PArtecipazione e COnflitto
http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Issue 14(2) 2021: 530-546
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v14i2p530

Published 15 July, 2021

RESEARCH ARTICLE

ACTIVISM AS A WAY OF LIFE: THE SOCIAL WORLD OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN MIDDLE-CLASS BEIRUT

Sophie Chamas
SOAS, University of London

ABSTRACT: This article concerns itself with why and how activists persevere and manage to reproduce themselves as activists in contexts where they experience what is described as routine "failure", taking Lebanon's activist scene as its focus. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork carried out when Lebanon's civil society was dominated by members of the country's cosmopolitan professional middle class, I emphasise the affective dimensions of activism, the role that personal desires, emotions and anxieties play in enabling activists to persist in the most stagnant of conjunctures but that also, at the same time, keep them from advancing their agendas.

KEYWORDS: Lebanon, activism, affect, class, failure

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: sc118@soas.ac.uk

1. Introduction

This article concerns itself with why and how activists persevere and manage to reproduce themselves as activists in contexts where they experience what is described as routine "failure", taking Lebanon's activist scene as its focus. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2016 and 2018, when Lebanon's civil society was dominated by members of the country's cosmopolitan professional middle class, I

emphasise the affective dimensions of activism, the role that personal desires, anxieties and emotions play in enabling activists to persist in the most stagnant of conjunctures, but that also keep them from advancing their agendas.

I argue that an attentiveness to affect allows us to make sense of the complexities and contradictions of activist life and labour, and of the impact that neoliberalism as a governing rationality has had on activism. To understand why Lebanon's cosmopolitan professional middle class has come to play such a prominent role within the country's civil society, how it has managed to persist in the face of routinised failure, and the shape that its activism has taken, I argue that we must turn our attention to what Gould (2009) calls the "emotional habitus" of this class (10), embracing both the emotional turn in the scholarship on social movements (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001) and the anthropological call to take up intimacy as an analytic when studying dissent (Kelly 2019).

I arrived in Beirut, the Lebanese capital, for fieldwork in the summer of 2016 to a civil society I found to be surprisingly lively given the petering out of the "garbage protests" the summer prior – an unprecedented, at the time, grassroots political mobilisation that was quick to lose momentum.[1] Much has been said about why the garbage protests, or *Hirak*, did not last more than a few months. Activists and scholars have pointed to disagreements over discourse and strategy, and to the inability to bridge the divide between revolutionaries and reformists (Nayel and Moghnieh 2015; Kerbage 2017; Khneisser 2019; Chamas 2020). They have also pointed out the role that egos and competitiveness played in the inability to build a broad-based activist alliance (Khneisser 2018). All of this, moreover, is said to have prevented the development of a strong alternative to government discourse that could prove worth rallying around for the many non-activists who gathered in Beirut's streets during that electric summer.

As the movement evaporated and was relegated to memory, it became yet another reminder of the Lebanese ruling class' resilience; its ability to survive crisis after crisis of its own making and, paradoxically, position itself as the only safeguard against total collapse or all-out war. The perpetual resurrection of the *status quo* has produced a ubiquitous sense of "stuckedness" for many in Lebanon (Hage 2015), productive of a resignation to bearing with a deeply entrenched condition. What, then, accounts for the perseverance of civil society activists?

In the aftermath of Lebanon's 15-year civil war (1975-1990), the country's civil society sector grew substantially. Khneisser (2019) writes that by April 2014, Lebanon was home to 8,311 registered civil society organisations (3).[2] In the aftermath of the *Hirak*, Lebanese civil society came to be dominated, in particular, by middle-class professionals – engineers, architects, urbanists, lawyers and doctors, who saw in their expertise the potential for the country's salvation. In this article, I concern myself with the activism of Lebanon's cosmopolitan, professional middle class. I ask what drew a significant portion of this class

[1] The garbage protests erupted in response to a waste crisis provoked by governmental mismanagement. At the time, they constituted the most significant cross-confessional, cross-class mobilisation since the end of Lebanon's 15-year civil war [1975-1990] (Kerbage 2017).

[2] This number does not factor in the many unregistered, less formal groupings also active in the country. Scholars tend to distinguish between what is referred to as independent political activism in Lebanon and the country's NGO-dominated (in both form and content) civil society sector (Kingston 2013; Naber and Zaatari 2014; Khattab 2015; Musallam 2016; Khneisser 2019). There is sometimes overlap between NGOs and independent activist collectives and organisations, but there is also substantial criticism amongst independent activists, particularly those who identify with radical or revolutionary leftist currents, of the NGO sector, which many consider to be a depoliticising force (Nayel and Moghnieh 2015). Many independent activists do not consider themselves a part of civil society, despite having to engage with it, because it is seen to be dominated by an approach to socio-political change focused either on social provision or managerialism and technocracy.

towards activism, and how and why these activists have been able to remain committed in an environment characterised by "stuckedness", haunted by a history of what was described to me as activist "failure".

I attempt to address these questions by looking to the personal desires and anxieties that both propel and stifle professional middle-class activists in Beirut, exploring the link between middle-class habitus, the affective workings of neoliberal governmentality, as well as the intimate life of social movements.

2. Methods

What follows draws on two continuous years of participant-observation with influential organisations and collectives from within what Harb (2016) has called Beirut's urban social movement: The Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche (also known as the Dalieh Campaign), Nahnoo ("We") and The Alliance for the Lebanese Coast.[3]

The Dalieh Campaign is a public-space focused collective founded in 2013 that gained prominence for its attempts to protect the Dalieh from privatisation. The Dalieh is a stretch of rocky coastline that includes Beirut's symbolic Pigeon Rocks. The Dalieh Campaign is a small, non-hierarchical collective of architects, urbanists and designers that relies on crowdfunding to finance its initiatives. Nahnoo started out as a club at the Lebanese University in 2003 and evolved into an NGO focused broadly on "social cohesion" in 2009. Its work relies on a core leadership structure and a network of volunteers. Its remit would come to centre on public space and urban issues, and its reputation as an influential advocacy group was sedimented in 2015 with the success of its lengthy campaign to have Horsh Beirut, the largest green space in the city, partially reopened.[4] The Alliance for the Lebanese Coast was initiated in 2017 by the Dalieh Campaign and two other environmental/urbanist groups from the South and North of Lebanon. It brought together campaigns and organisations from across the country, including Nahnoo, to develop a strategy for protecting Lebanon's coast from privatisation, in an attempt to move away from site-specific advocacy and address the issue of public space on a national scale.

