experiment with alternatives to NGO structures and funding models, such as the collective Nasawiya. While no longer active, Nasawiya was an attempt to spark a grassroots and "alternative" "renewed women's movement" in Lebanon," (El-Hage, n.d., pp. 49, 51) although there were many critiques of its project around class and representation (H., 2015). The work of alternatives is also personal: Kaedbey speaks to a politics of daily life, for "queer feminists today are connecting struggles and reaching out to other

[10] Kaedbey offers one possible explanation, speaking to her own choice to largely exclude religious feminisms: "Religion and ethno-sectarian belonging, however, though important factors in Lebanese politics and social relations, have not been key issues in feminist and queer activist writings. Instead, secularism, largely a reaction to sectarianism and sectarian wars, is dominant within civil society and activist groups in Lebanon."

communities not through philanthropy, but through deconstructing their own privileges and challenging classist, racist and heterosexist norms" (2014a, p. 44).

1.3.4 The Decolonial, Coloniality of Gender, and Transnationalism

The myths that feminism originated from the West and the West has expanded women's rights (Hatem, 2013) have been widely countered, even as they form the foundation for mainstream knowledge production and consumption. In relation to Lebanon and the region, Mervat Hatem argues that women's education, motherhood, and domesticity were created as part of the colonial project, as a way to control the population. Arab modernism and nationalism adopted these discourses, creating gendered obligations for women posited as domestic duty, without giving them a decision-making role.

Maria Lugones' theory of the coloniality of gender helps to explain the institutionalization of these myths. Lugones argues that the processes of colonialism, and the ongoing situation of coloniality, have produced modern categories of gender that continue to govern our economic, ecological, governmental, and educational systems. She contends that colonialism created both racialized and gendered dichotomies of human/non-human and man/woman, marking the (white) male as human and civilized. These binaries allowed for systemic dehumanization and its associated violence. This dichotomous understanding of gender, and continued experience of coloniality mean that activists fight both local and global discourses predicated on these norms (Lugones, 2007). As both Sara Ahmed (2000)and Lugones argue, colonialism is not an event that has passed, but an ongoing process that continues today.

It is the reality of ongoing coloniality and the interlinked capitalist economy that produce both not only the structural violence that feminism opposes, but also new subjects of feminist activism in Lebanon. Prior to the 1990s, the discussion of the (non-Arab) women migrant domestic worker was not prevalent in feminist discourse in the region. As global economic and migration flows brought more Asian and African women to Lebanon, and transnational discourses about race flowed in and out of Beirut, the migrant domestic worker emerged as a figure, a feminist subject. While we more easily discuss how the "post"-colonial condition has created economic between multiple interlocking Global Souths, we also must examine how coloniality has shaped – and made – subjects of activist discourse.

For these reasons, I choose to incorporate frames of coloniality of gender, decolonial theory, and transnationalism throughout this thesis. Decolonial work, academic and activist, has also centered discussions of solidarity within transnational organizing. Richa Nagar cites Hanan Sabea's (2008)criticism of the "taken for granted and 'catch-all' nature of the term transnational," which in some ways depoliticizes it and minimizes possibility of critique, and instead defines a transnationalism that "includes encounters and conversations that take shape 'from particular locations and positions, while simultaneously attempting to traverse compartmentalized and already packaged forms of knowledge' (Sabea 2008, 16)" (2014, p. 11).

This framing is key for Beirut and Lebanon, home to refugees, migrant workers, and those with high degrees of mobility, where the transnational becomes local. Richa Nagar argues "for a postcolonial and transnational feminist praxis that focuses on (a) conceptualizing and implementing collaborative efforts that insist on crossing difficult borders; (b) the sites, strategies, and skills deployed to produce such collaborations; and (c) the specific processes through which such collaborations might find their form, content, and meaning" (2014, pp. 19–20). This is what many participants, and I, have been trying to do – whether locally or regionally.

1.3.5 The Role of Knowledge and the Complicity of Academic Research

Linda Tihui Smith defines knowledge as a key part of activism and as a shared public good, with the researcher as an actor who must be fully accountable. She writes, "Sharing is a responsibility of research…sharing is about demystifying knowledge and information and speaking in plain terms to the community" (Smith, 2012, p. 162). However, knowledge production has traditionally reasserted the power structures and forms of domination present in colonialism and educational, military, and cultural imperialism. Academic, white, and popular feminisms and gender studies have often been complicit; by continually placing "third world women" as objects of research, scholarship reifies the cultural superiority of Western women, and thus Western societies (Geiger, 2003, p. 402).[11]

Knowledge production is also an opportunity to counter hegemony and coloniality. A feminist research practice thus prioritizes understanding, rather than controlling, the material gathered and interpretations of its findings. Put more simply, feminist research inquiries should

[11] In her analysis, Geiger also draws on Chandra Mohanty and Aihwa Ong.

open further questions and opportunities for understanding, rather than establish objective closure (Geiger, 2003, p. 400). Smith defines decolonization not as an outright rejection of research, but as a re-centering of research priorities and worldviews (Smith, 2012, p. 41). Naber and Zaatari build on Tihui Smith's approach and Kamala Visweswaran's *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* to use a methodology "grounded in social movement accountability, which entails conducting research in relationship to the social movements that are relevant to the lives, dreams, and visions of our research participants (2014, p. 93)." This is linked to the project of *collective* theory-making. Citing Katie King's essay, "Producing Sex, Theory, and Culture: Gay/Straight Re-Mappings in Contemporary Feminism," belle hooks (1991) emphasizes that "the production of feminist theory is complex, that it is less the individual practice than we often think and usually emerges from engagement with collective sources".

In this work, I seek to follow Kaedbey as she pushes back on academic knowledge production, and instead prioritizes a reconstruction of knowledge as a key tenet of activist work. Kaedbey challenges how "common sense" thinking that upholds dominant knowledges and views (2014a). She also calls upon the goal of "cognitive liberation" in resistance movements that realizes supplying different information is never enough, that we instead must rethink our own theories of knowledge and its creation. Much of the work of those interviewed for this thesis contribute to this practice in their daily lives, *through* their daily lives. I aim to center their contributions, to cite with them, and to challenge my own assumptions created by academic training.

1.4 Methodology and Research Design

This qualitative study seeks to understand feminist activism in Beirut that disrupts, resists, and reproduces gendered violence, through data collected via interviews and document analysis. The primary data was gathered in interviews with 14 feminist activists in Beirut, about their work and their experiences of, and resistance to, many forms of gendered violence or discrimination in Lebanon. As feminism in Beirut is not the project only of Lebanese activists, collaborators included Ethiopian and Palestinian feminists, certainly not meant to be representative of all the national groups living in Lebanon. Findings were triangulated by document analysis of primary and secondary sources relating to feminist community organizing

in Beirut around sexual violence, harassment, and gender-based discrimination, as well as learnings from events, discussions, and meetings organized by these individuals and their organizations or collectives. Documents include publically available campaign materials, news reports, articles, social media posts, and blogs, produced in both Arabic and English over the last twelve years.[12] Collaborators were recruited through personal networks, as well as direct outreach to civil society groups, NGOs, collectives, and institutions.

1.4.1 Participant Interviews, Data Collection, and Analysis

I refer to those interviewed both as participants and collaborators. For the purposes of participant recruitment, I defined activists as anyone who is or has been actively engaged in the last 12 years on activism around any aspect of gendered violence in Beirut. Their activist tactics are not necessarily visible, and tend to involve "conscious resistance of these mainstream norms; a deliberate failing to meet the preconceived notions of patriarchal society" (Sowards & Renegar, 2006). Collaborators' activism thus combines the visible, formal, or professionalized with unseen daily actions or modes of being. While most collaborators identify as feminists or activists, some avoided those labels. They work in, volunteer for, or represent three categories, reflecting a wide range of tactics and experiences: (1) civil society groups or NGOs that address gendered discrimination and sexual violence, via direct service provision, advocacy, and awareness raising; (2) feminist collectives, collaboratives, and informal groups; and (3) institutional initiatives connected to universities, international organizations, or the state.[13] Many spoke to experiences in more than one space, reflecting the flow of people and ideas across groups and networks.

The first category, civil society groups and NGOs, includes groups that organize within an NGOized structure. They primarily employ paid staff, although many also use volunteer labor and support, and often run grant-funded programs and projects. Some are registered with the Lebanese state, although that is not a requirement for this category, due to the challenges to

[12] This corresponds to the shift in activism after the Cedar Revolution and 2006 Israeli invasion, highlighted by Rita Stephan, Nadine Naber, and Zeina Zaatari.

[13] Many more organizations, groups, and individuals could be included. Another category would be feminist knowledge production projects in Beirut, such as the Knowledge Workshop, Lebanon Support, and Sawt al-Niswa. Knowledge production represents a major strategy of feminist activism, to expand access to information contrary to established institutional, national, and Western narratives. Articles and databases were included in the document analysis, but the limited scope of this thesis means that I could not prioritize knowledge production in the interviews.

registration for groups working on politicized issues such as LGBTQ rights. Civil society groups and NGOs represented or discussed by the collaborators include the A Project, ABAAD Resource Center for Gender, the Anti-Racism Movement, the Arab Foundation for Freedom and Equality, Helem, Marsa, the Migrant Worker Task Force (now inactive), and KAFA. Not all of these explicitly identify with a focus on feminisms or women's rights activism; if not, their work intersects with broader feminist networks in Beirut.

Feminist collectives, collaboratives, and informal groups often resist NGOized structures, and instead operate outside of a traditional business, non-profit, or organizational framework. They typically do not take funding from international donors, or do so under limited and critical terms. Their missions often combine external advocacy and internal provision of safe space or community. Those discussed or represented in interviews include the Dammeh Cooperative, Egna Legna Besidet, Feminist Bloc, Feminist Network, and Nasawiya (now inactive). This is Lebanon, an activist group exposing the violations of the kafala system, is also represented here. Although it does not identify itself as a feminist platform, the associated activists who were interviewed view their work through a lens of feminism. The Women's Human Rights Defenders network, which brings together women from different Arab countries, also is included here.

Institutional initiatives are groups or programs addressing gendered violence within an institutional framework of the university, INGO, or state. Like NGOs, some contend with donor needs, but also navigate the politics of their institutions. I include university clubs here, rather then in collectives, because although many student activists use clubs to organize outside an NGOized framework, they are still contending with power structures of their home institution. The limitations imposed by university administrations speak to the intersections between categories and the difficulties of imposing typologies in this space. Clubs represented include the Feminist Club, Gender and Sexuality Club, and Red Oak Club at the American University of Beirut, and the Lebanese American University's Intersectional Feminist Club.[14] In this category, I also include the feminist RootsLab initiative, housed within Oxfam, an international NGO. Although RootsLab was run by longtime feminist activists as a way to incubate a cross-cutting set of young feminist efforts in Lebanon, it still had to contend with the politics of an international organization.

[14] This sample is not representative of feminist university activism across Lebanon or Beirut, as that was not the goal of this study. However, the collaborators associated with these groups spoke to the impact of student activism on broader feminist networks, and many work in association with students at other universities.

Document analysis includes review of primary and secondary sources on feminist community organizing in Beirut around gendered violence. Sources include blogs, social media posts, and articles in newspapers and academic journals such as Sawt al-Niswa, Jadaliyya, and Kohl, published in English or Arabic over the twelve years up to 2018. Analysis also included Lebanese and international news reports on incidents of violence, government activity, feminist groups and work, and lobbying for various laws and policies. For context, related publications from donor organizations to gender-based violence projects in Lebanon were also reviewed, to understand the language used by the international funding communities and agencies, in relation to on-the-ground work.

Interviews with activists were semi-structured and conducted primarily in-person, with two Skype interviews in order to include people who were out of the country at the time. The formation of interview questions and protocol drew on Bridget Byrne's open interview style (2012, p. 246) and Marjorie L. DeVault's feminist approach to interviewing. DeVault advocates for acknowledgement of power dynamics, as well as opportunities for collaborative practice with interlocutors, understanding that "we share multiple versions of both oppression and resistance" (2003, p. 246). Interviews primarily focused on participants' experiences and understanding of feminism and activism, their efforts (whether professionalized or not) against gendered violence, the challenges they face, the tactics they use, and their daily lives. Some discussions also include strategies used within or against NGO structures, and the role of national and international discourse and institutions.

Interviews also drew upon practices of oral history collection, following Geiger, Naber, and Zaatari. While this was not a project to gather full life histories, interviews included narrative collection on background on the historian's life, upbringing, accomplishments, challenges, and daily practices, and encouraged storytelling. This was intended as an entry point to discuss multiple experiences of and reaction to many forms of gendered violence, rather than reducing an individual to victimhood or their professional position, and instead capture complex stories and dilemmas.

Data analysis largely drew on discourse analysis practices, as outlined by Fran Tonkiss, DeVault's feminist approach to interview analysis, and Naber and Zaatari's guidelines for feminist participatory action research. Tonkiss focuses on the organization and interpretation of text and conversation, eliding line-by-line accounts in favor of targeted thematic elements (2012,

p. 412). Tonkiss' approach to characterization and agency, and patterns of emphasis and silence was particularly useful in addressing questions of coloniality and resistance. While their paper is not explicitly methodological, Naber and Zaatari's embrace of feminist participatory action research reflects practices of transparency, respect for collaborators as theory-makers and partners, and intentional following of their own inquiries within analysis.

1.4.2 Language and Class

The majority of participants who grew up in Lebanon, regardless of nationality, were multilingual and comfortable in Arabic, English, and sometimes French due to both the language politics of Lebanon and in many cases to their class positions and/or education access. The Ethiopian activists I interviewed, who had come to Lebanon over the decade prior, were either comfortable in Arabic or English, in addition to speaking Amharic and/or Oromo. I conducted most of the interviews English, and several in Arabic or in a combination of Arabic and English. In the case of Arabic interviews, I have translated quotes to English and checked their accuracy with native speakers as needed, respecting confidentiality, or with interviewees themselves if they were multilingual.

The use of English in the majority of interviews speaks to my own position as a native English-speaker and foreign researcher, and with whom I built relationships during my years in Beirut. However, it also reflects the relative commonality of discussing certain concepts of feminism in English, as opposed to Arabic, in certain, classed feminist spaces. This speaks to the language politics of Lebanon's classed education system, ongoing coloniality, and transnationalism in local feminist discourse and practice. A number of participants spoke to their frustration with the prevalence of English in the contexts of knowledge production, NGOization, and classed communication – and their twinned inability to express themselves fully on these topics in Arabic. While in some cases this use of language reflected the class position of the individual, for others it reflected classed access to more mainstream feminist knowledge and spaces in Lebanon. Some expressed anger over the lack of resources in Arabic, and some were involved in initiatives to create more shared knowledge of these ideas in Arabic. Many gained vocabulary for their feminist consciousness via universities, readings, or formal organizations

that conduct work in English or French; others through feminist spaces and collectives that did not use an academic approach but still grappled with the politics of language.

A reflection about the feminist activists and spaces in this thesis must also take into account class and mobility, which I define both in terms of geographic and social position. Unlike the "unusual suspects," or feminists removed from the centers of visible activism and knowledge-creation, as discussed in reference to RootsLab in Chapter 2, many participants in this research moved fluidly between spaces. Some had traveled for education or regional collaboration and returned to Lebanon; others moved from their hometowns to Beirut, from Ethiopia to Lebanon, from labor migration to activism, from student clubs to collectives, from Amharic to Arabic, from Arabic to English and back. This mobility was not always by choice. Global capitalist migration flows drew the migrant activists to a far-away center of Beirut, for work. Beirut's underlying coloniality of knowledge and centralized labor market also drew young people to a perceived center of English- and French-speaking work and education. Language serves as a key to mobility from Lebanon, or Ethiopia, to abroad.

Language also serves as an access point to feminist knowledge, in transnational spaces. The majority of interlocutors had entered the feminist transnational, regardless of whether they had ever left Lebanon, via an exchange of ideas, readings, and terminology. While local context always remained important, and served as the source of written and unwritten feminist theory-making and activist practice, the influence of the regional and transnational is clear. In many cases, we built their perspectives on the same sources, drawing on feminists of color in the US, of transnational feminist thinkers in Southeast Asia and Africa, of Arab women's movements. Our understandings of activism are thus informed by global and regional flows, of intercontinental debates, of activist-scholar practice in some cases, and of lived experience. As will be explored in chapter 2 and 3, mobility and transnational access can create feelings of alienation for those who don't have access, of exclusion based on geographic access and class.

1.4.3 Confidentiality and Naming

I discussed confidentiality with all interviewees, both formally as part of the consent process, and throughout interviews, as many people were open to using their names, except when speaking on particular issues and topics. I also shared back participants' quotes and contributions

before publication, to confirm the content and also their decisions of whether or not to use their real names.

In *Muddying the Waters: Coauthoring Feminisms Across Scholarship and Activism,* Nagar outlines principles of coauthorship in feminist storytelling. I am far from co-authorship, but I aim to follow her approach in collaborative knowledge-making and reflection. In writing on coauthorship and storytelling, she writes, "I deploy and claim some "truths" here—to highlight the nature, significance, and unfolding of those knowledges that can be enabled and authored only through a collective commitment to recognize the mutually inseparable nature of doing, feeling, representing, theorizing, and dreaming in alliance work" (2014, p. 167). She argues that translation, both literally of language and also of story and knowledge, must be guided by love and trust. Without "intentional grappling with specific political questions and shared political agenda," however, the work can be far from alliance and solidarity work (2014, p. 169).

In using people's real names, when they have expressed the desire to do so, I seek to ground them as the central force behind this process. In using pseudonyms, I also seek to center their knowledge, as anonymity allowed in many cases for participants to speak more freely, without fearing personal or professional retribution for their words.

1.5 Ethics and Positionality

This project finishes after almost four years of me living, studying, and working in Beirut. This does not erase my origins and the power dynamic of a researcher from the US in Lebanon, subject to ongoing Western military imperialism, cultural and educational coloniality, and violent European, American, and regional national security and surveillance measures. Despite my own political beliefs and actions, this paper could settle into the many oppressive bodies of scholarship produced by the Western-centric academy on the non-Western as the object of study. As belle hooks writes, on appropriative feminisms and white academic approaches to theory-making, "the privileged act of naming often affords those in power access to modes of communication that enable them to project an interpretation, a definition, a description of their work, actions, etc. that may not be accurate, that may obscure what is really taking place" (1991, p. 3). Intent is rarely the same as impact, and does not absolve a writer of the damaging nature of

their words. And how, writing within a colonial academic institution, can the impact at all match the intention?

A positionality statement provides an inadequate answer to this question. Often, the author acknowledges their privileges, identities, relationships, and the ever-moving orbit around and within them – but then writes the same paper they would have written otherwise. So many efforts to push back against imperialist, racist, and colonial structures stop at lip service. As much-needed critique of the whiteness and patriarchy of the academy continues to spread, many researchers and writers are instead taught to say, "I know enough to know that I know nothing." This in itself becomes a type of social capital.

Academic training pushes many outsiders (with power) to think they have a place wherever they choose (often among those with less relative power). Many outsiders' experiences are thus over-intellectualized, over-processed, and speculative. This ignores the productivity of outside-ness and the multitude ways outside-ness can operate. Many of my collaborators also experienced outside-ness within the same feminist spaces – of nationality or race, of coming to Beirut from Tripoli or their village, of politics, of youth, of exile. It should be the bare minimum to accept that, as an outsider *coming from a place of power* – whether to a country, a group, a community, a time, or a place – you can only know so little, and that your understandings will be irrevocably shaped by your own experience. But an over-focus on outside-ness risks exceptionalizing the *privileged* outsider's position, and ignoring the many ways that spaces are full of outsiders already, and this itself shapes our individual and collective creation of knowledge.

Through this thesis, I learned from Sara, Mira, Sous, and Belan to articulate that there is a difference between knowing that you know nothing, and *relearning something that you thought you knew*. This is, in many ways, what outside-ness allows us. The second requires a deeper vulnerability, admitting not only ignorance, but also wrongness and incompetence. Nagar frames some of her work as an academic memoir, "a self- conscious attempt on my part to become radically vulnerable, even as I share knowledge and truths that become possible only through coauthorship with many others " (2014, p. 6).

Radical vulnerability can be learned, but it is antithetical to how many of us are socialized and raised. We want expertise, familiarity, knowledge, and belonging. To be, or to have been, wrong or incompetent is the opposite. It is to need to be educated, to need help.

Ignorance can be a temporary, adjustable condition, but it is also a permanent state, from which we can grow. The danger comes not from this ignorance, but from the way we pretend it doesn't exist.

Outsider perspectives can be positively instrumentalized. Elsa emphasized this in our interview; she learned through reflection with other Arab feminists that she had relative space to organize in Lebanon, compared to other activists' countries. For her, this distance and exchange opened up new thinking, collaboration, and actions, as it has for many of us. Outsider/insiders can work in solidarity by responding to the calls of those directly affected, and apply their privileges and resources (Smith, 2012). I try to follow Elsa, Linda Tihui Smith, and activists including Indigenous Action to be an accomplice in this work, as I will discuss in the third chapter.

The knowledge, experience, and theory of the 14 participant/collaborators I interviewed has helped me to make sense of my research questions, as burning questions in my own life, and in the collectives and groups to which I belong. Some of these are grassroots groups woven into feminist movements in Lebanon, some are elsewhere. For the past three years, I have worked with the Anti-Racism Movement and Migrant Community Centers in casework and advocacy for migrant worker rights, and spent much of my personal time organizing around similar issues. At the time of interviews for this thesis, I also was an active member of the Feminist Network, a feminist collective in Beirut aiming to fight sexual harassment and create reflective space for women and trans* folks to come together. With them, and organizing in coalitions, I experienced firsthand the struggles of resources and daily life for grassroots collectives in Lebanon. As part of my Graduate Assistantship at AUB, in which I worked in exchange for my tuition, I worked in AUB's Equity & Title IX office on anti-sexual harassment and non-discrimination initiatives, getting to know many student clubs active on issues around gender, feminism, and sexuality. I have written for Kohl about the tension of protectionism in feminism, of being an outsider. (Finn, 2018) I have lived much of the experiences in the pages of this thesis, but I also lived it as a very privileged migrant worker.

I thus struggled methodologically with this thesis for a long time, felt uncomfortable in writing about people and places I knew through personal experience and intimacy, but that I do not come from.

Richa Nagar's writing of the personal through the lens of radical vulnerability, and autotheory, provided some guidance. Autotheory is a "feminist modality, a method of writing the self that shatters the academic fourth wall and asks how theory (political, academic, or otherwise) can be incorporated and intermingled with real life, not merely used as a tool to measure, describe, and define it" ("the academy, autotheory, and the argonauts," 2016). It requires the writer to get personal, but not in a practice of self-indulgence, of fusion of the self and goal. Rather, it requires a brutal honesty in addressing subject matter, understanding that I/the author cannot be separated from it/the writing.

In the past few years, autotheory has been more popularly ascribed to Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* and Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie* – queer and trans writers respectively in the US. However, many authors relate autotheory to the long history of feminist practices, particular feminists of color, such as Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Audre Lorde. Autotheory does not belong to a specific time and place; many Lebanese feminists have a similar approach, in reflective works such as Meem's *Bareed Mista3jil*, many essays on Sawt el-Niswa, and beyond. Autotheory is an extension of the personal as political, an extension of the practice of valuing women's experience as knowledge.

Autotheory and radical vulnerability have their limits. They do not in themselves absolve the reader of her role in the hierarchies of knowledge and academia, and other forms of power and privilege. As Lauren Fournier (2018)writes, "One could argue that the entire history of feminist theory and practice is one of autotheory, though the resonances of 'autotheory' as a twenty-first century term bears consideration, particularly when it comes to the twenty-first century context of neoliberalism, late capitalism, and the post-confessional technologies of social media." In other words, there is a fine line between self-reflective writing, autotheory, and meaningful consideration of positionality. What does it mean to write self-theory in a neoliberal capitalist world, where promotion of the individual takes precedence over the collective? What does it mean to draw upon autotheory within racialized capitalism, where promotion of the white (male, but certainly not exclusively) individual is often the only voice given space? Or where success relies on conformation to ruling/upper class, heterosexual norms, regardless of one's identity?

How does this connect to this thesis? I set out with questions that resonated between feminist communities I was apart of or connected to, but that also came up in my life and my

work, before and within Beirut. Influenced by the expectations of Sociology, Gender Studies, and Queer Studies as disciplines, I looked to interview style and methodology that would push back against further appropriation of knowledge. I wanted to avoid further blurring the line of "interlocutor" and friend, colleague, comrade, and to honor my participants' labor – but also to make space for trust and care. I seek to combine autotheory with the work of Lugones, Nagar, Akram Khater, Dana Olwan, and Arianne Shahvisi to help re-center radical feminisms in our understanding of activism and community. At the end of the day, at the end of this writing, I am not using theory only to make sense of other people's actions – but applying other people's theory to make sense of my own, and endeavoring to share these frames of analysis with others.

