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Movement. Images.
Gendered Geographies of Arab Militant Images and Social Movements, Past and Present

By

Mary Jirmanus Saba

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Philosophy

in

Geography

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Gillian Hart, Co-chair
Professor Michael Watts, Co-chair
Professor Leigh Raiford
Associate Professor Jeffrey Skoller

Summer 2024

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Abstract

Movement. Images.
Gendered Geographies of Arab Militant Images and Social Movements, Past and Present

By
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Movement. Images examines the relationship between militant images and social movements in the Arab world in the 1970s and 80s, in comparison to the so-called Arab Spring and our current conjuncture. It departs from questions raised in the process of making my film *A Feeling Greater Than Love* (FIPRESCI Prize, Berlinale Forum 2017), which revisits the role of women in two major popular uprisings in 1970s Lebanon, a strike at the Gandour chocolate factory in 1972 and a 1973 tobacco farmer uprising in South Lebanon in relation to militant cinema of that era.

Movement. Images situates ethnographic research into historical on-the-ground organizing with contemporaneous film representations to investigate the changing modes of popular uprising and militant images from the late 1960s until the present, and the political stakes of those shifts. I make three primary interventions. First, I adopt the framework of the "housework of the movement" understood as the range of relational activities that build meaning and sustainability in movements, to highlight the invisible and gendered work which actively develops strategy and tactics by connecting movement praxis with peoples' everyday lives. I suggest multiple instances in the strikes in which centering strategic insights of movement housework may have prevented setback and even changed the movements' course. Second, I argue that we cannot isolate questions of representation from material and movement histories; rather, we must read social movements and militant images in relation to each other, and in relation to the interconnected spatially and temporally situated circumstances from which they emerge. Suggesting that resistance is a nonlinear cultural and material landscape of struggle, I consider the ways the strikes and films continue to intersect with ongoing political practice. Juxtaposing distinct moments of Arab militant cinema from the 1970s until the Arab Spring, I demonstrate that in each of these conjunctures, distinct dynamics of financing, circulation and popular discourse enabled certain narratives, movement organizing models, and modes of image production at the expense of others. 1970s and 1980s filmmakers, steeped in the praxes of tricontinentalism, harnessed formal experimentation to critique both colonialism and rigid hierarchies within anticolonial organizations that funded their films. In turn, introducing a framework called "character driven resilience doc," I show how several critically acclaimed Arab Spring films emphasize personal change at the expense of illuminating structural inequality, subtly but powerfully limiting horizons for imagining social change. Finally, by bringing critical geography into conversation with film theory, I offer an expansive definition of the militant image — one based on an image's function and active political interpretation with its concrete audience. I conclude by suggesting this relational mode of viewing images and movement histories — bringing images and critical movement histories in dialogue with our present, and through the lens of social movement housework — can help us discern new political directions. Returning to our current conjuncture and the brutal multifaceted war on Gaza, I search for emergent political actors, alliances and configurations that push the boundaries of cinematic and political horizons.

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Dedication

For Elaine,
Saniye, Naila, Warde
and everyone else
doing the housework
that is actually the movement work.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation began in 2009 (or even before) as a film, *A Feeling Greater Than Love,* itself a labor of many years and contributions of dozens of people, plants, places and other beings. The film and thus the dissertation began as a conversation with my comrades and collaborators in the collective Vientos del Sur (now Runa Sur), and I am grateful to their relational thinking, dedication and expansive creativity for both my first serious political education, and for asking me why there were no films about farmer movements in Lebanon and Palestine — provoking me to make one. I thank also everyone who worked on, and appeared in, our short-lived but fierce rural broadcast television program, *Via Comunidad,* where I first experimented with dialectical editing that resembled the constant discussions we had parallelling our organizing work. The spatial relation between rural Carchi, Quito, Beirut and South Lebanon, particularly between Mount Pichinicha and Jabel 'Amil also created sensations, tensions and openings that formed how I made the film and what questions I ultimately asked about space, time, history and movement.

Of course, my participation in Vientos del Sur would never have happened without the formidable Elaine Hagopian who convinced me to go back to Ecuador in 2006 when I was burnt out and discouraged from chaotic organizing against Israel's US-supported war on Lebanon and the catastrophic beginnings of the US-NATO Project the "New Middle East." She thought maybe I'd learn something useful about movement discipline and strategy in Latin America, and she was correct. I'm forever grateful for Elaine's guidance, stories, wisdom and all the movement housework she has done and inspired for Arab liberation. Elaine also introduced me to her 1970s generation movement contacts in Lebanon, in particular Fawaz Traboulsi whose important book *A Modern History of Lebanon* set the ground for my investigation, and who likewise directed me towards his Gandour and Tobacco Uprising comrades who then reached back in time towards comrades they hadn't seen in decades to help my research. This project wouldn't have happened without him.

In Lebanon dozens of people supported my vague and meandering but ambitious search for the histories of the Gandour and Tobacco Farmers Strikes. Ahmed Dirani and Adib Abou Habib, offered many stories, analyses and insights which in turn led to their own paths. Ahmed told me the stories of his own overlapping student and worker organizing, and introduced me to Saniya Soueidan and Ahmed Choulan, the charming protagonists of *A Feeling Greater Than Love* and brilliant political analysts, expert gardeners and model grandparents. Rasha Salti believed in my aspirational vision even though I had never made a proper film before, introduced me to loads of people in film funding and the 1970s left, gave incisive feedback on numerous cuts of the film, and was an invaluable supporter, executive producer, and champion up through and beyond the film's premiere in the Berlinale.

The film and research would not have happened without the members of Itihad al Shabab al Demoqrati (The Lebanese Union of Students and Youth) who committed to this research as their own, drove with me around on seemingly endless scouting and filming trips in South Lebanon, heatedly debated the difference between material conditions in Lebanon and South America, all while sometimes making fun of my (then) very poor Arabic. Hiba Awar, Ali Bassal, Yara Namoura, Yousef Meslimani, Ali Amacha, Ali Salame, Adham Najdi and Jamal Awar and the overlapping film crew-ex-Itihad extraordinaire talents of Karam Ghoussein and Mohamad Hamdar magically helped transformed my vague desire to retell the stories of the Gandour and Tobacco Farmer uprisings into

actual film scenes with people who had organized those strikes. Likewise, my friends in Nasawiya, particularly Farah Salka and Nadine Mouawad, understood, empathized and strategized around how to highlight the essential (but difficult to uncover) organizing and strategic work of women in the movement. Jinane Dagher, Sabine Sidawi, Ramzi Haddad, Rouba Attieh, Ziad Chahoud and Dahna Abourahme were also superb film interlocutors and logistical supporters in the early phases of the film and research. Kinda Hassan, Farah Ibrahim and Alexandre Paulikavitch graciously participated in the first iteration of the film (which I never finished) and Alex introduced me to *his* comrade Nadine Acoury (aka Warde) whose stories, staunch perspectives and insistent critiques were central to the film, and to my own analysis. Fadi Bardawil's ambitious research agenda on the Arab left informed this project, and along with the wonderful Nour Ouayda, he skillfully moderated a tough audience at *A Feeling Greater Than Love's* opening night. Hania Mroue, Nisrine Wehbe and the entire Metropolis team gave the film a warm welcome in the cinema for six weeks. Rida Ismael and his fantastic memory offered detailed stories, thoughtful analysis and lists of names of worker-colleagues. Mohamad Najib Al Jammal and Habib Yaghi welcomed me and whoever else I showed up with, for long, sprawling conversations and have stewarded the memory of tobacco militancy through the decades. Malek Abisaab created a formidable example to follow for researching women's work in the labor movement and was a staunch ally when I was struggling with the public reaction to the film. After seeing the film, Wadah Charara too offered encouraging words, told me all kinds of OCA back stories that I still need to explore and dreamt up a new intergenerational film project — which we still need to make. I thank also all the women who did not want to be named, but particularly N and R for excitedly tracking down old friends and coworkers. I hope that I've down your stories justice.

At Ashkal Alwan Home Workspace Program, where I developed work around the missing or stolen strike images and tried to edit the film, I found a set of lifelong collaborators and comrades, without whom I would have long ago quit art (and definitely contemporary art) altogether: Xaytun Ennasr, Ilia Yankovenko, Salwa Aleryani, Merve Unsal and the organizing experience of cooperative/ta3waniya are among my very dearests. Rami Sabbagh tracked down the copy of *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* which we all watch and write about, an incredible feat, and he also gave invaluable feedback on final edits of my film, as did Vartan Avakian and Chagigh Arzoumanian. Bilal Hibri, Sarah Francis, Chrystel Elias, Ali Essafi, Victor Bresse, Ziad Fayed, Haitham Atme and everyone at Lucid Post accompanied my delirious final moments of finishing *A Feeling Greater Than Love,* and I associate the film's finishing with their friendship. I am grateful also to Kristine Khoury, dear friend, most gracious host, image acquisition expert and the MasterChef cousin only rivalling my actual cousin Naila Saba.

My wonderful family fed me, deflected my mother's worried phone calls during escalations in the South, and told everyone they knew to go to the film's premiere even though they found it leftist and experimental: Naila Saba and children, Nahia Nasrallah, Laila and Jacques Saghbini, as well as my surrogate family, Nuzleh, Rasha and Rania Kassab, Nadia Nasrallah and particularly the too-big, too fancy 1990s Mercedes in which I managed to do many (I think) captivating tracking shots all around Beirut and the South. I am grateful also to my dear friends, neighbors, beach and protest companions, Romy Attieh, Lina Mounzer, Tarek Abi Samra, Yousef Zbib, Bernadette Daou, Yazan Saadi, Diana Abbani, Jamil Oueini, Lamia Moughnieh, Walid Houri, Mansour Aziz and Elizabeth Saleh for many long, hilarious debates crossing between frivolous and serious political discussions. Lina Mounzer and Liz Saleh offered incredibly helpful feedback on very early drafts of some of these chapters. Tayounne, Sanayah, Kfar Roummane, Aytaroun and the tobacco-lined roads in

between inspired much of my thinking and feeling about history, space and past and present, and this dissertation is a story of those places as much as it is of the people within them.

In Cairo, master editor Louly Seif was the most crucial interlocutor of the film, finding resonances between images past and present in ways I hadn't imagined or felt. Jennifer Evans and Mia Jankovitz laughed at all my jokes and encouraged me to pursue a tough critique of contemporary art funding which turned into Chapter Four. And while we have never actually met up in Cairo, Alia Ayman's sharp critique of the political economy of cinema funding and circulation and the possibilities we might generate together continues to push my imagination. Mai Abu ElDahab who I also met (quickly) in Cairo, later encouraged me to write about motherhood and gendered exclusions in the art world which have transformed both my artistic practice, and my scholarship.

At Berkeley, Gillian Hart has provided unbridled intellectual, moral and theoretical mentorship for this project, as it has changed from a comparative rural political economy study to a film, and back over the years. Her academic and political rigor, commitment as an educator, scholar and mentor to a global project of collective liberation has offered a model which so many aspire to, and has helped clarify and support this project in countless ways. Jake Kosek convinced me to return to Berkeley to complete my PhD after five years away and a film, and joyfully maneuvered with and around the logistics and hoops put forward by academic institutions so that I could do my work, as well as insisted I read a set of thinkers which have truly transformed my thinking. I am grateful also to Michael Watts, whose work on critical ethnography and political economy pulled me to Berkeley in the first place. Michael also recognized the ways that images, movements, revolution and nationalism were deeply interconnected geographic questions when I was questioning whether my topic of study was misplaced within the discipline. Jeffrey Skoller — filmmaker-scholar — has challenged me to push the boundaries of what that hyphen can mean, enriched my historical thinking about cinema and images, constantly reminded me that film form is deeply political and that images are a social construction with very high stakes. Leigh Raiford's ways of thinking and writing about images, art and movements, feminism and racial capitalism are inspirational and exciting, and her supportive mentorship and commitment to community made being back in the academy feel manageable and even meaningful. I am blessed to have met her and her writing. Finally, I am grateful to Mel Chen, and their caring and experimental pedagogy. Supporting their teaching in *Doing Feminist Research,* was an actual transformative experience which solidified for me that thinking about how we do our research and teaching, where we are and with whom, is as urgent a question as any political matter.

At Harvard and MIT, Renee Green, Philippe Grandrieux, Philip Cartelli, John Akomfrah and Lina Gopaul introduced me to so many films, texts, people and ways of working that set the stage for my artistic practice and research.

Finally, my family who are the home that crosses and defies geographic borders. My parents: Naila Saba Jirmanus and Munir Jirmanus, who were relieved that geography is at least a science on paper and who might disagree that all my radical ideas are actually their practice put into words (they are), thank you for everything always. My sister, Lara who got lost with me on long interview drives to the South, became a film producer and sound designer (while already a medical doctor) in order to help me start and then finish my film, took care of me and my children so that I could write my exams, and taught me what it means to put fighting injustice at the center of everything I do. Tareq Rantisi, artistic and intellectual partner, whose ideas, creativity and steadfastness infuse all my work, from scholarship to film to organization, and who has also done the bulk of invisible movement housework while I write. Nada Ziane and Seri Kamil, my children, have produced in our

collaboration the embodied awareness of the feminist principles that this text aspires to, and all my aspirations (and the things they will certainly imagine and produce) for the movement I hope they will carry forward. My surrogate sisters, Patricia Stuelke and Molly Geidel have been model political academics who introduced me to so many important ideas and ways of working, and organized while they wrote.

In the US, my chosen family, the housework collective: Balraj Gill, Sanjay Pinto, Chavi Goenka, and my People's CDC comrades, including Zoey Thill, Rita Valenti, Adam Moore, Raj Chaklashiya as well as UAW Labor for Palestine: amid the horror of our present, with you it feels that the great power of our collective action is truly invincible. I am grateful to reflect on our organizing in relation to these pasts I have researched, and to be living the profound challenges of this current conjuncture with you as comrades and conspirators. This is truly a feeling greater than love.

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While all these people and places have contributed ideas, feelings, histories, critique and feedback to this text, any errors or admissions are mine alone.

Malden, MA unceded Massachuset territory, August 2024

Introduction

> The cinema to which we aspire will have to devote itself to expressing the present as well as the past and the future. (Palestine Film Unit 1974).
>
> How *could* we come to understand … the genesis of the present, along with the preconditions and processes involved, other than by starting in the present, working our way back to the past, and then retracing our steps? (Lefebvre 1991: 66; emphasis in original).

In May 2018 *A Feeling Greater than Love* — my debut feature documentary — opened its Lebanese theatrical release at Beirut's Metropolis Cinema to an oversold audience. The nearly two-hour Q&A that followed with many of the protagonists became an expansive intergenerational discussion about labor organizing, feminism, and possible futures. The film revisits two significant labor uprisings in Lebanon — a 1972 worker strike at Beirut's Gandour confectionary factory, and a massive 1973 tobacco farmer uprising in South Lebanon in relation to the moment after the 2011 Arab revolutions. Together, these 1970s uprisings are still recalled by many on the Arab Left as a moment of possible revolution of workers, farmers, and students allied with the Palestinian nationalist movement, thwarted by the outbreak of Civil War in 1975. Both were met with direct state repression, each leading to two martyrs and massive demonstrations of popular solidarity including general strikes across the country. That expression of solidarity was in turn eventually channeled into the founding of the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) in August 1975, a coalition of secular, progressive and left political parties which sought, and ultimately fought militarily, to reform the Lebanese sectarian state structure.

A Feeling Greater Than Love recounts the two uprisings centering perspectives from movement rank-and-file and women workers. It documents the social reproductive work of uprising: the nuts and bolts, often invisible labor of organizing that historian Dana Frank, and Angela Davis after her, called "the housework of the movement" (Frank 1994; Davis 2014). It also incorporates scenes from 1970s and 80s militant Arab cinema, films born from the same political milieu and conjuncture as the movements, including a 1974 film, *The Leaves of the Poor Are Golden,* a newsreel about the tobacco farmer uprising. I began producing *A Feeling Greater Than Love* in 2009, and my research took place before, during, and after the massive regional rebellions against austerity and police violence known as the Arab Spring. Thus, the film looks at the repetitive nature of contemporary uprising asking how movements might change their repertoire to truly transform and decolonize.

While most of the film's protagonists were present for the Beirut premiere, a few sat out the discussion. On the one hand, former Gandour women workers who had appeared in the film anonymously, only their hands and voices showing, watched the discussion from their seats in the audience. On the other hand, some leadership of the 1970s Lebanese left skipped the premier altogether. In lieu of declining my invitation, and after trying to convince me to re-edit the film, a prominent labor researcher who had been a leftist party liaison to the Gandour strike committee liaison published an op-ed explicating his critique of the film. He wrote that the film did not adequately represent the movement and focused too much on mystery surrounding the identity of Fatima Khaweja, a 19-year-old killed by police at the Gandour strike. Another prominent figure who

had advised me extensively at the outset of my research likewise never RSVP'd; instead, he expressed discontent about the film in private conversations to my peers, his own contemporaries, and leftists of both generations. In the days following the premiere, other op-eds from 1970s generation leftists appeared in the press highlighting aspects the film had neglected, as did text messages I received from people I had interviewed for, but not included, in the film. An intense discussion ensued on social media about the role of women in movements and the responsibility of cinema to collective memory.

The controversy over the film — and the strikes — while stressful for me, generated more interest in the film. Its initial two-week theatre run was extended to six weeks. More importantly and relevant to this text, however, are the ways this anecdote shows that the memory of the strikes and the 1970s movements remained deeply contested forty years later. Tensions over whose voices were heard in public debates, and whose were muted, exposed clear and persistent fault lines over gender, nationality, hierarchy, movement strategy and representation that continue into the present. Such questions are certainly as old as the movements themselves, and these frictions appeared in a stark way in the context of the film's Lebanese premiere. The friction around the premiere paralleled debates among rank-and-file and leadership described to me in the process of research for the film, which likewise are mirrored within contemporaneous 1970s and 80s militant cinema that represented the movements as well.

This dissertation explores these tensions at length, unpacking debates about how and through what and whose labor social transformation comes about, which are often sidelined in Arab social history, labor geography and film studies alike. As the above anecdote suggests, many of those tensions pass through gender and class, which themselves run across both social movements and militant cinema. This dissertation, which began as a film, examines the inextricable relationship between images and movements, insisting that movement images and contemporary social movements cannot be meaningfully understood in isolation from one another. The film documents the past, while placing that past in relation to pressing practical contemporary political concerns. Indeed, the film, and the questions which I continue to explore below, began with a practical present-day political question about Lebanese social movements, which in turn, led me to questions about militant images.

Initially, I sought to understand the relative absence of grass-rooted contemporary movements that I encountered upon "returning" to live in Lebanon with my mother and sister in 2009. I went to Lebanon after working with an Ecuadorian farmer federation and its rural television program from 2004-8 and having grown up primarily in the US. I set out to make a film about Lebanon's social movements, motivated by the Ecuadorian agrarian and audiovisual organizing work that was connected to broader movements in Latin America. In sharp contrast to Latin America, I could find very few available films about Lebanese and Arab social movements past or present. I was equally struck by the fact that by 2009, Lebanon's unprecedented inequality and growing ecological, colonial, and political crisis was met not by a response like the massive (if struggling) farmer and Indigenous federations active across the Andes, but by an apparent absence of effective independent trade unions, a demobilized Communist Party, and a scattering of smaller left, feminist, and anarchist organizations. A set of more substantive religious political parties, some like Hezbollah and Amal Movement, responded to changing political environment with a class-flattening discourse of sectarian dispossession (Ajami 2012, Abisaab & Abisaab 2014). As in much of the late 2000s world, none of these organizations mounted an effective challenge to the neoliberal agenda of privatization, financialization, real estate and wealth concentration (notwithstanding the growing independent public sector workers union that made political waves in 2013). To understand our present-day

limitations, it seemed necessary to return to an earlier moment of social movement power. Affirming these contemporary challenges, organizers and scholars across generations directed me to research the landmark Gandour and tobacco farmer strikes, emblematic of a moment of revolutionary possibility before the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). The strikes remained a notable contemporary reference.

I set out to make a film that would document present-day Lebanese social movements, imagining initially a cinema verité documentary that would follow two young organizers from different political orientations with the 1970s as backdrop. While filming, I searched for images or films about the 1970s strikes and turned up emptyhanded, instead I ended up watching a handful of surviving militant films on VHS at the production house Beirut DC (now called Aflamuna), which explored armed struggle of the 70s and 80s and its anticolonial intersections. Still images and films depicting armed clashes and widespread destruction of the civil war (1975-1990) were readily available, including staged images of predominantly male anticolonial Palestinian and Lebanese fighters.[1] But both my research process, and the intervening outbreak of uprisings which became known as the Arab Spring in late 2010 changed the film and my research.

As revolutions spread across the region, images of them traveled even faster around the world. Whereas I had previously struggled to find a few images of Arab revolutions, suddenly there was a surplus of images, still and moving, of revolt across social media, television and cinema, seemingly sparking more uprising in their wake — a literal manifestation of what film scholar Jane Gaines called political mimesis (Gaines 1999). The images were debated at length by image and political scholars alike[2]. And yet, these new militant images and the revolts they chronicled were by and large not able to improve our social or economic reality.[3] As the 2011 Arab revolutions rose and fell, subsumed into re-entrenched authoritarianism and austerity, it seemed just documenting the contemporary, and historical uprisings was politically insufficient. Moreover, the circulating militant images disproportionately featured young men, often clashing with state security forces, strikingly similar to the widely available gendered struggle images depicting the Lebanese Civil War. That is, our new revolutions too closely resembled the ones from the past, with few substantive wins. Was there no other way forward?

Again, these questions about images led me to back to questions about movements. I knew from my own experience in social movements and from my preliminary research into the 1970s strikes, that this spectacular and gendered image of uprising concealed the less dramatic and perhaps more essential day-to-do work of organizing. To understand the circular historical repetitions of images and movements, I suspected that I needed to understand better the nuts-and-bolts logistics of how the earlier movements were constructed, and how they were dismantled. As geographer Henri Lefebvre offers, I wondered: how else could we understand the genesis of the present, except by "starting in the present, working our way back to the past, and then retracing our steps" (Lefebvre 1991[1974]: 66). Thus, the final film, *A Feeling Greater Than Love*, aspired to document that social movement housework of the 1970s, focusing on the work of rank-and-file, in relation to pressing contemporary political concerns.

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[1] The Arab Image Foundation's important work has made many of these alternative civil war images available to the public online and at their physical archive. The collection has very few images of non-militarized organized resistance.
[2] See Miriyam Aouragh (2012) for a critical review of the discourse on social media images and the Arab uprisings.
[3] Tunisia is a case in which the revolution did indeed lead to some substantive economic and political reforms.

This aspiration and relational approach continue within the pages of this dissertation, expanding stories, inquiries and arguments that were beyond the scope of the film. Thus, in first order, the dissertation provides an in-depth account of the two largely undocumented uprisings at Gandour factory (Chapter One) and of South Lebanon tobacco farmers (Chapter Two) and their historical context. Through historical, visual, and participant ethnography, as well as archival research, I expand upon recent social histories of the Arab Left that tend to focus on the thought of prominent intellectuals (Halabi, 2017; Bardawil 2020), insisting on a reorientation towards the housework of the movement necessary to produce the strikes and films. Further, I directly consider the relationship of images of militancy to archival practices and social reproduction (Chapter Three).

Refusing to separate material history from the production of meaning, the militant films emerge through discussion of the strikes, rather than as separate objects, emphasizing the films' relationality to the movements, and in turn both movements and images relation to global conjunctural frameworks. Exploring the cinematic moment of the post-Arab Spring (Chapter Four) explicitly in relation to 1970s militant cinema allows me to reflect on the impact of changing funding structures and circulation modes on what films are more readily made in which moments. I conclude by querying new forms of online militant images which defy these political modes. Throughout, personal stories of the strike participants interweave with autoethnography of my experiences of producing and then screening *A Feeling Greater Than Love,* alongside conjunctural analysis and close readings of the contemporaneous films. This dissertation makes multiple interventions across labor and postcolonial geographies, film and cultural studies, and Arab social history, as well as advancing methodological approaches vis-à-vis the side-by-side study of movements and cultural production.

Social Reproduction and the Housework of the Movement

Reading films and labor history through social reproduction is this text's first intervention. Whereas labor movements implicitly question the artificial separation between intellectual and manual labor wrought by capitalist class society (Fanon 2004; Gramsci 1971; Sangtin Writers 2006; Hart 2024a), social reproduction theory deepens this analysis, suggesting that household labor, social reproduction, and maintenance work *is* political-intellectual labor. In an organizational context, Dana Frank (1994) used the term "housework of the movement" to imply everyday social movement maintenance (akin to secretarial work). I expand this, defining movement housework as the range of relational activities that build meaning and sustainability in movements — including what is often called "reproductive commons"[4] (Gill, Jirmanus Saba and Williams 2024). The framing is deliberately gendered since of course "housework" is historically gendered labor, but also because it implies a hierarchy of importance. That is, rather than adding another siloed category of labor — "housework" — and further reifying the division of intellectual from manual labor, I demonstrate ways movement housework is actively developing strategy and tactics, in so far as it is the work most connected to people and their needs. The housework of the movement is an essential reframe of

[4] The phrase "housework of the movement," was introduced by Dana Frank in 1994 to discuss gender dynamics impeding 1920s US trade union work, implying primarily clerical and maintenance work. Sara Evans (2010) and Angela Davis quoted in Willa Simpson (2014) expand upon the term to suggest a broader range of day-to-day organizing. The term "reproductive commons" in turn implies the organization of alternative common means to meeting social reproduction and day-to-needs, not dependent on the capitalist market. While "reproductive commons" can often accompany direct challenges to state power, it is often used in isolation from that project (Jirmanus Saba & Pinto 2022).

social movement studies because it most fundamentally disrupts the false division between intellectual and manual labor.

Centering the housework of the movement alters the core legacy of the Gandour strike and tobacco workers' uprising from national or at times international alliances (a "great leaders" model of social movement history) to insist that rank-and-file's often invisible political labor is decisive. I show this in distinct ways and moments throughout the text, in relation both to ethnography of the movements and close readings of the films. The housework of the movement creates the relational fabric that holds together social movements, encompassing relationship and trust-building, organizing logistics (sending letters or emails, arranging buses for demonstrations, obtaining cleaning, and maintaining military and other equipment, etc.) and actual household labor like cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing to sustain comrades so that they can organize. In discussing the Gandour and tobacco farmer uprisings, I tie the movements' shortcomings to the leadership's unwillingness to take rank-and-file and particularly women's political intellectual labor seriously. Gesturing to speculative histories, I suggest multiple instances in which centering the strategic insights of movement housework — following the lead of organizers on the ground — may have prevented setback and even changed the movements' course.

Further, I argue that recentering movement history around social reproduction and gender reveals how exclusionary gender dynamics are deeply intertwined with the limited gains of movements, past and present, seeking paths to transform such dynamics. This approach links feminist critique with political theorist and ethnographer Frantz Fanon's nuanced discussion of the pitfalls of postcolonial nationalism and "false decolonization" that retains attachments to capital and class. As feminist scholar Himani Banerji offers, postcolonial nationalist movements (and their corollary labor struggles) too frequently maintain allegiance to interests of national petty bourgeoisie, deflecting "the movement outside of the left popular directive" (Banerji 2000: 902). Indeed, the multi-scalar brushstrokes with which Fanon described the internal dynamics of decolonization and the "spatial organization of political domination" (Kipfer & Goonewardena 2013: 109) provide the theoretical undercurrent of this text, offering tools to look at the social struggles as inseparable from decolonization.

Thus, while not dealing explicitly with geographies of nationalism, over which there has been a long and important debate (Coronil 1996; Goswami 2002; Tirmizey 2023), struggles over Arab nationalisms and anticolonial struggles are interwoven with the labor and agrarian struggles detailed in this text. Taking lead from decolonial feminists who have recentered movement history around the gendered constructions of nationalist and revolutionary projects (Saldana Portillo 2003; Banerjee 2012; McClintock 1995; Wallace 1979), I link the imperatives of patriarchal nationalism with the limited gains of movements. In a similar vein, cultural studies scholar María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo has suggested that an implicit commitment to development discourse, revolutionary "progress" and patriarchal structure (such as Che Guevara's "new man") subtly but consistently undermined the potential of 1960s-80s revolutionary movements of Latin America (Saldaña-Portillo 2003). At the heart of their critique is a reification of the division of intellectual-manual labor along class and gender lines, which the movement household explicitly highlights.

Movement housework is simultaneously the construction of meaning that binds place-based and movements for decolonization, which occurs largely through relationship building and the construction of alternatives for survival not dependent on what I call — adapting bell hooks — the

"white supremacist capitalist colonial patriarchy." While hooks specified a US-based "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" to imply mutually articulated "interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation's politics" (hooks 2003: 17), I reframe slightly to a global purview. Returning to Fanon via Anne McClintock (1996), Silvia Federici (2004), Saldaña-Portillo (2003) and others, the colonial patriarchy illuminates the continued practice and logic of colonialism as it continues to differentially impact distinct geographies. It encompasses the mutual articulation of race and capitalism (Robinson 2000) attending to how patriarchy has been specifically and critically deployed to advance racial capitalism and ongoing colonial dispossession, particularly in the Global South.[5]

In this context, I suggest that a social movement housework approach to movement praxis offers concrete directions for how political movements may truly transform everyday life. Lefebvre, to whom the political application of "everyday life" is attributed, offers that the contradictions of everyday life — at the heart of how we experience "uneven development" under capitalism — are experienced in large part at the level of the household.[6] The lived tensions between what is sold under capitalism as desirable or necessary, and what is actually attainable mirror the discrepancy between the deterioration of the conditions of existence and the new social need for unattainable consumer goods and corresponding lifestyles (Lefebvre 2002: 9). When Lefebvre insisted that revolution 'cannot just change political personnel or institutions; it must change la vie *quotiddiene* [everyday life] which has already been literally colonized by capitalism" (Lefebvre 2002: 80), he was signaling that revolutionary change must function, I add begin, at the level of the household. Perhaps despite himself,[7] Lefebvre reminds us also of the inextricable relationship between colonialism and capitalism, and the ways racialized ongoing dispossession continues to function across the realms of everyday life and in social reproduction (Hartman 2016; Weinbaum 2019). This allows me to make plain the multi-scalar and interconnected ways that movement housework both unites and distinguishes across geographic context and historical time.

The movement housework also becomes an analytic from which to think about the production of Arab militant cinema and the kinds of narratives it tells, and those it leaves out. I read 1970s and 80s militant films through this lens, including Christian Ghazi's *A Hundred Faces for a Single Day* (1971) and Kamal Kareem's *The Leaves of the Poor Are Golden* (1974), Maroun Baghdadi's *The Most Beautiful of Mothers* (1976) and Jean Chamoun and Mai Masri's *Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon* (1987). Rejecting both the auteur approach to film studies that sees even militant films as the product of director's unitary vision (Khoury 2004; Salas-Hoteit 2013), and a contemporary art world tendency to fetishize militant films as objects from the past, I instead call attention to the creative and political ecosystem around militant films, paying attention to funding sources, production dynamics, crew and actor involvement, and distribution channels. I show that the films, unlike official forms of movement discourse, often reflected the priorities of a rank-and-file, particularly women, that was otherwise detrimentally excluded from political decision-making.

Indeed, militant cinema of the period actively reflected public debates about political praxis and

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[5] To the point, for indigenous people in the formally decolonized Americas, Palestine, Ireland, or Australia, for example, colonialism never ended; colonialism as a practice has shifted (rather than ended) in formally "decolonized" nations like Lebanon.

[6] Lefebvre offers us the example of peasants who live in dilapidated homes, but have electric cookers, who manage to buy gadgets but cannot afford to fix their homes (Lefebvre 2002: 9). As a result, "family life became separate from productive activity" (ibid 31)."

[7] See Kipfer & Goonewardena 2013 for a thorough account of Lefebvre's colonial blind spots.

organizing challenges. At times, as in *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day,* films rehearsed possible scenarios for movement next steps. Other films, like *Wildflowers* about women's' involvement in armed resistance to Israeli occupation, feature militants reenacting tactics of struggle, even as the struggle remained active. Connecting threads between films over time, I show ways that militant cinema, like the labor movement, provided space to transgress constraints on women's political agency. Both, however, were ultimately insufficient to transform gender and class relations. This dynamic was particularly salient as the popular struggle militarized in the aftermath of the Gandour and tobacco strikes, the LNM's coalition becoming a military front aligned with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) against the Lebanese state and right-wing militias (Pines & Hawi 1986). While not directly commenting on the consequences of collapsing labor movement into armed struggle, I allude to ways rapid and hierarchical militarization paralleled the foreclosure of more expansive possibilities.

Representation, History, and Conjunctural Analysis

The second major intervention of this text is to insist that we cannot isolate questions of representation from material and movement histories. Throughout, I argue that the two are inseparable. While this dissertation's title "Movement. Images." bears similarity to *Cinema: I The Movement Image,* film theorist Gilles Deleuze's 2013 sweeping "taxonomy" of cinematographic concepts*,* I am less interested in the function of film in the world, or how film taxonomy represents political changes. Instead, I am concerned with the relation between movements, images and a global conjunctural frame. Building on Antonio Gramsci (1971), Fernando Coronil (1996), Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012, 2020) and others, I argue that resistance is a nonlinear cultural and material landscape of struggle. In brief, the work of changing society is cultural work (Jirmanus 2021). Social movements, like films, are producers of culture — capable of shifting the terms on which people engage with dominant structures, with land, with notions of work and politics, and with each other. Movements, like the hegemonic classes, offer different framings for peoples felt experience at different times.

As such I refuse a linear or teleological approach to documenting the obscured histories of the strikes and militant images which long dominated social movement studies (Tarrow 1998; Tilly 2004). Such an approach risks seeing 1970s militancy as a contextual, unrepeatable occurrence, and viewing resistance to colonialism, external domination and Western hegemony as ending with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the so-called "end of history." Too often, histories and films about late 1960s and 1970s radicalism are limited by such framings, unintentionally even embracing a contemporary neoliberal status quo where militancy is circumscribed to the past or youthful foolishness.[8] This study rejects such narratives.

[8] While making *A Feeling Greater Than Love,* I watched the handful of contemporary films that revisit this period, among them *Alfaro Vive Carajo* (1983)*, The Weather Underground* (2002)*, My Perestroika* (2011)), finding that many of them viewed this past through a neoliberal cast, towing the line of "we didn't change the system, but we changed." The more hopeful, albeit melancholy ones, like *Chile Memoria Obstinada* (1999), took a critical-memory view of the past, reflecting on what memory of this past might be able to invoke. And while these past moments of possibility were produced by working class movements, unsurprisingly, perhaps, given the class character of their directors, most of these films privileged intellectual organizational labor and viewpoints over perspectives of working-class people and their collective political work. That is, these films depoliticized the questions of class and actual bodies on the ground, to focus instead on intellectual labor done primarily by middle- and upper-class party leadership.

Instead, I consider the ways the strikes and films continue to intersect with ongoing political practice, their meaning ever mutable, as in the anecdote which opened this introduction. I demonstrate ways movements and films are both actively produced — but they are done so, to paraphrase philosopher Karl Marx, under conditions not of their making. This means that I both read militant films and movements in relation to one another, but also in relation to the interconnected spatially and temporally situated circumstances.

Gramsci called these organic and conjunctural movements. By distinguishing between more long-lasting organic movements — akin to relations of production or available material conditions — and more contingent "conjunctural" movements in his analysis of relations of force, he offered approaches to think through how and in what ways political movements emerge in distinct moments, to determine next steps. Both organic and conjunctural movements are multi-scalar and temporally expansive, with multiple processes overlapping simultaneously in a "dialectical nexus" which can be difficult to establish precisely (Q12§3;1971: 179). Gramsci insisted it is necessary but insufficient to study material conditions, and while he saw the third relational force, military force, as often "decisive," there is always a great range of possible movement in his analysis. Geographer Stefan Kipfer usefully defines conjunctures as "historical moments that articulate the punctual temporality of the event with longer-term forms of historical duration" (Kipfer 2012: 87), allowing us to pay attention to major events or historical turning points with simultaneously local and global articulations. However, distinguishing among these processes in their "distinct, but intertwined temporalities" (ibid 85) is key to political movement. As Gramsci clarifies, analyzing relations of force is an eminently practical endeavor for those engaged in social struggle, revealing "points of least resistance, at which the force of will can be most fruitfully applied; they suggest immediate tactical operations; they indicate how a campaign of political agitation may best be launched, what language will best be understood by the masses, etc." (Q12§3 1971: 186). That is, to determine *how to move* in each specific juncture, we must assess the contingent conjunctural situation at hand.

This conjunctural analysis involves studying the more ephemeral "characteristics of the economic situation" including actions of influential politicians and corporate actors. Stretching conjunctural analysis to explicitly include representations and cultural texts, cultural theorist Stuart Hall insisted we pay attention to the "accumulation of contradictions," the fusion or merger of "different currents and circumstances" (Hall 1980:165). Engaging these framings, my analysis takes note not only of seemingly contradictory factors in the emergence of the strikes (the confluence of religious politics and Marxism for example), but also historical contingencies, the ever-shifting relationship between city and countryside, and people's individual and collective actions. Thus, the Gandour strike and the tobacco farmer uprising, only two months apart must be seen both in relation to each other, as they began to consolidate a — urban and rural — counter hegemonic program, and for their distinct contingencies. Yet also they are inseparable from the context of global and regional uprising (as I show in Chapters One and Two).

Indeed, these local articulations — such as the relative facility of organizing significant labor and agrarian strikes in early 1970s Lebanon, and the contrasting difficulty I had raising funds for a film about those strikes in 2010 — are in turn deeply connected to broader regional and global dynamics. Here I rely on geographer Gillian Hart's framework of global conjunctural moments, which she defines as "major turning points when interconnected forces at multiple levels and spatial scales in different regions of the world … come together to generate new conditions with worldwide implications and reverberations" (Hart 2024b). This allows me to reflect on ways the Gandour and tobacco farmer strikes emerged in relation to the global conjuncture of early 1970s anticolonialism,

including as well feminist and democratizing currents within those movements. It also lets me think about how different films are more readily produced at distinct moments. The latter point draws my attention to changing global political economy and in particular the ways maneuvering by the US, NATO and its regional allies (the Arab Gulf monarchies and Israel) operated to actively repress and contain resistance cultural production through a combination of financial pressures, distribution incentives and direct violence linked to the "War on Terror" (explored in Chapter Four).

Again, Hart reminds us that these dynamics are not separate forces but rather relational moments. Adapting Gramsci, Hall and Lefebvre, she insists we consider together "global conjunctures; praxis in the multiple arenas of everyday life; and projects, practices, and processes of bourgeois hegemony that mediate between global forces and everyday life" (Hart 2024b: 151). Hart's relational framing underscores this dissertation: I interweave discussion of concrete historic context and attention to alliances of transnational capital, with reflection on ways that movements and films contested or sought to shift available conditions. Each chapter alternates between narration of the movement histories within a conjunctural frame and reflection on ways they remain deeply relevant to, reflective of, and contested within the present moment.

However, this is not a dichotomous process of seeking lessons from the past, nor of isolating revolutionary incidents from one another, either spatially or temporally. Instead, I see historical time as decisively nonlinear, moving in "cycles and spirals… [with] the past-future… contained in the present" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012: 96). This understanding of time allows me to view contemporary politics, and history, as intertwined, providing an approach for joining historic inquiry with a worldview which seeks active decolonization. As feminist theorist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui offers within her rejoinder on decolonization and indigenous modernity, this requires us to eschew discursive frameworks which are divorced from political practice and instead seek movement in each historical repetition. She insists: "the regression or progression, the repetition or overcoming of the past is at play in each conjuncture…" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012: 96). Such repetitions are central to *A Feeling Greater Than Love,* where images and even entire sequences appear more than once, where I juxtapose formally similarly images of landscape and protest across time and space, bringing historical memory in conversation with contemporary space and alongside observation of the violent landscape of everyday life.

Similarly, throughout this dissertation, I reflect on such repetitions, asking always how else we might understand the past and present by holding on to an "'anticipatory consciousness' across contexts" (ibid). Thus, as a scholar and filmmaker involved in the contemporary successors to the movement struggles about which I am writing, and amid a new global uprising for decolonization in Palestine, I review these militant histories for their urgent relevance. Amalgamating these relational approaches in the text that follows, I search for emergent political actors, alliances and configurations that push the boundaries of cinematic and political horizons.

Cinematic and Political Horizons: Where Geographic and Film Theory Meet

The third major intervention of this dissertation suggests ways film theory and critical geography can be brought into productive conversation — particularly with regards to militant cinema. This observation emerged from my process of filmmaking. As I proceeded to put together a militant film about an imminently relevant past, which incorporated sound and image from 1970s and 1980s Arab militant films, I began to note resonances between conjunctural analysis and militant cinema. Many

of the films paid attention to the persistence of past in the present, to historical repetitions and the relations of force surrounding a given event. Indeed, the Palestinian Film Unit articulated this explicitly, aspiring to a cinema that expresses "the present as well as the past and the future" (Palestine Cinema Group 1979). These resonances are perhaps unsurprising: filmmakers engaged in anticolonial and labor movements were actively theorizing their praxis along with the same movements and theoretical influences (like Marx, Gramsci, Cesaire and Fanon) and, meeting one another across international contexts in festivals like the 1969 *Pan-African Culture Festival in Algiers* (Mestman 2002), and the encounters of *Third World Cineastes* in Buenos Aires (1973) and Algiers (1974). They also watched and responded to a range of cinematic influences, viewing third cinema and European art house and experimental films in local urban and rural cine clubs and discussion screenings (Chen 2019; Farine 2023). Despite or perhaps because of these internationalist and theoretical influences, it is illuminating to consider ways that militant film undertakes a kind of mobile conjunctural analysis. First, it's essential to clarify the terms of discussion.

Indeed, authors and makers have used a wide range of framings to discuss the relation between cinema and politics with theorizations of political militancy and cinema form stretching back to the medium's invention (Vertov 1984 [1922]; Eisenstein 1977 [1925]), and the development of film industries (Adorno 2002 [1947]; Benjamin 2018 [1935]; Brecht 2000 [1935]). Closely related to my discussion here, global south artist-theorists also directly confronted the role of cinematic form and content in decolonization (Fernando Solano and Octavio Getino 1968; Glauber Rocha 1997[1965], Julio Garcia Espinosa 1979[1971]); gender and development ideologies (Sara Gomez 1974), modes of representation (Trinh Minh-ha 1983; Black Audio Film Collective 1986), the impact of neo-colonial financing (John Akomfrah 2012), the instability of memory and meaning Walid Ra'ad (1989) and modes of circulation and political intervention (Janaina Oliviera 2021, Jemma Desai 2020). While this brief survey just touches the surface of broad-ranging debate on cinema and politics, these makers have too infrequently been put in conversation with one another and often segregated into various area studies or other academic sub-fields.