I gained access to these organisations through friends who had collaborated with them, and my approach to ethnographic fieldwork involved placing as much emphasis on participation as it did observation. In the case of the Dalieh Campaign in particular, I immersed myself within the collective, and played an active role in all aspects of its work. My interlocutors welcomed me into their spaces as an ethnographer, but they wouldn't allow me to be *just* an ethnographer. I was too familiar, sharing a middle-class background and Western education with most of my interlocutors, albeit while bearing the characteristics of someone who wasn't quite as local as they were – an obvious child of the Lebanese diaspora, but one that was close by, in the Arabian Gulf. I felt ethically compelled to offer labour and commitment in exchange for being folded into their spaces. It was expected of me to invest, and to want a better Lebanon.

Anecdotes from the field are complemented by material from open-ended, both semi-structured and unstructured interviews that I carried out regularly with interlocutors.[5] These were more often approached as

[3] During my fieldwork in the aftermath of the *Hirak*, the NGOs and collectives that comprise this movement had come to play a prominent role within Lebanon's civil society, as many activists turned their attention towards questions of liveability and wellbeing that were believed capable of attracting mass appeal in ways more contentious issues were not.

[4] Horsh Beirut had been closed to the public since 1992.

[5] Upon allowing me access to their spaces, my interlocutors consented either verbally or via email to my use of observations gathered in the meetings and events they organised, and interviews were always framed as being conducted for research purposes. In cases where new participants/volunteers entered the fray, I would re-establish my role as an ethnographer and inquire into their feelings about my presence.

conversations rather than Q&As, recorded and transcribed, and carried out in a mix of English and Arabic with all translations being my own.[6] Juris and Khasnabish (2015) argue that ethnographic methods are not prevalent within the conventional literature on social movements, despite the fact that anthropologists have written extensively about social movements. Such work, they write, "remains disconnected from dominant trends in the study of social movements in sociology and political science" (578).

This article aims to contribute to attempts at demonstrating the usefulness of ethnographic methods for theorising about social movements, particularly for illuminating the role that affect and emotions play in structuring and reproducing them. Ethnography allows for the capturing of "the subjective mood, tone, and feeling of social movement events, activities, and encounters" (Juris and Khasnabish 2015, 579). More than just document what social movements do and what they say, ethnographers are well-positioned to capture their sensorial and visceral dimensions.

3. Affect, Dissent and Middle-Class Subjectivities

In the introduction to the anthology *The Intimate Life of Dissent*, the editors write that "in the popular imagination, dissidents are moved by a commitment to what is right or wrong that transcends their own narrow self-interest and personal ties" (Amarasuriya et al. 2020, 4). By contrast, they argue that not only are dissidents and activists committed to more than abstract ideals and grand schemes (Schielke 2015; Salman and Assies 2017; see also Biagini in this Special Issue), but that their commitments to these ideals and schemes are often entangled with personal desires and aspirations as well as a sense of responsibility and love towards those they share the world with.

Activism, then, is informed not only by "commitments to high principles" (Amarasuriya et al. 2020, 4), but also by "specific intimate attachments of kinship, friendship and solidarity" (2020, 4), as well as the particularities of a habitus and the "aspirations and anxieties" it is productive of (Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2012, 6). "Dissidents are not simply lone individuals with abstract ideals; they are also caught up in other, sometimes contradictory aspirations and relationships and forms of responsibility" (Amarasuriya et al. 2020, 3). It is crucial that we pay attention to social movements and activist organisations as spaces of intimacy and desire if we want to make sense of their form and content and the directions in which they evolve.

In her work on AIDS activism in the 1980s and 90s in the United States, Gould (2009) critiques the emphasis, within the study of social movements, on the "rationality" of dissenters.[7] "Protesters are construed as rational actors in the sense that they engage in reasonable, thoughtful, strategic behaviour designed to achieve their sensible goals" (15), and in the process the role of their emotions in shaping their activism is denied. The emotional turn in the study of social movements developed in the 1990s in response to this lacuna. Gould draws on but also develops the literature in the emotional turn. Gould departs from the

[6] It is typical amongst Lebanon's cosmopolitan middle-class for conversations to be carried out bi- or tri-lingually, in a mix of Arabic and English, Arabic and French, or Arabic, English and French.

[7] Gould (2009) explains that this emphasis on rationality emerged, in the 1970s, as a response to what was then the dominant paradigm for the study of what was referred to as "collective behaviour". The collective behaviour literature approached protest as a product of psychological instability. Scholarship on social movement studies that materialised in the 1970s challenged these depictions of protest "by adopting paradigms that assumed, even if implicitly, the rationality of protestors" (15).

emotional turn's framing of emotions "in overly cognitive terms," drawing attention to "the noncognitive, nonconscious, nonlinguistic, and nonrational aspects of the general phenomenon of emotion" (19).[8]

Gould calls for a folding in of affect into the study of social movements, drawing on Brian Massumi's work to describe affect as "nonconscious, unnamed, but nevertheless registered, experiences of bodily energy and intensity that arise in response to stimuli impinging on the body" (Gould 2009, 19). Importantly, affect does not necessarily "line up with our rational selves" and yet is a "constant motivational force in individual lives and thus a force in social life as well" (22). This is why I argue that an attentiveness to affect when studying activism allows us to think contradictions without intention. To say affect is *non-rational* is not to claim *irrationality*, but to point to that which is "outside of – but not necessarily contrary to – conscious, cognitive sense-making" (Gould 2009, 24). An attentiveness to affect allows us to contend with overlooked aspects of activist social reproduction.

In my work on middle-class activists in Beirut, I am invested in thinking about the effects of their *emotional* habitus. If habitus refers to "the processes – bodily, nonconscious, affective – through which actors are conscripted, unwittingly but willingly, into the social," emotional habitus refers to a kind of "emotional pedagogy, a template for what and how to feel, in part by conferring on some feelings and modes of expression an axiomatic, natural quality and making other feeling states unintelligible within its terms and thus in a sense unfeelable and inexpressible" (Gould 2009, 34). What was the "reigning emotional habitus" (2009, 36) amongst middle-class activists in Beirut's permanent present?