CHAPTER 2
VISIBILITY, POWER, AND RESPECTABILITY

"We're constantly up against the state and constantly up against its mechanisms and its forces. And it's something that's so big, and so overwhelming, and so all-encompassing that… for people to be visible in the avenues that we recognize, that the political system recognizes, there has to be something that's really, really vocal. There has to be something that's very much in the public eye."

– Mira Mawla

"Apart from the work we have in feminist spaces, the work that we do does not really translate to work within the communities that we come from…The most visibility or the furthest your politics can get out, for example, as Dammeh, is participation in protests and the calendar that we're working on. And that is usually acquired by other feminists…That's a problem in most of our circles. We have a hard time getting into spaces of people who are not us."

– Sarah Kaddoura

2.1 "Justice" for Some

On a Tuesday in July 2017, I drove with three friends from the Feminist Network, two hours from Beirut to Tripoli. We parked on a main street, and then walked into a state building, past guards at the door, to a courtroom. We were there to accompany Marie (pseudonym), a woman none of us knew very well, as she testified against her rapist. Marie and her friends had reached out to us for support in the weeks before, not knowing how to handle the legal and social aspects of her assault complaint. The whole neighborhood must have heard her scream during the rape, Marie had thought, but no one had come to her aid, making our presence more important to her. We knew the man who attacked her was from an important family, that Marie would need emotional support to share her experience in front of him in court, so we came. Security officers didn't allow us inside the courtroom, so we waited outside, alongside his family members. No one spoke much. We didn't expect an outcome in Marie's favor.

Hours later, Marie walked out of the courtroom, unexpectedly smiling. The judge had found her rapist guilty of assault. All of us – her lawyer, friends, and even the policemen – were shocked. The rapist's family had connections. Yes, there was a doctor's report of her injuries, but there had been no penetration, making it less likely the courts would consider her complaint. Yet somehow, the judge had said: *I'm sorry that this happened to you*. *This isn't Lebanon. This isn't who we are.*[15]

Marie was far from the average survivor of gendered violence or sexual assault in Lebanon. She was a white foreigner with a European passport and privileges of class, education, and nationality that allowed her a different kind of access to the police station, forensic doctor, pro bono legal representation, and the court. Who she was made her visible, in a way that opened doors. Most people who survive sexual violence in Lebanon – as in much of the world – never report (M. El Ammar, 2015; Hassan, El Mir, & El Rahi, 2017). The system is not built for their benefit. They remain out of sight. Or, as in the case of migrant domestic workers from Africa and Asia in Lebanon, their visibility makes them a target.

Mira Mawla – a feminist activist involved with several collectives in Beirut, who I also interviewed years later for this thesis – drove the car up that day. It was an unspoken agreement that we would be there, not so much to address the specific act of physical and emotional violence, but the patriarchy, misogyny, and violence of the whole police and justice system. Our presence did not change the outcome. The goal was not accountability, or the punishment of the courts, but of solidarity.

Marie's case did not prove that the system worked. Instead, it raised old questions about whose sympathy is worth public (and private) outrage.

Later that year, in December 2017, Rebecca Dykes, a 30-year-old, white, British diplomat, was raped and killed by a Lebanese Uber driver. News of her death went viral in and out of Lebanon. In 2019, the man was sentenced to death, although the death sentence was overturned in February 2020, as is common practice.[16] The forensic doctor reported that he had never seen this crime against a "Western" woman, before, but sees four or five similar crimes

[15] Based on personal observation and conversations with Marie in July 2017.
[16] https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/2/20/lebanon-overturns-death-sentence-for-british-embassy-employee-murder

against Lebanese and Syrian women every month[17] – and he didn't mention migrant workers of other nationalities. ABAAD reported in 2016 that one in four women in Lebanon experiences sexual assault, but that around only 13 women report sexual assaults to the police each month (Akram, 2018). Behind the report, statistics, and these murders are realities of racial and class oppression that bring this violence into being.

Prompted by the violent deaths and murders of eight women in the month and half since December, KAFA and other civil society groups coordinated a vigil to call for justice for their deaths and changes to the law governing domestic violence, on January 27, 2018 (Akram, 2018; KAFA, 2018). They called it "٨ مش عدد"" or "8 is not a number." I had attended as a participant, not as a researcher, and later discussed the event with several people in our interviews. Red silhouettes were arranged around Nejmeh Square, each representing one of the women. Rebecca Dykes was one of them.

In 2017, IRIN (which later became the New Humanitarian) found that at least two migrant domestic workers die in Lebanon every week, according to the Lebanese General Security itself (Su, 2017). Most are listed as suicides without proper investigation, some are actual suicides or failed escape attempts from apartment balconies, fleeing abusive and exploitative working conditions, or direct violence. There would have been twelve more women for the vigil – if we had known all their names, if they had been included.

This is not to say the deaths of the eight women – and probably dozens more Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese women left uncounted – do not matter. They do. My first instinct was to write that the deaths of the eight women, that the violence they suffered, was rendered *speakable* by activists' efforts, while the deaths of migrant women were left unspeakable, invisible. However, I think the answer is crueler: The twelve migrant women who likely died from December 2017 to January 2018 were rendered invisible by violence that is far from unspeakable. Violence toward migrant women, Syrians, Palestinians, and certain classes of Lebanese is commonplace. The violence visited upon the eight women honored in the vigil, in contrast, held a degree of taboo. This granted it visibility, speakability, by way of the activists. The death of an Ethiopian migrant worker, in comparison, rarely causes an investigation, a court case, a vigil.

[17] https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/rebecca-dykes-murder-latest-updates-lebanon-beirut-uber-driver-sexual-attacks-surian-women-a8117826.html

In three years of work at the Anti-Racism Movement, I've heard countless firsthand accounts of assaults, rapes, deaths, and beatings of migrant women in Lebanon. Judges do not apologize to them. In 2019, we supported an Ethiopian woman – let's call her Genet – in her early twenties, after she raped by the *natour* (concierge) of her building. She had reported immediately to the police, and they arranged a forensic doctor report the same night and immediately arrested the attacker. We speculated this only happened because the natour was Syrian, that he was an easy target himself for the police. We assigned her a lawyer and went with her to court. But her Lebanese sponsor and employer knew the rapist, and pressured Genet over months to drop the case, threatening to get both her and her sister detained and deported. They drove her multiple times to the public notary to sign official documents releasing her claim; several times, she called us screaming for help from the car.

Deportation would have upended their lives and the little economic stability that Genet and her sister had. So, after months of resisting, Genet took money from the sponsor, and stopped cooperating. Our lawyer argued in court that she was acting under extreme duress, and was allowed to continue in Genet's stead. The rapist served time in jail during the trial, but in the end, the judge ruled that the assault was not rape. In three years, this was only the second rape case we'd been able to bring to trial.

Unspoken regulations about visibility and speakability are yet another form of violence imposed by the system, part of the status quo that activists fight to change. Would Rebecca's death – and the efforts pushing for accountability – have been as visible if she were Syrian? Lebanese? Ethiopian? Sri Lankan? If she had a different class position? Would Marie have walked out of the courtroom smiling? Would she have entered it at all? The silence of survivors is maintained by design. "This is not Lebanon" does not apply to everyone, and that is not an accident.

2.2 Introduction: Visibility versus Activism

"Everybody really, really, just completely misses the mark on what's visibility and what's action."

– Mira Mawla

This chapter explores tensions around visibility in feminist activist work around gendered violence in Beirut, and the relationship of visibility to power and privilege.[18] Almost every interview highlighted this issue, often in relation to clear tensions between more mainstreamed women's rights activism and radical feminist work. Visibility can be both a positive and a negative, a tool to be used when justice cannot be accessed through traditional means, and a curse that severely limits what kind of activism can be publicly performed and privately pursued, what kind of violence can be made legible to the mainstream public. It often becomes a crux, a currency in the games of respectability politics, distribution of funding and resources, and competition for legitimacy.

In discussing visibility, I refer to the degree to which a person, group, intervention, or demand is publicly acknowledged, seen, or recognized. It exists on a spectrum, and is an essential ingredient to many people's definitions of activism. Visibility is not the same as public acceptance or embrace of an activist or a tactic. However, activist demands for women's rights that are more visible tend to also be more moderate, more closely aligned with mainstream discourse, or focused on the rights of those closer to power and from higher class positions. Forms of violence that are more visible tend to target "victims" who are seen as respectable, often along spectrums of nationality, race, class, sexuality, and gender identity. This is no coincidence.

When activists use the term visibility, the implied audience is the general public. In regards to feminist activism against gendered violence, various parts of the public are viewed as apathetic, disengaged, too overwhelmed by the oppression experienced in daily life, and politically in opposition to activists' goals. Visibility is seen by many interviewed as a counter to the apathy, at least, as a wedge to crack it open.

Patriarchy is built on control of women, specifically women's reproductive capacities and basic autonomy. Patriarchy thrives on apathy, and an unwillingness or inability to challenge the status quo. As women's rights movements across the world have risen and fallen, reinforced and sometimes undermined one another, activists have successfully subverted some forms of control. They have made certain injustices, individual victims, collective harm, and specific moments

[18] I define power here as the ability to control the narrative, to make decisions. Privilege gives a person the ability *not* to see how dynamics of power operate, typically when they share identity characteristics with those in power, or are in power themselves.

visible. In Beirut, certain women – typically the Lebanese middle and upper classes – have been able to access relative daily freedoms, around education, labor, and mobility.

This expansion of rights for some, however, occurs too often at the expense of other women, and gendered, racial, and economic domination remain key pillars of social codes, laws, interpersonal relationships, and everyday interactions. This is seen in the social structures and care chains of the *kafala* (sponsorship) system, which propels some Lebanese women into the work force by providing cheap, exploited, reproductive labor from Asian and African migrant domestic workers.(Chamoun & Ayoub, 2017; Jureidini, 2009) Outside some feminist groups discussed in this research, very few women's rights groups stand in solidarity with domestic workers' struggles or acknowledge the connecting forms of oppression – as seen in the January 2018 vigil.

Mainstream women's rights demands in Lebanon have tended to focus on issues such as parliamentary quotas for female representatives and the right for Lebanese women to pass on their nationality to their children, which are both essential to overall fights for gender equity in Lebanon. At the same time, they remain divorced from intersectional struggles around race, class, and labor. In the 2018 march commemorating International Women's Day, for example, several older women's rights NGOs balked at the inclusion of demands around LGBTQ rights and the inclusion of trans women.[19] A common reply to those calling for an intersectional approach claims, "We need to take care of our own rights first," or more directly, "How can we focus on 'them' when we don't have rights ourselves?"

Sarah Kaddoura, Sexuality Hotline Coordinator at the A Project at the time of our interview, argues that the most visible calls for women's rights often miss the mark. Rather than focus on underlying structures of oppression, they focus on singular issues, often more visible to donors. Campaigns tend to focus on laws perceived as "backward," regardless of whether they reflect the actual situation of these issues in practice. Instead of taking a grassroots approach targeting a whole range of laws and practices that are not progressive for women and children, Sarah said, the focus trends towards those penal codes that funding sources designate as "important" issues, such as child marriage. Rather than connecting sensationalized issues to a broader understanding of inequity and injustice, Sarah argues that some women's rights groups tend to eschew efforts at cross-cutting solidarity, in favor of singular issues easily digested by

[19] Personal observation.

donors and the public. The work may be necessary and good, she says, but the focus on certain laws does not translate into a shift of discourse and practice.

An example of Sarah's critique can be seen in campaigns like KAFA's 2016 "Ra18e the Age" initiative,[20] which called for a standard law in Lebanon to increase the age of marriage for girls to 18 years old. The main video for the campaign, while emotional and affecting, features young girls talking about not being able to watch certain movies, drive, stay up late, or work because of their age, making the point that they are children not yet ready for marriage. The actresses are young, clearly Lebanese, well-dressed, hair uncovered. There is no reference in the campaign to the factors that drive child marriage, the role of men, poverty, and conflict, and intersections with other rights. The video is well-produced, clear, and branded, and not surprisingly was widely viewed.[21] To apply Sarah's analysis, child marriage is an important issue in relation to gendered violence and gender equity, but it cannot be understood in a silo. The law is perceived as "backward," so it becomes the target, rather than the social and economic structures surrounding child marriage. Sarah acknowledges the necessary labor of these more mainstreamed groups, including KAFA, because they can pave the way for discussion on more complex issues. However, there is a fine line between this work, and lifting up the rights of some at the detriment to others.

Although many feminist activists deliberately push against these power dynamics, this tension still permeates aspects of feminist work and life in and beyond Beirut. This is exacerbated by the constant struggle for resources, which both stem from and lead to visibility and social legitimacy. Attaining visibility often requires conformation to normalized social codes, maintaining a politics of respectability, and fighting for the narrowest and most liberal of definitions of women's rights.[22]

Activism that is rendered visible becomes eligible for resources from outside sources. And activism is often made visible *by* these resources, creating a vicious cycle. Many activists interviewed spoke the tension inherent in this paradigm on three levels: media and public perception, funding mechanisms linked to NGOization, and internal hierarchies within activist

[20] https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10154376399009337&t=36

[21] https://claudeelkhal.blogspot.com/2015/11/in-lebanon-its-legal-to-marry-child.html [link original KAFA source]

[22] The October 2019 revolution, as well as past social movements, saw some examples of these codes breaking. Chants from feminist groups about bringing down patriarchy, racism, the kafala system, homophobia, and transphobia spread, along with graffiti promoting women's and LGBTQ rights and stating "faggot is not an insult."

spaces. This chapter will discuss these three areas, and explore both the consequences of visibility and respectability politics, as well as the tactics of those pushing back and creating alternatives. I ask: What are the roles of visibility, in relation to power, in activist structures in Beirut? How do these dynamics intersect with existing social, political, and economic power structures – and respectability politics? How and when does feminist activism both reproduce and disrupt them, using visibility and associated privileges strategically as tools?

2.3 Visibility and State-Sanctioned Activism

The push towards visibility further marginalizes those who cannot safely perform their activism publicly, those who are not legible as respectable to Lebanese politicians and the public, and those who choose forms of organization that eschew formal funding and NGOization. It favors those who embrace tactics and ways of being that focus on the television interview and the political stage, thus cutting out the majority of the population, and occasionally the street. It limits publicly-translatable activism to a narrow set of tactics, reducing much of women's rights work to NGOized projects, which are primarily distilled into specific media campaigns or sanitized service provision. It leaves behind direct action, strategic and comprehensive advocacy, and cross-cutting movements.

For Mira, activism can be invisible commitments and actions such as accompanying Marie to her trial. This was not, however, the definition she learned growing up. Her father was active in local politics in the Bekaa, and this gave her a window into both the sectarian political space and the way that women's rights activism is widely viewed. She saw how his critique of "feminist" activist discourse rendered certain people visible because of their self-presentation, use of language, and sectarian political affiliations. She remembers him commenting on one woman, the head of a local civil society organization active in women's rights, who later ran for Parliament: "She was always a respectable woman" and "always knew what she was doing," he would say. Mira remembers thinking that this woman's image was not by accident, and that she had to work hard to maintain it. She realized that her father bestowed legitimacy only on a certain kind of woman activist, who was read publicly as "legitimate" and given media platforms precisely because of her ties to the state and her moderated.

Mira went on to be one of the founding members of the Feminist Network, and one of the key activists in the Feminist Bloc, group of feminist collectives. She views the meaningful work of these collectives as internal community building, creating space for women and trans people to come together, more important than the public outputs of any activism. However, the outside world doesn't see it that way. When the Feminist Bloc, which included the Feminist Network, student clubs, and grassroots organizations, planned a march in Beirut around 2017 International Women's Day, the media and public couldn't see all the effort, relationships, and care that had created it. They also couldn't see the true impact of the march, which went far beyond numbers:

> [The number of] people who asked me how many people were at the Women's March amazes me. We really didn't make that much of an effort to count them. But it was, it was something that we constantly got asked, because that's how people measure activism. It's how many people you….motivate and mobilize, when it's really like, the people who were planning it were literally just ten people around the table like this one. And no one realizes how much power comes from that alone and how much that's a sphere of influence and that's creating a community.

Visibility thus becomes a key commodity, in a number of ways. That can be a focus on the number of participants in a march, or a type of legitimacy conferred by age, class, and proximity to power. Some people interviewed identified a divide between feminist activists involved in feminist collectives and coalitions and those focused on women's rights, who tend to work for formal NGOs or are linked to political parties, and are often perceived to be an older generation of women. In these situations, activism is not about opposition or structural change, but access to people, specifically men, in power. The rationale around this tactic may cite access as a tool to lobby for policy change, but it often falls far, far short.

Mira highlights how this approach can require a compromise of feminist values: "There's a fine line between being an activist and literally being an apologist of the political status quo that we live in right now. Because to be recognized, in that way, you have to have been in the public eye for a really long time. It means you have to have rubbed shoulders with the people, with the very people that we [Feminist Bloc and similar groups] refuse to rub shoulders with, when we're planning a march, for example." Mira goes on to argue that these "activists" don't just benefit from their links to the state, but that the state – and individual political parties – actively creates and benefits from the role that these women play. The state uses these women as a stand-in for broader, "thriving" civil society, maintaining an image that reflects positively on the state. Mira says, "The state always prides itself on like all the civil society that happens. It's a

vehicle for the state to be visible, one thousand percent. All the brunches, all the political parties, all the *sob7iyyet* [social breakfasts or brunches] for the women. All of these things are things that happen through the very same mechanisms that help these political parties get votes."

To follow Mira, this benefit happens in two ways: First, the Lebanese state is reproduced as an entity promoting human rights, specifically manifested in a sanitized version of women's rights that does not threaten the essence of the patriarchal state. Dramatic, typically physical, violence with legible victims gets to be seen as egregious crimes, and the authorities can step in. This builds off tired, and carefully curated, rhetoric on Lebanon as an "oasis" for human rights in the region – thankfully challenged by many activists and investigative journalists. Even so, the building blocks of this image remain: Charles Malek's participation in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the image of Beirut as a "haven" for (some) LGBTQ people, and elitist political and social discourse of Lebanon's "modernity" compared to the rest of the region (Moussawi, 2015, p. 600).[23] A rich civil society gets added to the evidence of Lebanese creativity and entrepreneurship, rather than as a condemnation of the gaps left by the state, ongoing legacies of colonialism, and global structures of aid and development that "benignly" invest in capacity building of civil society rather than challenge the status quo. Political parties benefit from publicity around their sponsorship of discussions and campaigns, from brunches for the women.

Second, more insidiously, the state benefits from the creation and promotion of "legitimate" activists who align with general state rhetoric on most points, to be positioned in contrast to more radical activists. State-sanctioned activists, whether actively in coordination or simply in tacit cooperation, maintain a standard of respectability that often precludes meaningful confrontation, intersectional struggle, and efforts toward structural change. Radical activists who do not conform are then re-constructed as illegitimate, foreign, or dangerous.

2.4 Respectability Politics, Visibility, and Reproduction of the State within the University

Respectability politics, as Mira identifies, severely limits not only which activists and causes become visibly, but whose pain is valued and heard. This trend is reproduced within

[23] In Ghassan Moussawi's historical analysis of LGBTQ+ organizing in Lebanon, using the examples of Meem and Helem, Ghassan Moussawi challenges the narrative of Beirut as a liberal, tolerant place for gays. He asks: which queers is it safe for?

Beirut's microcosms, notably the university. Interviewees for this study included former student activists at the American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanese American University (LAU) campuses in Beirut and Byblos, and Notre Dame University (NDU). Many referenced similar dynamics of respectability politics and representation between student activists and university administrations. Their experiences also demonstrate the ethical challenges to forming alliances with structures of power, and the calculated decisions activists must make to guarantee the most basic rights and protections for their groups. These dilemmas are clearly illustrated by the experiences of two former student activists, Patrick Haddad at AUB and Sarah Kaddoura at LAU.

Patrick's experience of establishing the Gender and Sexuality Club at AUB in 2015 reflects the difficulties of navigating visibility, politicization, and respectability politics. Patrick is a former student activist who advocates for LGBTQ rights. He was one of the main founders and then president of the Gender and Sexuality Club at AUB, which served as an informal safe haven for many LGBTQ students at the university.

Patrick came to understand gendered violence through his family's protectiveness of his sister and female cousins. He remembers being forced to accompany his sister, even though she was around his age, when they left the house. He said,

> She would always complain, like 'come to the supermarket with me'…and I would say no. And my dad would say, 'she's a girl, you have to do it.' And I would argue that she's perfectly capable of doing it herself. And they're like, no, that's not the point. I don't think I got why they wanted me to walk her to the supermarket and back. But like much later – I guess that's also one of the instances of gendered violence – I kind of understood. I think I was with my cousin, my older cousin at some point. She was at least eight, nine years older…We were walking down the street, she was holding our hands and whatever. I was young. And someone cat-called her and she screamed at him and we as kids laughed. But we didn't get what was happening.

In his understanding, violence was manifested in individual acts against women that required protection. But slowly, Patrick began to "change his perception from individual acts of violence to systemic acts of violence, like it's less about someone harassing me or catcalling you down the street. And more like a law that allows him to do that and doesn't prosecute him, but prosecutes you if you fight back." Through his experiences and that of his friends, he also saw similar violence performed on queer bodies. Years later, Patrick again found himself in a position to provide protection – but this time, he wasn't going to make the same mistake. He knew gendered violence was not individual, and doesn't need an individual solution.

Not long after Patrick and others had already established the GSC, there was an incident of harassment of a teenage boy on AUB's campus, with AUB students targeting the high school student because he was gay. At the time, the GSC's position was precarious; there were no formal protections for LGBTQ students in university policy, and Lebanese law was widely interpreted to criminalize homosexuality, according to Penal Code 534. "Our whole safety inside of AUB," Patrick said, was "built on the administration's kind of lackluster promise that 'oh yeah even though it's not written anywhere, we'll protect you.'"

That day, multiple AUB students bullied the teenage from International College, an elite private school that shares AUB's campus. They harassed him for being feminine-presenting. They called him *louti*, or faggot. The harassment was public, in the middle of an outdoor smoking area in the center of campus, close to the main gate of the university. According to Patrick, "no one did anything to stop it," not students, teachers, security guards, or other university staff. Patrick was angry.

Patrick talked to the student, explained about the GSC, and apologized on behalf of the students who harassed him. Then, Patrick and others from the GSC took the incident to the Dean of Student Affairs. They said: "Okay, this is horrible. There's no law that protects us even though you tell us that you will…that the law that AUB has implicitly protects [LGBTQ students]. No, that's not enough." They emphasized that the harassment had happened in front of the university's security officers, who had "no fucking clue what to do," and did not stop it. This is an implicit critique of the administration, more than the security officers themselves, who are classed workers in AUB's ecosystem.

That was Patrick's biggest point: "We expect homophobia, but we were shocked and upset and…enraged by the kind of taciturn reaction from people who represent the administration." The security officers, in many ways, are falsely conflated with the administration – but they themselves are subject to the administration's control. Many come from a lower class position than students and staff at the private university, and their authority comes from their social identification with the university administration's power. Thus, an indictment of failure to act, if delivered effectively, should be understood as a policy failure, rather than a critique of the security officers.

Patrick and others in the GSC knew preventing future incidents of harassment wasn't about individual accountability security guards, but the administration. And in responding to the harassment, they knew that they were in no position to take radical action or publicly protest. They had developed a system with another club, which had a stronger support base and wasn't explicitly involved in LGBTQ rights, to hold events under their name, rather than the GSC. In this case, that wouldn't work. So Patrick decided to go to the administration and explicitly ask for protection.

Long term, this shifted the approach of the GSC. The membership of the club made a clear trade-off: implicitly agreeing to play the role of the "nice" student activists who work in collaboration with the university administration, in exchange for protection and basic rights on campus. This allowed the university to look like a protector of "vulnerable" minorities including LGBTQ students, while giving queer students tiny steps toward fulfillment of their very real needs for protection and respect on campus. As a result, Patrick made an effort to outwardly minimize more radical elements of the GSC's agenda. Instead, he highlighted areas of compromise, such as inclusion of sexual orientation as a protected category by the university's policies around harassment and discrimination, under Title IX.[24] The university lifted up the GSC's work as a public example of their liberal commitments, and offered a formal policy and other interventions for minimal safety and security.

Although internally the club kept its politics, Patrick highlighted the cost: This trade-off occurred as the administration simultaneously quashed movements campaigning for student rights more broadly, which would have countered the administration's goals, and the GSC was paralyzed to act. In a way, they were a pawn:

> It's all public perception and it's about publicly reinforcing the power structure, the hierarchy. It's about letting the world know that oh, 'Some students are nice and when they play nice, they get what they want.' Sometimes I think it's because of our playing nice that other students campaigning for different things didn't get what they wanted…The administration needs like a balance of students who play nice versus students who play ugly, to…keep things okay in the public eye, especially in the eye of the wide AUB campus. So like having us, the nice students, on their side helped them be ugly to the ugly students on another side.