Similar limitations apply to discussions of "militant cinema." Notably, the film studies literature bears a strong tendency to periodize "militant cinema," confining it to mid 20th century anticolonialism and at times specifying implying armed struggle (Chanan 1997; White 2002; Buschsbaum & Mestman 2021). While authors like Kodwo Eshun and Ros Gray (2011), for example, have made important contributions to how we conceive of militant cinema, crucially tracing internationalist influences and material connections across borders among artists, political parties, and postcolonial governments, their framing of militant image as "produced in and through film-making practices dedicated to the liberation struggles and revolutions of the late twentieth century" (Eshun and Gray, 2011:1)[9] has inadvertently confined our purview to a moment in time. Defining militant film in relation to periodized anticolonialism risks adopting dominant frameworks of postcolonial nationalism discussed above, ostensibly pushing nuanced perspectives, such as feminist or queer anticolonialism, outside the frame of militancy. Theorists like Gabriel (1983) and Croombs (2019) have searched for the persistence of militancy in more contemporary films, but still restricted militancy to particular circumscribed forms of political action.

To avoid these bifurcations and limitations, I offer a more expansive definition of militant cinema. I adapt the functional definition of militant cinema offered by curators Sabine Bitter, Jeff Derksen and Helmut Weber, who define the militant image as an image "in dialogue with its historical present at

[9] Patricio Guzman's seminal film *Battle of Chile* was for example, shot on film stock mailed from France by Chris Marker.

the same time as it contests the shape of the present" (Bitter, Derkson, & Weber 2014). This framing allows me to bring left political party funded films of the 1970s and Netflix-financed critically acclaimed contemporary Arab cinema into the same field of vision, and to contemplate what films and movements, reveal about a particular conjunctural moment, and how viewing films might help us assess current conditions while contemplating next steps. In short, my approach to militant cinema is more of a method than a taxonomy. This broad definition also coincides with the perspective of 1960s militant cinema practitioners like Getino and Solano's 1968 manifesto *Towards a Third Cinema* who similarly asserted that what makes a film militant is not the author's intentions, "but the very practice of the film with its intended concrete audience: that which the film seizes as something recuperable in a particular historical circumstance for the liberation process" (Getino and Solano 1968). While Getino and Solanos referred concretely to "discussion screenings" with workers and militants of their vastly experimental *Hour of the Furnaces,* thinking about the practice of a film with its concrete audience remains incredibly generative. I interpret this as calling on us to reflect on what a film *of any genre* is doing politically and in relation to movements, in a way shifting the onus of militancy onto a film's mobilized viewer.

Thinking about militant cinema in this expansive way, in relation to its function in the world, may be seen as unmanageably broad (could Hollywood films be militant films? Are activist films militant films, is Artist cinema?). But it is precisely this broadness that I find useful and illuminating. Pushing back against frames that miscategorized 1960s and 1970s Global South militant films as didactic while simultaneously seeking to establish the "newness" of video art post-1989 (Hojeij & Zaatari 2002), I reject narratives of "rupture" in favor of a more nuanced understanding of continuity and change, overlapping "organic" and "conjunctural" movements of varying durations. Similarly, some may find the term "militant" anachronistic, implying a particular form of (often armed) struggle. While in this text I at times use the term "movement" images interchangeably with "militant," I maintain both terms because they emphasize continuity with earlier militant films and frameworks of linked anticolonialism and labor struggles which supposedly ended with the "end of history" in 1989 (Fukuyama 1992).

Further, a functional framing of militant cinema allows me to shift away from unresolvable matters of periodization or categorization to instead call attention to the *function* of film and images in relation to ever-developing social movements. This mode is illuminated in relation to a concept Gramsci called *previsione* — a political method for assessing present conditions in relation to political openings (Frosini (2013) cited by Thomas (2017:298)).[10] *Previsione* hinges on active interpretation, of reading a given situation for its political possibilities. Thus, reading militant cinema as *previsione* casts militant films as circulating texts that may highlight and heighten existing contradictions for those who engage with them, themselves instigating both reflection and further movement. In this framework, a commercially oriented film, such as Jehane Noujaim's Oscar-nominated 2013 *The Square* about the Egyptian revolution, can still provide fodder for deliberation and movement reorientation as it reflects both the movement it is representing, and the dominant modes of representation in its given conjuncture (which I discuss more in Chapter Four). Seeing militant cinema as *previsione* — or a method rather than an ideal type — is distinct from other perspectives on militant or political cinema which insist on a specific mode of activation. Chief among these is Jane Gaines's concept of "political mimesis" whereby bodies in real life mimic bodies on screen, translating movement to image back to movement (Gaines 1999). Gaines's influential intervention,

[10] Hart, invoking Gramsci scholar Fabio Frosini (2013) here clarifies that previsione "allows the present to be seen differently to make possible a "practico-political intervention in the present" (Hart, 2024). See also Frosini (2016).

while aspirational and politically important, limits how we might understand a film's work of activation, prioritizing more spectacular forms of physical activation. It similarly fails to offer a more nuanced view of militancy, implying that mimicry, rather than nimble and situated organization, is the end goal.

Instead of thinking about how militant cinema physically mobilizes people, I find it more generative to think through how cinema interacts with social movements, engaging space and affect, from film production to circulation, allowing me to explore resonances between critical geography and film theory. At a basic level all cinema "indexes" real world space on screen (Nichols 2012), creating the appearance that we are viewing unmediated life — despite of course extensive authorial intervention into what and how we are seeing (Akomfrah 2012). Crucially, however, the notion of indexing space suggests that space is static when critical geography insists it is decidedly not (Lefebvre 1991, Kipfer 2008). As social movement geographers have demonstrated, movements are concerned with unsettling and shifting space (Nicholls 2011, Halvorsen 2017). Returning to Lefebvre offers us language for thinking about how space relates to transformative movements. I find useful here his concept of "differential space" (elsewhere called maximum difference): an explosive space that "accentuates differences" with radical or even revolutionary claims (Lefebvre 1991, 52). While Lefebvre saw differential space as largely transient moments of uprisings or festivals, geographer Stefan Kipfer elaborated that movements function to connect those disparate moments "into quests for spatial centrality and maximally different, non-capitalist forms of everyday life" (Kipfer 2008, 206). Seen this way, the concept becomes essential to thinking through social transformation.

Differential space should not, however, be confused for "liberated zones" of resistance or occupations of public space. As anticolonial critiques of reproductive commons have noted, commons praxis often fail to grapple with settler colonialism: "taking back" public space which itself is on occupied land (Tuck & Yang 2012) or alternatively fetishizing the physical occupations as an end (Halvorsen 2017). In an anticolonial context, similarly national liberation has often functioned within the spatialized logic of development, preserving teleologies (Saldaña-Portillo 2003) or more frequently bringing national territory under control of a native elite without challenging ownership relations (Fanon 1961) and the false notion of land-as-property (Arvin, Tuck and Morril 2013:21).[11] Rather, differential space must be seen — as Lefebvre insisted all space be considered — as a *process*, not a fixed place. It is an ever-present possibility within the seemingly immutable and dominated space of capital. We might say then that militant cinema not only indexes differential space; by documenting such experiences, it translates *differential spaces as process* and its aspirations to the screen, and — through circulation — to distant concrete audiences.

Japanese 1960s militant filmmakers arrived at a similar conclusion in the genre of *fukeiron* or landscape cinema. Its practitioners shifted away from documenting obvious resistance — clashes with police or liberated zones — to show structural dominance, or the violent spaces of everyday life. By focusing on seemingly rigid infrastructure and landscape, the *fukeiron* film movement aspired to unsettle a "revolutionary view of history, which privileges dramatic moments of rupture and change" (Furuhata 2007). Fukeiron suggested precisely that radical change is ever-present within the

[11] The transformation of the Palestinian anticolonial resistance operating within Lebanon in the 1970s into the West Bank based Palestinian Authority (which coordinates policing with the Israeli occupation within ever-decreasing unsovereign territory) is an excellent illustration of this dynamic. This dynamic which came to fruition in the early 1990s was in development in Lebanon throughout the period discussed here. While not the center of my argument, a critique of the transition from popular movement to militarized resistance runs throughout this text.

seemingly dominated spaces of everyday life, transmitting this possibility to the viewer. Through this lens, differential space becomes an ever-available possibility within the contradictions of everyday life.

I bring this insight to both the movements and militant cinema discussed in this text by highlighting practices that take the critique and momentum of the movement with them in motion, rather than insisting on spatial fixity.[12] This reframe shifts attention to the distinct ways of moving through literal space that transgressive movements create as they defy dominant social and economic structures. Again, the notion of social movement housework is pivotal here. If revolutions must transform everyday life, not only rearrange political actors at the top, then movement housework is the relational work necessary to change the minutiae of everyday interactions, to multiply and sustain differential space *as an ever-adapting process*. This is a perpetual decolonization, a practice of "anticipatory consciousness" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012: 96) which itself implies a multiplicity of worlds and ways of being in space (Blaser and de la Cadena 2018). This expanded notion of decolonizing differential space *as process*, offers an approach to ways that movements — and militant images — engender practices towards radical transformation in motion.

In the case of cinema, this transformative motion requires affective connections between viewers produced through the screen. That is, as viewers we *feel* the possibilities suggested by a militant film, across space and time. As Gaines implied by suggesting films engender mimicking movement, we experience injustice and the contradictions of everyday life foremost in our bodies. This initially indescribable sensation gestures to political possibility that we register through our senses, before giving it meaning. Militant cinema relies on this interplay between feeling and analysis. Cinema can translate a political possibility which can be felt, and even acted upon, if not easily defined. As film and media scholar Kara Keeling writes, reflecting on three queer Black films, this sensation "points toward the ways that whatever escapes recognition, whatever escapes meaning and valuation, exists as an impossible possibility within our shared reality, however that reality is described theoretically, and therefore threatens to unsettle, if not destroy, the common senses on which that reality relies for its coherence as such" (Keeling 2009: 567). Keeling surmises this feelable political possibility must have been what Marx implied with the phrase "poetry from the future" (also the subtitle of her essay). Thus, militant cinema relies simultaneously on cinemas' affective and argumentative qualities to transmit both feeling and analysis, allowing disparate audiences to viscerally register contradiction and poetic future possibilities — and ideally resist and reimagine.

To stretch slightly Gaines' political mimesis through Keeling, Lefebvre and Rivera Cusicanqui, we could say that a simultaneously felt/understood awareness of decolonizing differential space as process can seed possibilities for new differential space to be felt and acted upon by distant viewers. And yet, this felt awareness can only resonate across time and space because we are all living through the same interconnected dynamics, experiencing a shared, *felt* understanding of the global conjunctural moment. That is, a 1960s militant film from, say, Argentina continues to resonate with a viewer in Lebanon in 2024, because we are experiencing the longer-term consequences of organic and conjunctural movements: 500-year-old globally interconnected colonial dynamics, alongside the shared experience of 1960s anticolonialism and the present-day experience of life under neoliberalism. To return to my analogy between militant cinema and *previsione,* militant cinema

[12] Such contradictions can be found also in the confrontation of the unattainable promises (certain modes of leisure and consumption) of everyday life, "because these promises are denied by the very regressive forces of administered consumption and gendered, phallocentric planning that spread them" (Kipfer 2008: 199).

unsettles these dominating structures and processes, articulating multiple temporalities beyond contemporary limits.

More, this flexible framing of militant cinema additionally lets me demonstrate multiple ways militant cinema changes over time in relation to shifting movements and conjunctures, and to note the stakes of those shifts for movements themselves. I take on this question directly in Chapter Four where I reflect on the kinds of films that can be more readily made in a particular moment. Thus while 1970s militant cinema was often funded and circulated through left political parties and anti-colonial movements, much critically acclaimed Arab Spring cinema was produced with European, US and increasingly Arab Gulf funding, and intended for a supposed "global" audience. Finally, reading films in relation to movements, and political-economic context disrupts any false distinction or attempt to see each one of these as separate, viewing politics, representation, and conjuncture as an ever-shifting relation — even as movements and makers struggle to open possibilities beyond the context which they are given.

This dissertation is also a story of displacement of those possibilities, and of people, histories, and images. 16mm film reels were literally displaced along with their makers and keepers, who shifted their organizing frameworks and targets as the political landscape of the time changed. I include stories of the films' displacement and recovery, in many cases decades later, to affirm ways the films and their meaning remain contextually dependent and never fixed. Displacement here is not a melancholic metaphor, nostalgic for a lost militant past, rather it is a concrete way to think about how ideas and political practices also bend and expand over time.

Conjunctures of Arab Militant Cinema: Three moments of militancy: 1970s, 1990s, 2010s
Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation reads Arab militant films and movements traversing the conjunctural shifts of the last five decades — from the blossoming of Arab militant cinema in the 1960s amid global anticolonialism through the neoliberal counterrevolution of the 1970s and 80s and towards the post-Arab Spring contemporary moment marked by climate wars, multiple pandemics, genocide and the global rise of fascism, but also unprecedented international solidarity with Palestinian liberation and the open horizons it represents. Parsing the multi-scalar political-economic shifts — overlapping organic and conjunctural movements — through cultural-formal shifts in Arab militant cinema from the 1960s to the present allows me to both demonstrate what kinds of films emerge at what moments, and to consider what militant cinema reveals about those moments, in a sense, analyzing relations of force through turns in image form and movement content.

I begin with the late 1960s, the moment of "global and local articulations" represented by the 1967 war through which Israel annexed Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, triggering a crisis of faith in Arab Nationalism and leading to the founding of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (Khalidi 2020). The financial crisis sparked by the 1966 crash of Lebanese-Palestinian Bank Intra and resolved through shifts in financial power to the West and the Arab Gulf Monarchies (Saffiedine 2020, Traboulsi 2008) also informs my discussion, as do the global May 1968 uprisings, the Cairo Accords which permitted Palestinian guerilla to operate from South Lebanon in coordination with the Lebanese Army, waves of labor strikes of all sizes throughout the region and globally, and the subsequent founding of new left political parties like Lebanon's Organization of Communist Action and national liberation movements in places like Yemen and Oman (Takriti 2013; Wilson 2023).

While militant film experiments in the Arab world precede the late 1960s, a relatively coherent movement of Arab Militant Cinema solidified alongside these waves of anticolonialism, and in tandem with third cinema globally.[13] Amid this movement upturn, the widely documented Palestine Film Unit (PFU) was founded in Jordan in 1967, engaging with a broad base of Arab militant filmmakers beyond Palestine and creating moving and still image works for both internal politicization and discussion and for generating support internationally (Habashneh 2023; Yaqub 2018). Many of the filmmakers and technicians discussed in the chapters that follow — Qays al Zubeidi, Rafiq Al Hajjar, Jean Chamoun — collaborated with the PFU and its members in one form or another until its materials and archive were disappeared in the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

While most widely celebrated, the PFU was one of many often more informal formations of militant Arab filmmakers spanning the whole Arab world from Cairo, to Kharthoum, to Baghdad and Damascus, crisscrossing with practices from African, South and East Asian, Latin American and leftist European filmmakers (Eshun & Gray 2011; Djagalov 2020). These militant artists relied on a combination of private, self-funding, political party and Soviet support. At times, militant filmmakers received support from state cinema institutes in in newly decolonized nations like Algeria, Syria, Tunisia, Morrocco often producing boldly experimental works (Shafik 2021). Whether financed by the state or political parties, the 1970s era militant films were by and large politically incisive and formally daringly. At times they subtly critiqued their own funders. In some cases, like Syrian Omar Amiralay's 1974 *Everyday Life in a Syrian Village,* state institutes banned the films, resulting in Amiralay's exile to France; while in others, like Morrocco's Ahmed Bouanini, critical militant cinema was tolerated or flew under the radar of newly postcolonial nations.

Chapters One and **Two** are situated at this conjuncture, exploring intertwining labor and agrarian movements, anticolonialism and films which represented those struggles. **Chapter One "Gender, Class and Representation in the Unmaking of a Strike"** reads an ethnography of the active role of rank-and-file workers and women in the November 1972 Gandour chocolate factory strike, alongside autoethnography of *A Feeling Greater Than Love* and discussion of Christian Ghazi's (1972) *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* which engages the themes of women's liberation and worker struggle. I explore the local and global cultural and political circumstances around the Gandour strike, including the overlapping financial and political crises surrounding the 1967 war, the emergence of the Palestinian National movement within a global atmosphere of anticolonial, student and labor uprising, and the work of new left organizers in Lebanon to activate and channel working class discontent. I draw on the tensions that emerge from juxtaposing my ethnographic research into historical on-the-ground organizing with the films' contemporaneous depiction of them, and my own position as an artist several decades later. Through the lens of social movement housework, I argue that the organizational space of the Gandour strike created openings for effective creative action and leadership by women and rank-and-file workers, transgressing the supposedly fixed boundaries between manual and intellectual work. Simultaneously, the militant films — directed by men and produced by leftist political parties — attempt to center worker's (as an undifferentiated category) and women's role in anticolonial and revolutionary struggle. I show how the films and movements ultimately threatened to collapse these possibilities back into stricter hierarchies of

[13] Until the early 2000's, militant cinema scholarship focused disproportionately on Latin America. However, as Buchsbaum & Mestman 2021 and others have shown, Latine filmmakers were in conversation with counterparts in Africa, Asia, Europe and the US. Arab filmmakers were present at film exchanges in Havana, Algeria and participated in exchanges like the 1973 and 74 encounters of third world cineastes in Buenos Aires and Algeria.

power. I suggest this tension — both in cinema and in organization — remains a critical line to be overcome in political and artistic practice and reflect on my own film's attempts to do so.

Chapter Two, "Landscapes of Agrarian Uprising" revisits the January 1973 South Lebanon Tobacco Farmer Uprising (only two months after the Gandour strike) in relation to the Lebanese Communist Party-produced (1974) newsreel film *The Leaves of the Poor Are Golden* about the uprising. I consider the distinct context of the uprising, within long histories of agrarian struggles in South Lebanon, as well as the relations between the Lebanese state and tobacco production, the growth of agribusiness and impacts of Israeli attacks on the South, and the specific circumstances of tobacco farmer organizing. I investigate the tension between the visual prominence of women farmers in the film, and their relative political relegation. The chapter advances arguments in Chapter One, juxtaposing the work done by the film to the gendered dynamics of both labor struggle and its cinematic representations. I suggest *The Leaves of the Poor Are Golden* circumscribes women's resistance — to the movement's detriment. Reflecting as well on the limitations of the newsreel film as militant form, in relation to movement ethnography, I bring in a broader landscape of activities, relationships and cultural work that led to the uprising. Viewing visual and sonic elements of the film against these stories, I uncover points of narrative and affective openness within the film and that history.

The early 1970s Lebanese state repression of the Gandour and Tobacco Farmer uprisings, and subsequent state violence against student, Palestine solidarity protests, and striking fishermen (1975) along with increasing Israeli attacks on Palestinian refugee camps and Lebanese villages signaled escalation towards war. The latter part of the dissertation takes us into that distinct conjunctural moment: the shift from labor, anticolonial and social struggle into Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and various forms of armed resistance to Israeli occupation. These local changes intertwined with global ones, namely the emergence of the neoliberal counterrevolution from the mid 1970s onward and maneuvering by the US and other global powers against anticolonialism and Global South initiatives that proposed counterweights to Western dominance like the New International Economic Order, which was systematically dismantled throughout the late 70s and 80s. Relations of force within the region began to shift as well, with Arab Gulf monarchies becoming increasingly central to Nixon's efforts to re-assert US dominance amid increasing domestic and international opposition to their presence in Vietnam, a US domestic manufacturing crisis and rising opposition to US imperialism (Gowan 1996, Hanieh 2018). Simultaneously, the Arab Gulf Monarchies increasingly benefitted from these changes, taking advantage of financial crises and political instability in Lebanon to expand their financial and real estate holdings (Hanieh ibid; Traboulsi 2008), and beginning to take a larger influence on the broader Arab region's political economy and culture, from suppressing popular uprisings in the Gulf to participating in the Lebanese war (Takriti 2013, Sahakian 2013; Bou Habib 2011).

By the early 1980s the conjuncture had shifted dramatically, with Reagan and Thatcher's electoral victories and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The latter resulted in the PLO's expulsion to Tunisia (with it the dismantling of the PFU) and the occupation of South Lebanon which continued until liberation of the South was won in 2000 largely through resistance from new actor, Islamic political party Hezbollah. The full effects of the neoliberal counterrevolution began to be felt as social safety nets were systematically dismantled worldwide throughout the 1980s (Harvey 2005). These changes had reverberating impacts across political economy, social movement and cultural production alike. Throughout the 1980s Arab militant cinema began to see an influx in funding from European state arts funding — through European coproducers — and American public television. Distinct from

leftist political party funding, these Western state art funds required a varying degree of formal application processes. Towards the late 1980s, and with the spread of video technology, art market and gallery financing also played an increasing role in supporting Arab video art. Whereas the militant cinema of the 1970s freely mixed genre and form, combining observational documentary sequence with narrative, text on screen with non-diegetic and jarring sound, the late 1980s and early 1990s began to see specialization emerge: with formal experimentation associated with "video art" and observation with "documentary." Also in the 1980s, Political Islam became an increasing force in the Arab region, with direct financial support from, on the one hand, the US and CIA, and in other cases, after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iran and its allies emerging as a counter force combining anti-imperialism with regressive class and social policies (Mamdani 2004). Locally, parties like Lebanon's Hezbollah offered social services and functioned as urban and rural planners (Fawaz 2014; Bou Akar 2018), ultimately changing the balance of power including in geographic areas which once had leftist leanings. These movements began to displace — in some cases violently — secular and leftist resistance (Amel 1989; Daher 2016; Amin 2017).

Chapter Three "The Labor of Women's Resistance" is situated at this turning point. It bridges conjunctural shifts from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, considering ways that militant cinema in Lebanon engaged differently with women's role in armed resistance to Israeli occupation of South Lebanon (1982-2000). It is grounded in two films a decade apart about women in South Lebanon and the armed resistance: Maroun Baghdadi's *Most Beautiful of Mothers* (1978), funded by Lebanon's Organization of Communist Action (OCA), and Jean Chamoun and Mai Masri's *Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon* (1986). While Baghdadi's film relegates women's role to mothering fighters, Chamoun and Masri center women's activate participation in the anti-colonial resistance, albeit as entities functioning in an ancillary role to the male-led struggle. Engaging decolonial feminist and social reproduction theory, I argue that audiovisual elements of both films which anchor discussions of armed resistance in the care work of women's everyday lives constitute a launching point from which to imagine and articulate a shifted feminist resistance based upon unpaid and largely invisible social reproductive labor, both within cinema and in life. Formally and politically distinct from one another, Baghdadi and Chamoun and Masri's films also subtly exemplify changes in militant cinema forms and modes of circulation which began to crystalize in the late 1980s, in tandem with political changes in the region and globally.

Namely, the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 and corresponding ascendency of US global hegemony further accelerated these cultural and political changes. The end of Soviet funding severely impacted Arab left parties, as it did many socialist and anticolonial forces globally, affecting also these groups' cultural programs. This period saw the October 1989 Taif Accords which ended the Lebanese Civil War with amnesty for all warring parties, and direct US military intervention in Iraq in the 1993 Gulf war, as well as the growing strength of Islamic resistance movements consolidating also as political parties like Hezbollah, which displaced secular blocs (Mamdani 2004; Traboulsi 2008; Daher 2016). While the Lebanese South remained under Israeli occupation until liberation in 2000, the exiled PLO transitioned from nationalist anticolonial resistance movement into the Palestinian Authority with the 1993 Oslo Accords, achieving marginal sovereignty over ever decreasing territory in Palestine's West Bank. Throughout this period — the 1990s and into the early 2000s, video art and US-funded contemporary art institutions became increasingly central vehicles for Arab militant film (Toukan 2022), which often took a more personal perspective on social and political subjects (Elias 2012, Kesrouany 2023). This trend tracked a corresponding shift in global film financing which became more mobile, parallelling changes in finance and banking structures towards financialization and speculation, much of which accrued to increased power of US and Arab Gulf banks (Randy 2002,

Avenessian & Malik 2016; Nestler & Malik 2016; McClanahan 2017). These trends culminated in the 2003 US-NATO invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, marking a distinct conjuncture with the US and its Arab Gulf allies further concentrating financial power and matching it with direct military violence (Hanieh 2015, 2018). In this period, the number of US military bases in Arab Gulf monarchies grew dramatically, along with their regional cultural funding programs (Sahakian 2013, Toukan 2021). The intertwined projects of the "War on Terror," and the "New Middle East" — announced amid Israel's 2006 war on Lebanon — sought to increase domestic surveillance at home in the West while reconfiguring territories to serve continued geopolitical goals of the US and its allies, all while engaging cultural production to generate hegemonic consent and influence.

Chapter Four "**The Arab Spring was Critically Acclaimed"** tracks these conjunctural changes in relation to shifting forms of Arab militant cinema, revisiting the films and political movements from the rest of the dissertation. The chapter begins by contextualizing the 1960s militant films and forms and ends at the Arab Spring — the massive 2010-2011 uprisings against austerity and police violence across the region. Through brief analysis of Jehane Noujaim's Oscar nominated *The Square* (2013), I identify the emergence of a subgenre I call "the character-driven resilience documentary," in the mid 1990s, which I argue marks a drastic shift in Arab militant cinema. This narrative frame, which arises alongside the neoliberal counterrevolution and the War on Terror, reframes resistance to austerity and state violence in the Arab world as a story of personal overcoming, reinscribing the failed revolutions onto themselves: "we couldn't change our country, but *we* changed." I suggest that even when the films attempt to recuperate radical potential from the thwarted revolutions, their formal structure aspires to foreclose that potential. Couching my critique within a broader discussion of the political economy of documentary financing and circulation, I show that this shift becomes widely becomes legible in comparing the scope and focus of militant cinema across the 1970s, the 1990s with the so-called Arab Spring era. I look for new directions.

I conclude by returning to the present — where the accumulation of crises and contradictions which culminated in the Arab Spring have since led to retrenched dictators, increased and militarized policing and security coordination deals with the US and the acceleration of Israeli settler colonialism across Palestine, Lebanon and the broader region. A final **Coda Chapter: "Old Images, New Movements"** considers the role of images from Gaza in building unprecedented solidarity with Palestinian liberation, in relation to a set of anonymous twitter images from the ongoing Lebanese financial crisis. This final set is comprised of images of banks and ATM machines being set on fire by masked protestors (primarily men), as well as images of (primarily women) fighting with bank employees as they unsuccessfully attempt to withdraw money. I view these as offering direction towards an embedded, transformative militant cinema and politics. Recapping the modality of relational viewing which I develop throughout the dissertation, of seeing images in relation to one another, to concrete places, moments and movements, I conclude by suggesting ways our current conjuncture — marked by climate crisis, overlapping pandemics, massive financial crisis in Lebanon, the global rise of fascism, genocidal wars on Gaza, Sudan, and colonial political violence in much of the Global South — raises new questions about shifts in Arab militant images, including the increased importance of internationalist online image exchange, the implications of which we are just beginning to grasp.

Whose Labor Movement? Closing Notes on Method

The question of who had the authority to narrate these labor histories — did I? did the women? — accompanied this project from its inception, through to the final film's circulation, as the opening anecdote of this introduction suggests. With a few notable exceptions like Bizri (2017), the history of these movements was documented by leadership, rather than movement rank-and-file. Disinterested in grand discourse I heard from social movement leadership whose theories overemphasized global political economy (shifting balances of global power and the end of support from Moscow) and the rise of Political Islam, I actively sought out rank-and-file participants from the strikes.

Thus, although the uprisings and films documented here occurred 30-40 years ago, I use a framework of historic and feminist ethnography and feeling-as-method rather than oral history to describe my approach. Whereas oral history implies a "well-prepared interviewer" and a clear and systematic method (Ritchie 2003), ethnography implicates me as active participant in documenting the strikes, with my own positionality, partialities, limitations and embodied reactions to the dynamics I encounter (Ahmed 2017). Indeed, the "data" for this dissertation was collected to produce an artistic-political intervention. As a feminist artist, the choices I made regarding participants, interviews, landscapes, and films to include in *A Feeling Greater Than Love* were themselves embodied and situated political concerns (Visweswaran 1994, Ahmed 2017, Stevenson 2014). I convey this intention formally in the film in part through semi-fictionalized narration text on-screen, where I ask questions about the observations the film is presenting, unsettling my authority as the sole narrator of this obscured history.

Even more than the film perhaps, this dissertation acknowledges and reflects directly on this context. Continuing in a long and varied tradition of feminist research methodologies (Alcoff 1991, Minh-ha 1989), I explicitly draw attention to gendered and racialized power dynamics as narrated to, and experienced by me (Arvin et al 2013, Berry et al 2018). My own extensive participation in movements — against the Iraq war, within the early 2000's Global Justice Movement in both Ecuador and the US, against the 2006 Israel war on Lebanon, and within feminist organizing spaces in Lebanon parallel to my research — motivated the kinds of questionings I pursued and gaps in the story that I aimed to fill. Specifically, my personal experience of doing a large share of the social reproductive work in movement contexts — the housework of the movement — informed my approach towards the film and research.

These experiences also created a suspicion of the rosy picture I initially encountered of pre-war social movements. I reasoned that if the civil war so quickly became dominated by sectarian fighting, there must have already been holes in the movements' fabric. If their coalition was so powerful, why then did it not lead to revolution? Since the strike was narrated primarily by public-facing men holding advanced degrees, I wondered where were the workers and farmers who created the strike with their bodies and minds. Moreover, I asked — where were the women?

Here, as in the film, I offer a critical feminist take on leftist praxis by focusing on the movements' "organic intellectuals," and "rank-and-file." The former concept, central to Gramsci's thought, is critical to his conceptualization of the iterative process through which politics *ought to be* thought and practiced, and I would add, ultimately "led" by those who are most affected. Yet while Sotiris interprets *thinking through politics* — the production of movement theory and line — as an "organizational question" (Sotiris 2019: 14), I offer instead *feeling through politics* as method. That is, by making plain the ways that my own feelings, reactions and lived interpretations of what I was

documenting through autoethnography, I also suggest that political practice goes beyond what can be thought.

Practically speaking, my research began with a small set of initial contacts made by family friends from international Arab Left circles, contacts and leads from Fawaz Traboulsi's 2008 *A Modern History of Lebanon,* but also interpersonal connections, mapping, scouting in key locations like near the old Gandour factory, and chance. I relied on a mix of informal and semi-structured individual and group conversations around memories of these events, staged gatherings of ex-militants, and reenactments, many of them recorded on film, some hastily noted on loose paper ends, others spottily remembered by myself, collected across seven years of conversations with dozens of factory workers, activists, and intellectuals. Participant observation, through my own active involvement in meetings, demonstrations and social gatherings of the LCP-affiliated Union of Democratic Youth and feminist groups like Nasawiya and the Feminist Bloc, grounded these historical accounts in contemporary practice.

My desire to make a film that would recenter rank-and-file is what led me to the women workers. I quickly learned that in Gandour factory, like in many confectionary factories across the world, young women were the primary labor force. As I discuss in Chapter One, this was simultaneously about political economy and power relations — women could be legally paid less and (if they were under 20), fired without legal recourse, supposedly did not expect job permanency (because it was thought they should leave when they married) and were seen as suitable for the more "delicate" work of moving and boxing candies.[14] I surmised, if the strike at the majority women-staffed Gandour factory had full participation, then surely these women, who had even more reason to demand improved working conditions, must have been a major force in it. Eventually finding a set of photographs prominently featuring women in the strike (Jirmanus Saba 2022) offered visual evidence for a narrative that many of the men and leadership had side-stepped.

A similar reality persists in tobacco farming: until today women do the bulk of tobacco-related labor, from harvesting, to stringing, to processing — an observation easily confirmable by a sunrise drive through any of Lebanon's tobacco producing regions. Having been less displaced by the civil war than urban factory workers, women tobacco workers involved in the 1973 uprising were easier to find. Practically everyone I spoke to above the age of 50 (and many younger people as well) in the villages of Kfar Roummane and Nabatieh — where the Tobacco Régie is located — had participated in the 1973 demonstration or had relatives who had. In sharp contrast to my search for striking women factory workers, women tobacco farmers spoke openly about joining the rural uprising. These rural women who casually and with pride discussed turning out to demonstrations, and participating in resistance against Israeli occupation, defied any narrative that would portray them as outside the frame of possible militancy. As I argue most directly in Chapter Three, political work takes place on a spectrum, encompassing household and reproductive labor.

I also sought to draw out the inextricable connection between rural and urban — in a landscape where organizers, farmers, and workers were often both peasants and workers. While philosopher Mahdi Amel (2021) and others have framed the continual link between newly urbanized workers as peasants as a stunted proletarianization, I argue that these continued connections are in part what allowed these movements to be so expansive in the first place. That is, "worker" demands made by

[14] See for example: Khater 1996.

"peasants" contain the other worlds and felt knowledge of liberation which goes beyond socialist worker control of production to imply continued relationships to land and life. While these kinds of connections are rarely articulated explicitly by Arab political theorists, they are implied within much cultural production of the era — a point I argue explicitly in Chapters One, Two and Three — and by the strike participants themselves.

This intention carries through both the detailed accounts of personal stories in the film (where we understand Gandour workers' lasting connections to the countryside, and tobacco farmers relations to the city). It is also held in the structure of this text, which traces political and conjunctural dynamics across country and city — refusing, in turn, to separate agrarian rebellion from its urban counterpart. Ultimately this study seeks to do what the film could only gesture towards: create a fuller portrait of a moment of political possibility, with all its openings and limitations. It is my hope that in doing so I raise lines of questioning and paths of possible future action for scholars, artists and movements that have not yet been fully explored.

Chapter One

> The problem of creating a new stratum of intellectuals consists therefore in the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone" (Gramsci Q12§3;1971:5)

> Feminism begins with sensation: with a sense of things. I want to explore how feminism is sensible because of the world we are in; feminism is a sensible reaction to the injustices of the world, which we might register at first through our own experiences. (Ahmed 2017:21)

Reflecting on her role supporting Gandour workers before, during and after their monumental factory strike in 1972, middle-class student-organizer Nadine Acoury (better known by her pseudonym "Warde" after 1946 martyr Warde Boutros) commented to me: "there was something in the air." Whenever she spoke to women workers, she found that basic assumptions of Marxism — such as the notion that wealth results from exploited labor — were culturally-accepted norms, or at least not inconceivable to every worker she encountered. And indeed, in the course of only a few weeks, dozens of working women (and men) not previously involved in party politics became mobilized and effective organizers, connecting their felt experience of injustice in the workplace to an ambitious set of political demands and praxis that gestured to broad liberatory horizons.

For her part, Saniya Souiedan, recent rural migrant and biscuit line worker who became activated during the strike — and instrumental to its organization — described her activation in relation to a film she had recently seen at Cinema Dounia in Chiyah, *Enemy of Women*. The 1966 Egyptian comedy follows the transformation of a character called Dr. Issa, a self-proclaimed enemy of women. In the film's opening scene, as Dr. Issa defends his ideas in front of a live television audience, young women interrupt his talk "Down with the Enemy of Women!" This dramatic televised gesture of opposition leads Nadia, a lawyer friend of the talk show host, to vow seduce Dr. Issa and convince him women are his equals. In the film Nadia learns that Issa's hatred of women results from a negligent mother and a broken heart, and Issa falls in love. Through contact with an *actual* woman, Issa comes to see women as whole people. If at one level, *Enemy of Women* relegates misogyny to individual experience, it also allows space for personal and collective transformation through confrontation and dialogue. Issa goes back on TV to publicly retract his misogynist views and they live happily ever.

Walking into the factory courtyard on the morning of November 5, 1972, the all-male strike committee stood in front of the gate calling on workers not to enter, reading their list of demands and announcing the intention to strike. Ahmed Choulan, the charismatic President of the Strike Committee was among them. Upon encountering Ahmed — simultaneously reserved and convincing — Saniya and her friends joking compared him to Dr. Issa, so strictly did he avoid their contact. Saniya and a handful of other women began meeting with the strike committee. Following both social norms and relying on their friendships for activation, they organized the factory's substantial bloc of women workers to observe the strike. As in the film, during the strike, Ahmed and Saniya fell in love, became important driving forces in the monumental strike, and married soon after.

While comparing Ahmed to Dr. Issa *Enemy of Women* certainly involved fun poking, it elucidates some of the cultural backdrop and dynamics of the Gandour factory strike, and the 1970s Lebanese social movements more generally. The women workers' joking belies an openness to narratives of social transformation. As I will discuss below, the women's activation resulted from both active politicization from a range of movement actors, but also widespread availability of progressive cultural works like films, books, plays and newspapers available in Beirut's early 1970s religiously mixed urban periphery, as well as a global conjuncture which saw widespread anticolonialism and left movements. This broader atmosphere contributed to the readiness of Saniya and several other Gandour women workers to become activate effective rank and file — so called "organic intellectuals" — during their relatively brief strike.



Figure 1 Center Saniya Soueidan, Ahmed Choulan and the Gandour Strike Committee deliver a press conference during Gandour worker Strike. November 1972. Source: Dar Al Sayyad.

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This chapter explores the 1972 strike at Lebanon's Gandour & Sons Chocolate factory in conjunctural context while reflecting upon my process of documenting and activating the strike for my 2017 film *A Feeling Greater Than Love*. I explore the strike's organization, its aspirations, the circumstances surrounding it and its modes of representation. Much as *The Enemy of Women* affirmed an expansive model for gender relations to the Gandour workers, I argue that the strike itself was a kind of cultural work. It shifted norms, particularly around class, gender and movement hierarchy, creating political possibility on the ground even as the strike's organizational work inspired more traditional cultural works — such as militant films. Viewing the strike's organization through the lens of social movement housework, I also consider ways gendered labor was critical to the strike's initial success. I argue that both the strike, and related militant cinema created space for a broader area of women and rank and file's decisive political action. At the same time however, I explore ways

that gendered organizational norms and movement hierarchy contributed to the strike's ultimate unraveling.

As Saniya's experience suggests, questions of representation — the active production of meaning around the strike — were likewise pivotal. I suggest that the Gandour strike must be seen in relation to ways strikes, and the overlapping anticolonial and labor movement more broadly, were presented and discussed. Thus, discussion of the production context, form, and content of Christian Ghazi's epic *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day,* a 1972 experimental fiction about social and political struggle in the period surrounding the strike, illuminates this chapter. The film was originally commissioned by the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) as a love story intertwined with the Palestinian nationalist struggle. However, facing production problems and disagreements with the party funders, director Ghazi and Syrian Iraqi film editor Qays Al Zubeidi restructured the film as a nonlinear critique of class, gender, national contradictions inherent in the struggle. *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* grapples with similar tensions which emerged from my ethnography of the Gandour strike. I incorporated images and sounds from *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* into *A Feeling Greater than Love,* and the 1972 film's structure and approach became a key reference for my own film's montage.

In this Chapter, *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* serves as a fictional foil against which I posit observational arguments about the movement surrounding the strike, and speculative counterfactuals about what *might have been* had leadership taken the strategic insights from the movement housework more seriously. I argue that *One Hundred Faces* offers a subtle critique of the patriarchal structures of anticolonial nationalism and aims to expand the horizons of women's political action, albeit in fictional form. However, the film ultimately collapses these possibilities back into the hierarchy of military structure in its closing message. Much like the film, I contend that the organizational spaces of the strike created openings for effective creative action and leadership by women and rank-in-file workers, transgressing the supposedly fixed boundaries between manual and intellectual work. Ultimately however, the left and labor organizations constrained the transformative possibilities opened by their rank-and-file. I speculate what might have been had these openings been expanded upon and become the basis for a political praxis that centered the housework of the movement, and the myriad forms of at the heart of social struggle.

By way of concluding, I reflect on the process of distributing *A Feeling Greater Than Love* in Lebanon in 2018, as renewed debates around the strike's organization, its legacy and meaning took on new significance through a public debate regarding who had the authority to recount the strike. By briefly revisiting this experience, I insist that *whose perspectives* were considered essential to the strike's organization then, and to its narration, now, are inextricably linked to first, the strike's immediate goals, and second, an aspiration to broaden the horizon of political possibility moving forward.

What makes a strike historic?

The November 1972 Gandour strike united around 1500 workers from the factory's two Beirut branches in a seven-day long work stoppage, demanding a 5% raise to match the rising cost of

living,[15] equal pay for men and women, an end to humiliating and violating body pat downs for stolen goods for workers leaving the factory, the right to form a legal union separate from management's control, and a reform to the Lebanese Labor Law Article 50 which allowed employers to dismiss workers without justification. Lebanese state security forces violently repressed the strike. Dozens were arrested, injured, and two demonstrators were killed. The martyrs, Yousef Al Attar and Fatima Khaweja, became household names and thousands attended their public funerals. A general strike and mass demonstrations spread across the country supporting the workers' demands and successfully calling for the organizers' reinstatement. The Organization of Communist Action (OCA), a new left party which had been most involved in the strike's organization, was propelled into the national spotlight. A coalition of left and progressive political parties emerged in support of the workers; in August 1975, it would eventually call itself the Lebanese National Movement (LNM). Bolstered by popular support in the weeks following the strike, including the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (GCLW) which had previously stood on the sidelines, the reinstated striking workers remained firm in their demands.

And yet, in the following months and years, the strike's aftermath became largely catastrophic for many of the participating workers. When the dust settled from the immediate public support, the workers returned to the factory, without achieving their demands. A month later, they renewed the strike. With popular sentiment distracted by escalating military attacks by Israel, and the formation of new political alliances, the strikers did not receive the same outpouring of support. Factory management responded by locking the workers out. When the factory eventually reopened with a nominal raise, and a GCLW push later successfully reformed Labor Law Article 50 permitting "arbitrary dismissal," (Boutros 2015), the strike's ring leaders were fired and blacklisted from Lebanon industry. A few short years later the OCA and the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) within the contours of the LNM, aligned directly with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), playing a central military role in the early years of the Lebanese Civil War. Several of the strike's workers, student organizers and party intellectuals, became actively involved in the war's fighting. Labor-specific demands and tactics were subsumed into armed struggle.

