Reclaiming The Past v2: Reimagining a Concrete Ruin of Beirut's Past – The Egg

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Reclaiming The Past

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Source: Yasmine Baddoura and Paul Rafih, 2021. Provided by the artists.

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Master:	Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology
Track:	Visual Ethnography
Date:	23-06-2023
Word count:	12296

Abstract

In the Lebanese 17 October Revolution in 2019, protestors occupied *The Egg*, a ruinous landmark of Lebanon's modern past. The Egg hosted many events like grassroots movements, dance raves, and cultural gatherings within months of protests against Lebanon's degrading economic and political circumstances. The thesis argues that localized, sensorial notions of the past are disregarded in general historicist and anthropological accounts of the Global North. Framing the history of the Egg as a *minor literature,* as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1983), the thesis aims to highlight the agency of Lebanese people in co-constructing experiential narratives as powerful alternatives to hegemonic historical narratives in postcolonial context. Borrowing Naeff's (2018) argument, which posits that time is necessarily related to space(s), I examines people's experiences of time-space (i.e., *chronotopes*) with regard to the Egg. I draws on three interventions that I did with local artists to illustrate the potential of chronotopes: (1) a *spacelicitation*, or walking interview in and around the Egg together with a local photographer; (2) a performance inside the Egg with an opera singer; (3) a sound interpretation of the Egg with a music producer. This thesis is one of the first to combine a collaborative and multimodal ethnographic approach to study chronotopes. In line with Blommaert's (2015) definition of polyphony, I argue that the study of multiple chronotopes of the Egg can provide a polyphonic historical account that is an alternative to traditional historicist narratives, because it gives way to the multiple sensibilities and voices that history contains of.

17 October Revolution in Lebanon, Historicity, Minor Literature, Time-Space, Chronotopes, Polyphony, Collaborative Ethnography, Multimodal Ethnography.

Table of Contents

1. Acknowledgements

The last hours of my time in Beirut I visit the spaces that I had spent most of my days. I walk past the bakery where I usually ate *Manakeesh* and talk to the owner to practice my Arabic. I sit at the seaside Corniche to watch the fishermen who face the wind that carries the ferocity of the sea. I meet at Barbar Restaurant to eat my last Lebanese meal with two dear friends from Tripoli. When we walk back to my house, I suddenly hear someone call my name. I look into the alley which leads my eyes to a far-stretched stairways. When I pinch my eyelids to locate the sound, I see a grey man that has the same fashion style as my dad. His neck is draped with a brown velvet scarf, and he wears a woolen pull-over on top of a dark blue jeans. His hair looks grey and had the shape of a hedgehogs spines. His eyes seem always gleaming. The last time I saw him we gave each other a firm hug. On the day of the performance with Noura inside the Egg, I found out that he lives inside the Egg.

When he saw us entering the Egg with five people and equipment that night around six, he was slightly wary whether we would be finished in time. He told us “I might want to go to bed at some point”, and pointed out that he often sent people away if they would come in at this time. Yet when he heard there would be an opera performance, he said “I love opera, OK, come, I will help you to build up the stage”. He was the only visitor of the performance that night.

The moment that I saw him again on the stairs weeks later, I was in dire excitement to talk to him. Not only because he was such an unexpected appearance, but in particular because I wanted to know his name. I remember he told me his name at the performance but I forgot it as my brain was oversaturated that night. This was the moment to ask him. I ran up to him and hugged him, which felt even more magical this time. Finally, at the stairway on my last day in Beirut, he tells me “Dear Zehra, my name is Ghazi”.

I am glad I am able to mention Ghazi’s name now in my acknowledgements. If I had not seen him that day, he would remain the enigma in my memory. There are many who we meet in our lives that remain hidden; behind cameras, in between headphones, on phone calls, or unnamed. Yet we always remember our relationship to them and how they make us feel.

Dunya, your face remained largely hidden in this project, but your presence is felt everywhere. You taught me more about film than any film school could achieve in one month. Without you as warrior camera woman, the film Burst Out *(Fachet Khele)* would not have been possible. I am very surprised but thankful that you did not fall into one of the many holes in the streets of Beirut. To all the bursting out into laughter together – at times to cope with our fatigue.

Bassel, your ears are the backbone of the film. I am sad that I will never work with someone who has a motorcycle of such hulking size as yours. You taught me the tricks of the trade, sometimes with a strict but gentle remark, such as the time I forgot to bring medical tape to a shooting day. Thank you for trusting a director without experience.

I feel endless gratitude to my collaborators. Noura, for being so in tune with your emotions. For putting into words my convoluted feelings for Beirut, wondering together why the place can be so beautiful and cruel at the same time. Jana, for your openness about your dreams and nightmares after recording time. Sami, for showing that being underwhelmed is also to pursue an honest life.

Mark, my supervisor, who showed me what a real teacher should be: receptive to the minds and feelings of his pupils. You made all the anthropological theories on sensorial apprenticeship, decolonizing efforts, and multimodality graspable in our personal lives and research. I am extremely proud to say that Mark Westmoreland supervised my thesis.

The house of this project stands on the conversations with all the Lebanese people in cafés, bars, taxis, abandoned buildings, living rooms, and zoom. I greatly appreciate all the interviews with Khalil, Zeina, Tariq, Yasmine, Aimee, Bassem, Lara, Amin, Tala, Khalil, Ahmad, Jonas, Ayman, Abu, Mohammed, Aya, and Ghazi. With every window that they shared they made a kaleidoscope to look at the Egg.

Nabil and Nassab, you provided me with more knowledge of Lebanon than any history book ever could, and more emotional support than any therapist could give.

Hendrik, my partner, for the late-night exchanges of views within our disciplines on space and time, crossing boundaries between anthropology and physics. We look at life in the same way.

My classmates and teachers at the Leiden University, my two big brothers, my friends, my housemates for supporting me in their own ways.

My father and mother, who always make me feel strong when I think about them.

And to those unnamed that I remember.

2. Introduction

"The exercise of imagination is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show that the way things are is not permanent, not universal, not necessary." - Ursula K. Le Guin, A War Without End

"Wonder can start from trash." - Jeffrey G. Karam and Rima Majed, The Lebanon Uprising of 2019: Voices from the Revolution

The building stands dormant, facing Martyr's square since 1966, forgotten, but never out of sight. Its flanks are voluptuous, roundly curved around a portion of Beirut's air. For some years it seated visitors to watch any modern movie one could think of in the 60's. After that it remained an empty skin, a hollow place. Its rounded exterior bears the scars of 15 years of Civil War, the bullet holes to pattern on its skin. It kept standing. Unmoved. Never forgetting. Three years ago, in 2019, people broke the fences. They colored it with graffiti, danced on the roof, held academic lectures, raved inside, and sang the chants of revolution. It kept standing. Unmoved. Never forgetting. A murderous explosion in 2020 at the port of Beirut. It kept standing. Unmoved. Never forgetting. The older generations refer to the building as *Sabouneh* – derived from the Lebanese word for soap. Others call it *the Dome*, or *the Bean*. But most of all, people say *the Egg*, hinting at the glaring snow-white walls that used to make up its shell.

Yesterday, I was walking at the coast of Beirut together with Dunya, my cinematographer, who had just arrived in Beirut. I wanted to show her the Egg, as this area was shut down completely the last time we were here in 2020. I have already shown the Egg to several people, like my dad and my partner, who came to visit Beirut in the past weeks, as if the building or the city were mine to show. On many of those first walks to the Egg, which for me had almost become a routine, a couple of generic questions arose, such as "What was this before?" and "What is it now?" and "Can you go in?". Some even asked whether the place was haunted, or wondered why people are so attached to it as it looks like it is about to fall apart. For me, the first time seeing the building felt like a tunnel vision, in which my senses only focused on the Egg. I later explained this experience to myself as a conflation of sorts due to the last months of reading and talking about the Egg in the Netherlands. But also while walking there with Lebanese people, they noted that the Egg conveys a certain presence. Whether you walk

near it or observe it from a far, it felt like the Egg was watching you. It was as if the building had a gaze.

