Civil Marriage in Lebanon as a Site of Resistance and the Emergence of Sectarian and Political Identities

Submitted by

Ana Almuedo-Castillo

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Signature:
This thesis examines the case of civil marriage in Lebanon as an example of the contestation of sectarian identities and a political system. Sectarianism in Lebanon and in the Middle East has become not only a seemingly naturally-produced social categorisation, but also the hegemonic epistemological concept through which every social and political act is interpreted. In contrast to this, the Lebanese civil married spouses interviewed in this thesis, challenge sectarian practices and discourse.

I examined the context and identities civil married spouses practice. I conclude that certain sites of resistance favour the emergence of civil marriage, where individuals perform alternative practices and political identities. Practices of resistance may cyclically trigger the emergence of other pockets of resistance where contestation happens. Nonetheless, as ethnographic research shows, isolated cases of civil marriage happen in many different contexts and circumstances.

This research also investigates the limits of civil marriage as acts of social change. I have identified intention and consciousness as key drive which allow political acts to become transformative of power. Indeed, spouses that exhibited high levels of political consciousness identified at the same time sectarianism as an oppressive system to which they intended to subvert with their act of civil marriage. Further, politically-conscious-civilly married spouses demonstrated intersectional subversion not only to sectarianism, but also to other oppressing systems such as patriarchy, kinship or social classes. Ultimately, they contested sectarianism in a non-exclusive fashion when it came to their choice of marriage.

Finally, resistance, as a reflection of power, is never pure. That is, even self-conscious and self-reflexive individuals that contest sectarianism or other systems of powers do it while embedded in the same structures of power. Confronting one form of power in one context does not mean that they will confront the same form of power in another context.
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When you set out your journey to Ithaka,
Pray that the road is long.
Full of adventures, full of knowledge.
C.P. Cavafy ‘Ithaka’

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I have used a modified version of the style of the International Journal for Middle East Studies (IJMES) for transliteration of all Arabic terms, with minimal diacritics. Only those diacritical marks indicating the hamza (‘) and the ‘ayn (‘) are used here.

In references, I have retained the spelling of names (or their correct transliteration). For family and place names I have kept their known common English spelling in the case of places and kept the family names spelt the way they spell them in English (for example, I use Gemmayel, which is commonly used, rather than the Arabic transliteration Jumm‘ayel)

All Arabic words have been italicized.
LIST OF ARABIC TERMS

‘aid el-Ftir
Muslim holiday celebrated during the Holy month of Ramadan

‘ajaneb
Foreigner

‘almaniya
Secularism

‘arabiya enkasar
‘Broken’ Arabic

“‘ayla murataba”/“‘ayla mniha”
Good family

“Al-‘Obros Manna Baydeh”
“Cyprus is not far away”

“Ente wahdeh menna”
“You (f.) are one of us”

“haram”
“Poor one”

“ma fi dawleh”/“weinhi al-dawleh”
“There is no state”/ “Where is the state?”

a’yan
Nobility

Abu Kees
Mr. Plastic Bag

ahali
People

akhraj qaid
Civil registry papers

al-‘idda
Period women need to wait before remarrying

al-Hizb al-‘Ilmani al-Dimoqrati
Secular Democratic party

al-Hizb al-Dimoqrati
Democratic Party

al-Hizb al-Suri al-Qawmi al-Ishtiraki
Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP)

al-Mithaq al-Watani
National Pact

“Al-shari’ ilna”
The street is ours

al-zawaj al-madany
Civil Marriage

aysh al-mushtarak
Coexistence

al-bourj
Centre

al-Dahiyya
Periphery (in Lebanon, it referred to the Southern periphery inhabited mostly by Shi’a middle-lower class families)