While the Gandour Factory strike plays a symbolic role in Lebanese leftist history, these details are largely unknown to those who did not experience them. Yet the strike is regularly invoked by Lebanese leftists and progressive historians to demonstrate the power of that secular social movement and as a foil for contemporary struggles (Abu Zaki 2012; Kobeissy 2015). In Lebanon's 2011 Arab Spring demonstrations an individual protester could be spotted regularly wearing a Gandour t-shirt to demonstrations, and in the waste management protests of 2015 and revolution of 2019 the strike was evoked in protest chants. In the highly contested minefield of Lebanese history, the Gandour strike is convincingly presented by Boueiri (1978) Trabousli (2008), Petran (1987), Tufaro (2020) and others as part of a counternarrative to a dominant narration painting the civil war as the result of pre-existing sectarian tensions (Salibi 1988, Khazen 2000). This leftist counternarrative insists that the war came in part as a ruling class response to the growing labor, student, and agrarian movements' push for a fundamental change to Lebanon's extractive political economy. The counternarrative also sees bullets fired by Lebanese security forces at Gandour workers as among the first shots of the civil war, insisting that state repression demonstrated that the secular and worker movements presented a clear threat to the status quo.

[15] The rise in cost-of-living adjustment, commonly referred to as a COLA.

Still, despite the strike's symbolic importance, surprisingly little has been written on its details, and even less material includes direct perspectives of rank-and-file workers who participated in the strike. Further, at the time I began my research in 2008, no images of the strike, moving or still, were publicly available. The existing written records tell us little about the building of the movement that led to the strike, the experiences of the workers who led it, nor about the challenging and inevitable messiness of labor organizing.

Reframing labor history

My research sought to reframe the story beyond these broad brushstrokes, and to center narratives from factory rank and file. Beginning with a few public figures who regularly spoke about the strike in public settings, primarily historian and public intellectual Fawaz Traboulsi and labor advocate and anthropologist Ahmed Dirani, I gathered a list of initial contacts of strike participants — all men. I read archival accounts of the strike and its aftermath in a range of publications, from the LCP daily *Al-Nida* to the pro-government *Ah-Nahar,* and right-wing *Al-Hayat.* The archival sources emphasized the presence of women in the strike, specifying male and female workers ('ommal w 'ommaliat rather than using the discursively gender inclusive 'ommal), and featured women workers prominently in photojournalist documentation (Jirmanus Saba 2022). My initial interviewees confirmed women's vast participation: the labor force was majority young women who were imagined to be more physically suited to the delicate and repetitive work of confectionary manufacturing (Khater 1996). Yet when I asked my interlocutors to introduce me to women, they drew an apparent blank. This alternated with an occasional crude recollection of one or another of the politically active women workers. Their conclusion evoked some variation of: "How would we find them? They've all moved. They got married," and most remarkably, from men of the same age as their women counterparts: "They got old."

Motivated by the mysterious absence of women narrators who were simultaneously abundant in the archive, I reasoned, if the strikes' participation was so comprehensive, and women were most of the labor force, then women must have been active in the strike. But finding women to speak with me about their militancy was challenging for a range of reasons. First, the civil war's displacements meant that many workers who had lived near the factory's two branches, in Chiyah and Choiefat, had moved. The Chiyah location, used by various military groups as an encampment during the war, was replaced with a mall in the late 2000s. Walking around the neighborhood asking about former workers I turned up empty-handed, finding only stories from current residents who remembered the abandoned factory and various nefarious activities which took place there. Newspaper archives provided a lead: names of the women who had been arrested during the strike. When I finally obtained a phone number of an arrested worker, via a fellow filmmaker from her same home village, the woman who I excitedly spoke with, then in her early 60s, affirmed she had worked at the factory. When I asked if she had been arrested, she refused to speak any further — likely a result of my impulsively poor ethnographic method. Still, her refusal indicates a multi-layered reality, certainly involving trauma, shifting norms of what is acceptable political behavior for women, and a tendency, within the context of increased domination of politics by religious sectarianism, for former militants or fellow travelers to distance themselves from communism and other leftist politics — particularly among women.

Ultimately, I met a group of women workers in 2014, after encountering one of their husbands while filming the mall which had replaced the old Chiyah factory. Two sisters who worked at Gandour until the late 1970s who introduced me to several friends, some of whom continued working through the early 2000's, including a Palestinian woman from Tel Al Zaatar camp who remained at Gandour until being laid off during another strike in 2005. Their willingness to participate in the film crossed a nuanced spectrum. One of the sisters conferred with her children and determined she would participate so long as I did not show her face. Her sister however, divorced from her husband, was happy to go on the record. Their friend was delighted to talk about the strike and her time at the factory, but needed to keep her participation strictly anonymous, and told her family she had gone shopping while coming to the sisters' home for the film shoot. Ultimately, in the film, I show only their hands and voices, with identifying details edited out. I was careful to show them the scenes in question before releasing the film. While insisting she had never been involved in political parties, the anonymous sister spoke incredibly eloquently about exploitation in the factory using language that deeply resonated with Marxist terminology. All the women insisted their parents had prevented them from going to the demonstrations and marches during the strike, and that they had observed the stoppage by staying home. The plot thickened however after the premiere when anonymous sister messaged me to inquire about a photograph she'd seen in the film: two women and an older man with a suit jacket seated on chairs, a policeman standing near them and a Gandour box in the forefront. She asked: "what are my father and sister doing in that photo?" Although even then neither of the sisters admitted to being detained at the strike, the image complicated their picture of pious participation. Again, a combination of gendered social norms, changing political alliances and likely trauma from the wars of intervening decades certainly played a role.

For the early years of my research then, I relied on the perspectives of Saniya — the charismatic worker organizer who later married Ahmed, the strike committee president — and Nadine — an OCA student organizer from a self-described "bourgeois" background. Despite sharing a similar religious, geographic and class background with the other women workers I spoke with, Saniya was far more forthcoming about her experience, including relating the harrowing experience of being jailed for throwing rocks at the police during the strike, and the valiant behavior of some of her fellow women workers who fought back with the cops (based on her name, I suspected Saniya was describing the first woman who refused to speak with me). Certainly, Saniya's marriage to a labor leader and continued involvement in politics throughout the early 1970s impacted her relative openness to discussing her past militancy. Still, Saniya, and Nadine's perspectives came with their own limitations — also impacted by gender norms. When interviewed together, Saniya would regularly defer to Ahmed, an incredibly charismatic thorough thinker, when I asked them both to recount details of the strike. Saniya only spoke more directly when interviewed alone. Her interventions became most spirited in a strike committee reunion which I staged for the film. In Nadine's presence, she recalled important details and defended political positions at odds with the men, including her husband. In a critical scene Ahmed criticizes the reaction of a protest "mob" which burned several private vehicles after police killed two protesters. Saniya insists on the demonstration's legitimacy. We hear her vehemently affirming "it wasn't a destructive demonstration, it was reactive," to the violence of the state.

For her part, Nadine maintained a sharp feminist critique of many of the political parties' hierarchical structures and politics, mediated by over a decade of marriage to one of the OCA's key politburos (who later withdrew from politics and barely said anything when I interviewed him). Nadine's proximity to the politburo meant that other people who were politburo-adjacent (and more

defensive of their approach) reacted strongly reactions to her words and critiques in the film. Their dismissive reactions were mediated through unarticulated long-term disagreements with various prominent members of the Lebanese left and gendered dismissals of her political views. I include this extensive account of my efforts to recuperate women's narratives of the strike here to underscore that their absence was a multi-level erasure, caused by displacement, structural, patriarchal, and family norms as other feminist labor historians have noted in other contexts (Abisaab 2004, Matta 2021). The range of obstacles to even documenting women's memories of the strike — particularly from working women's varying refusal or unwillingness to discuss their former militancy — adds an important layer of complexity, revealing ways even excavating collective memory is an exercise in gendered exclusions.



Figure 2 Gandour Strike Committee. From left to right, Ahmed Choulan, Ahmed Dirani, Mohamad Shreim, Issam Al Jurdi, Nadine Acoury, Saniya Souiedan in A Feeling Greater Than Love (2017)

This gendered exclusion overlapped with class and hierarchy, each influencing the ways this history has been narrated. When I inquired with LCP and OCA leadership about the *procedure* of organizing the factory, they gave me broad answers about worker circles and strike committees. The people able to describe organizing in detail were the ones who had done it: the workers and student organizers who had transformed what were likely vague instructions about building political relationships across class lines into actual friendships and intellectual exchanges.

Further, when pressed on what had gone wrong, leadership explained the movements decline vis-à-vis global decline of trade union movements, sectarian division and control of Lebanese unions and politics, a post 1989 conjuncture that declared class politics over and a population exhausted by fifteen years of civil war, US-supported Israeli intervention and decades more of neoliberal restructuring. While assuredly the impacts of the neoliberal counterrevolution, and ending monetary supports from the USSR were significant, such a view of recent history verges on teleology,

attaching movement high points to material conditions, making deactivation seem inevitable. The strike's political memory threatens to become nostalgia.

Below, I dispute this view of history as past. In an effort at *previsione* — activating the strike's potential for the present — I parse out the strike's longer term and more immediate context, the "relations of force." I document the strike's distinct moments and messy details, considering conjunctural context, the nuanced and often jumbled interplay between organization and spontaneity, party leadership and rank-and-file, and the shifting cultural and material circumstances. This means as well showing ways changes since 1970s — including the shifts towards sectarianism — were deeply spatialized, and simultaneously incredibly unstable. To do this, I turn first to understanding the strike's conjunctural emergence.

Geographies of Political Action, Local Articulations, Global Conjunctures

The original Gandour Factory was built in 1912 while Beirut was still a city within the Ottoman Empire and employed some 350 workers. Situated near Tayouneh roundabout along Old Damascus Road dividing Chiyah from Ein El Roummane, the factory witnessed vast regional and local changes, expanding their operations through the period of French Colonial Mandate (1923-1946), the founding of the Lebanese Republic (1943) and the passage of Lebanese Labor Law (1946), and a popular uprising and civil war (1958). By 1972, and following a small industrial boom, Gandour ran two factories with over 1000 employees from wide-ranging sectarian and geographic backgrounds, becoming one of Lebanon (and the Middle East's) largest factories. Left political parties vied over who could first organize this prize of industry (Tufaro 2020). Only a few years later however, upon outbreak of the civil war in 1975, the Chiyah factory closed, fell into disarray and was used by a range of political groups as a base, a detention center, and for a film shoot in Jocelyne Saab's 1984 *A Suspended Life*. Old Damascus Road became the civil war's front lines, dividing supposedly "Christian" East Beirut from supposedly "Muslim" West. By the Civil War's end, and in its aftermath of reconstruction, historian Lea Bou Khater writes: "organised labour was in alliance with the post-war 'allotment state' (dawlat al-muhasasa) and its elite" (Bou Khater 2022: 6). By 2011, Gandour factory was replaced by a mall, and the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (GCLW) opposed an unprecedented, proposed rise in the minimum wage, and by the uprising of 2019, a political general strike was organized by informal union actors, with the GCLW trailing behind, issuing a statement more than three weeks into the uprising (Bou Khater 2021).

The drastic spatio-historical shifts mirror the vast transformations regionally and globally from the turn of the 20th century towards the present. While regional labor movement and varied forms of peasant radicalism stretch back across the region at least to the mid 1800's Ottoman Empire (Quataert 1993, 2006; Nacar 2014), the expansion of a "world economy" in the early nineteen hundreds moved with changes in colonial power brokering among countries like Britain and France deeply impacting the terrain of social contestation in Lebanon and regionally. The spread of railroads and tobacco processing plants associated with incorporation into the global economy which brought socialist, Marxist and anarchist technicians from European traditions into conversation with local peasant radicalism, Arab nationalism and currents of liberation theology (Khuri Makdisi 2010). The increased movement of people from countryside to city in search of employment combined with the consolidation of the global economy, generated a regional exchange

of ideas: overlap from Beirut to Cairo and Alexandria (and sometimes Europe and South and North America). As historian Ilham Khuri Makdisi notes:

> migrants took their grievances, their struggles, and their methods of contestation to new destinations, they also brought back with them new methods of collective action and new ways of challenging the status quo. It was not only peasants who were on the move, but also artisans, craftsmen, white-collar workers, and countless others, who converged on Beirut, Cairo, and Alexandria in search of employment. (Khuri-Makrisi 2010: 5-6).

And yet the while uneven process of integrating the Arab world — and Global South more generally — into expanding global capitalism engendered greater inequality and deprivation, social movement power varied dramatically with the conjunctural context, creating openings for labor movement at distinct moments. In French-mandate controlled Greater Syria and what became Lebanon, the early 1920s saw waves of labor unrest at railways and print presses, which intertwined with the anticolonial nationalist movement opposition to French Mandate; a global economic downturn of the 1930s combined with agricultural crisis seeing railway, taxi, and print workers strikes; and a 1936 general strike responded to the devaluation of the French currency (Khater 2022: 15-20).
But as nationalist, labor and agrarian movements in French-mandate Greater Syria and British-controlled Palestine pushed towards formal decolonization amid the outbreak of WWII, Lebanon's ruling elite, and their European allies, began to solidify persistently effective approaches to maintaining their power.

On the one hand, political sectarianism emerged through the heavy hand of colonial powers — like the Ottomans (between 1840-1860) and later the French — which maneuvered the diversity of religious sectarianism in a small geographic area into a means of social division and control (Makdisi 2000, Amel 1989). From 1845 Ottoman bureaucratic ordinances establishing sectarian identity as the basis for political and social participation, to French alliances with the Maronite Christian elite as they secured political and economic interests, through to the founding of the Lebanese Republic, sectarianism became an effective tool of rule. Political sectarianism governing distribution of public employment and cabinet seats was written into the newly independent Lebanese Constitution (Khater 2022: 22, Kardahji 2015:23, Thompson 2000: 80-89, Traboulsi 2008). As political theorist Mahdi Amel has argued, sectarianism has consistently functioned to "link the masses" to bourgeoise interests in a "relation of sectarian political representation" in order to undermine class consciousness (Amel 1989:259 cited in Khater 2022). Particularly amid distinct periods of social unrest (stretching back to at least 1860), ruling elite have regularly stoked the instrument of religious sectarianism to disrupt popular protest.

On the other hand, the Lebanese state has vigorously structured around a laissez-faire economy, neglecting social protections, its privileges firmly reserved for the ruling elite. Since 1943 Independence (and unlike most other postcolonial nations) Lebanon spent scantly on social services (Majed 2019), prioritizing instead a supposedly "balanced budget," which emphasized its economic role as regional intermediary, finance sector, commerce, tourism, and private education (Saffiedine 2020, Nasr 1978). As I will elaborate on below in the case of the 1970s, this combination of sectarian power-sharing and a vicious commitment to laissez-faire has consistently hindered the emergence of labor movement and progressive or revolutionary politics as they emerge throughout Lebanon's history. Thus, while decades of social struggle paralleled Lebanon's formation as a postcolonial nation, culminating for example in the 1946 labor law (Abisaab 2004), in the short

aftermath (1948-52) politicians passed legislation enshrining laissez-faire, easing foreign currency restrictions and promoting tourism, trade and finance at the expense of more mobilized industry like tobacco processing and print (Khater 2022: 24). Still, this bargain has engendered periodic crises. With no social safety net for a modernizing primarily rural population, a sectarian-structured government that failed to represent its population, and a financial sector controlled largely by the same political elite (Saffieddine 2020, Sayigh 1962: 295—6) — the Lebanese state was inherently precarious.

In 1958 a popular rebellion which held some potential for transformation was met with US military intervention. Fouad Chehab, an army general who had refused to act against the rebels, was brought on as a compromise candidate for Lebanese President, effectively ending the rebellion. Chehab undertook a slew of social reforms many of them movement demands: establishing a national public university, creating the national social security fund (NSSF), initiating rural development schemes, all while concentrating power in the executive branch and secret service. Acting in part to quell and coopt growing social demands, Chehab's government created an unstable opening for leftist and unionist forces as well, leading to a "massive wave of mobilizations shaking the cement industry and the transport, water, electricity, and communications sectors" (Tufaro 2021). Chehab maneuvered to control opposition, particularly through an expanded secret service, and through truncated reform projects. Already entrenched in Green Revolution ideologies of land concentration, Chehab's promised rural infrastructure programs like the Litani River Project were also mired by an elite which thwarted public works projects that did not obviously accrue benefits to private interests (Kardahji 2015: 69). Crucially, Chehab's short-lived programs never significantly challenged the growth of the finance and trade sectors, nor did they alter the laissez-faire bargain of high-value service sector (from which the elite could extract profit) alongside unstable low-wage jobs for the majority.

More egregiously, Chehab's rural reforms sparked land concentration and encouraged agribusiness production of export crops: citrus, apples, and poultry, leaving many peasants newly landless (Nasr 1978, Tufaro 2021). Tobacco production likewise expanded within the same logic of monopoly capital. Thus, for example, while by 1972, some 72% of South Lebanese peasants planted tobacco, the mixed public private Tobacco Régie Administration (discussed further in Chapter Two) suppressed crop purchase prices and distributed planting permits primarily to large holders, preferring to make profits from imports on foreign tobacco than to support national industry development. Agrobusiness domination over rural production was encouraged by lack of supports for small scale production and rising cost of producing cash crops. These dynamics led peasants to become indebted and lose land. Land concentration increased throughout the 1960s and early 70s, with the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (UNFAO) finding that small landholder indebtedness increased from 30 to 69% in a few years (Nasr 1978). Peasants responded by organizing, with the support of left political parties, including a major apple planter uprising in Aley in 1965 (Traboulsi 2008: 127). Still, rural displacement drove urban migration. The 1960s saw one fifth of the rural population migrate to the cities, mostly Beirut (Nasr 1978: 10). Rural migrants of all sects concentrated in the "misery belt" surrounding Beirut, largely in the semi-industrial areas of Chiyah, Dekwane, Ein Roummane, Ghobeiry and Ouzai (Khuri 1975).

But the rural crisis was also exacerbated by regional dynamics, especially Israeli raids on South Lebanon from the late 1960s onward. Indeed, the watershed 1967 war which ended with Israel occupying Palestine's West Bank and Gaza strip and the closure of the Suez Canal reverberated across the region. At the level of industry, the Suez Canal's closure increased opportunities for

Lebanese products to enter Arab Gulf markets, fueling a relative boom in Lebanese industry. Simultaneously, the 1966 collapse of the regionally important Lebanese-Palestinian owned Bank Intra precipitated a financial crisis which resolved in increased Western dominance of Lebanese banking, tightened control of the Lebanese political oligarchy on the financial sector, and a wider role for Arab Gulf monarchies vis-à-vis the Lebanese financial sector (Saffeiddine 2022). In this context, the Gandour family began building a second modern facility a few kilometers in Choiefat structured to house up to 1500 workers.

The Intra crisis also sparked a financialized structure of industrialization and investment (Traboulsi 2008: 156). Lebanon's foreign dominated banks directed credit and resources outside of Lebanon, rather than funding infrastructural works (Nasr 1978, Traboulsi 2008). Multinationals serving the regional market established processing or "light" industries for their own products, relying on so-called "unskilled" labor that did not require investments in training or specialized skills like textile, food and building materials (Nasr & Nasr 1974). Lebanon's post-1967 industrial boom thus became dominated by foreign capital, and poorly paid, precarious jobs. Since the industrial boom was not structured to absorb new rural migrants, nor accompanied by expanded social services or taxes on industry, the financial crisis was passed on to the poor through progressive rises in the cost of basic goods — a key spark for the Gandour strike.[16] Between 1967 and 1975, the cost-of-living doubled (Gates 1998).

During this period around the Intra crash, Lebanon experienced an enormous wave of labor mobilization, much of it coalescing around a unified set of demands including a cost-of-living adjustment, boycott of NSSF fee payments, the right to housing and including of farmers in the NSSF (Tufaro 2021, Traboulsi 2008). Facing a weak and conservative-dominated national trade union confederation, leftists devised a plan to unite the country's disparate trade unions federations in a national platform (Boueiri 1986: 298-29). They demanded union participation in government socio-economic planning and social institutions, and effectively pressured the government to authorize a left-wing union federation. By 1970, the trade union movement successfully united all authorized union federations under the GCLW; nonetheless, the GCLW remained unstable and politically weak (Khater 2022: 37-40).

Amid growing labor agitation, many employers — like Gandour — expanded their profits in this period by taking advantage of weak Lebanese labor law: employing people under twenty (exempted from minimum wage requirements) and new urban migrants to keep workers temporary and thus avoid registering them in social security. Hiring lines were a common sight outside Gandour factory which one worker militant described as visually and psychologically akin to "choosing cattle." Further driving down wages, the Gandour factory hired mainly young women, to whom it was socially acceptable to offer temporary jobs and pay less than men. As with many other Lebanese factories post 1948, Gandour employed a large percentage of Palestinian workers, mainly from Tel Al Zaatar camp, situated in nearby mixed-religious working class Dekwene.[17] Exempt from labor law

[16] Traboulsi 2008, citing Gates (1998) suggests the cost of living doubled between 1967 and 1975. Unionization drives in turn incorporated cost-of-living adjustment raises in their demands. Demands by the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers — itself fraught with sectarianized pro-employer divisions — for cost-of-living adjustments were largely ignored (Bou Khater 2022).

[17] Beirut's periphery — referred to as the misery belt "hizam al bo'os" — was far more religiously mixed than it is often portrayed. Salim Nasr and Marlene Nasr realized a 1971 survey of the industrial periphery finding that 44% of workers were Shia, 45% Christian, 11% Sunni and Druze combined. Christians tended to be employed in more skilled positions and Shia in "unqualified" jobs (Nasr 1974).

protections, those hiring Palestinians were not required to pay social security, making the Palestinians' jobs more precarious for the workers and profitable for the factory owners. Yet social solidarity grew inside between Lebanese and Palestinians in many workplaces, built upon the shared experience of expulsion from a rural context and common exploitation and the growing cache of the Palestinian nationalist movement.

Indeed, post-1967 while solidarity grew with the Palestinian nationalist struggle particularly among Arab working classes, New Left and anticolonial Arab nationalist parties expanded their ranks. With Israel's preemptive bombing of Egyptian and Jordanian forces in June '67, it became clear that Arab governments were unwilling and unable to defend against Israeli expansion or achieve Israeli withdrawal through diplomacy. The Palestinian nationalist movement presented itself as a compelling alternative to top-down politics, emphasizing the radical potential of the ordinary refugee. Victories like the 1968 Battle of Karameh precipitated recruits into Fateh and the PLO's affiliated organizations by disaffected Palestinian refugees and anticolonial Arabs (Petran: 1987: 90). The expansionist war began to spread into Lebanon, with Israel committing "more than 6200 acts of aggression against Lebanon," including nearly 4,000 arial bombardments of villages and refugee camps (ibid 142) between May 1968 to April 1975.

Yet the Lebanese army failed to defend South Lebanon's villages and ignored pleas to arm villagers, despite the passage of the 1967 Cairo Accords, which established coordination between the Lebanese Army and Palestinian resistance. Instead, the army repressed Palestine solidarity demonstrations, clashed with Palestinian commandos directly, and criminalized armed resistance.[18] Right-wing politicians worked to articulate rising tensions along sectarian lines, despite active support for Palestinian resistance among many Christians, and presence of many Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Maronite Lebanese in the ranks of leftist political parties and union formations. Tensions continued to rise as militias like the Christian nationalist Phalangists clashed directly with Palestinian groups[19]. Simultaneously, leftist organizers fostered a political consciousness which articulated peoples lived experiences of migration and exploitation along class lines particularly those Lebanese and Palestinians living side-by-side in the urban periphery. The global spread of progressive ideas in popular culture, material wins for anticolonialism and socialism in Cuba and Vietnam all contributed to a relative openness to narratives of social transformation.[20] Chiyah in particular had a number of cinemas — where films with progressive messages like *Enemy of Women* were projected to enthusiastic audiences, and newspapers of secular, pan-Arabist and communist parties were widely sold.

The backdrop encouraging worker militancy mirrored and was fortified by global and regional trends. As geographer Michael Watts has demonstrated, the era post 1967, around "Global 1968" was "a *disruption,* a derangement of the complacent bourgeoise dream of 'unproblematic production"' (Watts 2001: 161). Globally, 1968 alone was bookmarked by a myriad of watershed events: the North Vietnamese Liberation Army Tet Offensive, May General and student strikes worldwide (including of 10 million workers in France), but also countermovement such massacres

[18] For a detailed discussion of active criminalization of resistance see Tabitha Petran 1987, Chapter Four and Traboulsi 2008.

[19] And in the South where villagers also shared lived devastation of Israeli raids with their Palestinian counterparts, the heterogenous and at times undisciplined Palestinian resistance began to sow distrust of the Palestinian nationalist movement among villagers (Petran 1987).

[20] The influences of global anticolonialism are regularly emphasized in memoirs and interviews on this period (Bardawil 2016, Bizri 2017)

of students in Mexico City, the assassination of Martin Luther King and the election of Richard Nixon in the US (Hitchens 1998: 101). The Global revolutionary fervor and expansion of the horizon of political possibilities intertwined with local radicalism. In May 1969 the widely-read Beirut-based Arabic Language *Dirāsāt 'Arabiyya (Arab Studies),* published an "Introduction to Reading the Communist Manifesto" (Bardawil 2016: 316). Third worldist publications like *Edition Maspero* were also widely read in Beirut, allowing local militants and intellectuals to debate and consider theories from Ben Barka, Giap, Cabral, Che Guevara and others in relation to their local situation (Bardawil 216: 320; Ross 2003: 83-84). Indeed, these global-local articulations expressed global conjunctural trends, but also "distinctive local identities," geographically situated articulations grounded in their specific conditions which nonetheless reverberated in a global moment of possibility (Watts 2001:172). This point was articulated clearly to me by the range of militants I spoke with for *A Feeling Greater Than Love*, who noted Vietnam, Cuba, and French workers, along with the crisis of Arab Nationalism as inspiration for their "New Arab Left" political involvement.

The explosion of widespread radicalism was voraciously syncretic: not only reflecting outside third worldism, but deeply rooted in longstanding traditions of local peasant revolt. Indeed while Arab labor historians have often narrated the emergence of Levantine labor movements in relation to European-militant assisted labor union consolidation at the railroads of Zahleh and Haifa and the tobacco processing factories of Bikfaya (Beinin and Lockman 1987; Batatu 1978), Boueri (1986), Vatter (1993), Abisaab (2004, 2010), and others demonstrate the longstanding legacy of farmer uprisings and artisan organization stretching back at least to the 19th century (Boueiri 1986:10). Abisaab's ambitious ethnography of militant women tobacco factory workers found women workers inspired by experience and collective memory of peasant struggle in their villages, and the lived experience of exploitation, more than communist agitation (Abisaab 2010:58). And Lebanon's geography of reciprocal movement of people between city and countryside fostered these hybrid identifications — until the present. Indeed, as Lebanese theorist and Communist Party intellectual Mahdi Amel noted with an ambivalent gloss, Lebanon's peasants retained their connections to the village, returning home for "holidays, vacations and funerals" (Amel 2022[1973]:73). And yet while Amel implied this stunted proletarization restricted class consciousness, the experience of newly urbanized worker-peasants-militants who drove the expansion of worker militancy suggests otherwise. As I elaborate upon below, the workers with whom I spoke retained connections to their villages and brought experiences of rural organizing and politicization with them to the city, adeptly mediating connections between lived experience of rural dispossession within a context of acute industrial exploitation.

But as much as radical practices were passively available — present in collective memory, lived experience and communicated in the Arabic, English and French Press — the pivotal politicization which led to the broad wave of late 1960s and early 1970s militancy was also an active construction. New political movements and parties with a wide range of ideological commitments began embracing a Fanonian discourse that championed collective empowerment and militancy of the dispossessed, incorporating reflections on experiences of militancy from other areas of the world.[21] Active presence of organizers from the Lebanese Communist, Iraqi and Syrian Baath and later, newcomers like the Organization of Communist Action (OCA) distributed newspapers, held discussions, and sought new ways to mobilize the urbanized workforce. Leftist collectives translated political theorists (like Gramsci, and Fanon) into Arabic and published fervent reflections on local worker strikes, global anticolonialism and regional politics (Bardawil 2016, 2020; Saffieddine 2022).

[21] For a discussion of the new left, see Bardawil 2016 & 2020, Bizri 2017.



Figure 3 Ahmed Choulan former Gandour Strike Committee President tends to his lemon trees in his home in South Lebanon. A Feeling Greater Than Love (2017)

Worker Circles, New Left Organizing Methods and The Strike

Socialist Lebanon (SL), founded in 1965 comprised primarily of disillusioned students and intellectuals, founded in 1965, was among the new left groups. Filmmaker Christian Ghazi and his wife, actress Madonna Ghazi, as well as prominent cultural figures Waddah Charara and Fawaz Traboulsi were members (Bardawil 2016). In 1971, SL merged with the Organization of Lebanese Socialists, which itself grew out of The Arab Nationalist Movement and retained a more class mixed membership and a trajectory reaching back to the 1940s (Bardawil 2020). The new formation, the Organization of Communist Action (OCA) set out to distinguish itself from the slower moving LCP, "score points" on the national scene by organizing the increasingly politicized new industrial and agricultural workforce. The OCA built alliances with student groups in working class urban communities, supporting elementary, high school and university student strikes and other demands and holding study groups in universities where they attracted left-leaning students from upper-class backgrounds, including many young women.

This student recruitment tactic was part of a "Labor Centralization Effort" which aimed to build a network of OCA-linked "worker circles" throughout the country. Student organizers were sent, or at times sent themselves, to develop contact with workers and farmers in the country's major economic sectors: tobacco processing workers in the South, Apple farmers in the North, and factory workers in Beirut's poverty belt. Student organizers I spoke with recalled building political relationships and friendships with workers. Disparate factory and agricultural workers too recalled

these conversations with OCA organizers as central to their politicization, at times asking me to relay regards and messages to comrades they had not seen for decades. While the category of student-organizer often carries an upper-class connotation, many of the student-organizers shared backgrounds with the workers. Now prominent labor advocate and anthropologist, then student Ahmed Dirani organized with the OCA, having previously worked at Gandour factory during summers to pay for his schooling. Reda Ismael, in turn, was recruited to the OCA after leading a student strike in his working-class Beirut neighborhood of Rmeil.

Keen to revive the procedural knowledge of these organizing traditions, I pressed my interlocutors to detail the mechanisms of their organizing work, producing accounts of a complex layering of class, gender and ideology. Student organizers would scout a given factory, standing nearby and studying worker hours, shifts and after-work movement patterns. They then returned to flyer the workers standing not far from factory gates. Some women student organizers from wealthier backgrounds recalled at times feeling like "bait:" young attractive mediators between male factory workers their age, and the OCA's older, all male "bourgeois" politburo. One recalled initially wearing beat-up old clothes to seem more culturally like her working-class interlocutors, only to have a worker point out the obvious incongruousness of her choice. Another detailed an ongoing set of conversations with a woman factory supervisor, which triggered difficult reflections on the communist aspiration to "equality" among people from very distinct backgrounds (a story related in *A Feeling Greater Than Love*). Some of these encounters were one off. Others developed into longer-term exchanges and even cross-class friendships.

The worker circles were intended to expand the OCA's working-class membership and support organizing around workers' rights and unionization campaigns. But while many workers were invited to join worker circles, the OCA central committee did not have a mechanism for workers to directly influence their political analysis or strategy. While it is difficult to tell how widespread the OCA's worker committees were, several workers and student organizers recalled them as important to the Gandour's strike's organization. What is certain is that the period leading up to the strike saw unprecedented worker action, particularly in Beirut's urban periphery.

From February 1970 the fraught General Confederation of Lebanese Workers played cat and mouse with the government and employers, threatening a general strike to make temporary wins like an increase in employees, or additional worker enrollment in the NSSF, only to be outmaneuvered by employers. GCLW threatened another General Strike in May 1971, which was again deferred by a 5% increase in wage rates, again eaten up by rising cost of living (Traboulsi 2008:167-9). The summer of 1971 saw a major strike at Pioneer-Jabr Factory, in Chiyah, others at Snibois, Unifid and Seven-Up, and an open-ended strike of thousands of public-school teachers began in November 1972 to be suspended and later renewed in January 1973, in step with the Tobacco Farmer Uprising. It culminated in mass layoffs. Student militancy moved in tandem: with waves of strikes hitting university, middle and high-schools, and in March 1971, an unprecentedly large student march set off a 49-day faculty and student strike at the public Lebanese University demanding public, high-quality Arabic language education at all levels (Petran 1987: 141). The student-worker militancy dovetailed with escalations in the Palestinian nationalist struggle: with July 1972 seeing beloved Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine spokesperson Ghassan Kanafani and his niece assassinated by Israel in Beirut.

Against this backdrop in mid 1972, a group of religiously mixed workers at Gandour's two un-unionized factories, formed a central planning committee, electing Ahmed Choulan, a self-taught

machinist affiliated with the OCA, as President. The strike committee also included William Sader, a factory supervisor and rural migrant from a Maronite village on the Lebanese border with Israel, who had organized strikes at his rural high school with the Iraqi Baath Party. Raji Bahhous, also a Christian, was born in Jerusalem to Lebanese parents; while another key figure, Kamal El Yemen, a Sunni Muslim from Saida was a Communist Party member, who married one of the women militants, a Christian worker from South Lebanon, against both their families' wishes. Saniya Soueidan, a rural migrant from Yatar joined the strike once it was underway and became active organizing other women workers. Ahmed Dirani, a rural migrant from Baalbak, and high school student who worked summers in the Gandour factory biscuit lines, acted as a go between members of the OCA politburo and the strikers. Similarly crucial to the strike — and visible leading young women in chants in several photojournalism images — were Reda Ismail, a Shia student from a poor neighborhood of Beirut who had cut his teeth organizing strikes in middle school, and Nadine Acoury, a Greek Orthodox University student from a prominent Beirut family, then married to a Sunni OCA politburo member. I emphasize the religious and class backgrounds of these actors here to show that strikes, like other major events, are contingent upon the people who make them, the personal experiences they bring, as well as the transformative potentials wrought from coming together.

Notably however, while much of the Gandour workforce were women, and Saniya and others were active in its organization, no women were initially represented in the planning committee, nor was I able to find any women who admitted to being part of an OCA worker circle. Yet the factory's women workers were essential to the strike's organization, undertaking a range of social movement housework. The role of friendships inside the factory was particularly decisive, creating the relational fabric on which the strike relied. Working women active in the strike interwove discussion of working conditions and organization alongside recollection of friendships fostered inside the factory, including reminiscing about a mixed religious group of friends who organized outings on their days off.

While previous efforts to unionize the factory had been met by immediate layoffs, the initial strike call saw more momentum. Women workers across sect and nationality had long informally exchanged grievances in bathrooms and during breaks, discussing long-working hours, unequal pay, rough treatment and sexual harassment from the owners and supervisors.[22] Women led delegations to their coworkers' homes urging them to uphold the strike. The relational politicization of shared suffering set the stage for broad participation in the strike that followed. This movement housework was pivotal to the directions the strike was able to take, and as I will argue below, to various forms of political action whose potential was ultimately left unexplored.

[22] One woman recalled this impromptu solidarity-building as part of the broader non-sectarian factory culture at the time, fondly recalling post-work activities with fellow workers where "we didn't know if our friends were Shia or Catholic."

Constructing Sectarianism: Gender & Nationalism In Action

Simultaneous to the worker organizers efforts to galvanize support for improved working conditions, Gandour's management worked to undermine solidarity inside the factory.[23] Sensing the threat from spatially situated solidarities across-religion and class in the early 1970s, management moved to exploit the country's growing sectarian divide. Upon opening the Choiefat modern plant, Gandour had called upon a supervisor to coordinate delegations of mostly women workers from his Christian home village of Derb-el-Sim and Miye-w-Miye near Saida, roughly 45 kilometers from Beirut. While the strike occurred years before the sectarian geographic divisions of the civil war were more firmly inscribed (Bou Akar 2018), this recruitment tactic was but one of many ways ruling elite actively constructed divisions.

Many workers interpreted the decision to bring in rural Christian workers as attempting to undermine ties between workers who were also neighbors and often friends. Workers also noted the clean look and new uniforms of the Christian working women, even as the new Choiefat facility required less workers to operate its new machinery. One worker committee member surmised that the new workforce coincided with an apparent decision to phase out the Palestinian workforce. Indeed, the rise of the Palestinian national movement and its increasingly public face had changed the power balance in the factory, emboldening Palestinian workers to collective action. The Palestinian political parties began to successfully intervene to protect workers who otherwise had little protection by the law. Interestingly, Palestinians don't seem to have been active in the 1972 strike, although this was difficult to confirm. Much of Gandour's Palestinian workforce was based in Tel Al Zaatar, infamously targeted by a 1976 Israeli and Lebanese Forces massacre; it was difficult to locate Palestinian ex-Gandour workers. However, one Palestinian woman worker I was able to reach through political party networks only recalled being told not to go to work during the 1972 strike and readily complying.

For their part, the Christian women workers were geographically removed from centers of leftist practices and ideas. It was relatively easier to locate Gandour workers in rural Derb-el-Sim and Miye w Miye, less displaced than urban workers during the war. Further, personal connections facilitated my research: my paternal grandfather was born in Derb-el-Sim and our family remains registered to vote there.[24] Despite my having never lived or even visited Derb El Sim, former workers who were otherwise distrustful about my interest in the factory, agreed to speak with me.

Again, the narration of the strike was refracted through gender. The men who had recruited women workers, a pair of brothers, one of whom sported a Lebanese Forces poster in his corner store in Derb El Sim, both insisted they had supported the strike committee's initial call for improved working conditions. However, they justified their decision to undermine the strike by objecting to its growing politicization along leftist lines: finding the local-worker cause manipulated into a broader political project they opposed. Indeed, whereas Christian nationalist Lebanese Forces mobilized working class sentiments to recruit constituents towards politics that blamed socioeconomic

[23] The Gandour factory workers were firmly entrenched within the Lebanese ruling elite, demonstrating the close ties between political class and industry. As Tufaro shows: "The [Gandour] ` brothers could boast solid relations with [prime minister] Saeb Salam, sealed by the appointment of Rafik Gandour to the presidency of the Salam family's Sunni giant charitable establishment, the Makassed Society, in 1966 and again in 1970" (Tufaro 2020: 30).

[24] This voting registration is a product of Lebanon's paternalistic voting laws which function to secure sectarian electoral majorities, geographically.

problems on "foreigners," the Lebanese Forces also actively undermined progressive and redistributive tendencies in the GCLW (Bou Khater 2022). These national-level politics often made their way to party rank-and-file, and others within the LF's broader purview, undercutting solidarity between LF-influenced Maronite Christians and other workers of similar social classes.

And yet, curiously, while the Saida-based male supervisors described the strike in detail, none of the women workers I interviewed recalled the strike at all. These instead spoke fondly of the change from monotonous rural life and the financial independence they enjoyed as single workingwomen, echoing the ambivalent view of politically activate women workers. While Saniya identified two Christian coworkers active in the strike, one had been killed in the civil war. The other had married a Muslim member of the strike committee against her family's wishes and left the village. I was unable to track her down.

Ultimately, the supervisors and Christian workers acted to help break the strike. After a week of work stoppages, solidarity delegations, and escalating support, the Derb El Sim brothers brought two busloads of workers, escorted by government security forces, to replace the strikers. Previous attempts to break the strike had been preempted by worker delegations to Derb El Sim, but on November 11, buses arrived at Gandour's Chiyah's Tayoune Roundabout. The strikers attempted to block the buses, throwing rocks and making a blockade.[25] The Internal Security Forces responded by opening fire on the strikers. While the striking workers described the buses' arrival as the spark which led to government repression of the strike, the Derb-el-Sim women workers I interviewed did not recall the event. Perhaps the memory of the strike was lost amidst the multitude of dramatic events of the early 1970s when the cry for war overwhelmed other aspects of everyday life. Perhaps their supervisors deliberately did not inform them of the strike or provided another narrative to explain their buses turning back to the South on that eventful day in Beirut. Whatever the reason, this anecdote certainly suggests that the potential of organizing the Derb el Sim women workers was not fully realized. It is worth speculating, that if political organizations had made greater efforts to target these Christian replacement workers via the factory's militant women workers, the sectarian split may have been avoided.

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[25] See *Al Nida*, November 12, 1973.



Figure 4 Gandour women workers. From A Feeling Greater Than Love (2017)

By early November 1972, the Gandour strike committee had compiled a list of grievances echoing in many ways the trade union consensus demands and was debating the correct course of action. When the government announced a 15% rise in the cost of subsidized basic goods, the committee identified its spark. They sent a delegation to the factory administration requesting a corresponding 5% raise in wages. The raise was not honored. With tensions in the factory high from months of agitation, the committee voted to initiate a wildcat strike. On the morning of November 5, 1972, the strike committee arrived at the factory, read their demands, and urged the other workers to walk out. The longitudinal work of committees in the factory was decisive in the immediate wide support for the strike — as was spontaneity.

While protagonists recalled the wildcat from distinct vantage points, all of them were eminently cinematic. Ahmed Dirani, OCA student organizer, recalled the strike committee reading their demands outside the factory, urging workers not to go inside. As they leveraged existing relationships to grow the stoppage, they faced threats and insults from factory supervisors. Many workers appeared reluctant, and the supervisors began forcing workers inside. Then, Dirani recalls, Youself Flity, a worker from Baalbak known for his quick temper and tendency for swearing, began yelling back at the supervisor: "what do you think we are, cattle? We're not. We are men. We're going on strike. You should all join me." His inspiring speech, and performance of masculine defiance proved decisive (at least in Dirani's memory). The men and women held their ground, and the factory was paralyzed.

One Hundred Faces For a Single Day: When cinema resembles life

Christian Ghazi's 1972 experimental fiction *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* was released in Damascus's International Film Festival for Young Arab Cinema just months before the Gandour

strike. It is unlikely any of the strike's main protagonists saw it. But the film rehearsed paths for organizing similar to the strike.