Heiman, Liechty and Freeman (2012) write that "styles of consumption, modes of production (immaterial and material), approaches to reproduction, and motivations for citizen action are often inextricably connected in middle-class practices and subjectivities, and they are often imbued with affective traces of aspiration and anxiety and the desire for a feeling of security or belonging" (8). They argue that "middle classes emerge under certain socio-economic and historical conditions of possibility that allow us to conceptualise the middle class as a coherent category of social analysis," but insist "that the term's analytical coherence should not obscure the fact that, in actual practice, middle-class dynamics play out in potentially infinite ways" (12). They emphasise, crucially, that although the middle classes are economically privileged when compared to the working classes, middle-class subjectivities are also pervaded by "*feelings of insecurity*" (19). They argue that "central to the ontology of middle-class subjects across cultural and national boundaries" is a "*longing to secure*" (19), which we can attribute to the normalisation of crisis and precarity across scales of privilege.

Despite their relative privilege, middle-class subjects grapple routinely with an anxiety and nervousness in response to "the volatility now being experienced by most classed subjects" (Heiman, Liechty, and Freeman 2012, 20). For Heiman, Liechty and Freeman, middle-class subjects are burdened simultaneously by anxiety *and* aspiration, and what distinguishes them is the embodied sense of being able to slip into the working-classes but also climb the socio-economic ladder.

There is, then, an affective contour to middle classness that it is important to explore when making sense of middle-class activism. How did the middle-class aspirations and anxieties of my interlocutors shape their activism? Heiman, Liechty and Freeman (2012) highlight the "affective load of in-betweenness, or middle-ness, characteristic of middle-class life" (23). In what follows, I think with this in-betweenness in the context of Lebanon's civil society.

[8] Gould (2009) argues that social movement scholars from within the emotional turn were burdened by a concern that emotion would be equated with irrationality, and therefore they "overly cognitivised and rationalised political feelings" (23). Gould argues that this approach does not account for the ways in which feelings and reason can sometimes divaricate.

4. The Rise of the Urbanists

Reflecting on a series of events organised by the Dalieh Campaign in May and June 2017 in a draft of a report shared with campaign members, Jana, an established Iraqi architect based in Beirut and founding member of the campaign, points out that political turbulence and economic precarity in the Middle East had provided urbanists with "abundant time to fight for natural and cultural heritage protection in Lebanon."[9] Many, she explained,

> "myself included, are in design-related professions with a strong environmental sensibility and a penchant for social justice. With opportunities for professional work in architecture, landscape architecture, urban and graphic design dwindling, many channelled their energy and creativity by volunteering as campaigners for causes that have been undermined by the neoliberal economy taking over the country and the blatant suppression of the public right to the city. Caring for our heritage, both natural and cultural, is one such cause. *True volunteering doesn't pay the phone bill or put food on the table, but the rewards of upholding the right of those citizens whose voices have been silenced, accrues dividends that can't be measured in monitory [sic] terms* [emphasis added]."

The desire to exert a measure of control over the conditions shaping and constraining one's life, as well as the desire for self-fulfilment in a country widely considered as stifling as Lebanon, played an important, motivational role for my interlocutors. Amongst the mostly middle-class urban activists I worked with, there was an awareness of how their knowledge capital could be instrumentalised. My interlocutors appeared driven by a sense of duty rooted in the privilege of having the resources to cultivate this capital, and by the gratification that could be derived from acting on this sense of duty when one had few other opportunities to inject meaning into one's life.

They all shared cultural and knowledge capital that made Lebanon seem wholly inadequate, aware as they were of the workings of urban infrastructure and public services in other countries, which they had visited or lived in as students, trainees or conference and workshop participants, and which they had studied as models to aspire to. They couldn't shake their belief in the feasibility of erecting similar structures and applying similar processes in Lebanon.

"I can afford to go to the beach," Alia, a founding member of the Dalieh Campaign and a prominent urbanist and researcher, told me, "but I don't *want* to pay to go to the beach. Not because I can't, but because…I don't want to call it ideological, but I have a set of beliefs and they are linked to what I've read and what I've learned, and what I think about justice. *There's something in my experience that makes this reality unacceptable*. Of course, it's linked to what I've studied. I don't come from a revolutionary or leftist family. I guess it's what you get exposed to and what you make of it."

It felt impossible for Alia to accept to have no say in how her city and country were run. "One of the main ideas behind the right to the city and urban rights is to say that you have a right to say your opinion about your city and about how it's changing and to change it in ways you want and think are important," she told me. This insistence on having a say can be understood to derive from these activists' confidence in their expertise as urban planners, designers, engineers whose talents were being wasted, as well as from feelings of embarrassment and frustration towards a country whose "corruption" and "inadequacy" did not reflect or represent these activists.

[9] I use pseudonyms for the members of the collectives and organisations I worked with.

There is nothing new about Lebanon's contemporary professional middle class' disenchantment with the country. The activists I worked with belonged to a tradition of middle-class disillusionment and the urban activism it had been generative of, which can be traced back to the beginnings of the twentieth century. Watenpaugh (2006) describes the rise of a Levantine middle class in the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, which asserted its "modernity" as a distinguishing factor both from the ruling Sunni Muslim oligarchy and the urban and lower rural working classes. Despite its cultural capital, this class, like its contemporary iteration, was deprived access to structures of power, which it challenged through appeals to the "right to equality, citizenship, and political participation in the idiom of modernity" (8). Writing more specifically about the emergence of a middle class in Ottoman Beirut at the turn of the twentieth century, Abou-Hodeib (2017) explains that what distinguished this stratum of society was "education, upward mobility, and an investment in the city's position" (16).

When I was carrying out my fieldwork, I also observed a distinct habitus that distinguished Beirut's cosmopolitan professional middle class, one that cannot, I think, be disassociated from the genealogy traced by historians like Watenpaugh and Abou-Hodeib. It is important to elaborate on *which* Lebanese middle class I am referring to. When I refer to the middle class in this article, I am referring to a sub-section of the broader economic category – what we might consider an upper-tier with enhanced financial capabilities distinguished by a cosmopolitan lifestyle enabled by physical and cultural mobility. In Global South contexts, scholars have noted the "rise of a segment of the middle-class whose members are noticeably more affluent and more globally oriented than other members of the middle-class. These people enjoy the Western style of life, speak English, feel comfortable in foreign culture, and exhibit a global orientation in their work and leisure" (Koo 2016, 442). Koo (2016) calls this a "global middle class", defined by its "consumption patterns and social identity more than by mere income status" (443). Others have referred to this as a cosmopolitan middle class.[10] It is with this globally-oriented or cosmopolitan sub-section of the middle class in the Lebanese context that I concern myself.