In 1966, modern architect Joseph Philippe Karam designed the *The Dome City Center*, colloquially referred to as the Egg (*el-Bayda* in Lebanese Arabic) due to its white color and round shape. The Egg was supposed to be a cinema adjoining a large residential and commercial complex in downtown Beirut. Located in the heart of Beirut, the Egg was one of the 27 cinemas which flourished in an affluent and 'mondaine' Lebanon in the 60's and beginning of the 70's (Andary, 2023). The 24-meter wide and 11-meter high cinema building aimed to seat more than a thousand visitors (Baddoura 2021: 13). It remains unclear for how long the cinema was able to host visitors, but the use of the complex came to end after a few years when the Lebanese Civil War broke out. The Lebanese Civil War lasted from 1975-1990, and was marked by large political issues both regionally and globally, including "the Palestine-Israel conflict, Cold War competition, Arab nationalism, political Islam", further decolonization from France, and sectarianism (Haugbolle 2011, as cited in Baddoura 2021: 14). As downtown Beirut became the main battlefield of the war, the Egg was a visible marker situated on the Green Line – a dividing line of East and West Beirut that separated Christian and Muslim communities. The story goes that, like many other buildings in Beirut, the Egg was used as a shelter during sniper attacks. The great number of bullet holes and the collapse of the two towers, originally designated for the shopping mall, reveal the physical traces of the Civil War period (Baddoura 2021). In contrast to many buildings from the Civil War period, the structure of the Egg remains intact today despite its damaged and neglected appearance. Remaining formally closed off from the public for years, it was only during the 17 October Revolution that the Egg became revived as a central place for political and social resistance in the Lebanese Revolution (Abdul Reda 2019).

Figure 2.1. The Egg. Source: Atlas Obscura, 2020.

Figure 2.2. Visitors watching a film inside the Egg, date unknown. Source: Yasmine Baddoura, 2021.

Figure 2.3. A 3D recreation of how The Dome City Center used to look. Source: Beirut Heritage, 2022.

My engagement with studying the experienced history of the Egg in Lebanon can be traced back to my personal experiences of living in Beirut in 2020. For two and a half months, I worked as a research intern at a NGO called ALEF – Acts for Human Rights – in which I helped write the annual report on human rights issues in Lebanon. In my free time, I was learning Lebanese Arabic and shared time and conversations with students and legal activists still involved in the ongoing 17 October revolution. During these conversations, I heard Lebanese people talk about the Egg several times. I came to understand that it was one of the central places where the revolution had started, but I was not able to visit it as the Internal Security Forces had closed off parts of downtown area as a response to the protests. The fact that it was inaccessible sparked my curiosity for the building, but also obstructed the potential of getting to know more about it. While writing solely on formalized historical and political issues during my internship, I became aware of the distance such formalized narratives can create towards Lebanese people and the international community outside of Lebanon. I also remember well the concerns of my Dutch family and friends who always evoked solicitous remarks and questions involving Lebanon's Civil War period (1975-1990) and the recent Beirut explosion on August 4, 2020. Questions like, "Isn't it dangerous there?" or "Wasn't there a Civil War going on?," suggest an image of Lebanon as a 'war zone'. With the revolution only mentioned – if mentioned at all – as a furtherance of these solicitous questions, stories of conflict and defeat overshadowed the resistance practices I saw during my time in Lebanon in 2020. I learned that formal historical and political narratives are often not all-encompassing, let alone productive, in understanding people's daily lives. I felt the need to learn further about a less formal and more quotidian (hi)story of Lebanon through the perception of its people.

This thesis is composed of two interrelated parts. The current article is complemented by the documentary film *Burst Out (Fachet Khele),* which showcases Lebanese people's experiences of time and space in relation to the Egg. In particular, I worked together with three Lebanese artists: Jana

Khoury, who is a freelance photographer and videographer; Sami Serhan, who produces electronic music in his free time; and Noura Badran, who is training to become an opera singer. They each convey their temporal interpretation of the Egg in relation to their praxes in image, sound, and performance. It is an answer to Hirsch and Stewart's (2005) question: "can a dream, a song, a dramatic performance, a ritual of spirit possession or the perception of a landscape […] be classified as 'histories?'" (266). In trying to answer this question I attend to recent anthropological calls that explore a myriad of modes to study phenomena that were for decennia researched merely through traditional ethnographic methods such as participant observation and interviews. Multimodality, as Westmoreland (2022) contends, is more than merely using multimedia in ethnographic research, but rather aims to attend "to the diverse ways of knowing the human experience" (174). Moreover, I aim to stretch the boundaries of academic disciplines by including audiovisual, sensorial, narrative, performative and architectural approaches to doing anthropology and studying history. In this way, I hope to gather insights on the use of alternative ethnographic modalities to reimagine histories and futures in collaboration with people.

In this article, I explore the local history of the Egg together with Lebanese people with the aim of shedding light on public claims to history and space on local and translocal level. Thereby, I contend that the Egg has become a main spectator of how history, urban space and social justice can go hand in hand. After I draw my conceptual underpinnings, I examine experiential narratives of the Egg and its surroundings with regard to space and time (i.e., present, past, and future) as powerful alternatives to entrenched hegemonic narratives. I will do this by reflecting on three modalities (photography, performance, and sound) that aim to garner knowledge about people's sensorial articulations of time and space.

3. History and space in Lebanon

3.1. Historicity and the Lebanese Civil War

> *"I remember I would always look at that specific building, it would stand out"*
>
> *'"For a long time we thought it was a water reservoir"*
>
> *"The only thing I heard is that soldiers during the Civil War would go there to watch porn movies"*
>
> *"We used to drive past this strangely shaped building daily when were younger and always asked our parents what it was"*
>
> *"They would answer 'oh, it was supposed to be a cinema' and that was it"*
>
> *"Our parents never talked about it"*

The first question I asked to people I interviewed was "how do you know the Egg?". The quotes above echo the majority of the answers which the younger generation of Lebanese replied to this question. As the formal history of the Egg remains largely incomplete and unknown, especially with regard to the events that happened there during the Civil War (1975-1990), these answers are indicative for the opacity of Lebanon's historicity and its materialization in the urban surrounding of downtown Beirut.

Historicity deals with knowledge of events and persons in the past, present and future. In all its different uses, historicity finds one commonality: it determines and documents historical 'facts' in chronological order (Stewart 2016: 80). The historicity of Lebanon abounds with claims by numerous political actors and narratives pertaining the 'authentic' Lebanese history. Characterized by a politics of sectarianization, different sects and international actors have made claims to Lebanon's modern history especially regarding the events that took place during the Civil War (Haugbolle 2011). Indeed, Beydoun (1984) has pointed out that the writing of Lebanese history became increasingly politicized after the Civil War, as Lebanese scholars "were under the heavy influence of political and ideological projects that sought to mould history in their shape" (Beydoun in Haugbolle 2011). In particular, the aftermath of the Lebanese Civil War sparked disagreements on how to tell the national history of modern Lebanon to future generations, with some Lebanese people referring to a "national amnesia" analogous to the state's deliberate refusal to recover the damages and injustices of the Civil War (Barak 2007: 57; Makdisi 1997).

The institutionalization of historical narratives and the contestation of these narratives indicate that historicity is not excluded from realms of the state power (Trouillot 2015 [1995]). Unsurprisingly, the contention that is central to historicity that there is only one historical truth may invite power struggles in which different state and non-state actors lay a claim to a particular historicity. In her ethnographic work surrounding radical democratic attempts as part of the Rojava Revolution in Kurdistan, Dirik (2022) discusses statist and modern histories in juxtaposition with non-state historical epistemologies. The call for an "anti-state … [and] anti-modernist history of the Middle East" (Dirik 2022: 31-32) implies that there is a contested political and formal historicity that claims to hold universally but is not shared by a large group of the Kurdish people. Unavoidably, historicity thus constructs and upholds a division between a political history of the state vis-à-vis contesting histories of people. The government's trivialization of resisting voices with regard to the 2019 October Revolution and the current political climate as well as the absence of transparency regarding the 2020 Beirut Blast marks Lebanon's contested recent past.

On international level, the comprehension of Lebanon's historicity as both war-torn and conflict-ridden is often foregrounded, particularly in the Global North. It fits with hegemonic narratives about the MENA region as former colonies, money laundering havens, or war regions, often framed within failed attempts at modern development (Citino 2011: 313). Echoing Trouillot's (2002 in Stewart 2016: 83) contention on historicity's "North Atlantic universalist" or Western tendencies, anthropologists and historians have questioned its common use as a conceptual tool to understand and study global histories. As long as conceptualizations characterize a prevailing "intellectual colonialism" (Escobar 2020: 84), the monopolization of dominant epistemological paradigms in historiography renders non-Western narratives and acts subservient. Meticulously pointing at the silencing of revolutionary acts of enslaved Haitian people in Western historiography, Trouillot (2015 [1995]) argues that scientific methods used to determine historicity lend themselves to sustain and legitimize historical and political schemes. The cooption of dominant epistemologies thus sustains neocolonial asymmetries in which complex, experiential and layered histories are subordinated to universalized hegemonic narratives. Hence, in a postwar and postcolonial context, it has become challenging for Lebanese people to move beyond national and international hegemonic narratives that dominate Lebanon's modern historicity.