[24] Title IX is a section of the U.S. Education Amendments of 1972, a gender equity law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in all US federally-funded educational programs and activities. Because AUB receives Title IV financial aid and other funds from the US government, the university must abide to the law.

The "ugly" activists were those campaigning for student rights such as tuition relief and freedom of expression more broadly, through clubs like Red Oak, and as individuals. The university's image – for itself, the media, and its donors – relied on the concept that AUB provides a liberal, safe space for students of various identities. Students protesting tuition raises did not fit within this picture. A compliant, and conveniently vaguely-titled "Gender and Sexuality" Club did.

Sarah Kaddoura's experience at the Lebanese American University (LAU), when she was a student, demonstrates similar dilemmas. In 2015, She and other student activists decided they wanted to start a secular club, similar to groups at AUB and Université Saint-Joseph (USJ). However, this was not permitted by the LAU administration, being seen as too political. Instead, "We figured that the best way to talk about the things that we wanted to talk about was through an intersectional feminist lens, so we started the Intersectional Feminist Club." When the students approached the administration with this idea, they were again denied – but told that they could reactivate the existing but defunct "Women's Voice" club. They decided to play nice, and mobilized other students to sign a petition to restart the Women's Voice club, to get the needed approval from the administration.

Then, Sarah and others changed the club's name to the Intersectional Feminist Club. However, this itself was not controversial. Feminism – conflated with women's rights – was not seen as explicitly political by the administration, and thus was less threatening than a secular club. To the administration, Sarah said, women's rights seemed like "an accessory kind of interest," and the university thus pushed the more activist students in this direction, towards the palatable. Women's rights clubs reinforced the image of a modern university, supportive of its students.

Sarah and the others played along, but then discussed the same issues that had wanted to address in the secular club. The Intersectional Feminist Club joined the Feminist Bloc and was active in planning events, protests, and marches. Many of the club members, including Sarah, continued or grew into radical activist work with feminist collectives or groups after graduation. The university got another piece of evidence of its commitment to women's rights. Sarah and the other student-activists got a space, but they were somewhat bound by the university's restrictions.

This dichotomy of "protection for some" is not an isolated phenomenon. The rise of neoliberalism on university campuses reflects the neoliberal policies of the Lebanese state and global structures. The choices Patrick, Sarah, and their fellow student activists made echo the

pressures of respectability politics that Mira and others identify in the wider public discourse.

Neoliberalism often promotes an image of humanitarian ideals, while restricting individual and collective rights of expression and organization. Respectability politics are an essential part of this. Patrick reflects on this: "This rise of neoliberalism on campus in the last five years, it skyrocketed, and that kind of curtailed the freedoms of others…We're [the GSC] definitely not to blame for the rise of neoliberalism, but we're definitely on the side of neoliberalism to some extent, in the past five years. And that's screwed over other people." This tension, this tampering of activists' broader goals for moments of protection, is reflected in larger feminist and queer activist groups. And by playing the "nice" students in order to obtain – very needed – protection, others are cast aside.

2.5 Defining Activism via Visibility and Public Perception

Attaining visibility as an activist is intricately tied to the public's definition of respectable, legible activism. Whereas activism and resistance are conflated in some contexts, it is not necessarily the case here. The concept of resistance has a particular role in Lebanese society, applied to external forces, specifically the Israeli state and Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), and regional and global geopolitics. In limited cases, resistance directed against the state can also become popular, as in the 2015 trash crisis, various socioeconomic crises, and of course the 2019 revolution. Struggles for women's rights, however, are rarely included in public discussion of resistance, at least in the popular imagination. Instead, issues around gender and sex are largely made legible by NGOized forms of advocacy that maximize media campaigns and minimize a feminist approach to protest, power, and solidarity. Again, this is no accident. Mainstream understandings of activism – in state discourse, the media, and international funding structures – often and intentionally leave out those often doing more radical, complex work.

There are multiple understandings of activism, but almost all hinge on visibility. On one hand, as was outlined in the last section, we have a state-sanctioned definition of activism that upholds a few moderate, well-connected older women. These women's rights activists are made visible by their political ties and organized public events.

In a second understanding, an activist is a person who is constantly vocal and visible, with the need to constantly speak taking precedence over the content of what is spoken. By

virtue of contrast to an apathetic public, they become an activist, regardless of their subject matter. Mira gives an example of Gino Raidy, who runs "Gino's Blog," a Medium blog that focuses on "Everything you love and hate about Beirut" and covers current affairs and entertainment (Raidy, n.d.). She said, "Gino Raidy was just interviewed by CNN about legalizing marijuana and his label was activist…I had no idea that this was how he was recognized in society. And just comparing him to some of the activism that I've been surrounded by, is really just very stark…People like to call someone like Gino an activist because they see that he's always, he always has something to say. And he's always in the middle of things. And he always has a comment and he's always online." But, says Mira, that doesn't translate into action. She questions the conflation of blogger and activist, between someone who is publicly visible and another working more systemically for change.

Another skewed paradigm of activism, according to several people interviewed, also appears within activist circles. For feminist activists, while definitions can be more complicated, a common understanding of activism focuses on the people always on the street, never missing a protest. Similar to the women's rights representative connected to the political elite, and the media-savvy blogger posting clickbait, this "on the street" protestor reinforces the concept that public visibility is the standard of legitimacy for activist tactics.

Aya Jamaleddine, a feminist activist involved in the Dammeh cooperative, Feminist Network, and AUB Feminist Club, questions the effectiveness of this tactic. On one hand, she argues, "You really need to be in the game as an activist, raising your voice on television. It will have emotional impact on a viewer." However, she questions, "How long will this emotion last? This sentiment, it dies after. Like any hard emotional trauma, at some point, unless you re-invoke the trauma constantly, you know, you will just forget about it after a while." She contrasts the younger generation and tactics parlaying representational politics into media stunts and appearances, with the same NGOs and older women's rights organizations more focused on legal change, which Mira identified. They are not independent of each other: The apolitical nature of many women's rights organizations certainly plays a role in pushing frustrated feminist activists more towards representational politics. As Aya says: Neither can work alone, but current tensions make collaboration painful and difficult.

Throughout interviews for this research, participants spoke to the moments and experiences that moved them further towards radical activism. While public protest or publicly-

performed activism certainly played a role for many, it was direct experiences of marginalization, often combined with opportunities for education or exposure to like-minded groups, that pushed individuals to engage in direct organizing. By continuing to prize the visible, often temporal, tactics and moments, we lose these other experiences, which are often drawn out and require more labor. What else are we missing?

2.6 Representation in Public Protest

This focus on visibility is intertwined with a focus on what can be made public. This not only minimizes other forms of activism, but also actively creates a culture of performativity and competition for more visibility. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this competition is also intertwined with NGOization and professionalization of activism. Aya Jamaleddine and Sarah Kaddoura argue that this competition fuels inter-group tension and limits feminist activists' ability to focus on more meaningful work, seen in several examples of public protest in the last few years.

Aya addressed two similar vigils, held in December 2017 and January 2018, both to remember women in Lebanon who were killed by domestic and family violence. As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, I had attended the January 27 event as a participant. Both events were linked to KAFA and attended by a mix of activists, mostly younger, many of who vocally speak to a more intersectional approach to feminism. Their work reflects tensions of visibility, performative activism, and deep efforts towards change and demands for justice.

The December 23, 2017 event, "She Could Have Been Me: A Vigil to the 4 Women" commemorated four women and girls murdered in one week in Lebanon (Hamdan, 2017). According to the event's Facebook page, independent feminist activists organized the event, although many people involved were also working as staff or volunteers with KAFA. The event text, posted in Arabic and English, and content of speeches at the event, indicated a strong commitment to addressing structural social forces that caused this violence, not only individual perpetrators. The statement posted in the Facebook event included:

> These crimes are not solely the result of an angry or provoked man, or someone with an exceptional situation. This is an issue of structural violent masculinities. The time has come to admit that violent and toxic masculinity is a structural problem that promotes and produces various forms of violence against women ranging between harassment, rape,

> verbal and physical violence, sexual assault, on to murder. It is time to seriously acknowledge this systematic and patriarchal violence in order to reach tangible and effective actions to respect women's boundaries, bodies and identities.

In the second, "8 is not a number" to commemorate the deaths of the eight women killed in one month and a half, protestors gathered at Nejmeh Square in downtown Beirut. Family members of the women spoke to a small crowd, maybe 200 people (KAFA, 2018; Saade, 2017). While demands shared in speeches varied, official text from KAFA focused on pushing forward a draft amendment to the domestic violence law, Law No. 293, and demanded it be referred to the Parliament. Language focused on a legal approach to addressing domestic violence, and reforms targeting laws and the formal justice system. This follows a broader trend of women's rights campaigns pushing for increased criminalization and state-administered punishment, shifting control to the state.

Whereas the December event was held in front of the National Museum in Beirut, at a major intersection and thus quite visible to the general public, the January event's location in Nejmeh square spoke more to symbolic meaning. As the square is cut off to vehicles and heavily guarded by security forces, it is not populated by many people, except for those working in the few restaurants and tourists wandering by historical sites. Neither vigil gathered more than a few hundred people.

Aya speaks to her experience at the vigils:

> It's only the activists showing up at the end of the day. And who are we here for, finally? We are trying to build a crowd obviously, and why does no one else show up? Why does no one care? What are we doing wrong? What, we appear as angry feminists on television? With our short hair and our appearance? …The most cynical thing you could say is we are just patting ourselves on the back and on our moral high horses, coming to these things…The optimistic view is that it will change something, that our faces and our appearance on national television [will make a change].

But, Aya, continues to question, will it result in tangible reform or systemic change? Aya identifies problematics both of goals and outreach. She wondered if more people would have showed up, had it been advertised in other places besides the echo chamber of Facebook. In contrast, she questioned if the underlying issue is that of public apathy, or activists' failure to make gendered violence an issue of public importance. Will the general public attend, if there is a general understanding that these protests are led by *and are for* only a particular subset of women? At the same time, when NGOs orchestrate and monopolize these events, the protest can

shift away from the grassroots to serve the NGO's agenda, equally alienating to independent activists.

To return to the questions at the start of the chapter, highlighting Rebecca Dykes as part of the vigil of domestic and family violence clearly demonstrates both the savvy calculations of activists in tapping into a media moment, as well as the failure to challenge the structures that make her death *worth* more. The selection of the eight women, reinforced by the inaccessible location of the second event downtown, risked enforcing the idea that justice – already unattainable to so many, Lebanese or foreign – is worth fighting for, only when certain women die. A migrant worker or a refugee woman's death, outside of a strict understanding of aid, charity, and conflict, is rarely equated with (middle and upper class) Lebanese women's struggles. To include migrant women in the protest would have changed the dynamic of the vigil and the call to action, but this was perhaps not a risk that organizers wanted to take.

Other protests organized by feminist activists and groups often face similar dilemmas around visibility. Sarah Kaddoura highlights parallel questions around participation of women's rights and feminist activists in social movements, and particularly within leftist groups. She speaks to the way women were tokenized within and by multiple movements, and how dissent from women was simultaneously silenced. "In 2015, during the *hirak*, the demonstration against the trash crisis, many, many groups emerged…I felt so uncomfortable with so many things, but I never felt like I could voice my discomfort. And I also saw how things were being dealt with among these groups, like, 'Oh, we want to look progressive, so we bring out like a female speaker, and a male speaker,' but when we're sitting around we're OK with men making sexist comments or men holding sexist signs." Sarah highlights here that non-feminist groups understand the same tactics of and need for visibility, and that public representation of and by women holds limited political currency. Just like the state, political parties, and the university, male activists in broader movements instrumentalize the participation of a limited number of women they deem palatable, who hold the title of "female activist" and thus legitimize the work of the male activists, legitimizing the men as supposedly inclusive and progressive. This has resulted in backlashes from feminist groups who seek to establish feminist blocs in large-scale protests. It can also be linked to a retreat – active, not passive – into the creation of safe spaces, for different, less visible forms of action.

2.7 Naming and Shaming

The social bias towards visibility, while potentially damaging to feminist activists working on the margins of the mainstream, simultaneously opens opportunity to use tactics of public shaming and threats to reputation. Activists use both traditional and social media, and interpersonal communication. The specter of ruined reputation serves, in some cases, as a stand-in for the threat of punitive action by the police and judicial systems. More practically, it allows activists to circumvent the security and justice systems' bureaucracy and inherent violence, which often exacerbate existing harm and trauma faced by survivors and targets of gendered violence, and create and maintain social norms that are inherently violent.

Despite some favorable rulings of the judiciary in regards to penal code 534 ("Lebanon: Same-Sex Relations Not Illegal," 2018), rights to unionization, and women's rights, even the more progressive courts remain inaccessible to most people targeted by gendered violence. When formal mechanisms of authority and justice fail to serve the needs of women and trans people targeted by violence – or perhaps, work exactly as they are intended – activists can resort to the threat of visibility to address individual cases of harm. Shame and visibility can lead to an alternative form of "justice," in the form of compensation, apology, validation of harm experienced, and/or revenge or accountability. This approach can push back both on the experience of violence and the complicity of authorities ostensibly charged with societal protection.

A direct and extreme example is the work of This Is Lebanon (TIL), a primarily anonymous Facebook page and group working to end the violations of the kafala (sponsorship) system against migrant workers. TIL's activists and volunteers include migrant workers in Lebanon and those who have left the country by choice or force, Lebanese, and Westerners – who clearly influence the tone and language on the page. TIL's primary tactics are naming and shaming of employers and public storytelling of horrific cases of abuse. Lugones' framework of the coloniality of gender, although it grew out of the Americas, helps us understand the racialization and gendering of care labor in Lebanon – and reminds us that we must also examine the role of coloniality and imperialism in tactics used to support migrant workers, particularly when they are young women. As discussed more in chapter 3, the making visible and instrumentalization of individual young migrant women *as victims* is not an innocent project.

Although TIL doesn't identify as a feminist group, the two Ethiopian activists with TIL who participated in this research do. My analysis will focus on these activists' feminists approach and behind-the-scenes work as part of TIL, in the broader context of the initiative.

TIL's public tone is direct and unapologetic. Their Facebook bio reads:

> You are our madams, our misters, our agents, our embassies, our consuls. You have confiscated our passports, withheld our salaries, starved us, physically and sexually abused us, cut off contact with our families, imprisoned us in your homes and offices, treated us like Hoovers by getting us to clean multiple houses, made us sleep on your balconies and kitchen floors, screamed at us, and even murdered us. We have suffered in silence while we've walked your dogs, raised your children, washed your old peoples' bottoms, and cleaned your homes. The time of silence is over.

This silence refers both to the mainstream acceptance of the kafala system, as well as the employers, state actors, and recruitment agencies who perpetuate it. TIL thus identifies cases of labor abuse, and physical and sexual violence, particularly against women migrant workers. While their tactics include direct negotiation with employers, agencies, and embassies and provision of resources to targeted migrant workers, their most visible tactic is to name and shame abusive employers of migrant workers online.

Naming and shaming often first play out in a threat to reputation. For example, if a Lebanese employer has not paid their migrant worker employee's wages, TIL often contacts the person directly, to demand they pay. If the employer refuses, TIL might post the story on their Facebook page, which had over 34,000 followers as of March 2019, and over 69,000 as of late May 2020 (This Is Lebanon, 2018). Several of their videos about abusive employers have over 100,000 views. This tactic is a direct threat to the person's status and social reputation, and has been used to recover months and years of unpaid salary.

In the past, TIL has also targeted employers' business interests, as in the case of the Ajami family, who run a fashion company called Eleanore Couture and were responsible for horrific abuse of an Ethiopian woman named Lensa Lelisa (This Is Lebanon, 2019). Lensa, the 20-year-old migrant domestic worker who worked in the Ajamis' home, jumped off the balcony of her employer's home, on the second floor, to escape sustained abuse from her employers. While in the hospital with two broken legs, Lensa recorded video testimony of the physical and psychological violence she experienced from the family, including assault, death threats, nonpayment, and being forbidden to speak to her own family in Ethiopia (Chamoun, 2018a).

Despite visits from the Ethiopian consulate and Caritas Lebanon, a widely-criticized branch of the Caritas international charity, Lensa was returned to her employers' house when she was discharged from the hospital, in contrast to her clear call for help. She later appeared with one of her employers on the "Lel Nasher" program on Al Jadeed television to "recant" her story, still in a hospital bed, and clearly speaking under duress (Chamoun, 2018b).

TIL posted numerous videos and statements identifying the Ajami family and Eleanore Couture online, and organized an in-person protest in collaboration with other activists, including feminist activists involved in migrant worker-led collectives and civil society groups (Azhari, 2018). Protestors gathered outside the employers' home and office in Jdeideh, to call for a full investigation by the judiciary. One of the participants was Rahel Zegeye, an Ethiopian activist who I have known for many years, and the founder of Mesewat, an Ethiopian migrant workers' group focused on mutual solidarity, awareness, and advocacy. Rahel is quoted in the media as saying: "The government doesn't like you [migrant domestic workers] to contact each other, because if you speak to each other you get a lot of power, you find a solution. The employers have rights, and that's it" (Azhari, 2018). Showing up to the protest that day, for Rahel, meant breaking the barriers imposed on and between migrant women, not only for Lensa, but also for the sake of all migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. The protest named and shame Eleanore Couture and her family, and simultaneously drove some cracks in the wall of shame masking both the individual and structural abuses of the kafala system.

When TIL's strategies of direct contact and the joint protest didn't achieve full freedom and justice for Lensa, they posted the full story and contact details for the four family members online. Sara (pseudonym), an Ethiopian activist with TIL, said of this approach:

> We will let anyone text him [an abusive employer] on Facebook and call him, shame him so that he has nowhere to hide…Not a couple of people, should be in thousands of people…[He can hide] from the Facebook, but he cannot hide from his phone…like on Lensa, like everyone called them [Lensa's employers]. Everyone texted them: 'You did this! You did that?!' That's how to get like big attention.

Only this major public attention, Sara said, would be enough to get any justice for Lensa, when the Ethiopian consulate, police, and Caritas – the NGO with the most access to the detention centers and authorities – did not take action.

This name and shame tactic was performed in public posts, in the facilitation of activists to contact abusers directly and confront them with the allegations of abuse, in interviews with

media, and in targeting celebrities who wore or supported the Ajamis' fashion business. TIL's language clearly talks about abuse and slavery, charging the direct perpetrators, and the consulate, media, and authorities who facilitate the violence and impede access to justice. As will be discussed below, there are real risks to this approach, and Sara spoke to backlash from the Ajami family and the public. Lensa's story eventually faded from public attention, until many months after she was finally repatriated to Ethiopia in August 2018. In 2019, TIL made public further details of her story with a short documentary (This Is Lebanon, 2019). But "justice" in the legal sense never happened.

TIL's language might get the story of abuse covered in the news, but is not always successful in changing people's perspectives. The calling out of abuse, the simple insistence that migrant workers are human beings, comes up short against social stereotypes and norms around migrant labor. Speaking about Lensa's case, as an observer, Aya Jamaleddine said:

> In terms of media awareness, it wasn't a successful battle…There is always the hysterical house-worker trope that people will always refer to, that there is something wrong with her [Lensa]…'She is making up lies, she did this to herself.' It's totally disconnecting the cause from the effect, and putting the blame on the victim… I remember my grandmother was telling me, 'This girl is crazy and it was on 'Lel Nasher.'

Aya's grandmother trusted the perceived legitimacy of the TV channel, the upper-class visibility of the Lebanese employer, and the tired stereotype of the mentally ill migrant worker out to get her Lebanese employers. Aya tried to reason with her grandmother, sharing different sources, reflecting on the individual case and broader trends, but it didn't shift the older woman's perspective. "There will never be a self-reflection," Aya said. "We [Lebanese society] will always be demonizing the employee, the migrant worker."

Thus, both Aya and Sara from TIL emphasized the importance of targeting abusers' business interests. "What you want to do is really destroy them [the perpetrators], economically," said Aya, because that's the most meaningful impact possible amidst social normalization of the kafala system and its abuse, and taking into account the inaccessible and bureaucratic judiciary. This is why activists target employers' reputations in the media, rather than appealing to viewers' humanity. While many groups and NGOs push back against the tropes about crazy migrant domestic workers, TIL is one of the few that goes on the offensive. This has its risks, but for Sara and another Ethiopian activist I interviewed, there's nothing left to lose.

This approach, however, relies on public engagement. If people on social or traditional media do not engage, then, Sara says, "It dies, that story. And then that person [the employer] don't give a shit anymore. And the people [migrant workers] will be like more powerless, you know?" Going public can backfire, giving more power to the abuser if the name-and-shame tactic is tried, but produces no real damage. As an example, the two activists shared the story of a Filipina worker, who worked for 21 years without pay. In our interview, I asked Sara if she was talking about Halima, a migrant domestic worker with a case widely publicized by TIL and others (This Is Lebanon, 2017). Sara said, "No, another one. See, you don't even know her. So 21 years, she was slave. She's been kidnapped in someone house for 21 years. Never get paid. Never calls…No one give a shit." The three of us all paused at the impact. Activists can publicize that a migrant domestic worker was enslaved and abused for two decades, but no one will react or remember.

TIL's name-and-shame tactics require that the majority of their activists and supporters remain anonymous, for the safety and security of their work. This anonymity – and the privileges of Western, Asian, and African activists involved from outside Lebanon – allows them to directly confront abuses and abusers. The average migrant worker cannot risk this approach for their own safety, and NGOs and journalists often choose not to, for fear of defamation lawsuits, personal retaliation, and threats to their own reputations. Those publicly identified with TIL's online presence, Dipendra Uprety and Priya (This Is Lebanon, n.d.), Nepalese activists and former migrant workers in Lebanon, are safely out of Lebanon. While they have been publicly quoted or identified in media reports, the network of TIL volunteers in the country remains mostly secret. The risk of retaliation by employers and others is particularly real for activists who are also migrant workers, especially those who are undocumented. However, even Lebanese connected to these stories are not immune.

Timour Azhari's experience covering Lensa's case demonstrates this threat all too well. Azhari is a reporter who often writes about social justice issues, including the rights of migrant workers. He was charged with defamation for a March 28, 2018 article he wrote about Lensa's accusations of abuse against her employers, as well as his tweets about a protest held at Eleanor's home and workplace (Abrougui, 2018). According to media reports, authorities at the Lebanese Cybercrime Bureau interrogated Azhari, confiscated his phone, seized confidential information from his anonymous source on the device, forced him to delete his tweets, and tried

to make him sign a pledge saying he would not speak further on the case – which he refused. He was even brought to trial on the defamation charges in November 2018. This threatened Azhari's reputation, his livelihood, and safety, but he didn't stop. He posted on Twitter on November 27, 2018: "Part of my job as a journalist is to give a voice to the voiceless. In Lebanon, migrant domestic workers have the faintest of voices. To ignore this case would have been to ignore my responsibility, so I did my job. I was interrogated by the Cybercrimes Bureau because I did my job. I am being sued for defamation because I did my job. I will continue to do my job" (TimourAzhari, 2018). He continues to report on stories of violence against migrant domestic workers, including the suspicious death of Faustina Tay, a young Ghanaian woman, in 2020 (Azhari, 2020).

Name and shame tactics can circumvent a biased, bureaucratic, or inaccessible justice system. But, as Azhari's case shows, they can succeed and backfire simultaneously, turning that same state system on activists and journalists, and criminalizing dissent. *Who* can successfully name and shame is also tied to respectability politics, race, class, and nationality.

Activists against sexual harassment have used similar tactics of shaming and visibility, both around individual situations of assault or harassment, as well as to promote change in places of business. HarassTracker, an initiative launched by feminist activists in Beirut, provided an online portal for people, particularly women, to geographically log and anonymously report instances of sexual harassment in Lebanon. While this rarely names individuals, it allows the founders and other activists to see "hotspots" of harassment. HarassTracker's team also identifies cases of harassment on its social media accounts, particularly when individual women have posted publicly about their experience. They use their platform to get more attention to an allegation or incident, and parlay that visibility into face-to-face meetings with the business in question, to force more systemic forms of change. They provide a cover, if you will, for individual people reporting harassment, and a public face.