Bourdieu identified an "over-involvement" on the part of the middle classes in the political and cultural spheres, linking it to nurturing environments where "taste, disposition and know-how, not to mention the inherited 'ticket' of cultural capital, such as a university degree" cultivated a desire to engage in the "political public sphere" (Crossley 2002, 175). The habitus of Beirut's cosmopolitan middle class also depended on this type of cultural capital, one that had nurtured a desire for a Lebanon that was better suited to the tastes of this class, and to its "ethics of consumption" (Abou-Hodeib 2017, 6).

It is this habitus, I think, that encouraged activists like Mansour, who founded and headed Nahnoo, to proclaim: "I have something *inside* that tells me I can change things." Nabila of the Dalieh Campaign was generating a lot of money as a senior landscape architect for one of the country's leading architectural firms, but she couldn't turn a blind eye to the corruption she argued had infected the private as well as the public sphere. She saw immense potential in the country and didn't want to participate in hindering it, so she quit her job to focus on urban activism full-time. In our conversations, she would draw on her knowledge of other contexts to explain her visions for Lebanon and the source of her desire for such visions. Expertise and knowledge capital, in this case, were productive of particular anxieties about what Lebanon was not, and desires for what it could become; desires and anxieties that were entangled with such figures' professional aspirations given that that they were equipped with the skills needed to manifest the visions they advocated for.

[10] See Moussawi (2018) for a useful breakdown of scholarly debates on the concept of cosmopolitanism, and for an elaboration on how it can be applied in the Lebanese context.

My interlocutors seemed to derive pleasure from their victories, however small or ephemeral; a pleasure rooted in their positionality as activists who were driven towards causes because of their professional background – from a need to feel useful, but also to be taken seriously; to have their authority recognised. Many spoke proudly to me about the relationships they had cultivated with particular ministries. While they bemoaned having had to pick up the slack of state institutions, they also acknowledged how much they gained from such efforts, broadening their networks, receiving work opportunities, but also coming to be relied upon by official governmental bodies.

In 2015, for example, the Dalieh Campaign organised "Revisiting Dalieh", an ideas competition to open up the debate around the site and create awareness, inviting proposals for holistic rehabilitation plans for the Dalieh. Importantly for the campaign, the competition unfolded under the patronage of the Ministry of Environment. Nabila asked me excitedly during one of our conversations if I comprehended what this meant. "We convinced the Ministry of Environment to launch the competition in their space – imagine! You're organising a competition about land that is privately owned, and the Ministry of Environment is involved. What does this mean? It's a message or indirect declaration that this site is public."[11]

In our conversations, Mansour boasted about Nahnoo's evolution from consulting with experts in 2012 to being paid for its own expertise. The organisation rarely applied for funding: "Foreign funders come to us." And, he prided himself on having cultivated relationships with the governor and the mayor, on being able to approach them for documents, to meet and negotiate with them, all the while confronting them publicly when he didn't get his way. He'd become, in his framing, a power broker.

"There should be a purpose for your professional evolution for a form of activism to survive," Balkis of the Dalieh Campaign told me. "It's not easy to find the right marriage. The people most active, this is core to their work. This is what helps the sustainability. To continue, there should be a purpose for your professional evolution." Sally, a practicing urban planner and member of the Dalieh Campaign, learned about the Dalieh through her interest in landscape architecture. She bemoaned the free labour that campaign members put into the site, taking on duties that should have been carried out by governmental institutions. But she also acknowledged the personal gains the campaign members accrued.

Thinking back on how she ended up heavily involved in more than a decade of urban activism, the Dalieh Campaign's Nour, who studied graphic design at the American University of Beirut, told me she was particularly influenced by one professor who taught her students the relationship between design and social responsibility. "The designer has a lot of power, and she should be careful how she uses it, because she can create discourse and change discourse, and set the culture of a place. We have a strong tool in our hands, and we should be aware of it."

I didn't know Nour could speak Portuguese until more than a year into working alongside her. One evening, I joined a small group of collaborators and friends gathered at her home to offer her childhood friend and partner in a research and design studio focused on urban issues well wishes after the sudden passing of a close relative. Nour spent much of the evening on her feet, prodding people to eat the snacks she had prepared, checking on the baking Pao de Queijo she'd made with ingredients hand-delivered from Sao Paulo, and translating from English and Arabic to Portuguese for the Brazilian friend visiting her. After a year of witnessing and experiencing the frustration and cyclical sense of defeat that had come to define, for many, activism in Beirut, I couldn't understand how and why Nour persisted when she had a viable elsewhere to escape to – one where she was already a naturalised citizen; where she had plenty of relatives;

[11] Despite being privately owned, the Dalieh had long functioned as a public space. "The land had originally been owned by several Beirut families who had been custodians since Ottoman times. No building was allowed, and the land was available to the public for farming and fishing. In the 1990s, the Hariri political dynasty came together to buy it" (Battah 2015, para. 7).

where language wouldn't serve as a barrier; where her skills as a graphic designer, teacher and urbanist would surely be desirable; and where, she told me, there existed a robust grassroots urban activist scene that she could become involved with.

"If I wasn't an activist working on things in the country, I wouldn't stay here," Nour told me. "The country doesn't offer me anything. It's a catastrophe. Daily life is exhausting. *It wastes your time*. I'm here because I have hope that I can change things. Because the country is small, you can create a network between different issues and people, and you feel like you can change things. In bigger countries, activism tends to be very grassroots and strong, but it's very difficult for these movements to think of running for elections, for example. Here, imagine, we [Beirut Madinati] were about to win municipal elections! *There's room here*."[12]

Urban activists like Nour regularly expressed a desire to make up for lost and wasted time resulting from the conditions of life in Lebanon; to inject meaning into their lives through activism. Survival was not often what was at stake for these activists, but rather, *purpose* and *pride*, and so it makes sense that emigration would not be the more desirable option for such highly-skilled individuals, compared to deploying their skills in a context compact enough that "successes" could be conceivably logged within its territory. I have placed "successes" in quotation marks because, as I have attempted to show in this section, the determining factor in what made something an activist success for my interlocutors was not necessarily the scale or impact of a particular strategy or action, but its effect on their sense of self.

The desire to not have one's talents wasted, to cultivate a more acceptable Lebanon where one did not feel completely devoid of purpose or belonging, can be seen as one source of the drive to continue with activism despite the likelihood of failure. This desire, however, and the context within which it has been cultivated, not only propels but *shapes* middle-class approaches to contentious politics in contemporary Beirut, as I will demonstrate in the following sections.