At just over sixty minutes, *One Hundred Faces* is loosely structured around a budding romance between a Lebanese woman, supervisor at a textile factory and a Palestinian militant, metal shop worker, both members in an unnamed leftist Palestinian military cell. The film interweaves fictional sequences with documentary footage and audio of demonstrations and political meetings, underscored by unsettling sound design featuring electronic music pioneer Karlheinz Stockhausen's influential *Hymen No. 1*. The 1970 Black September massacre of Palestinians by the Jordan army is also a sonic shadow through the film, as is the sound of political meetings. Its images are presented without sound: we the tanks of the Jordanian military and Palestinians marching, but not the massacre, an ominous intensity stretching across 50 years as we continue to experience its consequences. The film is simultaneously a fictionalized depiction of the intertwining labor movement and anticolonial struggle, a biting critique of Lebanese society's class structure, gendered political norms, and the divide between theory and practice among movement leadership.

One Hundred Faces was commissioned by the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and cowritten with Lebanese director and cinematographer Rafiq Hajjar, to tell a story supportive of the Palestinian resistance. Ghazi however, had a political disagreement with the party, and was unable to complete production as he had wished. He was able to self-finance *One Hundred Faces* completion with family support. Born in Syria in 1935, the son of an officer in the former French colonial mandate army and a French émigré mother, he was known for explosive critiques and a radical framework. One of his early films, a commission by the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, famously juxtaposed images of the Casino du Liban with shantytowns and refugee camps (the Tourism Ministry did not release the film). Sadly, Ghazi's broader repertoire is largely inaccessible: during the early years of the civil war, he lived in an area of Beirut dominated by Haraket Amal party, who famously burned his entire oeuvre. The copy of *One Hundred Faces* was rescued by Rami El Sabbagh, a young film student at the time, who upon learning that the film had screened in the Festival of Youth Cinema in Damascus, enlisted a friend in the Syrian state-run Film Institute to have the 16mm print surreptitiously transferred to VHS in Damascus (Sabbagh 2021). He gave this cheap digital print to Ghazi. The same copy gained wider distribution through Lebanese film distribution company, *Nadi Le Kol El Nas*. I encountered it as a low-quality digital file given to me by a friend from the Lebanese Communist Party.

One Hundred Faces is a whirlwind tour through the connected spaces of anticolonial and leftist struggle. Moving back and forth between informal metal workshop, textile factory, urban periphery, rural fields, and the interior spaces of the ruling classes (chic pubs, neat supermarkets, luxurious apartments), *One Hundred Faces* makes a deeply spatial argument about the dialectical nature of anticolonial struggle. Echoing Fanon throughout, the film demonstrates ways experiences of marginality, structural violence and gender inequality are spatialized but also inseparable. It accomplishes this through juxtaposing scenes of wealth with the daily socioeconomic situation of the Lebanese and Palestinian poor and through a haunting and disorienting sound design. In a recurring element, the film's protagonist, textile factory supervisor militant played by Ghazi's wife Madonna, argues with her slum landlady who has come to demand rent from Madonna's dingy, underground apartment. In another, two children are sent home from school after being unable to pay their fees: a jump-cut closes in on the young boy's confused expression as he faces his angry teacher. And while everyday life of Lebanon's underclasses features prominently, it is juxtaposed explicitly with class struggle. The "other side" is just as regularly evoked primarily through the

personage of an albeit caricatured portrayal of a rich and idle young woman, played by Micheline Daou. We see her first haplessly drinking cocktails in a bar, a voice repeating "Guernica" over and over on the soundtrack, she is later donning a luxurious gown and admiring herself in the mirror while dialogue from a self-critical meeting of Palestinian militants runs in the background.

Throughout, the disjointed combination of image and sound underscores the violent contradictions of everyday life and the uncanny sensations that violence produces, reminiscent of *fukeiron* and Lefebvre. An opening scene features a rural man and woman, undertaking household and field chores. Their mouths move in unheard conversation, while sound is replaced by Stockhausen's *Hymnen*, its own musical feat of dissonance and inversion of historical time. The film cuts to a field which the plows with an ox, only to be bombed by an unseen airplane. The man falls injured to the ground and the camera continues tracking along the field. Dates flash across the screen: 1936, 1948, 1952, 1967, signposting key moments of Palestinian dispossession. Structural violence of rural poverty is linked to the explicit violence of colonialism; the necessity of armed struggle, for which the film will go on to argue, is linked to both.

In a second scene, introducing the film's central protagonist, Madonna walks up and down the lines of fabric spigots in the textile factory, supervising women workers. Perhaps overwhelmed by the contradictions of her own life as a management cog, she walks closer to the camera and closes her eyes, apparently about to faint. The sounds of the factory blend with *The Internationale,* that hymn of communist solidarity mediated through Stockhausen's electronic transformations, reminding us of the contradictions of life in struggle. By intertwining fictional and documentary scenes of urban and rural exploitation: at workplace, and home, Ghazi intimates the multilayered structures of poverty and marginalization joining poor Lebanese and Palestinians and facilitating the ideological work of re-uniting these "nationalities" (inscribed as such by colonial place-making).

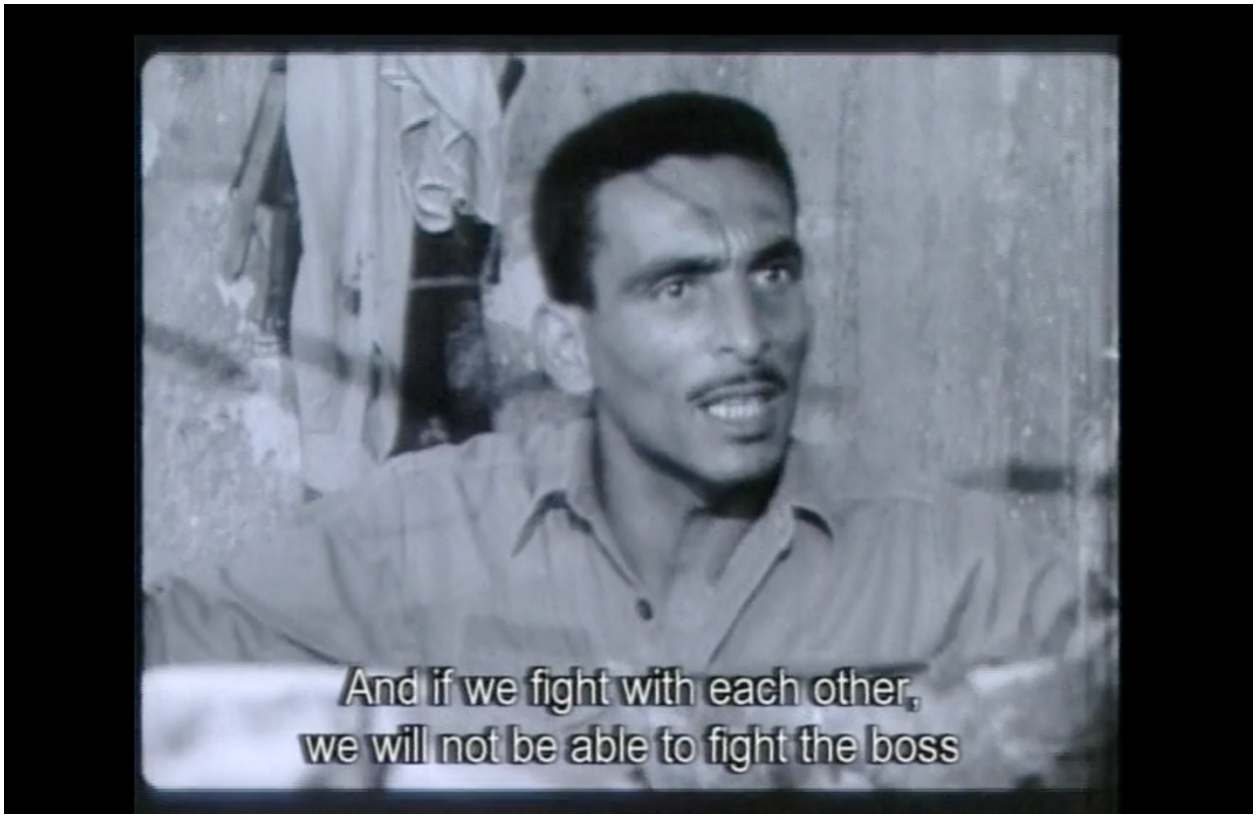


Figure 5 Metal workshop organizing across national origin. This metal shop worker is also an anticolonial military commander. One Hundred Faces for a Single Day (1971)

This point is underscored in a scene at the informal metal workshop employing both Palestinians and Lebanese (differentiated by their accents). The workers are underpaid, keeping long overtime shifts without compensation. As the film progresses, divisions become more apparent. One of the Lebanese workers tells a Palestinian worker: "go work in your own country." Another (who we will come to learn also plans anticolonial military operations) responds firmly, his finger raised in an authoritative gesture: "the boss wants the price of labor to remain the same. And it's important to him that there be workers with permits, and workers without. This allows him to make more profit. If we fight amongst ourselves, what have we left for the boss?" An off-camera voice queries: "what's the solution?" He responds: "UNITE. Then we can solve all our problems." This scene might very well have been drawn from ethnography of the Gandour strike.

A second scene explicates similar gendered tensions. The film's "bourgeois" female character, played by Micheline Daou, wakes in bed next to her male partner, theatre director Jalal Khoury. She fidgets restlessly, then gets out of bed to return with a small coffee pot and resumes her seat under the covers. Apparently nervous, she addresses her husband seen now smoking a cigarette and reading the newspaper: "Jalal, do you support the Fedayeen [Palestinian Resistance]?" He replies calmly: "what do you say you iron my shirt, instead of asking such questions." The simplistic picture of her gender and class position thus far is undermined: Micheline's seemingly luxurious life is rife with gendered marginalization. Her relative comfort relies on a strict gender division of intellectual / household labor, positioning her closer than expected to the film's dispossessed women farmers and workers, and reframing our earlier casual interpretation of her carefree drinking in a bar.

Indeed, the film's two central women characters (and the secondary ones) provide us with distinct versions of women's potential militancy, as they crisscross through the domestic space, to the workplace, and within the organization. Madonna Ghazi's character, we learn, is also a militant. After meeting at her place of work, and in her basement slum apartment where she is seen arguing with the landlady over rent, she appears in a political meeting with the metal workers. Notably, the gender critique of Micheline Daou's domestic space is not applied to the political space. She appears to be an equal participant in political process as her cadre (perhaps mirroring Madonna and Christian's recollection of their experience founding Socialist Lebanon?).

A budding romantic relationship between Madonna and fellow comrade and metal shop worker Talal emerges through this narrative. The relationship, and the film ends tragically as the cadres' unexplained mission is abruptly halted by Israeli attack. Talal is killed off camera. The film ends with the distraught and devastated cadre returning to their responsible, unsure how or if to continue. He reminds them that Talal's brothers school tuition is due. The workers take off their ammunition belts in shock, one stating: "I have to get to work."

The film's end is ambivalent. There is no simple message: the fedayeen are not victorious over their occupiers, they lose a beloved comrade in battle. The film does not waiver in its portrayal of anticolonial violence: viewing it as the necessary response to the violent structures of capitalism and occupation, but anticolonial violence is not glorified. Neither is there a revocation of the cadres' commitment to the struggle (a message that would come later, starting in the 1990s, in numerous post-revolution memoirs and texts).

Militant Cinema Context and the Movement Housework

Much has been written about Jean Luc Godard's and Anne Marie Melville's 1974 *Ici et Auilleurs* — commissioned by the PLO just before the Jordanian army's Black September massacre of Palestinian civilians and militants. Distraught by the massacre, Godard was unable to finish the film as originally envisioned, and returned to Paris and stored the footage. Ultimately, in a collaboration with Anne Marie Melville, the celebrated film reflects on distance (literal, political, embodied) from the pre-Black September struggle. The film can be read also as critical of some of the didacticism and hierarchy of the PLO. However, while *Ici et Auilleur* uses images filmed in Jordan, it removes the voices and perspectives of the Palestinians almost entirely, replacing them with a reflexive voiceover in French. While the film intentionally contemplates the difficulties of solidarity, as French people positioned "Far from" Palestine (to invoke the title of another solidarity film with which Godard was involved), it commits a double erasure. Critiquing the hierarchical structure of state-targeted anti-colonial nationalism, *Ici et Aiullers* similarly erases the perspectives and agencies of those people — adults and children — whose bodies are on the line.

One Hundred Faces treats very similar content quite distinctly, demonstrating a deep affection for its nuanced characters, and crucially, allowing us to understand some of the housework entailed in this anticolonial movement. The film prominently features women doing actual housework and advancing a subtle critique of the capitalist patriarchy through its three central characters. Madonna carries arms along with the cadre, but also obtains medicine for her neighbor's sick children, Micheline's curiosity about the Fedayeen defies her circumscribed gendered-class position. Most notably, Hoda Rami's agrarian character performs household maintenance work. Yet whenever we

see her, instead of sync sound, we hear jarring electronic music and recordings of political meetings, literally underscoring the centrality of household labor in producing popular struggle.



Figure 6 Hoda Rami fetches water from well. One Hundreds Faces for a Single Day (1971)

Even still, the housework's pollical potential remains underexplored. In a segment towards the film's end, Hoda is seated on a stool cleaning Kalashnikovs outside the home. A fellow comrade (wearing fatigues) arrives inquiring after her husband. The film conveys that she too — keeper of the cadres' rural weapon stock — is an active part of the struggle. And yet, Hoda has different concerns. She asks her visitor what happened with a plan to make a popular medical dispensary. He replies vaguely that the city comrades are working on it. Appearing ambivalently satisfied, she gazes upward to the fighter, and asks: "if we work together, can we make a free dispensary and a school for the illiterate?" Grasping expertly one of the rifles, the comrade replies with a nod, "If we cooperate, there is nothing we can't do."

And yet this incredibly important sentiment is left as theory. We neither see the dispensary project, nor engage with the process around which it is being made nor see the city comrades in action. Who is doing the "cooperative" organizing work to meet people's educational and medical needs? If history is any indication, it was probably the women (Maurer, 1979). The film offers no chance to visualize this cooperation, despite the ample possibilities of fiction as a genre and the presence of

such projects across Lebanon (ibid). Instead of exploring the possibility of cooperation, Hoda's desires are also channeled into the military struggle: in the film's final scene she is seen passing out weapons and preparing tea for the cadre.

When the comrades *do* engage in mutual support, it is largely discursive. In a long scene set in one of the comrade's urban gardens, we learn he hates his steady job as an elevator operator: "all day riding passengers up and down, will this recover Palestine?" His mother stands by while he washes in an outdoor shower, urging him against political work: "we were able to buy this small piece of land. Have a better life." He rejoins: "All my father left us was his love for Palestine. Do you want me to keep the job to support us, or to have enough money for your sister to get married?" His aunt, we learn is the shopkeeper and slum landlady who has been harassing Madonna since the film's inception. She begins to cajole him alongside his mother, asserting her love for him and again discouraging him from politics.

Soon the cadres, including Madonna, arrive peering through the garden's humble wooden gate. They stand by and watch the argument. Emboldened by their presence, the elevator-technician mocks his aunt's desire for bourgeois values, invoking the contradictions of everyday life: "you want to get married, have a washing machine, and finely carved wooden furniture? With my salary?" His critique of the new "social needs" (Lefebvre 1991: 9) of colonial capitalism is sharp, and the comrades' support seems critical to him delivering it. However, their solidarity only takes the form of mean comments directed at his aunt and mother. Other more tangible aid against the shopkeeper's nefarious activities, like say, eviction support for Madonna's character, or for her neighbor's sick children that Madonna is seen attending to in the beginning of the film are eclipsed. In this structure, Madonna's care work appears individualized. The film misses another opportunity to model the radical collectivity to which it gestures in words.

A similar dynamic plays out with relation to class. Whereas the film suggests the need for worker and agrarian organization across multiple contexts, workers grievances, and tensions between Lebanese and Palestinians, within and across classes, are left unresolved. There is no scene of confrontation with the workshop boss, no conversation among Madonna and the textile workers she supervises, and the rural family appear isolated from the community around them. The complexity of what is needed to develop unified social struggle in the factory and in the fields, is left unpictured. By not returning to any of these spaces of organizational possibility as active fronts — workshop, the factory, urban slum, agrarian space — they remain discursive abstractions.

Instead, these social struggles are deferred, channeled into armed struggle. The workers leave the workshop to head to the battlefield, and after their comrade Talal is killed on the front, they return to work. Assuredly, this "divide between theory and practice," - as one critic called it upon the film's release - appears as a key concern. The film raises and leaves open multiple tensions: between and within social classes, across gender articulated by class and nationality, and within the hierarchal structure of anticolonial movement which purports to undermine these distinctions. Still, while this openness is a strength, when the film attempts to resolve some of those tensions, it exposes the movement's greatest limitations.

In another sequence, we see a classroom filled with boys young and elderly men, who sit with glazed over eyes listening to a lecture delivered by the same party leader who later sends the cadre to battle in the film's final scene. He speaks about British colonialism and the occupation of Palestine and the Lebanese South. One interrupts him, "why are you telling us this information?" He replies: "because

knowledge will set you free." Yet, there is no discussion, no relating of personal experience to theoretical knowledge. Those attending the lecture appear bored, not critically elaborating their existing "intellectual activity" as per Gramsci. Does this represent the old party politics that Ghazi and Socialist Lebanon actively opposed, or was top-down political education a gap in left critique?

This question remains unanswered, an ambivalence which creates its own openings. The film concludes with a monologue spoken by Talal, the fallen comrade. In the film's first use of direct address, his off-camera voice declares: "Roses are not as they are told to us in children's books. Roses grow on the arm of a peasant and in the fist of a worker. I do not care if I die, as long as there are armed men to continue the struggle." The film concludes with a romantic vision of labor struggle as creative beauty which is rich in unexplored potential.

And while *One Hundred Faces* doesn't explore this notion, we can use the film's declarations against its blind spots to link manual work to the development of revolutionary praxis within the film. The visual centrality of manual labor in the film: in the textile factory, in the welding workshop, in the household and the field — performed by both men and women — itself undermines the false boundary between manual and intellectual labor. Hoda appears adept with both weapons, rural household labor, and organizational potential. The disorienting use of sound underscores these creative tensions throughout the film, bringing urban meeting to rural space, Internationalist soundscape to unsettle bourgeoise hegemonic everyday life.

Such combinations allow me to locate feminist and class critique of the hierarchal structures of anticolonial nationalist movements within the film. Perhaps, as third cinema theorists Getino and Solanos reminded us, Ghazi's intentions are less important the film's function as it travels across time and political context. Highly ethnographic, it resembles the questions, debates and limitations of the movement with which it was a dialogue, in illuminating ways. It articulates the popular sentiments, material conditions and organizing strategies that linked poor dispossessed women and men, workers and farmers, Lebanese with Palestinians as emerging from shared conditions of impoverishment and marginality, vis-à-vis the Lebanese state and the extreme and concentrated wealth of Lebanon's late 1960s financial ascendancy. It shows that solidarity was not theoretical. It also highlights the ways an anticolonial class critique alone was insufficient to overturn those conditions, offering us an unresolved dilemma. Inspired by its uncanny sensations and open-ended questions, I took *One Hundred Faces'* montage as a guide, seeking to blow these questions open with *A Feeling Greater Than Love*. More, when read alongside an ethnography of the movement it is in dialogue with, as I will do below, *One Hundred Faces* illuminates important spaces of political possibility on which contemporary organizers can expand.



Figure 7 Madonna Ghazi leads the comrades, carrying Talal's dead body, back from the front

Cinema Resembles Life — New Geographies of Struggle

One Hundred Faces for a Single Day premiered at the 1972 Festival of Youth Cinema in Damascus where it received the Grand Prize. It was received more positively by critics than by the general audience, some of whom walked out of the theatre. Noting this, Georges Al Rassi, a prominent young film critic, commented: "the film is ahead of its time, and certainly this will become clear, as it appeared to the spectators." And yet while some found the film's explosive dynamics over the top, many of its critical nuances may well have been documentary footage of the actual struggle.

Similar dynamics played out as Gandour workers attempted to take charge of their narrative. The 1972 strike came to a head on November 11, as busloads of workers from Christian South Lebanon, escorted by Internal Security Forces (ISF), attempted to reach the factory. The strikers resisted by throwing rocks and attempting to blockade the road, and the ISF opened fire on the protest, leading to bloodshed and public outcry.

This dramatic finale is where the strike's narration generally lands — and where the OCA stakes its claim to political efficacy. Outraged over blatant government repression and two worker deaths, a massive march in Beirut took off the next day, led by socialist leader Kamal Jumblatt. A similar march took place in Tripoli, and demonstrations were held in Ba'albak, the major city closest to the

home of martyred worker Yousef El 'Attar. After extensive postponements, the GCWL finally declared a general strike, which was observed solemnly throughout the country (Khater 2022: 41). The strike committee was ushered into negotiations with the Ministry of Labor and factory management, and the OCA was catapulted onto the national stage.

To avoid this flattening, I locate the movements' importance not in its repression and symbolism, but rather, in the intense period of political invention before and after. Those few days were marked widely by distinct ways of moving throughout the city, and country — generating differential spaces —disruptive of class hierarchies, geographic boundaries, and the growing attempts to spatialize and solidify sectarian divisions.

Young women were at the forefront of this transformative potential although they joined the strike spontaneously. Once news of the strike had spread, many women workers found their families forbade them from attending — some stayed home, not violating the strike. Others pretended to attend work, joining marches instead. Still others appear to have participated in protests their families wishes. Women are visible in all the limited photographs of the strike, and often at the images' foreground (Jirmanus Saba 2022).

In part through nascent romantic connections formed in the upheaval, a handful of women, like Saniya, participated in strike-committee strategy discussions. As patriarchal norms discouraged men from directly organizing women, the strike committee women-built solidarity with other women workers, drawing upon factory friendships. They organized and joined delegations to workers' homes, defying their usual home-to-work pattern, to urge their coworkers to resist management's bribes. The women leaders modulated an empirical class-consciousness, based on their life experience, into a geographically expansive praxis of slogans, tactics and most importantly, face-to-face interactions with fellow workers — all of which is movement housework.

The unrealized potential of these working women and their cross-regional, cross-sectarian friendships cannot be overestimated. Saniya spoke fondly of her strike-era friendships with Derb-el-Sim based Linda and Milia, who arranged for a strike committee delegation to their village to persuade the Christian workers to honor the strike. She and Ahmed recalled the conversations they had with fellow workers, and the impact their visit and Linda and Milia had in delaying the strike's end. Ultimately however, it appears the busses of workers brought to break the strike on November 11, were these same Christian workers. It is worth speculating that had the OCA, LCP and strike committee done more to support women's political leadership, and to build upon the relationships women fostered across sect, the strike may have held out for its demands.

Equally significant was the strike's transfer of political and intellectual labor from the upper-class leftist leadership to the working class. While the political parties provided invaluable logistical support and coordination with press, union, and solidarity organizations, rank-and-file men and women of various religions engineered day-to-day strategy. Workers were the public face of the strike, writing and delivering statements to the press, and negotiating with the factory administration and union federations. Through enacting an organizational method that put workingmen and women at the center, the strike held the potential to democratize movement leadership and praxis.

This practice-based political education surpasses the kind of dry one-way lecture which *One Hundred Faces* ambivalently pictures. Indeed, the portrait of Gandour's militant worker organizers

operationalizes the ideal of worker-agrarian leadership to which the film aspires. The "roses" or beautiful product of "organic" creativity, leadership, and personal experience is the strike itself: the product of its participants' collective thought and action. And while *One Hundred Faces* is able to imagine proto-solidarities channeled into armed anticolonial struggle, the workers themselves seemed to have envisioned a far more nuanced and interesting political horizon.

If geography was important to the factory's initial organization, the strike's radical potential is also expressed through the differential space it generated. It multiplied mobile practices and ways of moving that defy the roles workers and student-organizers are supposed to enact. It subverted both dominant social hierarchies and the accumulation of capital (stopping Gandour's production). By generating and multiplying distinct and defiant processes and literal ways of navigating space, the strike created and aspired to sustain more transformative possibilities.

In turn, the Gandour management maneuvered to reinscribe spaces of bourgeoise hegemony: visiting workers at home and offering them individual raises for breaking the strike. Management also attempted to activate sectarian affiliations. Factory foreman and strike committee member William Sader's wife recalled a visit from management that specifically played upon his Christian identity, differentiating him from the majority Muslim rank-and-file. Through observing his refusal and herself interacting with the strike committee, Sader's wife, also a rural Christian migrant, explained her own transformation to durable cross-sectarian class solidarity.

As the factory management moved to spatially inscribe sectarian difference to break the strike, the striking workers sought to translate their coworkers' lived experience of colonial and economic dispossession — including many recent rural migrants from villages under Israeli attack — into solidarity and political action. For the moment, party leadership followed their lead.

OCA cadre Ahmed Dirani, who communicated between the workers and the politburo, noted the power differential, himself the child of poor rural migrants from the Beqaa', when he reported on the workers' decision to strike. He notes: "I walked anxiously to the home of Ahmed Baydoun" — literary figure and anthropologist and then OCA politburo member — "I told him: 'the workers decided to strike.' He said to my surprise, 'that's their decision tell them to go ahead.'" The scene recalls the tenuous relationships among military leader and cadre in *One Hundred Faces.*[26]

Yet this tenuous relation between the workers — whose livelihoods were on the line — and the political parties remained unstable. During the strike, the OCA and the LCP followed the workers' lead: reporting excitedly on the strike in their publications and spreading the word worker and student networks, many of whom sent delegations to the factory in solidarity. But leadership did not sufficiently follow the workers' lead for long. With massive demonstrations and attention focused on the strikers, workers were reinstated at their jobs and a committee formed to "study" their demands. Yet a few months later, little progress had been made in terms of formal agreements for wages. Many of the workers felt the attention of the press and parties had moved on.

Weeks after the workers were first reinstated, strike committee president Ahmed Choulan arrived at work to find the supervisor had shifted his duties. Choulan, a self-taught machinist, was suddenly expected to work on the biscuit line "with the girls." This gendered demotion — assuredly

[26] After a long bout in the military wing of the OCA, outlasting Baydoun who quit soon into the war, Dirani would later continue his studies earning a PhD in Anthropology from the Lebanese University under Baydoun's supervision.

deliberate — was too much. He refused to work. He walked up and down the factory lines — much like Madonna Ghazi in the film — telling all the workers the strike was back on. In solidarity, they stopped the machinery. Choulan recalls, as if narrating a dramatic scene from a movie: "the conveyor belts continued but with no one operating them, the cookies ended on the floor, the uncooked dough falling off the edges of the conveyor belts." The workers renewed the strike. This time they lacked sufficient external support. Instead of negotiating, Gandour locked them out. While the workers continued to demonstrate outside the factory for the following month, factory management had weathered themselves for the storm. Ultimately the strike was broken: the factory reopened without the strike organizers. Saniya, Ahmed Choulan and the others found themselves without work.

This conglomeration of patriarchal capitalism, hierarchal movement structure and classic strikebreaking tactics created disaster for the laid-off workers. Ahmed Choulan's story is perhaps most dramatic. Having been highly public during the strike, his photograph appearing on the front page of newspapers in strike negotiations, he found himself unemployable in Lebanese industry. In what became a prominent scene *A Feeling Greater Than Love*, Choulan describes being called in by the manager at a factory where he sought work as a machinist. The manager showed him a copy of his photograph in the newspaper, asking: "Is this you?" to which Ahmed replied "yes." The manager responded: "You want me to hire you here so that you can organize my work force?"

Ahmed Choulan, and the others found themselves blacklisted. The OCA was unable to create a solution, apart from handouts and eventual employment in its burgeoning military wings. For a period, the workers and student organizers continued meeting and creative planning for months. Their collective visions likely considered distinct paths forward. Yet New Left political parties were unable or unwilling to create formals mechanism for incorporating worker leadership as the country edged closer to war. As with *One Hundred Faces,* workers' creative energies were increasingly channeled into the armed struggle. The workers found themselves — to invoke the title of Jasmina Metwaly and Philip Rizk's 2015 film — *Out on the Streets*, both as political strategists and employees.

By 1975, some of the Gandour strike leaders were reincorporated into the struggle through the OCA's military wing. This new dynamic would reveal and reinforce some of the problematic limits of hierarchal ways of working initially apparent in the strike, much of which is beyond the scope of this essay. Still, the historical counterfactual remains: what might have happened had the movement encouraged leadership of its rank and file, particularly those militant women on whose labor the strike was made and then broken?

It is also beyond the scope of my research to discuss how and to what degree a strike-centered strategy remained viable in the wake of the violent provocations and massacres to which the start of the civil war is pinned. But it is still worth speculating whether continued left party support for the labor movement might at very least maintained a class framing of worker power that could have persisted throughout the late 70s and 80s, shaping or tempering some of the war's more extreme moments and sectarian divisions.

Indeed, the Gandour strike and the distinctive ways of interacting and literal moving through space generated distinct possibilities and shifted cultural norms — itself a powerful cultural work generative of differential space. In the few weeks surrounding the strike, the Gandour workers temporarily shifted the horizon of what was possible, especially for militant rank-and-file women, creating in practice an anti-sectarian politics. This horizon of cross-sect rebalanced power between

not only capital and labor but also "men" and "women," rural and urban, and leadership and rank-and-file should not be underestimated.[27]

Whose labor makes history?

Could seeing strikes as cultural works helps us reflect on the kinds of more traditional cultural works — songs, films, books, plays, and so on — that could expand and support contemporary revolutionary shifts? Certainly, a similar proposition inspired Ghazi's experimental attempts to undermine the straightforward linear portrayal of the Palestinian struggle. And yet, *One Hundred Faces'* blind spots prevent the film from further exploring the minutiae of interaction, decision making, creativity and contradiction within the worker struggle itself. Expanding on these questions motivated my own considerations in *A Feeling Greater Than Love*. I attempted to include stories — such as those recounted above — that would portray broader and deeper horizon of struggle particularly movement housework.

And yet as I distributed the film, nearly half a century after the strike, many of the same contradictions and tensions remained, as in the opening anecdote of this dissertation. Within Lebanon, upon viewing a moment that had lived primarily in collective memory reflected back to them on the cinema screen, the response was stark. Critiques of the film focused largely around 1) the inclusion of women's narratives in the film — both upper class student organizers, and working women, 2) the presumption that as a Lebanese-Palestinian born outside the country, I could not relate this crucial history with any accuracy. That the film would trigger such intense reactions — many focusing on women, and on my own positionality as a feminist outsider — five decades later suggest questions of theory and practice, rank and file, gender, class and hierarchy remained unsettling and unresolved. I continued to show the film in small discussion screenings in community and rural settings. During the 2019 uprising, activist groups big and small screened the film, as it took on a new life. But my own questioning of whether my interventions and critiques were legitimate remained harder to settle.

I revisit my experience here again because it allows me to reflect on difficulties faced by workers and organizers who had offered constructive and potentially transformative critique surrounding movement strategy fifty years prior. If the public backlash was difficult for me to handle as an artist representing the strikes, I surmised, the stakes were immeasurably higher for those whose actual livelihoods depended on it succeeding.

History writing is always interpretation. But movement history belongs to the movement that continues it. Listening to story after story of spontaneous leadership and creativity, the product of worker organizers and political visionaries experimenting tactics and stakes on the ground, it became apparent how impactful interpretation can be in shifting our view of history and possible futures. I continued to wonder what might have happened if the LCP, the OCA and others had taken the worker centralization effort to its logical conclusion: as a basis for political education that hinged upon the leadership and needs of workers as they identified them? If they had made good on *One Hundred Faces'* poetic relational words on roses and peasants? What might we take from this history

[27] I attempted to recuperate in my research the practice of being involved in these movements, of collectively making wins, and together processing losses which are usually individualized in reflections upon this period.

and its shortcomings for organizing today — particularly as Palestine, Lebanon once again face violent colonial escalation, and its related global conjunctural impacts, as the accumulation of contradictions past erupts spectacularly into the present?

Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth,* a key referential text for anticolonial movements of the 60s and 70s, posits that armed struggle becomes the only option under deadly structural violence that obliterates and forecloses the "space of language" (Cherki 2006: 182). Assuredly *One Hundred Faces* depicts various everyday fronts through which structural violence encroaches upon colonized working-class possibility. And there is great nuance in the portrait of a militant worker-farmer who also may carry arms in anticolonial struggle, nuance which the film, and 1970s movement leadership, left unexplored. By exploring those relational dynamics, across city and country, space and time, film and everyday life in the rest of this dissertation, I hope to provoke film and movement paths that dance more easily among these contradictions, nuances and organizational forms.



Figure 8 Nadine Acoury in A Feeling Greater Than Love (2017)

Chapter Two

> What defines a film as militant or revolutionary is not only the ideology, [or] the intentions of the producer or director… *but the very practice of the film with its intended concrete audience: that which the film seizes as something recuperable in a particular historical circumstance for the liberation process* (Getino and Solanos 1968: 42, emphasis added).

On a quiet afternoon in late Summer , Khadra Qansu and I watched the 1974 film, *The Leaves of the Poor are Golden,* played on my laptop in her living room. We watched as a young woman, her face half shaded by a line of grapevine leaves, looks amusedly off-camera; a sleepy-looking child sits at her feet. "Even my four-year-old daughter goes with me to the fields," she says, "I've been farming tobacco for seven years." The camera cuts to other children and older women seated on a dirt floor, systematically threading tobacco leaves into large bundles, while the woman's voice continues: "The Régie isn't guaranteeing our rights in the slightest. It's eating us all alive. What can we do, that's life!"

Khadra has been rolling grape leaves for iftar while we watch. A public figure in her South Lebanon village of Kfar Roummane, known for her vocal political positions and tough attitude, she is referred to affectionately as Hajje Khadra — having undertaken a pilgrimage to the Shia holy sites in Iraq. Kfar Roummane, in turn, is known by many Lebanese as Kfar Moscow, referencing its substantial Communist Party minority, of which Hajje Khadra counts herself a member.

When the scene finishes, Hajje Khadra laughs. Everyone I've spoken to in Kfar Roummane insisted that the young woman in the film speaking about the Lebanese Tobacco Régie's exploitative practices must be her, Hajje Khadra. Haije Khadra says, "well, she looks like me. She sounds just like me, but no one ever filmed me about the Régie uprising! It's not me."

The Leaves of the Poor are Gold, a 1974 newsreel film directed by Lebanese musician, businessman and cultural philanthropist Kamal Kassar (pseudonym Kamal Kareem) and produced by the Lebanese Communist Party, recounts a major farmer uprising against the Tobacco Processing Company, the Régie Libanaise des Tabacs et Tombacs, in Kfar Roummane, South Lebanon in January 1973. Thousands of revolting tobacco farmers occupied the Régie building demanding higher returns for their crops and land access. The Lebanese army opened fire on the protestors, resulting in two deaths, Hassan Haik and Naim Na'me Darwish, and dozens of injuries. Much as in the aftermath of the Gandour strike, the following day, tens of thousands marched and a general strike was declared across the country, demanding justice for the farmers. Months long struggle ensued resulting in the farmers eventually winning some of their demands.

While the uprising happened nearly forty years ago, it lives vividly in the imagination of Kfar Roummane's villagers. It's likewise "recalled" by a younger generation of South Lebanese communists, who grew up hearing about it amid Israeli occupation and anticolonial resistance led increasingly by Shia' political party Hezbollah. Hajje Khadra is famous in Kfar Roummane for a story of militancy during the uprising: wresting a rifle away from a soldier and knocking him out with it. The evocative story, however, did not make it into *The Leaves of the Poor*. Khadra's brother Na'im, himself a character in the film, recalled to me the filmmakers coming from Beirut to document the strike. He speculated wryly, "perhaps they filmed her without her knowledge."

In *A Feeling Greater Than Love*, Khadra, Naim, and his wife Sabah— who all appear in *The Leaves of the Poor* — sit in their living room, watching their younger selves. "It's not me." Hajje Khadra insists. Laughing joyfully, the pair (and their daughter from off screen) are certain: "it's definitely you Hajje Khadra," they retort. A few scenes later, the trio gathers in front of the Régie, still a site of exploitation for contemporary tobacco farmers and workers. They recount the 1973 uprising, arms interlinked as they march again forty years later up the now neatly paved driveway. Khadra pauses to tell the story of fighting with a soldier which she remembers well: "I grabbed the rifle from here, and from here," she demonstrates with her hands as she speaks, bodily memory reactivated by the scenario. "He pulled me to the ground with him and said, 'get out of here.'" With my not-so-slight hand, Hajje Khadra rewrites into film history and collective memory the scene omitted from *The Leaves of the Poor.*

***



Figure 9 Hajje Khadra talks about the challenges of rural household production. The Leaves of the Poor Are Golden (1974)

Upon viewing Hajje Khadra in my finished film *A Feeling Greater Than Love* in a festival in Priznen, Kosovo in 2017, a local film critique recalled to me a moving scene from Chilean cineaste Patricio Guzman's 1997 *Chile, La Memoria Obstinada* which similarly revisits a militant cinema classic, Guzman-directed 1975 *The Battle of Chile.* In the key scene recalled, a woman militant is shown herself in *The Battle of Chile,* two decades before. Filmed watching carefully, she denies the person is her. Narrating the after this moment, Guzman laments the current political reality in Chile.

The Kosovar critic drew a parallel between this scene, and the scene in my own film, where Hajje Khadra, seated with brother Na'im and sister-in-law Sabah watching themselves on TV, fails to recognize herself. Referencing the similar time frame of the Chilean and Lebanese militant films — both produced in the early 1970s — the critic read Khadra's position considering Guzman's. She speculated: is today so distinct from that moment, that these women can no longer see themselves

as militants?

Collapsing time and space, the critics comments left me uneasy, implicitly referencing post-1989 narratives that frame labor struggles as being over. I responded that Hajje Khadra's misrecognition of her filmed self belies more nuanced dynamics of patriarchy, struggle and the political limitations of the newsreel as genre. Indeed, while many of the women I interviewed about the Gandour strike had refused to publicly acknowledge their own militancy, a layered result of social norms, trauma, and the shift of many communist-aligned working-class Muslims towards Political Islam. But the situation in the countryside was far more open. Usually however, a film travels without context (or its director to make such arguments). Judging by the critics' response, my own attempts to imbed such complexity or "traveling theory" within *A Feeling Greater Than Love* had also fallen short.[28]

In the pages below, I explore the relationship between Kareem's *The Leaves of the Poor Are Golden* (1974) and my own *A Feeling Greater Than Love* (2017) to contemplate these relational dynamics — film as traveling text, gender, genre, militancy, past and present. *The Leaves of the Poor* became a grounding point for *A Feeling Greater Than Love:* I selected tobacco-uprising characters and locations for my film from it. In my research I took a visual cue from *The Leaves of the Poor* which visually portrays tobacco cultivation as women's work and responded to the 1974 film's absences. More than half of the farmers in Kareem's 1974 film are women. Yet, as I suggest in the pages below, *The Leaves of the Poor* genders organizing efforts as masculine, relegating women to victims rather than revolting agents. By comparing the work done by the film in these instances in relation to the gendered dynamics of both labor struggle and its cinematic representations, I suggest *The Leaves of the Poor Are Golden* circumscribes women's resistance — to the movement's detriment.

More precisely, I consider how *The Leaves of the Poor* frames and "iconizes" "images of legitimate leadership [and] appropriate forms of political action" (Raiford 2011: 8). I show ways that this newsreel narrates the uprising as a political achievement of the Lebanese Communist Party, bracketing other kinds of organizing work and spontaneity that produced this major event. Building on my ethnographic and archival research, including contemporary responses to my film in the Lebanese press, I show ways that narrative of party-led uprising is deeply contested. Instead, I build a more nuanced and layered portrait of popular uprising, contextualizing the uprising within the immediate conjunctural context, as well as seeing it in relation to the inheritance of a long history of peasant revolt in South Lebanon and the region. Occurring only two months after the Gandour factory strike, and riding a broader wave of social movement escalation, the tobacco farmer uprising was also an expression of broad-based and growing will for the power of collective action.

Finally, I discuss the implications of *The Leaves of the Poor Are Golden* as a document detailing farmer social movement, intended for circulation. I question the film's implicit commitment to showing a positive portrait of political organizing, in lieu of teasing out nuances of political disagreements, context and consequences which inevitably mark struggles. So doing allows me to comment on the genre of newsreel. I argue that under the guise of "depicting" struggle, the newsreel often reinforces particular organizational frameworks, at the expense of others. I suggest that the work of the film misses the chance to contribute to a more nuanced "reformulation or restructuring" of movement goals and practices, including but not limited to the role of women in social movement.

In an effort to create openings, I read *The Leaves of the Poor Are Golden's* visual and sonic elements

[28] I mis-invoke Edward Said's essay Traveling Theory.

against its textual ones, uncovering points of narrative and affective openness on which alternative readings of this history, and the genre of newsreel, can be built. Building on that, I reflect critically on my efforts to shift this framing within *A Feeling Greater Than Love,* and the limits of my own work.

Tobacco as Gold: The "Leaves of the Poor" in Conjunctural Context

The Leaves of the Poor opens with the sound of gusty rural wind over a black screen. A line of broad tobacco leaves fills the screen. The rustling tobacco fades as a hand-written title card appears:

> When the French Economist Paul Hoffman returned from 1919 to Syria and Lebanon, he answered the French merchants to their questions about the value of that country: They need not doubt the extent to which French cultural values has penetrated this area. On the contrary, the investors are fighting violently over the material profit and loss of the land… they have succeeded in bringing French civilization into this country.

The next title card describes the founding of the Régie in 1935, which reorganized the growing, selling and processing of tobacco in Lebanon into a private monopoly company, majority owned by a French bank, disrupting subsistence and artisanal production of other crops (Hamade 2014). The cards continue: the decree was immediately rejected by the popular movement of tobacco growers that "began offering its first martyrs in bloody struggle with the oligarchy, the monopolists, and the government powers." Photographs and handwritten names and dates follow: commemorating the martyrs of various ostensible confrontations with the company and the state: 1936, 1946, and 1951. This title card/photograph sequence is followed by a brief interview with a young man recounting a recent strike of tobacco factory workers at the Régie's processing plant (likely 1974, see Abisaab 2010), wherein work stoppages by the men and women workers, and solidarity from the broader community forced the Régie to meet demands for wage increases and job security. This introduction situates the 1973 rebellion in response to the half-century old shift from formal French colonialism to "independence" and within a longer trajectory of exploitation and peasant resistance to "agrarian production's incorporation into the world capitalist economy" (Abisaab 2004, 483).