“Erhal, erhal”
“Leave, leave” Popular chant during the Arab uprisings against the dictators

ghayr shari’a
illegitimate child

hawwiya
ID card

“Hayda al-bahar Ilna”
“This sea is ours”

ibn/bint ‘ayla
Son/daughter of good family

jumhur
People/republic

kafir (f. kafra)
Infidel/unbeliever
Kata‘eb  |  Phalangist Party
katb al-kitab |  Muslim ritual to wed
ma‘mur al-nufus |  Civil status officer
“ma3oul?” |  “How is it possible?”
Majlis As-shoura Al-dawla |  Consultative Council of the State
Mustarrafiyya |  Autonomous administration of Mount Lebanon during the Tanzimat of the Ottoman Empire in 1861

natur |  Concierge
nitham madani ikhtiari lil-qanun al-Ahwal al-Shakhsiya |  Optional system for civil personal status law
Qanun al-Ahwal al-Shakhsiya |  Personal status law
sajilat al-nufus |  Civil registry
sayyid |  Muslim cleric descendant from prophet Mohammed
Sha‘t al-ishara fi sijelat al-nufus |  Removing sectarian denominations from the civil registry
shari‘a |  Islamic law
sheikh (pl. shuyukh) |  Muslim cleric
shw‘ay |  Communist
souk |  Market
sumud |  Resistance
ta‘addud |  Pluralism
ta‘ifyya |  Sectarian/sectarianism
Tayyar Al-Moujtama’ Al-Madany |  Movement for Civil Society
Tole’at ri7atkon |  ‘You Stink’
wasta |  Connection/Favouritism
za‘im (pl. zu’ama) |  Leader
CHAPTER I: Introduction

1. Introduction: Studying Sectarianism

There is no shortage of views on sectarianism in Lebanon. Media, academia and popular discourses have contributed to the over-study (and perhaps even the reification) of sect as the primordial social category in Lebanese politics and society. This body of literature tends to see sectarianism as an outcome; as essentialised identities that are inevitably salient. By featuring sectarian identities as fixed categories, violent conflict is interpreted within this school of thought as an inevitable outcome when two sectarian groups interact.

Contrary to this corpus of literature, this thesis aims to contribute to the scholarly work of authors that contest the notion of sectarian identities as something primordial and unchanging. Sectarian identities are perceived as unitary and immutable only in their appearance. Rather than as an outcome, this literature sees sectarianism as a dynamic process that is continuously produced, reproduced, performed, while similarly permanently contested and resisted. Sect and sectarian identities are constantly constructed through networks, institutions and provision of services that have developed particular understandings of sect and sectarian affiliations. As defined by Nucho (2017: 6), “in Lebanon, the relationship between infrastructures in urban spaces and sectarianism is dialogic –many urban infrastructures and services are produced by sectarian political and religious organizations at the same time that they are the channels through which sectarian belonging and exclusion are experienced, produced, and recalibrated.”

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the ensemble of cultural and social practices, as well as political discourse, that is constantly modelling and reinforcing sectarianism as the dominating social norm. Considering the possibility of the agency of the Lebanese to challenge and confront these social norms and the Foucauldian logic of “[w]here there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1976b: 85), I intend to analyse not only how (sectarian) social norms are produced and reiterated in Lebanon, but equally how they are daily challenged, confronted, contested and resisted.

This thesis believes that the sectarian hegemonic system of power is currently performed and it shapes social practices and political discourses. The continuous performance of these sectarian practices and discourses guarantees, at the same time, the hegemony of the sect as the dominant social category. Hence, sectarian identities have emerged in Lebanon as one of the most salient political identities, which has not remained uncontested. Following the Gramscian concept of ‘cultural hegemony’, the sectarian hegemony of power has been resisted, contested, challenged and subverted (Gramsci, 2000).
I believe critically studying the concept of sectarianism is crucial at the present crossroad in which conflicts are increasingly following sectarian precepts in the Middle East, from Syria (Phillips, 2015) to Iraq (Haddad, 2011). Neither Lebanon nor any other Arab country has been driven exclusively by sectarian intentions. Further, sectarianism can be interpreted as the only, and most important, marker of political mobilisation and identities. The concepts of sect and sectarian identities are understood in this thesis as malleable concepts that historically have been produced as modern ideas, but notably have shifted since the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975.

In this chapter I first use a case study of Lebanon as an introductory explanation of my thesis. Secondly, I present my research aims, including research questions and the empirical and theoretical puzzle that I intend to tackle. Thirdly, I briefly explain my argument in order to address the research questions. The fourth section sets out my empirical and analytical contribution to the literature and academic debate. The fifth and last section includes a chapter breakdown of this thesis, leaving the ‘How’, the methodology, for the following chapter (chapter II).