This occurred in the case of several clubs and restaurants, including the Back Door in late 2017[25] and Radio Beirut in early 2019. Regarding the Back Door, a woman reported that she was physically assaulted in the parking lot, prompting an outcry on social media. HarassTracker picked up the story, contacted Back Door staff, and negotiated with them on how to react to the event and provide training to their staff on bystander intervention, sexual harassment, and

[25] Social media posts on this have been taken down, so this is from personal observation.

beyond. Similarly, in early 2019, HarassTracker stepped in to support a woman posting about harassment in her workplace, Radio Beirut, and the company's failure to take action. HarassTracker activists confronted Radio Beirut's owners in several stages of the case, including publicizing the incident, shaming Radio Beirut for their treatment of the woman who reported, and then calling for fuller accountability when Radio Beirut's apology rang empty. Part of a HarassTracker Facebook post in March 2019 stated:

> After Radio Beirut issued a shameful reply discrediting the employee, and claiming her story was a defamation campaign against Radio Beirut, they now backtracked with an apology…All this remains lip service if:
> 1) the aggressor is not named and fired. Named, so no other institution is excused for not knowing about this and hiring him, and his crime needs to be on public official record and made known openly and explicitly; and fired because a mere 'suspension' only tells us that you still don't believe the story, and that you don't really care about neither your employees' nor your customers' safety.
> 2) your staff, including the aggressor if he is to work again in this field at any point in the future, undergo regular sexual harassment and bystander intervention trainings, and if a policy and a reporting and accountability system for both customers and employees are not developed and instated immediately within your institution. (HarassTracker, 2019)

HarassTracker went beyond naming and shaming, to engage directly with the institution at hand, not just individual harassers. Before this happened, they had called for a boycott, to target Radio Beirut's business interests and force them to engage. All this aimed at systemic change, rather than retribution for a singular incident of harm. When this is not possible, or when harassment is outside of an institutional space, HarassTracker has amplified women's posts about specific harassers. Beyond accountability, this aims to create more widespread knowledge about individual perpetrators and institutions that are unsafe for women and LGBTQ people.

In other words, if the law is inaccessible or nonexistent, communities can create circles of shared knowledge to protect themselves and take action. This is true in both Lebanese and migrant worker communities. Information circulates about abusive employers, sexual harassers, exploitative agencies, and unsafe workplaces. Knowledge doesn't stop the cycle of violence, but it's an important tool in fighting back.

Activists' focus on reputation and visibility echoes discourses – internal to Lebanon and imposed from outside – about honor and shame. In terms of scholarship, media, and pop culture, it is difficult to write about gender, women, or violence in the Middle East without running up against an oppressive body of literature about shame and honor, often coming from an Orientalist

gaze. Most of this analysis infantilizes and stereotypes – and crucially misses the key functions of shame for women and LGBTQ people.

In her analysis of a *Bareed Mista3jil*, Sarah Hamdan (2015) defines queer shame and its function. She cites Eve Sedgwick in understanding shame's "potential for cultural production," prompted by the vulnerability caused by the real or imagined gaze of others, inherent in shame, drawing on Dina Georgis (2013). Bareed's stories, she argues "us[e] and imagin[e] the Arab queer body (similarly to using the feminine body) as well as its shame to write and produce knowledge to subvert imperialist knowledge about homosexuality" (Hamdan*, 2015). Similarly, HarassTracker and other feminist activists build on their own experiences of shame and societal expectations of the integrity of the body to condemn harasser's conduct. They use their shame, their experience as a target, to push back.

Tactics of naming and shaming rely on reputation as a motivating factor for action. This is a meaningful threat not because of cultural meanings of shame, but because these perpetrators and activists live in a highly capitalist economy, embedded within a clientalist society that prizes interpersonal relationships and family connections, in the absence of a supportive state. In the situation of the gendered violence and labor violations committed on domestic workers, damage to reputation of the perpetrator is based upon practical business concerns rather than personal morals. TIL's discourse around Eleanore Couture, for example, identified her as a "slaveholder" to shops selling her clothes abroad and celebrities promoting her designs. Grassroots campaigns like the #BoycottRadioBeirut target businesses' wallets. Activists aim to demonstrate that protecting harassers is not profitable, while simultaneously giving space and voice to survivors' testimony, contrary to larger society and justice systems.

However, shame and visibly must also be understood emotionally. Tactics that play with shame and reputation are deeply personal for activists, and intersect with their experiences of shame in their own lives. Citing Dina Georgis (2013), Sarah Hamdan (2015)argues that shame is a tangible and affective good:

> It is important to emphasize that this approach to reading shame is not essentialist. There is no fixed understanding of Arab shame, since the subject of shaming changes and social moral codes are not static in cultures (Georgis, 2013, p.243). However, and given this formulation of shame, it seems relevant to point out that the fear of shame is an emotional reality for most Arabs (at least for the authors of *Bareed*), since they live in contemporary societies where family ties and sectarian/religious identity are highly valued and are connected to economic as well as emotional survival (Georgis, 2013, pp. 243-244).

> Therefore, the attachment to cultural values such as family bonds or sect/religion should not be read as traditional as much as material and affective.

When activists thus deploy naming and shaming tactics, when they play with visibility or respectability politics, they are deploying the material, the affective. They are often drawing on their own experience in communities and societies that places shame onto their bodies, identities, or acts – or those done to them. Shame holds a double weight.

2.8 What are the Consequences?

Playing for visibility has clear impacts on the health and unity of larger movements for gender equity and LGBTQ rights. As Patrick discussed, demanding rights for some groups of people – like LGBTQ students at university – can allow the university to protect one group at the expense of the other. This is basic respectability politics, elevating the needs of one's own group at the expense of others. However, Patrick highlights that this can happen both consciously or unconsciously, through times of crisis and in strategic efforts for change. He said: "Our protection on campus could be very well seen as something that kind of stimulated or enthused the system. And I think that's how 'playing nice' operates, you can see your own rights and thus the rights of your category of students who are being taken advantage of, in exchange for rights that other people don't – can't – benefit from. But you and your people do." There is inherent risk. While Patrick hoped that expanded rights for some would translate into expanded rights for all, he knew there was a likely probability of further fragmentation.

The consequences of respectability politics, or of playing for visibility, are not limited to actual access to rights or resources. They impact how activists see themselves and define the institutions of oppression that they oppose. Fragmentation happens not only in the form of NGOization, or of group's target issues, but in identity and ideology.

One activist interviewed, who asked not to be identified when quoted on this subject, identified Helem's transition from radical group to globally-recognized NGO as emblematic of this tension. At the beginning, she stated, Helem took explicitly pro-BDS, anti-Zionist stances publicly, including when speaking at international conferences. They started out, she says, as a group of queer people protesting the war on Iraq, politicizing their identity and showing solidarity with different groups. But slowly, she argues, their public discourse became

depoliticized, particularly regarding issues that intersect with LGBTQ rights, but are not perceived as central to queer identity. She said:

> Now it's very hush hush. They don't talk about these things [such as Zionism]. They do not ally themselves with these things, because, I mean, I guess it goes back to the kind of funding that they accept. In the beginning, they did not accept funding from USAID and organizations that were obviously very problematic…Today, they frame themselves as apolitical, which produces a new generation of queer/LGBT people who do not identify their causes with different positions, do not really feel intersection of the different struggles.

The creation of depoliticized beneficiaries, rather than politicized activists, is often linked to the NGOization of movements for gender equity, women's rights, feminism, and LGBTQ rights, as will be discussed more in the next chapter. The consequences of respectability politics and games of moderation, however, face collectives, clubs, and individual activists. In all applications, when potential participants and organizers are reduced to representations of singular identities, they do not have the opportunity to make the connection between the forms of oppression that they and others experience. This can easily happen even in "safe" spaces, which are often the first welcoming community that younger activists experience.

In other words, regardless of Helem's actual decisions about where to take funding, the limitation of their public discourse, or the *impression* it has become more moderate, does shape the people who come into contact with the organization. If queer people do not see their oppression as connected to intersecting struggles of workers, migrants, and refugees – and understand that the same social and state structures are its cause – then there is little basis for solidarity. Gendered violence against queer people does not exist in a silo, and cannot be successfully countered alone, separate from the larger fight again capitalism, racism, and classism, at a minimum.

2.9 Saying No

Through her participation in regional networks connecting Arab women's human rights defenders, feminist activist Elsa Saade came to think of Lebanon as a place of relative privilege for feminist activists, compared to the environment in other parts of the region. She realized that activists in Lebanon "have the space" to build safe spaces, whereas women and trans people in Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere face greater levels of repression for simply trying to organize. There,

visibility was primarily a threat to existence. In Lebanon, she learned, visibility can be many things: a tool, a beginning, an ending.

The rejection of public visibility thus holds incredible power. Some activists choose the opposite approach to public recognition, building smaller communities, protective and protected safe spaces that serve as an oasis *from* visibility. Hamdan (2015) references Meem as an example, which chose to focus on intentional community building rather than public action. This feeds into a more contentious, complicated version of activism, moving beyond public understandings of activism as protest and lobbying. A number of today's feminist collectives, spaces, and friendships focus on building up each other's capacity, economic resources, and knowledge. Some recognize this as activism, others don't, and express a frustration at having "not done anything" visible, as Mira said. But at the same time, activists acknowledge the physical, emotional, and psychological labor of individuals and groups in creating and maintaining these spaces, in the face of tremendous challenges. These spaces grow and shrink, rise, and fall, like Meem, Nasawiya, the Feminist Bloc, and Dammeh. Without many material resources in the capitalist sense, and often fighting to pay rent for their physical space or carve out an emotional one, it is only natural that they shift, like breath: expansion, contraction.

2.10 Conclusion

The reduction of activism to visibility, and the association of power with the associated social legibility, further marginalizes activists deeply engaged in building alternatives to the status quo. It is no surprise that feminized labor – care work, logistics, creation of safe space, and emotional support – is also rendered invisible within activist spaces, just as much as outside. As some activists seek to create safe spaces for discussion, co-creation, alternative economic models, support, and learning, they face a double-edged sword. Their work is needed *because* of the daily violence created by the heteropatriarchal state and societies in which they live. At the same time, retreating from direct engagement with that state, to instead build alternative spaces, leaves the same women's rights representatives and single-issue NGOs occupying the little of the public sphere accessible to women's rights and feminist activists. This reinforces the dynamics of respectability among activists, and who an activist can be. A liberal, narrower understanding of women's rights, rather than intersectional forms of feminism, maintains the tiny platform

available, around gendered violence and other issues. Radical, leftist, and more complicated understandings of state violence, sexual violence, the kafala system, and other forms of gendered violence rarely get a public voice.

CHAPTER 3
NGOIZATION, PROFESSIONALIZATION, AND FORMS OF ORGANIZING

"[Feminist communities in Beirut are] also a space where, probably for good reasons, the political and the personal are inseparable, which, yeah, I understand. I understand that philosophical stance, right? We always say the personal is political, the political is personal. But it's also exhausting…I've been to meetings where I would share an opinion and then a fellow feminist comrade is crying and then I feel like I can't come to the next meeting…I've had some of my most, my best surrounded time and my loneliest times in this circles."
– Sous (pseudonym)

"You're part of civil society as one thing, and then you're an activist as something completely different." – Mira Mawla

3.1 Introduction: Space, Visibility, and NGOization

For activists in Beirut, visibility and palatability translate tangibly to access to power: influence on public discourse, funding, resources, media exposure, and/or government permission for action. In the previous chapter, I discussed activists' choice of tactics and strategy in relation to visibility. In this chapter, I will also explore how NGOization and forms of organization also interact with, access, (in)visibility, and solidarity.

Power and resources are defined differently based on our contexts. In Beirut, power is inextricably tied to space, as a city with little public space, with extraordinarily high rates of residential vacancy in some areas and population density in others, and with mainstream media aligned with various political parties. Funding allows for office space. Social legitimacy creates space for media coverage. Respectability politics dictates who gets permission from the

municipality or relevant government agency to march on the street.[26] Most women, queer, and trans people, activist or not, are systemically denied access to power and space in Beirut, which increases the stakes. Many people who fight against gendered violence and women's rights and feminist issues are simultaneously struggling for space and power in the microcosms of their own families, jobs, ability to walk down the street or enter public space, and lives. While many critiques of NGOization are valid, some civil society and NGOs hold physical and conceptual space for people to address these issues, even when their paradigm is flawed.

In Beirut and Lebanon, civil society has expanded from voluntary organizations (largely focused on development) before the civil war, to services and relief during the war. Post-war, there was an expansion of "modes of action to encompass human rights and advocacy efforts," and in the 1990s, an average of 250 organizations were created per year (AbiYaghi, Yammine, & Jagarnathsingh, 2013, p. 1). Each perceived conflict or humanitarian crisis has sparked additional increases in the foundation of new NGOs, which speaks to the close tie between NGOization and aid and development models. Although the state holds[27] the jurisdiction to grant permission for the creation of an NGO or other organization, via the formal registration process, the Lebanese government plays almost no part in allocating resources for their work.

Like the broader civil society, women's organizations in Lebanon rely almost completely on international donors for funding. 29 of 36 organizations, surveyed as part of a 2014-15 Lebanon Support study on "gender actors," reported that they were partially or fully funded from abroad. Only one reported that it was exclusively supported by national funds and donations and only one reported that it was self-sustainable (Mitri & Siqueira, 2016, p. 9). The majority of these groups were formal NGOs, with a few collectives. Many of these organizations were, and remain, the more visible and audible in public discourse, and international and national media reports. That visibility is not only about holding of space, campaigns, and advocacy. Visibility maintains the public image necessary to prove the success of current grants, and attract ongoing investment from new donors. And to echo the last chapter, the goals of visible groups tend to fit

[26] Times of social movement (*hirak)* and revolution (*thawra*) run on different rules, and in the October 2019 revolution, state protocols around permission for demonstrations were ignored. However during much of the time of my participants' analysis and activism, marches or events in the streets or public spaces for women's rights, worker's rights, and other social justice causes could (and can) technically only be held after getting permission. This requires submitting the IDs of three Lebanese people to the state, yet another barrier to action led by Syrians, Palestinians, and other migrant workers and refugees from across Africa and Asia.

[27] Or withholds, in the cases of organizations focused on LGBTQ rights and other socially taboo issues, and associations formed by non-Lebanese.

more squarely into a women's rights agenda, but less so into feminist principles, practices, and strategies.

This chapter will outline common critiques of NGOs and challenge the binaric approach to unregistered/registered groups, drawing on analysis from Zeina Ammar and Catherine Moughalian's work on feminist movement building and formations. Then, I will examine several facets of NGOization and professionalization, and the way they shape feminist work around gendered violence in Beirut, through the experiences of people I interviewed. Finally, I will explore the impact of NGOization and professionalization on forms of organizing and individual experiences of joining the movement. Through all of this, I ask: How do forms of organization impact feminist solidarity work around gendered violence, both in definition and in practice? How does the way we come into movements impact our experience and capacity, and how we define our work? Why is NGOization often the dividing line in debates of organizing structures, rather than values and politics?

3.2 Competing Typologies and Critiques of NGOization

The NGOization of the Lebanese and Arab women's movements has been well documented, most notably by Islah Jad and Dalya Mitri. Jad tracks the NGOization of the Arab women's movement, primarily focusing on the 1980s and 1990s. She links this proliferation to global development schemes, personified by the World Bank and IMF, the growth of the development state, and understandings of class and nation, and more damagingly to the growth of "good governance" and democratization programs (Jad, 2016, pp. 39, 41). Institutionalization and formalization, caused by needs for funding, excludes the participation and problems of non-professional women and reduces the work to donor-funded, project-based initiatives (Hodžić, 2014). Mitri applies a similar analytical lens to the professionalization of the women's movement in Lebanon, noting that it has "negative impact on the capacity of mobilization of women's organizations in Lebanon, but also unexpected consequences on the structure of the Lebanese political space" (Mitri, 2015).

Zeina Ammar and Catherine Moughalian clearly summarize the primary feminist critiques of the NGOization of women's movements, in relation to feminist movement building in Beirut and Lebanon. Citing Sonia Alvarez (1997), they write:

> This dichotomy [of registered NGOs versus unregistered groups] stems from a common feminist critique of NGO-ization defined as a "shift away from experience-oriented movement politics toward goal- and intervention-oriented strategies" [Alvarez]. The professionalization of feminism, it is argued, has "enabled the depoliticization of social and women's movements, their appropriation by donor-driven agendas, and a neoliberal co-optation of feminist practice" [(Hodžić, 2014)]. Feminist researchers have argued that the NGO-ization of women's rights issues shifts the focus from challenging and questioning structural injustices and oppressions into project implementation and quick issue-based solutions. (2019, p. 14)

These and other criticism often argue that NGOization impedes social change, and prompts fragmentation or deprioritization of grassroots movements. While valid, these assumptions risk romanticizing past movements "pre-NGOization" and elide past and present challenges of class inequalities, power struggles, disagreements, and mistakes. Saida Hodžić challenges the universalism of critiques of NGOization, arguing (more broadly than Lebanon) that alliances with the state are contextual and that NGOs may be a "productive" phenomenon. They result in new enterprises, forms of activism, and inventions – both positive and negative. This does not absolve NGOs of their limitations, but complicates the binaries that ironically exist within movements that claim to move beyond assumptive identity categories.

These critiques also leave out key considerations in the context in Beirut's feminist activism against gendered violence. First, building on Hodžić, there is a productivity of NGOization and the ways in which networks form, coalitions are built, and organizations seek partners within and outside of civil society. NGOs and civil society organization also allow for a small group of activists to sustain paid labor within movement spaces, in an environment where job opportunities are scarce. Second, as Ammar and Moughalian discuss, the dichotomy of NGOs versus unregistered groups does not accurately reflect which groups are doing the most radical, intersectional work – as forming a registered organization is almost always necessary to obtain funding. Third, damaging frameworks of service, charity, reformism, and depoliticization transcend forms of organization, and can be found across NGOs, collectives, and state structures (Finn & Hassan, 2019). While beyond the scope of this thesis, this should be explored further.

At the same time, NGOization and professionalization clearly foster power dynamics between paid staff, volunteers, partners/participants/clients, and funders. NGOization of women's movements in Lebanon, and beyond, often replicates local systems of clientalism on several levels. Some NGOs tend to fold neatly into existing clientalist structures with the

Lebanese state, tied to specific political parties. Even those that actively resist sectarianism and state oppression find themselves in clientalist relationships with international donors. These structural relationships can foster communication styles, strategic approaches, and programmatic initiatives that increase clientalist relationships between the NGO and its "beneficiaries." Of this relationship, Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi, Amreesha Jagarnathsingh, and Léa Yammine write:

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> The relative liberal atmosphere and the absence of a welfare state in Lebanon have historically provided opportunities for elites (political, social, and economic) to create and maintain informal dependency networks that contribute, *in fine*, to preserve the socio-political status-quo in the country. Advocacy efforts are hence transformed in maneuvering dependency dynamics in order to achieve sporadic advocacy goals. (2013, p. 5)

Between constraints of funding, the competition that results from scarcity of funds, and the navigation of state structures, many NGOs are driven – or are explicitly created – to focus on singular issues, rather than a comprehensive or structural approach. Unsurprisingly, this often takes the form and perspective of aid or service-provision, which will be addressed later in this chapter. However, even efforts for advocacy are paralyzed or chunked into miniaturized goals that no longer link to the needs of the collective, which lack an intersectional approach. This can look like branded campaigns, such as the KAFA events against gendered violence mentioned in the first chapter. It also is reflected in calls for Lebanese women's right to pass nationality to their children. This could so easily be connected to sectarian, racial, and class oppression, to the treatment of Palestinian, Syrian, and African and Asian migrant workers more broadly, but it rarely reaches this analysis in public discourse. Acknowledging these intersections, both in service-based work and advocacy, would gain allies and focus on structural problems, but would also politicize the issue in ways that antagonize traditional women's rights organizations' supporters, donors, and opponents. It would also cross class lines that fall along many NGO's binaric service provider/beneficiary divisions.

Islah Jad's analysis of the NGOization of women's movements in the Arab World outlines actors who fit into several clear categories: the grassroots, the NGO, and the funder.(Jad, 2016) But as activists move between the first two, and professionalized employees move between the second two, this distinction can easily be blurred, as it is in Beirut. In our interview, for example, Mira spoke to her experience working professionally for large, internationally-funded aid projects in various parts of Lebanon. The development and aid frameworks, and the

funding sources, in no way align directly with her feminist values, but she decided she'd rather have a say in the distribution of these resources to communities she knew well. If she didn't, Mira felt, it would be an outsider making the decisions. She decided to work within the donor's framework, and influence it from the inside, while maintaining her explicit activism with feminist collectives outside.

Ammar and Moughalian challenge the dichotomy of grassroots/NGO, which they frame as registered/non-registered. They offer a counter-reading of NGOization and professionalization that moves away from the registration binary:

> We posit that it is a group's ideology, reflected in their understanding and analysis of the problem and their end goal, and not their legal status or organizational structure, that better determines their role in the feminist movement. A more useful typology from the lens of movement building is one that analyses feminist action based on tangible political differences, namely their proximity to or level of engagement with the state, their relationship to their constituencies, and their understanding and analysis of feminist issues. (Moughalian & Ammar, 2019, p. 14)

This analysis more accurately reflects a reality where identities, roles, and needs shift, where who does the work matters, and where living one's values is not determined solely by the form of one's organizing. There is no clear dichotomy around right and wrong from the issue of registration itself.

Ammar and Moughalian point out that many feminist activists actively resist organizing via an NGO frame, because of decades of evidence of its negative impact on social movements. As I discussed with an activist involved in Nasawiya and a number of groups organizing around queer right and sexual health, a lot of this resistance also comes from pain and experiences of alienation or toxicity. At the same time, Ammar and Moughalian argue, some of the strongest critiques come from those who themselves have founded NGOs. It must thus be acknowledged that much of the richest criticism comes from those struggling to live and implement radical, activist values within a "registered" structure, and that this can take many forms. NGOization is not only a trend, but also a conscious choice by activists that can be instrumentalized for access to resources. This reality opens much more interesting questions: What happens to individuals whose personal experience of injustice is transformed into their paid labor? What structures support them to do this healthily? Can professionalized feminist labor be positively integrated within movement spaces, or is there an inherent toxicity that prevents this?

However, public perceptions of activism, NGOs, and civil society largely lack these nuances. Excluding moments of social movement or mass uprising, established NGOs tend to be more visible than the grassroots, regardless of their politics. Thus, as Mira points out, any work in civil society is often falsely conflated with activism. Activists and individuals working with an NGOized framework are rendered most visible – to the state, media, public, and international funding community.

Based on much of the above, Mira and others interviewed deliberately aim to challenge the conflation of activism with work in civil society or NGOs. They argue that this misconception contributes to ongoing minimization of those doing on-the-ground, movement-building work, regardless of whether they are in unregistered collectives or the more radical organizations, and/or working from within oppressive structures.

3.3 The Landscape of NGOization and Classed Communication

More broadly than feminist and women's rights movements, NGOization in Lebanon promotes and prioritizes classed forms of communication, work, and knowledge. Taking action against various forms of injustice is translated into professionalized work focused on set issue areas. One of the most damaging aspects is the shift in relationships and the imposed hierarchies between those working in civil society and those who are "served *by*" civil society, as mentioned above with clientalism between organizations and their "beneficiaries." NGOs, and the funding structures that resource them, create a class of experts charged with designing and running programs, writing reports, and formulating policy recommendations. These are often middle-class people, university-educated, without the experiential knowledge of the people accessing services. How many humanitarian aid workers (working in an organization's headquarters, at least) have lived through the process of internal displacement, became refugees, or came from a household with few resources? The role of the NGO worker, cynically, is to gatekeep between the "target population" and society, government, or funder, to mediate the client's needs to those with more power. Regardless of a feminist activist's role in a collective, radical registered NGO, or more tradition women's rights organization, she will interact with NGOs and civil society more broadly – and thus engages with the negative consequences of NGOization.

These dynamics were referenced throughout interviews for this project, both in regards to feminist and non-feminist spaces, and are clearly visible in the fabric of events, NGO communications, and discourse throughout Beirut. They are, in some ways, impossible to escape. As I was first writing this section in January 2019, in a café in Beirut, two women working at an NGO focused on aid for refugees sat close to me. It was impossible not to overhear. The supervisor, a German woman based on the Beirut, had called the meeting – notably outside the office – with the second, a Lebanese project manager primarily working in several Syrian refugee camps outside of Beirut. The subject was the project manager's "violation" of organizational protocol, which had cost her the trust of her manager. The Lebanese project manager had, without permission, misused donor funding allocated for winter boots for refugees in the camps. Instead, she had bought winterized sneakers, since they were more attractive to the teenagers living in the camp. She tried to explain to her supervisor that there was no breach of trust, that winterized sneakers served the same purpose as boots, that they would be worn whereas boots would be wasted. This resulted in the hour-long argument at the café, to discipline the project manager for her transgression and discuss how her decision could possible be justified to donors.

Feminist theory acknowledges many forms of expertise, including experiential knowledge (hooks, 1991), but most funding mechanisms and governments prioritize association with established and moderate organizations, gender and race, age, education, and wealth. Many of the activists interviewed for this research actively push back against this, and deliberately choose to work in or foster alternative forms of organization, with power centered more clearly on those most deeply affected, in or outside of NGOs. But even when feminist activism against gendered violence using NGOized frameworks to its advantage, more traditional forms of NGOization across society serves as the backdrop for their experience. There is little way to disengage, to truly disassociate. Funding, the rigidity that comes from maintaining strict donor standards, and professionalized labor "affects the relationship of organisations with the community of women they are helping or representing. Rather than working with women as equal partners, organisations act as service providers with women as their beneficiaries, encouraging the idea of a hierarchy" (Lebanon Support, 2016, p. 10). Furthermore, these civil society jobs are often feminized, and the focus on service provision fits these roles squarely into a traditional understanding of "women's work."

