The Platformization of Queer Solidarity: Re-Defining Space in Post-Protest Lebanon

Sinine Nakhle (Author) s2577909

Dr. Steinbock (Supervisor)

University of Leiden, Faculty of the Humanities

Leiden, Netherlands, 6/14/2020 (Final)

Table of Contents

Introduction

Scrolling across borders on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat and TikTok, draws a rainbowed filter over what seems to be a thriving queer global culture. Chatrooms, phone-based geolocation applications, ephemeral photography, real-time stories, live-recordings and drag-like digital story features have forged a new layer of queer visibility, eroticism and connectivity that re-defined interwoven understandings of intimacy (Roach 2015), risk (Hall 2018) and privacy (Maney 2017). These features have endowed individuals residing in countries like Lebanon, with high governmental surveillance, with a space for embodied expression, connection, and resistance. Despite and perhaps because of a thorny political climate where homosexuality is criminalized, queer and trans* folk in Lebanon continue to challenge both the status quo of their government *and* the binary narratives of suffering and resilience imposed on the complexity of their histories by the Western gaze and its ensuing humanitarian discourse. For example, the 'drag family' in Lebanon very recently released a wonderful rendition of the "Brush Challenge" trending on Tik-Tok, where Fifteen drag Queen and Kings shared before and after makeup transformation videos that topped half a million viewers overnight. At a time of double-crisis when the country is burning as protesters express anger toward an unprecedented economic crisis and an un-democratic government formation while also surviving a pandemic lock-down, the daring act of seeking digital visibility is quite literally dangerous. Yet the video received heart-warming support and culminated in the drag family's reception of free make-up kits and invitations for local Instagram Live interviews (Khoury 2020). Glossing over relatively new accounts such as Kharabish Nasawiya, Beirut By Dyke, Kikafilmadina, Boumet Beirut and SeenNoon, which use the medium of comics, poetry, and performance to defy the gender binary as well as compulsory heterosexuality, it seems that

the reclamation of digital space is providing new-found forms of solidarity and 'connective'

action for communities which have been subject to structural, social, and aesthetic erasure.

 Considering the historic role which the creation of physical space has played in feminist

organizing, it becomes clear why the digital realm would provide the allure of a home for bodies

which struggle to inhabit urban and cultural sites. It is not by coincidence that social engineers

like Mark Zuckerberg give the rules of inhabiting their spaces homey tags like "community

guidelines" which offer the ever-so-alluring concept of connection beyond the nuclear family.

Where queer, trans* and gender-non conforming communities suffered from a lack of security in

public spaces *and* a lack of access to private ones, location-based hook-up apps like Grindr,

Tinder and Snapchat promised to facilitate promiscuity and sexual cruising regardless of 'social

skills' (Haber, 2017). Where these communities also suffered from lack of institutionalized

recognition and socio-familial marginalization; Tumblr, Facebook and Instagram promised the

possibility of mutable identities within a 'chosen community' where the performativity of self is

protected and allies are ready to engage in connective action at the drop of a social injustice tag.

 At the same time, the algorithmic ordering and control which digital systems use in

exchange for exquisite user experience are often regarded, and with arguably good reason, as

anti-queer or anti-feminist. In their reliance on deterministic categorizations, binaries,

normalities, and capital, companies like Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, Tinder and Grinder,

posit a vision of digital sociality whose reliance on *disruptive* mass-data analysis provides an

oasis for states and investors alike, where advertisements and surveillance are key and issues

around privacy surmountable through public apologies (Haber 2017). Facebook and Instagram,

for example, have been shown to engage in a form of social engineering by tampering with

political attitudes (Zhang et al. 2010) and curating informational news content resulting in

similarity bias (Ribeiro 2018) and political polarization (King 2020). The psychological and socio-political ramifications of this algorithmic glue are numerous, ranging from dopamine-induced addiction (Meshi et al. 2020) to identity politics (Chun 2016) and democratic participation (Burnley 2020). The relevant question for this paper lies in the automated process of orientation and the way it breeds "homophily" (Chun 2016), or love of sameness.

Because contemporary network science is predicated on the assumption that similarity breeds connection, it transforms what seems to be an open web into poorly gated communities that propagate already-existing forms of prejudice and discrimination. If the algorithmic fabric of social media platforms pushes people with the same views and interests towards each other, what does this mean for queer individuals in Beirut inhabiting a city whose very urban fabric segregates and limits their interaction in public space? What possibilities can the digital realm provide queer lives in a cyberspace unhinged by the geography of residence and the materiality of the body?

I attempt to answer those research questions by relying on Sara Ahmed's Queer phenomenology (2006) and on Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's (2016) concept of "homophily". Those theoretical lenses will guide my use of auto-ethnography and close visual analysis to explore the outputs and social media strategies of two case studies of visual activism in Lebanon: Beirut By Dyke and Kikafilmadina. My personal experience as a member of civil society groups in Beirut and my positionality as the creator of Beirut By Dyke orient me, to borrow Sara Ahmed's term, towards these pages as cultural objects. The concept of the social media accounts, which revolves around the narrativization of queer inhabitance in space, propels me toward Sara Ahmed's theory around sexuality as residence. Conversely, the social impact generated by both social media accounts on collective imaginations and social participation in cyber and physical

space leads to me to question how "homophily" (Chun 2016) can be used to challenge the neoliberal assumptions it was built on. My aim is to counter existing literature around gender and digital culture whose understandable focus on the capitalistic and behaviorally predictive valence of social platforms is grim and dystopic (Goldberg 2016). Instead, I suggest that the study of platforms like Instagram offers a resource for queer studies insofar as it "emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of newness, or the role of repeated habitual action in shaping bodies and the world" (Ahmed 57). It is specifically the power of repeated habitual actions that I want to focus on in exploring digital possibilities. In a context where systemic oppression is difficult to dismantle and social change impossible to imagine, the creation of new paths is, after all, a labor of repetition.

Author's Note

The very act of writing about the social, spatial, and representational dimensions of "queerness" is itself a type of labor that requires introspection, connection, and repetition. Throughout this thesis, I use the word "queer" not as an attempt to capture the entirety of sexual bodies, identities, and experiences; but as a radical identifier which precisely counters any attempts at 'capturing' experience. I recognize that in tackling what is in essence uncapturable, I run the risk of reducing a plurality of experiences to a language or understanding that may not hold them. It is important to reflect on this failure to represent, interpret, or even care for "queer experience" which may rightfully refuse to be probed by the very product of a system that limits it. Yet I try, in the hopes that my failure and its ensuing discomfort will prove to be productive. I also recognize the narcissistic irony in using auto-ethnography to analyse introspective content in Beirut By Dyke that is my own. Yet it is the very need to produce that content which leads me to a space where I can write about queerness as a way of reflecting on it. As a way of documenting

it. My insider information inescapably affects the way in which I interpret that content. In fact, my work on this thesis affected my creative content just as much as my creative content affected my work on this thesis. I found myself having to recognize and gauge the difference between what my work does and what I hope it is doing. Yet the overwhelming number of messages and support I receive from strangers telling me how my work touches their reality gives me the hope that my interpretation of what constitutes 'impact' may be fair to consider. In training to write about things that matter, I hope I find something queer about my failure to be detached.

CHAPTER 1: Homophily & Orientation

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun is the author of the trilogy *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (2016), *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (2011), and *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (2006). Her interdisciplinary training in Systems Design Engineering and English Literature seeps into her theoretical and critical approach to digital media and places her today at the discursive forefront of digital cultures. In her article "Big Data as Drama" (2016), she explains how the Internet, which we have been deliberately made to construe as a space for diversity, democracy, and participation, relates to the transformation of the web into poorly gated communities which propagate already-existing forms of prejudice and discrimination. Contemporary network science, Chun explains (2018), is based on the concept of "homophily" which assumes that similarity breeds connection. Interestingly, the term emerged from studies of segregation, in which Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) "discovered" race as divisive factor in the way that friendships are made, maintained, and disrupted. The way it works in cyber space is that through intricate correlations with a predictive valence, network analytics maps connections between people who already know each other and

more importantly, strangers mathematically determined to be virtual neighbors (Chun 2018). What is mostly relevant for this thesis is the social implication of those virtual neighborhood and the potential they have on shaping behaviors. When we as users are grouped together in digital gated communities with similar others, the actions of those people pre-empt and shape our own. Action, for an algorithm, is defined by how much time we spend on an article. When we pause a video. Where we check-in. What advertisements we click. What we purchase. Who we connect with. What petition we sign. By valuing user action, what an algorithm does, therefore, is translate bodies, ideology, language, race, sexuality, class, and other demographic variables that make up a human being in structural terms, into a series of code. The more users engage in patterned behaviors determined by those demographic "nodes", the more likely it is that their similar neighbors will follow suit. This idea of repetitive actions shaping similar people's future actions is of particular importance for us. We will revisit it throughout the three upcoming chapters as we explore the effectiveness of digital art in re-shaping social attitudes and behavior.

