Journal of Intercultural Studies

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cjis20

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To cite this article: Zeina Tarraf (2020) (Re)negotiating Belonging: Nostalgia and Popular Culture in Postwar Lebanon, Journal of Intercultural Studies, 41:3, 355-369, DOI: 10.1080/07256868.2020.1751600

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2020.1751600

Published online: 28 Apr 2020.

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JOURNAL OF INTERCULTURAL STUDIES
2020, VOL. 41, NO. 3, 355–369
https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2020.1751600

(Re)negotiating Belonging: Nostalgia and Popular Culture in Postwar Lebanon

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ABSTRACT
In this article, I explore how national belonging in Lebanon is (re)negotiated in the aftermath of a protracted civil war. More particularly, I investigate the nostalgic underpinnings of Lebanese popular culture, mainly Ziad Doueiry's hit film, *West Beyrouth* and the revered singer, Fairouz, to examine what their popularity and deep resonance within Lebanese society reveal about the collective, affective negotiations of living with loss in the Lebanese context. I situate these works within a larger discourse on nostalgia in postwar Lebanon to complicate earlier assertions about nostalgia as an uncritical and insidious affective mode operating largely in service of unjust power relations. While I do not dismiss these earlier theorizations, I argue that an attention to the consumption and circulation of Lebanese popular culture reveals how nostalgia is not only fundamental to the way power operates as a top-down phenomenon, but it is simultaneously embedded within a more diffuse network of narratives and discourses that shape national publics and that unfold as affective negotiations of loss.

KEYWORDS
Affect; nostalgia; popular culture; Lebanon; national publics

> It is like mourning at a funeral: you can't judge people's styles of living with loss in the middle of a situation where loss might be all there is even though one is living on and not dead. (Berlant 2010)

It is now a truism in scholarly and popular discourse that the aftermath of Lebanon's 15 year civil war (1975–1990) was marked by state sponsored amnesia that stifled the emergence of a national conversation about the bloody events. The protracted conflict, which was marked by shifting political allegiances, international and regional intervention, and mass violence, ended abruptly with the fate of thousands of disappeared persons left unknown and the relatively smooth transition of former warlords to positions of power in government. These conditions, along with an uneasy sense that discussing the war would only reignite volatile schisms, prevented the establishment of a national framework in which the civil war could be discussed beyond individual kinship groups who had each become defined by their own sets of traumas. Importantly as well, postwar Beirut was in the midst of a reconstruction era, which unfolded under the auspices of former Prime minister Rafic Hariri's private company Solidere. These reconstruction initiatives not only

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massively reshaped the identity of the city's downtown, but also insisted on a forward-looking gaze that deemed any attempts to revisit the past regressive and obstructive to healing.

Interestingly enough, these future-oriented initiatives that were intent on propelling Lebanon into a global economic market were bound up with the illusion of past glory as they capitalized on nostalgic sentiments for a prewar Beirut. More specifically, Solidere's promotional plans highlighted their attempt to 'recapture the spirit of Beirut in the 60s when … it was known as the Paris of the Middle East (for its sophistication)' (Fricke 2005: 171). This 'mythified and nostalgic past of Beirut' (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2002: 40) was a dominant image in the collective visual landscape. Writing in 2006, for instance, Saree Makdisi observes how visitors of modern-day Beirut would find it nearly impossible to locate postcards that depict Beirut in its current state. Instead, visitors

> can find dozens of cards showing the city in its former glory, presenting, for example, images of Martyr's Square bustling with cars and people in the 1950s, of the gleaming Phoenicia Hotel in its heyday in the 1960s, or of the crowded streets of the commercial center in the years before the war (2006:202).

These visual representations of Beirut's prewar landscape occupy bookstores and magazine stands around the city and give the sense that 'Beirut has been frozen in time' (203).

As evident from Makdisi's critique, the nostalgic form of marketing propagated by Solidere was fiercely criticized in academic, activist, and artistic communities who insisted on the need to insert the civil war back into public discourse. The appeal to Beirut's prewar glory days was fundamental to the state's refusal to engage with the country's recent past, and it is one of the reasons any type of nostalgia for a former Lebanon became rightfully admonished by those actively engaged in critiquing the elite. Many scholars have been reasonably critical of the elite's nostalgic desire to preserve and safeguard selective remnants of 'authentic' or 'traditional' practices while disregarding the people who engage in these lifestyles. Aseel Sawalha (2007: 196), for instance, shows how heritage largely concerns the state and the elite of the country who aim to preserve cultural forms that they 'frame as public property of the nation' without much regard for the people from which these cultural forms originate.[1] In this regard, there has been a concern that these nostalgic sentiments tend to be imposed from the top down and provide a facile way for those in power to erase a large chunk of Lebanese history and thus maintain the corrupt and unjust systems that enable their reigns.