Sarah Kaddoura from the A Project also identified how these dynamics change the language around the issues closest to activists. When organizations depend on funding to continue their work, discourse becomes de-radicalized, the edges smoothed over. She said, "I hope that at some point we manage to become less and less professional…Why can't we just talk like we talk? Why can't we talk about issues like we would talk about them when I'm sitting with you? Why do I have to use the human rights language? Why can't I just say things as political as they are?" Even when we are painfully conscious of the reasons we use donor-focused human rights language, target numbers, and reduce people to outcomes, this of course seeps into our work and relationships."

NGOization not only encourages classed communication and competition, but fights for territory, fights to be seen as *the* experts. As examples of this last point, activists named several NGOs, active around SGBV and LGBTQ rights. They tend to either approach their work as a solo endeavor, without collaboration with other groups, or aim to coopt others' work into their outputs and publicly visible action. This is easily visualized, in the use of organizational logos on signs at a protest planned by a coalition, as has been seen in International Women's Day marches for the past several years.

Patrick's experience relays the toxicity that can come from these approaches. In his experience founding the Gender and Sexuality Club at AUB, he was approached by and then worked to build a relationship with a prominent NGO known in the region for promoting LGBTQ rights and access to information on sexuality. He had several casual meetings with this NGO, after they heard about the GSC. Representatives said, "If you need anything, call us." This did not lead to tangible partnership at the time, but Patrick was thrilled at the meeting, and assumed collaboration would come at a later stage. A few months after, he heard that the NGO was "claiming to its funders that they created us [the GSC]…and they were kind of receiving congratulations when we announced [our establishment]." Patrick and other students were hurt and offended, and also shocked that an NGO of that status would try to take credit for an initiative like a student club, which they viewed as much less socially important. Later, Patrick heard that the organization had tried to coopt the work of other young groups, as well.

After the GSC became more established, another NGO also picked up on the trend. The GSC was leading its own events, without collaboration with external NGOs. Then, in April 2016, Helem held an event about student clubs and activism on LGBTQ rights at Bardo, a gay-friendly

café and bar. The Facebook event, advertising the event as a panel discussion on student movements and their role in LGBTQ activism and community" (Helem, 2016), originally had an image of one of the GSC's members. However, Patrick reported that Helem had not consulted or informed neither that person nor the GSC, and the club was not invited to speak. The event was run in collaboration with the British Council, presumably a funder. After a brief confrontation, Helem changed the photo, but Patrick said he was again left wondering if the established NGOs could ever treat the GSC as collaborators and fellow organizers, rather than clients or tokens.

3.4 RootsLab: An Alternative Model

NGOization is by no means a monolith. As mentioned above, many people and activists clearly make the choice to work within its structures, while subverting mainstream hierarchies. This is true at all levels, from intern and entry-level employee, to the design of initiatives, organizational strategy, and foundation of NGOs. Groups like the Anti-Racism Movement, which I work with, and the A Project exemplify this: local groups with radical politics, using NGOized structure to access needed resources for their communities.

The 2017-18 RootsLab project, conceptualized and funded by Oxfam, FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund, Global Fund for Women, and the Young Foundation, also aimed to "do things differently." RootsLab's goal was to build the capacity of young feminists and feminist groups in Lebanon, with ten young collectives selected for the pilot year to participate in a "social innovation lab to advance young women and trans youth's rights, leadership and collective action" ("Rootslab Lebanon: About Us," 2017). The project targeted those left out of the dominant organizing centered in Beirut, and also aimed to build a community of collaboration and learning rather than competition. It did not prize existing visibility as a criterion for selection, but instead aimed to confer visibility – or its resources – upon young, informal, or invisible groups.

In the public evaluation report reflecting on the project, created in collaboration with many participants and the project team, Zeina Ammar and Myriam Claire Baker write:

> Involving unusual suspects RootsLab has deliberately and proactively sought to break the centralisation of feminist activity in Beirut and amongst longer-established individual activists and organisations. They [RootsLab organizers] did so by including women who are usually left out of women's rights and feminist organising or included

> as beneficiaries of women's rights organisations (WROs) rather than activists in their own right. They referred to these women and trans* people as the 'unusual suspects,' which they defined as "persons who may lack access to spaces and resources, or the ability to participate in collective organising work. (Z. Ammar & Baker, 2019, p. 13)

In other words, RootsLab explicitly aimed to bring together and resource the "shadow feminism" defined by Deema Kaedbey, discussed in the introduction. The selected groups came from Tripoli, Saida, Bekaa, Aley, and Beirut, and included Syrian women activists in the Bekaa and Egna Legna Besidet, an Ethiopian migrant domestic worker collective in Beirut.

RootsLab thus also created a space for relationships between women and trans people who would likely never have met, between those engaged in various shadow feminisms. Part of this exposure and relationship building was the creation of space to break down participants' own perceptions of who feminists and activists could be, create opportunities for solidarity work. Belan (pseudonym), an Ethiopian activist with Egna Legna Besidet, described their experience as they entered the space, as the only group of migrant women. Besides at the Migrant Community Center, a space run by the Anti-Racism Movement, they hadn't had much experience with other feminist groups. She said, "When we entered into RootsLab, we saw other groups, other communities. They started saying about us: 'Wow.' We started communicating, we talked with them, we had a lot of good experiences with them." Going through the program together, not only of exchange, broke down stereotypes held by the Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian feminists in the space. Belan continued, "They learned as well, about domestic workers, Ethiopian domestic workers, it's not that 'They don't know how to do anything.' [The other participants learned] that they are not coming just to work inside the home, no, there are educated people, there are smart people. When they saw this, they were shocked, you know? We opened them, a bit." Then, Belan says, was there space for solidarity.

Coordinated on the ground by a feminist organizer activist[28] in Lebanon for more than 13 years, the initiative was also designed to give these groups access to the funding, knowledge, and networks they were typically denied – and to redistribute decision-making power often reserved for the INGO grantor, not local grantees. Applicants could identify a project and issue of their choice, rather than follow an imposed call for grant proposals. Each selected group was paired with an established feminist organization in Lebanon that joined them for the program, to host

[28] The two members of the RootsLab project team interviewed for this thesis requested that their names not be used, to keep the focus on the work of the collective and the project as a whole.

the younger groups and exchange knowledge and lessons learned in both directions. Groups were also matched with a peer mentor who provided guidance and support, and the groups themselves could suggest a mentor if they had an existing relationship or preference.

Sara Abou Ghazal, a feminist activist and managing partner at the Knowledge Workshop, which helped conceptualize RootsLab in Lebanon, gave a speech at the September 2018 closing event, titled "Supporting Young Feminist Activism in Lebanon: A RootsLab Journey." She cited three key principles of RootsLab to be replicated: intergenerational work, reaching outside the center to the margins, and the acknowledgement that (unrestricted) financial resources are key to this work. In a blog post recapping the speech, she wrote that RootsLab aimed to "refute the idea that to practice feminism means that individuals and women must get out of the communities they come from and settle into new ones. In fact, RootsLab has confirmed that feminist initiatives can live in the places each and every one of us comes from" (Abou Ghazal, 2018). In her speech at the RootsLab closing event and blog, Abou Ghazal continued:

> "Providing access to flexible funding for those who have not had access to traditional donors…helps the movement revisit its relationship with funding, and highlights the need for everybody to have access to it, so we are able to invest it collectively. When a single organization amongst us monopolizes most of the funding, they would be crossing a bridge on their own. This goes against a key feminist principle, which is that freedom is in its essence collective. (Abou Ghazal, 2018)

Abou Ghazal so eloquently frames what many feminist organizations, collectives, and individuals intimately know: that funding and NGOization can easily fracture movements via competition and split the work into silos, but that they do not have to. Resources, when shared and accessed outside frames of competition, can contribute to liberation.

It is not easy, however, to change the model and undo learned behaviors around funding, for participating organizations and for the international NGOs running the project. The project team spoke to the difficulty of working within the framework of an international organization, which typically partners with established organizations. They discussed the need to change the way things are done inside international organizations. They said that they worked to intentionally shift some of the terminology generally used in international development, using "partners" instead of beneficiaries, naming Syrian women as "leaders" instead of refugee recipients of aid, and focusing on agency rather than empowerment. They also said that supporting and highlighting the issues and work that the participating groups themselves deemed

most important was in itself challenging the status quo that generally imposes funding agendas and issues on local organizations and feminist groups.

As the team said, change won't come from Oxfam, but Oxfam and the other international organization can support those who will make change, *and* they can model a different relational dynamic for other international organizations and funders. This disruption of the standard big partner-small partner or funder-grantee relationships happens at both a structural and an individual level. A lot of the structural happens in the relationship to money. RootsLab financially supported the whole of a group's work, the coordinator said, rather than providing funding for a specific project. They encouraged participants to spend the difference in grant costs, and did not want them to have to be tied to rigid reporting requirements.

The evaluation report quotes the project team: "We protect the people we work with from external visits [from funders], and only accept those that are completely necessary. We don't tokenize, we don't give these stories, we compromise on our visibility but we determine its terms and decide on our own language" (Z. Ammar & Baker, 2019, p. 12). We value people's experience, the team said in our interview, what they go through is important.

The program coordinator explained that on a individual level, she never wanted to have a grantor-beneficiary dynamic with a peer activist. However, she understood her role and positioning as a program manager at Oxfam and representative of other international organizations, and didn't want participants to moderate their reflections and needs when speaking to the project team. She wanted people to say what they think, and thus aimed to intentionally open up space for participants to express what's going on, positively and negatively.

Ammar and Baker's evaluation report makes it clear that there was space for participants to express their critique, that there was deep benefit and learning for the groups involved, and also that the experience also raised questions about the model and its politics. Here, I will focus on the critiques around the involvement of international women's rights organizations in feminist movements and the role of funding. First, Ammar and Baker surface a critique from one of the project's mentors on "non-feminist" organizations like Oxfam and Global Fund for Women taking on a feminist label. They write, "This critique reflects a shared unease among some radical feminists in Lebanon towards mainstreaming feminism to the extent where the concept becomes devoid of politics and detached from the practice. The view is that large structures that

are not built on feminist principles cannot simply become feminist through a few changes in their organisational policies." Although many involved in the project clearly pushed back on this, perception and visibility remain important. Belan, for example, described public events where attendees – a mix of INGO staff, donors, and people in feminist communities – were overly impressed and surprised at Egna Legna Besidet's participation. It was almost as if, she said, "they thought it was bigger than our capacity."

The second critique highlights the realities of distribution of funds. Several mentors, cited in the evaluation report, question the "loss of financial resources to the intermediary or 'middlemen' organisations," wondering if those resources could have been better used by local activists (Z. Ammar & Baker, 2019, p. 15). In addition, the mentor model's component of fiscal sponsorship raised questions. Beyond Oxfam, fiscal sponsorship is one of the only tools that allow unregistered groups and collectives to access institutionalized funds in Lebanon. A registered organization agrees to received funds in the name of the unregistered group, so a grantor's bank transfer can go to a registered organization's bank account rather than an individual and also sometimes for security concerns for the unregistered party. In Oxfam's model, mentor organizations were there for project and personal support, as well as in fiscal sponsor capacity. Ammar and Baker quote one anonymized participant on the impact of this relationship, "I think there was a romanticization of fiscal sponsors in the sense that we're supposed to support each other but money does not allow for support. Money is the worst poison you can give a relationship" (2019, p. 28).

The local feminists involved in the project clearly considered these critiques, in conception and implementation. The main point here is, in feminist practice, critique walks with you through the process, it does not necessarily provide a yes/no answer on whether to engage or not.

3.5 Invitation

RootsLab raises important questions about how people enter into feminist space and activism, especially in environments lacking centralized physical and conceptual space to meet and learn.

One of the team members studied gender and feminist theory in her Masters at the London School of Economics, with academics providing her an introduction to theory – but no way to practice. Returning to Lebanon, she joined Oxfam. When she joined RootsLab, she realized what she'd been missing. Without the connections to other individuals engaged in feminist organizing and activism in Beirut, she was unable to easily join feminist movement work from the grassroots. Instead, she entered organizing via professionalized work with a highly visible organization. Like many other young people, activists, and feminists, her entry point was joining a cause or movement from its visible manifestation, or from development, aid, and gender justice frameworks.

RootsLab offered an invitation, and an umbrella. As one RootsLab participant said in the evaluation, "That was the value of RootsLab […], people who come here don't have papers, or the ability to form a union, they can't have official groups and apply for funding under a registered name" (Z. Ammar & Baker, 2019, p. 13). Despite huge challenges of limited resources and overwork, as discussed in the evaluation report, the project team were able to create a collaborative, supportive space, away from visibility but using its privileges. In a way, RootsLab physically and structurally centralized an opportunity for learning, but decentralized feminist practice by inviting in unusual suspects from across communities and geographies.

RootsLab has yet to be replicated in Lebanon, but it leaves behind key lessons and questions. Activists working within NGOized frameworks can use their resources to successfully build movements that challenge status quo power relationships, and bring in those left in the shadows, but the hierarchies and implications don't completely disappear. Could this model work without institutionalized support and funding, when it was already so hard for participants to engage when they had stipends? Could it have been hosted locally? How do resources truly get *shifted*, instead of simply assigned for project funding? What happens to the participating collectives when the project ends? If there was no Oxfam, who would have invited these feminist groups in?

3.6 Forms of Organization

What does this reality mean for the concrete organization of feminist collectives? Beirut's feminist groups, whether directly or indirectly engaged around issues of gendered violence, are

far from a monolith. Rather, young feminist groups and activists working against gendered violence fall into several categories that move beyond the registration binary: independent collectives, informal networks, student groups, local NGOs (radical and non-radical), international NGOs, and state-sponsored parties or organizations. Feminist activist Elsa Saade argues that these categorizations are far from complete, particularly in relation to NGOs focusing on women's rights, human rights, and gender issues: "I think there's like three layers to this: the organizations that say they are feminist, and that they work on a feminist agenda publicly; the organizations that do feminist work but don't necessarily label themselves as feminist organizations; and you have organizations that don't label themselves feminist organizations, so that they wouldn't have to do feminist work or have a feminist agenda."

In other words, feminism is a fraught word. Applying a feminist label to one's work can have serious connotations for visibility and funding, both positive and negative. It may open up opportunities for outside funding, participation in local, regional, and global networks, and local solidarity work. However, it may also hinder attempts for mainstream acceptance or visibility locally, when – to return to Aya Jamaleddine's reflection on the KAFA vigil from the first chapter – feminists are seen as radical women with short hair and nontraditional values. It's thus no surprise that established NGOs working for women's rights, might not embrace the label.

With little mechanism for state support or local funds, the choice of formation, of how to organize, is a calculated decision. It involves an analysis of both values and practicalities. Visibility becomes a consideration, both in the basic form of organizing and in choice of tactics. And many groups push against this. As will be discussed in the next chapter, collectives like the Dammeh Cooperative and Feminist Network eschew visibility to instead focus on building up their community and spaces internally, as have many before. Through a discussion of Meem's formation, Sarah Hamdan highlights how choices of the form of organizing intersect with these questions of visibility:

> Unlike Western LGBT groups, Meem's strategies seem to be not interested in public visibility or gay rights, but rather focus on creating a support group, on blogging, and on contributing to feminist activism in Lebanon (Ibid., p.242). Meem members consider themselves *ambiguously* visible and situate themselves away from the Western framework of visibility and also away from the binary of closet/coming out or visibility/invisibility (Lynn, December 16, 2010). (Hamdan*, 2015)

In other words the form of organization is not just about politics, it is itself a political decision.

3.7 Internal Hierarchies in Activist Spaces and Organizations

The focus on visibility, and NGOization of potential movements, can foster negative dynamics within activist spaces, specifically competition, performativity of activism, and reinforcing of privilege. Arching across all these trends, several interviewees mentioned, is a dilution of radical demands and politics into those that are more palatable. Like Meem, many activists thus choose to organize alternate spaces and groups that are more aligned with their values, but inherently less publicly visible.

Many activists spoke about the need to be "productive," and the way this pressure of productivity poisons group dynamics, individuals' own self-perceptions and involvement, and movement-building as a whole. Productivity, in the context of activism, means producing tangible, consumable outputs, events that can be attended, protests that can be joined, projects that can be completed. Mira said, "It goes back to the language that people speak. When they [activists] see, when they want to talk about 'change' and 'seeing change on the ground.' And how if there's no committee for it, there's nothing…If there's no, you know, like structure that people can, like, see, like, a brochure…it's nothing, you know? And like, if there's no pomp and circumstance surrounding it…if you don't have a big table with everyone with a bottle, with their bottle of water, and a projector."

Mira reflected on the way this tension prompted members of the Feminist Network and Feminist Bloc to question their participation in the groups, both on an individual level and as collectives. If an individual is not "contributing" tangibly, should they continue as a member of the group? Do they "deserve" to? If the group has not achieved concrete aims, are they succeeding? For example, Mira described several members facing mental health challenges or stressors external to the group. In these cases, the members had trouble balancing their day-job and organizing or basic participation, and thus felt that they were "not contributing" to the Feminist Network or Feminist Bloc. Mira said that they withdrew from the group, rather than engaged further, for fear of hurting the perceived need for productivity. Even when Mira and other members of the collective tried to reassure these members, to emphasize that they of course were welcome in the space, they couldn't erase the members' underlying anxiety.

These worries also surface for activists prone to more behind-the-scenes or logistic work. Mira described the pressure in this way: "If I'm behind the scenes, I'm not in the forefront…I'm

worried about my contributions. If there's a discussion, I'm not participating. If there's a post, I'm not commenting. If there's an issue, I'm not reacting. And it just makes people feel like they're not good enough…if their contribution is not something, you know, that people can see or measure. It's a, also a language that they've internalized." Here, Mira refers to the pressure of NGOization, and capitalistic productivity. She continued, "And if they haven't 'done enough,' it cancels out, it 'cancels out the contribution.' So they exit. And thereby, I think, become more apathetic." These dynamics make it all the more important to push for different understandings of what activism is, of how support work, changes to daily life, mutual aid can produce unseen changes that hold more meaning that logos, event pages, and numbers at a protest.

Another result of these anxieties is a silencing of learning opportunities and individual development. The pressure of productivity is entwined with pressure on individuals to already be knowledgeable, active, and radicalized, in some spaces. Many people interviewed spoke to a related replication of structures of privilege in feminist activist spaces: Even when groups might explicitly address power in regards to gendered and racialized hierarchies in the content of their discussions, or actions they take, they still perpetuate acts that feed into social hierarchies.

One anonymous feminist activist interviewed focused on implicit – but rigid – rankings of seniority among members in a specific feminist collective in Beirut. She described attending a meeting with a feminist group in Beirut at age 19, and asking what she knew was a "stupid question" about whether supporting trans people reinforces the gender binary. She said, "I remember this because it was like a shameful moment in my life." She felt like she should have already known the answer, but she'd never had the chance to explore these issues before. She was a young college student, newly arrived to Beirut from a conservative town, and desperately needed someone to "walk her through" the thought process. She wanted to be a more knowledgeable participant in the group, ready to do the work. Instead, the said the responses from the group were frustrating and unhelpful: "Some of them [the collective's members] were just outraged, like, 'Ah! How can you ask that? You know, like, you can just Google it.'…I also got very patronizing answers." One person brought out a small whiteboard, to illustrate the difference between sexuality, sex, and gender, which made her feel humiliated. Many people in the collective, she acknowledged, were adept at handling newcomers, but those who spoke up that day were not. She left the meeting feeling alienated, unheard, and embarrassed.

In reflecting on that meeting, and the larger social dynamics it represents, the activist said that internal hierarches have consequences. They play out in who makes decisions in multiple feminist groups, who is invited into feminist and activist spaces, and who continues to be visible outside the spaces. Her experience, she said, demonstrates how these tendencies can also stifle growth and learning of younger or newer members. These dynamics end up also replicating heteropatriarchal dynamics around permission and taking up of space, as well as NGOization's valuing of certain forms of expertise.

Pressure to conform to set norms and structures also exists within activist spaces, in accordance to hierarchy and expected ways of being. Activist Sous (pseudonym) speaks to the frustration of some activists, of entering into or building spaces that are non-normative by design, and yet getting caught in the same challenges. Every group has norms and dynamics, and these are often unspoken, left out of any initial conversation or orientation. Reflecting on her own experience coming from Trablus to Beirut and joining feminist spaces there, she says, "Once you figure out the norms, you do well. But it's sort of tricky to get the norms, because it's a group that sort of suggests or claims that it's anti-normative. And then you realize, nope, it's all there, you know, all the etiquette and all the right ways of saying things and doing things is there…And I would call it privilege." It takes time, Sous said, but you learn that people who don't follow the group's norms risk becoming unwelcome. Disrupting these dynamics requires long-term work to challenge to the way that we individually and collectively internalize social hierarchies and ways of interacting.

Many groups struggle openly with how to address these group norms, interpersonal dynamics, and other learned behaviors and consequences of members accessing different levels of privilege. These dynamics are not hidden, and many groups actively engage in conversations, practices, and guidelines around power. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, Mirvat speaks to her experience in this with Dammeh Collective, and separately working for migrant worker rights, first with the Migrant Worker Task Force (MWTF), and then with the Anti-Racism Movement. She came to work with MWTF as someone who wanted to teach, not as an activist. With support from others, she then started questioning her own role in perpetuating structures of kafala, and her desire to "help" migrant workers, as a Lebanese person with class and education privilege. She asked: "What does it mean for me to be in MWTF, in the position

that I'm in?" This questioning is essential, but she spoke to the way it can also paralyze activist spaces and stop people from taking action.

People with academic backgrounds or the opportunity to have learned language around power and positionality, in particular, can drive conversations to a level that is elitist and potentially alienating, discouraging others who may not have the same vocabulary from fully investing in those spaces. The constant self-reflection can also take more space than the actual work of organizing, protesting, self-education, or community building. Mirvat said, "There's a lot of positionality talk…If you're not careful, it goes round and round. It's never ending. And you become like the cesspool of negativity." Making space for joy, too, is necessary for disruption.

3.8 Toxicity, Tension, and Competition

Struggles of "toxicity" also came up in multiple interviews, specifically in regards to intragroup dynamics. Much has already been written about tension within radical, leftist, and feminist communities, and the replication of oppressive structures within toxic interpersonal relationships. I don't want to cause more pain, so this section will be short and continue to anonymize interpersonal conflicts, as above, even if interviewees had no issue with using their name. Instead, I will focus on two ways that toxicity is also linked to replication of oppressive social hierarchies complicity: within the relationships that form the structure of any group, and in the choice of forms of organizing. Before this discussion, I also want to point out that toxicity and tension are often falsely conflated, that tension can be productive or disruptive. In contrast, toxicity refers to more deeply ingrained social and institutional dynamics that negatively invade individual experiences and the group's ultimate goals.

In reflecting on relationships, we go back to Sous' experience of joining feminist collectives, after coming to Beirut from Tripoli. She spoke to the feeling of finally being "home," upon joining a feminist space. The intentions of these spaces, particularly one feminist collective she joined, were clear, and politically and personally aligned with what Sous wanted, for herself and beyond. Initial rules meant to redefine power dynamics, such as having men speak last, seemed to create a baseline for how people in the group could interact, in ways that pushed back against social norms and gendered expectations. But soon, she found the high standards to be exhausting, especially as a younger person still defining her political foundations. She said:

> [Feminist communities in Beirut are] also a space where, probably for good reasons, the political and the personal are inseparable, which, yeah, I understand. I understand that philosophical stance, right? We always say the personal is political, the political is personal. But it's also exhausting…I've been to meetings where I would share an opinion and then a fellow feminist comrade is crying and then I feel like I can't come to the next meeting…I've had some of my most, my best surrounded time and my loneliest times in this circles.

As she got more involved with different collectives, she realized that the same women were speaking, and that the vocabulary was beyond where she was at the time. Although she benefitted in the long run, she was left as a spectator, not a participant. Younger members learned to stay silent, rather than express opinions that were less radical or ask questions perceived as ignorant.

The internalized expectations of the group created an environment of self-censorship, at least for Sous. Similarly, Mira spoke to the experience in another group of not feeling "needed" and not wanting to be a "burden" when she perceived that others knew so much more, or had read so much more, than her. At the end of a meeting of a feminist group, she remembers hearing negative comments toward another person in the group who said something problematic and feeling like, "That could have very well been me. So I'm not going to contribute anymore, I'm scared."

Sous also pointed out that many groups were and are hyper-aware about these dynamics, and there were reflexive discussions and interventions made. She learned that dealing with tension and power dynamics requires more complex solutions, that it's hard to leave what we learned from our families and other communities at the door of a "safer" space.