In terms of code, what this process does is voluntarily segregate similar users into neighborhoods also called 'echo chambers' by news media to metaphorize a situation in which a user's beliefs are amplified by communication and repetition inside a closed system (Steglich 2018). The problem is that while the language used to describe this digital process insinuates openness, what it really does is close worlds up. We end up inhabiting digital space only with those we "love" who are like us, a dangerous social process which Sara Ahmed tackles in her article "Affective Economies" (2004) and her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2013). Love, Ahmed claims, draws contours over closed social groups and borders. It also mobilizes the production of a fantasy around the white subject as an "ordinary" loving person exposed to the threat of the 'other' who is different and who should therefore reside outside the realm of love.

This reading of emotions, which we could tag as Derridean (1980), highlights a discursive and social opposition: hate is produced through its counter-attachment to love. Thus, the rosy term "neighborhood", which produces a community and homey feel is deliberately misleading, as the digital engineering of sameness erases the possibility of difference. Because of homophily, we therefore find ourselves stuck in a world inside-out, which seems to be open but is constituted instead of a series of echo chambers reverberating a singularity of voices that muffle difference.

Ahmed in fact provides a fundamental critique of the idea that "difference" between people are exhibited morphologically through sex or race. In her *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), she argues that bodies are racialized and sexualized in the way in which they extend into space. Difference comes about from the way in which we tend toward objects in space and the way in which we inhabit that space. The desire and contact between lesbian bodies involve differences that take shape through contact and are shaped by histories of contact with others. In directing one's desire toward another woman, she claims, one directs desire toward a body different from one's own. It is precisely the counterfeit idea of "opposites" which negates the alteritiy within lesbian relationships. The very refusal to walk the straight lines that are put in place by authoritative forces through racism, sexism, and patriarchal configurations of capitalism, pulls queer individuals together, in a proximity that is productive. The way to change systems which orient us in the heteronormative direction is to create new paths or directions through collective and repetitive acts against normality.

Chun and Ahmed meet virtually in their call to establish change through repetitive actions of resistance. In digital space, Chun (2016) recommends that the way forward does not entail boycotting platforms and social algorithms, as they only learn from and reproduce already existing prejudice and discrimination. Rather, we should steer away from "pre-emption and

predictable yet rampant consumption towards political contestation and sustainable habituation […]. A possible way [to do that is] through repetition and publicity" (Chun 363). In other words, if the body in cyber space is never singular but always plural, and if this plurality renders singular actions into probable actions or collective habits, one way of resisting the fake promise of democracy and constant pull towards consumption would be by changing our repetitive actions and collective habits on social platforms. This would result in a spreading activation whereby online norms could change social ones and vice versa. In terms of code, we would be writing a different future for our actions.

In the following three chapters, I use Chun and Ahmed's concepts of "homophily" and "orientation" to analyse and compare the properties of queer residence in private, public, and alternative spaces to the properties of queer residence in digital space. How do the Instagram accounts Beirut By Dyke and Kikafilmadina, which tell digital stories about being queer in Beirut, resist the heteronormative lines of direction shaping the space and social dynamic of a family home? How do they counter the urban fabric of a city and the apparatus of a confessional state that have been designed to limit inter-group connection and community organizing? And how do they learn from, replicate, and expand on the strategies and possibilities of alternative queer spaces?

CHAPTER 2: Family & Home: Queer in the Private Sphere

Lebanon is home to long-standing religious, patriarchal, and heteronormative social norms maintained by the patronage of a confessional system whose legal apparatus and practices discriminate against womxn and members of queer communities (SMEX 2018). In a society where family ties are key and where "when will you get married?" is part and parcel of a Sunday lunch, how can visual activism contribute to re-shaping social norms around sexuality and

provide a counter-space for a private sphere which does not always serve its purpose of being

safe? In this section, I will go into the private corners of a home in Beirut to walk through the

spatiality of gendered indoctrination. By analyzing two scenes from Beirut By Dyke and

Kikafilmadina, I will argue that both social media accounts resist the heteronormative social

fabric of Lebanese society by digitally reversing the private-public spheres and by creating a

cyber space upon which communities can collectively reflect on shared family dynamics that

resist any attempt to resist them.

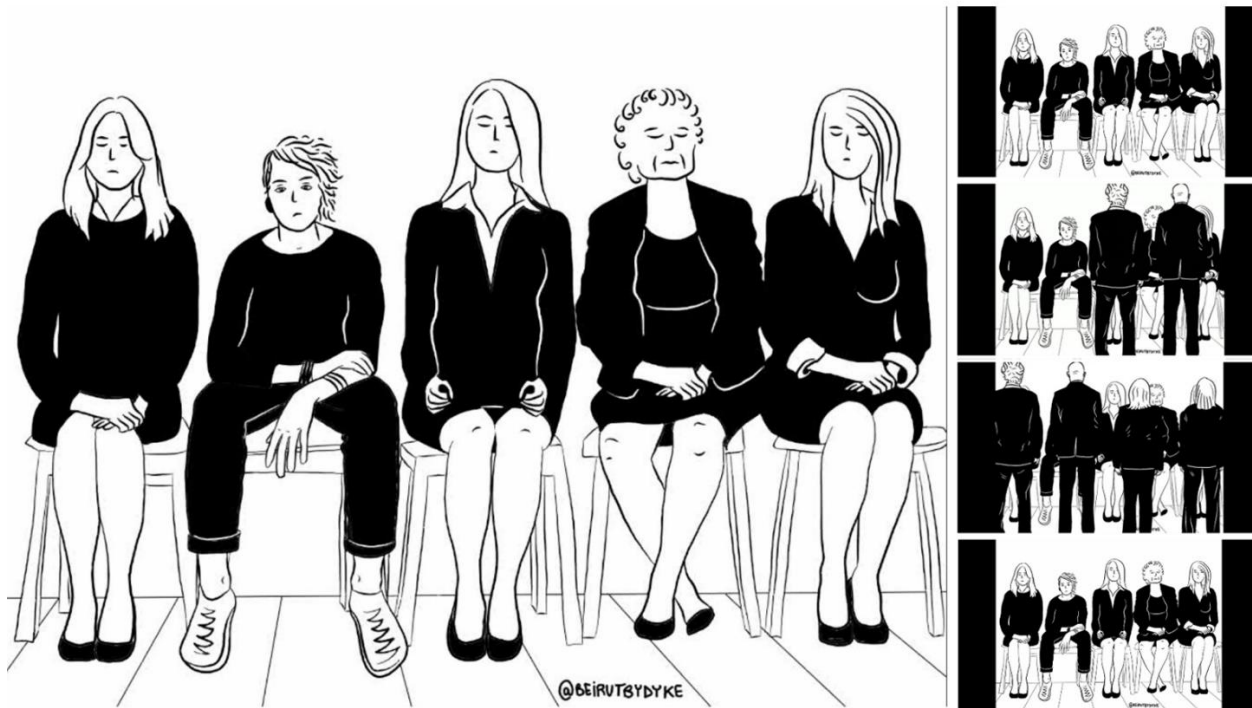A Dyke Walks into A Funeral House

Figure 1- *Beirut By Dyke, "*A Dyke Walks into A Funeral House"

"When we entered the salon at Teta's funeral, I chose a strategic spot in the corner among

the young cousins in my family whom I love and feel safe around. I asked them about

appropriate responses and practiced the two-way mechanics of "يطوّل بعمركم" - "الله يرحمها" -

"روحها بالسما" and "العوض بسلامتكم"[1]. It was my first time in the business of accepting condolences and something in me wanted to be and stay "proper". If I wore my dyky but formal attire right and said expected things, I could perhaps "make up" for how queer I looked and felt against a hyper heteronormative background. […] My showing support right now meant I had to erase certain aspects of myself. I wore smaller asymmetrical earrings, covered most my tattoos, and tried my best not to slouch. As a kind of negotiation between what I want to be and what they hoped I would be. More straight, more married, more successful, less angry. […] In a room of black dresses and suits, in which social exchange revolved around updating competition polls about who aged best and with the least amount of medical intervention; I knew oh too well how the expression of my gender would be read as something that had to be - or should have been - momentarily tamed. As if the way in which I wear my body was a form of collective action that was unfit for the performatives of grief. If "queer" originally meant difference, disruption, or defect, I embodied that negativity simultaneously and suddenly felt a deep sense of alienation from a group of people with whom I had shared most of my past" (Beirut By Dyke 2020).