Appearing before the title credits of the film, this introduction frames the uprising in relation to longer term organic and conjunctural dynamics, crucial as I have argued, to understanding the uprising's immediate significance and contemporary resonance. Tobacco cultivation within the greater Ottoman Empire dates to the 17th century. Resistance narratives around tobacco stretch nearly as far back.[29] As historian Ilham Khouri-Makdisi and others argue, with the uneven solidification of global capitalism, sites of integration of "peripheries" like tobacco processing plants, ports and railways became nexuses where the transformation of economies, space and worlds was seen and felt. Tobacco solidified as a monopoly cash crop within the Ottoman tobacco monopoly administration Régie in the mid 18th century. In response to the 1873 global debt crisis, the Ottoman Empire turned the Tobacco Régie — a key productive industry — over to their French creditors, as

[29] Tobacco militancy was particularly salient within Ottoman labor history. Ottomon labor historian Can Nacar reports of the 260 strikes recorded by Ottomon labor historians from 1891 to 1911, the tobacco industry saw 27 recorded strikes involving hundreds of workers (Nacar 2022: 20). In 1899 Egypt, a three-month wave of strikes saw tobacco workers coordinating strikes across multiple workplaces (Khuri-Makdisi 2010:150). While archival documentation infrequently details specific worker perspectives, and even brief mentions throughout the archives are significant, stand-ins for world of creativity and worker militancy.

a concession. Therein out, tobacco became key to the Ottoman Empire's transformation from imperial power to supplier of commodities and labor to Western Europe. As historian Can Nacar notes, the Régie "was the largest foreign enterprise in the Ottoman Empire; its capital made up 23% of total foreign direct investments between 1881 and 1914" (Nacar 2020: 16). Labor contestation moved in pace, with some 27 recorded strikes in the Ottoman Empire during that period (ibid).

In Lebanon specifically, global dynamics similarly incentivized agricultural reorganization. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, tobacco became a primary industrial crop in Lebanon[30], replacing domestic silk production which faced competition from mechanized production. The tobacco industry's growth was accelerated also by WWI-era blockades of the Ottomon Empire which increased demand on domestic tobacco. Throughout this period, workers and farmers, men and women, contested the terms of employment and crop pricing at tobacco processing facilities, and in the fields (ibid, Al-Shimali 1935)[31]. Under French mandate rule (1918—46), tobacco was again an important marker of the transition to neocolonial European economic and political influence. The majority French-owned Tobacco Monopoly Administration — the Société Anonyme de Régie Co-Interesse Libano-Syrienne de Tabacs et Tombacs — known as simply "Régie" was established in 1935 and continued as a private corporation until 1993.[32] Now nationalized, the Régie continues to monopolize control of tobacco production and sale, issuing growing permits, setting crop prices (Khayyat 2022).

[30] By 1914 the cultivated area did not exceed 1,000 hectares (Karyergatlan, 1965: 19-20 cited in Doumani 1974: 56). Doumani notes: Production figures rose from 1,155,250 kilos of tobacco in 1936 to 4,191,692 in 1963. "While in 1936 only 7,460 cultivators were authorized to grow tobacco, the number of cultivators owning permits in 1970 had increased to 43,389" (An-Nahar Economic Supplement, 1972: 6, cited in Doumani 64).

[31] Tobacco factories became sites of confrontation and labor organizing, Benin and Lockman have convincingly argue for two reasons. First, the tobacco factor or processing site became the place where confrontation with the international economy or the changes wrought by uneven "integration" were felt on the ground, by farmers whose means of producing was forced to change. They became sites where radicalized secular intellectuals and clerics alike would interact with peasants: Second, this was changed or influenced by a particular kind of radicalism by the physical presence of international consultant brought by the foreign companies. Otten these Italian or Greek machinists brought with them a specific European Marxism, which undoubtedly blended with local resistance tradition. They were often also sites where radicalized secular intellectuals and clerics from the cities were interacting with peasants. As Abisaab has argued in the case of Bint Jbeil, a synergizing with local traditions of resistance against Ottoman and local feudal oppression.

[32] In 1993 the Régie was nationalized and placed under the ministry of finance, but the tobacco monopoly continues, albeit in slightly shifted form. See Khayyat 2022 for more detailed discussion of contemporary tobacco cultivation and its political implications.



Figure 10 The Régie, Nabatieh in The Leaves of the Poor are Golden (1974)



Figure 11 The Régie in A Feeling Greater Than Love (2017)

Tobacco work is repetitive and consuming, requiring pre-dawn labor and stretching far into the late morning, and encompassing the entire year for little monetary gain, only made worse by these

changes. Once the Régie was established, farmers who once shopped crop around to regional buyers, became required to sell to the Régie. Because the French opposed import taxes, Lebanese farmers competed with cheaper imported crop. The Régie also disrupted the traditional relationship to tobacco, prohibiting farmers from growing tobacco for household consumption.

Because the Régie issued most of its permits to feudal landowners, peasants became forced to sharecrop both planting permits and often the land on which they planted. By 1970, anthropologist Osama Doumani found immense land-ownership inequity in South Lebanon. In Nabatieh, where the Régie South Lebanon administration is located, he found: "Five absentee landowners owned 230 hectares, 66% of the village land. Of the 325 adult men in the village… approximately 2% owned 50% of the remaining land (or 18% of the total area). Nearly 75% of the population of this village is completely landless" (Doumani 1974). South Lebanon's reliance on tobacco cultivation continued into the current century, with "survey dating from 1999 indicated that tobacco provides 25% to 85% and sometimes 100% of the total income of farmers" (Zurayk 2008).

The Régie's formation in 1935 met massive protest from both Lebanese and Syrian religious leaders, businesspeople, workers and farmers. In a peasant uprising and general strike known as Intifada of Bint Jbayl in 1936, Shia anticolonialism intersected with farmers demands in protest of transformations wrought by the French Régie monopoly (Doumani 1974; Abisaab 2009)[33]. Thousands of farmers demonstrated against the new laws, and the subsequent detention of protest leaders. Farmers demanded fixing tobacco crop price, sale quotas, prohibition on tobacco imports, and bylaw flexibility regarding planting to accommodate farmers' needs, among other things (Abisaab, 2009). In the 1936 uprising, three farmers were killed by colonial police, including Mohammad Al-Jammal, a relative of Mohammad Najib Al-Jammal, who appears in my and Kareem's film. Photographs and names of the 1936 Bint Jbayl martyrs are featured in the introduction of *The Leaves of the Poor*.

Women — who made up nearly half the tobacco processing workforce by 1935 — participated throughout these uprisings and strikes, as Malik Abisaab has diligently demonstrated (Abisaab 2004, 2010,).[34] Because tobacco processing and cultivation is detail-oriented, it relies on the supposed continuity of household labor and labor-intensive industrial tasks, meaning women have always done much of the work. As anthropologist Munira Khayyat pithily summarizes: "tobacco is domestic labor. It is female labor" (Khayyat 2022: 102). So too was tobacco worker organizing.

Women's labor was always central to tobacco organizing militancy.[35] Women often created their own specific platforms and actions: in a 1946 strike at the Régie headquarters in Furn el Chebbak,

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[33] The cinematic nature of protest and performance comes across in documentation of this uprising itself: "The demonstrators carried a coffin filled with tobacco leaves, symbolizing the death of the tobacco industry, and, chanting the Marseillaise, placed the coffin at the feet of the agitated Commissioner." (Doumani 58)

[34] Women made up 45% of the workforce at the newly established French-Lebanese Régie (Abisaab 2010:29), and similar percentages fluctuated before and since. Following a similar gendered division of industrial labor as Gandour which played on the supposed continuity of household labor and labor-intensive industrial tasks, Régie factory workers were employed in labor-intensive unmechanized work like sorting.

[35] "Gila Hadar, "Jewish Tobacco Workers in Salonika: Gender and Family in the Context of Social Life and Ethnic Strife," in Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture and History, ed. Amila Buturovic and Irvin Cemil Schick (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 127-52; Şükrü Ilıcak, "Jewish Socialism in Ottoman Salonica," Southeast European and Black Sea Studies 2, no. 3 (2002): 115-46"

"For tobacco workers' activism in other parts of the world, see Beinin and Lockman, Workers on the Nile, 49-57; Mary C. Neuburger, Balkan Smoke: Tobacco and the Making of Modern Bulgaria (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 65-

Beirut, women took the lead in setting demands and self-organizing. The strike's leader Warde Boutros was famously killed by police.[36] Once underway, the broader labor movement rallied alongside the striking women workers. Their strike contributed directly to the newly independent nation's first Labor Law (Abisaab 2004)[37]. Women were also visible and vocal in documentation of the 1936 Bint Jbayl Intifada, and assuredly throughout the intervening decades. Their willful presence is woven throughout company, newspaper and colonial archives.

Within this context, it seems unremarkable that Kassar's 1974 film would feature women so centrally. And yet, other documentation of the 1973 uprising barely mentions women farmers. As I discuss throughout this volume, gender remains a continuous focal point for unsettling historiography and enacting revolutionary struggle in Lebanon.

69; Patricia A. Cooper, Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900-1919 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); D. J. O'Connor, "Representations of Women Workers: Tobacco Strikers in the 1890s," in Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain, 151-72."

[36] Boutrous's name is invoked in the Lebanese feminist organization, Warde Boutros Association, and the pseudonym of Nadine Acoury, "Warde."

[37] Within the context of that strike, Abisaab quotes Michele Azar, an eyewitness, writing in *Al Nahar* daily. He noted that, "journalists expressed their admiration for such organization and for women's strength, political awareness, understanding and intelligence" (Abisaab 2004: 56).



Figure 12 Hajje Khadra, Naim and Sabah Qansu reenact demonstration at the Régie, Kfar Roummane. A Feeling Greater Than Love (2017)



Figure 13 Hajje Khadra talks about fighting with the soldier in front of the Régie

Gender of Resistance

Hajje Khadra is the first person to speak in *The Leaves of the Poor* after the credits, which appear over a sequence that establishes the calmness of rural life. A pan across a mountainside dotted with quaint houses promise an idyllic picture of rural life. This is halted by a large concrete building. Ominous pans and zooms on the building suggest this can only be the Régie. It is surrounded by endless fields of tobacco, which give way to closer shots of the plant, shimmering in the wind. Lush tobacco fields surround the building, stretching across the space of the screen and, we are led to imagine, the entire Southern landscape beyond the film's scope. In this narrative succession, the tobacco plant itself appears ominous. The labor of the people we watch confirms that fact, and the camera cuts to a sequence of farm workers arduously preparing the fields in a dim, pre-dawn light.

The people, interestingly, are mostly women. The film imagines the collectivity of agricultural laborers as groups of young women standing amidst waist-high tobacco plants, shielding their eyes from the sun. Women, clearing dead leaves from a small plot of land in front of a house, are apparently too busy to pay attention to the camera. Older women: their hands unceremoniously reaching into the dirt, gather piles of stems and leaves in one hand while they expertly continue digging with the other. Women too, dropping seeds as they follow a plow digging an endless trench as it prepares the field for the planting season. These descriptive shots are short, resting with each group for only a few seconds, before moving onto the next. This seemingly endless arduous labor of tobacco cultivation is done entirely in groups, and mostly by women laborers.

When Hajje Khadra appears, five minutes in, we have been prepped to accept a woman as an authority on tobacco production, working conditions and even organized response. In some ways, the interview does not disappoint. Hajje Khadra sits under a canopy of leaves, looking far off camera, but appearing comfortable and calm. She offers commentary upon the arduous labor we have been watching: "a typical year is 12 months, but for us, it's 16." The planting season begins in January, requires extensive attention to the crops until they are ready to be harvested and packed in May through August. Again, the leaves are pressed and reorganized, by the time it is ready to be sold to the Régie in February, planting season is well underway: a cyclical and never-ending temporality of production and life. Tobacco cultivation controls the entire organization of life: "the whole family works in the field, even my daughter who is four years old…" Khadra articulates with authority the exploitation of the farmers by the Régie, their inability to meet the rising cost of living with tobacco production, and the need to do something about it. As she speaks, her description is confirmed by sequences of women and children seated on dirt floors, in front of massive piles of tobacco, spearing them onto long sticks.

But Hajje Khadra is pessimistic about the prospects of organizing, telling us that those who demonstrate against the Régie face serious repression: "they are beaten up." Further, she only briefly alludes to the fact that she may have participated in the strike: "those of us out on the front lines took the hit, but those who didn't go to the demonstration are already well off enough, they don't have to worry." The woman speaks with confidence and command describing the uprising's trajectory. Yet the details that she provides about the strike itself, and her own participation in it, are scant compared to her more elaborate description of living conditions. Nor is Khadra given an introductory title card, or any geographical reference point—making the mystery about her identity harder to solve. Her role in the film becomes more about household reproduction and victimhood than about active organization.

In sharp contrast, my own discussions with the women and men in Kfar Roummane revealed that women's work in the strike was central to the uprising, and to a debate over risk and accountability within the Communist Party at the time. On the day of the uprising, as the marchers approached the Régie from the neighboring villages, dancing and singing chants against the landed oligarchy and the monopoly corporation, word got out that the army awaited the demonstrators at the Régie's door. Eager to make their outrage known to the Régie and convinced that the army would not open fire on women, the Communist Party women and other women villagers of Kfar Roummane took the front lines of the demonstration, in some case marching with their children. Hajje Khadra and others recalled their violent confrontation with the army at the doors of the Régie, and in Khadra's case, her own retaliation against the soldier who tried to knock her out with his rifle. Such conversations are a compelling point from which to interrogate the scope of the film's militancy.

This scene raises more questions than it answers: Why does the film give visual priority to the women's manual labor, but exclude their intellectual labor (as strike organizers), and pass over their militancy? Why did Kareem and his collaborators choose to construct the young woman as a victim rather than a resisting agent. Did they aim to valorize the Communist Party's involvement over other forms of organized and spontaneous action, or were they not aware of her role in the uprising? Did her story of confrontation with the soldier end up on the cutting floor, or was it Hajje Khadra who chose not to share: an act of self-enforced policing of gender norms?

These questions could continue. But they point to limitations in the transformative vision that *The Leaves of the Poor* can imagine, constrained by a masculinist vision of anticolonial revolution blind to women's political labor (McClintock 1995). The film makes room for only certain kinds of subversive lived practices, foreclosing the possibility for difference that could explode also gendered division of labor (political and reproduction) and include all people in defining a new social and economic arrangement. The kind of differential space that *Poor Golden Leaves* can imagine and gesture towards is no doubt a product of the modes of political practice and the limit of critique of the time. The film provides a window into the transformation that the filmmakers could (or were allowed to) imagine—a party-led revolution that relegated women's work to the sidelines.

This overemphasis on teleological party-led revolution and material conditions at the expense of wider dynamics of struggle are reinforced by the film's other narrative choices. *The Leaves of the Poor* suggests the landscape of everyday life in tobacco-producing South Lebanon contains the contradictions that produce uprising and credits the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) for channeling those contradictions into revolt. As such, the labor process is centered and the film proceeds alongside a year-long season of tobacco production: from planting, to plowing, to picking and packing tobacco alongside calming music. We see close and wide shots of farmers working both day and night, often combined with interview voiceover which prevent the images from appearing as a nostalgic portrait of rural life. An older man siting amongst a group of children and young women stringing tobacco leaves tells us: "The whole family works in the tobacco, sunrise to sunset." Hajje Khadra insists: "Selling a kilo of tobacco barely makes enough money to buy food for the family… but what else can we do?"

As the interviews build to describe the uprising, the narrative progression reinterprets the labor process as exploitation vis-à-vis the Régie and the state. We first see the Régie as visually disruptive and out of place: a pan across rural landscape ends at the massive concrete Régie structure. This is underscored by suspenseful percussive music, at odds with the calming *oud* that accompanied rural

labor. Consistent with newsreel form, we are next introduced to movement leadership. Mohamad Najib Al-Jammal is described in a title card as the President of the South Lebanon Tobacco Farmer Union and is visually framed more formally than the other characters, seen in the center of the frame, wearing a suit, ostensibly reflecting his authority. As Al-Jammal explicates the Régie's hybrid system of semi-feudal monopoly capitalist production, and unequal permit distribution, images of labor transition to see images more obviously coded as "organization." An unidentified march with a long line of men, holding banners walks through a city center. While the film is fairly conservative formally, this mode of cutting images of the labor process and uprising with interviews that provide contextual political-economic information for the images but do not directly explicate them engages dialectical visual techniques, gesturing to something beyond the text.

Al-Jammal's role in the film is to emphasize that uprising requires organization. As we watch women farmers tending the land, Al-Jammal explains, "ever since the first uprising in 1936, the work of the Communist Party has been central to this organizing." He underscores the importance of consistent organizational work in movement building and the role of the LCP. But he sidesteps other more spontaneous forms of movement, let alone the gendered structure of political party organizing.



Figure 14 Farmers hang tobacco to dry. The Leaves of the Poor are Golden (1974).

By glossing over the historical specificity of the early uprisings mentioned, Al-Jammal's interviews flatten their temporality into one long string of uprising, ignoring the differing causes and efficacy of each, and the specific movement housework required to advance them. This allows the viewer to understand tobacco farmer organizing as a series of periodic upsurges with the same cause: farmer exploitation by the landowners, the Régie, and the world capitalist economy, guided by organizations. Together, we might understand, these build inevitably towards a new structural arrangement, the transformation of the economy, society and everyday life.

Thus Al-Jammal's interview gives way to the film's climax of images of the uprising, clashes with police, farmers entering the Régie, underscored with suspenseful music. We see images of victims on the ground, and then massive demonstrations in response. The music calms and we return to farm worker labor, emphasizing again that exploitation produces resistance. The scene also reframes the Régie as a mutable rather than exclusively oppressive site and frames uprising as a constant possibility latent within everyday life of tobacco production. The film's final images show farmers on the back of a tractor, fists raised to the sky with a title card that tells us the 1973 uprising too is "another chapter in the long struggle of farmers against exploitation."

In this way, *The Leaves of the Poor* affirms the constant possibility of uprising within lived exploitation. The film makes visible both the farmers' lived understanding of how the system works and suggests ways that they organize resistance. At the same time however, it restricts its own militant possibilities, even as it wishes to crack them open, in relation both to movement housework, but also with regards to the relation between spontaneity and organization and crucially, between material conditions — so-called "organic movements" — and conjunctural dynamics. Exploitation is a necessary precondition for social struggle, but it is not determinative — for that we need to look at the more contingent and ephemeral dynamics: the conjunctural moment. As my ethnographic and archival research demonstrated, *The Leaves of the Poor Are Golden* leaves out important circumstances, situations and actors that both contributed to the uprising but also might have led viewers to distinct takeaways as that of the film surrounding the role of organization and spontaneity. I will turn next to these dynamics, departing from stories told by Habib Yaghi, then vice president of the South Lebanese Tobacco Farmers Union and second "official"-coded character in *The Leaves of the Poor*.

Spontaneity & Organization

يا سلطان يا لطيف، صار الكيلو بسعر الرغيف
يا حكم شو حل حالة وين الحكم وين العدلة

> Oh Sultan, oh dear Lord, a kilo [of tobacco] costs the same as a loaf
> Oh dear leaders, where are the wise men, where is justice?
> (Popular poem / chant in 1970s South Lebanon)

> I didn't feel like I was leading the farmers, I was catching up with them… This demonstration, which seemed to the observer to be organized, but with the farmers, was spontaneous. (Hani Fahas quoted in Hamdan 2013)

The official discourse of Mohammad Najib el Jammal, Tobacco Farmer Union President is matched by a second "official" voice, Habib Yaghi, labeled simply "Vice-President of the Union." Like Al-Jammal, Yaghi is seated at the center of the frame, also wearing a white button down. These visual framings contrast sharply with other interviewees who are pictured obviously outdoors, their full bodies showing, several in work clothes. And yet, whereas Al Jammal fulfills the role of expert, providing historic and political context, Yaghi's role is slightly different. He is introduced in *The Leaves of the Poor* by describing the moment of confrontation with the state. Standing upon the roof of the farmer-occupied Régie, Yaghi tells us he saw the state security forces fire on protestors. He

raises his arms as if holding a gun and looks directly at the camera: "he aimed and fired… like this." Yaghi leans in towards the camera, his physical gesture magnified by celluloid. By heightening the intensity, he engages the viewer in an affective relationship with the farmers and against the state violence. As he finishes speaking, the film cuts to photographs of the uprising marching towards the Régie, and of its repression. The emotional tension generated by this interview directs our response as viewers towards the state, initially reinforcing the message that uprising directly results from state-party confrontation, and individual grievances.

Yet Yaghi's stories beyond the film portrayed a far more nuanced landscape of lived resistance to oppressive rural work conditions, the role of chance and political-economic situation. Yaghi, now retired from farming and reliant on his children's' support, evoked a long history of economic and political marginalization of the Lebanese South and an overlapping political landscape of Arab nationalist, Communist and progressive political parties, and the role of women in organization. A talented storyteller, he wove personal experience of rural poverty — recalling for example borrowing a pair of "good" shoes to visit a representative of a local feudal powerbroker, to ask for a political favor — with narration of the uprising. A story of his mother arguing with colonial administrators, stands out in my memory, as does his recollection that until the late 1960s, most of the South did not have electricity — but the Régie did. Villagers would compare the bright lights of the ominous brutalist Régie building with the lights of electrified Israeli settlements, visible across the Southern border. Yaghi left school when his father became sick at 14 to tend to his family's 1000m tobacco permit. He bought a permit and paid workers to help him. Between paying for his younger brothers' schooling, his father's medicine and supporting his family, Yaghi ended up 8000 lira in debt — a reality common across rural Lebanon (Nasr 1978). Similar perspectives were echoed throughout my interviews with dozens of farmers, local historians and party officials, across South Lebanon.

Yet, Yaghi confirms, the uprising didn't simply result from exploitation. Groups, organizations, individuals, including the clergy, produced a cultural narrative within which resistance could be consolidated, directly agitating for a range of actions that preceded and built towards the uprising. Crucially, Yaghi highlighted the presence of activated religious clerics, like Sheikh Hani Fahas a prolific archivist of the tobacco farmer and anticolonial resistance, and Sheikh Hassan Malek, the Shia imam of Kfar Tibnine, popularly known as Sheikh Guevara. Fahas and Malek crucially connected economic injustice and rural marginalization to Shia' symbolism and collective action through liberation theology tinged with dialectical materialism.

Through revisiting Yaghi's stories, my conversations with villagers who participated, and another written intervention published by OCA Fouad Moqadem (Moqadem 2018)[38] I now turn to the range of mechanisms and actors leading towards the uprising.

From exploitation to spark

The years preceding the uprising had seen regular strikes and confrontations between farmers with the Régie with varying degrees of organization. Regular spontaneous confrontations happened over the sale of tobacco, often quelled through offering a higher purchase price to select farmers or to small groups to break solidarity (Domani 1974). Agitation by the LCP and others throughout the

[38] Moqadem's text was published in response to watching *A Feeling Greater Than Love* in the Lebanese cinema, and to details he saw therein lacking. theatre

1960s and early 70s already led to smaller victories such as a well-recalled uprising in 1969 in Aytaroun, a village on Lebanon's Southern border with extensive communist influence. In that instance, women, children, and men farmers successfully fought with the Régie's representatives, overturning tractors and blocking the roads out of the village, resulting in higher purchase prices.

Such actions, small and large, were articulated in varying ways by Communist, Iraqi and Syrian Baath parties, into a broader critique of the feudal structure of landownership and tobacco permitting, and the marginal position of landless farmers and the South more generally. Party agitators combined one-on-one conversations with active farmers, with party meetings, and direct participation in localized negotiations with Régie officials over purchase price and other details.

In the wake of the 1967 war, agitation combined with fissures among Southern Lebanese ruling elites, farmers achieved a partial win: the formation of multiple tobacco farmer unions representing major Southern cities. The unions were an important victory and coordinating space for farmers but were effectively "house unions." Their practical impact was limited, both because each union remained under influence of its local feudal lord, and because regional unions lacked the coordination to impact the Régie together. Still the unions proved pivotal at the start of the uprising.

Other conjunctural circumstances weighed favorably for the farmers. The winter 1972-3 tobacco selling season coincided with a state deficit, which the Lebanese state sought to meet by raising funds through an added "damage tax" of 10-40%, further reducing what farmers took home from the already low sale price of tobacco crop. Passing the deficit onto the poorest rural farmers, this disproportionately penalized small farmers, who unlike large landowners, could not bribe the government officials to increase the price of their crop. Seeking to balance the budget, the state offered tobacco permits for sale.[39] Large permits were sold cheaply to landlords and small permits to small farmers at a higher price, causing uproar among the farmers already forced to sharecrop planting permits. In December 1972, a delegation of farmers from the Committee of Southern Tobacco Farmers delivered a long 50-meter-long petition with some 10,000 signatures from farmers across South Lebanon to Parliament in Beirut (visible in the film *The Leaves of the Poor*).[40]

Most egregiously, the Régie created a closed-door purchasing system, the glass" or "iron" room. Farmers were suddenly required to bring their tobacco to a closed room to be priced — providing the uprising's direct spark.[41] This eliminated haggling over sale price, long a site of witnessing and potential collective action, as other farmers stood by waiting their turn. The Régie appointed "expert" now had absolute authority over whether the tobacco was defective. While rich farmers could bribe the expert, the poor had no space to negotiate.

At the national level, the massive display of solidarity with the Gandour strikers only two months earlier in November 1972 had raised the temperature of popular pressure. Also in January 1973,

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[39] Fahas (2010, 2011) and also Hamdan (2013) also see Al-su'āl al-kabīr: limādhā ḥaṣala ma ḥaṣala wa-men hūa al-mas'ūl?!" ["The Big Question: Why Did What Happened Happen and Who is Responsible?!"], Al-Anba', Feb. 2, 1973.
[40] "Al-'ummāl al-zirā'iyīn fī al-janūb yetaẓāhrūn amām majlis al-nuwwāb wa-ya'qidūn mu'tamaran ṣaḥafīan yeṭraḥūn fīhi awḍā'aham wa-maṭālibaham" ["Agricultural Workers From South Demonstrate In Front of Parliament and Hold Press Conference Wherein They Share Their Condition and Their Demands. Demands"], *Al-Nida',* Dec. 9, 1972. See also Keppen 2021 for more discussion of this protest delegation.
[41] Interviewed in 2013 in online publication *Janoubia*, Progressive Shia Cleric Hani Fahas recalled the way the closed-door purchase system even further angered farmers by all but ensuring that large landowners would receive a better purchase price (Hamdan 2013).

some 16,000 public teachers renewed an open-ended strike. Uproar around the Ministry of Education breaking up a teacher's demonstration in Houla, South Lebanon and firing all the teachers nearly concurrent to the farmer protest, assuredly contributed to people's perception of potential collective power. Yet whereas the Gandour strikers faced the tool of sectarian division in the form of geographically-disparate Christian workers in breaking up their strike, and a polarizing urban political landscape where their left party allies remained relatively politically weak and their specific demands could be marginalized, the plight of South Lebanon's rural tobacco farmers was more widespread. Primarily, since the production of tobacco affected a vast number of dispossessed Southern farmers, across region and sect, a divide and conquer strategy proved more complicated than in the city where workers could be isolated. Further, and as I will discuss below, the support of religious leaders and institutions which both participated in the uprising and offered a place for demonstrators to gather once they had been violently expelled from the Régie, fostered a broader range of social support than the striking urban workers — far from their village communities — were afforded.

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The days leading up to the uprising were marked by broad agitation and targeted action. Walking in market in Nabatieh, Yaghi recalled running into a friend Talal Fayad who insisted it was time to protest the closed-door purchase system. Yaghi joined Fayad to protest at the local police station, but the whole group left dissatisfied as the target didn't impact decisionmakers. Many concurred it was time to escalate. Yaghi and others circulated among friends in the coming days. Many desired to protest at the Régie.They drove around the South pitching the idea of a large demonstration with two demands: one, eliminate the closed-door sale process two, raise the sale price of tobacco by 15%.[42] The local tobacco farmer union got on board with the demands, but the major political parties: LCP, Iraqi and Syrian Baath parties dismissed the farmers concerns. According to both Yaghi, and Fouad Moqadam, the political parties offered no explicit support until nearly a week after the demo had occurred: when there already was "blood on the ground."

Without institutional support, farmers circulated the call through existing friendship and family networks, through teacher union contacts and religious leaders. The night before the January 22, 1973 demonstration, Yaghi and others proposed occupying the Régie to a small group. In an evocative narration, captured in *A Feeling Greater Than Love,* Yaghi described driving along the road home at night, and seeing the Régie's flood lights lit up in an otherwise under-electrified district. His copilot Najib Ismael commented: "the Régie looks like Masgav Am" a settlement across the border in Israel. "We should occupy it" — they resolved to do so.

The following day thousands gathered at the Nabatieh Husseini a kilometer from the Régie. While marching around the city, some protestors, including Shia clerics Hani Fahas and Hassan Malek (Sheikh Guevara) were on board with the plan. They redirected the march towards the Régie. True to his nickname, Sheikh Guevara led the charge to occupy the Régie, breaking the glass door with his hand, and bandaging his bleeding arm with his head scarf, in a symbolic gesture reminiscent of A'shoura. While women were involved and visible in the protest march, an all-male group of protestors including Musa Shuyab, Ali Aliq, Zuheir Salame from Aytaroun, and others announced they were sitting in the Régie. They formed a protest committee to articulate a list of demands. The

[42] Yaghi alleged that the demand for 15% was a calculation he made for the purchase price increase necessary to cancel out his extensive debt.

occupiers included a range of political affiliations including the LCP, Iraqi and Syrian Baathists and the Organization of Communist Action (OCA).[43]

Initially, a celebratory mood prevailed with protestors coming and going throughout the afternoon. Soon however, Régie guards cut off water and electricity to the occupation. While they did not have the force to disperse the sit-in, they could prevent the occupation from growing larger by allowing demonstrators to leave, but no one new to join. The newly formed Régie occupation committee formed a list of demands that included: eliminating the "iron room," distribution of planting permits to small farmers, a 15% increase in the sale price of tobacco, a cap on the number of planting permits a single family could own at 25 hectares (given that some feudal and other large landowners controlled up to 400 hectares) and government recognition of the Tobacco Farmers Union as well as newly unionized farmers' inclusion in the National Social Security Fund.

With guards preventing reinforcement to the Régie occupiers, local villagers responded by bringing packets of food and water, throwing them over the fence. Notably, Naim Na'me Darwish, who would later be targeted and killed by police, used his tractor to throw large bundles of food to the occupiers. Women farmers who showed up with food were sexually harassed by the police guarding the Régie. Fearing they were being starved out, and with little attention from the press or the leftist political parties, the occupiers needed reinforcements.

Without access to media or even party support, the occupiers relied on word of mouth to call for a solidarity demonstration. Taking Yaghi's small Fiat 1100, a group of coconspirators strapped a speaker to the car's roof and drove through Southern villages alerting and inviting people to the demonstration, a scene they reenacted for my film. As with the Gandour strike, this alternative way of navigating the literal geography of South Lebanon was pivotal. Their call-to-action resonated through non-traditional channels to the felt anger of farmers throughout the South. The following day, between 10 and 20,0000 demonstrators protested by newspaper estimations, the largest protest to date in the South. Everyone I interviewed described it as the largest demonstration they had ever seen. Students, teachers, farmers from the most Southern villagers and even solidarity demonstrators from Beirut arrived *en masse*. For his part, Yaghi still inside the Régie occupation and standing atop its high roof, witnessed the roads in the hills around the Régie fill with people arriving in tractors and school buses to make their demands.

[43] The OCA cadre were less represented in the rural South than in Beirut.



Figure 15 Habib Yaghi demonstrates moment of state repression of Régie uprising. A Feeling Greater Than Love (2017)

From his vantage point on the roof of the Régie, Yaghi watched women in the front lines pushing at the gates, attempting to enter the Régie. The police began hitting the women and men with their rifles, and in turn, demonstrators responded by throwing rocks. The police shot in the air, angering protestors further. Then, as with Gandour, police snipers aimed and fired directly at the protestors. Protestors then blockaded the Régie with electricity poles, trees, and large rocks to prevent the state security forces and reinforcements from entering. Upheaval and anger followed the blood on the ground: two martyrs and nearly twenty seriously injured — the police arrested some of the occupiers and others moved the demonstration to the Husseini in Nabatieh where they continued their sit in with the blessing of the local Imam. While local Southern leaders attempted to steer the protestors demands to their advantage, their usual power was undermined by the demands' widespread resonance. A committee was formed to continue pressuring the government and local landowners, including Habib Yaghi, Musa Shayb and Mohamad Najib Al Jammal, who had been traveling at the time of the demonstration. The LCP and Baath parties, as well as Kamal Jumblatt, and the coalition that would become the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) called for massive demonstrations. The General Federation of Trade Unions announced a General Strike. The issue took on a national character.

The farmers' consistency, continuity and widespread resonance of the demands had an effect: the closed-door purchasing system was quickly eliminated, and a 10% price increase issued, and a cap on permit size instituted. Empowered, the farmers persisted in a campaign which would eventually lead to recognition of a national tobacco farmers union and farmers' incorporation in the National Social Security Fund.

Representing Organizing and the Housework of the Movement

Most of these details are omitted from *The Leaves of the Poor are Golden* (many, arguably from A *Feeling Greater Than Love* as well), and curiously the literature discussing the uprising reports that the farmers did not win any of their demands (Traboulsi 2008). Consistent with the formal language of newsreel, *The Leaves of the Poor* recalls the dramatic aspects of the confrontation, the martyred and injured, the mass demonstration and the historical trajectory of resistance. And yet, while *The Leaves of the Poor* gestures to the ever-present possibility of farmer organization moving forward, as viewers of the film we are led to understand the uprising resulted directly from economic deprivation and exploitative work conditions.

These formal decisions are also political ones. By focusing on resource deprivation and the Régie's exploitative structure in interviews and visuals, the film misses the opportunity to describe *how* those politicizing links were articulated. As a filmmaker and researcher, the central question for me was*:* through what means was the popular common sense of the Régie's exploitation translated into the concrete notion that collective action might shift that exploitation? As the above ethnography suggests, this was accomplished through the multifaceted cultural work of narrating people's power back to them. Personal connections, friendships, unions and religious institutions were pivotal. Together these led farmers to travel together to the Régie, and for those at the front line, to directly confront police and army.

As a traveling cultural work itself, *The Leaves of the Poor* had the opportunity to echo and deepen this conversation of how change is made. Instead, the film directs our attention to the moment of confrontation with the state, creating the appearance that such clashes are the central mode of political change. The social movement housework — relationship building, conversations and organizational history through which a demonstration of such historic size and significance could emerge are barely discussed. Subtly, this in turn creates the impression that when resistance is not visible, in such spectacular forms, it does not exist. Prioritizing the spectacular at the expense of the pivotal person-to-person work which makes the spectacle possible makes such work appear unimportant. As with the Gandour strike, this is dynamic is highly gendered.

While downplaying organizational work in general, *The Leaves of the Poor* almost entirely obfuscates the political labor performed by women. By offering Hajje Khadra and Sabah only as eyewitnesses to the Régie's repression, we bypass women farmers' militancy even as they willingly volunteered to march in the front lines as a possible deterrent to government violence. Nor do we glimpse women farmers' certain participation in translating the oppressive conditions of tobacco labor to political frameworks and languages that their fellow militant farming women could make actionable. It is likely women farmers had their own concrete and specific demands, reasons for mobilizing in the thousands and for joining the demonstration's literal front lines. And yet these can only be discerned through reading between the lines of the testimonies surrounding social reproduction and images in *The Leaves of the Poor*. As with Chapter One, reading the film against itself is illuminating.

The film shows women's work and hints towards their specific demands, if not clearly articulating them. These stories create their own openings towards different imaginings of struggle and its horizons. Hajje Khadra speaks of the high cost of living, of the hustle of making a small amount of foodstuffs stretch to feed an entire family — factors which undoubtedly motivated her direct

struggle with the soldier. From Sabah's story, we understand the extent of community involvement. Sabah casually mentions carrying her infant son with her to a demonstration, falling from her hands as she pushed back police. When we look for it, the "second shift" of social reproduction is always visible (or audible) within the margins of more classic stories of resistance and confrontation.

The uprisings' concrete wins — a rise in the purchase price of tobacco, an end to closed door buying and an increase in permit size to small farmers — were certainly felt most practically by the women and caregivers who had to do the work at home to keep the household running even as economic circumstances got tighter. If we combine these stories with a read of the social reproductive organizing work performed by Yaghi and others, we can arrive at a richer appreciation of the *work of the uprising,* one not limited by party speeches and grand gestures.

Material Histories: Recovering Cinema and Labor History

Understanding the narrative frame of *The Leaves of the Poor Are Gold* — including the political work the film does and falls short of doing — becomes clearer when we see its local and material context. The film was self-initiated by Kammal Kassar and produced by the Lebanese Communist Party. It was edited by Qays Al Zubeidi in Berlin and then premiered in East Germany and was shown once in Lebanon at a school in Nas El Nabe' Beirut, in 1975. It apparently disappeared during the civil war only to reappear for a one-off screening in Kfar Roummane in 1998. It resurfaced in my research for *A Feeling Greater Than Love* and circulates now primarily within the context of my film. As I will discuss, the circumstances of the film's material history reveal a broader ecosystem of labor struggle, tying Hajje Khadra, Sabah, Habib Yaghi and Mohammad Najib Al Jammal as well as Kamal Kareem into transnational flows of images and frameworks of liberation as well as conditions specific to South Lebanon and Palestine. Reflecting on *The Leaves of the Poor's* production, disappearance, and recirculation sheds light on the stakes of militant image making, past and present.

I learned about *The Leaves of the Poor* early into my research. Mohammad Najib Al-Jammal (known by most as Abu Rafiq) mentioned he'd participated in a film, remembering only the filmmaker's name: Kamal Kareem, and the words "Golden Leaves." He had no idea how I might locate a copy. Neither did the veteran filmmakers who were active in that period, nor cinema archivists like Nadi La Kol El Nas. However, a longtime LCP member pointed out that Kamal Kareem was *nomme de guerre* for Kamal Kassar, a prominent cultural figure and founder of Arab music archive Amar Foundation. I easily obtained his number through persistent left networks. For his part, Kassar reacted with apparent delight, confirming he indeed made the film but had no idea where it lived. He urged me: "If you find it, could you bring me a copy?" I promised to.

Kassar was trained in Lebanese and French law at the University of Saint Joseph. The child of North Lebanese traders, he is a polyvocal artist, also a practicing musician and composer, and was a member of the LCP. As with others of his generation, Kassar engaged in the broad leftist arts and culture community of the period, scoring a theatre production by Jalal Khoury in 1971 (one of the protagonists of *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day*) and cowriting the script for Maroun Baghdadi's (1982) classic *Little Wars.* Along with his LCP comrades, in 1973 Kassar participated in solidarity marches demanding justice for the farmers, marching in the days following the uprising's repression from Beirut to Nabatieh in a massive demonstration echoing the farmers demands. With a pan-Arab orientation and an eye to the new left in France, Kareem was privy to the experimental and politically-engaged productions coming from Europe, Latin America, and in particular from his

Palestinian compatriots (Kareem 2010).

Kareem concluded he could best commemorate the uprising by making a film to propagate the farmers' struggle. He decided to self-fund a newsreel. Kassar enlisted veteran militant filmmaker Rafiq Hajjar as cinematographer (who cowrote *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day)*, and Kassar's wife Houda as crew. They spent a few days in the South interviewing survivors. For their part, in a humorous story with underlying hints of class and rural difference, Naim and Sabah recalled hosting the film crew and caring for them amid a bout of food poisoning. Unable to edit in Beirut, Kamal Mroue a prominent cinephile who later became LCP's Secretary General, arranged for Kassar to travel to East Germany to edit the film with Iraqi film editor Qays al Zubeidi (also editor of *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day).* The completed film was shown once at a school in Beirut right before the war, with Abu Rafiq as guest, and I later learned from al Zubeidi, at Dok Leipzig festival where it won a jury prize.

Since the LCP had no record of the film, Abu Rafiq ambivalently directed me to Hassan Faqih who had succeeded Abu Rafiq as President of the Tobacco Farmer Union after it came under the control of *Haraket Amal*, a sectarian political party, after Rafiq Hariri's systematic dismantling of the independent trade unions in the mid-1990s and early 2000's (Abu Khater 2022; Baroudi 1998). I found the now defanged General Confederation of Lebanese Workers building lined with historic strike and labor images but largely empty of workers. Alone in his office, Hassan Faqih promised to find the film. A few weeks later he called me. After months of fruitless searching among the archives of the left, Faqih — the Haraket Amal representative — delivered me a DVD transfer of the film which had largely inaudible sound. Delighted to finally have a copy, I copied it myself for Kassar and Abu Rafiq, and arranged a visit to Kassar's North Lebanon home to see Kareem and Houda where Kassar recounted the story of the film's production, and his interest in popular media as political tool, and promised to allow me to use the film in my own film.

My search did not end with this discovery: I continued to seek out the original 16mm print in hopes of restoring it and the sound. In a visit to Kfar Roummane, I met photographer Kamel Jaber, who participated as a child in the uprising. Jaber had transferred the DVD for Faqih from a U-matic tape transfer which he retained from the film's screening in a 1998 harvest festival in Kfar Roummane, celebrating farmer resistance while the South was still under Israeli occupation. Lacking a 16mm projector, Jaber had transferred the film to videotape for the festival. Jaber directed me to LCP member Ali Jawad Daher, whose mother, Im Ali Jawad, I had interviewed separately, as the keeper of the 16mm reel.

Herself a captivating storyteller, Im Ali Jawad had told me stories of the South LCP's founding, including her own circumscribed participation. She recalled with enthusiasm the party's first meetings: as a woman she was not allowed to participate but was "honored" to stand guard outside the house until late in the night, when her husband and others held secret meetings because the party was still illegal. Equally affable, Ali Jawad filled out the fuller story of the film reel. During the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, a small group of friends including Ali Jawad salvaged the South LCP archives, storing the boxes in his mother's home. The archives contained details of party membership and involvement, including images like *The Leaves of the Poor.* Hiding them was essential to safeguard militants' identities, as the invading army sought to target, arrest, and assassinate resisting leftists and other organizers and indeed has since built up a large archive of stolen Arab images (Younes 2017). Displaced repeatedly during the long occupation of the South, Um Ali and her children carried the archives with them, successfully hiding them until the South's liberation in

2000.