Anthropologists of history and memory as well as postcolonial thinkers have made considerable efforts to challenge hegemonic historical narratives. For example, Trouillot's (2015 [1995]) analyzed the silencing mechanisms that underly the production of history to trace why certain parts of history are left out in the collective memory of the Global North while others are not. Other scholars aim to regenerate historical agency by writing "histories from below*",* in response to formalized narratives of national and international institutions (Cronin 2008; Chalcraft 2006). Pels (1997) furthermore contends

that anthropologists should question what is considered "credible" historiographical knowledge by examining histories that "derive from street art, spirit possession, oral tradition, rumor, gossip and other popular or subaltern forms of knowledge production" (168). Localized histories of Lebanon have been documented in studies revolving around themes such as (pre-)Civil-War memory (Khalaf 1994; Larkin 2012; Haugbolle 2010; Tannoury-Karam 2021), identity (Naeff 2018), visual art (Westmoreland 2013), and more recently the 17 October Revolution (Majed 2020; Karam & Majed 2022). For example, Westmoreland's ethnography on visual art practices in Lebanon (2013) shows the importance of adopting alternative approaches derived from local practices to restore agency in making sense of the past. Accordingly, only through moving away from conventional historiographic methods and epistemologies one may challenge entrenched historical narratives altogether (Stewart 2016: 83). So, *how* does one achieve such agency? How does one challenge hegemonic historical narratives on a national and global level without resorting only to foundational premises of modern historiography such as linearity, universality, and objectivity?

Asking these questions about Lebanon, I arrive at a narrative epistemology as it has the potential to bypass conceptual and methodological challenges of traditional historical and (geo)political writing about the past. Initially advanced in narratology, I deploy Bakhtinian socio-linguistic terminologies of *polyphony* (multiple voices) ([1929] 2013) and *chronotope* (timespace) ([1930] (1981). As scholars have extended these concepts to numerous other disciplines, they argue that chronotopes are a prolific tool in garnering domains of knowledge that modern historiography fails to address (Naeff 2018). Studying people's historical narratives in multimodal ways through art, memory and imagination, chronotopes can illustrate the multitude of temporal and spatial imaginations in which Lebanese people's ownership of history and resistance practices are located. Furthermore, with the emphasis to challenge Eurocentric historiography, I embrace Deleuze and Guattari's (1983) concept of *minor histories* to foreground the connected locality and the spatialized history of the Egg as perceived by Lebanese people. By doing so, I aim to move beyond the Civil War as an all-defining character of Lebanon's modern history by including a more recent history of political and social action during the 17 October Revolution taking place in and around the Egg.

3.2. Whose history? Historical Agency and Minor Histories

Since the Enlightenment, Western scholars rely on the idea that history is something textual that can be arrived at in rational and chronological manner. In the Middle Ages, people commonly orated or wrote down historical events as part of an amalgamation of stories (White 2015 [1973]). 'Making history' is a term that earned meaning only in the late 18th century in France during the formation of the nation state and its expansion under Napoleon (Hirsch and Stewart 2005). As part of Western European nationalistic and political pursuits, the general method for writing historicity became focused on the chronological and factual depiction of events. Foundational to this method is the conviction that history belongs to the past, and that the past and present are distinct from each other, which departed from a view of linear temporal development (Hirsch and Stewart 2005). Within anthropology, Levi-Strauss (1966 [1962]) was one of the first to challenge this notion of historicity in recognizing the multiple ways that societies – and individuals – may relate to the past, present, and future. Anthropological studies since then have aimed to include culturally sensitive and situated knowledge of global and local histories (Harkin 2010). Nevertheless, history was commonly conceived by Western anthropologists as linear and textual, exemplified by Levi-Strauss' way of describing non-western histories in a "historical code" which set out "history as a distinct class of dates (events) organized in a linear series" (Levi-Strauss 1966 [1962], as cited in Hirsch and Stewart 2005: 265). Linear temporal development is thus primarily a construct of Western modernity, which has to a large extent shaped social scientific insights and our conception of history worldwide.

The claim to historical agency in postcolonial studies is often framed within documenting subaltern histories that interrogate hegemonic colonial narratives (De la Cadena 2010). De la Cadena (2010) provides an example of how activists in Ecuador include indigenous epistemologies of non-humans to cause a "moment of epistemic rupture" (343) of long-standing political powers. Similarly, many anthropologists have argued to centralize subaltern literature (Cronin 2008; Chalcraft 2006). However, one prevailing criticism of this view in postcolonial and subaltern studies is that it fails to give agency to minority subjects, as the 'center' still holds the power to decide of what qualifies as 'peripheral' – or subaltern – literature. To counter this criticism, Deleuze & Guattari (1983) argue to move beyond third-world literature and post-colonial literature as they propose the term *minor literatures*. Moving beyond classical works and literary traditions, minor literature refers to great literatures written by a minority in the language of the majority (Deleuze & Guattari 1983). As Deleuze and Guattari (1983) argue that minor literature is necessarily framed within a 'major' language, they recognize that "the minor and the major participate in one shared … space structured by uneven power relations", hereby surpassing the binary of dominant versus subordinate (Lionnet & Shih 2005:7). It is around the notion of minor literature "as making possible a conception of something other than a literature of the

masters" that I position my study on minor histories of the Egg in Lebanon (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 17).

Minor histories have taken shape in many different forms in Lebanon in the last two decades such as in "cultural production, political discourse, [and] urban space" as journalists, novelists, artists, filmmakers, and architects have attempted to share their grappling with Lebanon's war history (Haugbolle 2011). This also resulted into a proliferation of academic publications on Lebanon's past, in which scholars challenge Lebanese historicity through documenting minor narratives on various topics including memory (Khalaf 1994; Haugbolle 2010; 2011; Larkin 2012), visual art (Westmoreland 2013), popular culture (Tarraf 2020), public memorials (Volk 2010), identity (Naeff 2018), and urban redevelopment (Nasr 1993; Makarem 2014). Lucia Volk (2010) identifies claims to national history through spaces in her study of memorials in Lebanon. As she conceives of the memorials in Lebanon as "'events' with a life of their own", Volk pinpoints the dynamic historical character of Lebanon's public sites (Volk 2010: 2). Accordingly, these events and spaces invite different ethno-religious communities in Lebanon to continuously reconstruct a national history of Lebanon embedded in the physical and cognitive surroundings (Volk 2010). Likewise, in a recent article about the 17th October Revolution, Tannoury-Karam (2021) tells the modern history of Lebanon by focusing on The Grand Théâtre, a famous theater built in 1929 during the French Mandate period. By documenting the theater's specific history through a postcolonial and neoliberal lens, she illustrates how power structures of colonialism and capitalism – otherwise greatly intangible constructs –, are materialized in the theater's early construction, former use, and current abandonment. In this way, it has engendered a "reckoning … with a contentious past" (Sana Tannoury-Karam 2021: 25) as well as a claim to Beirut's privatized 'public' space.

3.3. Non-Linear Histories – a Bakhtinian Perspective of Polyphonic Time-Space

The importance of space in structuring social reality is not a new idea, as indicated by Foucault's ([1984] 1986) "heterotopia" or Lefebvre's ([1974] 1976) "socially produced space". Spaces, be it urban places, digital, or media spaces, convey traces of social and historical meaning (Low 2011). Over the last decades, social scientists and historians have examined historical narratives in relation to space. Writing minor histories of spaces, ethnographic studies that document resistance through spaces have played a significant role in adding alternative stories to long-standing hegemonic historical narratives (Deleuze & Guattari 1983; Moore 1998; Singerman & Amar 2006; Low 2011; Volk 2010). Low (2011) indeed discusses space and place as sites for reframing and reimagining history. In revising the ethnohistory of the Spanish American plaza and the claims to this space, she challenges the falsely claimed Eurocentric past in urban space in San José, Costa Rica (Low 2011: 391). In similar vein, Rabbat (2012) considers the function of public space in the modern histories of the Middle East, and frames Middle Eastern public spaces – the mosque (Islamic public space) and plaza (modern public space) –, as markers for civil rights and indigenous self-expression. More recently, a Beirut-based research collective has presented a research platform that includes short films, 3D-modeling and exhibitions, which looks at the urban history of Martyr's square in Downtown Beirut to explore the agency of urban space to accommodate public expression (Aramouny 2023).