This is the caption of "A Dyke Walks into A Funeral House" (Fig. 1), a two-dimensional looped animation published on Beirut By Dyke. I published the page on October 7, 2018 to tell intersectional stories around gender and sexuality, mental health, and bodily issues. The time of publication was conducive to the creation of my content. I was highly inspired by Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2007) and *The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For* (2008), the local page Kharabish Nasawiya (Comics Kill-joy), and the blog Rgheef Sokhn, which to my knowledge is the first Arabic blog to tackle personal experience with mental health in Lebanon. The title of the page "Beirut By Dyke" echoes that of a local bicycle rental service

---

[1] (May her soul rest in peace; peace be with you, etc.)

called "Beirut By Bike", and reflects the promise of taking the audience around the city of Beirut to experience it differently, through a queer lens.

This scene animates a religious and social gathering where the performatives of grief coincide highly with the performatives of gender norms. Squeezed between femme-presenting womxn in formal attire, our slouching main character with a Longer Pixie Cut feels or is made to feel visually and phenomenologically out of place. The room, which we would assume to be stricken with grief, is metonymically inhabited by "black dresses and suits", and exudes exudes instead a competitive, pressuring and discomforting ambiance for a character whose very queerness is felt as unbefitting to the ritualized and gendered process of grief. Before we analyze the scene further, and to understand why the very existence of this account in cyber space counters the straightening aspects of private space for queer folks, let us first examine the details hanging quietly in modern Lebanese households through Sara Ahmed's lens.

<u>What Home Looks Like</u>

There is no 'typical' way of inhabiting home within a culture. Lebanon has a unique sectarian distribution along geographically segregated governorates: what home means, where home stands, and to whom, is political. Let us still try and walk through 'common' objects that make up the middle to upper class decor of the millennial generation's parents' houses, also known as 'the war generation'. Outside the main entrance, the doorbell plate or tag usually includes the full name of the husband and father. The name of the mother is sometimes featured, but almost never alone. If the father is a medical doctor or lawyer, it is customary for the doorbell plate, the elevator button, and the parking space - when they exist - to specify it. Inside the house, shared spaces like the door entrance, corridors, and living room, include generational wedding pictures and graduation ceremonies.

The arrangement of objects in space mirrors a social gaze, rendering the most intimate of spheres open for lines of judgments. The judgment of others (horizontal) and that of the divine (vertical). The use of certain objects is intended for certain people. The remote control is the father's, especially at 8:00 pm for the news. The "guest bathroom" contains aesthetic objects that the family bathroom does not. Wedding and graduation pictures face the prospective guest. They are "happy pictures" which attest to and immortalize the achieved successes of the family in the hopes of more to come. The more valuable cutlery and china are reserved "for the guests". Religious ornaments are also placed in shared spaces intended for guests, like the living room or dining table, as well as in private spaces like the bedrooms. Copies of religious texts are placed on all beside tables. In the kitchen, most food and cleaning products are printed with Arabic descriptions targeting womxn. Modern middle to upper-class houses also include a five-meter square "maid room" as an extension to the kitchen. The 'maid's room', akin to a storage space with no windows or access to ventilation, is intended to house domestic workers, most often migrants, working under a *Kafala* System (Sponsorship System) which places their legal status in the hands of their employers, and which has been rightfully dubbed as modern slavery (Amnesty International 2019). It is worth mentioning that in accordance with Lebanese Construction Law, the 'maid's room' cannot legally exceed 8 meters, to allow developers to maximize other areas that add market value (Saad 2016).

Thus, everything about the arrangement of objects within the private sphere in Lebanon, from interior to architectural design to the use of space and objects, points to the importance given to the family, in terms of values that encompass social status, class, gender and sexuality, race, and ethnicity. The politics behind this home aesthetic visually corroborate the social psychological findings that family dynamics and inter-communal relations in Lebanon dominate

the identification process over and above national identity and sectarian affiliation (Harb 2010).

In other words, family matters more to Lebanese society than nation or sect. This is quite telling

and partially explains the dominant social attitudes toward "sexual minorities" in the country.

The Arab Foundation for Freedom and Equality in fact surveyed 1200 citizens and found that

81.2% of them agreed that homosexuality was 'unnatural' (Nasr & Zeidan 2015). It is in this

interdependent social context, where family and communal bonds are key and where the family

home breeds heteronormativity and self-surveillance that queer folks who can afford it grow up.

Considering this context in which survival often revolves around family ties and in which

"being out" often equates being "pushed out", we could claim that Beirut By Dyke as a social

media account resists the heteronormative lines of direction by giving creative visibility to the

experience of difference among family. The simplicity and accessibility of the lines and the

black and white visuals provide a complementary lightness to more emotionally heavy content,

making it more likely for followers to read and connect with the story, and maybe recognize

themselves in it. The caption as a textual device allows the audience to experience the character's

own point of view, even if they do not necessarily identify with her sexual orientation or gender

identity. What might have felt like a lonely process for a queer follower attending a highly

heteronormative funeral becomes a shared political experience. Moreover, the public display of

vulnerability provides the social media account with a sense of "realness" or a brand of

authenticity, to use Chun's term (2016), which challenges the platform's pull towards

consumption and gives the cause behind the page visibility. Linking this back to Chun's idea of

shaping the future online, we could say that when followers read, like, share, tag friends, and

comment - by often sharing their own stories around the same themes - they engage in repetitive

actions that make it more likely for similar content to be created, liked, and shared in the future.

The account thus becomes a counter-space for a digital community that resists the lines of private space by reflecting and sharing the embodied experience of being with family members who should be close, yet feel perpetually distant through their refusal to accommodate difference.

Being Out (Of Line)

Figure 2 Kikafilmadina "It's Just A Phase" (Season 2, Episode 4)

This felt disconnection is also illustrated in our second case study, Kikafilmadina (Kika

in the City), which tells the adventures of a queer main character in her late twenties who moves

out of her parents' house and into an apartment in Beirut. The page was published on the 14th of

January 2019. While Beirut By Dyke is an autobiographical project tackling several topics,

styles, and mediums, Kikafilmadina depicts a fictional web-comic series (albeit possibly based on personal experience), divided into seasons and episodes. The page itself is a collective funded project which, according to its administrators, culls a team of six to nine writers and illustrators, as well as ten advisers who wish to remain anonymous. The stories, written in Arabic as a main language and translated to English in the story highlights, never explicitly pinpoint Beirut as the main city in which current events unfold, yet the visual and cultural references are easy for a Lebanese audience to recognize.

Throughout the series, we follow Kika as she faces socio-economic challenges with the support of a group of friends akin to a chosen family. In this scene (Fig. 2, Season 2, Episode 4), as Kika finally furnishes and settles into her new home, she receives an unannounced parent visit. Through the depiction of an overly curious mother who takes over her daughter's space and a father whose presence is quasi-absent, the scene invites a reflection around private space, objects, and orientations. Kika must clean up before her parents arrive. She is not out to her parents and must tuck away 'queer objects' which are queer insofar as they are her own. A basket of dirty laundry. A photograph of her ex on the fridge. A sign that says "do not enter" on her bedroom door. Her objects tell a story about her, one which her parents do not fully know. Much like our Beirut by Dyke character who must erase parts of herself at the funeral, Kika must also hide her objects to co-exist with her parents, even in a space that is her own. This felt disconnection with family is especially poignant in the final scene of the panel. What started as a conversation about Kika not being fond of the dish her mother cooked, explodes in a motherly tirade about Kika's shortness of hair, her alleged over-involvement with friends, her move into the city, and her lack of involvement with the family. The escalation is but a symptom of bubbling tensions: Kika is queer, but no one talks about it. The fact that her difference cannot be

"outed" or performed in private space affects interpersonal dynamics. Her parents cannot comprehend or accept why Kika wants to have a space of her own as an unmarried young woman, and resist Kika's resistance of heteronormative lines ("what will your grandmother say? What will the family say? Are you trying to bring us shame?!"). Even though the scene ends on this angry tone, Kika as a character succeeds in maintaining her space even through her mother and society's enmeshment, because she has also created an online space upon which she can metaphysically reflect on space and queerness. In fact, she (and the team of artists behind the page) refuses to take up a fatalistic approach to the criminalization of sexuality in Lebanon and resists it instead by deploying humor as a healing and collective act of resistance.