Ali Jawad promised to retrieve the original reel. However, after several follow up calls and visits, he confessed he hadn't been able to locate it. My aspiration to restore the film to a higher quality were thwarted. While I was able to find a different VHS transfer of the 16mm, which had slight differences in montage, perhaps due to skipping in the transfer, both had nearly inaudible sound.

Following in the lead of Subversive Film Collective's research around Palestine Film Unit, I then attempted to track down the film or its rushes in Germany (Subversive films n.d.). I contacted the archivists of Dok Leipzig where the film had screened and where Kassar was invited the following year as a jury member, to no avail. The German institutes which might have preserved the film or records of it turned up empty-handed. Years later, when *A Feeling Greater Than Love* was finally complete, cinema preservation institute Nadi La Kol El Nas approached Kassar hoping to restore and circulate the film but were apparently unable to agree. I suggested to the LCP's Cultural branch that they post *The Leaves of the Poor* — of which they are listed as producer — on their YouTube channel, but the project never materialized, in part because of its poor sound quality and sketchy copyright situation. Until now, *The Leaves of the Poor* lives only as a complete film on scattered hard drives of the people I gave it to, VHS and DVD copies of an absent original.

Complicating the "Poor Image" in the third world — Material histories of struggle

To engage with the film's material history — the VHS-DVD transfer of the16mm print of *The Leaves of the Poor, Are Gold* — is to recognize the multiple ways in which the film already reached the present materially and politically transformed. First, the film itself only persists as a digital copy (file) of a copy (VHS) of the "original" 16mm. The DVD transfer and the VHS version had slightly different cuts, perhaps evidence of a glitching transfer machine. The slight variations in the different versions only hint at what *might have been* left out in this copying process. This material history points as well to the editing process which itself involves making copies of copies. 16mm film is first processed to make it visible, then the processed reel is cut, and taped together — physically edited — before a final copy is reprinted, the original reels often discarded.

In interviewing Kassar, Houda, El Zubeidy (cameraman Al Hajjar had since passed away), I wanted to understand what was left out. Whose perspectives were not sought and what interviews ended up on the cutting floor? This question holds multiple implications for how we understand, amplify and learn from this history. How heavy handed was Hajjar, the cameraman — himself an established director — working with a first-time filmmaker? To what degree did Houda, Kassar's partner, influence the inclusion of women in the film and its visual emphasis on women's central role in tobacco cultivation? When I asked El Zubeidy separately about the editing process, inquiring what scenes, protagonists or stories might have been left out, he laughed and told me matter-of-factly that he didn't recall: "as it is with these things, the rushes we didn't use, we threw out."

The distorted audio itself is another layer of mediation. Without access to professional sound restoration, I made an amateur attempt to improve and transcribe the distorted and often inaudible voice track. Listening over and over to the interview snippets spoken in Southern Lebanese dialect, often with the help of my mountain-raised Lebanese mother or Palestinian musician partner, through my mixed-region re-learned Lebanese Arabic, it was abundantly clear the ways translation itself is a ritual of mediation through space-time. When showing the film to others, before subtitling

it in Arabic / English, I would overdub live in Arabic, repeating the words and phrasings of young farmers forty years before to articulate structural oppression, such that even as I am writing now, I find myself repeating their phrases in my head. Mediating the narration to new audiences changed the ways I understand this uprising and agrarian resistance more generally.



Figure 16 Najib Ismael drives car through contemporary South Lebanon, repeating his call to tobacco farmers to demonstrate. A Feeling Greater Than Love (2017)



Figure 17 Driving through contemporary South Lebanon in A Feeling Greater Than Love (2017)

Further, because *The Leaves of the Poor* primarily circulates through its segments in *A Feeling Greater Than Love,* the film object is itself mediated through my specific attempt to re-present and contextualize those stories in relation to contemporary struggle. To reframe Hito Steryl's "poor image," I could say that the impossibility of an "original copy" of this film defies both the "fetish value of high resolution" and the fetish of militant cinema as reified object from the past as it became copyable and more-widely circulatable. But there is more going on here.

Tracing *The Leaves of the Poor* through its production and limited circulation forces us to acknowledge the differentially-situated ways that "poor images" arrive to the present in the first place. That is, like movements, films are spatio-historically situated documents, the meaning and material of which is never fully fixed. *The Leaves of the Poor* emerged mediated by time, war, occupation, the dismantling of Lebanon's progressive / left movements and rise of Political Islam (itself mediated by Cold War geopolitics). These factors influenced, for example, the fact that the film was not shown in occupied South Lebanon until 1998, with the South on the verge of liberation from Israeli occupation by an Islamic anticolonial movement which had pushed the secular resistance to the sidelines.[44] Notably, the intermediate period — the 1980s and 90s — were marked by targeted assassinations against communist leaders and independent progressives by those same parties (Daher 2019, Saffiedine 2021).

It is equally significant that the film was recovered and given to me by Hassan Faqih, prominent leader in sectarian political party Haraket Amal, which usurped the Lebanese Tobacco Farmer Union leadership held by Al Jammal and Yaghi. That Faqih would confidently pass on a document

[44] For more about Hezbollah's relationship to the National Front for the Liberation of Lebanon see Daher 2019, Amel 2021[1987].

once so contested that its stewards carefully hid it for decades, attests to the sharp transformation of the political climate over the ensuing period. Revolting farmers were supposedly no longer a credible threat to the neoliberal status quo. And yet, the details of exactly how that history remains contested are vital to understanding its potential to seed continued disruption.

Before releasing *A Feeling Greater Than Love* in Lebanese cinemas in 2018, I sent a copy of the film to Kassar, along with other interlocutors as discussed in Chapter One. Kassar did not reply. Yet through a friend and collaborator, I learned that Kassar had suggested I incorporated *The Leaves of the Poor*, without his knowledge or approval. I responded proactively, sending him an email in which I reminded him the circumstances of our meeting nearly ten years before, sketching the details of how the film was recovered, and reiterating his promise to allow me to use the film — if I gave him a copy. He replied with an affirmative confirmation of permission to incorporate his film, but a gentle suggestion that the film would have been stronger had I selected different characters.

Conclusion

Like *The Leaves of the Poor, A Feeling Greater Than Love*, was mediated by the conditions of its production: like Kassar, it was my first feature film, funded sparsely by a hodgepodge of small grants, labor trades and uncompensated household labor. I attempted to respond to some of the gaps in *The Leaves of the Poor,* by highlighting women's militancy and rounding out Al-Jammal's LCP-centered narration with Yaghi's personalized ecology of resistance. Still, my own film raises as many questions as it answers.

Some of these questions were raised in the Lebanese press and in public discussions by my film's interlocutors. Fouad Moqaddem, one time Organization of Communist Action member's written response to my film in the popular press queried why I — like Kassar — neglected to highlight the role of militant clergy and a liberation theology that merged class struggle with Shia sentiment of dispossession and a relationship to the land. He asked also why I chose characters at all for an uprising that was by all accounts led by masses of farmers. Most regrettably, he noted accurately, that my film did not celebrate the actual and important wins which the uprising achieved. Focusing more thoroughly on the aftermath of the Gandour strike and feminist critique, the film does not sit sufficiently with the farmers in order to appreciate what was won, and what else might have been.

Uprisings, like any historic event, are never univocal. But it is essential to think about how we come to understand them through certain narratives rather than others. As historians, artists and organizers however, it is our responsibility to reflect on which stories are being told and which are not — and to use available media to shift the straightforward narration of history.

The question that remains is what might a film do to not only propagate and agitate towards visible political action, but rather to unearth and excavate stories, narratives and even fertile disagreements with or through which contemporary viewers might build towards something else? What kind of engagement, perhaps with stories, landscapes, people, could impart to the viewer, not a chronicle of events, but a *way of working* — alternatively differential space *as process* — similar to that which Yaghi and others conferred in their narrations?

The opening scene in *A Feeling Greater Than Love* aspires to this kind of cinematic engagement. Decontextualized images of a hand holding a steering wheel and a hand-written script, followed by

shots of a rural road in South Lebanon situate us alongside Najib Ismael, militant and former farmer as he recreates the act of calling villagers to protest the Régie. His drive elicits mostly confused reactions from passersby. This simple action recurs in the middle of the film, with some of the exact images repeated twice. But while the scene in *A Feeling Greater Than Love* could be read as displaying the vast gap of political action between then and now (and the confused stares of villagers to the staged reenactment by a man in his 70s certainly speak to this), it simultaneously aims to reactivate the bodies and landscapes of that moment through the mode of sensation.

Because a primary goal of my film was making organizing pedagogy accessible through feeling — hence the film's title — I was concerned to document through what mechanisms tobacco farmers' material deprivation and political marginalization were articulated towards collective action and unionization. Whereas the newsreel genre assumes that in some ways the film's mimetic qualities will inspire and compel bodies to replicate the action on film (as per Gaines 1999), I aimed to engage the medium's affective capacities to inspire questioning about political possibilities. I hoped that the film, and this scene in particular, might take the incongruencies of the present to inspire distinct ways of thinking and making politics in a moment of political uncertainty. Ultimately of course, a film is just a film, its capabilities and impact only as vast as the imagination and material horizons of the movement in which it is embedded. In the final section of this dissertation, I will turn to the circumstances through which contemporary militant films may at times exceed and at times, be limited by those horizons in their aspirations, and to what else we might do to surpass those limitations.



Figure 18 Farmers pick tobacco in pre-dawn harvest. Aytaroun, South Lebanon. A Feeling Greater Than Love (2017)

Chapter Three

In the early weeks of Lebanon's unprecedented mass protests in 2019, a twitter post and video tagged "Ajmal Al Umahat" (the most beautiful of mothers), spread across the internet (Jaber 2019). In it, there is the image of a woman, apparently in her 60s, who struggles valiantly to not lose grasp of a young, bearded boy who Internal Security Forces (ISF) officers[45] are trying to detain. She holds two wrapped sandwiches in her hand as she beats off the ISF with the other. They manage to wrest the young man from her hands, ultimately dragging him away. She became an instant celebrity, newspapers reporting on this "most beautiful of mothers" for her auxiliary support of the young revolutionaries (النهار 2019). [46] News reports checking back in with her several months later painted an image of a matriarch defending her children's protest, a goal the press framed as secondary to her own support of the contemporary movement's demands or her personal history of resistance (Shabaro 2020).



Figure 19 Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon (1986)

The same phrase, *Ajmal Al-Umahat*, is simultaneously the title of a 1978 poem by Hassan Abdallah, a song by Marcel Khalife, and a film by Maroun Baghdadi. While a common phrase with multiple possible interpretations in everyday parlance, Abdallah, Khalife and Baghdadi's 1970s era works popularized a particular version of "The Most Beautiful of Mothers"—a woman who "mothers" the

[45] ISF is essentially a state police force.

[46] النهار "أجمل الأمهات' مشهدٌ 'أيقونيّ' جديد في انتفاضة تشرين". *Annahar.Com*, November 19, 2019.

resistance, which echoes in this present-day. In fact, this phrase and the concept underlying it has proven a surprisingly resilient framework for framing women's political action in Lebanon.[47]

At least since the civil war, if not before, a wide range of women's political activity has regularly been flattened into mothering, and more often as mothering the resistance. Across the political spectrum, competing nationalist discourses have maintained remarkably similar options for women, of "muscular nationalism," a gendered binary that constrains women's role to "chaste woman," or devoted motherhood (Banerjee 2012: 2). Thus, in exploring an archive of news images from the 1975-1990 Lebanese Civil War, we might just as easily pull images of distraught Palestinian women searching for their children, as we could Christian-nationalist women holding crosses alongside images of their sons, their gazes confronting the camera in defense of their political project. Such representations have often come at the expense of more nuanced portrayals of the rich landscape of women's political action during the civil war and beyond.



Figure 20 The Most Beautiful of Mothers (1978)

This latter point has been no truer than in the genre of documentary cinema, which for the past decades has in Lebanon been dominated by narratives of the civil war, or its reverberations in the present. Perhaps reflecting the militarized and deeply hierarchal forms of struggle characterizing war and the aforementioned limiting nationalist frameworks, very few films have rarely made room for alternative social histories or narratives of collective action, and even less frequently for collective action by women beyond the framework of mothering. Notable civil war era works, by Jocelyne

[47] The role of cultural production around the question of motherhood — and women's political action — has been equally limited.

Saab and Randa Chahal, which have featured women as political actors largely focused on those in exceptional leadership positions, or as social deviants, exhilaratingly enacting their refusal of social norms in isolation (Khatib 2006). In both cases, these individuals are abstracted from a broader context of working-class social movements. The films' women protagonists are deviant in part because their class position allows it; we are not introduced to sustainable movements that nurture working class women's leadership. Mothering is even more marginal. While implied in different moments of filmed struggle, the labor of raising children is confined to isolated households, rather than portrayed as integral to social movements.

For the most part thus, searching for stories of women's collective struggle and resistance in times of war has often meant reading between the lines of the documentation we have available, and at times excavating narratives of militant motherhood and other forms of social reproductive labor for different potentialities. Doing so allows us to defy both the narrative and material practices which have sought to constrain women's political action, and to seek resonances across texts and moments that might provide new horizons beyond the most beautiful of mothers.

Documentary Film: Women's Resistance, Political Agency, and Struggle

In the pages that follow I attempt such an undertaking, reading Baghdadi's 1978 newsreel film *The Most Beautiful of Mothers* alongside Jean Chamoun and Mai Masri's *Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon* (1986). Both films are set amid the resistance to Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, a decade apart. Both focus on women, with distinct stylistic approaches. Baghdadi's newsreel eulogy was commissioned by the Organization for Communist Action, a member of the largely secular Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF) which brought several organizations together in resistance to Israeli occupation of South Lebanon. The film is often discussed in this exceptional light, as a rare document of that resistance. The film is composed largely of direct address primarily by women — for the most part mothers, but also wives and sisters and one father — speaking of their lost fighters, interspersed with a scene of teenage men heading into a military operation. *Wildflowers,* in turn mixes verité and same-person reenactment to explicitly narrate women's role in the same struggle a decade later, in a distinct political moment, just as the role of the secular LNRF was being eclipsed by the Islamic Resistance and specifically Hezbollah.[48] The film tracks a central character Khadija Hassouna—imprisoned for her political activity, who later became a prominent Hezbollah member—as she discusses her own involvement in the nationalist resistance.

Whereas Baghdadi's film is in many ways emblematic of its eponymous title, Chamoun and Masri's work directly centers women as political agents in different moments of one ongoing struggle. Consequently, both reflect the subsidiary role frequently available to women within the movement even as it changed over time. And yet as I will attempt to show, read together, the two films open a set of questions and possibilities about distinctions and continuities across these two moments of nationalist struggle, and women's presumed role within them. I will ask, what kinds of images of women's resistance and political agency have been available to us? Within what frameworks do they operate, and have they been constrained? How does the legacy of these narratives carry forward to the present — and how could we read around them, and in the margins, to recuperate a different kind of more complex and politically tenable and productive version of women's radical action? Which stories reach the camera and our subconscious, and which must we unearth? What role has

[48] See (Daher 2016) and (Frangie 2012) for a discussion of Hizbollah's role in the Lebanese resistance

political motherhood played in popular struggle in Lebanon, and how might an expansive reading of representations of mothering and social reproductive work reveal alternate horizons for coordinated action on the ground?

This chapter reads these two films against the grain of their typical interpretation by critics. These two now classic films are commonly seen in Lebanon to be part of a descriptive archival record of a sparsely documented secular resistance, in contrast to the deliberate efforts by Hezbollah to mis-historicize the anticolonial resistance to Israel as exclusively religious, and exclusively theirs. In part because of the paucity of audiovisual documentation of that secular resistance struggle, the content and context of "militant films" like *The Most Beautiful of Mothers* and to a lesser degree *Wildflowers* are read for the "facts" that they show, and less so for the kinds of narratives they enable and promote, nor for those they eschew. In my readings of these films, I will draw out ways an explicit version of women's agency is limited to their participation in a nationalist resistance project, subject to the deeply gendered limitations inherent in nationalism as a frame.[49] But my reading goes beyond this, and I propose that we can re-view the films, to find a parallel hidden narrative, as if to organize images in lieu of people — to continue and expand a historical-political project unduly truncated.



Figure 21 Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon (1986)

I contend that these films document and amplify a movement-politics that is structured to replace the ruling political system with another one that is in many ways indistinguishable from that which it

[49] Feminist scholars have argued extensively about the myriad ways in which post-colonial nationalist projects have circumscribed women as unequal or subsidiary political subjects, locating this in the limitations of nationalism as a framework. See among others, Bannerji 2000; Stoler 2002.

opposes, at least as far as women's lives are concerned. I have argued throughout this dissertation and elsewhere (Jirmanus Saba 2022) that the failure on the part of progressive or revolutionary movements to take women's political and intellectual labor seriously greatly contributed to those movements' ultimate downfall. By shifting towards a sharper reading of women's labor and the social movement housework, I extend this argument here to consider the radical potentials lost by an oppositional politics which relegates women to a subsidiary political role. Put another way, these films address mothering but do not take the actual labor and work of mothering into account in their critique, and thus miss an important potential nexus of political coordination. The limited version of women's labor—confined to raising martyrs or supporting the indeterminate ends of a nationalist resistance project—in the two films both reflect and further confine our political imaginaries, as well as of the possible horizons of social transformation. At the same time, this lens allows me to propose an alternative reading of moments of these films which reach affectively towards different logics and offer different paths to a new political future that values women's political-intellectual and reproductive labor. I conclude this chapter by speculating on ways to think through these films as stories or histories of the Lebanese Civil War to imagine alternative narratives that could in turn create alternative futures.

Poetry Across Time: The Most Beautiful of Mothers

Hassan Abdallah penned his poem, "Ajmal al-umahat," upon witnessing a heart-broken mother in South Lebanon, whose son had been martyred in the resistance, refuse to succumb to her sorrows. Instead, with all the surreal intertextuality of everyday life, she blasted Marcel Khalife's nationalist tunes from a loudspeaker on her roof, fighting back pain with a gesture undoubtedly aimed at raising her own (and local public) morale, and proudly showing her defiance to the Israeli occupiers.[50] The rest of this story, including the effects of the woman's public intervention and her other political efforts is, sadly, lost to the archives. And yet this backstory of the poem's origins provides us with rich content within which to read Abdallah's poem, and the music and film it gave rise to. Abdallah responded to this event by penning "Ajmal al-umahat," perhaps missing, or deliberately sidestepping, the organizational function of the grieving mother's anger (Abdallah 1978). His poem instead lauds her steadfastness:

> The most beautiful of mothers is she who waited for her son
> The most beautiful of mothers is she who waited for her son
> She waited
> And he returned, a martyr

Like the woman who inspired him, Abdallah's protagonist continues to turn her grief into beauty:

> so she cried
> two tears and a flower
> and didn't isolate herself in mourning clothes.

[50] This narrative is related by Habib Sadek in Supplement to Nadi La Kol El Nas's release of Maroun Baghdadi's *Ajmal Al Umahat* (Beirut, Lebanon: Nadi La Kol El Nas. 2013).

Indeed, Abdallah hints at his protagonist's public action but pauses only briefly on her politicization of that grief by telling us she did not isolate herself. Rather, he quickly moves on to affirm the justness, the transcendence of the martyr's cause.

> the war did not end,
> but he returned
> his rifle wilted
> his hand, neutral

The martyr's political project continues, his agency enacted even after his death. His mother's action, on the other hand, is restricted to vigilance: "her eyes do not sleep." The cause instead, is taken on by an unspecified collectivity as the poem continues:

> We will not retreat from his blood that is soaked in the land.
> We will not let go of our love for the mountains that drank his soul.

Abdallah subtly promises retribution, enacted on the occupied land:

> We will remain steadfast, here.

Conflating land and landscape with cause and country, he subtly subsumes the grieving mother's sadness and rage into that naturalized fabric which becomes her contribution to the movement —

> she cried…a flower.

Bracketing the broader set of human-land-agriculture relations that define people's relation to land, as well as the human and more than human labor of producing flowers, the poem capitalizes on the mother's grief, while circumventing her rage. Not allowed within the poem to give practical and political expression to that rage, the mother's inability to do anything more than watch and wait, is subsumed into the collective "We" who will enact vengeance on her behalf.

Shortly after this poem appeared, the iconic Lebanese performer, Marcel Khalife, put the lyrics to music and recorded them. Not long thereafter, Maroun Baghdadi's newsreel film of the same title appeared. Through Khalife and Baghdadi's works, Abdallah's words produce a powerful version of nationalism that reduces women's resistance and political action to "merely" mothering.

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Baghdadi's film *Ajmal al-umahat,* opens in silence with a slow-motion telephoto shot of a simple metal coffin. It is held aloft by five pairs of hands, whose faces we do not see. Far in the distant background there is a verdant mountainside, and closer-up, treetops. The camera focuses in on a young woman's distressed, contorted face. She is walking within the procession. She cries — also in slow-motion — and waves a white handkerchief, her hair flying in the wind, peeking out through her loosely wrapped scarf.

The procession's synchronous sound is removed, replaced with strains of melancholy oud and Marcel Khalife's (Khalife 1994) voice singing:

The most beautiful of mothers is she who waited for her son
The most beautiful of mothers is she who waited for her son

The same shot of the anguished woman repeats. She waves her handkerchief, again in slow motion. Khalife continues:

She waited
And he returned, a martyr.

The screen then goes black and cuts to an older woman, her head covered by a black scarf. She affectionately describes her son, Ali as, "blonde like his father, tall after his mama." Hearing herself repeat this perhaps once oft-spoken phrase causes her to pause. She squints as she fights back tears.

This haunting image of a woman speaking of her lost son in the present tense, and the accompanying sensation of collective mourning and anger, remained with me long after I first viewed Baghdadi's film first in 2010. As I revisited the film for this essay, reflecting critically on present day reverberations of the same reductive narratives of political motherhood, I was overcome by what I can only call the *surplus* of sensation invoked by this clip in particular, and the film more broadly. It is that affect that allows the frames of Abdallah's poem to become amplified so effectively through the film, functioning at a variety of sensory levels: discursive, sonic, visual. The film proceeds as an accumulation of story after story told by mothers, widows, and fathers, all of whom seem to aspire to camera-appropriate composure, maintaining calm and steady voices, fighting back tears, as they detail their loved ones' characteristics, their reasons for joining the armed resistance, and the details of their death.

Many of these narrators convey an excess of affect or emotion in relaying their stories. A young woman, one of few who appears without her head covered, chokes back tears as she describes being newly pregnant at the time of her husband Reda's death. She describes dismissing friends and family's recommendations that she terminate the pregnancy because she wished to honor his strong desire to have a child. In this context, the young woman's story of her personal decision to have a child is transformed into a continuation of the political project outlined in the song—giving birth to the resistance. The contribution of women becomes literally producing new soldiers.



Figure 22 The Most Beautiful of Mothers (1978)

And yet, feminist criticality aside, the cumulative impact of these stories is devastating. The repetition and the fragility of each story, delivered with relentless urgency, works at a visceral level. This impact is akin to what film scholar Joshua Hirsch has called a "traumatic afterimage," in so far as it formally produces or accesses in the viewer the sensation of loss associated with a traumatic or visceral memory, evoking in the viewer "an experience of suddenly seeing the unthinkable" — in this case, occupation and colonial violence (Hirsch 2003, 19).

But this excess of emotion also produces other kinds of possible connections and conclusions — beyond those to which Baghdadi would so meticulously direct us. In particular, the longer stories from which the women's interventions are cut create a narrative thread linking women's experience of war and resistance to each other, and to other stories beyond the screen. The aforementioned pregnant widow barely lasts on screen for two minutes and yet the apparent candor with which she relates her memorable predicament — deciding to give birth after her husband's death — is not only an emotional decision but also a material one. We are left wondering about the kinds of labor through which she sustained this life under occupation, who (certainly other women) helped her, how she fared. Even when Im Ali, the charming and devastated mother with whom I began this section, returns to tell us: "I felt I lost my heart. How should I feel? I lost my son," we wish her, at the very least solace, community. That at some level we might want to allow the characters in such humanly similar situations to comfort one another — to speak, to scheme together — suggests a way in which their narratives reach beyond the film as text, beyond the screen even, towards each other and to us as viewers.

Still, the film's rapid and charged pace succeeds largely in redirecting our sympathies away from the

mothers and their towards the cause of the fighters. As with other newsreel films, the propagandist structure of *Ajmal al-umahat* seeks to transfer this afterimage into a political end — here support for the form of political projects of the OCA and LNRF and international legal protection against the Israeli onslaught. The film's DVD slip tells us that the film was shown at the United Nations and contributed to a UN resolution deeming Israel's invasion of South Lebanon illegal.[51] For those viewers with direct or proximate memories of that violent occupation, the message is hard to avoid. Thus, the film moves on to introduce us to some of these young soldiers; seated in a barebones rural encampment, the young men, some barely teenagers, articulate their motivations for joining the resistance: to free their villages, but also to fight for equality and a dignified life for their families and fellow citizens.

Intercutting these teenage fighters with the charged testimonials, Baghdadi creates an increasingly heightened feeling of urgency across the film's twenty-nine minutes. Thus, when the film culminates in the military resistance excursion, it is difficult not to be overcome by a sense of enthusiasm for this action as possibly leading to liberation from Israel's military occupation of the South. The film plays on invoking this feeling and seeks to transfer it explicitly to support—moral, financial, or otherwise—for the OCA's military actions in the South during the Civil War. More specifically, our concern as viewers is transplanted from a potential curiosity about the situation of the film's women (most of the characters we meet), to the young boys who will take military action to secure justice. It simultaneously and subtly reinforces the gender division of political labor as articulated by Abdallah's poem, frameworks which assuredly preceded the poem and definitely have outlived it. The final images of the film are a rapid series of images of faces. They are the party's fallen fighters, including one woman, and are associated here with the various regions of Lebanon. The film's final title cards leave no doubt about its closing message appearing as text on screen — "ours is a nationalist cause."

This ending comes at the expense of any narrative around women's political action or lives more generally. In framing the activities of resistance in this way the film — and perhaps the movement itself — manages to successfully bracket out all other forms of struggle. The all-important armed struggle for national liberation trumps labor, agrarian, feminist, political intellectual struggles — all integral to the project of national liberation, underlining both hierarchal structures of military action and underwriting the masculinist ethos to sideline women's participation. The unaddressed afterthought here is: whose national liberation? By what means, and with what consequences will liberation come?

[51] The film's screening was "a major influence in the issuance of resolution 1425, concerning the withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from Lebanon" (Nadi la kol el Nas 2013). Like numerous UN resolutions, 1425 had no binding effect.



Figure 23 The Most Beautiful of Mothers (1978)

Wildflowers: South Lebanon's Resistance a Decade Later

In sharp formal contract to Baghdadi's newsreel-style film, Jean Chamoun and Mai Masri's 1986 *Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon* fits primarily within the genre of cinema verité, intermixing observation with interview and reenactments of various genres, depicting women, and at times children, resisting the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon. The film attends to how gendered roles function across different situations in the occupied South, including what it is like to be a woman prisoner. The narrative is told through the life story of Khadija Hassoun, a former political prisoner and currently prominent member of Hezbollah. She tells her own story of her political involvement, imprisonment, and eventual release. The film depicts this through a mix of interviews with Khadija and observations of her in important sites of her struggle and domestic life.



Figure 24 Khadija in Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon (1986)

Wildflowers opens with a long shot of a landscape in the countryside. We see a woman in the distance, she calmly crosses a tobacco field, a large burlap sack balanced atop her head. Women of various ages perform a variety of domestic tasks, tending to plants, milking a sheep, gathering water, sifting cracked wheat. Children play around them. While paring small squash, one woman kindly chides her daughter about how much easier household chores have become: "mechanized food preparation is much easier, but it is less delicious than when it's homemade." By opening the film in this way, Masri and Chamoun locate their characters' resistance in a relationship to the land, community, and everyday life, aspects that are far more marginal in Baghdadi's portrayal of the same resistance. Through women discussing their attachment to the land but also the tedium of traditional housework and agricultural labor, we observe the complex relationship they have with their lifestyle and the land. This relationship is crucial to the ways in which actual rural women characterize their position vis-à-vis the occupation of their lands, villages, and country. This discussion is decisively not nostalgic but rather practical. Throughout the film this nuance is conveyed visually through the recurrence of rural landscapes and frequent interjection of scenes of household and agricultural work, and discursively through the specific story of the film's main character, Khadija, who relates a story of resistance also rooted in gender-based inequity.

We are introduced to Khadija as she finishes changing her young child's diaper, carrying her to meet her husband and other child relaxing on the grass near a riverbed. Seated peacefully under a tree, Khadija reads to the camera, and to her husband Mohamad, from her memoirs. We learn she decided to attend her first demonstration against the occupation on her wedding anniversary while he was imprisoned: "I decided to celebrate in my own way, and called for a demonstration demanding the prisoners' release…" She likens the mixed emotions of anger and collective power to

a personal joy: "I fought them with sand and stones, jumping up and down as if I was dancing at my wedding anniversary." Assuredly this intensity of emotion which mixes personal feeling with political commitment carries throughout Khadija's narration, complicating the more straightforward narratives of injustice and nationalism proffered by Baghdadi's shorter film.

We witness documentation of Israeli aerial attacks and tanks plowing along rural roads, as Khadija relates the rage and powerlessness she felt during the occupation itself. Articulating and simultaneously undermining a narration where woman equals nation, she laments: "I felt as if someone was raping my daughter in front of me, I could do nothing." She clearly describes ways in which the violent occupation targeted *all* residents of the South, in varying gendered fashion: men being taken from their homes and tied up, women and children being forced to watch waiting for hours in the village square without food, water, a tactic likely intended to increase discouragement and dependence. For Khadija and the women she comes to organize with, however, this injustice has the opposite effect. She decides to get involved in the resistance, which emerges organically from gathering with women whose husbands or sons are imprisoned at Ansar, an infamous Israeli prisoner of war camp. Meeting at first to comfort one another and ask news of each other's loved ones, they decide to organize: "we decided to do something about it. To rebel." This flipping of the woman-as-nation paradigm where the woman becomes defender of the nation is subtle, but insistent in the film. Indeed, the collectivity of women whose impassioned accounts parallel Khadija's own story echo and amply this ambivalence. Khadija's narrative of involvement, imprisonment, release and re-involvement throughout the film provides a focal point from which a collective narrative resonates.



Figure 25 Women's Prison in Nabatieh at the site of the occupied tobacco Régie. Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon (1986)

Amidst Khadija's relating of a pivotal demonstration at Ansar prison, we are introduced to the intergenerational group of women with whom she has worked. Gathered together on a hill along with their children, each relates her own action during the Israeli onslaught, her steadfastness (to borrow a term from Abdallah's poem) in the face of unfathomable violence. An older woman takes center stage, telling of her response as her son is arrested: "We are all going to resist. Men, women and children." Another interjects: "We are going to continue resisting Israel," she continues "Until there are none of us left." A second tells of Israeli soldiers coming to her house to take her son: "I had a pot on the stove, I was going to throw it at them! … I told them 'shoot, I'm not afraid of you!'" A third mocks the Israeli soldier who tries to enforce a curfew: "I told him, 'you are so scary! I'm going to the store,'" producing smiles and laughter from the group. Early in the film, we understand that the women use a variety of spontaneous tactics to respond to their occupiers, but also that this spontaneity is in relation to one another and to a broader struggle.

And yet, even as we begin to understand the women's political work as essential to the resistance, women's formal role within that struggle appears largely contingent and not necessarily consistent. In sharp contrast to Baghdadi's organization-specific portrait, we never understand from *Wildflowers* with which organizations Khadija worked. When she recounts to us being violently arrested and tortured, taken first to a prison inside Israel, and later to a women's prison in South Lebanon, she tells us she was interrogated for information on resistance activities, which she refuses to divulge, vaguely alluding to participation in formal organization. We hear this story over staged abstracted reenactments of torture.

The violence she faces is decisively gendered, as is her resistance to it. After days of isolation, exhaustion and beatings, Khadija recalls responding to a soldier's threats of rape by playing on his own gendered sense of decency, "I don't have anything to tell you. And before you do anything, remember that there is God, as our witness." This is apparently convincing, and he pulls her by the hair and throws her into a holding cell before she is transferred to another prison. This concealing of organizational details is a product both of Masri and Chamoun's decision to remain independent from all Lebanese political parties, and a security measure for a film made amidst an ongoing struggle.[52] And certainly, as in other instances throughout Lebanese (and global history more broadly), the lines between organizational belonging and spontaneous participation were often blurred. As Malek Abisaab reminds us, since the inception of the Lebanese state women participated actively in the labor movement, but rarely joined the leftist and communist parties (Abisaab 2004). This is a double-edged sword. In the absence of such an explicit discussion however, we are left with a sense that women's resistance is contingent and even temporary — and thus we are bereft of the opportunity to ask more explicitly about women's often subsidiary position within those organizations.

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[52] The machinations of international geopolitical battles, internal power struggles, and the practice of violence—for example political assassinations and intra-resistance front struggles that led Hezbollah to subsume the secular Front for National Liberation—are elided. Khadija has spoken publicly about her involvement with the PLO, and her transition to a prominent role within Hezbollah—two groups with distinctive visions of social transformation, but with rigid hierarchical power structures. During the early 1980s when the film was shot, the resistance the women are discussing was not yet solidified as "al-muqawama," and it was a more collectivist and fluid moment of response than we are in perhaps today. Of course, the film and filmmakers are explicitly not trying to detail that landscape in all its political detail. Indeed, Masri and Chamoun deliberately evaded mentioning political parties in their films, a decision which could be interpreted as a critique of all of them. Like Baghdadi, their war-time films aimed to be an urgent reflection on a developing and critical situation. Certainly, both films offer rare insight into women's roles in a moment of history that they otherwise are written out of.

Rather, the film attempts to maintain instead a broad setting and understanding of resistance within a collective of women and children, and again, emerging from a direct connection to the land, without specifically locating it. Portrayals of landscapes — transient, moving and contemplative — recur throughout the film. In many ways, it appears as if the land itself is engendering the resistance, or at the very least the women's political activities are in an active relationship to the land of South Lebanon. At stake in Chamoun and Masri's work is posing a constant challenge to the Zionist narrative. The land itself, in this case South Lebanon under Israeli control, therefore, must be established as deeply rooted in and with the people to counteract the violence of the settler colonial forces.

Khadija articulates this explicitly early in the film. When she takes us next to the remains of the Ansar prison, in rubble after the Israeli military destroyed it after a 1985 prisoner swap, we have a vastly different landscape from Baghdadi's film, one where women react, scheme and actively resist as part of the liberation struggle. Khadija articulates this resistance as emerging from and in relationship to the South and its people as one united body. She relates a women's march to Ansar, where she was identified as an instigator: Israeli soldiers chase her with whips and guns, and she stands on a hilltop and yells to Mohamad and the men inside the camp: "We are a women's march here…" The women and children below, and the men inside the camp join her yelling "God is great" and calling to their loved ones. The prisoners inside yell back to them, defying the violence of their capturers to come out to the prison yard and respond to their loved ones outside. In this brief moment Khadija is swept away with emotion. "Forgetting Mohamad," she identifies herself, her own suffering with that of the land, and of the occupied South as a whole, "as if the South itself was one suffering mass of women, children, and land, and I stopped thinking of just Mohamad." This weaving of life, land, love and resistance together continues throughout Khadija's narration. It also structures Masri and Chamoun's visual approach.

As a result, the film's most dramatic scenes depict a collective resistance which appears to emerge from or even blend with landscape. In one such sequence, we follow two young women as they walk through a field at dusk. They crouch behind trees, and then stand up again, moving about decisively and fluidly. We begin to see a cable that they are carrying. Slowly we understand the women are planting a bomb, as they explain to us their routine procedure of arming the landscape to prevent Israeli advancement. It is unclear if we are witnessing a reenactment or if the filmmakers are accompanying these operatives on a mission. Nevertheless, the blurred timelines between resistance and documentation, reenactment and political complicity of the filmmakers, make the moment all the more resonant.



Figure 26 Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon (1986)



Figure 27 Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon (1986)



Figure 28 Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon (1986)

In another similar moment in the film, children and women (men are conspicuously absent) run, yell, and throw stones as they describe repelling an Israeli onslaught. The camera fluidly accompanies them as they dodge and weave behind large rocks and trees, standing on a hill above the road, leaping back down excitedly. Once again, a scene so close temporally to the actual event, located within the continuation of the same occupation, appears to be as much a reenactment as it is a training for future and continued actions. Women excitedly gather to relate their different encounters with occupation soldiers, and their myriad forms of resistance to them. One describes trafficking bombs under her pregnant belly—even feigning that she was going into labor if she was threatened with capture. In doing this, she fuses the work of social reproduction with resistance work, simultaneously reproducing the population while actively contributing to its means to defend and sustain itself.

There is no shortage of such stories within the '82 invasion reenactment sequence. In another moment, an older woman stands on a rooftop, "I had a boiling pot of oil on the stove, as the soldiers passed, she pauses dramatically, "I threw the oil from the window onto their heads," tipping the pot full of water onto the road below. Other scenes hint at a direct link between women's household labor and political-intellectual work, as well as disruptions of gendered divisions of labor. In a third instance, two women in a garage appear to be cooking something in an old pot. As they discuss their work, it becomes apparent that they are heating materials for explosives — in essence, cooking a bomb. These explicitly political sequences are always followed by interludes of agricultural and household work: women stringing tobacco leaves, making bread on a wood-powered stove, caring for children.

The film subtly politicizes these other forms of labor — household work, child rearing, political-

intellectual labor, education — and yet these remain secondary to the national question. Towards the end of the film, Khadija explicitly articulates her own predisposition to reflect on the world, to question social structures, right and wrong in terms of her family experience, and gender inequity. In a final sequence, seated with a friend and seamstress who sews as they speak (reproductive labor is never far from the visual narrative), she tells the story of how her father couldn't justify spending money on a girl's education, so he removed her from school as a child. Her love for knowledge proved much stronger than his discipline, however, and she continued to learn by sneaking in on her brother's lessons. She later worked overtime at a sewing factory to put herself through school, lying to her parents that the instructor was teaching her for free. She states, "I'm not the kind of person who takes for granted that you should obey your parents, without questioning. I would obey, but I would always question internally... I was living a constant rebellion." Subtly, the film leads us to interpret her later decision to join the resistance as rooted in her intolerance for injustice as a child—patriarchal/familial injustice is linked to colonial injustice.

Yet the film leaves this subtle link unexplored, leaving out for example the story of a harmful previous marriage and being separated from her children.[53] While Khadija's persona as a militant actor in her own right undermines Banerjee's "chaste woman, militant man" binary invoked above, the decision to sidestep and even erase these personal details which complicate the portrait of her defense of the land are also significant. They limit the film's potential to frame the conditions under which women took active part in the resistance to Israel, in light of a continuity of resistance and political action, uniting housework with paid work with nation. Similarly, they miss the chance to more clearly consider ways in which women's participation — say through intellectual work — at times challenge those clear divisions of labor.

While this creates a defiant vision and version of a landscape of people's resistance, it simultaneously leaves many questions unanswered. This leaves the film open to some of the same critiques I made of Baghdadi's newsreel earlier. By not exploring the political-organizational structures with which the resisting women interact, the films make the resistance appear purely as a product of personal experiences of exploitation — class, gender, colonial. Assuredly this is true, but the films also extrapolate from who participates in what kinds of decisions at what level from our understanding of the broader context that guides the specific forms of resistance.

Wildflowers gestures towards explicitly linking a gendered critique of women's social, reproductive, and intellectual-political labor to a broader critique of settler colonialism and occupation but leaves this tension underexplored. This is indeed both an explicit product of the film's verité form, and assuredly also a reflection of the movement itself. Undoubtedly, both Baghdadi's and Chamoun and Masri's films reflect actual divisions of labor inherent in militarized forms of struggle, with their strict hierarchies, secrecy, and the virtual absence of women in leadership positions. Yet simultaneously, by glorifying women's auxiliary roles in anti-colonial armed struggle, the films reinforce these models of political action at the expense of others. Certainly, as the films themselves suggest, that has never been the entire story. In a moment late in the film, this could be broadly interpreted as reflecting that awareness, a young woman discusses her role in planning military operations, adjusting plans for an attack on a military facility in a way as to "not hurt civilians." This

[53] She relates these details as the subject of a later documentary *Women of Hezbollah,* by filmmaker Maher Abi Samra (Abi Samra 2001). Like many of her generation, Khadija trained militarily with the PLO which was based in Lebanon until 1982, a detail she related to Mai Masri but did not make it into the film, likely for the same reasons that Masri and Chamoun generally omitted political affiliations from their films.

important documentation of rural women's political intellectual work should not be understated. And yet, under what coordination or leadership bombs are placed is left unanswered.

By leaving these contexts and questions to the side, we fall short of being able to imagine a different possible future — one which might have avoided the historical pattern of sidelining women's labor from political movement once the revolutionary moment has subsided. By omitting this explicit critique, we do not end up questioning what follows from this exceptional moment of communal coordination and collective action. What other futures might have been? The question becomes: what other kinds of films might we imagine, recuperate, or make, that could engender different kinds of frameworks for action? What does a feminist reading of these films together provide as a method or model for future work?



Figure 29 Women of South Lebanon (1986)

Beyond the Most Beautiful of Mothers

I first viewed *The Most Beautiful of Mothers* and *Wildflowers* in 2010 in the makeshift screening room of the film production house and cinema association Beirut DC in Beirut. At the time I was doing preliminary research for what became my film *A Feeling Greater Than Love* (2017). This meant I was explicitly searching for specific images—those depicting labor strikes, farmer organizing, and women's political action in general. A few of the participants in 1970s social movements who I had previously interviewed recalled such images within Maroun Baghdadi's films, and others thought

there were some in Chamoun and Masri's films as well. Though still not widely available today, ten years ago, Beirut DC's impressive archive of VHS transfers was one of the only places to view Lebanese 1970s and 1980s "*cinema badila*" (alternative or militant cinema). Over several weeks, I watched their entire collection of Baghdadi's films, from fiction to documentary, Masri and Chamoun's slightly better-circulated works, along with a handful of other films, by Joceleyn Saab, Randa Chahal, and Borhane Alaouie and others.