> The problem is that even when there are attempts – I remember struggling with this so much – even when there are attempts at breaking this [these dynamics], they're just done in a very unthoughtful way. So I remember I was at a few meetings where, you know, the seniors [after speaking]…would then look at every other woman and be like, 'You didn't say anything, did you? Let's just hear her out.' And like, guys, that's really not the approach you should be taking right now. I think that could use a lot of reflection.

Ways of communicating, and expectations of knowledge or political development, are also linked to the NGOization of struggle – even in spaces that actively push against NGO frameworks, like many feminist collectives that Mira and Sous discussed. NGOization creates competition between like-minded groups that could more easily work in solidarity. In a personal example, when a colleague reached out to another organization working on the rights of migrant

workers to ask them to train us about a particular government complaint process, they refused because "they don't train people outside of [this NGO]," even though we were working for the same cause.

Patrick's experience with the professionalized NGO taking credit for the GSC's foundation also speaks to competition and toxicity. After the incident, Patrick considered cutting off communication with the NGO, but knew he had to stay connected, as they were his link to other queer organizations and groups in the region. He continued, with the feeling that the GSC's work was being co-opted for the NGO's prestige, funding, and reporting needs to donors. He said:

> Part of me feels like it's that specific NGO and part of me feels that [many] NGOs have a thing that, like if anybody does anything [on the same issue and if the NGO is] remotely connected to that person, like if they met them once, they would feel like they had a hand in it. I've seen that happening in front of me, I don't think it's malicious in their eye. I really think that [the NGOs] think that they're doing everything. They can't conceive of grassroots politics outside of their framework. And if something happens, they feel like, 'Oh that's obviously because of our influence.'…There are people that I would consider just bad people working in this. Not bad as in evil, but as in greedy.

Patrick's frame of analysis distills the blame to greedy individuals, and organizational structures that promote and permit their behavior. However, the toxicity of NGOized action and of cooptation goes far beyond that. It is also the environment of scarcity and adherence to donor priorities that fosters competition for resources both between organizations and within them, rather than generative movements and collaboration. The toxic is not only interpersonal, as we commonly associate it to be. Toxicity can be structural, too, regardless of the form of organization. This means, however, that it can also be resisted, even in the hardest of times and environments.

3.9 Reducing the Structural to the Individual

ABAAD's work around masculinities has become well-known both within and outside Lebanon, funded by international donors, with representatives from the organization invited to local and global conferences. A professionalized NGO found in 2011, ABAAD Resource Center for Gender defines itself as "a non-profit, non-politically affiliated, non-religious civil association that aims to promote sustainable social and economic development in the MENA

region through equality, protection, direct service provision, and empowerment of refugee and host community groups who may be vulnerable, especially women" (ABAAD, 2016). Although ABAAD uses a feminist label in some media and campaigns, it is not perceived to be part of intersectional feminist movement spaces in Beirut by many of the people I interviewed. It is also privately and publicly criticized for its politics and an approach that overlooks intersectionality.

ABAAD's approach is drastically different than the work of the collectives and radical NGOs discussed throughout this thesis, although reflective of that of mainstreamed women's rights NGOs, so I want to directly interrogate its tactics and their impact on feminist movements. I ask: Can ABAAD's aim to unravel toxic masculinity – and its associated programs – be understood as an act of or commitment to solidarity with feminist groups? How does their cooperation with – and even solicitation of – traditional authority figures impact larger feminist work around gendered violence? When do NGO structures of funding and operation open or close doors to solidarity work?

In 2012, ABAAD launched a public video campaign called "We Believe," as part of the annual 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women. The campaign featured both videos and billboard advertisements of well-known Muslim and Christian figures condemning violence against women, using religious texts and justifications. As Riwa Salameh writes in her critique:

> 'We Believe' generated a public debate: religious leaders reported encouraging feedback among some congregants who were pleased to see the problem confronted, while some feminist groups criticized the campaign, claiming that its approach reinforced the patriarchal authority of those leaders, who are already granted significant control over women's autonomy and family affairs by virtue of personal status laws in Lebanon that several CSOs are in fact trying to amend. (Salameh, 2014)

Salameh's (2014) critique, in essence, condemns this strategy for "perpetuat[ing] the existing sectarian structure." She writes that the tactics pushes women's organizations to engage with traditional authorities, rather than other women. Prioritizing the voices of male religious authorities, especially in a campaign by an NGO that uses a feminist label, clearly marginalizes the unusual suspects and shadow feminisms in favor of the existing power structures. Furthermore, it feeds into cults of personality that also reflect work more internal to the organization.

ABAAD is also one of the only visible groups actively working around masculinities. In addition to a men's center, workshops, and counseling, visibility is precisely one of their key strategies. For this thesis, I interviewed Anthony Keedi, Program Manager for ABAAD's masculinities work. I'd previously seen him speak about his work, both in conference settings and a workshop on gender norms for a mixed-gender group. His individual style in these presentations was personal storytelling and reflection. This seemed intentional; a modeling of a masculine man talking about emotions, to demonstrate that masculinity can be reframed. At the same time, I questioned how it reflects social norms of masculinity taking up shared space.

In our hour and twenty-five minute conversation, the discussion took the same form. I asked few questions, and Anthony's answers often focused on his experience as an individual. He spoke about his psychology, his coming to terms with his own role in violence – largely through the labor of his girlfriend and other women in his life, and his own understanding of masculinity. For example, when asked to briefly introduce himself and his work with ABAAD, his answer included how he came to terms with his own masculinity and internalized violence. He said:

> I was raised in a very benevolent sexist hyper-masculine [household]. And I say benevolent sexist because in my house only a coward would ever raise their hand on a woman, that's what we were told, 'Any man who would ever touch a woman sexually or physically in a violent way is a coward that is not a man. In fact, it's you who needs to protect women from those kind of men.'…I went years without ever shedding a tear, and it wasn't because I was emotionally incapable of crying, it was because I would never allow myself to and if I did it was very much in private, no one would see, [I] wouldn't tell anyone… I was pushing people away. I didn't want that. I didn't want to be aggressive. I didn't want to be violent. I actually do believe in peace, I actually prefer to be like that.

In talking about ABAAD's masculinities programming and training approach, just as when he talked about his own journey, Anthony used vocabulary from the fields of peace and development, and gender. He argues that one of the goals is "to help these men understand that they were lied to, they were shoved into a box, they have a need to emotional expression, they have the need to listen and speak with other people, all the responsibility isn't on them. It should be a shared responsibility." This means that "they give up a little bit of that power but they also give up a lot of that pressure in responsibility and its just a better model, and again, all of our trainings go into showing them how gender equality is a win, win, win , win , win." In other words, the focus is on also creating the man as a victim of this system, showing him he too was

harmed by it, which is accurate. But the approach rests on intervention at an individual level, to frame each man also as a victim of the system, and show him what he has to gain by opposing it. However, much less emphasized is how the individual man has also benefitted from the system, and any sense of responsibility to combat it, in contrast to an approach that prioritizes individual loss and gain.

Anthony illustrates the complex way that ABAAD both makes visible social structures and collective problems. The programs avoid placing blame on the individual, instead absolving them if they step into ABAAD's trainings and taking on a traditional ally role, the politics of which will be explained in the next chapter. He said:

> I can't believe that I am naturally violent, because I don't believe that – I can't believe that I am naturally twisted or dominant. I don't believe that white people are naturally racist and I don't believe people who have means are naturally insensitive. I think that they all come with those little bubbles, little lies about the bubbles that we were told that sustain that system and I think its only by breaking on that personal level you can really get to that empathy. On a personal level, it's that empathy that really does a lot on whether men are able to criticize themselves and investigate their power and their privilege, as opposed to not.

This approach puts the onus of change on the individual, with the tool of empathy. It acknowledges structural problems as the root cause for individual suffering, but hesitates instead of pushing structural solutions. If this is the basis for the NGO's approach, it is difficult to see them as collaborative partner of a grassroots, radical movement.

Regardless of ABAAD's approach, Anthony highlights a key tenet of solidarity work: it requires acting against social norms, and work must be done both on the individual and collective levels. In order for someone to deeply transform his understanding of toxic masculinity, gender roles, and individual actions, for example, moments of learning need to be "systematic and consistent over a period of time." In his trainings, Anthony tells participants to expect hard, long work: "We will not be [positively] reinforced when we change our gender roles," but we must continue.

3.10 Conclusion: Moving Toward Solidarity

It can seem that there is little tangible reward for solidarity, for working in ways that subvert norms of competition and traditional resource distribution. This is precisely why deep solidarity work rarely comes from professionalized, NGOized structures beholden to strict

indicators and grant funding, although the people within them may engage in deep, meaningful alliance-building. When we engage in critiques about toxicity and complicity, solidarity work can also seem far away, the fruits distant.

In September 2018, Ethiopian activists organized a memorial for Lembibo, a 26-year-old Ethiopian woman, in partnership with the Anti-Racism Movement and other activists. Lembibo was found dead in the swimming pool at her recruitment agent's home, only days after giving birth (Hall, 2018). Her employers had called the agent to take her, when they "discovered" she was pregnant. Activists suspected that either the employer, agent, or someone they knew had raped Lembibo. The baby died only two hours after delivery, from birth defects. Lembibo was soon taken to the agent's home, and was dead by the next day. Video footage showed Lembibo kneeling on the ground, crying out for her baby. No one was charged in correlation to her death. and most activists knew little about her.

Belan spoke about the impact of Lembibo's death on Ethiopian communities, and Egna Legna. They felt they had to organize something, to shine a light only on Lembibo's death, but the hundreds of migrant women killed by the kafala system. They organized rapidly, pulling together speakers, coordinating with a church and religious leaders, and involving the media. They used the Migrant Community Center in Achrafieh as a base for this organization, as many groups do, for planning events, protests, and advocacy. But through this organizing, Belan also realized that the solidarity she'd seen at MCC and in other spaces extended further than she thought.

"When we came to MCC and got into MCC, there was the Filipina community, Sri Lanka, so many communities," she said. At first, it was about learning and classes. But over time, it changed. She continued, "When we had the vigil for Lembibo, and several [non-Ethiopian] communities came. This was the biggest solidarity for me." The event was not about Lembibo, as an Ethiopian woman, but justice for Lembibo as a migrant worker, a woman. For Belan, this was the result of years of building up individuals in different migrant communities, of raising their shared capacity. There *were* tangible fruits of solidarity: Lembibo's name was remembered. And Belan and the other activists were not alone that day.

CHAPTER 4
SOLIDARITY AND COMPLICITY

"Very few people mobilize for structural progress." – Patrick Haddad

"We had this International Women's Day protest that we organized. We were six women and we made a committee exclusively of woman and we said, 'We're going to organize a protest outside AUB.' And everyone, like the guys were like, 'I mean sure, we support you, but how are you going to do that?' And we ended up actually doing a whole march on the Corniche at 9 pm. The slogan was sort of "taking back the night." and 200 people showed up. That was, that was one of the nicest nights of my life. Like that was insane, that we actually pulled that off."
– Sous (pseudonym)

4.1 It Was Too Cold to Eat Ice Cream

That morning in winter 2018, Sara dressed differently, before leaving Beirut for the mountains. She didn't want to look as "organized" as normal, she said. She needed to blend in, to look like any other Ethiopian migrant domestic worker, to thus become invisible in this Druze town in the Chouf. Sara's goal for the day was to smuggle a phone to an Ethiopian woman in this village, so they could collect evidence against her abusive employer, the owner of a local salon. Sara could not afford to stand out.

The woman had gotten in touch with Sara via This Is Lebanon (TIL), asking for help. Sara spent most of her waking hours directly supporting migrant domestic workers facing abuse, through TIL and other platforms. She is an activist, an advocate, a caretaker. She embodies intervention, by whatever means necessary, a match and a can of kerosene.

But that day, not everything went as planned. Sara drove up to the village, where she found an Ethiopian woman near the salon. Sara thought she was the one who contacted TIL, but she couldn't be sure. And Sara couldn't walk right up to her and ask, because people in the neighborhood were watching her, a stranger. The building's *natour* stood outside the building. They were surrounded.

“I was saying, ‘Man, like is it her?’ And I walk and then I try to call her and then the boss, he was like standing [there]. I say, ‘Oh my god.’ So I turned my face and there it was, there was ice cream.”

Needing something to do, to look occupied, she picked up an ice cream bar from the store next to the salon. And then, “I was laughing. I realized that I ordered ice cream, but I have no money in my pocket. It is in my car, so I said to the guy, ‘Could you hold that? That’s my car, let me get my money.’...Everyone is watching me, watching me, and there standing and talking about me. But I say whatever happened, I'm not going without giving [the woman] this phone.”

An Ethiopian woman with a car of her own, without a Lebanese person accompanying her, was not the norm in this town, nor anywhere in Lebanon. But, for the moment, Sara passed just enough to not be confronted; she could fit into another narrative, as a domestic worker on her day or hour off.

Eating her ice cream, Sara casually said hello to the woman, who cautiously responded, since she had never seen Sara before. Once she realized who Sara was, the woman signaled her to try to get closer, but the neighbors, the natour, and her employer were all within sight. So Sara strolled down the street, until she could stand inconspicuously by some water tanks, slowly eating her ice cream in the cold. She waited, until the woman found a reason to walk past Sara, without acknowledging her. Sara managed to pass her the phone, silence between them. And then Sara left, eyes on her back, but the woman was not found out.

“I can't forget this day,” Sara said. Not because of the danger, the risk, the exposure of her body, already so often at risk, exposed by virtue of who she is, the papers she does and doesn’t have, the commitments that she has made.

“I can’t forget this day,” she said, because “in the cold, I ate ice cream.”

4.2 The Possibilities of Solidarity

To write about Sara, who I consider a comrade and a friend, seems wrong. I’ve watched Sara’s profile shoot up in the media, saw her work portrayed both in the way that she intends – although reflecting only a sliver of what she actually does – and also witnessed her tokenization. I’ve read and heard her story a dozen times with a dozen pseudonyms, seen her reduced to sound bites, anecdotes, romanticizations of the struggle. Too many journalists, too many researchers,

have used her story, and those of others like her, in ways that maintain Eurocentric structures of victimhood and saviorhood (Mohanty, 2003, p. 519). Sara consented knowingly to these interviews, with strategic goals of her own – but that doesn't excuse the writers' appropriation. As Chandra Mohanty reminds us, too many strands of feminism do little to break social and intellectual hierarchies, and instead reinforce commonly held notions of who exists at the center and who lives on the margins. Sara actually, physically rescued countless migrant domestic works, but in writing, a story of saving and liberation is constructed by others.

Writing another anecdote of Sara, in another English document, to be consumed mostly by people far from her day-to-day, does not feel like an act of solidarity with her. It does not feel like an extension of the work that we did together, with other groups, much of which can never be recorded. I want to continue to take action with her, not to condense the risks she takes, the emotions she feels, to paper.

I know, not through our interview but from other aspects of our relationship, that Sara rarely thinks of herself, rarely spends fifteen minutes without discussing *kafala* and its abuses. I know that she is often thinking ahead of the person holding the microphone. So I know that she consented, more willingly than any consent form could indicate, to our interview. I know that for her, another piece about *kafala*, even if only read among allies, adds another millimeter to the stacks of evidence she continues to build. For Sara, every millimeter counts – even though I may not be convinced,

Critiques of appropriative feminisms are often reductive in themselves. They forget that those in the "margins" can also instrumentalize stories of victimhood, and the very position of the victim, just as effectively as those in the "center."

I don't want to be yet another report, another narrative. But maybe, solidarity requires that you become what others need you to be, even when it places you in a position that you abhor, because that position represents so much of what you're fighting. Maybe it requires that you become simple and unglamorous, that you give up the idealized version of your own accompliceship, to be what your own identity *allows*. The debates of use of language, of instrumentalization, of the master's tools and the master's house (Lorde, 1984), are not new. But that doesn't mean they are, or will ever be, solved.

Since the interview in late 2018, Sara has continued to mobilize. Almost every moment of her day – then and now – is built around opposition to kafala, in the micro and macro. Almost

every day is action, or the planning that goes behind it, the labor that remains unseen. Sara long ago escaped her own abusive employer, although she could not escape kafala until she was able to leave Lebanon, an impossibility for many migrant domestic workers. Her forms of activism and solidarity operate on an individual and collective level. Her own body is no longer subject to kafala's control, but she continues to put everything she has on the line. Because she is part of a collective – or perhaps because humanitarian and refugee regimes also operate as their own exploitative sponsorship system – she is still tied to kafala.

Are Sara's actions from afar those of solidarity? She has lived the injustices of kafala firsthand, and has struck back actively, and with sustained direct confrontation, even when it is no longer her body at risk. What are the overlaps between solidarity, and continuation of the resistance she began long ago? What does solidarity require in terms of physical self, mind, and spirit? Is what is typically practiced as solidarity – supportive words, statements, and actions – instead a more superficial form of allyship? Or is there a web of forms of solidarity – practical, embodied, vocal, networked – as I propose below?

Can anyone live up to the standard Sara set long ago?

Sara's form of solidarity leaves little room for basic steps that make life more bearable, that avoid or postpone destruction and burnout. What is the balance between embodied solidarity or direct action, and self-compassion?

When I talked to another activist friend in late 2019, asking for advice on yet a case of abuse, in a different village in different mountains, her immediate reaction was for us to go there and investigate in person. My immediate reaction was twinned resistance and shame. I hesitated, because I knew our limits, knew how little evidence we had and how small the chance of success was, knew we almost certainly would not succeed without even knowing the women's name, phone number, and current location. Shame followed, because of my resistance. I had spent several hours working on this case, advising the Lebanese informant late on a Monday night, to prep her to act if we got more information, but it didn't feel like enough. It never feels like enough.

I still wonder: Was my hesitation practical, a way to balance our limited capacity in the face of hundreds of other women waiting for our call? Or was it a resistance to diving deeper into meaningful, practical solidarity work? Are solidarity and resistance even possible, when it

becomes your paid job? How do we discuss this, without resorting to false notions of purity of the work, that almost always impede the struggle?

Here, again, Sara's theorizing helps me make sense of my actions, more then her own. In examining solidarity through a lens of autotheory, I not only aim to understand her approach, but also to honestly interrogate my own reactions, even when they produce feelings of shame.

belle hooks is often quoted on the emancipatory power of theory, particularly from "Theory as Liberatory Practice." She writes:

> Living in childhood without a sense of home, I found a place of sanctuary in 'theorizing,' in making sense out of what was happening. I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently. This 'lived' experience of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis, became a place where I worked at explaining the hurt and making it go away. Fundamentally, I learned from this experience that theory could be a healing place. (hooks, 1991, p. 2)

Deep solidarity, when employed between those who don't share the same lived experiences, relies on shared theorizing. Because without the possibility of alternative futures, of shared imagination, how can we sustain the hope needed for solidarity?

4.3 Allyship and Accompliceship

I started this discussion of solidarity with Sara's story because she also helps me understand the extreme end of a spectrum between *allyship* and *meaningful solidarity*, a specific, embodied type of activism and solidarity. For the purposes of this paper, I will define allyship, accompliceship, and four types of solidarity. While it is tempting to put these on a spectrum, I want to avoid teleological notions of progress, as what defines acts as solidarity is constantly changing, based on the context, our own positions and capacities, the needs of those we are in solidarity with, and the hour or the day.

For allyship and accompliceship, I draw on definitions from Indigenous Action's work on indigenous activism, and their critique of exploitative and performative allyship from non-indigenous "allies" (2014). They argue that the term "allyship" has become ineffective, too often reduced to an identity label for the benefit of the ally alone, "disembodied from any real mutual understanding of support."

Ostensibly, an ally supports or stands by her partner. In practice, Indigenous Action argues this term has been rendered meaningless, by the self-serving entrepreneurship that has sprung up around allyship, the "ally industrial complex," and particularly notions and trends of saviorhood. Although Indigenous Action's perspective is US-based, the argument reflects discussions I heard throughout interviews and in numerous activist discussions over the past years in Beirut, particularly around NGOization. Indigenous Action writes:

> The ally industrial complex has been established by activists whose careers depend on the "issues" they work to address. These nonprofit capitalists advance their careers off the struggles they ostensibly support. They often work in the guise of "grassroots" or "community-based" and are not necessarily tied to any organization. They build organizational or individual capacity and power, establishing themselves comfortably among the top ranks in their hierarchy of oppression as they strive to become the ally "champions" of the most oppressed. While the exploitation of solidarity and support is nothing new, the commodification and exploitation of allyship is a growing trend in the activism industry. (2014)

Indigenous Action instead argues for accompliceship, drawing on the basic definition of an accomplice: "a person who helps another commit a crime." While an ally often provides only temporary support or solidarity, they argue, an accomplice fights alongside her comrade, although perhaps playing a different role: "When we fight back or forward, together, becoming complicit in a struggle towards liberation, we are accomplices." To be an accomplice, in other words, is to risk that you too will be targeted or criminalized, that you too transcend the boundaries of acceptability of mainstream society.

The lines of allyship and accompliceship are contextual, so we learn them intuitively based on the unspoken rules and associated risks of our own societies. I often think about the accomplice/ally divide from my own experience. In 2014, the Movement for Black Lives Matter gained energy across the US, after a grand jury "declined" to indict police officer Darren Wilson for shooting Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri that August. This came after the police murders of Akai Gurley and Tamir Rice within days of one other, and centuries of violence, death, and destruction of black, brown, and immigrant communities. The work of many activists of color made the injustice visible even to the collective consciousness of those who didn't live this daily violence, prompting searing questions about allyship and solidarity.

One night that November, I was at a protest with friends, part of an unpermitted march shutting down streets, highways, and tunnels leading into New York City. The same week, a

police car had driven at full speed at my friends and me in a different march, missing us only because we ran. That night, the cops cut off about 200 protestors from the larger march, trapping us at an entrance to the FDR highway. For the first time in hours, we were still. The cops brought buses with gridded windows, ready to arrest, to take some of us away. With most of us standing in the street, the police made an announcement. Although I can no longer remember the details, its message was: You are illegally blocking the road. In a few minutes, we will arrest anyone standing on the pavement. Disperse.

A friend in the protest, a white man, hesitated. He'd recently had surgery and was still recovering. He shook his head: "We need to get on the sidewalk." I argued back: if not our white bodies, whose? "The police could fuck up my shoulder if they put me in handcuffs. I'd have to do the surgery again." We argued about the importance of putting our bodies on the line, about individual safety, about the bigger picture. We had acted that day as if we were accomplices, but I knew in that moment we had been naïve. Accompliceship requires accepting the uncertainty that it could be you, your shoulder, your life.

As the cops yelled again, he stepped up, off the street. Our compromise, I stayed below.

This continues to be a familiar conversation, this weighing of risks, the necessary making of a safety plan. I have chosen to act in ways in other protests that avoid arrest: days before my own surgery, when with friends who are immigrants, when caretaking of others had to be prioritized, when my own identities were targeted and I looked to accompliceship from others, when detention would threaten my loved ones or work in ways that I could not gamble.

I do believe that accompliceship makes space for physical and mental health, for individual wellbeing. But that night, I am still ashamed I stood so close to the sidewalk.

Critiques of specific forms of solidarity reflect this condemnation of allyship. However, rarely are these discussions combined. What forms of solidarity does an accomplice practice? Are all forms of solidarity relative? What does it mean to take a backseat role in the immediate fight, a role that does not put yourself on the line as an accomplice, in order to prioritize longer-term goals? What does it mean to do so because of the risks you face? What does it mean to have the privilege to do so? Why do we think of solidarity as a state of being – rather than a tool?

4.4 Forms of Meaningful Solidarity

Through the course of my interviews, readings, and personal reflection, four types of meaningful solidarity became relevant to this discussion. With "meaningful," I refer to a full-throated solidarity, which moves beyond hacktivism or a solidarity of words alone (although words can also be one of the strongest forms of solidarity). Meaningful solidarity reaches firmly towards a goal of liberation, rather than fighting for a few rights here and there. There are already many discussions of feminist solidarity in academic circles, primarily focusing on defining feminist forms of solidarity, tackling the challenges of transnational feminist solidarity within examples such as BDS, or questioning the role of privilege in solidarity work. However, in discussion with those I interviewed, we raised questions about the essence of what solidarity *is*, and started to think of solidarity as a tool in itself.

I argue that solidarity is just as much a tactic or strategic choice as an identity or state of being, and that solidarity is most effective when it is knowingly employed as such, which requires that it be thoroughly deromanticized. Our common understandings of solidarity often ring hollow. To be blunt, what do idealized declarations of solidarity from afar – or up close – do to halt the abuse of migrant domestic workers in Beirut, Hong Kong, or Mexico City households; to stop the destruction of Palestinian villages, lives, and histories by Israeli soldiers with US weapons and training; to not only make black lives merely matter, but fundamentally abolish a system that enslaves, murders, and profits on their oppression? Yes, this performed solidarity has its role and value, and visible opposition to oppressive practices can be a key tool. However, the sentiment of solidarity more often does little, precisely because it professes to do so much. We must be more calculating.