The ability to laugh about the family's 'resistance to resistance' in the private sphere is revolutionary, especially when we look back at the grim stories told in the collective project *Bareed Musta3jil* (MEEM 2009), which included forty-two true stories like "Becoming", in which the writer recounts being beaten and locked-up in her room for 12 days, forced to take sporadic baths in a substance she could not identify and which her mother thought would cure homosexuality. The private sphere is far from being a safe space for queer folks in Lebanon, especially under the current COVID-19 Pandemic which exacerbated the economic recession and hit the Achilles' heels of queer organizing by putting a halt to both visibility and mobilization (Middle East Institute 2020). Under these circumstances, the home can quickly turn into a hostile space for queer folks who face the risk of being kicked out, disowned, verbally, physically and sexually assaulted, sometimes by the hands of those they trust most – family members. In fact, a report submitted to the Human Rights Committee by Helem (Lebanese Protection for LGBTQ Individuals) in 2017, shows that the most common method of psychological violence inflicted by State-authorities during an investigation includes the outing

or threat of outing to the detainee's family and workplace. One of the beneficiaries of the non-profit organization reported "I have been paying my blackmailer for the past few months, I cannot be outed to my family. I might lose everything" (Helem 2017).

Considering the reality of the private sphere in Lebanon in our reading of Beirut By Dyke's Funeral scene and Kikafilmadina's encounter with unannounced parents, we could say that the social media accounts make use of digital art as an accessible and disarming tool of communication to do the more serious labor of rejecting the very notion of family as a private matter. As Chun argues (2016), this refusal to protect normative national culture in cyber space is quintessentially queer. By refusing the notion of "airing laundry" as a shameful act, both pages invite followers to also refuse the privatization of a felt discomfort, which becomes a collective shared experience. Both social media accounts make use of Instagram's features to create strategies of visibility and connectivity for queer issues that would have otherwise not been represented. By reverting to social media for storytelling, the artists take agency over their own narratives and resist their inaccurate, stereotypical, and harmful representation in local media outlets affiliated with the State (Megaphone News 2018). If Instagram algorithms create the illusion of gated communities or safe neighborhoods by grouping people with similar interests and connections together, I would argue that in this context, the resulting "homophily" as love of similarity is an act of resistance, in that it assumes and reinforces a love of the self. In sharing relatable content that is based on true stories, the social media pages allow followers to identify and reflect on an experience they are likely to feel alone in. As Sara Ahmed (2006) reminds us, the social and existential experience of loneliness makes the queer body extend into different types of space, where others are present to return one's desire to connect. In a country where family bonds are both strong and fragile, in their close contingency on outer image, the very

existence of an alternative space for connection *over* difference from society is as cathartic as it

is productive.

CHAPTER 3: The City & the State: Queer in the Public Sphere

If the navigation of the private sphere poses challenges to the lived experience of queer

folks in Lebanon in that it touches on important family ties, the navigation of the public sphere

entails a more critical negotiation around physical and mental safety. Beirut's urban fabric

groups inhabitants of the city along sectarian neighborhoods where the failure of public

institutions is countered by highly visible state power. In this Chapter, I attempt to show that the

urban fabric of Lebanon, coupled with State military power, parallels the "digital

neighborhoods" and "eco-chambers" produced in cyberspace by network science (Chun 2016).

In providing a cyber space that creates new communities of individuals who would have

otherwise never met, Beirut By Dyke and Kikafilmadina defy geographic and bodily limits and

resist the State's structural effort to keep them invisible and separated.

A City of Echo Chambers

The urban development of modernity in Lebanon has been shaped by historical

emigration and public health trends which gendered and racialized the way in which

communities inhabited and continue to inhabit space. Akram Fouad Khater (2001) delves into

those travel stories in *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in

Lebanon,1870-1920*, providing an insightful analysis around ways in which the uprising of 1860

and the beginning of the French mandate in 1920 affected gendered labor and cemented geo-

religious divisions across governorates. For the scope of this thesis, I briefly focus on why Beirut

specifically has been dubbed a "patch-work city" (Giorgio et al. 2014) to reflect on the social consequences of its urban fabric.

During fifteen years of Civil War (1975 to 1990), previously cosmopolitan Beirut became a battlefield of rival sectarian factions (Nagel 2002). As depicted in movies such as *West Beirut* (Doueiri 1998) and *Around the Pink House* (Hadjithomas & Joreige 1999), the capital was divided into two major enclaves. The Christian-controlled east and the Muslim-controlled west, which were separated by a no man's land notoriously riddled with lethal snipers (Yassin 2010). Ten years following a costly war which invigorated a sectarian discourse based on fear that would only begin to dissipate in the recent October 17 Revolution of 2019, the ruling elite invested in a multi-billion-dollar neoliberal reconstruction called Solidere, which aimed to re-cast Beirut as unified, peaceful and prosperous (Nagel 2002). The illegal privatization of Down-Town Beirut did not only bury the ruins of an archaeological site but also limited the only central space where inter-communal exchange could occur. The old Souk El-Nourieh, which used to be a bustling open and popular retail market for agricultural produce and second-hand products (Khalaf 2012), is now home to commercial luxury shops dispersed along heavily militarized streets. The state-sponsored effort to polish the centre, while maintaining both the urban scarring of city outskirts and the homogenization of space according to sectarian lines, speaks loudly about its indifference to public interest and its need for punishment and control (Khalaf 2012).

The city's neighborhoods have been designed similarly to Chun's "digital neighborhoods" and "eco-chambers" which only amplify already existing social and political attitudes and resistance to difference. The internal landscapes of Beiruti neighborhoods include loud negotiations of meanings and identities established through banners and a proliferation of sectarian leader portraits (Nagel 2002). Self-sufficient governorates hosting different

communities are separated by large bridges and highways that limit mobility and inter-group

relations. Local news channels are also affiliated with different members of the ruling elite who

govern those areas, which makes, much like Facebook does, access to information contingent on

group membership and geographic location. In a landscape designed to limit inter-group

relations and maintain a discourse around fear of the other, the creation of cyber communities