To my disappointment, none of these beautiful and rich films contained the images of popular labor struggle that had been described to me. Likely, my interlocutors' impressions were based on their own limited viewings, due to the lack of the films' availability, which had occurred decades earlier. Significantly, their memories of the broad-based and multilayered social movements which overlapped with the films' production still remain largely unpictured, merged into their memories of wartime cinema—much like those alternative narratives of labor and other struggles merged into war.

The scenes they imagined are a kind of archive of a broader and more complex movement landscape that intervenes in more regimented versions of politics. Finding those counter-narratives, ellipses, and erased gestures can open new terrain for both the study and production of Lebanese cinema—an archive still much in need of excavation. Certainly, the past decade has seen exciting experiments in investigating hidden narratives of women's experience in and around war. Works by Zeina Daccache's like (2009) *12 Angry Lebanese*, Rami Nehawi's (2011) *Yamo*, Eliane Raheb's (2012) *Sleepless Nights*, Mai Masri's (2006) *33 Days* and (2015) *3000 Nights*, and history lab Knowledge Workshop are just a few such examples of contemporary filmmakers doing such work in early 21st century Lebanon. Nehawi's *Yamo* is a compelling portrait of the director's mother, her fraught relationship with the Lebanese Communist Party and with his absent, Syrian Socialist militiaman-father. Raheb's *Sleepless Nights* is also a portrait about the afterlife of militancy, following a mother of a fifteen-year-old disappeared in the Civil War, who is part of a broader movement for justice for Lebanon's 17,000 disappeared. Yet there is much work to be done to create a fuller picture of the varied horizons of women's political action, and obstacles to that action, during the civil war and beyond it. There is more work still required to mobilize those histories into forms useful to present day struggles. Simultaneously, I would like to suggest that a third, more nebulous and exceedingly ambitious path emerges from viewing these films side-by-side, that could situate women's everyday experience and varied forms of labor in relation to these narratives of struggle and provide means for a broadly transformative feminist cinema and politics.

Searching for those elusive scenes while viewing *The Most Beautiful of Mothers* alongside *Wildflowers,* I quickly began to read the latter as a response to the former, despite Chamoun and Masri attestation to not having seen Baghdadi's film.[54] Their narratives began a conversation, an affective montage between past and present, across space and time—between the South Lebanon of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the independent cinema production house in which I viewed them decades later. A set of questions arose through this conjunctural reading. Baghdadi's particular politicization of motherhood brought into sharp focus Chamoun and Masri's expanded landscape of political action and much subtler treatment of social reproductive labor. Together, the films called into question the possibilities of everyday linkages between women's labor and explicit political struggle, in what remained beyond the screen. Some of those questions indeed echo persistent if muffled debates

[54] Indeed, the inaccessibility of the films, amid broader condition of civil war, which complicated collective viewing meant that filmmakers were often unfamiliar with one another's work. Personal Communication Mai Masri, April 2019.

from the period surrounding women's circumscribed frames for political participation.[55] As I was looking explicitly for images of women in social movements, beyond the military struggle, I also began to question why those images did not exist.

Similarly, the time-space gap between the films, filmed in South Lebanon some seven years apart, each with a distinct funding structure, raises another set of questions about the political economy of funding and distribution. Baghdadi's film was produced by a political organization, the OCA and shown at the UN; Chamoun and Masri's film in turn partially funded by independent popular organizations in South Lebanon and shown in film festivals and on European television. My experience of these films is similarly situated in relation to the physical space of Beirut DC, a Beirut-based hub for independent cinema production largely financed largely by European Union development grants, and which offer occasional service provision to Lebanese producers like equipment rental and manage European-partnered film production workshops, such as Doc Med in which I participated with *A Feeling Greater Than Love* in 2012.[56] While political party-sponsored and hodgepodge-funded Lebanese cinema of the 1970s and 80s has given way to a more systematized international funding schema, this too has incentivized the production of certain kinds of films and marginalized others.[57]

While surprisingly little has been written about the funding and festival landscapes impact on the kinds of films which are produced and circulated, assuredly funding bodies globally have articulated a preference for "character-driven narratives" since the late 90s (more fully explored in Chapter Four). Attentiveness to this conjunctural context is essential, even as we try to uncover other kinds of past narratives that might be useful to our future imaginings. Most crucially, however, it is this relation between films, narratives, missing images, physical spaces that open mental space to both think about what kinds of films we lack, as well as the kind of films that are allowed to be made, and are relatively easily funded, distributed, critiqued and seen. Here again I pose the question regarding what a critical feminist cinema might do for contemporary Lebanese politics more broadly. This is the work of imagining different futures, as well as beginning to construct them.

This relational method, inspired both by my own serendipitous viewing of these two films in dialogue with one another (and with what they did *not* show), is equally informed by the various theorists and practitioners of The Global Women's Strike, a proposed international general strike of unwaged workers, inspired in Selma James and Silvia Federici's 1970s theorizations around an International Wages for Housework Campaign.[58] The strike has the aim of achieving both a wage for caregivers, but also presenting "a way of organising from the bottom up, of autonomous sectors working together to end the power relations among us."

As Argentinian scholar activist Verónica Gago has argued, the aspiration for and practice of such a strike is profoundly relational. Writing to promote the Feminist Strike in 2018, she connected our ability to assimilate or comprehend knowledge of the most extreme kinds of violence and oppression enacted on women by global capitalist patriarchy. She gives the example of what she calls the world "femicide capital"—Ciudad Juárez—and the everyday experience of life and work under

[55] See for example Daou (2015), Ribas-Mateos (2020: 3)
[56] For an in-depth investigation of these dynamics, including a scholarly discussion of Doc Med, see Farine (2019). I also edited parts of *A Feeling Greater Than Love* in an editing suite attached to Beirut DC in 2016.
[57] See Farine 2019, Ross 2011.
[58] See the Global Women's Strike website and 2020 communiques.

that system, arguing:

> there is no international women's strike without the expanded geography of Ciudad Juárez, without our fears and our desires, which are all mixed up there, to the rhythm of flexibilized production and the border, escapes, and conditions of exploitation that we never would have imagined we would be able to handle or confront" (Gago 2018).

Speaking from a Latin American context, but reaching beyond it, Ciudad Juárez is likewise indelibly linked to past histories of women's struggles across time and space, citing strikes from the 1930s and before in which women were central, if marginalized, protagonists. All of this together creates an understanding without which one cannot link their own experience to a broader analysis of exploitation and the possibilities of collective action. Feminist scholar Tithi Bhattacharya clarifies: "the fundamental insight of SRT is, simply put, that human labor is at the heart of creating or reproducing society as a whole" (Bhattacharya 2017: 2). To think about the disruptive, and generative potential, of halting *all* social reproductive labor, is the proposition from which the women's strike departs. Its proponents suggest the women's strike, and reproductive labor, are far from marginal to a transformative class struggle, but rather essential to its liberatory potential.

These expanded affective geographies are likewise relevant to the off-camera story of Hassan Abdallah's inspiration, the mother of the martyr who sought to mourn and inspire her neighbors by blasting loud nationalist music from her home, certainly making herself a target for the occupation. They relate to the stories of women who persisted and carried on living in their villages despite some twenty years of Israeli occupation. It also is linked to the gendered torture women continue to suffer in Israeli prisons, as described by Khadija in *Wildflowers,* and which associates her with female comrades internationally of many political persuasions. Together, these stories open enormous space for not only critique and cinematic production, but also for a politics that links everyday experience with a rich tradition of women's political action. This relational method of viewing and making feminist cinema also offers directions for politics itself. Women's stories in cinema can be productive for understanding what to do next because we cannot make new what we have not yet understood. To create a movement, we must act as we would making a critical historical film, reflexively, reflectively, with attention to the productive contradictions that are opened between efforts, as they are between films.

What might making films in this relational mode look like? How and through what collective production processes might they be made? Where, and how would they be displayed? And what kind of alternative horizons could they open? Perhaps these are not new films at all, but rather excuses for gathering across distance and generation. How else might we create a cinema that does not seek to memorialize, and in so doing consecrate already existing inequalities, but to explode them? Such a turn in our thinking, filmmaking, and political work is essential today, as the paths leading us out of the Lebanese uprisings of 2019 appear murkier, as the financial crisis and Covid-19 pandemic, and the onslaught on Gaza highlight the need for a politics in Lebanon and more broadly that integrates care, mutual support, and radical imagination into a historically-informed praxis. Only in this way could "*Amjal al-umahat*" [the "Most Beautiful of Mothers"] become not a foreclosing trope for women, but a means towards centering women's labor into an integrated and radically open cinema and politics.

Chapter Four

> What defines a film as militant or revolutionary is not only the ideology, [or] the intentions of the producer or director… but the very practice of the film with its intended concrete audience: that which the film seizes as something recuperable in a particular historical circumstance for the liberation process. (Getino and Solanos 1968:42, emphasis added).
>
> [A] conjuncture is not a slice of time [or a period] but can only be defined by the accumulation/condensation of contradictions, the fusion or merger … of "different currents and circumstances." (Hall 1980a:165)

The closing scenes of the two critically acclaimed Arab Spring Films, Jehane Noujaim's Oscar-nominated *The Square* (2013) and Wa'ed Kataeb and Edward Watts' Cannes Prix de Ore winner *For Sama* (2019) are remarkably similar. The two films follow a main protagonist, respectively Ahmed a precariously employed working class youth, and Wa'ed, a student turned journalist and mother, through the Egyptian and Syrian Revolutions. In the last shots of the *The Square*, Ahmed films demonstrators celebrating Mohamad Sisi's military coup over the elected Muslim Brotherhood candidate, declaring: "If people are being fooled, then we must film everything … As long as there's a camera, the revolution will continue." Six years later, drone footage shows Wa'ed in *For Sama*, now a BBC correspondent, walking with daughter Sama amidst a destroyed Aleppo, as she remarks: "I thought we lost everything when we lost Aleppo, but we didn't. I have Taima now [newborn child] … and my footage as well."

As the Arab uprisings passed from euphoria to suppression, neither film offered critical reflection on how dissidents might adjust course, nor did they think expansively about what the militant image might do — a question to which I have been regularly returning in this dissertation. Instead, the two films proffer the personal transformation of their main protagonist as resolution: each transformed into video activists and journalists who express faith in the revolutionary power of documentation. Structured in this way, *The Square* and *For Sama* exemplify a new and politically significant cinematic form which I dub the "character-driven resilience" documentary.

In the decade since the so-called Arab Spring first led to intense debates around the relationship between images and militancy, hundreds of films have documented the uprisings and their aftermath.[59] Arab militant images have continued to occupy an important place in the international film festival circuit, contemporary art market, and in scholarship.[60] Yet, in the Arab Spring's aftermath of reinvigorated dictators, deepening economic crises, and crack-down on dissent, surprisingly little literature has considered the political function of the Arab Spring films. Instead, scholars regularly interpret Arab Spring art through artistic subjectivity, as if cinema holds an internal coherence separate from the political, economic, and geographic landscape within which it is

[59] For a partial list of films about the Arab Spring See Joseph Fahim (2021) and Rasha Salti, B. Ruby Rich's 2021 Film Quarterly Dossier: The Resilient Spring of Arab Cinema, Ten Years After

[60] In 2022 alone, Syrian film *5 Seasons of Revolution* premiered in competition at Sundance, *Film Quarterly* dedicated a special issue to the Arab Uprisings, and documenta fifteen art biennial featured films of the 1970s era Palestinian Film Unit.

situated. While assuredly each artist does their best to express a coherent political and social critique, they do so, to evoke Marx, under "conditions not of their making."

Ten years on from the Arab Spring and amid new uprisings and colonial wars in Sudan. and Palestine, it is essential to reflect on what the Arab Spring films have done for the liberation process as they circulate — to paraphrase Octavino Getino and Fernando Solanos from this texts' epigram — and what they might still be able to do. In the pages below, I will suggest that attending to such conditions — that is, to the conjunctural moments within which these films emerge — sheds light on the relationship between cinema and militant politics in the Arab world. Specifically, I will consider what Stuart Hall calls the "accumulation of contradictions… of 'different currents and circumstances'" leading to the conjuncture of the Arab Spring (Hall 1980:165). And I will investigate the origins and functions of the "character driven resilience" documentary, a relatively new documentary subgenre which follows a "compelling character" who overcomes geographically specific structural challenges over the course of a film. In a movement context, like the Arab Spring, the character experiences personal transformation, even while the movement falls short, as if to convey: "we couldn't change the world, but I changed."

In this chapter I will suggest that the character-drive resilience narrative represents a significant shift in the political horizons of Arab militant cinema, one which subtly but powerfully undermines the radical potential of the Arab Spring revolutions. I will show that this shift emerged alongside the neoliberal counterrevolution, the cultural agenda of a strengthened US-Arab Gulf Monarchy alliance, and the weaponization of resilience discourse in tandem with the War on Terror in the early 2000's. And I will demonstrate that the "character driven resilience doc" sub-genre's significance is most legible if read in relation to earlier generations of Arab militant films and the movements and conjunctural moments they accompanied. Building on the arguments developed throughout this dissertation, I will demonstrate how conjunctural shifts since the mid-1970s, including neoliberalism, the shift in the center of gravity of US imperialism towards the Middle East and Southern Africa (Mamdani 2004), the increasing regional hegemonic aspirations of the Arab Gulf Monarchies (Hanieh 2015, 2018) and major global shifts in film financing and circulation, have reframed the horizons of possibility for Arab militant cinema.

As such, this chapter traces the evolution of Arab militant cinema from its formal emergence in the 1960s through the 1990s video art era to the present. Taking a long view on the films and movements discussed in detail in Chapter 1-3, I read changing general trends in Arab militant cinema in relation to historically and geographically-situated political and economic turning points, what Gillian Hart refers to as "global conjunctural moments" (Hart 2024b). By re-examining social movements and films within the shifting conjunctural moments of the last five decades, I will return to, and reframe, some of the overarching questions of this dissertation thus far about political economy, representation, and social transformation.

Below, I make four main arguments. First, I will show that while the framing of militant Arab film has been remarkably durable, funding and distribution structures, aesthetic forms and intended audiences have morphed significantly. As with the rest of this text, I will argue that understanding these changes through conjunctural analysis helps us understand the work the films do in relation to the movements they are part of. Second, I argue that the character-driven resilience narrative solidifies as a new mold for global cinema in part, *through* the production of character-driven "failed" Arab revolution films. While the character driven resilience doc precedes the Arab Spring and originates in the West, its political function becomes most pronounced in subtly undermining the

radical potential presented by the Arab uprisings. Its emergence must be seen in relation to the changes wrought by austerity programs and direct US military intervention of the War on Terror, including the Iraq war and the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon. Third, I suggest the spread of this genre was made possible by a discursive and material apparatus of global cinema funding and distribution, namely efforts to create an Arab film industry modeled after the US from 2007 onward. These efforts expanded with the Arab Spring, notably, with financing from Arab Gulf monarchies, and alongside shifts in Western aesthetic frameworks regarding "universal" audiovisual language, towards forms that bolster the neoliberal counterrevolution.

I then sketch three global conjunctural moments of Arab militant cinema: the 1970s, the 1990s, and the Arab Spring, periodizing changes in relation to "global conjunctural moments" (Hart 2024b). Finally, I return to the present. Through brief close readings of Jehane Noujaim's Oscar-nominated Egyptian Revolution film *The Square* (2013) and other critically acclaimed films, I articulate some of the stakes of narrating the Arab revolutions through the character-driven resilience form. Embracing insights from Gramsci's *previsione*, I search for emergent political actors, alliances and configurations that push the boundaries of cinematic and political horizons. I conclude by showing that possibilities exist for movements that exceed the confines of neoliberal cooptation and disenchantment, even within even the most closed cinematic frames.



Figure 30 Ahmed in The Square (2013)

Revisiting "Militant Cinema" in Conjunctural Context

Throughout this text, I have insisted we shift our lens away from a periodized definition of militant cinema to understand the militant image in relation to its function adopting Bitter, Derkson & Weber (2014)'s definition of an image in dialogue with its present which "contests the shape of the present." Bringing together an analytics of militant cinema that engages Gramci's *previsione*, Lefebvre's "differential space" and the housework of the movement, I have argued that militant

cinema itself undertakes a kind of conjunctural analysis: collapsing or juxtaposing past and present space and highlighting the contradictions of everyday life in order to create a political intervention towards the future. However, beyond helping us define militant film, conceiving of films in relation to global conjunctures allows us to reflect on the kinds of films that can be more readily made in a particular moment. Thus while 1970s militant cinema discussed thus far was often funded and circulated through left political parties and anti-colonial movements, much critically acclaimed Arab Spring cinema was produced with European, US and increasingly Arab Gulf funding, and intended for a supposed "global" audience.

Again, Lefebvre, Gramsci, Hart and Keeling — key theorists on which I have relied throughout this text — are useful to understanding the significance of these changes from the 1970s onward. If militant cinema engages with real-world space in ways that "accentuate differences," affectively "unsettle common sense," or even to "allow the present to be seen differently in relation to multiple pasts," we should also notice that over time, subtle shifts began to deemphasize concrete local "maximally different" situations in favor of so-called "universalizing" narratives. This point bears emphasis, as it exemplifies a dramatic change in militant cinema, and in turn, related movement frameworks since the late 1960s. In turn, this shift in what is considered "universal" audiovisual language for militant cinema must be seen in relation to both the increased flow of cultural funding from the US and Europe towards the Arab world and Global South more generally, but also to new aesthetic frameworks that emerged alongside the neoliberal counterrevolution in the 80s, 90s and early 2000s. In the pages below, I begin with an understanding that all representations are historically produced. I insist we consider the power relations inherent in shifting notions of who are universal viewers and what counts as militant cinema, and its link to what Fernando Coronil called the deployment of global power (Coronil 1996). That is, what is imagined as formally and socially legible to all — universal — is an active construction by film funders and distributors that changes with the global conjuncture.

Still, as I continue to insist, meaning and movements are fluid and nothing is predetermined. Films realize their militancy by creating space for political praxis and reflection, by translating differential space as process to distinct audiences, as they circulate. And each moment in creating a film, from production through to circulation, opens an opportunity for intervention. Selecting where to point the camera, what to record, and what not to, are all political decisions. For example, in the edit room, the once euphoric moments of 2011, were reinterpreted with regards to the present, creating space for political analysis and elaborating future programs. A film's circulation presents another chance for reflection, even in relation to films with less than liberatory aspirations. As I will discuss below, the context of these distinct moments — finance, production, editing and circulation — reveals much about both the films' circumstances, and the movements themselves.

Three moments of militancy: 1970s, 1990s, 2010s
From character as context to neoliberal narrative form

> [I]f Third Cinemas are said to have a central protagonist. it is the 'context' of the film: the characters only provide punctuation within it. (Gabriel 1990:60)

While militant film experiments in the Arab world precede the late 1960s, a relatively coherent movement of Arab Militant Cinema solidified in tandem with third cinema globally and in relation to global 1960s and 70s anticolonialism. Early and celebrated films such as Palestinian Mustafa Abu

Ali-directed *Palestinian Right* (1968) framed the Palestinian nationalist struggle among anticolonial movements, from Vietnam, to Mozambique, to Cuba.[61] The Palestine Film Unit (PFU) — the most celebrated example of Arab militant cinema — provided material and symbolic support for a broader base of Arab militant filmmakers beyond Palestine. Founding members Sulafa Jadallah, Hani Jawhariya and Mustafa Abu Ali formed a photography unit within the newly formed anticolonial *Fatah* movement committing to "communicate and disseminate the concepts of the revolution to the people and ensure its continuity" (Habasneh, 2023:15).[62] Like other militant filmmakers, PFU used cinema to generate both international solidarity and internal politicization. Their first images were disseminated to foreign media, and mounted as art exhibitions in refugee camps, projecting the struggle back to its bases.

As with other regions, militant Arab cinema was both a coherent moment, with many artists collaborating, and also a disparate set of artists responding to the same spatially-articulated global circumstances. Similar political and aesthetic considerations drove militant filmmakers from Khartoum to Damascus, emerging from and alongside anticolonial, labor, agrarian and student movements which erupted throughout the 1970s from Yemen to Egypt. Throughout these struggles, the movements explicitly produced writers, actors, and storylines for some of the period's most celebrated militant films. Experiments in cinematic militancy were ignited in Sudan, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt. Some functioned with state support from newly independent states, and others with a patchwork of Soviet, political party and private and even repurposed colonial funding as with Morroco's Ahmed Bouanini.[63]

In the decade following independence, state-sponsored cinema administrations were established in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria which often became the site for formal experimentation and even direct though subtle opposition to the state (Shafik 2022: 11). Newly independent Algeria, for example, supported a set of experimental films engaged with the popular struggle, agrarian questions, and women's liberation (Ahmed Bedjaoui 2022). In Egypt, groups like the New Cinema Society pressed and then negotiated with the National Cinema Institute to support their production costs (Refaat 2016). Distinctly, in Sudan, the first cine-club was created by the feminist communist leader Souad Ibrahim Ahmed in 1968, with militant filmmakers trained in the USSR and Egypt garnering funding and forms of support from a range of sources, including at times the state (Chen, 2019). While across the region cine-clubs initially attracted a more urban, wealthier audience eager to see the latest independent cinema from Europe, filmmakers arranged screenings in poor and rural neighborhoods, bringing their own and sometimes other third world films to people for discussion. Members of what later became the Sudanese film group created cinemas in the countryside, and films like Abu Ali Mustafa, Jean Chamoun and Adriano Pino's *Tel Al Zaatar* were shown to Palestinian survivors of the massacre that it documented.[64] Militant Arab cinema began with this circular vision of involvement-production-circulation-involvement precisely intended, as PFU manifesto stated, to ensure the struggle's continuity.

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[61] Until the early 2000's, militant cinema scholarship focused disproportionately on Latin America. However, as Buchsbaum & Mestman 2021 and others have shown, Latine filmmakers were in conversation with counterparts in Africa, Asia, Europe and the US.

[62] Fatah was one of the founding parties of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

[63] See Dickinson 2019; Limbrick 2020; Shafik 2022

[64] Personal communication, Monica Maurer, 2011 and 2015; personal communication Lajaa Abu Daher, 2015.



Figure 31 The Hour of Liberation Has Arrived (1974)

Omar Amilaray's 1974 *Everyday Life in a Syrian Village* articulates the positionality demanded by this militant cinema. The Syrian Film Institute-funded work offers a clear critique of rural abandonment, feudalism, development ideologies and the state by observing social reproduction, with interview and experimental interludes matched by an unsettling sound design. Ending with the epithet "we must involve ourselves in the struggle… There are no clean hands, no spectators," Amilaray implicates both state administrators who do not adequately support farmers, but also calls on himself, his fellow filmmakers, and viewers to transform conditions documented by the film.

Under this mandate, Arab militant filmmakers employed a wide range of narrative structures. Films like Heiny Srour's 1974 *The Hour of Liberation Has Arrived*, and *They Do not Exist* (1974) wove direct depiction of traditional militancy — guerilla warfare — with observation of alternative modes of social reproduction. *The Hour of Liberation Has Arrived* highlights women fighters in the anticolonial struggle in Dhofar, centering the social reproduction of the movement with a celebrated segment bringing us to a school for the fighters' children. Eltayeb Mahdi's *Four Times for the Children* (1979) is similarly set in a school for disabled children in Sudan. In this way, many films highlighted the importance of securing independently sustained livelihoods alongside armed struggle.

As with anticolonial movements globally, militant Arab cinema of the 1970s reflected and articulated — if at times subtly — feminist, queer, and anti-racist critiques of those same movements. Many

films also subtly critiqued postcolonial nationalism's gendered contradictions. Christian Ghazi's (1971) *A Hundred Faces for a Single Day* questions the gender division of political labor in both urban and rural settings. Other films of this period presented such critique through *fukeiron,* showing the structural violence of everyday life. Ateyyat El Abnoudy 1971 *Horse of Mud*, for example centers women brickmakers in a rhythmic portrayal of people, land, and the exploitative economy of brick making in Cairo's rural outskirts, using juxtaposition, non-diegetic sound, and repetition to create a felt sensation of injustice and refusal.

Going forward, the trajectory of militant Arab militant cinema marched along with the ambivalent path of anticolonialism. Specifically, the emergence of the neoliberal counterrevolution in the 1970s began to shape the horizon of movements and the kinds of militant films that accompanied them. Their form and content were equally impacted by the US and other global powers' maneuvering against anticolonialism and Global South initiatives that proposed counterweights to Western dominance — like the New International Economic Order, which was systematically dismantled through the late 1970s and 1980s. From the 1970s onward, Arab Gulf monarchies became central to Nixon's efforts to re-assert US dominance amid waning war in Vietnam, a domestic manufacturing crisis and rising opposition to US imperialism — transforming Arab militant cinema in its wake.

While the Arab Gulf organized 1974 OPEC embargo is typically narrated as a relation to US support for Israel's Yom Kippur Wars, Gowan and others demonstrate that the embargo was planned before Israel invaded Egypt. They suggest the embargo was part of an overarching strategy which bolstered the US and its Gulf Allies. Namely, in August 1971 US President Nixon decoupled the US dollar from the price of gold, in effect ending the Bretton Woods order and securing the dollar's ascendency. One of Nixon's central priorities was to take international financial relations out of the control of state banks and into the hands of private finance "through exploiting US control over international oil supplies" (Gowan 1999: 21). While Nixon maneuvered within international institutions, the US Ambassador in Saudi Arabia plotted with OPEC countries to raise oil prices to weaken Japanese and European economies dependent on Arab Gulf oil, culminating in the 1974 OPEC oil embargo.[65] So-called "petrodollars" — currency earned primarily by Arab Gulf states through the export of oil — created a currency surplus which could not be "productively invested" in the Arab Gulf. Petrodollars were recycled through US banks, strengthening the power of the Wall Street Banks.

These dynamics bolstered Arab Gulf oil states' regional power and material resources, increasing the pressures they exerted on regional popular movements, even as they continued to suppress movements at home.[66] With the support of the US, Gulf monarchies played an increasingly repressive in the region, from the 1960s onward: the first bombs of the 1975 Lebanese civil war were manufactured by Saudi Arabia, and when Lebanon hosted the 1973 conference of Communist parties, state-controlled Gulf press reported sensationist headlines calling the luxurious Hotel Carlton "Hotel Karl Marx."[67] Changes in the region's financial infrastructure, such as the 1968 crisis precipitated by collapse of the key regional player Bank Intra, also set the stage for increased presence of Gulf finance capital in the non-Gulf Arab region which continue to the present. The

[65] For discussion of collusion between the US and Saudi Arabia around the OPEC oil embargo, see also Oppenheim 1976 and Kubursi, Mansur and Shepherd 1994, and Wong 2016

[66] The Arab Gulf had some of the region's most robust labor and communist movements, active and violently repressed in places like Iraq, Bahrain, Iran and even Saudi Arabia (Bsheer 2021; Vitalis 2007).

[67] Personal communication, Adib Abu Habib, Lebanese journalist and trade union leader, 2010.

restructured international financial arena likewise precipitated the Global South debt crises of the 1980's which repositioned "the IMF to structure bailout arrangements that shifted the risk of such loans to the populations of borrowing countries" (Hart 2009: 125). In turn, the debt crises were "resolved" through loan conditions that solidified austerity (Harvey 2005: 67).

While few films addressed this shift in power balance in content, these changes manifested quite directly through the kinds of supports available for Arab Militant cinema. The mid-1980s debt crisis, and the fall of the Soviet Union led to a reduction in arts funding across the Global South. Crucially, the PFU formally ended with the PLO's expulsion from Lebanon in 1982, their archive destroyed in the US-supported Israeli invasion of Beirut.[68] While late 1980s Sudan saw the Sudanese Film Group consolidate their effort, they too were thwarted by the 1989 coup which, with the support of Sudan's National Islamic Front, brought Omar Al Bashir to power.

Indeed, the 1980s also saw the ambivalent rise of Political Islam which too began to shift both the ground of politics and militant image making. While religion has been both manipulated by colonial powers, at least as far back as the 1840s and certainly in the Lebanese Civil War (Makdisi 2000), it has also served as a liberatory force (such as in Algeria during and after the war for independence (Amel 2021; Cherki 2005). Yet from the 1979 Iranian Revolution onward however, Political Islam began to remake the terrain of social and geopolitical struggles, in many cases eclipsing secular anticolonial movements. Thus, after the PLO's 1982 expulsion from Lebanon, the secular coalition the Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF or Jammoul) which continued to fight Israeli occupiers in South Lebanon, was increasingly and violently displaced by Hezbollah, a political party which combines ambivalent anti-imperialism with social programs (Fawaz 2014), and regressive economic and social positions (Daher 2016). Political Islam further unsettled already unstable Cold War-era political binaries. From the mid 1980s on, the US fostered the emergence of a reconfigured anticommunist "Islamic jihad," in Afghanistan and stoked sectarianism among Sunni and Shia (Mamdani 2004: 51), functioning as a force amenable to maintaining its interests and combatting secular anti colonial nationalism. At the same time, Iran and its allies began to form a serious oppositional block with their own agenda — becoming a contradictory counterforce to Western influence in the Arab world. Both moved away from aspirations to social equality, albeit in different forms.

Materially, this was happening alongside an increase in European arts funding for Arab militant cinema, with artists like Borhane Alaouie and Atayeat Abnoudi producing films like *Beirut the Encounter* (1981) and *Permissible Dreams* (1982) with European co-producers and some crew. Works like UK produced Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1989) were among the first militant films made with English-language narration and distributed through a gallery system. And Mai Masri and Jean Chamoun's (1988) *War Generation,* which explores experiences of young people in war, was the duos' first production funded by the BBC. In tandem, the advent of video technology began to make militant filmmaking cheaper and more widely accessible. As I address in the next section, militant videomaking enabled the rise of a generation of globally mobile, internationally-connected Arab video artists, but it also was key to the growth of reconfigured militant actors like Hezbollah. Anticipating today's telegram channels documenting Hamas's military activities, Hezbollah began videotaping their operation and broadcasting them on national television (Houri & Saber 2010). While the emergence of Lebanese video art is often discussed in isolation from resistance videos, their simultaneous emergence is worthy of consideration, though beyond the scope of this chapter.

[68] See Habashneh 2023

In the coming decades then, the post-1989 conjuncture would see these ambivalent forces change the terms of Arab militant images and politics.

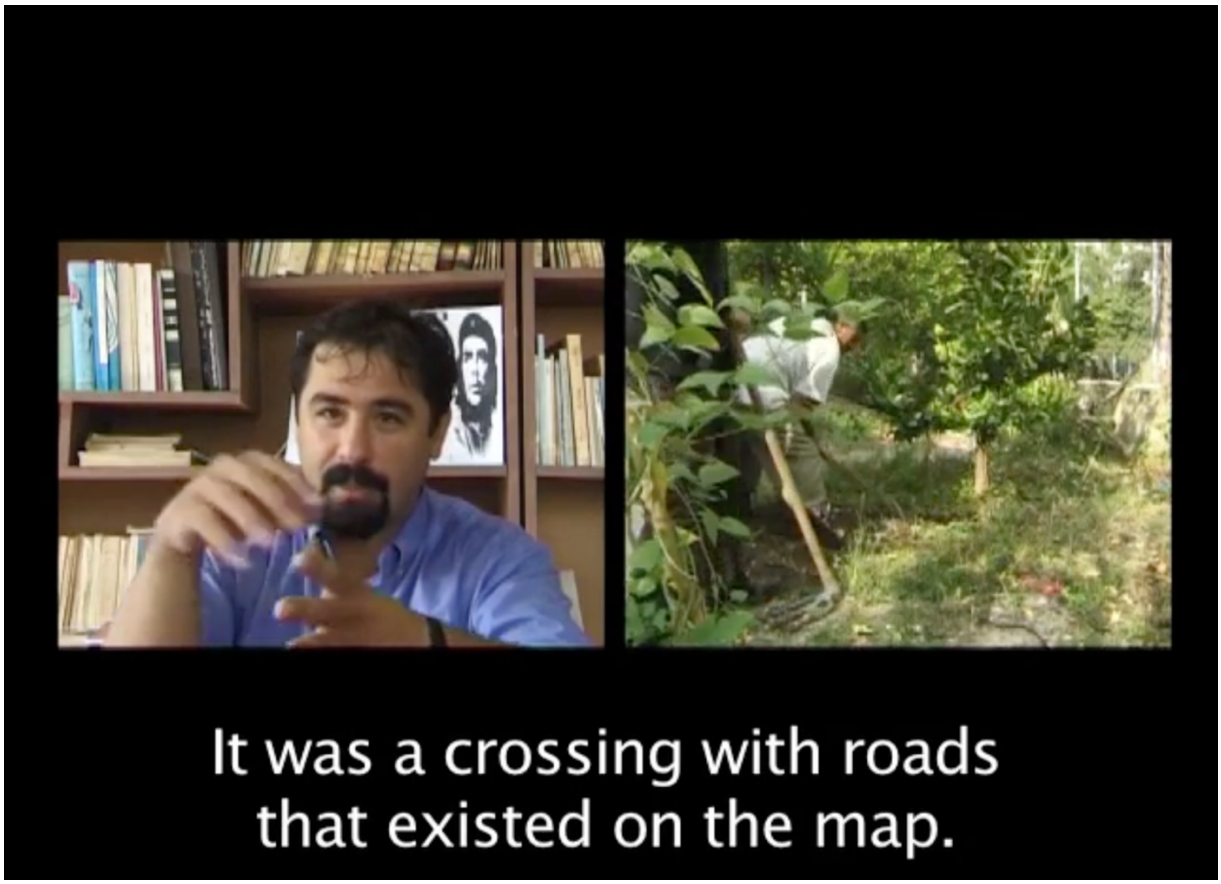


Figure 32a In This House (2005)



Figure 33b In This House (2005)

Militant Arab Cinema and the 1990s — the Era of Video Art

Writing in Canadian *Parachute Magazine* in 2001, Lebanese video artists Mahmood Hojeij, Mohamad Soueid and Akram Zaatari explicitly distanced themselves from 1970s militant cinema. Framing their video works within "the absence of any past tradition of filmmaking" they suggest in the text that they have no lineage (Hojeij, Mahmoud, and Akram Zaatari. 2002). By and large, the extensive literature on 1990s and early 2000s Arab video art concurs, interpreting video art as internally focused, marked by disillusionment with grand narratives, and refusing the existence of material reality.[69] Yet despite scholars and artists protestations, many of the formal characteristics and even political positionings of the 1970s and 80s persisted through to the early 2000s, even as funding sources and exhibition venues shifted. Non-linear structures, sharp juxtaposition of image and non-diegetic sound design as well as anticolonial and feminist content formally linked video works with earlier militant cinema.

At odds with scholarship that reads Arab video art as new (Elias 2018, Wilson Goldie 2010), I see video art as a key vehicle for challenging "the shape of the present." Video's relative cheapness and speed of production vis-à-vis film allowed a wide range of political uses, even as video became a vehicle for Arab artists to enter the global art market. Further, I suggest that aesthetic differences which art historians have interpreted through the lens of individual expression can be better understood in relation to the global conjuncture of the 1990's and in the wake of the NATO invasion of Iraq, which saw the expansion of US support for initiatives focused on entrepreneurial and individual freedoms.

[69] For this narrative, see Elias 2015 & 2018; Kesrouany 2023; Wilson-Goldie 2010.

With the 1989 collapse of the USSR, many left parties globally lost significant financial support and struggled to adapt their social and cultural programs. Coupled with mid-1980s debt crises, state safety nets were devastated across the Global South, ushering in austerity programs and neoliberal reforms. In the Arab world, the gap was filled by a combination of NGOs and religious organizations — some established with explicit US Cold War financing (Mamdani 2002, 2004). On the one hand, this contributed to the institutionalization of Political Islam — with for example, Hezbollah in Lebanon taking on significant social service provision in South Lebanon and Southern Beirut (Flanigan & Abdel-Samad 2009), and expanding their audiovisual reach, such as through their television station *Al-Manar,* and the production of increasingly slick resistance videos (Houri & Saber). On the other hand, "secular" US and EU funded non-governmental organizations provided social services and programming which often included stipulations on spending (Ibn Nafisah et al 2005, Hanafi & Tabar 2005). Within this trend, the 1993 Oslo Accords transformed the PLO from anticolonial nationalist movement into the Palestinian Authority (PA), a non-sovereign state-like actor which until today coordinates security with the Israeli occupation.[70] This turn to privatized and donor-funded social service provision was key to neoliberalism's expansion.

But neoliberal reforms were simultaneously enacted through direct violence, "shock doctrine,"[71] which destabilized resistance and directly targeted organized labor. Throughout the 1990s, governments in the Arab world repressed resistance to neoliberal changes, actively dismantling the powerful Lebanese trade union federation under Saudi-supported Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, suppressing resistance to dictatorship in Sudan, and attacking worker uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia.[72] The 1992 Gulf War set the stage for direct military intervention by the US and its allies in the region, a trend which escalated with the Bush-Blair administrations, and the invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). Throughout the early 2000s, US-NATO alliance forces murdered hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Afghanis, restructured Iraq's oil provision economy and enacted a new structure of private contract driven warfare. And in July 2006, as Israel bombed Lebanese civilians and infrastructure with US support, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice signaled a commitment to forcibly reconfigure alliances and borders as the "birth pangs of a New Middle East."[73] This involved what Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya calls "constructive chaos:" using destabilizing wars to alter territorial configurations, breaking up or undermining states less amenable to US interests (Al-Tamimi 2013). Assuredly however, US-led constructive chaos has not been unitary, nor decisive, notably in Lebanon where a resistance movement dominated by Hezbollah successfully expelled its US-supported Israeli occupiers from South Lebanon in 2000, and again, amid massive destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure and civilian death, repelled renewed Israeli aggression in 2006. In large part because of this continued, if reconfigured, resistance, the US has explicitly seen changing "hearts and minds" of Arab citizens as equally important to its hegemonic control.[74]

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[70] By the early 1990s, in West Bank Palestine Tawil-Souri notes "local and foreign NGOs provided more than half of primary health care services and hospital care, almost all of disability care, and about a third of educational services, including almost all kindergartens and day-care centers" (Tawil-Souri 2006)

[71] See Naomi Klein's 2007 book of the same title.

[72] See Baroudi (1998), Beinin & Vairel (2013).

[73] Speaking from Tel Aviv in the 2006 Israel war, Rice used passive language to sidestep the US's key financial and political support for Israeli, "It's hard. We're going through a very violent time… We're witnessing the birth pangs of a new Middle East."

[74] In the wake of Israel's military defeat in Lebanon, Lebanese journalist Rami Khouri observed that US allies, like the Arab Gulf states had no popular legitimacy in the region (Khouri 2006). See also Becker, Elizabeth, and James Dao. 2002.

In the wake of the July 2006 war, US and EU development funding flowed into the Arab world, many targeted towards individual and "digital" freedoms. These ramped up an existing trend of promoting "aspirations for individual mobility, both political and economic, as opposed to following prescribed norms or customs" (Aouragh & Chakravartty 2016: 566; Aouragh 2012). In the same vein, as Hanan Toukan demonstrates, US funding for cultural programs was key to establishing the then nascent field of contemporary art, particularly in Beirut, Ramallah and Cairo. Between 1990 — 2010, over a dozen prominent art institutions were founded in the region, most relying on international donor funding (Toukan 2021). A short list of these includes today's key players in contemporary art: Arab Fund for Arts and (2007 Jordan, now Lebanon), Beirut DC (1999 Lebanon), Townhouse (1998 Egypt), Khalil Sakakini (1996 Palestine), Contemporary Image Collective (2004 Egypt), Zico House (1994 Lebanon), Ashkal Alwan (1993 Lebanon). Relying on Ford Foundation, EU Erasmus and other funding, they supported the production of hundreds of video and other works which continued to address political questions, but on a shifting terrain of funding and distribution.



Figure 34 Trains, Trains (1999)

Throughout the 1990s, artists like Elia Suleiman, Wael Shawky, Jayce Salloum, Mohamad Soueid, Rania Stephan, Ali Essafi and Akram Zaatari and others engaged with questions of anticolonialism, class struggle, and the dismantling of social welfare provisions, if with a more personal reflective distance than their predecessors. In Lebanon and Palestine for example, Israeli occupation and economic issues remained at the forefront of working artists minds, which they expressed in essayistic videos. Throughout the 1990s, Mohamad Soueid produced an experimental television

show on state-owned TeleLiban, broadcasting dozens of often critical works made with public funds. These formed a kind of militant intervention into public space, even amid neoliberal restructuring. Films like Mohamad Soueid's 1995 *South,*[75] engaged the sonically and temporally distorted reality of living under Israeli occupation, as did Akram Zaatari's *All is well on the border* (1997). Rania Stephan's *Trains, Trains* (1999) was concerned with the ecology of defunded national infrastructure, following the dismantled Damascus to Haifa Railway, juxtaposing images from pre-war films with video footage of the contemporary dismantled train, and interviews with former railway workers. Similarly engaging repurposed film and television footage, Jayce Salloum and Palestinian Elia Suleiman's *Introduction to the End of an Argument* (1990) utilized juxtaposition and interruption to deconstruct representations of Arabs vis-à-vis Israel and the US. These videos are all concerned with contemporary political reality and are all formally open-ended.

While content remained political, the primary audience began to shift away from the 1970s discussion screenings with rank-and-file, refugees, and agrarian communities, to a broader and less defined but ostensibly politicized global public. By and large, these videos were produced to be circulated in art biennials, galleries and to a lesser degree film festivals and European television. In practice, as Toukan observes, the videos began to function "within a global art framework that encourages introspective communication between artists, prioritizes interdisciplinary knowledge exchange, raises awareness of global issues on aesthetics and politics" (Toukan 2021). She cautions however, that the works became less accessible to people without the "cultural capital" to interpret the global art language with which the works explicitly engaged.

Notably, the literal language of production often shifted to English — even as artists resisted a complete dissociation from local politics. Akram Zaatari's 2004 *In this House,* for example is narrated in English but avoids the dismissive gaze towards militancy that became common among many ex-leftists artists in the 1990s. *In this House* is a split-screen portrait of Ali who fought to liberate South Lebanon from Israeli occupation. The film is structured around Zaatari's search for a capsule which Ali buried in the yard of the house he lived in while fighting, containing a letter extoling the house and thanking its owner. Zaatari inserts a subtle critique of "International Art English," and its erasure of indigenous expression: the film's spoken Arabic is obscured by superimposed tones. And while most of the film is subtitled in English, the visuals are not, including photographs of Ali's diaries which articulate explicit class analysis, creating additional layers of richness for Arabic speakers. Zaatari's skepticism is directed not at the absence of "facts" of occupation but at the "postcolonial" Lebanese state security forces who impede his attempts to unearth the time capsule. In the final shot, the small white house which Ali lovingly describes, is shown being actively subsumed into a multi-level apartment building under construction: subtly critiquing the political economy of postwar reconstruction. Still, Zaatari's film exemplifies a trend within militant Arab video to move explicitly political content to the background, which matches changes in audiovisual trends in the US and Europe.