Understandings of solidarity in sociology are often traced back to Emile Durkheim', and his distinction of mechanical versus organic solidarity, which he argues relate to the type of society in which solidarity is being examined. He understands solidarity to be a feeling of connectedness because of similarities in work, training, or upbringing, in the case of smaller-scale societies with "mechanical solidarity" (Durkheim, 1933). His analysis of organic solidarity, which he attributes to industrialized societies, understands solidarity as the workings of interdependence of more heterogeneous people and parts. In both cases, however, solidarity is

understood to be part of the fabric of social life and the processes that sustain existence, rather than an act or intentional tool.

Feminist analyses of solidarity have come a long way, breaking from Durkheim's approach to solidarity, which reduces "ties that bind" to identity categories. Sara Salem's analysis of Angela Davis' transnational feminist solidarity work in Egypt in the 1970s demonstrates this path. She writes that Davis, "focuse[d] on the shared experiences between Egyptian and African American women based on the ways in which white Western feminists have represented them. By pointing to this form of oppression, Davis is already preventing us from imagining that there is some type of automatic solidarity among women on the basis of womanhood" (Salem, 2018, p. 245). Davis' visit, Salem argues, moved thinking around solidarity away from a simplistic understanding of feminism, towards an intersectional, contextual approach that understands "we as women are dominated in a variety of different ways, but that at the global level it is the experience of capitalism—which is always gendered and racialized—that creates divisions among women" (p. 247). Her tracing of the histories of Egyptian feminisms is one of many examples of feminists building and breaking intentional relationships of solidarity as a weapon in their struggles for rights and recognition.

Solidarity can thus *both* be understood as organic feelings that bind us together, whether from shared identities, shared oppressions, or other factors, as well as intentionally-constructed relationships and deliberate acts of unity, support, and struggle. Although she is speaking mostly to the academy and in the context of transnationalism, Mohanty argues that feminist solidarity "focuses on mutuality and common interests across borders, on understanding the historical and experiential particularities and differences as well as the connections between women's lives around the world, and on the connection and division between forms of women's activism and organizing across racial, national, sexual borders" (2006, p. 17). We learn from Mohanty that efforts at erasure of difference cannot be part of true solidarity, but that organizing deliberately and reflectively across borders is a required part of the process –often difficult, unending, and messy. This point in particular was reflected throughout my interviews in Beirut.

We return to the four types of solidarity most relevant to the activist movements witnessed, supported, and discussed in this thesis: performative, embodied, practical, and networked. I argue that we cannot understand these on a spectrum, or as a series of steps in a hierarchy. These forms are overlapping modes that can be operated individually or collectively,

as one conducts an orchestra. We also switch between these forms, by choice, function, or force. If we understand these forms of solidarity as shifting tactics in service of a more encompassing strategy, we can see why employing different ones at different moments would be beneficial.

Performative solidarity is solidarity on display, the public announcement of unity, support, or accompliceship. While often critiqued as allyship or hacktivism, especially when solidarity is performed via social media, the publicizing of relationships of solidarity has a concrete function in making visible more widespread opposition to a damaging status quo, or to give attention to the other forms of solidarity. A key example would be statements signed by multiple individuals or groups not as affected by the act of oppression that is being protested, in order to elevate the issue publicly.

Embodied solidarity involves action that puts your body, wellbeing, or resources on the line. It is a solidarity that is lived, because the risks – while personal or collective – are imminent. It may be practiced via physical protest, the investment of contextually significant funds or other resources, or the lending of one's name to an event, petition, or act when there is risk of retribution against those responsible.

Practical solidarity is the provision of support in daily life, in practical, often small acts rather than statements or public protests. It might be providing childcare, resources, or transportation so others can protest, or providing accompaniment with a friend or comrade to their court hearing, a family obligation, or another event that might trigger trauma. As Mira Mawla defined it in our interview, practical solidarity means:

> Just doing things practically, without getting taken aback by the big, by big labels like the word solidarity. Or showing support without looking at the support as something that needs to be calculated in a certain way, that can only benefit people in this or that way. There are no rules, there are no standards. There's no standard for what it [solidarity] can be, to make a difference.

Networked solidarity is an interwoven set of actions or relationships, intentionally built in solidarity with an individual, group, or cause. It is often long-term, focused on continual relationships and networks that collectively take decisions to act in solidarity, or follow the calls of particular groups. It is an advanced form of solidarity in the sense that it requires the patient consolidation of relationships. It often depends on interpersonal relationships and painstakingly-built histories shared by comrades-in-arms, and must take into account the needs and perspectives of diverse actors.

It is essential to note that these forms are almost always overlapping and changing. Solidarity may be embodied and practical at the same time, such as going to pick up a friend detained at a checkpoint at personal risk; or networked and performative, such as the coordinated release of numerous public statements and media articles. We also may only have access to certain types of solidarity, based on our privileges, identities, and experiences of oppression – and even more materially the restrictions of our daily lives, such as work, children, costs of living, mobility, and health. In other words, not everyone can engage in every form of solidarity, and our access to these various forms is highly contextual.

At the same time, activist group and individuals often assume an implicit hierarchy to these forms. Embodied solidarity, because it often visibly involves risk to the physical body or reputation, can falsely be placed above the others. What results is a dismissal or devaluing of less visible forms, which can seem to pale in comparison as they remain unglamorous and unseen. If we embrace this hierarchy of visibility, it's easy to dismiss 95 percent of the work.

The last point to emphasize before returning to analysis of solidarity of feminist activism against gendered violence in Lebanon is the importance of feminist solidarity as a key tenet of alternative ways of living, in opposition to globalized and racialized capitalism, coloniality, and imperialism. Silvia Federici's (2008) work on witchcraft, women, and globalization cites solidarity as a fundamental component of the communalism almost wiped out by capitalized industrialization; the attack on communalism disproportionately targeted practical solidarity in daily life, largely led by women. She also attributes feminist solidarity as a main condition for success of liberation movements, such as the Zapatistas and the Landless Movement in Brazil. She writes that communalism is not in itself feminist, but:

> What is needed, instead, are new forms of communalism guaranteeing an egalitarian access to land and other communal resources, one in which women are not penalized if they do not have children, if the children they have are not male, if they are old and can no longer procreate, or are widowed and without male children coming to their defense. In other words, feminist movements, in and out of Africa, should not let the demise and/failure of a patriarchal form of communalism to be used to legitimize the privatization of communal resources. (Federici, 2008, n. 31)

In other words, feminist solidarity is essential to successful communalism, to the "fully egalitarian commons." And it is real and possible, as Federici argues, we have lived it past and present.

4.5 Preventative and Reactive Solidarity

Solidarity can also be understood via time and space, not just form. In our discussion, activist Elsa Saade, in reflection on her work in women's human rights defenders (WHRDs) networks, defines two phases of solidarity: preventative and reactive. The often normative model of solidarity, particularly within in a human rights framework, is reactive. In a common example, organizations put out statements in condemnation *after* an event occurs, a violation is revealed, or a policy is enacted. Other common forms of reactive solidarity include research reports, campaigns against a proposed law, appeals that the public can sign, protests, and providing legal support for people arrested.

Elsa points out that while these forms of solidarity can be of deep value, the field[29] must continue a newer trend of exploring preventative mechanisms, alongside or instead of reactive mechanisms. Prevention, Elsa argues, is specifically needed in environments where human rights defenders, individually and collectively, face physical risk. Preventative solidarity, in this context, means understanding each individual's risks to their work, how to minimize those risks, and what to do specifically if the worst happens. The responsibility becomes collective: Each person has to do their own risk assessment, but the group has to understand each others' risks and strategy, so that: "We can help each other. We can send each other material. We can talk to each other's…governments or lobbyists or advocates around the word, preparing for if anything happens, or trying to prepare for something not to happen."

For example, a former colleague of Elsa's who worked supporting human rights defenders in the Gulf region, briefed her team about her risk assessment and plan of action before a trip to Bahrain, where she expected to be jailed. Sharing information allowed her team to prepare, to be ready, and to think through together and minimize negative impact. It also decreased the stress on Elsa's colleague as an individual, allowing others to hold some of the stress and anxiety, and letting the woman know she was not alone in responding to potential violence.

Preventative solidarity can also come in the forms of capacity building, to benefit the individual and collective. Elsa gives the example of digital security. If a human rights defender

[29] While Elsa's examples primarily relate to the regional-level actions of women human rights defenders (WHRDs), we discussed applications to local feminist work and both believe it applies to the framework of activism under discussion in this paper.

in Elsa's network were to be arrested, and the authorities take her unencrypted phone, they would have access to images and contacts of all the other WHRDs in the network, putting their individual and collective safety at risk. Elsa argues that preventative solidarity would mean providing the network with capacity building on digital security, including instruction on installing secure passwords, encryption, the ability to wipe data from a phone remotely, and an emergency notification system. In Elsa's words, "It's so important that…we understand if anything would happen, what to do, and how to create a space for that [risk] not to happen."

Preventative solidarity is deeply linked with networked solidarity, as prevention requires building and strengthening webs of connection that both rely on relationships between individuals, and must transcend them to prioritize the collective. Because of the risks, physical and emotional, Elsa reflects that "the person [representing a particular group] you speak to now…is not necessarily going to be there a year later." Reflecting on themes from across interviews, it is clear that networks of solidarity all too often rely on individual relationships. Elsa argues that to sustain themselves, networks must also have an underlying web of support to replace individual people, when and whether they willingly leave or are forced out of movements, by internal or external factors. Community organizing, networked solidarity, and many other forms of activist work rely on the intentional building and maintenance of personal relationships – but if these personal connections and friendship do not become signifiers for powerful collective relationships, then the work mirrors the success and longevity of the personal relationships alone.

That said, personal connection is often the motivating factor for people to enter a space or group; motivation often stems from feeling that you or your loved ones are affected, or simply from connection to other people. Solidarity, of whatever form, thus can never be understood as *only* a tactic or a tool. It is a facet of community building. Solidarity may be expressed with people you will never meet – especially in terms of reactive and performative solidarities – but deep solidarity builds on feelings of community, home, and belonging. [reference Cynthia] These bonds are essential, but they are not the same as solidarity itself, nor do they automatically imply that solidarity is present.

In the case of feminist communities in Beirut and beyond, networked solidarity may be expressed in the form of a coalition, as in the case of the 2017 iteration of the Feminist Bloc. Many previous feminist coalitions had been formed and unformed, including Nasawiya,

discussed in the previous chapter, and the Feminist Bloc that came within and out of the 2015 You Stink campaign. Similarly, the 2017 Feminist Bloc aimed to bring into deeper conversation and solidarity a dozen or more feminist groups, collectives, and organizations. It involved student clubs, grassroots NGOs, feminist collectives, and informal groups, and made space for some individual voices. It has continued since, expanding and contracting.

Reflecting on her experience with the Bloc as an individual and representative of one of the participating groups, Mira said, "For the most part, it's collectives, groups of people, each with their own sort of approach and aim. And Feminist Bloc became a platform for them to come together; to be in solidarity with one another, when needed; to share events, updates, and opportunities for collaboration; to be a network that supports one another, because a lot of those initiatives were not visible. And they needed to be." Mira emphasizes the myriad ways that smaller collectives can enhance their work, when functioning within this structure of practical and networked solidarity; it changes the thinking of what a few individuals can do, when they know there is a larger platform for amplification, or group of accomplices when they face risk. The Bloc functions as a structure for both preventative and reactive solidarity; part of prevention requires having the networks and pathways in place, for when – not should – reaction becomes necessary.

With the Bloc, we also return to the importance of visibility: networked solidarity both provides opportunities for greater visibility when beneficial, and protection from negative visibility by shielding more vulnerable groups within the whole. The coalescing of groups allows, as Mira points out, for a mechanism to establish visibility of individual groups' needs or crises, under a broader umbrella that can offer strength in numbers. In this way, signing a statement can be a form of solidarity that moves beyond performative solidarity to the practical, as it could actually provide physical protection. The presence of more signatures can dilute the risk for the most targeted.

The most outwardly visible effort of the Bloc has been the coordination of annual marches on International Women's Day since 2017, with different groups in the collective playing various levels of coordination each year. Messages for the march have consistently been intersectional, with statements inclusive of LGBTQ communities, migrant domestic workers and migrant workers, and refugees. The 2019 march was visibly led by trans women, with migrant workers also highly visible. Although the march is only one of many functions of the Bloc, the

type of solidarity it strives for is deep and intersectional, manifesting in performance, practical support, embodiment, and networks.

But, as Mira points out, the Bloc does not embrace the "classic definition" of a bloc. It does not endeavor to enforce a singular view, or represent one perspective. Rather, "it's a place for people to plan, to strategize, to share…to sort of check into a suite of even like, privileges and spaces and, and, and things that make an organization and the individuals in it feel safe and grounded." In other words, the purposes of the Bloc are not only external, or networked-based, for preventative and reactive action. It cannot even be understood only as a place for individual groups or people to grow and benefit from the collective; it also has an explicit goal of providing and sharing resources that fit groups' more basic needs.

The goal of RootsLab was similar: To create a space and welcome people into it, where people could intentionally work on different projects, so that they could learn from one another. In addition, the program coordinator said, while most networks and spaces bring together grantees who look like each other, RootsLab pushed against that to connect people from different places, backgrounds, and positionalities. The first day, she said, there was a moment of everyone realizing: "Oh, nobody looks like us." That was the first step towards creating solidarity based on other aspects of identity, shared work, or shared goals and principles.

Neither initiative nor community promises safe space. However, in aiming to provide opportunity for depth and connection, both the Feminist Bloc and RootsLab craft boundaries that protect and grow what happens within. Similarly, Dammeh Cooperative and other groups have set membership practices, limitations, and requirements in order to create safe space for Arab and migrant feminists, discussed in several interviews. Exclusion becomes necessary for inclusion. But other feminist initiatives – whether through rhetoric, membership, or action – often implicitly and explicitly set boundaries that limit participation by class, race, and other privileges, in ways that are not safe and push the unusual suspects out. The Feminist Bloc and RootsLab aim to do things differently.

4.6 Hidden Solidarities and Fragility

Since performative solidarity is much easier to identify, and often much closer to the common definitions of solidary, I want to focus on the three other forms.

For Mira's experience in the Feminist Network, particularly in 2017 and 2018, solidarity emerged in the form of "practical solidarity," an intimacy rarely visible to folks outside the group. Mira didn't remember who said the term first. It was "intuitive" to approach challenges and conversations in that way, for the Feminist Network. She said:

> We not coined, but like really digested the term 'practical solidarity,'" in the sense of support for individuals of the collective, a disregard for public acknowledgement, and an attention to the small. In the beginning, that took the form of regular meetings to discuss experiences of sexual harassment and ways to fight back, cope, or intervene. However, it soon branched out to discussions of other topics, participation within broader feminist networks like the block, individual actions of support, and some public events.

This was only made possible by the interpersonal relationships, simultaneously of friendship, mutual learning, and safety. Practical solidarity manifested in examples that might not be counted as solidarity on a larger scale. Mira cites the experience of two members going to pick up a third from the airport, after she returned from a difficult visit to family, and of the time we drove to Tripoli, to accompany a woman we did not know to her court. We discussed staying on call for one another, after or during incidents of harassment. Practical solidarity moves beyond the explicit work of the network as well, such as volunteering time and labor to one another, whether the need was related to the collective's aims or not. Acts of solidarity are rarely singular, they may be tied to an event or moment, but are still part of a collective or ongoing process.

Mira acknowledges that the collective did not fully grow into the broader network of practical solidarity that she envisioned over the last few years, but the possibilities continue, and are in no way limited to the Feminist Network. She wants to network forms of practical solidarity, and see the model grow and replicate, whether under a formal structure or not:

> People who are there for support…not only people, a hotline I can call for support, for real, real support for everyday mundane shit…There's no way I'm not going to want that. There's no way I'm not going to be part of a huge snowball effect as a result. There's no way if someone does that for me, I'm not going to see the value in it. Or if I see that there's a bunch of women working really hard to make an effort just for women to have a space to talk, there's no way I'm not going to take advantage of that space… And [then we start] working off of that, and growing networks like that.

For Mira, the experience of the Feminist Network, the ups and downs, are part of the process as well. She does not consider it a failure that the network did not scale, or yet reach this vision. All the effort on the way, all the starting and stopping, success and failure, and landing in the gray

areas in between, matter. Simply struggling to form these networks, perhaps, is a part of the process of solidarity, too. This work is part of the hidden process of creating solidarity.

As a younger feminist, discovering herself and first entering feminist spaces in Beirut , Sous spoke about the pain and shock of realizing that "a meeting sort of falls apart because someone doesn't like someone or they're all these like, internal personal frictions that you have no idea how they function." She saw that maintaining relationships of solidarity was constant work, precisely because of all these shifting interpersonal dynamics, primarily between people doing incredible amounts of unpaid and underpaid labor. "It's very difficult to keep up," Sous says about the personal, but it's also true for the collective.

The interpersonal relationships, the pain of solidarity, and the constant teetering on the edge of burnout, fosters an element of fragility in many feminist spaces also. As Sous discussed, building solidarity and community does not necessarily come easily or naturally. In reflecting on these feminist spaces, she described tensions that undercut both explicit and implicit efforts at solidarity:

> I would say that it's [feminist communities] a very, very ambivalent space…That's only my experience, obviously, but it really fluctuates between moments of beautiful, genuine-seeming solidarity and just feeling that you really belong to a community and just a sense of home. And on the other hand, really, really deeply-rooted, toxic, alienating practices that sort of creep up on you and these in-group/out-group divisions.

Here, Sous refers to the almost impossible expectation of feminist spaces: that they simultaneously provide solidarity, friendship, community, home, and a place to enact change or resistance. Reflecting on my own experiences through her analysis, I question with Sous just how many needs one space or group can fill. Is it possible to split our energies equally between internal community-building and external action? When most grassroots feminist groups and spaces are incredibly under-resourced, and the biggest resource is people's limited time, how can we possible expect to successfully play all these roles? Is this impossible expectation one of the biggest fragilities of all?

4.7 The Myth of Solidarity: It's Ours, and Ours Alone

In order to better practice solidarity, to learn from these examples, we must interrogate two additional underlying myths in our understandings of solidarity:

1. We often assume it to be *ours*, the property and the tool of activists and/or those in opposition to the status quo.
2. We primarily refer to solidarity as a positive force, for those in the opposition, and give little thought to how it can be used by and for those maintaining the status quo.

Solidarity is often claimed both by grassroots activists and those working in NGOized spaces; it cuts across class and forms of organization. It can be practiced on an interpersonal level with mutual aid and support, between groups and collectives around intersectional struggles, and within regional networks, such as examples shared in the previous section. However, as Elsa brings up, solidarity is not exclusive to activists, people in the opposition, progressives, or radicals. Solidarity is frequently and continually practiced by governments, businesses, and the local and global elite. Governments stand in solidarity with one another, or with other power actors, to control, to collect data on citizens, residents, and refugees, and to maintain border security, among many other objectives. Feminist and other activists are not only building alliances to oppose state and other patriarchal forces, but to oppose the deep networks of solidarity – money, information, control of resources – that these forces have built to maintain themselves.

Reflecting on her experiences working with WHRDs across the region, Elsa describes the relationship between these networks of solidarity:

> Governments have the money and have the resources and they're already in international solidarity, in a sense, or regional solidarity. They can…make laws and [say], 'Okay, this happened before, we should make sure it doesn't happen again. Let's put this person in jail. Let's shut down this app'…to just mitigate the risks of us resisting again. We don't have the resources. We're already burnt out. We have so many things that we have to deal with. The money that we need to actually do that is null basically, minus the organizational funding that we get sometimes. We are just taken with day-to-day routines and day-to-day life and getting money in the end, food on the table, that we don't necessarily have that same fast pace. So they kind of get way ahead of us, you know?

A clear example of this form of inter-government solidarity is the relationships formed, funding given, and promises made based on securitization and migration control. European governments, in an effort to keep the refugee crisis off their shores, invest figuratively and literally in securitization infrastructures and polices in countries of transit in the Mediterranean. Lebanon hosts approximately 1.5 million registered Syrian refugees, 18,500 refugees from Ethiopia, Iraq, Sudan, and beyond, and more than 200,000 Palestinian refugees (UNHCR, 2019). Policies

affecting millions of people are swiftly made and executed behind closed doors, because of these existing networks.

In referring to solidarity between governments, I in no way intend to erase histories of colonialism, the present of ongoing coloniality and imperialism that underlie these relationships. Solidarity can walk a fine line with coercion. Allies rarely have equal power distribution between then, and certainly do not have to be friends. Rather, I aim to bring to light that the current geopolitical system is built upon networked government actors, who collaborate to share information, resources (albeit within coercive relationships), and plans at the expense of their citizens and residents. A similar examination of Lebanese political parties would also reveal shifting and calculated networks of solidarity, evident in statements, voting blocs, and action.

Networked solidarity serves as a tool for NGOized coalitions, but is not limited to positive interventions. In analyzing Lebanon's civil society, Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi, Léa Yammine, and Amreesha Jagarnathsingh (2013) recount the history of coordination mechanisms between CSOs in Lebanon since the civil war, including the National Forum for Social Development (NFSD), the Lebanese NGO Forum (LNF), and le Collectif, "the latter two also described as 'silent and neutral' state partners (Karam, 2006:72)". The focus is not on feminist groups, but on civil society more broadly, and the challenges are similar. They write:

> Against the rather grim background of an increasingly shrinking operational space, horizontal solidarity networks among actors could appear to be a recourse for CSOs…The post-war period saw a rise in small associations networks and "civil movements" focusing notably on advocacy, and characterised by a relative homogeneity of their base. While these contributed to expanding the public space during this period, their impact on the political space remained limited. (2013, p. 5)

Elsa's warning thus translates to more traditional civil society. Even today, donors fund coordination mechanisms between NGOs, which are often conflated as solidarity in practice. However, these networks rarely challenge to the status quo, as the funding goes toward promoting existing frameworks of NGOs focused on social services, rather than political change. In my personal experience, the more radical opinions get drowned out or voted down.

The interwoven networks of solidarity – grassroots, government, and beyond – can be visualized (and romanticized) in this way: An ever-expanding and contracting chain of tiny, grassroots networks, surrounded or passing through a thousand larger chains, reinforced by money, resources, and political power. Both chains are constantly weakening and reforming, a

link breaking and another metal put in its place. To add to Elsa's analysis: These chains can easily interlink. A link can be connected to multiple allies. Alliances can be feminist, radical, and oppositional – or alliances can be formed across lines, for personal or collective gain, as in AbiYaghi's example of CSO's "silent" networks with state actors. These pressure points, at the break in the individual link, are gold.

Solidarity moves between individuals and between and within groups, both organically and strategically. More traditional women's rights groups in Lebanon, such as the Lebanese Democratic Women's Gathering (RDFL), engage in classic alliance-building with the state, in pursuit of goals such as a women's quota in Parliament. This approach was dismissed by many of the people I interviewed.. It is unclear, also, how much these partnerships state-CSO partnerships produce concrete change for anyone besides upper-class women. Representation in parliament, which has yet to be achieved even in the most minimal way, primarily targets the involvement of elites. Without partnership with other groups and collectives a bit closer to the needs of poor, working, and middle class women, it risks falling short.

These alliances with the state can also recreate rigid boundaries with other feminist or women's rights groups. Groups allied with a state structure, for fear of risking their credibility and legibility with the state's more conservative actors, adopt narrower understanding of gender and gender equity. In planning for the 2018 women's day march, for example, several women's rights organizations rejected unified statements that included trans rights and LGBTQ representation.[30] This is no surprise, considering the impact of identity politics and stark divides along lines of generation and inclusion, but still speaks to the consequences of solidarity and alliance with "friendly" government actors or other institutions.

Thus, the work of solidarity also requires the undoing of structural norms and hierarchies within our own spaces. In defining her particular form of activist work, Sarah Kaddoura said:

> I'm definitely working against the current system of patriarchy and capitalist patriarchy in particular, and also kind of against misogyny and sexism within…activist circles, leftist circles…that emerge in response to certain issues. So it's not just against the system that is already in place, it's also against the groups that are supposedly progressive but still perpetuate…misogynist ideas.

Sarah returned to her example of leftist male activists and supposed allies, who claim feminism, but still discount women's and non-binary people's experiences of sexual harassment or rape.

[30] Personal observation.

This also speaks to the previous discussion, of alliances across political borders, when they threaten the ability of activists to hold onto their foundational values, or when those values are willingly compromised.

At the same time, other groups have partnered with institutions to train them and build up their capacity to be better allies, without risking their own politics. This can be seen in the example of HarassTracker's offers to train bar and restaurant staff on harassment, after incidents of assault were publicized online. Student clubs, who may oppose some policies of the university administration, form alliances to maintain basic protections (as discussed by Patrick in the previous chapter), but also to influence the university's own internal politics and actions. The critique of this practice is often a healthy one; constant questioning is a requirement of deep feminist practice.