This article engages with these conversations about nostalgia to think through the complex ways in which nostalgia operates in a postwar context. It is undoubtedly valuable to highlight how nostalgia operates as a top down phenomenon that was largely capitalized on to rebrand downtown Beirut and thus concentrate wealth into the hands of a few. In this article, however, I contend that these sorts of arguments potentially overlook the ways in which nostalgia is also embedded within a more diffuse network of narratives and discourses that operate in the public sphere and that unfold as affective negotiations of loss.

I make this argument with full acknowledgment of the context that permits me to think through nostalgia beyond its repressive potential. I recognize, in other words, that scholarly works written in the aftermath of the civil war were marked by a different kind of urgency that required a critical outlook on nostalgia as a means to counteract the country's

inability and unwillingness to reconcile with its violent past. While these arguments are still valid and necessary, temporal distance from the events of the civil war and the development of new sociopolitical crises[2] allow an opening up of these considerations. To this end, my work builds upon those conversations by discussing the relationship between nostalgia and popular culture in Lebanon and, more precisely, what this dynamic can tell us about how societies negotiate their relationship to the collective in the wake of loss. I am concerned mainly with Lebanese singer Fairouz whose iconic status in the country and the region has become uncontestable, and with Ziad Doueiry's 1998 commercially successful film *West Beyrouth*, whose unprecedented success largely contributed to the development of the Lebanese film industry. These two examples, and their wide and continued popularity, are emblematic of Lebanese popular culture and thus provide rich grounds for exploring alternative dimensions of a postwar nostalgic landscape.

My attention to popular culture stems from my general interest in the everyday as a productive site through which to explore how the legacy of the war intersects with other social dynamics. As Mohamed Zayani (2012: 66) explains in his account about Arab media studies, an investment in the potential of the everyday as a site of elucidation requires us to go beyond an articulation of popular culture as evidence for the pervasiveness of repressive power structures. The everyday, in Zayani's Lefebvrian understanding of the concept, upends the distinction between 'high-brow and low-brow or, more pointedly, between elite and popular culture'. It is my interest in the wide consumption and circulation of nostalgic narratives that motivates my turn to popular culture. Here I also have in mind Tim Edensor's (2002) argument that an attention to popular culture allows an understanding of how the 'national is constituted and reproduced, contested and reaffirmed in everyday life'. Edensor's formulation is useful because I am interested precisely in thinking about how a relationship to the national becomes re-established and negotiated in a context marked by loss and division. How can the wide circulation and consumption of these works by multiple publics provide insight into the ways cultural trauma becomes absorbed into the everyday? In this regard, we are 'tracking mass-mediated norms of belonging in the affective register' (Berlant 2008: 22). Here I am not necessarily abandoning those earlier laments about the pitfalls of nostalgic commodification; rather, I am thinking *with* these laments to ask what happens when we consider nostalgic narratives from the bottom up?

To some extent, this reading of nostalgic narratives can be thought of as reparative. Here I have in mind Eve Sedgwick's (1997) famous critique of paranoid reading in which she calls for a turn to reparative reading that would offset the close-endedness of the paranoid position in which we locate texts and objects of analyses within a closed circuit of power.[3] By contrast, reparative reading approaches objects not from a hermeneutics of suspicion but one of love and allows us to see the 'ways in which selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them' (31). Therefore, instead of reading cultural objects solely for their complicity in perpetuating ideology, reparative reading would take seriously the 'powerful emotional experience [these] texts provide for its consumers' (Ronda 2008: 5). My inclination to engage with nostalgia as an affective negotiation and to read popular nostalgic texts beyond evidence of their ideological complicity, can be thought of as reparative only in so far as reparative reading removes

us from the binary mode of conceptualizing texts either as 'trangressive or ideologically complicit'(5) or 'progressive or reactionary' (Cvetkovich 2007: 462).[4]

To better understand the dynamics of this affective landscape, I begin with a brief theoretical overview of nostalgia to delineate how I am conceiving of it in this article. I then move to a discussion of how nostalgia informs the popular cultural productions of Ziad Doueiry and Fairouz.

The Theoretical Dimensions of Nostalgia

Although nostalgia currently signifies a complex constellation of yearnings that have both spatial and temporal connotations, the concept of nostalgia first emerged as a symptom of increased travel. The Swiss physician Johannes Hofer first coined the term nostalgia to describe the affliction that struck Swiss mercenaries in the French army 'who longed to return to their Alpine villages' (Cross 2015). Eventually, nostalgia developed from its pathological individualistic origins to a more 'historical emotion', as Svetlana Boym (2008) puts it.