5. Failure, "Stuckedness" and Neoliberal Time

In the introduction, I mentioned that my interlocutors were grappling with the routinisation of failure within Lebanon's activist scene. It is important to point out that my use of "failure" is emic. I understand my interlocutors' invocation of the term "failure" not to be a means, so much, of condemning themselves or their predecessors, but of commenting on the context within which they have had to operate and the ways in which this context has hindered them. I am interested, moreover, in thinking with failure as a *structure of feeling* (Williams 1977). Failure, then, is not a diagnostic through which I evaluate Lebanese civil society's work, but a ghost whose uninterrupted haunting I argue has had an important effect on the form that activism in the country takes, as well as why and how it has been able to persist. Failure as a structure of feeling, I argue, has paradoxically *enabled* rather than *disabled* Lebanese civil society, albeit in particular directions.[13]

[12] Beirut Madinati (Beirut My City) was an independent electoral campaign that participated in the country's 2016 municipal elections, and with which Nour was intimately involved. Beirut Madinati snagged around 30 percent of the vote but lost the overall election.

[13] I follow social movement scholars who call for a rethinking of the binary between success and failure. Haiven and Khasnabish (2013), for example, argue that this binary keeps us from approaching social movements as "living spaces of encounter, possibility, contestation and conflict" (479). To focus on the why and how of success or failure is to belie the fact that social movements more often than not dwell in what Haiven and Khasnabish (2013) call the "hiatus" between not-success and not-failure. The bulk of social movement labour, according to such scholars, is actually invested in the hiatus, in the "ability to keep hope, solidarity, and purpose alive, for both groups and individuals" (2013, 487). This "ecology of

In his research on activists in Lebanon, Musallam (2019) writes that his interlocutors described a feeling of "failure in the air" – not "failure-as-setback, but rather failure-as-'atmosphere'" (35). Musallam explains that his interlocutors experienced failure "as something beyond themselves" (36), and I heard a similar sentiment expressed during my time in the field. Failure was framed as a product of particular conditions of (im)possibility; of the entrenchment of the *status quo*, the Lebanese ruling class and sectarian-neoliberalism.

I understand life in Lebanon to be characterised by a sense of existential stuckedness (Hage 2015) born of crisis turned ordinary (Berlant 2011). Hage (2015) writes that on a global scale within our neoliberal conjuncture, "rather than being perceived as something that one needs to get out of at any cost," stuckedness is "experienced, ambivalently, as an inevitable pathological state that has to be endured" (Chapter 2). Within this context, the political imagination has been emaciated, and our ability to imagine alternatives to the *status quo* has been severely diminished.

In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant (2011) asks what happens to "fantasies of the good life" (3) when crisis is made ordinary and precarity is made ubiquitous. They write that "across diverse geopolitical and biopolitical locations, the present moment increasingly imposes itself on consciousness as a moment in extended crisis, with one happening piling on another" (7). Fisher (2009) refers to this impasse as "capitalist realism", "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system," but that "it is now impossible to imagine a coherent alternative to it" (2).

Both Berlant and Fisher argue that under the entangled regimes of crisis ordinariness and capitalist realism, people become fixated on finding ways to live on within the permanent present rather than live *towards* the future-impossible. What happens to activism, I ask, amidst the "attrition of fantasy" (Berlant 2011, 11)? What happens when world-making comes to be detached from the future? Affective responses, Berlant (2011) tells us, "may be said significantly to exemplify shared historical time" (15). What can the emotional habitus of Lebanese civil society tell us about capitalist time and what can it tell us about the relationship between class subjectivity and cruel optimism as it manifests in activist spaces?

What Berlant (2011) calls cruel optimism is a relation that exists "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing." Optimism turns cruel, they write, "when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially" (2). I argue that what Musallam (2019) calls "failure-as-atmosphere" turned, more often than not, the relation that my interlocutors had with their activism into one of cruel optimism – the desire to do activism a certain way and with certain people, despite also recognising that these choices and strategies hindered long-term growth. Personal joy, satisfaction, pleasure and growth in the *present*, I argue, were often chosen over the *future*. Activism became a means of performing a version of the good life rather than facilitating it. To make sense of middle-class activism as a relation of cruel optimism in Lebanon, it is important, I argue, to think through the effects of neoliberalism not only as a governing rationality but, following Berlant, Hage and Fisher, as a *temporal* orientation.

In the next section, I want to dwell further on this temporal orientation, moving from the factors enabling the perseverance of the activists with whom I worked, to those enabling fracturing or and breakdown.

6. The Social Life of Social Movements

Hermez (2015) argues that it is more common for many in Lebanon to view the sectarian-political system as "reflective of a non-state" (509). He writes that "in the imagination of its various citizens, the state exists

persistence," Haiven and Khasnabish (2013) argue, is "a vital one for researchers to study" because, among other reasons, "it (rather than definitive success or failures) is the real substance of social movements" (484).

in the subjunctive mood, as something that would be rather than as something that is" (509). People aim for and desire a "stronger, more accountable, and more bureaucratic and Weberian form" of the state (510) but negotiate with the state in ways that actually push this fantasy further from reality by, for example, taking advantage of clientelism in order to survive. He refers to this as a cynical relation to the state, wherein people recognise that their actions allow what they frame as the weak, failed or corrupt state to persist, but are unable to remove themselves from this dynamic because these negotiations constitute their means of surviving. "The cynical reasoning," he writes, "stems from people knowing how things are (they know their political engagement will not yield real change) but acting as if they don't know. I contend that they do this to, among other things, survive and manage everyday life, and for self-preservation" (517). Cynical relations emerge from "the absence of alternatives and an inability to imagine another horizon of possibility" (515).

Building off Hermez (2015), I see the middle-class activists I worked with as orienting themselves "in a demystified world by focusing on self-preservation and self-advancement" (516). But I argue that cynicism cannot fully account for the *emotional* attachment that my interlocutors had to their activism. Cynicism, I argue, linked as it is to a dearth of alternatives and the decline of the political imagination, cannot account for the *persistence* of the activist dynamics and strategies I observed in moments bursting with political potential, such as the October Revolution of 2019.

To make sense of this persistence, we have to factor in what we might call "nonrational" (Gould 2009) or "stubborn" affect or, following from Berlant, cruel optimism – the inability to detach from modes of coping and getting by even when opportunities for transformative rupture present themselves, because these modes were not only necessary but *gratifying* on a personal level. This is an approach to neoliberal time that requires that we grapple with embodiment and affect, with what it means to have been made to long inhabit the present as permanent and crisis as ordinary.