As Naeff (2018) points out in her encompassing book *Precarious Imaginaries of Beirut*, Lebanon's historical narratives cannot be captured merely in linear temporalities. Naeff therefore emphasizes the usefulness of Mikhail Bakhtin's ([1930] (1981): 100) literary concept referred to as *chronotopes* – or "time-space" literally translated from Greek. Accordingly, space cannot be articulated without its temporal aspect, seen in the light of the reconstruction of Lebanon's "collective memory, heritage and history .. as well as the anticipation and imagination of a collective future" (Naeff 2018: 53). Taken up mostly by the anthropology of history, memory, and language, chronotopes make a conceptual tool that underscores the importance of studying temporal and spatial aspects in making sense of the past, present and future (Wirtz 2016: 344). This is why we can currently find anthropological literature on "chronotopic identities" (Blommaert & De Fina 2017), "chronotopes of media" (Vokes & Pype 2018), and "chronotopes of desire" (Stasch 2011), to name a few. More relevant for the present inquiry is that chronotopes allow scholars to explain "social reality beyond historical causality" (Naeff 2018: 52), which is why they can prove their usefulness in defying western and politicized historical conceptualizations. As Stewart rightly points out, for historicity to be fully de-westernized, presumptions such as "causality, [and] linearity," (Stewart 2016: 83) have to be deconstructed. Additionally, modern historicity forgets to acknowledge the relational and performative character of

history, which is why Hirsch and Stewart (2005) call for an ethnographically informed historicity.

An ethnographically informed historicity in which chronotopes are foregrounded makes us ask "how do Lebanese people imagine the past, present, and future of the Egg?", "how do temporal and spatial imaginations make a claim to traditional Eurocentric and nationalist-historicist notions of studying and writing about the past?", and lastly "how can non-linear and sensorial notions of time and urban space invite socio-historic transformation?". Bitar's (2022) words in *Reliving the Joy That Exceeds Liberation* may lay sediment to these questions: "today, amid defeats, … our memories, records, and reflections, can serve as catalyst to reawaken our radical imagination that last came to life collectively on October 17" (xi). Following Blommaert's (2011) close reading of the Bakhtin's work, the different ways in which people perceive and experience time and space give rise to "historical and momentary agency" (Blommaert 2015: 109). Blommaert argues that a significant but often disregarded aspect of Bakhtin's initial conceptualization of the chronotope is its "historical-sociological analysis of different 'voices'" (Blommaert 2015: 108). Bakhtin ([1929] 2013) referred to this phenomenon as *polyphony* (literally multiple voices or sounds in Greek), which creates a "multifractal coherence that is achieved through the representation of multiple voices and worldviews". (Bartlett 2012: 14). Vokes and Pype's (2018: 210) ethnography on chronotopes of media in Sub-Saharan Africa resembles this view as they denote the agentive role of chronotopes as specific interpretations of time-space which combined produce a dialogue of different types of meanings, values and actions. Accordingly, the bundling of people's different spatiotemporal imaginations allows for a socio-historic reality with multiple narratives and understandings (Blommaert 2015: 108). Related to Arjun Appadurai's (1996 in Pink 2015: 39) often-cited assertion, in which he suggests that imagination has a collective dimension, shared imagination can result in collective action. Therefore, the number of actors that "invoke" chronotopes influences the scale of agency people have in socio-historical transformation (Blommaert 2015: 110).

In the following, I explain the different modes I deployed to give way to a polyphonic account of the Egg, which examines the spatial and temporal ways in which people have (re-)imagined it in art, memory, and imagination.

4. Towards a multimodal ethnography of time-space

One ethnographic approach to garner knowledge on chronotopes in relation to the Egg is through interviews. In total, I interviewed 20 people including (student) activists, artists, architects, musicians, writers, filmmakers, homeless, tourguides and local residents about their relationship with the Egg. Very concretely, I asked Lebanese people to share their memories or ideas of the present and future of the Egg, and whether or how it is indicative of their current practices and views related to social and political transformation. However, the main methodological insight derived from this research is that chronotopes require an alternative sensibility to doing ethnography and studying histories. Notions of time and space cannot be understood merely through traditional ethnographic approaches such as interviews and participants observation, or through historicist reading that stick to linear and one-sided transmissions of history. As Westmoreland (2013) argues, "disputing the objectivity of realist modes of representation" (720) – present in formal historical narratives dominated by war and conflict – may contribute to forms of resistance. Considering the Egg, due to its lack of function and contested Civil-War past, a formal and textual history is largely absent. Rather, the history of the building is reflected in people's memories and artistic expressions of the Egg and its surrounding landscape. To show this, I draw on three examples of time-space interpretations (i.e., chronotopes) of the Egg and explain in what ways I studied them together with my collaborators. These examples are exhibited in the documentary called *Burst Out (Fachet Khele)* which accompanies this written thesis.

4.1. Shared Anthropology

I accomplished the production of the multimodal research and documentary in collaboration with others. I developed this from the assumption that, in multimodal research, collaboration offers an "inclusive worldview, where diverse constituents can find new mutual ground" (Westmoreland 2022). Collaboration is often prioritized in anthropological studies, alternating between collaborative, participative, engaged, shared or dialogic ethnographies. Because of the multiple applications the term carries I give an understanding of how I collaborated with interlocutors. I did not merely involve interlocutors in theorizing, which can reveal "local viewpoints in the construction of anthropological theory" (Pfister et al. 2014: 26). The collaboration also departed from a methodological exchange, as interlocutors were artists themselves and contributed their praxis to the documentary. The term "shared anthropology" therefore comes closest to the approach to collaboration I deployed, in which interlocutors share theoretical *and* methodological authority over the research (Buckley 1987). First of all, I collaborated with photographer and aspiring videographer Dunya Zita, a friend who was also in Lebanon with me in 2020. She visited Beirut for four weeks and had the role of cinematographer. Second, I worked together with Bassel Moussa, a local audio operator to record audio during shooting

days. Lastly, I collaborated with the three artists (Jana Khoury, Noura Badran, Sami Serhan) who all contributed their memory, imagination, and artworks to the documentary as a way of showing their time-space interpretation of the Egg. While I saw my role as director and researcher mostly as a broker that coordinated the collaboration, the shape of this role also mirrored much of Pink's (2015: 104) "sensory apprenticeship", in which I attuned myself to the multisensory ways of knowing the Egg as interpreted by my collaborators.

Figure 4.1. From left to right: Bassel, me, and Dunya at a shooting day at the Egg.

4.2. Challenges to Sharing Authority

From the start, I had conceived this project as an exploration of shared authority with my interlocutors, as sharing authority is an integral part of ethical collaboration. Unexpectedly, I found that shared authority is a term that is sometimes difficult to uphold.

First, I realized that the coming-into-being of a shared authority is partially shaped by the manifestation of my gender, race, and class (Ruby 1991). As a white Dutch person studying at Leiden University, I was granted considerable privilege. I had the financial capacity to study, to travel to Lebanon and live off a government's loan which enabled me to make a documentary. Other collaborators did not share this privileged position. Sami, Noura, and Jana, are all Lebanese, Bassel is Lebanese-Palestinian. They noted that it was not likely that they could travel outside of Lebanon and that it was often hard to cope financially in a country where there is unprecedented economic inflation and barely any government assistance. Dunya is Dutch-Moroccan but holds a Dutch passport, as she was born in the Netherlands.

With a Dutch passport and a stable income of freelance jobs, Dunya was able to work for four weeks in Lebanon with me without getting paid. The collaboration thus revealed the "asymmetries of power implicit in a range of relationships" that me and interlocutors are embedded in (American Anthropological Association, 2012).

Second, after the field it proved more difficult to share my authority over the project, in particular with respect to "representational authority". Representational authority in audiovisual research includes taking distance from your research goals as much as possible and centering the perspectives, values and ideas of your participants (Marion & Crowder 2013: 6-7). Although I foregrounded my interlocutor's perspectives and methods in the field, I am aware that my audiovisual output does not literally represent my interlocutor's views on time and space with regard to the Egg. Rather, it is an interpretation of their views, which I advanced after the field for the sake of the creation of a storyline as I was editing the film. Vice-versa, I remember many moments in the field, at the film's shooting days, where I had to give up authority all together. For instance, standing next to Dunya, as camerawomen, and Bassel, as audio operator, I often felt like an imposter, as they both had much more knowledge and experience with regard to producing film than I did. Only by acknowledging that I did not have the knowledge to assure authority in these moments, I was able to cope with this feeling.

Nevertheless, sharing authority gave rise to a peer-to-peer learning environment where we influenced each other's viewpoints and practices. As Dunya says, in an interview that I did after our fieldwork period, "this project was different than the things I did before as it really became something collective. There are several people that contributed from their own discipline, either from in or outside academia". Furthermore, I found that, despite power differences, our intensive cooperation lay bare shared experiences and outlooks, such as being artists, insecurities about the future, anti-capitalist views, and of course a common interest in the Egg.

5. Chronotope 1: *Spacelicitation* of a Revolution

5.1. Walking Interview, or *Spacelicitation*, With Jana

Jana Khoury is a 25-years-old Lebanese photographer and videographer, and lives in Beirut since she was ten years old. The first chronotope reflects Jana's notions of time and space with an emphasis on the photos she took at the first night of the 17 October Revolution in Lebanon.