According to critics of nostalgia, it is a concept associated with a romanticization of the past and it has the tendency to obfuscate inequities, transgressions and difference. This view is based on the assumption that nostalgia is fundamentally opposed to veridical historical discourse. Most notably, Frederick Jameson (1991: 156) characterizes the 'nostalgia mode' as a regressive perspective that reduces the past to a shallow emphasis on style and glossy or lavish images.[5] Jameson's critique resonates with other concerns about how nostalgia frames shallow representations of the past. Margaret Farrar (2011: 729) acknowledges how nostalgia often coincides with market-based incentives that capitalize on a selective imagination of the past. Farrar here refers to the developers, city planners, and architects that 'claim to resurrect lost places or provide sites of manufactured community'. In these instances, nostalgia is capitalized on to reduce the past to a stylistic interpretation or to evoke a sense of history that encourages identification with an exclusively elite way of life.

Despite these criticisms, there have been attempts throughout scholarly discourse to salvage nostalgia from its infamous reputation. Most notably, Boym distinguishes restorative nostalgia from reflective nostalgia. While restorative nostalgia constructs a unified narrative about the past that is often regressive and uncritical, reflective nostalgia 'cherishes shattered fragments of memory' and reveals how 'longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another' (49). Through establishing this dichotomy Boym lays the groundwork for thinking about how nostalgia can be resuscitated as an effective force, while also identifying the extent to which narratives steeped in nostalgia can embody or be co-opted for hegemonic or non-inclusive means. In this regard, she does not necessarily posit these two forms of nostalgia in opposition to one another; rather, she acknowledges how they often operate simultaneously. Similarly, my reparative reading of nostalgia allows us to explore the possibilities embedded within nostalgic pleasures, while still recognizing nostalgia's oppressive manifestations.

My own intention in thinking about nostalgia is to move away from attempts to determine the essence of the concept (what nostalgia *is*), and instead to think about how nostalgia operates in a multitude of contexts. In this respect, I understand nostalgia as an affective frame through which the civil war is given meaning in the postwar present.[6]

My understanding of nostalgia as a lens or frame through which to view the past is influenced by Susannah Radstone's (2010: 189) argument that nostalgia must be understood as 'an intermediate or transitional phenomenon … [which is] best approached … not as an end-point or theoretical home-coming but as a point of departure … ' In this regard, nostalgia opens us up to questions about the production of knowledge and its relationship to the various orientations and politics that nostalgic memory 'condenses' (189).

In the following sections, I explore two examples from the cultural sphere to examine what their popularity reveals about the affective negotiations of living with loss in the Lebanese context. Firstly, I interrogate the popularity of *West Beyrouth* to understand the film's resonance within a postwar Lebanese society. Through a close examination of the film's nostalgic structures, I show, for example, how the western gaze was a central element in the construction of the film. The success of the film, I argue, is intimately tied to this commodification of nostalgia that packages national identity as an easily consumable commodity, and that worked as a redeeming force capable of re-establishing a sense of belonging and pride to a nation marked by shame and loss. Next, I focus on the circulation of Fairouz, who is lauded as one of Lebanon's national treasures. I explore how she and her project come to serve as vehicles of nostalgic attachment to the nation. Specifically, I examine her circulations in artistic spaces, namely the work of installation artist Ibi Ibrahim and the graffiti artist Yazan Halwani, to better elucidate how her nostalgic connotations operate as mechanisms through which national belonging is performed. My intention in studying these popular cultural figures is not to condemn the inauthenticity of their works or their potential for the obstruction of critical memory practices. I acknowledge that to a large extent, through a certain romanticization, these works engage in amnesiac depictions of Lebanon. However, as Berlant reminds us, 'national sentimentality is not about being right or logical but about maintaining an affective transaction with a world whose terms of recognition and reciprocity are being constantly struggled over and fine-tuned' (Berlant 2008: xi). In this sense, Berlant invites us to take seriously those narratives or even fantasies, which may be obstructive to our flourishing, yet to which we are affectively attached.

West Beyrouth

Berlant's work also incites us to consider the kinds of creative and affective negotiations that allow some notion of the collective or social to unfold in the midst of fluctuating landscapes. Here I am speaking about a public as, 'an imaginary world into which people enter without a high bar of self-consistency but with enormous needs to hammer out bearable and just principles of convergence' (Berlant 2011a: 185). Conceiving of publics in this manner allows us to account for the emergence of narratives of collectivity as a kind of affective negotiation that maps out and charts different senses of belonging. The questions I pose to Doueiry's film, then, are: how can we understand its popularity in terms of its nostalgic structures and what does this relationship tell us about nostalgia's role in the context of national loss?