In his theorisation of capitalist realism, Fisher (2009) argues that the term is also meant to describe the sense of purpose and fulfilment that those positioned against a capitalism to which no realistic alternative can be imagined derive from committing themselves to the belief that it is "bad", regardless of whether they continue to "participate in capitalist exchange" (13).This, I argue, can help us make sense of the commitment that many activists in Lebanon have to practices they *acknowledge* are unlikely to assist them in inching towards their own grander visions. The civil society scene I participated in was shaped by a particular kind of haunting – the spectre that everything was for nothing. As my fieldwork unfolded, I watched my interlocutors behave in ways they themselves often acknowledged were counter-productive in relation to their long-term goals. There was something to be gained from persevering with particular strategies in the present when more radical alternatives were felt to be impossible to achieve.

Many Lebanese social movements and activist organisations have collapsed under the weight of internal conflict. AbiYaghi, Catusse and Younes (2017) argue that anti-sectarian movements in Lebanon "face a kind of sectarian trap in which sectarian discourses appear to reproduce themselves" (84). I am reluctant, however, to diagnose the fragmentation that seems to characterise Lebanese civil society as indicative of the country's "culture" of sectarianism manifesting amongst anti-sectarian actors. Rather, I think it more fruitful to turn to neoliberal rationality's role in cultivating a pervasive commitment to entrepreneurial individualism, *as well* as the pleasure that can be derived from activism, and the desire not to have one's enjoyment sullied by others with whom one does not particularly *enjoy* collaborating – even when that desire gets in the way of the entrepreneurial drive.

Khneisser (2018) writes of the "high level of 'ego'" (14) that her interviewees pointed to when describing the struggle between activists vying for leadership of the *Hirak*. But egoism, I observed, had an everyday presence in Lebanon's civil society, even in the absence of explosive movements and mobilisations.

Particularly palpable was the tension between some of the collectives and organisations who came together during my fieldwork to form The Alliance for the Lebanese Coast.

The alliance meetings I attended were often punctuated by passive aggressiveness, attempts to position some forms of knowledge, expertise or experience as more relevant than others, and an obsessive need to call out anyone perceived to be attempting to creep into a position of leadership. Some, for example, were frustrated by the desire to reschedule meetings if particular prominent activists could not attend, with the latter assumed to be attempting to position themselves as *de facto* leaders of what was meant to be a horizontal collective.

At a volunteer meeting for one of the more prominent NGOs involved with the alliance that was called to discuss a protest related to yet another threatened site in the city, the head of the organisation explained that he'd invited another group to write and read out a collective statement during the protest. Shocked, one of the volunteers asked why he would do that when his organisation was the primary organiser. "They can have the protest," he responded. "It's only our name in the press anyway. What does a rich guy care about giving a poor guy 1,000 LL?"

This organiser saw humility in his organisation's discretion, but others saw this approach as suspiciously covert – a strategy for cunningly coming to dominate issues. A member of one of the more informal collectives involved in the alliance explained that despite being a member of the collective's wider net of volunteers, the NGO head mentioned above did not share relevant information with them despite having access to their data.

> "Anytime we ask him for anything, he refers us to their website where the logo is so huge you can't print anything. All of our stuff is published. He says something, then he goes to the governor and says something else. He works independently, doesn't coordinate with anyone, and then screws up your work. How can you cooperate with the governor when we are in battle against him? We are working over the table and getting burned while he visits with the governor because he's helping him with his campaigns*. It's become an issue of personal stakes. We're supposed to be fighting personal interest*. What guarantees to me that he won't go to the governor and tell him everything we're doing? How can I trust him?"

Members off the alliance whose collectives had purposely chosen a non-hierarchical approach to their organising that eschewed donor funds expressed a distaste for NGOs. One activist explained to me that NGOs "get a grant for a project, do it and put it in the drawer. Tell me, what are NGOs getting done?" She expressed trepidation with regards to NGOs that applied for funds aimed at addressing public spaces that these more informal groups had long campaigned on behalf of:

> "They want to apply for a grant and take over the project. We object, and they say, what's the big deal, it's public, do you own it? And we say, it's not about owning it, but when you're doing all the work and working day and night on something – if I show you the hours of work, it's worth thousands, thousands of dollars… and they're sitting there watching and not doing anything even though they are technically supposed to be part of the campaign. What do they mean they're going to go get a grant? How can I trust someone like this?"

But these NGOs felt similarly about the less structured collectives they shared the alliance with. In 2016, during an introductory meeting of the first iteration of the coastal alliance, which was meant to kick off with

an event on a site that had already been heavily campaigned for by one of its members, the gathered activists discussed whether to work under the banner of the collective focused on the site, or to present themselves as a coalition of independent groups working together for the site. Members of the collective insisted that, given their campaign's existence and success, the network should line up behind it. The second in command of one of the more prominent NGOs in attendance objected. "Strategy should never be finalised and imposed – it should be routinely revised. If we are partners, we should be able to amend the strategy, not just implement someone else's strategy." Members of the collective being addressed were visibly distressed. One noted, "what you're saying *scares* me," taking the NGO representative aback. "The campaign is active, working with ministries and international organisations. If we want a collaboration, we need to work within the strategy that was three years in the making." The NGO representative held onto this articulation of "fear", unable to fathom why her desire to share her recommendations should be met with such trepidation. "To build an alliance we have to trust each other," she responded. "Of course, if the strategy is great, we'll implement it, but if we have things to add we should be able to discuss them." The altercation came up the following week during a volunteer meeting organised by this NGO. "Why fear?" the head of the organisation asked: "It's all ego. Wanting to be the face of these things. Why are they afraid of partnership? We could have organised the event ourselves on a larger scale."

These NGOs and collectives needed collaborations to get where they wanted to go, and they often asserted that they were confident their organisations would always find a way to shine. However, these displays of confidence and ostensible commitment to taking a backseat in a gesture of goodwill to enable collaboration were contradicted by the anxiety displayed about being overshadowed, which came out in the seemingly endless tug of war for influence, which threatened to hinder if not collapse the coalition they were trying to collectively build.