online through digital art provide opportunities for reflection, connection, and imagination.
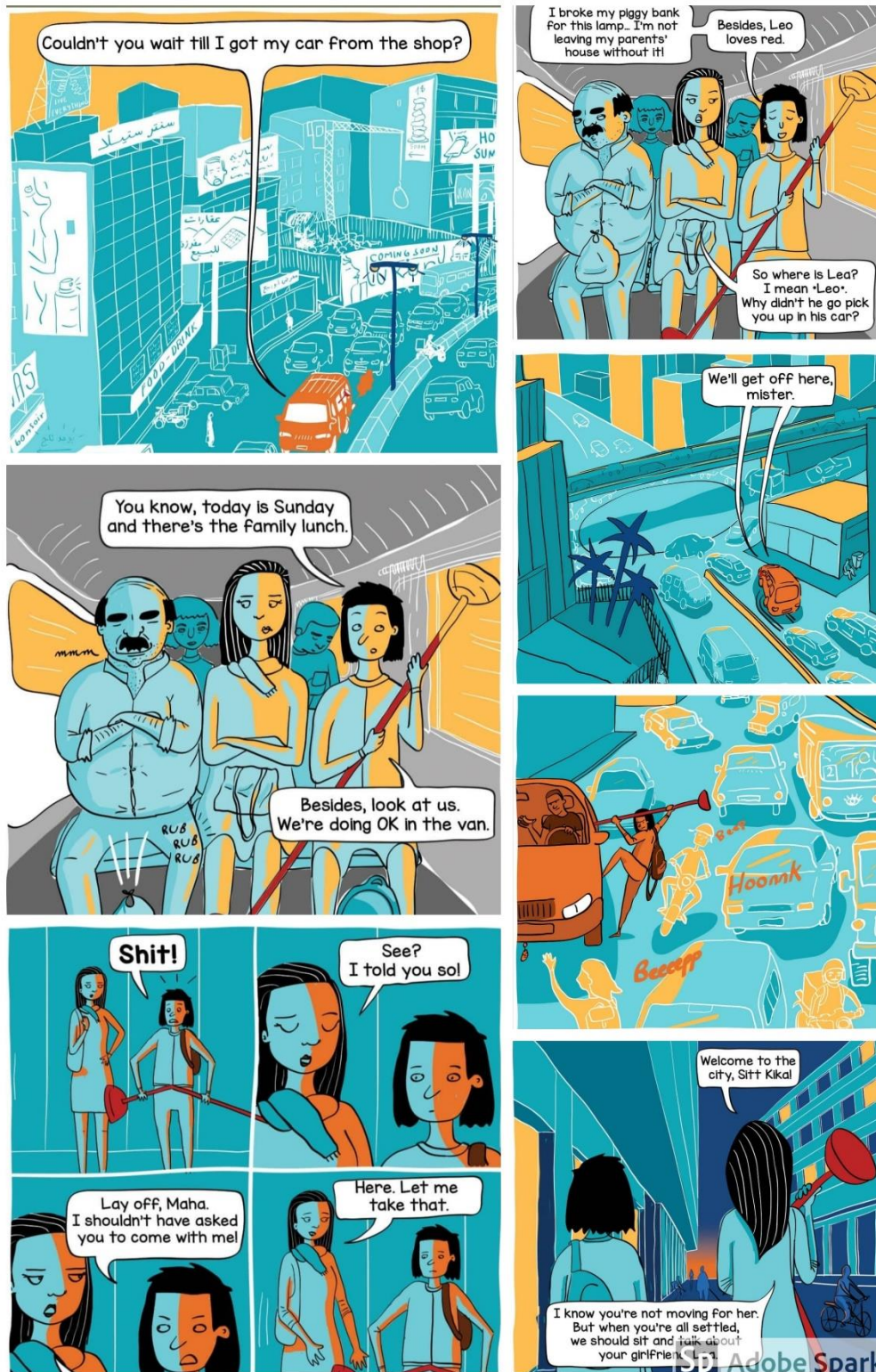
Queer Bodies in the City

Figure 3 – Kikafilmadina "The Lamp" (Season 1, Episode 1)

The first very first episode of Kikafilmadina entitled "The Lamp" (Fig. 3, Season 1, Episode 1) narrativizes the lived and normalized experience of navigating threat in the city as a queer individual, and hints at how the urban fabric of the country renders the expression of difference an almost-impossibility. The scene opens with an extreme long shot showcasing the Jounieh highway, notorious for its hellish traffic jams. Kika is moving to Beirut with the help of her friend Maha. As they use the Van for public transportation, they try to have a casual conversation about Kika's move and her romantic relationship with Lea. Yet the normalcy of their conversation is constantly interrupted by external factors, including traffic, other bodies, as well as the gaze and touch of male passengers. When one of the passengers gets a little too close to Maha's knee, the main characters order the driver to stop the Van, and storm out the middle of the highway, almost smashing into a speedy motorcycle. Kika's lamp breaks in the turmoil and the characters continue their conversation by foot. The scene ends at sunset, with Maha giving Kika a cynical "welcome to the city Miss Kika!"

The most powerful thing about this scene is its ability to capture the normalization of rupture and disruption with lightness and concision. If "the lamp" is meant as a metaphor of enlightenment or the contour of a silver lining around Kika's transitional move, then its breakage on the very first episode of the first season foreshadows the challenges she is about to face as a young queer woman in an unrelenting capital.

The Instagram account challenges the urban echo-chambers of the city by representing them in digital space and transcending their barriers. In its establishing long-shot depiction of an urban landscape riddled with electrical wires, advertisements, and construction sites, the scene represents Lebanon's poor infrastructure, as well as its geographic division along sectarian lines.

Kika is shown to be heading from the predominantly Christian North Governorate towards the capital. Her move is not only geographic but also cultural.

The account also challenges the normalization of rupture and violence precisely by depicting it, which enticing followers to pause and reflect upon them. As a queer woman navigating the public sphere, Kika faces a series of threats. The Van stopping in the middle of the highway accurately reflects the lack of road safety measures and the notoriously high but undocumented rates of accident injuries and deaths in Lebanon (YASA For Road Safety 2020). Kika must also ensure her safety and that of her friend by referring to her partner "Lea" as "Leo". This is a creative survival strategy that is all too familiar to members of queer communities who must constantly shift between "identities" in different social settings to avoid verbal and physical threat. Sexual harassment is literally depicted as a bump in the road which fails to interrupt even a conversation. The characters do not flinch at the constant interruption of their attempt to connect and have a normal day. Maha does not process having been harassed. Kika does not think of her almost crash with the motorcycle as the near death experience that it was. The characters instead continue their day, like every other citizen, because they must. Their daily encounters with threat and violence become short stories they will casually tell over a dinner table.

As activists and professors in Urban Studies and Planning, Fawaz, Harb, and Gharbieh insightfully argue, "Beirut has a fragmented, overlapping, and contested security system where the definition of what constitutes a threat is constantly negotiated and therefore changing, the monopoly of state agencies on security is openly challenged, and the boundaries between the public and private identities of public agents blurred" (2012). To translate this quote into lived experience, if I use public transportation (colloquially referred to as "service") to go to work, I

could never tell if I will be stuck in traffic, encounter a blocked road, be harassed or assaulted by the driver or other passengers. Moreover, if I encounter a man in civilian clothes who is illegally parked and blocking my way, I could never tell whether he is a military agent, whether his military affiliation is with the State or a sectarian militia, or more specifically, which militia that is. Navigating the city also means navigating interruption. Military checkpoints, armed Police officers, unannounced blocked roads, unsafe construction sites, improvised street passages, illegal parking, no-parking zones, no-photography zones, and other security measures create a lived and embodied experience of policing, harassment, and unpredictability (Fawaz, Harb & Gharbieh 2012). These factors, which differentially contribute to the potential degree of violence one could be subjected to without chance of legal justice, are weighed and negotiated on a daily basis by the inhabitants of the city, especially by womxn, queer and trans* folks, refugees, and migrant workers.

The subtle reflection on the constant potential of threat in Kikafilmadina's scene allows the bodies represented and those following the page to reflect on this interruption and constant potential of threat which passes as normal in the crude business of survival. Let's stop scrolling for a minute, the page seems to say, to reflect on this and maybe allow the space for productive anger to ensue. The page also allows members of the online community to transcend the vulnerabilities of their own bodies in a relatively safe online space where fake accounts are possible and opportunities for connection numerous.

The Potential of Queer in the City

Figure 4 - Beirut By Dyke, Untitled – Photo reference by Anne Barlinckoff

If, as Judith Butler argues, the body in the public sphere is "a site of desire and physical vulnerability, [and] a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed" (Butler 20), then queer bodies in Beirut, which are either fetichized or assaulted, benefit from a digital haven which offers the possibility to "be finally seen but never touched" (Beirut By Dyke 2020). On Lesbian visibility day this year, I published a multi-media post on Beirut By Dyke (Fig. 4), showing two queer individuals asleep in a lateral 69 position facing an open window overlooking Geitawi in Beirut.

In a *mise en abime* (image within an image) the reversal of the private and public spheres stages the possibility of the impossible for queer bodies inhabiting the city. This reversal, I argue, opens new possibilities for the queer erotic and queer residence in digital and physical space. The black and white documentary-like aesthetic of the photography comes in stark contrast to the comic and therefore fictional nature of the queer bodies. The heavy realism of the city's landscape (barrels, bullet holes, electricity wires) does not threaten the soothing calm of a post-sex connection. Unlike Diego Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* (1647), who defies the viewer's gaze over her back by gazing back at them through a mirror, our characters defy the fetichizing gaze over their bodies by not caring to notice it. They are asleep and their nudity happens to be part of the landscape in cyber space. Their position as being stuck in-between the gaze of the viewer on Instagram on one side, and that of the neighbors through the open window on the other side, could have rendered them vulnerable. Yet their ability to be aloof and present in their moment is emancipating in that it only opens new windows of opportunities for the viewers and neighbors whose gazes can now meet each other, triggering the question: how and what are we gazing at? In their sleep, the bodies make the viewers reflect on their gaze over a queer erotic and maybe even enjoy it, without having to appropriate it through discourse or touch.