Inspired from urban anthropology, a walking interview is a go-to ethnographic method in order to understand a person as situated in their environment. The walking interview, or here referred to as *spacelicitation*, helps to gain insights on interlocutor's spatial and temporal knowledge as they talk about the places they are walking through during the interview (Pink 2008). It constitutes "an imaginative practice" giving the ethnographer the chance to take part in the worlds and landscapes of the people they do research with (Moretti 2016: 93). Moreover, being present in spaces with interlocutors may yield affective gestures that photo or sound elicitation cannot necessarily elicit (Pink 2008).

Following her "trip down memory lane", as Jana referred to it, we followed the places and moments where Jana took photographs of the Egg and its surroundings at the first night of the 17 October Revolution in 2019. In our first talk, I asked her to select ten photographs of the places that she had gone that night. Together, we revisited the spots where these photos were taken, while I asked her if she could explain to us what she remembered from those locations, like what kind of events had happened there and how she had felt at that moment (see figure 5.1). At another instance, we filmed together the ten prints of photographs in a way that would visualize and do justice to her memory in terms color, angle, and movement (see figure 5.2). This follows Grossman (2013) plead to engage with visceral aspects of memory, as it departs from "'anti-representational' principles, challenging conventional logics of space and time" (200). Both the spacelicitation and collaborative filming garnered relevant temporal, spatial, and experiential knowledge with regard to the 17 October Revolution. While the formal talks and photo elicitation had raised more conceptual findings, our walk near and inside the Egg had brought up more feelings and nuanced gestures.

Figure 5.1. Dunya (left) and Jana (right) at El Amir Bachir Street at the location where Jana's first photograph of the printed selection was taken.

Figure 5.2. Dunya (left) and Jana (right) as we are filming the photographs that Jana selected for the documentary.

While revisiting the night of the revolution through the memory of her footsteps, Jana tells me repeatedly that she remembers the exact locations where she took the photos, as well as the movement of her body. Additionally, she indicates how strange it is to be at these places again. For example, when she enters the Egg, she merely says, “This is weird”, and sighs deeply. In other places, she says phrases like it was “Full with people here” during the revolution and “Now it is dead”, which is why “It almost feels like it [the revolution] didn’t happen”. This dissonance with regard to the experience of the spatial environment in different moments in time, and the feelings that relate to it, gives rise to phenomenological understandings of the body, space and time. On the one hand, it hints at embodied knowledge vis-à-vis space. As Low (2003) argues, coining the term “embodied space”, we relate our body to the space(s) around us. While “in the anthropology of space and place … the body has been so often overlooked” (16), embodied space acknowledges the ways in which people interpret space in experiential, emotional and cognitive ways. However, something that Low does not regard thoroughly in her concept of embodied space, is the role of time and our perception of it. In this light, it is relevant to note the way in which Jana conveys her memory of the revolution, where the perception of changes in space correspond to her experience of changes in time.

We walk further past one of the empty residential buildings, as Jana talks about the reasons of the revolution, and mentions that people were “Protesting the new, the gentrified”. With the Egg standing as a stark contrast in between these new buildings, I ask her what the Egg represented during the revolution, to which she responds: “It is interesting how a structure made this [Revolution] possible, like, it inspired so many people. It is not just the photos that are important, but being inside and how it felt to be inside too, and thinking what this place could have been if this place was used”. The spacelicitation with Jana reveals the momentary presence of thousands of people in Downtown Beirut and the Egg, which highlights a broader context where the reclamation of urban space was both a means and an end to the demands for justice in the 17 October Revolution.

5.2. Placarding The Past: Urban Redevelopment As an Obstacle To Social Justice

In the first weeks of January, I almost daily embarked on walks towards the Egg. I had to cross one of the most central intersections in downtown where Gouraud street and George Haddad road meet, around hundred meters away from the Egg. This intersection is the only place in downtown I clearly recognized from my last visit in January 2020 because most of other places in downtown had at that point been shut down with barricades and fences by the ISF. On one of its corners, now mostly accessible, I was confronted with a succession of more than 200 '#theymatter' portraits which stretched as far as Martyr's square. I found out later that these paintings were made by citizens in April 2022 (see figure 5.3) to make visible the victims that died during 2020 Beirut Explosion. Being reminded of the great frustrations that Lebanese people had expressed to me, the Lebanese government has to this day not launched an appropriate investigation into how the stock of ammonium nitrate entered the port and above all who is accountable for it. Every time I passed this corner I felt my heart contracting, entering a sudden realism that my daily fieldwork occupations in Beirut had helped ignoring. Yet on one Friday in late January, something had changed to the wall of portraits. Now the wall was covered with sable brown paint, the names of the victims Tippexed out as if correcting a minor grammar mistake. As I took the photo (see figure 5.4), two men were standing in front of the wall, gluing a shiny white placard on the wall. The placard announced a luxurious apartment residence, fully equipped and renovated.

Figure 5.3. A tweet that calls for volunteers to help painting portraits of the victims that died from the 2020 Beirut Blast. Source: Twitter, Beirut.com, 4th of April, 2022.

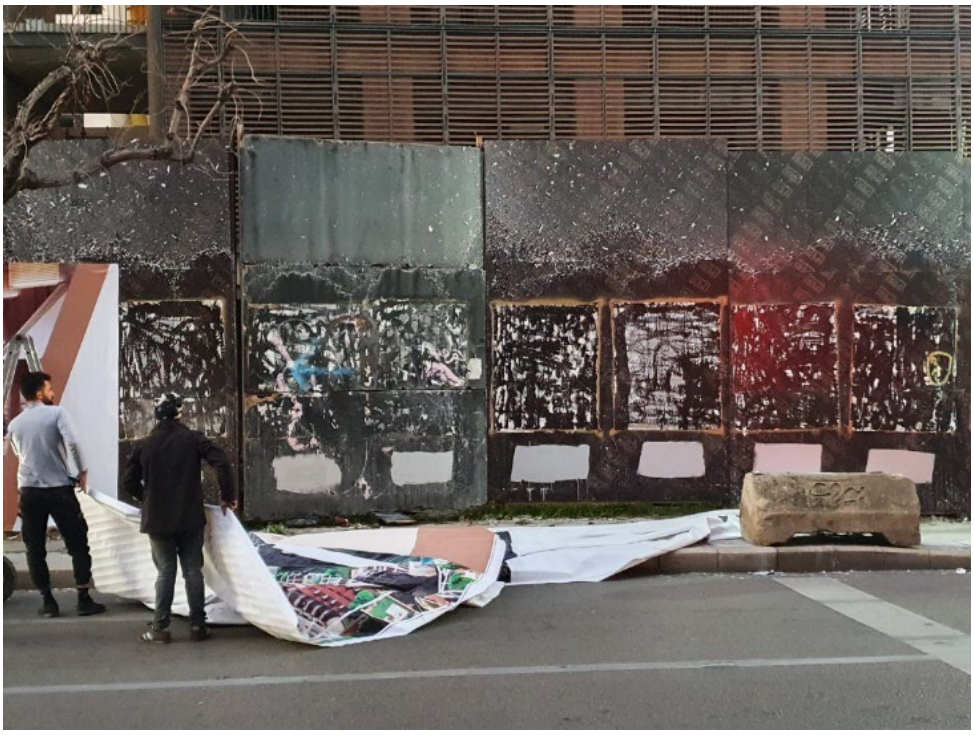

Figure 5.4. Two persons are covering up the wall with the paintings of people that died during the 2020 Beirut Blast.

The area in which the Egg is situated, Beirut Central District, or downtown Beirut, is since the Civil War in hands of Solidere. Solidere is a joint-stock company established in 1992 under the Council of Development and Reconstruction, which continued under supervision of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in the years that followed. Although the initial purpose of the CDR was to re-erect the cultural and commercial infrastructure as well as public transportation system that marked downtown Beirut before the Civil War, the first years after the Civil War characterized excessive demolition of damaged buildings (Makdisi 1997; El-Hibri 2021). As Makdisi (1997) illustrate, "more irreparable damage has been done to the center of Beirut by those who claim to be interested in salvaging and rebuilding it" (674) than during the Civil War. Counterintuitively, the main function of Solidere's redevelopment plans was not to rebuild downtown, but to manage and sell capital, rendering the faith of downtown Beirut to private interests of local and foreign investors (El-Hibri 2021; Kanafani 2017). In 2010, Solidere's yearly income was equal to nearly a quarter of Lebanon's GDP (Corbo 2020). With no to little regard to Beirut's urban history, Solidere prioritized the replacement of damaged historical buildings and infrastructures from the Civil War with new constructions instead of restoration (Ward, 2019). While many more buildings could have been repaired, only 260 buildings – of the two million square meters of property that Solidere owns – were deemed recoverable, inviting interested parties for their renovation (Makdisi 1997). Solidere's post-war reconstruction plans shaped therefore to a large extent Lebanon's "spatial narrative" (Makdisi 1997: 666).