West Beyrouth is a semi-autobiographical account that portrays the early stages of the war and how it developed through the eyes of the teenager, Tarek and his two friends, Omar and May. In a light-hearted manner, *West Beyrouth* depicts how the young

protagonists come to terms with the religious schisms that manifest in the division of their city, between the Christian East and the Muslim West. The story is largely concerned with portraying the civilian experience of the war and how everyday life was infiltrated and eroded by the conflict. Doueiry's film represents somewhat of a landmark in Lebanese cinema as it marked the first time a Lebanese film gained such a wide local viewership and received worldwide attention. As Lina Khatib (2008) argues, *West Beyrouth* marked the beginning of the 'renaissance period' in Lebanese cinema because the film's commercial success opened the door for other filmmakers to make their films. Khatib cites, for instance, how one Lebanese distribution company refused to release Lebanese films on DVD until the success of *West Beyrouth*. It was also the first Lebanese film to be picked up by American distributors. I should note here that while I am mainly discussing the film's popularity within the affective context in which it was initially released, the film's continued resonance is of significance as well as it points to the endurance of particular affective nationalisms.

Two obvious reasons for the film's local success are its higher production standards, which employed a Western film aesthetic, and the film's use of Lebanese dialect and humour. This latter point is especially significant considering how many Lebanese films and television shows attempt to cater to different Arabic dialects, which results in an unnatural sounding script. *West Beyrouth* is also heavily nostalgic, and this nostalgia is intimately bound up with a particular sort of commodification that is central to the film's production. I argue that the resonance of this nostalgia among local audience members, has a lot to do with the way the film created a digestible version of Lebanese identity that was accessible to Western viewers. In this regard, the film showcased a *consumable* Lebanese experience – which played on internal bias through dialect and humour, but that was ultimately directed *outwards*. Khatib states, for instance, 'watching *West Beyrouth* for the first time, I felt proud' (xv). The fact that Khatib feels *pride* here is very significant, because pride is always bound up with issues of public presentation. The film's success here needs to be understood affectively in terms of a recuperative function that remediated and reoriented national affect by reconfiguring Lebanon's image in a global mediascape and thus providing a medium through which affective ties to the nation could be restored.

In the postwar context, the film offered an easily consumable framework of familiarity and identification – an *authentic* narrative that was simultaneously palatable as a commodity for Western audiences through its use of images and frames that would be recognizable in the West. At the end of the film, for example, a montage of documentary images is presented with the sombre tunes of Tarek's father's *oud*[7] playing in the background. These final scenes reveal the death of Tarek's mother whose absence becomes subsumed within a compilation of footage primarily implicating foreign powers in the civil war. A young Yasser Arafat is shown, followed by an image of Beirut up in smoke, and George Bush senior is depicted giving a speech after which militia trucks drive by with a young Lebanese woman running after them in fury. Doueiry also includes images of the former Syrian president Hafez el-Assad and a team of soldiers with an American flag planted in front of them. While these images of foreign intervention work to alleviate the Lebanese of responsibility for the war (an issue I will discuss shortly), they also serve as familiar frames of reference that would be recognizable to Western audiences. Mark Westmoreland (2009: 41) argues that the use of 'televisual imagery and newsreel footage … in Lebanese film' is a reflexive technique responding to the hyper mediation

of the Lebanese conflict in Western media. This reflexive technique of using universally familiar news footage to reference the civil war, however, can also be understood as one mechanism through which Doueiry's film is *externally* directed – an issue that is crucial for grasping the nature of the film's success and its ability to subsume the trauma and shame of the war into a nationally resonant narrative.

To a large extent, we can attribute the outward nature of the film to Doueiry's reliance on foreign funding. Unable to secure funds from Lebanese funders who believed Lebanon was not ready for a film about the war (Viner 1999), Doueiry turned to French financers to make the film. Miriam Rosen (1989: 34), who writes about the effects of foreign funding on films, notes that when the Western viewer 'become[s] a major factor in the filmic equation' (34) 'the director-as-guide is suddenly conducting an audience of tourists through his or her culture' (40). We can see this issue clearly throughout *West Beyrouth*'s aesthetic. Tarek and his friends ride their bikes through the streets of Beirut against a background of hip disco soundtracks. They drift along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and through the narrow alleyways of the city as the camera glides past charming storefronts. Tarek and May stroll against a dynamic and colourful backdrop of vegetable markets and walls plastered with political posters, with Tarek pausing to greet various community members, evoking that nostalgia for effortless community that informs many golden age narratives about prewar Beirut. He banters with Hassan, the old and hearty baker, with a sense of affectionate familiarity as the camera lingers tenderly on a falafel wrap, the exported Middle Eastern sandwich so beloved and familiar in the West. In these scenes, the filmic frame acts as a tour guide, directing viewers through the charms and intimacies of the city. The civil war here is figured as an interruption to, rather than an extension of, the glory of a vibrant and welcoming city. In this regard, the Western gaze that is embedded within the structure of the film allows local viewers to re-establish a relationship to their city through a nostalgic framework that absorbs the civil war into a more digestible representation.