The fact that the scene reflects a present impossibility with the potential of actualization allows the audience and other queer followers to join the account in radical imagination. This could not have been an inconsequential full-blown photography of nude queer bodies near an open window in Geitawi. If it were, it would have to be quick and daring: the subjects would certainly not be able to sleep peacefully. In depicting a world-to-be, the account invites the audience's imagination: what if this could become part of our daily experience? What would it mean to our bodies, to us, and to society? More importantly, what would we have to do to get there? Interestingly, the image is a re-interpretation of a photograph by Anne Barlinckoff (2020) captioned "we are in this together". The original is a photography of an inter-racial queer couple in the Netherlands. While the bodies are awake, with one of them gazing at the camera in the original, I adapted it by juxtaposing comic illustration with photography to represent the need for radical imagination, locally. In a society which often conflates notions around sexuality with Westernization, the creation of what Sarah Ahmed (2004) would call "sticky associations" becomes crucial. In associating documentary like images of Beirut with a queer erotic, my aim is to contribute to the collective and repetitive forging of a path where queer communities in Lebanon can express and take agency over their queerness through their own language and culture. Kikafilmadina does this wonderfully through its predominant use of the Arabic language. As Sara Ahmed claims (2016), it is through the repetition of these associations that we chip away at oppressive institutions.

The reversal of the private and public sphere through the juxtaposition of urban design and an intimate erotic allows the social media page to create new lines of direction for users and followers. It puts forward the possibility of imagining the city otherwise and the possibility for the queer body to experience the full range of erotic possibilities without threat of interruption or

violence. Thinking back at Sara Ahmed (2006) and Chun (2016), if the we continue the publication of such images that break a habit of commenting, judging, and committing violence against queer bodies, we are also inviting new online norms that aim to change the algorithm.

CHAPTER 4: Productive Solidarity: Queer in Alternative Spaces

The challenges of navigating the private and public spheres created the need for queer folks in Lebanon to re-imagine alternative forms of organizing and cohabitation, which in turn raised challenges around safety and sustainability. In this Chapter, I argue that Beirut By Dyke and Kikafilmadina as digital art accounts, not coincidentally created by activists, re-configure the social experience of "being" queer into a form of action that shapes bodies and worlds while mobilizing individuals in cyber space (Ahmed 2006). Specifically, I will show that the pages have learned from and are expanding on the creations of queer spaces for community organizing by triggering radical imaginations in others and facilitating unusual collaborations and mutual aid initiatives.

Creating Queer Spaces

Through the creation of online communities, accounts such as Beirut By Dyke and Kikafilmadina expand on the queer physical spaces that have been created in Beirut, rendering new possibilities of social connection and collective action. The pages do not merely transcend physical space and bodies by dodging challenges around geographic location, mobility, and anonymity, but they also cerate possibilities for organizing in the digital realm which affects organizing on the ground. If, as Chun (2016) explains, our actions online participate in our own undoing - as they create imagined realities around sameness and write futures based on pasts - then one way to challenge the neoliberal model replicated through code, is to engage in different types of repetitive actions that reinforce and encourage collective initiatives. Two scholars and

activists, Moughalian and Ammar (2019) interviewed numerous feminist organizations and founders of queer spaces in Beirut to report on the challenges and opportunities of the feminist movements. In their conclusion, they recommend that an effective way of organizing and advocating for legal reform and social change in the country would be to de-centralize activism, outside the hands of the state and of non-profit organizations, to make organizers out of individuals who can best serve the communities they inhabit spaces with. If the NGOization of the humanitarian sector poses challenges around funding and representation, and if self-sustainable spaces with horizontal structures face challenges around sustainability and inclusivity, could the digital realm offer a new wave of feminism to movements that have notoriously suffered from the disconnection of their own actors? How has the experience of inhabiting queer spaces shaped the content and social media strategies deployed by Kikafilmadina and Beirut By Dyke? And how does this digital spill-over facilitate what Chun (2016) has called unusual forms of collaborations?

On June 28, 2013, I unknowingly engaged in my first act of collective action by joining a peaceful protest to denounce the illegal extension of Parliament whose term had expired 8 days earlier. On the night of that protest, during an intimate farewell gathering I thought would end quickly, my friends and I were held at gun point by the military guards of Prime Minister Nadim Gemayyel, who thought we were taking pictures of his convoy. The incident happened in grim irony in the kitchen of Nasawiya, the first registered feminist NGO which aimed to provide women with a space free from harassment and discrimination. At the risk of romanticizing what I can only in retrospect construe as a traumatic event, I can say that the enraging embodied experience of social injustice cemented my social desire or need to be a part of the feminist community with whom I had just shared that injustice. I was not aware at the time of the

political, historical, and social dimensions of Nasawiya as a space. Yet something about it pulled

me in, much like the feminist cooperative Dammeh would, two years later. If we can extrapolate

what about this space was alluring to me and to the other members creating, inhabiting and using

the space, then we could perhaps "capitalize" on homophily and replicate the force of the pull

digitally to incite individual users to become organizers around their own communities.

Let's consider Sara Ahmed's invitation to re-theorize both the sexualization of space and

the spatiality of sexuality. Sexuality is a spatial formation not only because the body inhabits

sexual space, but also because it becomes sexualized in the way in which it inhabits that space.

Visiting my memory of entering the feminist collective Nasawiya for the first time, I remember

feeling an instantaneous pull towards the space, prior to experiencing the military attack. The

very presence of pierced and tattooed queer bodies with asymmetrical hair cuts leaning over

stickered laptops was curiously alluring to me. The DIY aesthetic of the decor gave the space a

co-working feel which was as inviting as its members. Bean bags and a modular purple sofa

stood near open bookcases cradling a feminist collection of used books, from Nawal Al

Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (2007) to Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), that had been

donated over decades of community organizing. Concepts inhabited the space as strongly as our

bodies. The walls were riddled with posters of raised fist logos and black feminist quotes about

body rights and reform and capitalism and patriarchy and secularism. The space felt homey yet

looked nothing like the Lebanese home we visited in Chapter 1. The objects lurking around this

open space invited participation, imagination, and creation. The projector, flip-board, permanent

markers, banner fabric, event flyers, free condoms, and megaphones were ready to be summoned

for a workshop or a protest. If Lebanese households created lines of direction through an

arrangement of objects which pulled inhabitants of the space in the direction of the normative,

Nasawiya's events, informal discussions, and spatial configuration drew a question mark over everything we had been taught as womxn growing up in Lebanon. Similarly, if the urban fabric of the city did not allow members of different communities to meet and greet in public safely, Nasawiya provided a hub for social diversity where "single mothers, refugees, [people with disabilities], sex workers, migrant workers, people with non-conforming gender identities and non-conforming sexualities" resisted *together* to instigate social change (Nasawiya 2010). In Sara Ahmed's terms (2006), the intimate encounter of bodies and objects who are familiar and attractive insofar as they too are "out of line", created productive bonds of solidarity that resisted the external authoritative structures benefiting from their segregation.

Reclaiming Public Spaces

At the same time, the creation of alternative spaces for queer folks faced and continues to face challenges around representation, accessibility, and sustainability. The very creation of Nasawiya in fact sprung out of a gendered need for representation unhinged by the masculinity dominating not only the private and public spheres of the city, but also the humanitarian sector of queer organizing at the time (MEEM 2009). Hurriyat Khassa had been the first unregistered NGO that aimed to reform article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code in 2002, and it was from this group that Helem was formed, two years later (Makarem 2011). Three members of Helem held meetings in private houses which culminated in the creation of a separate group called MEEM (which literally stands for "Support Group for Homosexual Women") on August 4, 2007. It became the first-ever safe space in which political organizing by and for womxn and queer folks took place (MEEM 2009). The formal registration of Nasawiya followed in 2009, radicalizing the discourse around womxn's issues (Moughalian & Ammar 2019). When the NGO shut down in 2012, radical feminist organizations de-centralized and split into smaller groups, cooperatives,

and initiatives such as Dammeh, with varying aims and approaches (Moughalian & Ammar 2019). As revolutionary as the creation of MEEM, Nasawiya, and Dammeh was and continues to be, the groups still face challenges around sustainability and inclusivity. In fact, they are all located in Mar Mkhayel and Ashrafieh, respectively in a residential and commercial neighborhood known as the hub of Lebanon's nightlife, and at the heart of Christian dominated and middle to upper class 'East Beirut'. Considering also that Mar Mkhayel street is near the Gemmayze Police Station, these queer spaces are not accessible or friendly to refugees or migrant workers whose mobility is limited by night curfews and street harassment. In fact, the authorities have conducted mass arrests targeting several venues and meeting spots generally considered to be "safe spaces" for queer individuals in Lebanon. For example, in May 2018, the Censorship Office of the General Security shut down a poetry reading event and detained the organizer of Beirut Pride under the pretext that the poems had not been approved (SMEX 2018). The general prosecutor cancelled all the scheduled events of that Pride Week even though the preceding year had, quite controversially, included the participation of the Internal Security Forces (SMEX 2018). As brutal as these experiences have been for members of civil society groups, they have also provided valuable lessons around organizing through trial and error, which are apparent in the social media strategies and visual outputs of Beirut By Dyke and Kikafilmadina.