In the mid-1990s, the character driven documentary emerged in the US, of which Sundance Audience-Award winner *Hoop Dreams* (1994) is often considered the first example (Everett n.d.). Simultaneously, we saw video art, with its embrace of formal experimentation, bifurcate from "observational documentary" which aspired to document "reality." This is distinct from earlier militant cinema which readily shifted formal registers. The shift can be perceived in new films like

[75] *South* was commissioned by a parliamentary commission to commemorate the UN resolution that called for the Israeli army's total withdrawal from South Lebanon

Mai Masri and Jean Chamoun's BBC-commissioned (1988) *War Generation,* Randa Chahal Sabbagh's (1995) *Our Heedless Wars,* Mohamad Bakri's *Jenin, Jenin* (2002) which follow main "characters" who continue to resist occupation, war, and gendered structural inequality. But by focusing on main characters who lead us through political realities, such films reversed Teshome Gabriel's characterization of militant cinema, where the central protagonist was "the 'context' of the film" (Gabriel 1990).

These trends were reinforced throughout the early 2000's as the number of film festivals and international film funds grew — all while the forms incentivized by outlets and funders narrowed.[76] Arab militant filmmakers, increasingly dependent on international outlets for funding and circulation, began to face increasing incentives to shift their form and content. From 2007 onward, US efforts to win "hearts and minds" involved US, EU, and Arab Gulf funding for an Arab film industry. In this context, funders and festivals began to incentivize the character-driven resilience doc as an ideal model for documentary. Arab militant cinema makers continued to "challenge the shape of the present" but did so within increasingly confined audiovisual frames.

The Arab Spring was character-driven

Jehane Noujaim's Oscar-nominated 2013 *The Square* begins not with the eponymous image of Tahrir Square, filled with throngs of protesters. Instead, the film opens with its central character, Ahmed, a working-class youth walking through the streets of Cairo. Reminiscent of a Hollywood fiction, Ahmed describes the economic exclusion he faced, going to work at age seven, in relation to the political repression that formed the backdrop of the 2011 revolution, as images of young street vendors illustrate his points. We see flashbacks of Ahmed viewing police brutality on Facebook and watching video calls to action after the police murder of Khaled Said which galvanized thousands to protest. The scene concludes as Ahmed arrives in Tahrir to a demonstration which is being repressed.

Scholars writing on the Egyptian and Arab uprisings focused on the potential of revolutions' transformative uses of space (Telmissany 2014: 40; Hout 2016). Drawing on theorists like Lefebvre, they explain how new political possibilities were produced through distinct uses of public space: communal living, eating, music and public debate, all defended by popular protest. Yet while such differential spaces appear in films like *The Square*, they are secondary to the "emotional arc" of the film's central characters. For example, in a long sequence, one of the film's supporting characters, Khaled Abdallah, now a well-known actor, narrates Tahrir's new functions: "it has a housing department, it has an army, it has a way of feeding itself." His speech is illustrated by brief shots that transition to a musical montage showing young men engaged in an intense game of football; a close shot of Khaled tutoring a young boy (their clothing implying their class distinctions), a middle-aged man receiving a haircut flanked by tents and banners in the background. These sequences suggest ways Tahrir Square became a site of contestation between an abstracting state/army/capital juncture that sought to maintain the status quo, and a diverse opposition that intermittently created radical openings. And yet, rather than allowing the viewer to experience these openings at length, through

[76] The character driven documentary was increasingly incentivized throughout the early 2000's. A glance at a list of funding sources archived by US public television program POV shows the disproportionate emphasis on the character driven doc http://archive.pov.org/filmmakers/resources/documentary-funding.php See also Sarlin (2021) for a discussion of US funding sources and its impact on form.

for example the unsettling approach of *fuikeron,* the film eschews juxtaposition of image and sound, or even a framing that would contextualize the uprising within its longer-term causes, distinguishing between short term sparks and what Gramsci called longer more organic processes. In brief, *The Square* describes, rather than conveys, the radical potential of this moment.

By framing the Egyptian Revolution "through the eyes" of its compelling protagonists in this way, *The Square* exemplifies what I call the "character driven resilience documentary." The term "character driven" first appeared sparsely in the press in 1994 in relation to *Moving the Mountain*, a film about Tiananmen Square Uprising.[77] Initially, the character-driven doc just involved more screen time with film's protagonists, as in the works by Randa Chahhal Sabbagh and Mai Masri described above. But the form soon assumes a more concerning function.

We can perceive the shift towards the character driven resilience doc in 2007 press releases about a Sundance Channel series "Change Agents" which shows up repeatedly in press archive search for "character driven." The series, which ran as "Big Ideas for a Small Planet," "tells the stories of people who are blazing a trail to a sustainable future."[78] The show was also Sundance Institute's first branded partnership, sponsored by Lexus automotive and Gulf-owned investment firm Smith Barney.[79] *Change Agents* redirected focus from corporate-driven and state-backed fossil fuel pollution to "climate entrepreneurs," encouraging viewers to be resilient and to adapt, rather than to collectively demand our governments take action to halt to climate change and structural violence. While *Change Agents* was one of the first character-driven resilience docs, in the years following the 2008 financial crisis and social movement responses to it, the phrase "character-driven" increasingly appeared in documentary funder priority documents.[80] Funding incentives became key to the subgenre's uptake, as esteemed film editor Karen Everett notes on her website: "filmmakers understand that character-driven documentaries are getting funded, broadcast and distributed" (Everett n.d.).

In the context of militant cinema, the character-driven resilience doc constitutes a politically significant shift, for three central reasons. First, the genre recasts collective struggles as individual challenges — at the expense of confronting root causes. Second, "character driven resilience films" de-historicize the experiences of their characters. This is particularly salient in social movement films, wherein the character-driven form separates contemporary struggles from longer legacies and lessons. Third and most significantly, the films are structured around *personal overcoming.* By extrapolating from the historic roots of marginalization — through what Eve Tuck usefully calls a "damage-based" framework — film characters aim to *overcome* structurally-created harms rather than organize.

Resilience discourse neatly encourages neoliberalism, justifying policies that remove social supports, and put pressure on individual and family units to navigate austerity alone (Harvey 2005). Thus, character driven resilience docs habituate viewers — already experiencing the impacts of neoliberal restructuring in workplaces and the public sphere — into taking resilience discourse as given, and

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[77] Indeed, the first Arab film character-driven film to show up in a Factiva search is *The Square,* a decade later.
[78] A search in Factiva, Lexus Nexus and AP press reader reveals the term occasionally in relation to narrative films, and then in relation to Moving the Mountain in 1994 and again with 2007's "Change Agents."
[79] Schiller, 2007.
[80] See footnote 29 on documentary funding sources. Streaming platforms like Netflix and HBO have also entered the documentary funding landscape, offering large cash payments up front, at the expense of future revenue rights.

thus unchangeable. By representing social movements through resilience narratives, character-driven resilience docs create the impression that only individual adaptability is possible in face of oppression, leaving oppressive institutions unchallenged.[81]

But resilience discourse is also productive for capitalism; so too is the character driven resilience doc. Film protagonists are seen transforming structural difficulties into personal achievement, recycling "damages into more resources" (James 2015:7). In this sense, the character driven resilience doc transforms representations of suffering into surplus capital — certainly for financial stakeholders like film distributors. Notably, while newly self-imposed Egyptian President Abdelfattah Al Sisi presided over mass repression of resistance and the arrest of thousands of dissidents, *The Square,* became Netflix's first documentary acquisition for an unpublicized amount of money (Stelter 2013).

Seen conjuncturally, the character driven resilience doc, much like the Arab Spring itself, emerged through drastic changes wrought by both 1990s neoliberalization and direct US military intervention towards a "New Middle East." Throughout the 1990s, the Arab world saw both sharp neoliberal reforms, removing food and agricultural subsidies (pronounced in places like Tunisia and Egypt) and privatizing land and services. In this period, changes to banking and real estate foreign ownership clauses led to greater concentration of wealth, often in the hands of foreign and specifically Gulf-owned entities. Adam Hanieh points out that Gulf Bank ownership of Arab financial sector increased dramatically over the early 2000's, with Gulf Bank capital accounting for more than 50% of non-state-owned bank assets in Jordan, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon by 2015 (Hanieh 2015). With their demands of "Bread Freedom and Social Justice," the Arab Spring uprisings must be seen directly in response to these changes.

And at first, when protests erupted across the Arab World in 2010 and 2011, dozens of quickly made films echoed those demands and critiques of social and economic marginalization.[82] Almost immediately however, international funding flowed to the production of art and cinema documenting the uprisings. Building on the War on Terror era culture funding which formed part of the battle for the "hearts and minds" of the Arab street in tandem with the Iraq war, funding and distribution support was channeled towards certain types of films depicting the Arab Spring. The years from 2011 saw an explosion of funds, pitches, and platforms, many in collaboration with US and European festivals and institutions, from Sundance Institute to Locarno — in a stated effort to foster an "Arab Film Industry," modeled after the US and Europe.[83] Many of these funds prioritized the character-driven resilience form. While local Arab programmers still insisted on featuring Arab filmmakers as judges, jurors and mentors, there was a significant structural push towards European-US coproduction as well as Arab Gulf Funding.

As early as 2007, the Gulf had staged itself as the meeting ground for Arab film financing with the launch of the Dubai Coproduction Film Platform. This was initially met by skepticism from critics, with Lebanon's *Daily Star* columnist Jim Quilty reviewing the Dubai Coproduction Film Platform launch under the doubtful title: "Arabic film, financed in the Emirates?" (Quilty 2007). However, by 2013, the newly formed Doha Film Institute and several smaller Gulf cinema initiatives became

[81] For a discussion of resilience vis-à-vis pop music see Robin 2015 and Powell 2017:181.
[82] For a discussion of the initially wide range of formal approaches in Arab Spring cinema see Joseph Fahim 2021.
[83] See Peterson 2015 for documentation of Sundance's interest and role in funding Arab cinema. See Also Locarno's Beirut Industry Academy.

legitimated and sought-after sources of funding for Arab filmmakers. And by 2019, the launch of Saudi Arabia's well-heeled Red Sea Festival was met with scant outcry, despite its concurrent bombardment of Yemen. At the same time as Gulf monarchies like the Emirates and Qatar were hosting military bases to support the war on Iraq, and expansion of drone strikes in Pakistan under Obama, on the cultural front they created dazzling film festivals with large cash prizes, pitching and coproduction forums and international stars.[84]

In practice, these pitches, labs, and forums created entry points into the new "Arab film industry" for aspiring young artists, especially those not already linked in through the region's small but growing number of art schools.[85] In doing this, they adopted the framing of individual achievement, rather than seeking collective change or a public arts infrastructure. The language used by Danish-supported film fund Screen Institute Beirut on their website is telling: "every time a film is being produced young filmmakers take the next steps up their career ladder and add to the human resource base of their countries" (Screen Institute Beirut, n.d.). With little to no state funding (except in Tunisia), and limited broadcast opportunities, the local industry could not absorb the labor, nor secure all the films to completion. In practice then, the new Arab film industry began to mirror the exclusionary structures critiqued by theorists of sustainable development like Arturo Escobar, creating semi-stable jobs for a minority and unstable opportunities for a wide range of practitioners — much like US creative industries after which they were modeled.[86]



Figure 35 For Sama (2019)

Existing in an international system of production and circulation which incentivized character driven resilience docs, internationally acclaimed films like *The Reluctant Revolutionary* (2012), *The Cave (2019),*

[84] See Sahakian 2013 and other texts by the same author for a discussion of this dynamic.
[85] My account of these lab and pitches is based on my own participation in several of them with my film, *A Feeling Greater Than Love*. Labs generally do not provide funding. Pitches are meetings that culminate in a competition for funding. Platforms combine both with meetings with European coproducers with access to state arts funding.
[86] See Sholette 2011; Le Berge 2019 for a thoughtful discussion of the division of labor in the art world.

For Sama (2019), 5 Seasons of Revolution (2023), and *The Square* shifted their focus to the protagonists' emotional register. Although all these films engaged popular collective action and massive human courage, they ultimately reframed the structural limitations as personal challenges with possible entrepreneurial solutions, even as the revolutions failed to provide necessary freedoms, social safety nets, and end to class-stratified state violence. *For Sama's* Wa'ed becomes a BBC journalist and (we learn on the film's website) campaigner against hospital bombings. *The Cave* concludes with Dr. Amani's father reminding her she has save innumerable lives: "people will forget the war, but they will remember you." *The Square* too concludes with Ahmed — seen carrying a digital camera in the last shots — transformed into a filmmaker, ostensibly able to compete for a sustainable career in the emerging Arab film industry. [87]

It is equally significant that these films were released in tandem with the uprisings' repression, responding to the widespread questioning, frustration, and disillusionment with the sentiment that only individual change is possible. Through funding and distribution structures, Arab Spring filmmakers were encouraged to represent the uprisings as almost consenting to disaster capitalism. Filmmakers cast aside the more expansive and unsettling possibilities of differential space and *fukeiron* of militant cinema past, for stories which failed to address either the uprisings' relation to neoliberalism and imperial violence or consider the revolutions' shortcomings and offer possible future paths. By embracing the tenants of shock doctrine at the level of form, these films redirected the revolutions' more radical potential, transforming "the people want the fall of the regime" into: "we couldn't change the regime, but we changed."

Today's militant Arab filmmakers face a practical dilemma: struggles must be documented, critical social issues raised, film crew workers paid. And yet, despite ongoing repression and cooptation, more than ten years later, the reality of revolting Arabs still threatens the consolidation of the "New Middle East." The stakes for how to represent those struggles remain high, particularly amidst today's unprecedented global solidarity with Palestinians.

[87] Indeed, the film's other main character, Khaled Abdallah, already an actor, went on to have a successful career in the Arab and international film industry.



Figure 6 For Sama (2019)

Conclusion

My intention here in reviewing the genesis of contemporary Arab militant cinema in relation to the past, is not to lament what is lost but — to return to Gramsci's *previsione* — to see our present differently, so as to imagine what might be. By clearly identifying these shifts of the past decades, I hope to reframe the possible modes of representation and of struggle itself. I have juxtaposed the limits of a narrative frame that attempts to turn unwaged revolutionaries with cellphones into video entrepreneurs, with the limits of an Arab film industry heavily reliant on international coproduction funding, itself structured to absorb only a few. But the precarity of contemporary Arab militant filmmakers described above likewise comes up against the politically constituted ecological limits of our present conjuncture. That is, the ability to eke out a sustainable living in the countryside, as low-income waged laborers, or even as migrant cultural workers precariously employed in European cities, is increasingly constrained by imperial war, rising temperatures, floods, and wildfires, dismantling of remaining social safety nets, genocide, and the ever-visible contradictions of everyday life. In this regard, contemporary militant Arab filmmakers have a clear role to play in addressing these overlapping crises — but we must begin with understanding the conditions under which we are producing.

Reviewing the history of 1960s militant filmmakers in Egypt who forced the government to fund their critical experimental narrative films, film critic Ahmed Refaat queried whether such organizational experiments could be possible today. I echo his optimism and point to new efforts that continue to challenge dominant modes of production and circulation. These include a spirited, albeit short-lived effort to create a cultural workers union in Lebanon amid the 2019 uprising, a cinema production cooperative created by filmmakers Rami El Sabbagh, Ashraf Mteweh, Ghassan Salhab, Sabine Sidawi and others, and *Video Trace for Palestine* a pan-Arab largely anonymous Instagram account that posts mini films in solidarity with Palestine amid the current onslaught on

Gaza. These new efforts are structured in ways that aspire to resist unequal economies of production and distribution and use to images to intervene in political practice.

Another way forward is to take the character driven resilience doc as a point of departure, rather than rejecting it outright in favor of experimental cinema which looks more like militant cinema of the past. The character-driven resilience Arab Spring films resulted from the accumulations of contradictions, austerity measures, and imperialist wars that also drove the uprisings and propel our current conjuncture. As the global outpouring of support for Palestinian freedom and critique of entrenched art institutions is showing, that neoliberal status quo and cultural forms associated with it like the resilience doc, are deeply unstable. Even the most commercially successful Arab Spring films contain elements of collective creativity and possibility that themselves exceed allowable frames, such as the moving moments of mass action and community care within *The Square*.

If the character driven resilience doc repackages the potential of revolutionary action into deradicalized content for individual consumption via Netflix, how might we take inspiration from organized cultural workers and collectivize our function as viewers? Getino and Solanas's proposition of discussion screenings offers some direction, seeking to activate "concrete audience" for the liberation struggle. After all we — as makers and consumers of militant cinema — are products of the same conjuncture that produced the character driven resilience documentary in the first place.

Might we use the most commercially successful films as fodder for collective conjunctural analysis? What possibilities might lie in watching films from these different moments of militancy (1970s, 1990s, 2010's) side-by-side create, identifying formal narrative pitfalls and openings? Might it produce the space to resist these totalizing frames and demobilizing trends? If militant cinema reflects but also shapes movement practice, might we find that being inspired by, and critical of our recent and more distant histories, allows us to construct appropriate modes of cinema production, and politics, necessary to meet the political, aesthetic, and organizational challenges ahead?

Conclusion

> The militant image of any period is in dialogue with its historical present at the same time as it contests the shape of the present. (Bitter, Derkson, and Weber 2014)

I draft these concluding pages amid an escalating and expansionist US-Israeli-led war concentrated on Gaza and extending out towards all historic Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Syria and beyond. Not much further South, an extractivist "civil war" turned into genocide and fueled by colonial actors old and new, similarly engulfs much of Sudan. And in the "Global North," solidarity movement organizers are targeted by repressive legislation, dismissal from jobs and suspensions from school, and direct violence for calling for an end to racist and colonial violence.

Genocide in Palestine is being livestreamed by both journalists — targeted with assassination at unprecedented rates — and nonprofessional imagemakers with cell phones. The images include demolished buildings, bombed hospitals, tents, dead children, mass graves, but also the spectrum of everyday resistance from collective kitchens, resistant agricultural fields, dogged Gazans cleaning and reclaiming destroyed homes, press conferences led by displaced and orphaned children, doctors insisting they will rebuild their hospitals, older women declaring they know they will liberate their homeland. At the same time, images of armed resistance stream out of Hamas's Al Qassem Military Brigades communication apparatus: stylized edited videos with a signature flashing red triangle indicating targets, often from body cameras or featuring blurred out or masked young men wearing flipflops and throwing homemade grenades.

The daily flow of images out of Gaza has advanced the unprecedented spread of international solidarity with Palestine — cultivated for decades by Palestinian nationalist movements but hastened by palpable climate crisis, an ongoing pandemic, and the global rise of fascism and resource extraction which ravages land and people at a tangibly sped-up pace. Indeed, our current conjuncture is marked by deeply contradictory and unstable tendences. On the one hand we see an unstable aftermath of diversity, equity, and inclusion interventions which sought to contain the strong wave of racial justice protests of Summer 2020 across the US and in much of the Western world, which themselves followed global uprisings against austerity in late 2019, and a popular response to the start of the COVID pandemic which saw communities worldwide center practices of radical community care and an expansion of social protections ostensibly to protect people from disease and death, including the single largest expansion of the social safety net the US has ever seen (Miller & Parlapiano 2023). On the other, a deeply violent countermovement sees electoral victories for the extreme right worldwide — although increasingly tempered by forces coalescing around Palestinian solidarity, such as in July 2024 France and June 2024 India — themselves the product of decades of deferred capitalist crisis and calculated mobilization by fascist forces. This includes the sharp right-ward movement of the US Democratic represented by increasingly reactionary positions on key social questions like trans rights, homelessness and the Biden Administration's refusal to act decisively against right-wing assault via the judicial system, and most dramatically by its slight-of hand ending of the COVID pandemic by removing data indicators and undermining public health systems, rather than suppressing the still-harmful virus (Jirmanus et al 2024), even as climate crisis coupled with agrobusiness makes new deadly pandemics increasingly likely (Wallace 2023). A profound struggle over the direction not only of the Arab world but of our livelihoods, societies and economies is clearly under way worldwide. Solidarity with Palestinian liberation resonates with

peoples' felt experience of these disruptions, the rising cost of living and decreasing social supports as each month brings a new climate crisis milestone, such as the recent hottest day on record (Fritz 2024).

Amid this tumultuousness, Arab militant images, along with movements have radicalized, mobilized and even served as forensic evidence in an International Criminal Court case. With Gaza's internet access cut off as a weapon of war, the cell phone data with which these images are streamed on "e-sims" are purchased by solidarity activists outside Palestine, a direct material connection across borders and contexts. And while images have not been able to stop the genocide, their clear power alongside reinvigorated movements is evidenced by proactive measures by actors like Meta corporation and the US House of Representatives, which continue to censor, limit, and make illegal various modes of expression.

Still, an undeniable economy of militant images is imposed on us through corporate and repressive algorithms and pipetted telecoms access for people in Gaza but also through a shaped economy of attention that sways what kinds of images we stay with viewing. As long-distance viewers develop affective relationships with people in Gaza, some suggest that social media "views" offer their makers some modicum of protection against targeted assassination — a most dystopian version of "content creators" audience growth goals. And distinctly, Al Qassam Brigade's videos are subject to another logic: the War on Terror's confinement of speech on what is considered legitimate resistance to colonialism, as well as the shift since the late 1980s towards religious-oriented anticolonial movements (Zahzah 2024; Mamdani 2002). Hamas's videos are banned from corporate social media, but broadcast on public telegram chat threads and sometimes on TV, even as images from Israel's occupation soldiers undertaking torture and sexual humiliation of Palestinians appear on Western mainstream news networks.

The stakes of Arab militant images have never been higher.

Contesting the Shape of the Present

Throughout this dissertation I have argued in various ways that we cannot pay attention to militant images in isolation, nor even just to what images do as they circulate. What images *do* is as dependent on where we as viewers are situated and the movements and currents the images emerged from, as it is upon the time and place and ways in which they are circulating. Thus, militant images do not hold fixed over time: they can be re-assessed decades later for altered meaning — as I have done in *A Feeling Greater Than Love* and in the pages here — to allow contemporary organizers to consider their tactics and strategy in changed conjunctural circumstances. I have further insisted that a relational and functional reading of images is what allows us to deem a wide range of images "militant." An image realizes its militancy in motion, by helping its viewers clarify positions, future directions, and sense new possibilities. But this is not an academic exercise in defining terms, excluding some films in favor of others. It's a practical political intervention — a form of *previsione* — into how we might interact with images of all forms and genres, understanding where particular images came from while we discern where we are going.

This is why I have laid out the shifting terrain of social movements and Arab militant images over the last five decades: to revisit recent histories in their conjunctural context for their urgent relevance. I have argued that it is essential to view militant images conjuncturally, in relation to the

moment and movements from which they emerged, and to the present, because I sense this approach can help can communicate missing links in our understanding of our present. And thus, in concluding it is pertinent to return to those histories and images, while feeling our way to next steps. Through Chapters One and Two, I have examined two crucial, but under-documented uprisings in early 1970s Lebanon at Gandour Factory and among South Lebanon's tobacco farmers, in relation to films which represented and interacted with those movements. Reading the form and content of militant films which directly engaged those movements then — *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* (1972) and *The Leaves of the Poor Are Golden* (1974) — and now — my own film, *A Feeling Greater Than Love* (2017) — has shown ways cinema and movements move alongside the historic moment of which they are a part, even as they attempt to transform available conditions. I demonstrated that while the films in question in many ways sought to surpass the limits of contemporary social struggle, particularly with regards to gender and class, they largely remained constrained by political limitations similar to the movements themselves. Still, I have refused to conclude with foreclosures.

Instead, by reading movement ethnography next to militant cinema, I have conveyed the central role of cultural work in creating the possibilities for politics, while cautioning that film alone cannot create social movement. Indeed, while the global context of uprising and the presence of cultural frameworks of social transformation set the stage for worker and farmer organizing in the 1970s — a situation in some ways like today — the specific and contingent actions of individuals and collectives were pivotal in translating general discontent and specific conjunctural openings into collective action. Further, and I hope also useful to the present, I have sought to offer a nuanced understanding of city and countryside, continuities among anticolonial liberation struggles and workplace agitation — as in the film *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* — to better sketch the broad contours of a moment of widespread social agitation and political possibility.

Thus, reading the two uprisings together — both produced by farmers and worker-peasants — likewise demonstrates a continuity across rural and urban uprising as distinct moments in a struggle for hegemony. This too deserves our attention, particularly because of today's fixation on cities as simultaneously desired places for popular convergence (as in the right to the city), but also as sites of hyper accumulation and disproportional natural resource-exhaustion. Embracing Gramsci via Kipfer's "socially nuanced treatment of geographical differentiation" and the refusal to treat the city and countryside divide as "equivalent to social distinctions (like peasant verses worker or intellectual)" (Kipfer 2013: 95), I have demonstrated in ethnographic detail the theoretical and political richness of understanding worker movements in a Global South urban periphery as belonging *not* to a "failed proletaritization" (Amel 2021[1974]), but rather as militant worker-peasants-intellectuals influenced by a long legacy of regional peasant uprising. This observation, while at face value seemingly divorced from many people's lives, particularly in the Global North, is eminently relevant. Amid today's genocidal wars deeply intertwined as they are with climate crisis, extraction particularly of resource consumptive "innovations" like artificial intelligence, and extractive "green technologies" which depend on violently-mined minerals like lithium, all of which aspire to displace contemporary crises in increasingly brutal ways, it is ever more essential to shift our own locus of resistance away from obvious binaries, false "spatialized" teleologies (like rural-urban or Global South-Global North). We must instead embrace relational and embodied modes of politics.

My insistence upon centering the housework of the movement aims to move us in this direction, highlighting the invisible labor of producing, reproducing and weaving together situated groups of people upon which uprisings and indeed cohesive societies rely. Thus, my observation that in both

the Gandour strike and tobacco farmer uprising, leadership's failure to take seriously the political-intellectual contributions of the movement housework limited the ceiling of possibility of the movements' horizons signals a profound challenge for contemporary social movements. The insights of social movement housework have likewise provided a generative lens from which to view the shift from late 1960s and early 1970s anticolonialism and worker/farmer struggle to the Lebanese Civil War, and the concurrent growing influence of Political Islam regionally, through to the global start of the neoliberal counterrevolution. The long durée of these interconnected dynamics initiated in the mid 1970s — sharpened neoliberalism displacing labor and anticolonial struggle, the eclipse of secular anticolonial nationalism by Political Islam, the shift of US colonial focus towards the Middle East and Southern Africa and the centrality of fossil fuels in the struggle for hegemony — continue to deeply shape our current moment, calling on us to pay closer attention to the contours of this shift.

In Chapter Three, I have turned to this juncture, centering on two politically distinct and significant films, one from 1978 and the other, from 1986, both addressing women's role in armed struggle against Israel's occupation of South Lebanon (1982-2000). I demonstrate how Maroun Baghdadi's Lebanese Organization of Communist Action-produced *The Most Beautiful of Mothers* (1978) constrains women's contribution to anticolonial resistance to the act of mothering. In contrast, Jean Chamoun and Mai Masri's *Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon* (1986) paints a broad landscape of struggle which highlights household labor as integral to militancy. *Wildflowers* centers a practice of anticolonialism based in the land and everyday life, further from the patriarchal nationalism of OCA-produced *The Most Beautiful of Mothers* which confines resistance largely to martyrdom and armed struggle. Yet, while these films were made a decade apart and *Wildflower's* main character Khadija became a prominent militant in Islamic political party Hezbollah, my reading and the films themselves complicate any easy efforts to periodize these two moments temporally. Namely, Khadija does not mention the party context in the film, even though by 1986, Hezbollah was already maneuvering to establish itself as the sole resistance force in South Lebanon and engaging videomaking as a tool of recruitment and influence. Certainly, in both films, we can grasp the persistence over time of patriarchal movement structures, whether in leftist or religious-organized resistance. *Wildflowers* however also helps us to imagine the broad landscape of movement housework beyond the frame of spectacular resistance. The open-ended framing and relational reading I have pursued allows us to grasp relevant continuities across conjunctural moments, as well as salient distinctions. This is to say that films, like anticolonial practices, are full of unstable and contradictory tendencies, possibilities which can always open to new and distinct things.

This search for openings is particularly necessary in moments that may appear bleak. As such, Chapter Four reorients us, taking a long view on the history of Arab militant cinema, revisiting the films and movements from Chapters One-Three in relation to conjunctural shifts of the last five decades and into the present. In this final chapter, I demonstrate ways that funding structures and circulation modes have changed along with the changing political economy, leading to the emergence of what I have called the "character-driven resilience documentary," a form which functions to neutralize the radicalism of popular mobilization. By bringing anticolonial films from the 1970s within the same field of vision as half a million-dollar budget Arab Spring feature docs, I have demonstrated how the form and content of Arab militant images — and movements — have changed drastically across time. Tracking important shifts in cultural production from the 1970s along with the suppression of anticolonialism and alternatives to US hegemony, the 1989 collapse of the Soviet Union and in the early 2000's, the "War on Terror," I arrive at the 2011 Arab Spring, wherein the character driven resilience doc form threatens to reduce militant cinema to a self-

fulfilling re-inscription of status quo by mobilizing images and narratives of thwarted resistance. Even then however, I search for moments and directions within these circumscribed commercial films that spark new paths.

Relational Images, Liberated Futures?

This relational mode of viewing militant images across spatio-historical moments and locations itself derived from my own film practice, and inspired by artist-theorists from Christian Ghazi, to Sara Gomez, John Akomfrah, to Fernando Solanos and Octavio Getino and Nicole Brenez (among others), is the landing point of this study, providing us a possible means to approaching the onslaught of horrifying new militant images out of Gaza and elsewhere, the under-circulation of images of other concurrent forms of colonial and racist violent. If there is anything to be emphasized from my review of militant Arab images of the last fifty years, it is that militant images alone are insufficient to enact social transformation. That is, more images of violence and brutality, or even of resistance — be they festival films about genocide, news stories or Instagram videos — alone will not liberate us. As I suggested in the opening of this conclusion, it is not images of genocide in Gaza alone that have moved people to unprecedented action in solidarity with Palestine, but images, along with the global conjuncture, and stalwart work of thousands of organizers ready to grasp openings, to refuse the brutal present we are being shown, and reject more barbarous futures. But images are essential to the visceral communication of this political work — helping us feel what is wrong, and to sense ways the world can be fundamentally different. These images from Gaza with which I and many others wake up and go to sleep each day, emphasize the necessity of that drastic shift, but they do not reveal what paths are necessary to realize it.

To understand how images might help us approach these profound challenges, it is first fruitful to slow down and contemplate the ways we are materially interacting with these new militant images. Distinct from the militant films which I have reviewed in the pages above, online images are highly mobile if equally moving (in an affective bodily sense). Certainly, in terms of circulation, online images move farther and reach more people, faster than art house Arab revolution cinema, for example, and faster even the 1970s and 80s militant cinema available on YouTube or other platforms. By way of clarification, I am taking for granted that we may understand twitter and Instagram images as militant images and in a continuous spectrum of moving images from cinema to social media — a proposal exhaustively discussed by people like Gledhill and Williams (2000), Jenkins et al (2002), Tryson (2007). There is something notable however in how we are engaging these contemporary images. As media scholar Tryson notes, videos on small screens (like those from Gaza) "extend comfortably into everyday life, into our most banal daily experiences" (Tryson 2007). And this is how most people — outside Gaza - are interacting with Arab militant images: in our kitchens, beds, bathrooms, subway commutes.

To recall *fukeiron* for a moment, these mobile militant images link the direct violence of Israel's settler colonialism with the implicated, if less spectacular, violence of everyday life in the imperial core experienced through impossible costs of living, rising temperatures, fascist legislation, and so on. These affective and political connections — via images — are already being made in our embodied experience of active viewership. How could this juxtaposition be made more politically meaningful?

Might bringing together images of these deeply interconnected — say, the devastation of Gaza with the grind of New York — but superficially disparate manifestations of our present be useful? Could earlier images also help us sense next steps? As we experience the stark limitations of images-as-mobilizers — the dream of political mimesis supposedly realized in the Arab Spring — in the case of Palestine and concurrent genocides in Sudan and elsewhere, the relational method proposed within this dissertation is ever more urgent.

In these pages, I have insisted that we read films alongside movements, and in relation to the films we have, but also to films we wish we had, to narratives and missing narratives, to physical spaces where we currently are and those (like Palestine) that so many of us are excluded from, as well as to an aspirational "differential" space where everyone's material, emotional and psychosocial needs are abundantly met. Could we note the ways historical repetitions are visually and sonically manifested in our existing militant images and liberation movements — particularly ways that social movement housework is ever-present in, if perhaps marginal to, our militant cinema classics and simultaneously necessary to the rich alternative modes of collectively sustaining one another beyond the capitalist white supremacist colonial patriarchy? If decolonization is a "spiral whose movement is continuous feedback from the past to the future" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012:96), then each new moment offers us the chance to repeat or overcome the limitations of the past. Accordingly, what openings are produced by juxtaposing for example, the fictionalized armed anticolonialism of *One Hundred Faces for a Single Day* (1974), with household-labor-as-resistance in *Wildflowers* (1986) with stylized edits from Hamas and other military actors in Gaza, grasp the changing contours of our movement, and not in a nostalgic way? What I have been saying if perhaps indirectly throughout this dissertation is that the current conjuncture is calling on us to move beyond the limitations of labor and anticolonial movements past. I suspect that reading these images in relation to one another can help us do just that.

It is not then, a matter of creating new images: speculative fictions which imagine a victorious aftermath. Such an exercise necessarily stays in the realm of ideas, in the separation of manual and intellectual labor that I have been arguing against. Decolonization cannot come about — per Fanon — as the result of "magical practices." As social theorist Seyki Otu reminds us: "neither the motion of desire nor the motion of language can undo the colonial context" (Seyki-Otu 1996: 92). This is why I have so stridently emphasized the social movement housework throughout this text, because it is the labor which so directly connects the theory and practice of decolonization and transformation, the birthing of new worlds, not as a form of rupture, but as a work of production linking bodies to physical places to futures desired. Assuredly, the movements we need must part ways with past practices by centering the social movement housework, the relational and gestational practical-theoretical work of caring for one another, our environment, our more-than-human companions and our future in ways that will assuredly create space we did not even realize existed. That is, understanding that autonomous social reproduction as at the heart of true liberation and decolonization is part of a necessary reorientation of movement struggles. When we do this, as I have argued in Chapter Four, we may glimpse such expansive practices even in the most closed cinematic narratives, and darkest moments.

New Images

This dissertation began with a film, and I had imagined it would end with one. When I began writing, an apparently quite different set of militant Arab images had caught my sensory and political

imagination. While I did not make a new film, I would like to pause on these images for a moment, as they may prove useful to next steps. In April 2020, amid Lebanon's unprecedented financial crisis and a global pandemic, images of ATM machines and bank faces lit aflame started circulating on twitter. Sometimes, in dramatically staged videos, young people, their faces concealed in ski masks and keffiyehs sprayed gasoline all over a bank, slowly lit a match and threw it — lighting the bank on fire. Posted anonymously on twitter, each had hundreds of likes and retweets. Another set of images also started circulating during this time: of women arguing with bank tellers while attempting to withdraw their devalued savings. This culminated most dramatically in a widely publicized pseudo bank heist where an armed young woman successfully held up a bank to withdraw money for her sister's cancer treatment.

At the time, these 2020 militant images felt like a palpably marked shift from the "muscular nationalism" (Banerjee 2012) of the Arab Spring. Neither swarms of people in the streets waving flags, nor young men clashing with police, they turned our attention from the postcolonial state as aspirational harbinger of expanded rights to the international flow of finance which restrict us structurally. These violent international structures bring layered and gendered violence through the means of currency devaluation, lack of access to basic needs, housing, medicine, food — most sharply experienced at the site of the household. All are mediated through indebtedness, returning us to and shoring up the power of finance — which in Lebanon, as I've noted in Chapters One and Four, are increasingly controlled by the Arab Gulf. And debt, in turn, as feminist theorists Lucia Cavallero and Veronica Gago continue to demonstrate, is itself a form of gendered violence (Cavallero and Gago 2020).

I imagined staging fictional scenes inspired by the images of financial counterinsurgency that I have been describing here — cementing the links between financial violence and the actual household. I would have intercut images of burning ATM machines along with fictional scenes of organized bank workers determining the course of appropriate action to the financial crisis (might they run a decolonized bank themselves? Or is this a trap of neoliberal fantasies?). Other narratives would explore movement housework and alternative collective responses to surviving Lebanon's globally situated financial crisis. And while I even had financial support for such a project, the correct form and mode for the film never materialized.

Instead, the interwoven climate crisis, pandemics, financial collapse, colonialism intervened, producing limitations but also creating a new set of questions. It never seemed appropriate to make this new, certainly resource consumptive film. After all, digital production and circulation is itself bound together with global crisis. Travel, media storage, constantly upgraded digital cameras, "the cloud," that comprise the contemporary film industry all generate and rely on disproportionate amounts of fossil fuels, water, and other exhaustible resources.

More to the point, *perhaps this current conjuncture isn't calling on me to make new images.* Instead, it seems more pertinent to return by way of concluding, to all the images we already have.

New Movements

Today's Arab movements for decolonization face persistently similar everyday realities as the ones described in the pages above. If anything, amid globally higher costs of living, escalated surveillance infrastructure, rising temperatures, overlapping pandemics, it has never been clearer the ways the

globally interconnected dynamics of colonization impact us all — if differentially. Thus if, as I have argued, in the 1970s the cultural landscape was crucial if alone insufficient, to help mobilize peoples' felt sensations of oppression, then today's revolutions will be no exception.

The images I wake up to every day on my cell phone are militant images because of how they, as per Keeling, "offer us ways to think such a presently impossible possibility from within our historical conjuncture" via our feelings or what she calls, drawing on Marcia Landy, "affectivity" (Keeling 2009: 566). But Keeling also reminds us that we are not only passive viewers — recalling Getino, Solanos and the Palestine Film Unit, images are remade by viewers in their concrete liberation process. But whereas Landy defines "affectivity" as labor connecting us as "consumers" of cinematic images whereby we offer "up our lives as 'free contributions to capitalist power,'" Keeling reminds us that affect has both "subjective and collective elements" (ibid). Our feelings, movable and mobilizable via images, are indeed available to the capitalist white supremacist colonial patriarchy and its "structures of command." But they are also available to each other, to our collective liberated future, to the impossible possibility that allows us to feel — and thus know — that something radically different is possible.

It seems my inability to make a new film that would adequately grasp this moment is because the affect, the images, the "poetry from the future," which we are all trying to articulate are already here. This still impossible possibility is expressed not just in the moments and eruptions of spontaneous and more organized spectacular displays of collectivity — of which there are currently globally many. It is also in the relationships being forged by together striving to undermine the dominant structures as corporate actors and political "officials" fumble to find a new — necessarily temporary — way to resolve our crises.

And so, by way of concluding, I want to suggest that we look between, rather than at, the images which are calling us here. They are all connected: the flaming banks, women demanding control over their households, international finance, and the solidarity demonstrations, disruptive direct actions *and* the devastation, resistance and resilience in Gaza. These seemingly disparate spaces and practices are also materially connected through the medium itself. While we are broadly conditioned to think of the internet as "virtual," it is in fact many physical places: corporate controlled data centers, located in deindustrialized or former farm land areas, which both benefit from and further uneven development. Thus, militant digital images are transmitted across borders across the same telecoms' networks, their copies living physically on multiple devices and in the same resource-consumptive "cloud" storage facilities (Burrington 2015). Traveling through the same cables and cellphones, these militant images — in their form as both data and affect — embody the conjunctural relationality that I have been describing throughout this text in ways both material and metaphorical.

These new militant images of our present conjuncture cohabit in "streaming services" (itself a physical place) the "cloud" and private repositories — like my hard drive folder labeled "films" which contains a range of militant films from different spaces and times. And as these images inhabit the same space-time as us, they allow us to affectively grasp, if not see, together the interconnected global and multi-temporal time spaces which we are living. The consumptive modes through which we can now access all these images are themselves constitutive and expressive of the uneven development of our persistently harsh colonial present.

As such, we can hold these images, old and new, together as a reminder that images are not ideas or mere representations, they are material, physical realities, places and processes that are always

unstable. And they are spaces for moving through, with, and around, to studying together across time and space, our conjunctural conditions, to drastically transform them, much as the current genocides of earth, people and livelihoods in Palestine, Sudan, Congo, Haiti, and so forth are not new, but rather a speeding up of a dynamic begun at least 500 years before. And holding these distinct moments together, however unsettling it might be, helps us access that indescribable sensation of how else things might be.

The moment we are living in is calling on us to pay attention to those other senses. Not because they will offer a catch-all answer to the rise of global fascism, but because this kind of split attention — to past and present — is a kind of awareness that we all must cultivate to face the challenges ahead.

I offer that this way of viewing, reading, using, engaging with militant images — past and present — is itself a methodology of struggle, not just study. It draws connections among and across movements, people, feelings, ideas and modes of struggle from different moments and spaces. These "South-South" connections which we must continue to construct, themselves foster a "more organic" modernity, as Rivera Cusicanqui enjoins (ibid: 107). I refer not only to literal geographic "South" connections, but also to emergent alliances across geographic, temporal and political and cultural difference — what cultural theorist Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, also invoking Gramsci's "southern question," calls "emergent forms of "southern politics" and "imagined new geopolitical formations" (Espiritu Gandhi 2022).

Accordingly, as devices allow us to move militant images with us to and around the most banal places, we can also take these mobile modes of differential space as a form of adaptive politics *with images,* allowing us to confront the present with ever-flexible political approaches. These mobile images erase the artificial borders between artist, militant, historian, housewife, manual, intellectual because they are potentially with us all, all the time. These images are part of our physical landscape, not only are everyday lives, and they continue to allow us to discern the felt contradictions of the present conjuncture. It is true that we did not create the conditions that we are living. But it is up to us to grasp what is being offered at each moment — and move.

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