We can see a similar dynamic unfold in another scene where Tarek inadvertently finds himself in a brothel. In this pivotal scene, the sarcastic and hefty owner, Oum Walid, teasingly converses with Tarek amid the music, clutter, and lively energy of the bar. She sits back with her *narguile* and casts a longing look at the flirtatious scenes unfolding around her, lamentingly proclaiming: '*rizk allah 'aa eyemek ya Beirut*' (a nostalgic expression bemoaning the past glory days of the city). As she says this, the crescendoing sounds of the *nai,*[8] which had been playing in the background, are joined by percussive beats and melodies to erupt into a lively harmony that courses through the dancing and clapping bodies on screen. Oum Walid's nostalgic declaration, then, is amplified by this musical culmination that transforms the mise-en-scene into a celebratory party as swaying bodies crowd the camera's frame. To a large extent, this scene represents the affective structures that inform Doueiry's film. Oum Walid's brothel is one of the few places left in the city where divisions between 'east' and 'west' do not matter, and where the sounds of music drown out the noise of bombs. In this brothel, then, the nostalgia for a recognizable Beirut is bound up with the resilient celebratory and musical spirit that Beirutis pride themselves for. This form of representation not only showcases a vibrant and exotic side of Beirut, it also seeks to distance its inhabitants from the turmoil of the civil war. The effectiveness of *West Beyrouth* as a remembrance practice, then, ultimately stems from its ability to alleviate the Lebanese of their complicity in

the conflict. The movie does not dwell on the actual violence that took place; rather, it portrays the Lebanese as victims instead of perpetrators. Scenes of nostalgia depict sectarianism as an external and invasive force that penetrates a religiously indifferent society. The success of the film ultimately exemplified the need to construct a positive image of Lebanon that could alleviate the guilt and shame that the civil war left behind. In this regard, through its nostalgic elements, the film once again offered a framework of belonging that subsumed Lebanon's violent history under a more flattering image of resilience and exuberance.

After the dark years of war, *West Beyrouth* was a welcome and arguably necessary event that offered a means to make sense of the war and integrate it into a self-defining narrative that is simultaneously uplifting. In this way, the film confines the war to the past; it renders the war a souvenir or postcard. It places the conflict in the rear-view mirror as opposed to confronting how it actively takes shape in the present. The use of footage from a super-8 camera in the opening and closing shots of the film works effectively to this end. The film's framing sequences are made up of choppy black and white scenes presented against the whirring sounds of the super-8 camera's motor, ultimately creating a documentary-like effect. Here, however, the 'documentary integrity of the super-8 footage' is undermined in the first scenes of the film, as the camera not only records its own sound, but 'it has [also] somehow magically recorded its own presence as the viewer sees the super-8 camera through its own lens' (Westmoreland 2009: 40). Such techniques, I argue, actively contribute to a narrative that severs the past from any associations to the present. The black and white, amateur documentary footage serve as nostalgic devices that actively secure the past and distance it from the contemporary moment – an aspect of the film that undoubtedly contributed to its immense local success. In this sense, the film produces what Roger Simon (2005: 32) calls frozen memory in which 'the past is nothing but the past'. While Simon condemns such forms of remembrance for their limited pedagogical potential, it is also important to consider the affective dimensions of such mediations as a way to explain their wide resonance. The grainy depictions that make up the opening and closing scenes of the film aesthetically archive Lebanon's past, and thus create a way to dissociate from the ways that it might still operate in the present while allowing space for nostalgic attachments to redeem a severed relationship to the nation.

Fairouz

Fairouz is another figure whose immense popularity reveals the centrality of nostalgia to experiences of national belonging. The widely acclaimed and deeply admired Lebanese singer, whose extensive body of work includes nearly 1,500 songs, 85 albums, and 20 musical plays, has been both 'a champion of … the Palestinian cause … a siren for Jerusalem' and a voice that 'helped to forge an elite Christian nationalism that pitted itself against the Palestinians and other "Others" inside of Lebanon' (Stone 2008: 156).[9] Despite these contradictory political expressions, Fairouz is often figured as a symbolic force that transcends the narrow confines of politics. This assessment is remarkably apparent in the outrage that unfolded after her son and manager, the composer Ziad Rahbani, stated in an interview that Fairouz was a fan of Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of political party Hezbollah. Khalid Majzoub, presenter of the Middle East Broadcasting Centre, for instance, wrote an angry and well-circulated response to Rahbani. In his letter he writes indignantly,

'No one, not even you – the prodigal son – should even contemplate ensnaring Fairouz in some daft political agenda! … She may be your biological mother, but she's a spiritual idol to hundreds of millions of us!' Similarly, Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party declared that 'Fairouz is too great to be criticized, and at the same time too great to be classified as belonging to this or that political camp, or to this or that axis' ('Nasrallah and Jumblatt' 2013). These comments reveal not only the esteem that Fairouz holds in the Lebanese symbolic sphere, but also the anxieties that manifest when she is taken from her position as a unifying force and brought down to the divisiveness of Lebanese politics. Of course, this anxiety about maintaining Fairouz's transcendent status disregards the contradictory politics that characterize her expansive body of work.