Reclaiming Digital Spaces

On April 13, 2020, as the populous uprisings were still ongoing in Lebanon, Kikafilmadina published the 8th episode of Season 6, entitled "The Big Secret" (Fig. 5) a series of panels depicting the possibilities of social reform. In its depiction of an alternative city, the account not only invites users to engage in radical imagination and collective action, but also documents a collective imaginary and narrative which local media outlets grossly misrepresent.

In this scene, Kika is finally ready to show her friends what had been lurking in the bedroom which had been off limits. Her friends marvel at all the possibilities: is it a kinky BDSM dungeon? A secret reform operation? A cat kingdom? When they finally enter the room, they find themselves walking into a wondrous four-dimensional immersive art piece. Kika had taken up illustration again and painted over the walls, floors, and ceiling to create a replica of a Beiruti urban landscape. Balconies, hanging wires, laundry, streetlights, with a graffiti that reads "the city is ours". The final scene is a full-shot of the friends sitting on the floor of the room, backs to the audience, facing a wall like they would a movie screen. There, the city is painted and therefore imagined. Similarly to Beirut By Dyke's *mise en abime* of open windows, the scene reflects a possible impossibility. The queer bodies cannot really be "out" in the city safely, but they are now able to imagine and create a city that is theirs. One in which they could sit safely and publicly.

Figure 5 – Kikafilmadina "The Big Secret" (Season 6, Episode 8)

This scene captures the creative surge of community organizing strategies deployed in the October 17 Revolution of 2019. Thousands upon thousands of people went to the streets and symbolically reclaimed cultural landmarks like the historical theater colloquially referred to as "The Egg" which hosted lecture-performances and public discussions around governance. Kika's depiction of street art within the home to imagine the city otherwise reflects the populous action of its time of publication. The message confirms the necessity and possibility of collective action: the city can be reclaimed and re-made into an accommodating home. In another episode, Kikafilmadina also illustrates the labor that goes into organizing the International Women's Day march in Beirut as a way of inviting the audience to join the collective effort. I mentioned above how my encounter with queer objects in Nasawiya like banners, markers, projectors, and megaphones were alluring given the possibilities they promised and the power they gave. In representing those objects digitally, Kikafilmadina renders them accessible to those who have not necessarily been part of a collective and who may not have experienced how empowering co-habitation can be. By giving life to those objects, the page performs the call of Moughalian and Ammar (2019), who advised members of civil society groups to imagine new ways of enticing individuals to become organizers in their own community. In fact, Kikafilmadina as a collective project which culls several artists, activists, and contributors, performs the very model it publicizes. In visually representing the act of organizing, which usually happens behind the scenes, the page also de-centralizes it. It not only takes agency over the narrative and history of organizing, which is seldom documented, but also invites the audience to participate in the strenuous and empowering labor of making a city into a home.

The radical discourses and strategies of community organizing I have been exposed to have also shaped the way in which I use Beirut By Dyke. What started as an autobiographical

project turned into a cyber space in which stories around social injustice can be shared and archived. When one follower reported her experience of being harassed at the protest to the page, hundreds of womxn came forward, recognizing Marwan Habib, who turned out to be a serial rapist and harasser who targets under-aged students near universities. At the backdrop of the state's failure to criminalize and prosecute him, the account allowed unusual collaborations between gym owners, bars, clubs, and university Protection Offices to spread awareness and take necessary safety measures. The sharing of 150 stories on the page made local news and culminated in a physical protest against sexual harassment near the Gemmayze Police Station in Beirut (Makhlouf 2019).

Moreover, Instagram's interactive features have served as excellent tools for the creation of polls resisting the State's failure to document and report gender-based violence. Following the launch of the Women's Integrated Sexual Health Program (WISH) campaign in Beirut, which consisted of a series of advertisements targeting womxn and asking them to stop silencing sexual health, I launched an anonymous poll on Beirut By Dyke to shift the locus of responsibility from patients to medical doctors. "Why would *you* be reluctant to talk to your doctor about sexual health?", I asked followers. The flux of hundreds of gruesome stories shared by queer folks on the page also made local news (O'Regan 2019). The stories, now also archived, centred around medical professionals breeching confidentiality by outing individuals to their families, not having the skills and knowledge to provide sexual health service to queer individuals, and verbally and physically harassing patients. In a context where systems of accountability are non-existent and where the safest of spaces, such as confessional boxes, medical clinics, and therapy sessions, are often hostile towards queer individuals, the account provided a space for documenting those stories and sharing resources. For example, one among many other queer

individuals was forced out of her parent's house when she came out. Reaching out to the account

gave her the space to anonymously connect with other members of the community, who offered

to wire her money, pay for her Airbnb, and find a family who was willing to host her. In

publicizing and documenting stories around the lived and embodied experience of social

injustice, the account not only documents and archives instances of harassment that would

otherwise not have been reported, but also allows unusual collaborations between people who

connect through their shared experience of difference.

Conclusion

Social media accounts like Beirut By Dyke and Kikafilmadina have helped queer

communities in Beirut resist heteronormative lines of direction in the private, public, and digital

spheres. As problematic as the creation of digital neighborhoods or echo-chambers can be, they

have allowed opportunities for connection and reflection in a city that breeds segregation,

actively violates queer bodies, and controls their desire. "Homophily" loses its negative

connotation in such gated communities as it provides the opportunity to find one's felt

experience of difference *in* others. By triggering radical imaginations and facilitating unusual

collaborations and mutual aid initiatives, the pages also reflect and expand on the possibilities of

community organizing at the backdrop of a failed state and of crumbling public institutions.

Although queer issues have been gaining momentum through the October 17 Revolution of 2019

and have been "mainstreamed as a pillar of resistance for the first time" (Human Rights Watch

2020), Lebanese communities at large are teetering on the edge of burnout. The momentum of

the revolution is fading under a rapidly increasing economic recession as lives are centering

around survival. Social psychological research (Tausch, Becker, Spears, Christ, Saab, Singh, &

Siddiqui, 2011) has shown that a potent predictor of people's participation in different forms of

collective action revolves around their sense of "self-efficacy". What this albeit structural

concept refers to is a group's belief that their collective efforts are strong and effective enough to

resolve group-related problems (Van Zomeren, Spears, and Leach 2008). In a social context like

Lebanon where civil society groups risk losing hope in their ability to instigate change, it helps

to remember Sara Ahmed's (2016) description of a complaint as being part of a momentum. The

complaint, much like an act of revolt, needs to be documented and joined by other complaints. In

their plurality and their repetition, complaints become a momentum than can be neither ignored

nor managed. Similarly, art activists archiving their communities' stories today are part of a

movement in flux, and must continue the process of documentation, one story at a time, so that

other stories are created, and other platforms imagined. If the movement does not create change

which activists live to see, it continues moving for those who come after them, who can

encounter these stories in order to out-grow them.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. "Affective economies." *Social text* 22.2 (2004): 117-139.

Ahmed, Sara. *Living a feminist life*. Duke University Press, 2016.

Ahmed, Sara. *Cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*. Duke University Press,

2006.

Amnesty International. (2019). *Their House is My Prison* (pp. 1-67, Rep.). London: Amnesty

International.

doi:https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1800222019ENGLISH.pdf

Barlinckoff, Anne. Untitled Photograph. Netherlands, 2020.

https://www.annebarlinckhoff.com/b7jpvzc2d3poulbfmcis6bxuze9cf1

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun home: A family tragicomic*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007.

Bechdel, Alison. *The essential dykes to watch out for*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008.

Beirut By Dyke. (2020, April 27). A Dyke Walks Into A Funeral House [[Digital Illustration]].