The Egg is one of the buildings in downtown Beirut, among most notably The Grand Théâtre, Burj el Murr, Holiday Inn Beirut, and Piccadilly Theatre, that has yet to be restored. Abandoned and heavily damaged, the Egg and these buildings alike stand as alien landmarks of Lebanon's past in contrast to the perpendicular skyscrapers accommodating transnational companies and residential apartments. As Corbo (2020) describes, Solidere has sold the land where the Egg is located to ADIH, an investment corporation based in Dubai. Since then several plans have been proposed for its remodeling, in line with the 'Dubai-fication' (Corbo 2020: 222) of downtown Beirut. For example, financed by Saudi Arabian and Chinese investors, French architect Christian de Portzamparc's proposed an architectural design of the Egg as part of a 5-star hotel (see figure 5.5). Meanwhile, the Egg has witnessed the ways in which downtown Beirut has become inaccessible for the wider public, visible in the barricading and militarized securitization of empty landscapes and the numerous high-end stores primarily catered to wealthy tourists from the Gulf States. Less visible but just as pertinent is the inaccessibility that lies in the exclusion of Lebanese people from the knowledge and participation in past, present, and future narratives regarding the urban tapestry of downtown Beirut. Just like most Lebanese people I talked to indicated, downtown has become a "ghost town", skeletonized to Solidere's neoliberal cardboard cutout. Placarding portraits of victims of the 2020 Beirut Blast with gentrification ads is just a pars pro toto of Beirut's urban (re-)development strategy that overwrites public narratives addressing past, present and future claims to justice.

Figure 5.5. Christian de Portzamparc's architectural design called 'non construit' for the Egg and its surrounding area. Source: Christian Deportzamparc Website.

Figure 5.6. A graffiti tag that reads 'End Solidere 2019' on a wall next to Mohammad al-Amin Mosque and the Egg.

5.3. Space-Making and Reclaiming The Egg

"We shot our music video for the song 'destined to rise' inside the Egg during the 2019 revolution. A lot of people like the Egg because it symbolizes resistance. We chose the Egg because it symbolized organized chaos, for me at least. Because have you been there during the 2019 Revolution? I will give you an example of how we took the place to film it. You would go there, like physically go there, and look who is coordinating, as someone was going to be coordinating it. And this was kind of a grass-roots thing, there was nothing official, there is just someone there who says: 'there is going to be a lecture here at 6'. It's just people organizing it. It's not just one person in charge, you just see who's there, and who has the schedule. I still can't understand how they come up with the idea of a schedule, despite the fact that there is nothing there physically to write the schedule on. So you just go there … So we went there in the morning, and there was no one inside, but someone said we had to finish before 2 o'clock because they would have I don't know if it was a yoga class or a lecture that day.

- Bassem Deaïbess, Lead singer of the Lebanese metal band Blaakyum

"*The Egg was used by everyone like never before. I remember there were people who had the argile (i.e., water pipe) and doing BBQ, others that were playing around football. I remember I would go in the mornings, and partake in the recycling and cleaning, because you had to sustain it, you cannot leave the trash.*" – Ahmed Housseini, Architecture student

The protests that preluded the Lebanese Revolution, or Lebanese Thawra, on the 17th of October in 2019 were initially in response to the government's announcement of new set of taxes, including a Whatsapp tax, and the government's impotence of handling wildfires that had hit the country that week. Months of nation-wide protests followed, with thousands of people opposing long-lasting financial instabilities, such as devaluation of the Lebanese pound, short supply of essential goods, and political failures with regard to the Syrian refugee crisis, corruption, and deep sectarian divide (Karam & Majed 2022). To this day, there are no concrete improvements regarding these compounded issues. Many Lebanese people who I talked to equate the current deteriorating political and economic situation with the failure of the revolution – if they would even still call it a revolution.

At the same time, people have intermittently claimed the Egg as a public place through their presence and self-governance practices. In an interview, Amin Sammakieh indicates that he visited the Egg in the 90's as an underground meeting space that hosted music concerts and raves, and art exhibitions. Additionally, many others tell me that they trespassed the barriers during their adolescence, using it as a hang-out spot with friends, and do activities such as skating or free-running. Most notably,

people's presence at the Egg occurred during the 17 October Revolution, when people reclaimed downtown area, and organized numerous events at the Egg. A prominent event that made it into the news was when Charbel Nahas, economics professor and former member of parliament, on October 24, in 2019, held a lecture in the Egg called "Capitalism in Crisis" (Ward 2019). Amongst other topics, he discussed with students effective tactics for shutting down traffic. Many informal events, including music performances, film screenings, sport classes and hang-outs also occurred at the Egg in this period. As people appropriated a private building as a shared and lived space, the Egg marks a material and symbolic enabler of mobilization and political organization (Harb 2021). Corbo (2020) argues that the Egg functioned as a condenser of bottom-up space-making practices, which contained the voice of the people's narrative against government malfunctioning and neoliberalist urban space. Partaking in such space-making practices, people experienced first-hand the momentary agency in shaping the spatial narrative of downtown Beirut according to public imaginaries.

Figure 5.7. Charbel Nahas gives a lecture on "Capitalism in Crisis" inside the Egg. Source: Omar Darwish Photography.

6. Chronotope 2: Performing The Past

6.1. Performance Agnus Dei of Verdi's Requiem with Noura

I strike her eyelids with a tiny pillow full of eyeshadow. The only light that reveals our faces in the darkness is an egg-shaped bulb of a LED that I got from my landlady, in case the electricity goes off in my apartment. Noura is wearing the pink-red dress that we bought at a local vintage shop in Mar Mikhael last week. "Which shoes shall I wear? I brought these two pairs. These are way too small", Noura says when she points at the low-cut black heels decorated with a leather t-shaped mini-belt. She continues, "The other one is much more comfortable but it shows my toe nails and I didn't do them. They look horrible". I try to respond supportively by saying she should choose the most comfortable one, but I notice I sound unconvincing to a woman that is extremely self-conscious and critical about her own artistic forthcoming. Whilst during our last talk she still seemed spontaneous and care-free in discussing her imagination of what the Egg could have been and how this could be visualized in a performance, now she was doubting herself and her upcoming entrance on the stage of the Egg. Except for the crew and camera, there will be no audience physically present at the Egg. Still, she is scared that people will hear the self-inflicted flaws in the requiem she chose to sing today. This afternoon when we were setting everything up, she started talking about memories of the war, of growing up in a place that was in ruins. She said it was very difficult growing up in Beirut. It was difficult not being able to talk with her parents about the Civil War as they were silent about what had happened. "OK, yallah, I will wear these ones, but just make sure you don't film my feet from close up", she says. I walk her down the long concrete stairs towards the place in which the acoustics were best according to her. The light turns on and Noura is standing in the middle of the Egg. I tought about the words she told me in one of our earlier conversations. She told me that this performance was a way to relive a past that she was never able to live, in the Lebanon we never knew.

Noura is 37 years-old, and grew up in Beirut. While initially a water-color artist, she aspires to become an opera singer, which is why in recent years she focuses on training her voice as much as possible. The second chronotope reflects Noura's notions of time and space in the preparations and performance of *Agnus Dei* of *Verdi's Requiem*, which we organized together inside the Egg.

Imagination can include conceptions about the future, the present, and even the past as in memory (Pink 2015: 40). In line with the recently emerging ethnography of imagination, anthropologists have explored in which ways performances can be used as an ethnographic methodology to study or convey aspects of people's imagination (Kazubowski-Houston & Magnat 2018). Sharing much with a performative documentary approach, as described by Nichols (2017), a performance has the ability to

move away from “a realist representation of the historical world and toward poetic liberties, more unconventional narrative structures, and more subjective forms of representation” (132). The imaginative aspect questions traditional norms what is considered as valuable and informative knowledge and how we can garner this knowledge. The approach is similar to what Eliane Esther Bots does in her short documentary In Flow of Words. At the IMPAKT festival in December 2022, Bots (2022) explains during a Q&A session that her role as a filmmaker is merely to facilitate a stage on which interlocutors can play out a performance in the way that they indicate as the most desirable narration form. A key element to performances is performativity, in which “people’s bodily movements, gestures, and expressions” serve as enactments of the social (Mauss 1973 [1935] in Kazubowski-Houston & Magnat 2018: 362; Lawrence 2020). Kazubowski-Houston and Magnat (2018) argue that performances propose a new mode of ethnographic representation, as it deals with the performativity of performance instead of the performativity of quotidian experiences – the latter usually studied through more traditional observational ethnography.