While some have argued that it is the 'fuzzy' nature of nostalgic recollections framing her songs and performances that allowed her work to speak to various and conflicting nationalisms (Stone 2008: 90), I argue that Fairouz's resonance across conflicting nationalisms has less to do with the haziness of nostalgia and more with the framework of belonging that her artistic project offers. As I show through an analysis of artistic representations of Fairouz, the nostalgia that resonates throughout Fairouz's music provides and operates as a space on and through which national belongingness can be performed. Therefore, while the content of Fairouz's expansive project may not be entirely coherent or inherently unifying, the manifestations and reception of her work operate differently.

Before exploring this circulation in artistic representations, I will first discuss the ways in which we can conceive the Fairouz project as nostalgic. Most notably, Christopher Stone (2008) has taken up this task by attempting to deconstruct the unifying connotations of Fairouz and how she becomes a metaphor/metonym for the nation. Stone traces the evolvement of Fairouz's career from her collaboration with the Rahbani brothers (her husband and brother-in-law) to her work with her son, Ziad. As he observes, nostalgia figures into these collaborations quite significantly. Through her initial collaborations with the Rahbani brothers, for example, Fairouz promoted nostalgia for a rural and simpler version of Lebanon. In the 1960s, in particular, the Fairouz/Rahbani team and their musical plays would become essential to cultivating a folkloric image of Lebanon that was steeped in a romanticization and idealization of village life. These representations came in the midst of internal and external migration, and so the longing nature of these early works found deep resonance amid the desire for a stable sense of belonging in Lebanon.

Additionally, the 'folklorization' of Lebanese culture, as Elise Salem (2003: 73) calls it, was also essential in shifting the popular music scene away from popular Egyptian works to a platform that celebrated Lebanese culture. By peppering their performances with 'witty dialogue, colourful costumes, and rousing dabke dance' (73), the Rahbanis 'tapped into a yearning for a comforting image of the country' (72). Prior to the 1960s, in the newly independent Lebanon, Egyptian works dominated the musical and theatrical scenes, whereas festivals like the Baalbeck festival – which would eventually become synonymous with the Rahbanis (Stone 2008: 13) – were focused solely on Western productions. The Rahbanis dramatically altered this scene, so by celebrating a nostalgic version of Lebanese identity – regardless of the incompatibility of this identity with lived experience – the Rahbanis were still able to gain symbolic status by providing a common form of entertainment that presented itself as exclusively Lebanese. We can understand the *consumption* of Fairouz's work, therefore, as always, to some extent,

nostalgic. Salem eloquently notes that, in the late 50s and early 60s, 'The Rahbanis succeeded like no one else in "*turning on*" the nation' (73 *my emphasis*). In this way, Fairouz became essential to articulations of national belonging, and so, through these associations, her continued circulation and consumption within Lebanese publics and the diaspora, is always structured and informed by a kind of nostalgic relationship to the nation in which belonging is performed as an expression of loss.

We can think of the sort of nostalgia being produced through Fairouz as a sentiment that shifts according to political and social landscapes and as one crucial mode through which belonging is continuously performed in the national public sphere. Unlike Stone and others who think of Fairouz as a symbol or signifier for the nation, I see her as a vehicle of affective attachment that indexes modes of national belonging.[10] In other words, Fairouz and her music deliver a 'punctum of affective recognition' (Berlant 2008: 271) that lends insight into the ways a public is shaped amid loss and increasing fragmentation and how one negotiates their relationship to said public.

The Yemeni artist, Ibi Ibrahim, offers a creative framework to think through the affective structures of belonging that Fairouz registers as a cultural figure, and particularly how those structures in some way are always severed and destabilized. Ibrahim's installation project 'letters to fairouz', which he worked on during an art residency in Beirut in 2015, attempts to reconcile with Fairouz's iconic status in the country and more so with the kinds of attachments and associations that Fairouz evokes. The project compiles a series of letters addressed to Fairouz that Ibrahim collected from various Lebanese citizens and expatriates. In the initial presentation of the project, the letters were folded up and inserted amid barbed wire – a common sight in Lebanon, reminiscent of security breaches, violence, and the tumultuous, prickly conditions that Lebanese people constantly have to navigate – as Ibrahim recited some of the letters out loud. The use of barbed wire as a prop of sorts for the letters is a significant aesthetic choice that creates a contrast between the letters that evoke Fairouz as a kind of bond to home, and the jagged edges of barbed wire that serve as a reminder for how those ties are constantly undermined. For the final version of the project, Ibrahim ultimately composed a short video in which he and Lebanese artist Jean-Claude Boulos recite some of the letters against gentle sounds of crashing waves and black and white images and videos of Fairouz superimposed upon one another through double-exposure. The letters they recite are tender and affectionate and reveal how Fairouz evokes affective attachments that inform one's relationship to the nation as home: 'Through you I reconnected with Lebanon;' one letter says, 'I imagined it, reconceived it while thinking where I fit in'. Fairouz's music and her voice, 'her aura like warm honey', offer an avenue through which people who have left the country can stay connected to it. These sentimental letters do not necessarily romanticize the nation; rather, their attachments to Fairouz imply a sense of loss for a better nation that she seems to represent: 'You are what Lebanon could have been. What it should have been'. In this sense, attachment to Fairouz as a sort of bond to the nation is an attachment that is always informed by a sense of loss. One letter asks her, 'Where is the Lebanon that you sang and drew in your songs? The Lebanon that your voice made more and more beautiful. Where is it? Where is the real Lebanon? I am looking and I cannot find it'. The 'glory' of Fairouz is an assumption that underlies these letters and the project as a whole; but the letters also reveal a form of resignation about the limitations of Fairouz's project and the loss of possibility she