Retrieved June 13, 2020, from

https://www.instagram.com/p/B_euF7Ppalw/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Burnley, Benjamin. "Socially, Mediated Democracy: Modeling the Effects of Social Media Use

and Deliberative Behaviors on Voting." *Middle Tennessee State University*, Middle

Tennessee State University, 2020, pp. 1–88, jewlscholar.mtsu.edu/handle/mtsu/6215.

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. "Big data as drama." *ELH* 83.2 (2016): 363-382.

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. "Queerying Homophily." *Pattern Discrimination*, edited by Apprich,

    Clemens, Florian Cramer, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, and Hito Steyer, Lüneburg: meson

    press, 2018, pp. 59–97.

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. *Control and freedom: Power and paranoia in the age of fiber optics*.

    MIT Press, 2008.

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. *Updating to remain the same: Habitual new media*. MIT press, 2016.

Doueiri, Z. (Director), & Bouchareb, R. (Producer). 1998. *West Beirut* [Motion picture on Film].

    Lebanon.

El Saadawi, Nawal. *Woman at point zero*. Zed Books, 2007.

Giorgio, T., Sánchez, R., Joubanian, V., Lteif, D., Brownill, S., Omond, T., . . . Duman, A.

    (2014). *BEIRUT Leveraging the city as a laboratory for developing socially responsive*

    design strategies (2014 Edition ed., DPU summerLab workshop series, pp. 1-56,

    Publication). London: The Bartlett Development Planning Unit.

Goldberg, Greg. 2016. "Antisocial Media: Digital Dystopianism as a Normative Project." *New*

    Media & Society 18 (5): 784–99. doi:10.1177/1461444814547165.

Haber, Benjamin. *The Queer Allure of Digital Sociality*. City University of New York, 2017.

Hadjithomas, J., & Joreige, K. (Directors). (1999). *Around the Pink House* [Motion picture on

    Film]. Lebanon.

Hall, William J. "Psychosocial risk and protective factors for depression among lesbian, gay,

    bisexual, and queer youth: A systematic review." *Journal of homosexuality* 65.3 (2018):

    263-316.

Harb, Charles. "Describing the Lebanese youth: A national and psycho-social survey." *Youth in*

    the Arab World (2010).

Helem, Lebanese Protection for LGBTQ Individuals. (2017). *Human Rights Violations against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) individuals in Lebanon* (Rep.). Beirut. doi:https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/LBN/INT_CCPR_ICO_LBN_27152_E.pdf

Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Glyph* 7 (1980): 202-232.

Khalaf, Samir. *Lebanon adrift: From battleground to playground*. Saqi, 2012.

Khater, Akram Fouad. *Inventing home: Emigration, gender, and the middle class in Lebanon, 1870-1920*. Univ of California Press, 2001.

Khoury, Gilles. "La « Famille » Drag Libanaise Sort Le Grand Jeu." *L'Orient Le Jour*, 2020, www.lorientlejour.com/article/1216809/la-famille-drag-libanaise-sort-le-grand-jeu.html.

Kikafilmadina. (2019, January 21). The Lamp (Season 1, Episode 1) [[Digital Illustration]]. Retrieved June 13, 2020, from https://www.instagram.com/p/Bs6GkGHlz7u/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Kikafilmadina. (2020, March 16). It's Just a Phase (Season 2, Episode 4) [[Digital Illustration]]. Retrieved June 13, 2020, from https://www.instagram.com/p/B9y2CbzpqXi/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

King, Sarah. "Explaining the Role of Social Media in Political Polarization." *Eastern Kentucky University*, Eastern Kentucky University, 2020, p. 747. *Honors Theses*, encompass.eku.edu/honors_theses/747.

Lazarsfeld, Paul F., and Robert K. Merton. 1954. "Friendship as Social Process: A Substantive and Methodological Analysis." In *Freedom and Control in Modern Society*, edited by

Morroe Berger, Theodore Abel, and Charles H. Page, 18– 66. Toronto: D. Van Nostrand

Company, Inc.

Makarem, Ghassan. "The story of Helem." *JMEWS: Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 7.3

(2011): 98-112.

Makhlouf, Tracy. "Women of Lebanon: Hear Our Voices." *Nawa Media*, 28 Dec. 2019,

nawamedia.org/newsroom/posts/women-of-lebanon-hear-our-voices/.

Maney, Kevin. 2017. "Snap's IPO Might Be a Huge Win for Privacy." *Newsweek*, February 13.

http://www.newsweek.com/2017/02/24/snapchat-snap-ipo-privacy-555764.html.

MEEM. (2009). *Bareed Musta3jil*. Beirut: Heinrich böll stiftung.

Megaphone News (Director). (2018, May 23). *The LGBT Community in the Lebanese Media*

[Video file]. Retrieved June 13, 2020, from

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfWe27C59eU&list=PLnEtFSZ_c06JB2E_SXXmRJ-

KnccrkxWF7&index=22&t=0s

Meshi, Dar, et al. "Problematic social media use is associated with increased risk-aversion after

negative outcomes in the Balloon Analogue Risk Task." *Psychology of addictive*

behaviors (2020).

Middle East Institute (Producer). (2020, May 1). *Snapshot: Tarek Zeidan on COVID-19 and*

LGBT activism in Lebanon [Video file]. Retrieved June 13, 2020, from

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6jMXjoXGGQ&list=PLnEtFSZ_c06JB2E_SXXmRJ

-KnccrkxWF7&index=17&t=0s

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

Moughalian, Catherine, and Zeina Ammar. "Feminist Movement Building in Lebanon:

Challenges and opportunities." (2019).

Nagel, Caroline. "Reconstructing space, re-creating memory: sectarian politics and urban

    development in post-war Beirut." *Political geography* 21.5 (2002): 717-725.

Nasawiya. "About Us." *Nasawiya A Feminist Collective*, Feb. 2010, www.nasawiya.org/about-

    us/.

Nasr, Nour, and Tarek Zeidan. *As Long as They Stay Away: Exploring Lebanese Attitudes*

    Towards Sexualities and Gender Identities. Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality,

    2015. http://afemena.org/2015/12/04/as-long-as-a-stay-away-exploring-lebaneseattitudes-

    towards-sexualities/

Ribeiro, Filipe N., et al. "Media bias monitor: Quantifying biases of social media news outlets at

    large-scale." *Twelfth International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*. 2018.

Roach, Tom. "Becoming fungible: Queer intimacies in social media." *Qui Parle: Critical*

    Humanities and Social Sciences 23.2 (2015): 55-87.

Saad, B. (2016, November 30). The 5m² Maid's Room: Lebanon's Racist, Gendered

    Architecture. *Failed Architecture*. Retrieved June 13, 2020, from

    https://failedarchitecture.com/the-5m2-maids-room-lebanons-racist-gendered-architecture/.

SMEX. *Online Privacy Threats to Women and LGBTIQ Communities in Lebanon* (pp. 1-21,

    Publication). (2018). Beirut: SMEX. doi:https://smex.org/wp-

    content/uploads/2018/11/OnlinePrivacyThreats_EN.pdf

Steglich, Christian. "Why echo chambers form and network interventions fail: Selection outpaces

    influence in dynamic networks." *arXiv preprint arXiv:1810.00211* (2018).

Tausch, N., Becker, J.C., Spears, R., Christ, O., Saab, R., Singh, P., & Siddiqui, R.N. (2011).

    Explaining radical group behavior: Developing emotion and efficacy routes to normative

and nonnormative collective action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(1),

    129-148. doi: 10.1037/a0022728.

Van Zomeren, M., Spears, R., & Leach, C. W. (2008). Exploring psychological mechanisms of

    collective action: Does relevance of group identity influence how people cope with

    collective disadvantage? *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *47*(2), 353-372. doi:

    10.1348/014466607X231091.

Velázquez, Diego. *Rokeby Venus*. 1647. Painting. National Gallery, London.

YASA For Road Safety. (2020, May). Evaluation of Road Traffic Injuries in Lebanon. Retrieved

    June 14, 2020, from http://www.yasa.org/en/Sectiondet.aspx?id=10&id2=371

Yassin, Nasser. *Violent urbanization and homogenization of space and place: Reconstructing the*

    story of sectarian violence in Beirut. No. 2010/18. WIDER Working Paper, 2010.

Zhang, Weiwu, et al. "The revolution will be networked: The influence of social networking sites

    on political attitudes and behavior." *Social Science Computer Review* 28.1 (2010): 75-92.