Elsa's critique reminds us that we much push back against the romanticization of solidarity. If isolated to singular, idealized acts, the impact of solidarity often fades. Or, to put it less harshly, the value of solidarity can be compounded *when* it is linked to or performed in the context of networks and long-term collaboration. For example, if not connected to larger work to undermine the kafala system, the effect of Lebanese people joining a march for migrant domestic workers' rights easily dissipates. But, if this is part of a long-term movement, a visible act of solidarity can work in concert with the behind-the-scenes work. In other words, if our performative acts are incorporated into long-term efforts that include networked, embodied, and practical solidarity, then we might just have a fighting chance.

4.8 Growing Into Solidarity

As individuals and collectives, we grow into solidarity.

Solidarity is not a constant state. As much as it can be a tool when examined strategically, it is also a series of acts and positions that are ever-evolving. Sara did not always exist as the activist smuggling phones. Mirvat's experience helps us understand the move[31] into solidarity

[31] I intentionally do not use the word progress. I want to avoid teleological concepts of linear development and to emphasize that solidarity may be moved into and out of, that types of solidarity may shift, and this reflects circumstance and need just as much as growth. Stepping back may be the most significant action possible.

work, from a service-oriented position into thinking about networked, embodied solidarity, and the ebbs and flows in between.

Mirvat (pseudonym) grew up in an upper-middle-class Lebanese family. Much of her childhood was spent in Nigeria, where her immediate family had relocated for her father's work, which she says exposed her both to individualistic and communal ways of being. While anchored to Lebanon, she also spent much of her twenties abroad, in the US and Canada, for education and work, before returning to Beirut in her late twenties.

For the past ten years, Mirvat has been working around issues of migrant domestic worker rights, and migration more broadly, in many forms. While much of this work could be understood as solidarity, Mirvat does not identify publicly as an activist, and rarely uses that word privately. She instead speaks about herself as a feminist, a researcher, a teacher. In the context of activism in Beirut and the pressures of visibility discussed in the previous chapter, it makes sense she would not define herself as an activist. There is little space for her work to be seen as "pure" or "direct" activism since it is not visible, which as previously discussed, dominates public discourse and considerations of activist work.

And at the beginning, she was not at all an activist, in multiple senses of the word. Her first experiences with migrant domestic workers were with the women who worked and lived with her immediate and extended family. When she moved back to Lebanon, she found her interest in working with migrant domestic workers because of her own personal experiences of migration, and because she wanted to teach English. Only later, when she became more involved in feminist communities and activist groups, and gained experience with migrant communities, did her motivation change to a more politicized perspective.

During one summer back in Beirut in the early 2010s, Mirvat saw an application to teach English with the Migrant Workers Task Force (MWTF), which defined itself as "a grassroots volunteer organization that leads initiatives for better treatment and social advancement of the migrant worker community in Lebanon. MWTF aims to provide a space for Lebanon's migrant worker communities to develop professionally through grassroots-led initiatives and in collaboration with various organizations focused on migrant worker issues" ("About Us | Migrant Workers Task Force (MWTF)," n.d.). MWTF volunteers taught English, computer, and other classes for migrant workers in Hamra, and later at the Anti-Racism Movement's first Migrant Community Center in Nabaa. Mirvat applied, and was selected. She was aware of the

abuses of the kafala system, and conscious about the rights of migrants, particularly migrant women, but her main motivation was the chance to teach. She said this also reflected the ethos of MWTF as a larger group: "There was a feeling of non-politicization. It's more, it felt more service-oriented. And at the time I was more service-focused."

One of the main founders of the MWTF was a Swedish woman, and many of the volunteer coordinators and teachers were also non-Lebanese and Western, in Beirut temporarily, according to Mirvat's characterization. Mirvat struggled with the complications of working on migrant rights in Lebanon in partnership with Americans and Europeans who (falsely) saw themselves as divorced from the underlying cause of kafala, supposedly not complicit in maintenance of kafala in the same way as Lebanese. Mirvat said, "There would be sometimes decisions, perceptions of 'we know better than you, because we don't have a, we're not part of this system' [even though they were] …that's what happens when you have [foreign] people coming in and being like, 'I'm interested. I'm curious.'" This approach, as Mirvat and I discussed, naturally led to a form of depoliticization.

Acts of solidarity, particularly practical solidarity, Mirvat serve or provide resources, but solidarity itself is not charity or service. When enacted between those with different relationships to and possessions of power, acts and relationships of solidarity have the potential to intentionally instrumentalize that power. If people with privilege deny the ways in which they benefit from an oppressive system, their attempts to act in solidarity can easily fall short. "MWTF was there to initiate," Mirvat said. "It was not there to stay."

In those moments, Mirvat felt like both a Lebanese woman and a foreigner, returned from abroad but also *of* this place, of these systems. She slowly became aware that her motivations for joining MWTF were changing, that the goals of gaining teaching experience and simultaneously "helping" in a broad sense were diminishing. In its place, she became more away of the struggle of migrant domestic workers and her place in both the systems maintaining kafala and other types of oppression, and those forces acting in opposition. She credits part of this to her involvement with the Anti-Racism Movement, which was led by Lebanese activists in collaboration with migrant workers, and held an explicitly politicized position. Mirvat was one of only two MWTF volunteers who offered to go teach classes at ARM's Migrant Community Center in Nabaa, when the opportunity arose. The rest of MWTF opted to stay in Hamra, where they had already been teaching classes and which was a more convenient and central location in

the city for many. This brought her closer to ARM's work and eventually, she took action to move the classes fully under ARM's scope and responsibility, instead of under MWTF's name.

This act was not apolitical. For Mirvat – an introvert, a teacher, someone who at the time looked to others to make decisions – it also was not a small decision, either. MWTF leadership expected Mirvat to take over coordination of their group and maybe even register it as an NGO, similar to ARM. While Mirvat did not bring this up in our interview, this expectation is tied up in understandings of belonging, foreignness, and identity politics. Foreigners cannot legally establish an association in Lebanon, so Mirvat's identity as Lebanese had explicit value. However, Mirvat chose to move in the opposite direction. Rather than take a coordinating and professional position, with a service-focused group, she remained out of the spotlight and focused on a networked form of solidarity, although she did not explicitly identify her choices in this way. Mirvat continued her volunteer teaching, moved the classes to ARM, and convinced another person to take up coordination of the Nabaa MCC, a job with ARM that she had also been offered.

Mirvat did not take the opportunity of an NGOized job, even though she had already been doing much of the work. "I could have, when it started and became a job, I could have gone and said 'yes, I'm going to take it [the coordination role].' But I felt like new blood needed to be there, not just me. And I've been doing it for way too long. And I'm burnt out. and I didn't have much faith in helping, people helping me and me helping others." She explicitly moved away from a perspective of charity and service. Instead of burning out on this track completely, she shifted both herself and the work to a more politicized place, and remained invested, in a different capacity.

Mirvat has stayed involved over the last ten years in the broader struggle of migrant rights, working for the Institute for Migration Studies at LAU, serving on ARM's board, and returning to teaching at several MCCs, both as a volunteer and staff. She is a steady presence, if not often visible. She has identified the roles that she wants to play, and the places she wants to support. Even if her teaching work is not *explicitly* political, she chooses to do it in a place that is explicitly politicized. In the more than three years we have known each other, she had never once talked about the roles she played with MWTF, about building up the education initiatives with ARM, about connecting all these different nodes in the network – she simply performed the role that she has assigned herself. She has thought deeply about power, identity, privilege, and

leadership, and where she wants to fit, and she has acted, silently but accordingly. She has struggled with belonging, both in regards to this work and involvement in other feminist collectives, but she has ultimately continued to invest and engage.

In reflecting on the tensions of leadership and approach at MWTF, Mirvat asked: "What does it mean to lead? What does it mean to follow? What does it mean to be an active participant in a community or an organization where you want to decentralize things like that [power structures]?" In solidarity work, particularly its complicated, networked, embodied forms, all of these answers are contextual.

These questions that Mirvat reflected upon, from the struggles she described in 2011 and 2012, never lost relevance. Current feminist activism and solidarity work in and beyond Beirut includes waves of collective and individual burnout; tensions around identity politics and questions of who should stay, leave, and do the work; questions of what the work should be. These questions also flow across protest movements. For example, Mirvat was present at the 2012 hunger strike of Sudanese refugees, protesting the UNHCR's treatment of African refugees, along with other ARM and MWTF volunteers, to support the protestors. Similar protests by African refugees and asylum seekers have repeated, in 2015 and now 2019-20, and will likely continue. At the time, Mirvat said, she and other Lebanese activists were confused, trying to support as best they could. This meant getting a volunteer doctor to see sick protestors, trying to elevate the demands publicly, and being present in embodied solidarity. They did this work, explicitly with a non-institutionalized framework, and experimented with trial and error. No single act changed the direction of the protests, but maybe, with time, they will accumulate.

Mirvat grew slowly into active, if hidden, solidarity. It took direct experience, pain, mistakes, and time. It took learning from community, in good and bad ways, and that education is ongoing. Mirvat shifts constantly between forms of solidarity, and various levels of capacity, based on her analysis of her own role, and daily life as it inhibits or supports her actions.

4.9 Complicity

Merriam-Webster defines complicity as "association or participation in or as if in a wrongful act." The "as if" is noteworthy; participation can be perceived, not actual, for the individual or community to be complicit. Standard definitions often frame our moral and legal

spectrums of right and wrong, a point for questioning since laws tend to be set by state systems, often opposed to dissent. For the purposes of this research, I understand complicity to be words, action, silence, and inaction that supports the state, social, political, and economic forces activists are struggling against. Questions of solidarity go hand in hand with complicity.

We return once more to the courtroom in Tripoli. That day, Mira and I tried to serve as a potential buffer between Marie and the supporters of the man who attacked and raped her. Our intention was, in a small, simple way, to disrupt at least one more episode of masculine violence, masculine space, and masculine control. But we also found ourselves – and knowingly placed ourselves, even if only symbolically – in support of a very traditional form of justice. In seeking retribution for a violent act, we simultaneously risked reinforcing the ways in which hypermasculine, punitive authority is held and dispensed. Our solidarity also lay adjacent to social value along lines of nationality and class. In this case, with these considerations of identity and white female victimhood, the Lebanese state had a vested interest in visibly demonstrating its access to a liberal, judicial form of justice. We became part of that.

Justice for the Marie may have looked like accountability, and in that place and time, this could only be provided by the state mechanism. However, Mohanty pushes us to question: where does this fit in with broader fights for women's rights, antidotes to gendered violence, and class struggle? Do we want people to go to prison? What does justice after really sexual assault look like?

These dilemmas are not theoretical. Punitive punishment, or the threat symbolized by the court or the police, is one of the only socially- and state-sanctioned mechanisms to access "justice." It is, to no surprise, incredibly elusive when directed at violence targeting women, particularly outside of traditional victim-perpetrator frameworks that emphasize female purity and need for male protection. The lack of tools, and the rarity that even these tools work, mean there is little space for ideological purity.

In reflecting on that day, Mira argues that the scarcity of "justice" is easily traced back to representation and access to power and decision making:

> It's like representation 101. I need to have someone similar to me there [in positions of power] to be able to get my voice there *kaman* in the right way. Or feel like there's going to be structure behind the things that are being implemented. And yes, of course, it's corrupt, but at least you'll have something. That's what we always go back to. When we talk about sexual harassment and violence…if there's no institutional thing that's going to come and tell me, I can put this person in jail, [what do I do?]. I hate the idea of jail, but

> that's what I need. That's what I need right now for the people are violent towards us, you know?

Feminist activists cannot often afford the purity of ideological convictions of disruption and reproduction, but instead have to act with full knowledge of their role and its implications. Mira added, "I have to speak that language temporarily, to be able to get to a place where I can feel safe…I'm complacent to the structures that are in place and have been in place. They've been in place way too long for me to think that anyone from my positionality right now is going to come out and change them." Needing to speak the language allows for access, occasionally, to at least some form of justice. To adhere to more rigid standards of purity would deny us even that. However, we can simultaneously critique our concessions around the use dominant language or support for status quo punitive institutions, for short-term access to justice. These discussions are part of the larger struggle for rights to representation, decision making, and access to power.

The complicated result is that complicity and solidarity can occur simultaneously. The intention of struggling for basic rights does not negate the impacts of individual actions or tactics. Much of this complicity is to be expected; sometimes, the master's tools are all that is available, or the most effective for the moment, even if they won't eventually dismantle the master's house. There is a difference, however, between playing the game to achieve certain gains while sacrificing others, and other forms of complicity.

For example, Sara, the Ethiopian activist with This Is Lebanon, deeply criticized the complicity of many Lebanese lawyers, social workers and NGO staff, journalists, and other potential allies. In particular, she calls out the way that many profess their support for migrant workers' rights, but refuse to move beyond a charity framework, or to take action that would tarnish the reputation of another Lebanese person in their community.

The majority of NGOs with projects or resources focused on migrant workers are service-based. Along with primary healthcare centers, other medical and mental health NGOs, and a "second shift" education system, they recreate what Talah Hassan and I (2019) argue is a parallel system of care and rights. This parallel system is, by definition, inferior to the resources available to middle- and upper-class Lebanese in that it lacks choice, tertiary healthcare, and ability to provide care for chronic conditions.

As Sara framed it, helping is not at all the same as change. She gave the example of KAFA, which offers shelter, legal services, repatriation support, and social work support to

migrant domestic workers who have suffered direct, physical violence by their employers, as well as women survivors of domestic violence of any nationality. Sara points out that their criteria for providing support is extremely narrow. Neither she nor I criticize this criteria its core, as we know it is the result of working with limited resources. However, Sara does take issue with their unwillingness to take action to avoid repetition of the same violence:

> Sometimes even when [a migrant domestic worker seeking help has met the] criteria, they [KAFA] don't agree to expose the abuser…I see them like they don't want to see the change. They just want to help. Anyone can help. I can help another person, as well. No big deal to keep someone in my house and to take them like Shatila,[32] cheap places, for free medication and a free psychiatrist. It doesn't mean that's help, as I see it… Negotiating with your rapist or abuser, and then send you home, it doesn't make it better because that person has nothing to lose like, he will bring someone [another migrant worker] and nothing happen[s to the employer].

Sara brought up the example of KAFA because they are relatively more supportive than other NGOs in her experience, willing to offer much-needed support. However, Sara believes a different approach is needed: to guarantee that the employer will never bring or employ another migrant domestic worker, and expose another woman to that same abuse. That, she said, is "the help we need," not the help that people want to provide.

Service provision walks a fine line between addressing real needs and complicity with the status quo. People have deep needs for basic resources, medical access, financial support, and legal services. At the same time, if these needs are addressed one by one, without political attention to the implications for the collective, for the role of the system, then acts of service do little to challenge the underlying framework of injustice.

The complicity of reformism also extends into the legal system, manifested by the lawyers with whom Sara has collaborated, or approached.

> If it's the biggest case," she said, referring to major and public cases of abuse, like Lensa Lelisa, "The biggest challenge is the lawyers. Most lawyers like they are really afraid of *amen l 3am* [Lebanese General Security], and afraid of like losing their license. Few activists lawyers are willing to do the case...[where] they take it to court and [at] the same times we exposed this guy. Yeah so most of them they doesn't want to do that…maybe they're proud Lebanese.

[32] Here, Sara refers to the health clinic run by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Shatila, a refugee camp. It is common practice for NGOs and community groups to send migrant women there for free treatment, particularly when they are pregnant because of the clinic's focus on pre-natal and post-natal services, birth support, and "family planning."

Sara here refers to lawyers' unwillingness to take cases in the public eye, or to collaborate with This is Lebanon to expose people outside of a court process, because of the risks to reputation, as discussed in the first chapter. However, it also involves an avoidance of risk, and thus avoidance of embodied solidarity.

Part of TIL's and migrant activists' work of shaming is thus focused on the very institutions and groups that are supposed to help migrant workers confront and escape abuse and achieve justice. Sara references the case of a Nepali woman who was owed $10,000 by a Lebanese employer. The case was referred to Caritas, a Lebanese branch of an international NGO. Sara charges that Caritas tried to cover up the abuse, and would have stopped pressuring the Lebanese employer until TIL in turn pressured Caritas to continue the case.

Similar to the multiple forms of solidarity, complicity also manifests in different ways, at different levels. It can appear in small, interpersonal moments – such as power dynamics within activist groups – as well as intentional, visible acts. Complicity can appear as silence and exclusion; for example, a women's rights event that excludes trans people, refugees, migrant women, and sex workers. It can offer direct support for traditional authority, such as the punitive justice system. It can be inaction, like lawyers refusing to take on prominent figures accused of abuse of migrant workers or sexual assault and harassment, or a blatant cover-up by an NGO. It can be working with a university administration and lending them credibility, in direct exchange for needed protection. Acts of solidarity can also be complicity; the means to the end are not sacred.

4.10 Conclusion: Crisis and Care

There is a strong difference between solidarity work in times of (publicly-recognized) emergency and the general status quo, which clearly encompasses thousands of individual and collective emergencies, largely unacknowledged in the mainstream and rarely defined as such. In reflecting on times of crisis, we can clearly see the role of care and community in acts of solidarity.

Nadine Naber and Zeina Zaatari's work on LGBTQ and feminist activism in the context of the 2006 Israeli war of Lebanon provides a key example of this distinction, as well as context for the networks and forms of solidarity operating in Beirut feminist communities today.

Regarding 2006, Naber and Zaatari define a "distinct feminist and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) social movement that worked to respond to and resist the US-backed Israeli invasion," both in the form of concrete and material aid and in a broader discourse of resistance, to both global forces and local forms of oppression (2014, p. 91). Through their work, we see that publicly-recognized emergency not only invites state-led protocols, limitations, and opportunities, but also new or exceptional ways of working by activists. They write:

> We can understand many aspects of these activists' work as constituting a feminist and LGBTQ critique of imperialism and the way imperialism, nationalism, and sectarianism take on local form in Lebanon. Their anti-imperialist work is intersectional and transnational, building solidarity and bridges across worlds and continents and insisting on the relevance of sexuality and patriarchy to this work. These activists were calling for the need for safe streets and a safe society, a society that fights or criminalizes sexual abuse, criminalizes domestic violence and sexual harassment, and disentangles marriage ideals and practices, while linking these to other issues such as socioeconomic class injustices, war, sexuality, religion, and regional matters, such as Palestine, the status of refugees in Lebanon, and racism against migrant workers whether from other Arab countries, East Asia, or Africa…Indeed, throughout the period of the 2006 invasion and its aftermath, these activists were involved in what many other Lebanese were doing—saving lives, rebuilding homes, and participating in leftist anti-imperialist movements. Yet they were also redefining concepts of gender and family beyond ideals of biological kinship while bringing the problems of sexual violence and the safety of women and queers into the same frame as responses to war. (Naber & Zaatari, 2014, p. 106)

In their efforts to redefine care, family, and community, they were also pushing against toxic structures of help and victimhood. NGOs were not the vehicle, donors were not the source of funds. This is not to romanticize more grassroots work, but to highlight that even in environments saturated by NGOized services and domination of resistance, there are alternatives, and they rely on relationships. Naber and Zaatari emphasize that the activist efforts during the invasion "highlighted the dangers of transnational institutional norms and NGOization" and countered them (2014, pp. 101–2).

Naber and Zaatari's questions also bring up the role of care and community, in individual relationships that form the basis of solidarity, and in the acts themselves. We see this Belan's experience with Egna Legna, Mira's building of safe space for taboo conversation with the Feminist network, and so many others. At the core, deep solidarity work makes space for individual care. Individual care, in many ways, is a prerequisite for the collective.

CONCLUSION

"If we are to think of post-coloniality as that which is yet to come…then we need to pay attention to how *and* where *colonialism persists after so-called decolonisiation."*

– Sarah Ahmed, Strange Encounters (2000)

When asking questions around individual and collective complicity, especially in feminist spaces, it is easy to descend into despair, into the "cesspool of negativity" that Mirvat discussed. It is hard to enter into these conversations with grace. It is even harder to accept that complicity is part of the process, pressure points to examine. In this writing, I hope to invite questioning and compassion into these spaces of shame and silence.

In "US Empire and the Project of Women's Studies: Stories of Citizenship, Complicity and Dissent," Mohanty defines a dual role of feminist activism and practice: to not only disrupt hypermasculine and thus militaristic culture and empire, but also to actively work on ourselves and our communities so we don't reproduce what we have internalized. She writes: "Feminist practice at many levels (daily life, collective movements and organizing, knowledge production, etc.) needs to do the necessary work that disrupts and does *not* reproduce the terms of domination." Despite valid critiques of Mohanty, she still challenges us to think: If the work disrupts the patriarchal, misogynist, or imperialist status quo, but repeats the same internal or external power dynamics or practices, is it worth it? Is it feminist? Are the ends worth the means? Where do we place the line of ideological purity and how much respect does it deserve?

I came to this research because of these questions, which I couldn't answer in my own organizing and solidarity work. In the spaces created by the friends and collaborators I interviewed, in their own experiences, I heard parallel sets of frustrations about the fragility of initiatives, about NGOs, about burnout, about the work itself versus its visibility, about when we harm more than we could ever help. I also felt myself surrounded by deep wisdom. Like many others, I wanted to extract this wisdom, to distill it into a concentrate that could be sprinkled in our gardens, that could grow other communities, networks, weapons that change the status quo.

There are a proliferation of efforts to document, guide, and train people in organizing and solidarity work, locally, regionally, and globally. FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund released a "Happiness Manifestx" zine, to argue for principles of joy and care in organizing. CREA runs

trainings for activists steeped in gender and sexuality organizing, focusing on women and LGBTQ people from the Global South, and my own thinking was deeply shaped by one of these institutes and its people. SMEX in Beirut releases guides and runs conferences on tech in organizing. Lebanon Support has a whole initiative to build up grassroots civil society groups, some feminist, many not. Dammeh's model, in some ways, is an investment in building up young feminists. RootsLab does the same, but through an NGOized structure, which it simultaneously pushes against.

The sheer amount of guides on community organizing and activism, and the creation of physical training spaces, speaks to a recognition of the power of grassroots organizing *and* a deep, social need to document and pass along this knowledge. It also represents a wistful hope that complex, interpersonal forces like solidarity can be distilled and created through tangible processes, delivered in a written form or a training. As much as I wish this was true, I do not believe this is the case. Writing efforts like this often seek to create frameworks for older and younger versions of ourselves to follow. Even when it doesn't exist, we want a path that allows us to move quicker through the pain of growth and failure, the messiness of relationships, the lack of universality. Much of this desire for guidance, as Deema Kaedbey points out, comes from the pain of never having had a visible, written history, of wondering what is hidden.

As most traditional community organizers will tell you, the core of any work is the relationships. The answers are rarely in written guides or formalized trainings, although there are many useful tools for tactics, campaigns, processes to understand structural problems, and relationship-building. There is no true guide to solidarity, to activism, to feminism, and perhaps there shouldn't be. Solidarity is ever changing, based on your position within and/or outside of the movement, your various identities and relationship to power, and the needs of the movement or individual. This means that efforts to build it will also be contextual. Community organizing has a structure, many theories of growth and intervention, and clear campaign goals around which to build intentional relationships. Solidarity is more fluid.

In writing this thesis, I aim to explore not only what activism and solidarity are, but also how we *become* and *come* into them. I have chosen to include so many individual narratives, because the process of coming into feminist space, feminist consciousness, and decoloniality is often exceedingly personal. This set of disjointed narratives, of non-linear stories, is what builds our collectives. One of the individual stories has been my own, as I have struggled with my own

positionality in my daily work and in this research, and questioned how to de-center it. I continue to swim in the spaces where I embody outside-ness – in queerness, foreignness, disability – and where my forms of otherness both reinforces and disrupts existing power structures. But in this work, I seek to not only understand my own solidarity, but also to dream a little bit about how our collective spaces might move forward, about the worlds we can create.

Sous and Mirvat grew into feminism within spaces that they were both from and to which they were also other. Belan and Sara created community from their position as outsiders. I, too, have come to find myself in a place I am not from. As so many have pointed out in these pages, coming *from* is also coming *to*. To come into feminism means to re-learn, re-examine almost everything we have been taught, about the spaces and knowledge in which you hold indigenous knowledge, and about the stories we're told. To be "disloyal to civilization" is to embrace becoming the other, the outside, often to the place that seemed like home. This, to me, is a form of dreaming.

Traditional academic production tends to reproduce what we have internalized, to continue forms of cultural imperialism and colonization. I don't pretend that my words can reverse centuries of this, or that I can fully escape. Feminist theorizing, after all, is a collective practice, and one that has little to do with typed-up words. But I do hope that these pages have provided space for the feminist reflection that is too often stifled by all of the violence we face every day, by the fatigue it produces. I hope that the comrades, activists, and organizers who read this will hear their own questions echoed, perhaps see themselves, and know they are not alone in their disloyalty.

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