Khaled, of the non-profit Green Line, which had been active since the 1990s, criticised the blanket "demonisation" of NGOs articulated by collectives like the one discussed above. "They lump NGOs with political parties. We're demons. Why? Because we get funds. Okay, tomorrow you organise an activity and do it without funds." But Green Line had a tense relationship with other NGOs, particularly those that had addressed the issue of Horsh Beirut after Green Line had campaigned for the site for years, only to be eclipsed by their success. Khaled explained that the younger generation of activists did not want "to recognise the work done before." He observed a tendency to claim that "there was nothing before," as a means of activists inflating their own work and their profiles. He continued:

> *"Who is going to take responsibility for institutional memory? It's missing and we have to develop it. We have to clean things up so we can have harmony in our approach to long-term objectives, or else we will be easy to defeat. Politicians already have tons of NGOs.* Selfishness is being nurtured as we try to raise awareness and introduce common thinking about the social. Individualism is being nurtured, because it's only through individualism that people get what they want. *Everyone wants to be on the media. Civil society is not unified. Few are the people willing to risk their own personal reputation and interests. These new movements they tell us, let us live our own experiences. But I've been around for 25 years. I don't have the luxury of time to wait for you to learn."*

Accounts of tension and competitiveness amongst activists in Lebanon can perhaps be explained through recourse to Brown's (2005) discussion of how neoliberal rationality has reshaped practices of citizenship. "The body politic ceases to be a body but is, rather, a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers" (43). Ideal neoliberal citizens are "rational, calculating creatures" (42), invested primarily in self-care, in providing for their own needs and servicing their own ambitions. But making sense of the fragmentation of

Lebanon's activist scene *solely* through the analytical lens of neoliberal entrepreneurialism leaves something to be desired. It is, I think, an essential part of the story – we have, after all, seen the role that professional considerations play in propelling many towards activism and shaping their approaches to it. What it doesn't completely account for, at least not explicitly, however, is the fact that the ubiquity of competitiveness, egoism and cliquishness amongst activists *gets in the way* of their own personal ambitions, acknowledge as most of them do that coalition work is the only way forward – that they can't get where they need to go on their own.

While some of their decisions might seem "rational" and "calculating", activists also often seemed *incapable* of the collaboration across collectives and organisations that they had deemed necessary for meeting their own individual aspirations. What I have tried to show is that the activists with whom I worked did not only derive enjoyment from the successes of their activism, but also often sacrificed their own progress to hold on to their particular ways of doing things, which is why I have labelled this a relation of cruel optimism following from Berlant, rather than a merely cynical relation. This desire to cling to the peers one was used to collaborating with, the strategies one had thought up, did not always stem from a process of rationalisation, but was also rooted in the enjoyment that could be derived from one's own activist routine in a context and conjuncture where most of my interlocutors acknowledged that they were unlikely to log big wins.

This can be further illustrated through a brief discussion of the atmospheric discrepancy between the Dalieh Campaign's meetings and those of the alliance. I began volunteering with the Dalieh Campaign as part of my fieldwork in the summer of 2016. The first meeting I attended was boisterous. Campaign members hadn't met in months, because they had all been busy with different aspects of Beirut Madinati's municipal campaign. After almost an hour devoted to hugs and kisses, catch ups and jokes, the latest gossip and rumours, the group got down to business. The meeting and those that followed it, while in many ways serious, also often felt like what in colloquial Lebanese Arabic is referred to as a *sobhiyyeh* – a morning social gathering of friends over coffee, tea and treats. Campaign members knew one another on a professional and a personal basis; they were friends, non-biological kin even, sometimes co-workers. They attended one another's Christmas parties and *iftars*; they celebrated birthdays, marriages and births together; teased one another.

Their WhatsApp group, which I remained a part of after leaving the field, was a convivial space, more often one for exchanging personal updates than for sharing professional or activist news. By contrast, the WhatsApp group for the coastal alliance was used only for activist business, and the alliance's meetings were often tense and stiff. The activists I otherwise knew as funny, light-hearted, wise crackers wore unfamiliar faces in that space; their gestures were different: forced smiles, slouching, indicators of exasperation, boredom and tenseness, were more prevalent than those that signalled joy, comfort, and safety. An alliance meeting would not, or at least did not, during my time in Beirut, become dinner or drinks in the way a Dalieh meeting could. Alliance meetings felt painful, forced, burdensome, whereas Dalieh meetings felt effortless, despite the disagreements that often punctuated them. Such disagreements, unlike with the alliance, were often followed by laughter, teasing or other modes of defusing tension common to friendship circles.

The Dalieh Campaign, however, could not save the coast on its own. It was unlikely to even save the Dalieh on its own. But despite the need for the alliance the coalition had, at the time of writing, quieted down substantially, whereas the Dalieh Campaign, while it was not as active as it was previously, remained a collective, remained ready to mobilise, its members encountering one another in other activist spaces they either co-founded or entered into together. I argue that the intimate nature of the campaign, the fact that it served as a space of pleasure and fun alongside being a space for strategizing and campaigning, and that its

members not only got along with but enjoyed one another, has played a role in the collective's longevity. The reverting to the intimate and familiar, the reluctance to continue with or the desire to abandon the tedious, uncomfortable or burdensome, I argue, needs to be made sense of in light of neoliberalism's temporal effects and the emptying out of the future in our contemporary conjuncture, and in light of the embodied sense that this kind of labour was not worth much when substantial or transformative change was felt to be unlikely if not impossible.

7. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that, for many of my interlocutors, activism had become a "way of life" (Kiwan 2017); a good in itself, rather than a means towards a particular end. The activist spaces they moved between and the practices that informed them, regardless of their outcomes and wider impact, often appeared as goods in themselves, worthy for the personal, *secular* salvation they facilitated, for enabling a sense of the good life in a national context considered wholly corrupt and corrupting.

Within these spaces, a minority of disenchanted middle-class denizens of Beirut were able to derive temporary gratification and fulfilment from a being together with those who longed for "a different way to cohabit the political" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 159), and from work that enriched their professional and personal lives. The reluctance to change one's tactics or to collaborate, the fear of being "invaded", can be seen to derive from a concern about the contamination of a carefully cultivated, intimate alter-ontological space and the subsequent disruption of one's practice of the good life.

I have discussed the relationship between middle-class subjectivity and the "doing" of activism as a means of feeding particular aspirations and quelling particular anxieties, and some of the consequences of an approach to activism as *the* good life rather than a means *to* the good life. This investment in "the activity of activism" (Kiwan 2017) rather than the *telos* of activism, I argue, was a product of a particular political and temporal conjuncture that while taking on specificities in the Lebanese context, is in fact global in scale.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the editors of this Special Issue for inviting me to contribute, and the anonymous reviewers for their generous and helpful feedback.