was once perceived to embody. 'I still love you', one of the letters tells her, 'but the grandness with which I once saw you no longer stands. Where there was once pride there is now only affection, kept aflame by the warm glow of familiarity'. In these utterances, the understanding that Fairouz's grandeur and transcendent status is limited does not preclude the attachment the writer feels towards her. This attachment is informed, instead, by *familiarity* as an affective experience that is fundamental to structures of belonging.

Fairouz has also inspired several Beiruti graffiti artists, including the notable Yazan Halwani whose frequently photographed mural of the singer adorns a concrete wall in a small alleyway off the famous Gemmayze street. This portrait of Fairouz belongs to a larger series created by Halwani who uses graffiti art as an intervention into divisive politics and the neoliberal colonization of public space. Halwani, whose work is often influenced by his interactions and conversations with local residents, is known for his distinctive style which intertwines intricate calligraphy with beautiful portraits of various cultural figures.[11] In his portrait of Fairouz, her face seems to emerge from a musical culmination of calligraphic figures and around her angular face is a quote from Palestinian rapper Tamer Naffar which reads 'our grandfathers invented the zeroes and their grandchildren became zeroes'. This quote references the cultural and intellectual decline of Arab societies. Its nostalgic overtones, which recall the superiority of previous Arab generations, are amplified through their association with the figure of Fairouz who herself is endowed with nostalgic meaning. In this regard, Halwani's work embodies a dialectical process whereby the figure who he represents comes with pre-packaged associations of national belonging/identity that he not only affirms but also endows with new meaning through his inscription of her on public space. Halwani's depiction of Fairouz relies on the affective attachments she evokes, and, in his mural, she becomes the emblem of loss through which a severed relationship to the nation can be articulated. Halwani has stated that his purpose in creating this type of art in Beirut is so that 'the city can be changed and [to] make it belong to citizens instead of politicians or economic power, because citizens have a right to the city' (Bramley 2015). In this regard, Halwani's graffiti and the nostalgic attachments they evoke become a mode through which residents and citizens can re-establish a relationship to their city. As Rasha Salti (2008: 623) argues, postwar Beirut graffiti constitute a new 'mode of interpellation that is predicated on the perception of the audience as citizenry'. Halwani's graffiti, therefore, is a useful medium for thinking through the multiple and diffuse modes through which nostalgia operates in the public sphere.

Conclusion

Ultimately, what I have attempted to show through these works is that nostalgia functions as an affective register deeply implicated in the Lebanese postwar ordinary. While nostalgia is often implicated in troubling power structures, it is simultaneously embedded in the *lived* experiences and negotiations that are needed for the perpetuation of everyday life. In other words, it functions as an affective negotiation that is central for subsuming the memory of the civil war into the ordinary, which 'unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming' (Berlant 2011a: 10). This reparative reading acknowledges the oppressive modes that nostalgia animates, while still aiming to account for the pleasures and possibilities that nostalgic popular culture enables. Through such an endeavour, it

becomes possible to understand nostalgia as fundamental to the shaping of a national public sphere in postwar Lebanon and to understand modes of national belonging in Lebanon as consistently articulated through loss.

Of course, it is significant to note that since 2005, and most notably with the major anti-government uprisings of October 2019 as well as the economic crisis currently devastating the country, Lebanon has effectively moved away from the postwar moment into new multitudes of historical presents characterized by their own sets of contingencies. To this end, the conditions shaping the permissibility of public discourse have shifted to allow new and bolder forms of engaging with the past. These discursive shifts are ultimately implicated in a network of competing and entangled affective intensities that constitute ordinary life in Lebanon. So what of nostalgia now?