The opera performance aimed to provide a stage for Noura to present the Egg in her own desired way, in which we co-created the setting that mimics her chronotopical view of the Egg. During the weeks of preparation, we sat together multiple times to discuss the details of the performance, including the decor, the lighting, her appearance, the song, and the best (acoustic) use of the space (see figure 6.1). The performance invited us to think together about the possible function of the Egg, and tried to show Noura’s perception of the Egg. Noura chose the song Agnus Dei of Verdi’s Requiem, because “it is a song about death”, in Noura’s words. With a reference to her growing up at the end of the Civil War, and growing up with a normality of destroyed and abandoned places, Noura said that the Egg triggered a lot of post-war images. She therefore indicated that the performance should signify her “morose” feelings regarding the Egg’s past. At the same time, she emphasized that she identifies with these abandoned places, in similar way as she identifies with “rust and dust”. In addition, she told me that it felt somehow magical to perform in the Egg, as it had never been officially open for use. She explained that the Egg evokes feelings of nostalgia for her, as the Egg reminded her of a pre-war Beirut where such places flourished. The use of the space as an opera stage showed what the abandoned structure could have been: an opera theater. In this way, her view of the Egg shows why reimaging the Egg’s past simultaneously suggests Noura’s view as to what the Egg could be in the present and the future.

Figure 6.1. Noura is trying out locations to see what place is best to do the performance with regard to the acoustics in the Egg.

Figure 6.2. Me (left) doing Noura's (right) make-up inside the Egg, some minutes before the opera performance starts.

6.2. Imagination and Reclamation

Schäuble (2016) argues that imagination lies at the foundation of all forms of agency in changing socio-historical realities, as imagination determines "fields of possibilities" (Appadurai 1996 in Schäuble 2016: 3). Accordingly, imagination and art can enable forms of access to what is otherwise excluded from physical reality. Schäuble (2016) furthermore argues that new forms of media including film, photography and sound have a great capacity to convey sensational and ineffable components of people's imagination. With regard to the Egg, people have continued to reimagine the Egg in numerous media spaces, despite the fact that the building has been inaccessible most of the time since its origin. Given that "media spaces can themselves be the places visited" (El-Hibri 2017:29), people took ownership over the Egg through artistic expressions, visualized in dozens of architectural and graphic designs, (grafitti) paintings, and audiovisual media like film, photos, and music video.

For example, Aimee Merheb's (2009) graduation film documents a citizen initiative to save the Egg from demolition, while she reflects on the function and history of the Egg, and her own relationship to it. It even reached to a point that citizens made a Facebook page in 2009 called *Eggupation*, campaigning to save the Egg as a cultural heritage site (Executive 2009). During the Revolution, people also created numerous artworks related to the Egg, such as Zeina Badran's (2019) painting, as she makes use of fabrics and natural element to create patterns with ink (see figure 6.3). For the ink painting of the Egg she used medical bandage, about which she says in an interview that it symbolizes "pain and healing" with regard to the events that took place during the 17 October Revolution. Others have envisioned the Egg's future by creating architectural designs, such as Tala Zabian's 3D-design of the Egg as a new art, film and music venue. Even people have pictured the Egg in an imaginary space and time such as in the artworks of George Daou's (see figure 6.5) collage Egg, or Mazen Kerbaj UFO-Egg (see figure 6.6). Or, El Chanti's (2021) short animation film, in which three buildings in Downtown Beirut including the Egg, Piccadilly Theater and Beyt Beirut are personified and start a conversation with each other about Beirut's history. All these examples underscore people's agency and participation as to (re-)imagining what the Egg was in the past, what it represents now, and what it can be in the future.

Figure 6.3. “Thawra” by Zeina Badran. Provided by the artist.

Figure 6.4. Architectural design of The Egg proposed by Tala Zabian. Provided by the artist.

Figure 6.5. The Egg in the "D-scapes Series" by George Daou, 2013. Source: Daou.info

Figure 6.6. “Two Faces” by Mazen Kerbaj. Source: Plan BEY.

7. Chronotope 3: Stuck In Time

7.1. Evoking The Sound Of The Egg With Sami

Sami is 32-years old and has lived in Beirut all his life. Sami started producing electronic music a few years ago. While currently unemployed, he wants to start a career in sound design. The third chronotope shows Sami's notions of time and space with regard to the Egg in sound.

As anthropologists have mainly focused on visual and textual methods, the question 'but what of the ethnographic ear?' that Clifford asked in 1986 remains relevant today (Clifford 1986 in Erlmann 2020: 1). Auditory methods may invigorate the multisensory experiences and imaginative lifeworlds of interlocutors as well as audiences (Schäube 2018). Here I was inspired by *Raw Session* by As Talavistas (2022), where the filmmaker combines experimental Baile funk music from Rio de Janeiro with explosive strobe lights to cast the audience imaginatively into the setting of the lives of queer people of color in Brazil. Harris (2015) argues that, while sound elicitation is often glossed over by ethnographers, it in fact may open up "oral histories in potentially surprising ways" (3). Furthermore, sound and music can be used as a sense-making-tool to reveal people's notions of time and space, as it "imbues imaginative time and space with shape and feel, giving a sense of height, depth and extension where, … for example, clusters of tones can appear as 'open', 'hollow', 'filled' and 'stretched'" (Stone-Davis 2015: 2). As such, I deployed sound as a method with Sami to interpret the Egg in aural, temporal and spatial ways, including recording sounds together at the Egg and audiovisual elicitation.

Recording the Egg

In most ethnographic studies that include field recordings, the ethnographer takes audio samples of people's environments and/or subsequently elicits affective responses to these samples. In this view, one sees sound as a static object, where it is the task of the ethnographer to record or present it, and for the interlocutors and audience to listen to it. It frames sound as something out there, that can merely be elicited or evoked instead of produced by interlocutors. According to Yanagisawa (2021), anthropologists have overlooked the importance of sound as a creative and analytic research tool. While sound is often recorded without interlocutors, ethnographers omit important concepts as they exclude the listening perspective of the people they study with (Yanagisawa 2021; Feld 2004). While in general anthropological recordings the assumption prevails that we passively interpret the world around us rules, the fundamental distinctive character of *recording with* interlocutors is that it views interlocutors as active partakers in the co-production of research. Therefore, Sami's field recording

and sound producing acts shows that sound can be used *as a means to* make sense of the spaces around us.

Sami recorded the sounds which he created with concrete and metal elements that he found inside and attached to the Egg. With the focus on recording sound, he stops at several places in and outside the Egg and frequently explains that it difficult to record concrete sounds as there is too much noise from traffic. He further refers to the inutility of the Egg. When I ask him what he would do with the Egg if he could determine its purpose, he says half-jokingly: "I would destroy it", and continues saying that the Egg "is part of a past that has outlived itself". Accordingly, Sami conceives the past of the Egg in such a way that marks its worthlessness in present and future function.

Sonic elicitations

Sami and I used sound elicitation in two ways. First, we listened to sounds together as part of a workshop that I organized at the end of the fieldwork period. In this collective elicitation session, Noura, Jana and Sami participated. We discussed the framework of the documentary and how each artist's contribution to the documentary should interrelate. Sound was central to eliciting affective and conceptual understandings. For example, at some point we listened to protest sounds of the 17 October Revolution in 2019. Sami, Noura, and Jana envisioned entirely different images with the sound, but agreed whilst listening back to these sounds, that the revolution felt much like a spectacle. It engendered a conversation about how violence and protests can be represented in audiovisual media, if it can even be represented at all.

Second, Sami gave his interpretation in sound to the visual footage that Dunya and I shot of the Egg, and to the various interpretations of the Egg in visual media, such as the ones shown in chapter 6.2. He advanced this audiovisual elicitation through creating a soundtrack for the documentary film. In an effort to understand his production process better, we went to a studio where Sami comes more often. He explained how he generally makes music and how his view of the Egg shapes the composition of the soundtrack for the Egg (see figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1. Screen monitor of camera showing Sami as he starts the music production process for the soundtrack of the Egg.

In contrast to many other Lebanese people I spoke to, Sami's view of the Egg is not that of a transformative and hopeful place. Sami articulated during the production process that, "The state of the Egg feels like it is something that is stuck in time, not really moving. So I feel the sound [of the soundtrack] itself will carry that feeling, just like a bit claustrophobic in a way, like there is no real motion". In the collective elicitation session, Sami noted that "Beirut is like a giant Egg. Being inside the Egg feels the same as being in Beirut, they are both hollow and prone to destruction". Significantly, the feelings that Sami expresses about the Egg do not only comprise of a spatial narrative, but also denote a temporal narrative. Describing Beirut as a place that is prone to destruction, it resonates with Naeff's (2018) point on the convergence between Beirut's history of volatility and its materialization in the urban surroundings. She refers to the term "loss of confidence in the place" that arises from a circumstance of continuously being on the brink of imminent violence, given the unsafe urban environment and the government wrongdoings. This often results into "a numbed and distracted disposition, because … [it] prevents a self-assured engagement with the socio-spatial environment" (Naeff 2018: 52). Others have described similar loss of confidence in the place, however with regard to the modern past of the Egg. Andary (2023), for instance, discusses her detachment of nostalgia towards The Egg and other pre-war cinemas in Beirut, as she argues that it represents a neoliberalist and centralist period of a modern pre-war Beirut. These findings show how physical space can confront us with affects about the past, present and future, including anxiety and disappointment.