References

AbiYaghi M.N., M. Catusse, and M. Younes (2017), "From Isqat an-nizam at-Ta'ifi to the Garbage Crisis Movement: Political Identities and Antisectarian Movements", in R. Di Peri and D. Meier (eds.), *Lebanon facing the Arab Uprisings: Constraints and Adaptation*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 73-91.

Abou-Hodeib T. (2017), *A Taste for Home: The Modern Middle Class in Ottoman Beirut*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Amarasuriya H. *et al*. (2020), "Introduction: The Intimate life of Dissent", in H. Amarasuriya, T. Kelly, S. Maunaguru, G. Dustinova-Stjepanovic and J. Spencer (eds.), *The Intimate Life of Dissent: Anthropological Perspectives*, London: UCL Press, pp. 1-21.

Battah H. (2015), *A City without a Shore: Rem Koolhaas, Dalieh and the Paving of Beirut's Coast*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/mar/17/rem-koolhaas-dalieh-beirut-shore-coast/.

Berlant L. (2011), *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Biagini E. (2021), "What's love got to do with it? Women, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and organisational identity", *Partecipazione e conflitto*, 14(2): 547-564.

Brown W. (2005), *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Butler J., and A. Athanasiou (2013), *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge: Polity.

Chamas S. (2020), "Reading Marx in Beirut: Disorganised Study and the Politics of Queer Utopia", *Middle East - Topics & Arguments*, 14: 143-59.

Crossley N. (2002), *Making Sense of Social Movements*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Fisher M. (2009), *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books.

Goodwin J., J. M. Jasper, and F. Polletta (2001), "Introduction: Why Emotions Matter", in J. Goodwin, J. M. Jasper, and F. Polletta (eds.), *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 27-45.

Gould D. (2009), *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hage G. (2015), *Alter-politics: Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination* [Kindle version]. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Haiven M., and A. Khasnabish (2013), "Between Success and Failure: Dwelling with Social Movements in the Hiatus", *Interface*, 5(2): 472-498.

Heiman R., C. Freeman, and M. Leichty (2012), "Introduction: Charting an Anthropology of the Middle Classes", in R. Heiman, C. Freeman, and M. Leichty (eds.), *The Global Middle Classes: Theorizing Through Ethnography*, Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press. pp. 3-30.

Harb M. (2016), *Cities and Political Change: How Young Activists in Beirut Bred an Urban Social Movement* (Working paper no. 20). Rome: IAI-Power2Youth.

Hermez S. (2015), "When the State is (N)ever pPesent: On Cynicism and Political Mobilization in Lebanon", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 21(3): 507-523.

Juris J., and A. Khasnabish (2015), "Immanent Accounts: Ethnography, Engagement, and Social Movement Practices", in D. Della Porta and M. Diani (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements* [Kindle Version], Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Juris J. S. (2007), "Practicing Militant eEhnography with the Movement for Global Resistance in Barcelona", in S. Shukaitis, D. Graaber, and E. Biddle (eds.), *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations // Collective Theorization*, Oakland: AK Press, pp. 164-176.

Kelly T. (2019), "Introduction: Anthropological Perspectives on the Intimate Life of Dissent", *American Ethnologist*. Retrieved from https://americanethnologist.org/features/collections/the-intimacy-of-dissent/introduction.

Kerbage C. (2017), *Politics of coincidence: The Harak confronts its "peoples"* (Working paper). Beirut, Lebanon: Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy. Retrieved from http://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/publications/working_papers/2016-2017/20170213_wp_hirak_english.pdf.

Khasnabish A., and M. Haiven (2014), *The radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity*. London: Zed Books.

Khattab L.W. (2015), "Neoliberal Sectarianism and Associational Life", in B. F. Salloukh, R. Barakat, J. Al-Habbal, L. W. Khattab, and S. Mikaelin (eds.), *The politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*, London: Pluto Press, pp. 52-69.

Khneisser M. (2018), "The Marketing of Protest and Antinomies of Collective Organization in Lebanon", *Critical* Sociology: 1-22.

Khneisser M. (2019), "The Spectre of 'Politics' and Ghosts of 'Alternatives' Past: Lebanese 'Civil Society' and the Antinomies of Contemporary Politics", *Critical Sociology*: 1-19.

Kingston P. W. (2013), *Reproducing Sectarianism: Advocacy Networks and the Politics of Civil Society in Postwar Lebanon*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kiwan D. (2017), "Emotive Acts of Citizenship, Social Change and Knowledge Production in Lebanon", *Interface,* 9(2): 114-142.

Koo H. (2016), "The Global Middle Class: How is it Made, What Does it Represent?", *Globalizations*, 12(4): 440-453.

Moghnieh L., and M. A. Nayel (2015), "The Protests in Lebanon Three Months After", *New Politics*. Retrieved from http://newpol.org/content/protests-lebanon-three-months-after.

Moussawi G. (2018), "Queer Exceptionalism and Exclusion: Cosmopolitanism and Inequalities in 'Gay-Friendly' Beirut", *The Sociological Review (Keele)*, 66(1): 174-190.

Musallam F. (2019), "'Failure in the Air': Activist Narratives, In-group Story-telling, and Keeping Political Possibility Alive in Lebanon", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 26(1): 30-47.

Musallam F. (2016*), Failure and the Politically Possible: Space, Time and Emotion among Independent Sctivists in Beirut, Lebanon* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/3457/.

Naber N., and Z. Zaatari (2014), "Reframing the War on Terror: Feminist and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Activism in the Context of the 2006 Israeli Invasion of Lebanon", *Cultural Dynamics,* 26(1): 91-111.

Salman T., and W. Assies (2007) "Anthropology and the Study of Social Movements", in B. Klandermans and C. Roggeband (eds.), *Handbook of Social Movements Across Disciplines*, New York: Springer Publishing, pp. 205-266.

Schielke J. (2015), *Egypt in the Future Tense: Hope, Frustration, and Ambivalence Before and After 2011*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Watenpaugh K. (2006), *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Williams R. (1977), *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Author's Information:

Sophie Chamas is currently Senior Teaching Fellow in Gender Studies at SOAS, University of London. She holds a PhD in Modern Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Oxford. She is a political anthropologist focused on the study of the life, death and afterlife of the radical political imagination in the MENA.