On the one hand, as I suggested earlier in this paper, the opening up of these memory discourses provides us with the space to rethink nostalgia from a purely paranoid position because we are no longer hampered by the same urgency to resist public modes of amnesia and repression. On the other hand, we should be wary of over exaggerating the state of public memory discourses surrounding the war. While it is possible to track a shift in the dynamics of public memory on a cultural level, there are still no official avenues for discussing the war on a national level and former warlords have yet to relinquish their destructive grip on the country. In this paper I have discussed two cultural objects to unpack the resonance of nostalgia within a historically specific context (the immediate postwar) and also to consider nostalgia's more diffuse permutations in the national public sphere. It is also possible to track how nostalgia mobilizes modes and performances of national belonging across various historical intervals. Rayya El Zein (2018) for example notes how in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings of 2011, Lebanon witnessed a revival of pan-Arab nostalgia evident in the circulation of musical kitsch. During Lebanon's recent October uprisings, moreover, nostalgia was a significant affective mode mobilizing the country's visual and sonic landscapes. These examples highlight the centrality of nostalgia to the affective adjustments that shape ordinary life in Lebanon and allow us to understand nostalgia's public saturation as evidence of its "stickiness" that is continuously established through "past histories of association" (Ahmed 2004: 13). Ultimately, then, nostalgia emerges as *one* mode through which a national public sphere is formed because it assumes a collective sense of mourning that ultimately eases over the contentious forces of the past and present. This kind of negotiation does not negate the other affective dimensions of social life that either entrench the fault lines that fragment national publics or enable new modes of citizenship and nationalism to emerge. Nostalgia can help us understand how a public is formed amid cultural trauma, butits insufficiency also highlights the complex, intersecting, and contradictory dynamics that constitute and obstruct the shaping of said public. In this regard, nostalgiabelongs to those *ordinary* affects, which are 'public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but … are also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of' (Stewart 2007: 2) Simply put, they are what 'give everyday life the quality of a continual motion' (2).

Notes

1. For more on the elitist dimensions of nostalgia in the Lebanese context, see Anja Peleikis (2006) and Abou Ghaida and Al Zougbi (2005).

2. Lebanon has undergone a series of crises since the end of its civil war that have fundamentally reshaped ordinary life in the country. Most significantly are the massive and unprecedented anti-government uprisings that swept the country in October 2019 and arguably ushered Lebanon into a new historical present.
3. Sedgwick's distinctions here are influenced largely by Melanie Klein's articulation of the paranoid/schizoid position and the depressive position. Unlike the paranoid position that is characterized by a 'terrible alertness to the dangers posed by … the world around' (1997: 7), the depressive or reparative position seeks to repair 'the murderous part-objects into something like a whole' (1997: 7).
4. For more on how paranoid and reparative readings are implicated in one another, see Wiegman (2014) and Love (2010).
5. Despite Jameson's critique of nostalgia that functions as a condemnation of mass culture, his own work along with the larger body of critical theory operate according to 'a mode of thought [that is] necessarily nostalgic' (Stauth and Turner 1988).
6. Here I rely on Karyn Ball's (2014: 182) articulation of affect as 'differing degrees of intra- and intersubjective reactivity to and investment in ideational or external sources'. Ball's definition makes space for conceptualizing affect within a discursive context and a larger field of political and cultural relations. More specifically, by conveying affect in terms of reactivity to or investments in ideational or external sources, Ball allows us to think about nostalgia, on the one hand, as a collective or individual investment in certain images or ideas about the past that are invoked as part of an attachment to a national ideal. On the other hand, her articulation provides a framework for thinking about nostalgia as a reaction to the disappointments of modernity that contribute to the idealization of a former moment.
7. A stringed instrument resembling a lute or mandolin.
8. A flute like instrument that is the main wind instrument of the Middle East.
9. One of Fairouz's song is actually featured in West Beyrouth during a scene depicting the Ain El Remmeneh bus massacre in which 28 Palestinians were killed by Christian Phalangists. This incident is largely credited for instigating the civil war.
10. Dima Issa's (2019) recent work makes a similar claim in relation to how people in the Arab diaspora use Fairouz's music to negotiate their distance from home. In making this argument, however, Issa dismisses attempts to ground Fairouz in a particular national context. She relies here on a new materialist understanding of nostalgic affect that is removed from particular temporal or spatial boundaries. While it is true that Fairouz's music often transcends national boundaries, we cannot overlook the extent to which Fairouz functions as a vehicle of attachment to Lebanon and the central role that her project has played in constituting the idea of the nation.
11. Interestingly enough, Halwani's repertoire also includes a mural depicting two characters from *West Beyrouth*. Halwani depicts Tarek and May and the inter-religious love story they connote in a mural near the former green light that previously divided west and east Beirut. Once again, Halwani remediates thenostalgic evocations of certain cultural figures to re-appropriate public space and thus serve as a platform through which national identity isnegotiated.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

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