7.2. What 7 Visits To General Security Headquarters Taught Me About Anxiety In Public Spaces In Lebanon

I stand in a long queue where dozens of Lebanese people are waiting with papers in their hands. To enter, I have to give up my phone to one of the officers. The only instruction the officer gives me is to go to the third floor. After some searching around, I enter another building which can only be reached by crossing an enclosed parking lot where officers are drinking coffee and talking noisily. On the third floor of this other building, I enter a long hallway of cream white walls that give off a betraying scent of cigarette smoke. Boxes stuffed with folders and sheets of paper cover the floor. The hallway has numerous rooms where civil servants dressed in army suit are smoking, clearly not working. “Wrong room”, they all tell me indifferently. One civil servant stands up and sends me to a little room where I meet a giant of a man, even though I am in reality as tall as him. A woman, in a slim fit black dress, stands next to him, smoking a thin vogue cigarette. The man looks for ten seconds at my ‘intended script’ and then he tells me: “the documentary looks fine, but with whom are you making this?”. “I am making it together with a Lebanese guy”, I say. “OK”, he says imperiously, “that guy needs to be here, you should come with someone with a Lebanese passport”.

Some days later I go to the GSH together with Bassel, who has a Lebanese-Palestinian passport, which hopefully suffices. When we walk in, again we have to leave our phones behind. We walk up the stairs and I feel that Bassel is nervous like me. We go into the same long hallway as before where people are leading us to the wrong room about three times. This time a woman is handling our case. She looks different than the other officers, as she is unarmed and not in army clothes, dressed up as perfection. She is kind to us, but tells us that we first need to get an ‘artist card’ at the Union of Artists, one minute away from the GSH. We go outside and follow the directions of passing army officers, but every time we reach the assigned spot we don’t see anything that looks like a Union of Artists office. We decide to take Bassel’s motorbike in order to follow the Google Maps location of the office. After ten minutes driving the phone tells us we have arrived. We face a small office that looks like someone’s home. Inside there is a woman who lets us in for five seconds in hospitable manner, then tells us that the office we are looking for is actually four buildings away. We go outside and made a joke about the elevators not working in Lebanon and how lucky we are that this one does. The next building also feels more like a residential apartment than a public building. I see no clear signs to indicate its function. The entrance has a tiny garden, ornamented with campy objects and a meandering river. The hall is very small; one hall and one room for this supposed ministry of Arts and Culture. Two people are sitting in a hazy office looking rather happily surprised by our entrance. We are at the Union of Artists, but they have never heard of an artist card before, so they send us back to GSH. When we arrive at GSH, the woman that helped us earlier says that they will call us within six days with more information about

the permit. When we walk out, Bassel tells me that the permit would have been arranged in two minutes if one is a known film producer in Lebanon who has the ties with the right people.

Although downtown Beirut is in principal a public space, permission to film in this area is to be requested from the Secretary of General Staff of the Army Command, according to the website of the Lebanese Army. Whether it was actually needed after all, remains unclear. Some filmmakers in the field urged me to get a film permit in order to be able to film in downtown Beirut, others told me it is not necessary as sweettalking your way out of it on shooting days suffices (i.e., pulling the student card). To be better safe than sorry, I tried to request it at the General Security Headquarter, as outlined above. In total, it would take me seven visits to obtain the film permit. This repeated experience, which ran parallel to my occasional fieldwork activities related to the Egg, made me realize something about public spaces like government buildings and ministries in Lebanon. Resonating Low's (2011) point on "spatializing culture", spaces may uncover hidden systems of power concerning pre-negotiated social hierarchies that determine the exclusion and inclusion of certain (groups) of individuals. Paradoxically, one is forced to query who owns a 'public space' such as the GSH, and how one relates to the person or group that owns it. This relationality sets the extent of inclusion into the space (i.e., are you one of them) and consequently establishes the functionality of the space (i.e., obtaining a permit or not).

These intermittent feelings of anxiety when approaching 'public' spaces is as relevant for the Egg and the surrounding area in downtown Beirut. The Egg is encircled with a large green fence, put up by Solidere after the 17th October Revolution. The adjacent square, which is mostly occupied by cars and pigeons nowadays, is formally a public space but one is never sure whether one is allowed to be there, or whether someone is watching. There have been cases that undercover security guards were present to guard the area when I or interlocutors entered the square close to the Egg. Notwithstanding, I frequently saw people going into the fences of the Egg, as some parts were broken open, during my time in Lebanon. Some days, two homeless men who found a temporary home inside the Egg, were sitting on the lowest floor with blankets surrounding them. Other days, groups of tourists under accompanied by a guide, walked in and looked at the graffiti walls inside the Egg. It even came to the point that I saw Aya, a local tour guide who I interviewed about the Egg, run inside the Egg, while she had asked me the day before which documents were needed to film inside the Egg. These observations imply that Egg on the one hand is a site where people continue to be confronted with the anxiety of securitized and barricaded public space, while on the other hand a site where people break barriers by entering such areas, through physical as well as media spaces. Indeed, as Low (2011) argues "space and spatial relations subjugate or liberate groups and individuals from the state and other sources of power and knowledge" (Low 2011: 17). While the Egg shows clear traces of an oppressive past and

present, Lebanese people have accomplished moments of liberation through reclaiming the Egg, which may signals its transformative capabilities in the future.

8. Conclusion

The three chronotopes show where people's resistance to local and global hegemonic narratives on history and public space in Lebanon are located. Jana's articulations of her memories of the 17 October Revolution reproduce embodied knowledge of people's claims to public space and social justice in Downtown Beirut. In Noura's opera performance, Noura transmits an imagined history, which simultaneously defies and engages with Lebanon's Civil-War narrative as it performs the alternative present and future. In Sami's production of a soundtrack, where the Egg is conceived as stuck in time, Sami reveals how a history can determine the confines of spaces with respect to their present engagement and usability.

With the Egg as primary case evidence, I argue that spaces, including tangible spaces such landscapes, buildings, and infrastructures, as well as non-tangible spaces, such as art, imagination and memory, can be qualified as historicity. A linear and textual approach to historicity would not be able to capture the knowledge that Jana, Sami, and Noura performed. This is because spatio-temporal knowledge is visceral, incoherent, ineffable, and contingent. As chronotopes unfold a multiplicity of socio-historical meanings that maneuver along space and place, like nerves on a leaf, chronotopes have the capacity to provide antilinear conceptions of time. It matters therefore for anthropologists and historians to study history along these nerves. Furthermore, the chronotopes that I discuss form an alternative to universalized historicity of the Global North, as these chronotopes acknowledge that people have the agency to (re)claim spaces as a means to convey self-constructed stories about the past, present, and future. Set on a postcolonial horizon, the co-production of a minor history in the language of a major history generated new ways of understanding Lebanese historicity.

The collaborative and multimodal approach that I used to study the Egg had a dialogic and performative character. Studied in collaboration, the approach I used posed a reimagination of the Egg's past, present, and future as vocalized by different voices. Complementary to the observational an logocentric ethnographic methods that engender rather one-sided perspectives of historicity, the combination of Jana's view, Noura's voice, and Sami's point of listening, can account for a polyphonic account of history. Not only do these various ways of sense-making challenge standard notions of space and time, the enacted performance of this sensorial knowledge can redistill a crucial aspect of historicity: its social construction.

Obviously a constructed imagination of time and space stands in contradiction to one of anthropology's most common intentions, that is, to study repeated patterns and quotidian experiences of people. I did not study the daily realities of Jana, Noura, and Sami, and currently, people

are not organizing activities in the Egg anymore. Imagination deals with the no longer and not yet. Representing imagination might therefore fall into the trap of decontextualization, where painful realities become trivialized, or mystification, in which orientalist tropes of the Middle East are reproduced. Yet one thing imagination can promise is continuity. Imagination is the infrastructure to our narratives, as it determines which pathways are possible. Lebanese people have continued to reimagine the Egg's past, present, and future in imagination and artistic expressions. The film *Burst Out (Fachet Khele)* – of which the title refers to a popular Lebanese expression "to burst out one's feelings"– is therefore in and of itself a continuation of the Egg's time-space reimagination.

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