2. Civil Marriage in Lebanon: Case Study

Sectarianism operates in Lebanese society by virtue of a structure of power that operates simultaneously in political and civil society. First by coercive means (personal status laws), as Lebanese citizens are not allowed to wed in their country except by religious ceremony. The cultural hegemony of sectarianism in Lebanon is further achieved by consensual diffusion, that is, the reproduction of sectarian habits. The latter determines marriage and family first and foremost as intrasectarian, and second, through religious norms.
An ensemble of cultural, social and political practices determines from birth who will be the ‘appropriate match’ according to written and unwritten rules in Lebanon (Rivoal, 2014). Couples succumb to hegemonic practices and discourse and marry through religious ceremony in line with family laws. Some couples, however, subvert this power and seek to marry under civil law, which is not an option in their country.

The struggle for civil marriage subscribes to the absence of a non-sectarian alternative to personal status and family laws (Qanun al-Ahwal al-Shakhsiya). French authorities promulgated, in 1936, Decree No. 69 L.R. that recognised eighteen official religions and guaranteed their right to legislate on personal status matters for members of their community. Institutional architecture of personal status laws, under the authority of sectarian judiciary courts and religious authorities, has given unlimited control to these mandatory authorities to set the institutional foundations for the production of sectarian subjects (Karam, 2006: 96). What is more, personal status law rulings in each sectarian court were never submitted to the state, and even if they contradicted the Lebanese constitution itself, they were approved as legal customs (Salloukh et al., 2015: 33). On the other hand, article 14 of that law stipulated, “those not belonging to one these sects, shall be subject to civil law” (Traboulsi, 2000). Civil personal status laws, however, have never been approved, despite many attempts, mobilisations and pleas from the civil society. President Elias Hrawi in 1996 presented a draft law, months before stepping down as President, with an optional civil personal status law (nitham madani ikhtiari lil-qanun al-Ahwal al-Shakhsiya). The draft law was approved by more than two thirds of the Cabinet, the number necessary for it to be discussed in Parliament as stipulated in the Constitution, but Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri refused to take it to Parliament (Hrawi and Menassa, 2002).
The personal status legal system denies the fundamental right of Lebanese citizens to opt out of their patrilineal inherited sectarian ascription, while obliging them to participate within certain sectarian and religious affiliations (Azzi, 2007). Intersectarian or non-religious marriages are, of course, not contemplated in this legal custom. In the absence of a civil law, Lebanese couples who are able to afford, travel abroad, mainly to neighbouring Cyprus, to get a civil wedding. These civil engagements are automatically registered in Lebanon and the foreign civil law, where the marriage took place, is applied by the Lebanese judge in a civil court in the case of divorce, with some exceptions (El-Zein, 2010: 213). The paradox of civil marriage in Lebanon is that, although illegal, it has become a common and an increasing practice in the country, although a right restricted to those who can afford to pay the cost of a civil wedding in Cyprus, at least $1,000, in a country where the minimum wage has only recently been increased to $450.

![Figure 1: Rally Laique Praide, 2011. Source: AP/Hussein Matta](image)

The issue of civil marriage was put back on the table when, in November 2012, Khoud Succariyeh and Nidal Darwish had the first civil marriage on Lebanese territory.

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Following a long legal process led by Talal Husseini, legal expert and head of the association *Tayyar Al-Moujtama’ Al-Madany* (Movement for the Civil Society), the couple tied the knot with the approval of a public notary, Joseph Bchara. The legal initiative was made possible on the basis of the *circulaire* approved in 2008 by Interior Minister Ziad Baroud, lawyer and advocate in several human rights initiatives, which allowed Lebanese citizens to remove their sectarian affiliations administratively from their *akhraj qaid* (civil registry documents). The removal of their sectarian affiliation from public and administrative records was interpreted as if the individuals had opted out of their sectarian community. They could then make use of article 14 Decree Law 60 L.R., which stipulated that Lebanese citizens not belonging to any sectarian community could abide by civil law for family matters².

This initiative left many open questions as couples were still adopting a foreign law in the absence of a domestic civil law to adhere to. Many legal questions remained about removing sectarian affiliation in a country where the rules do not counternance individuals under the eighteen being other than in recognised sectarian affiliations. Without any doubt, what Succariyeh and Darwish’s civil marriage triggered was, once again, a heated debate among the sectarian/political elite and the public opinion, which I will reflect on later in this thesis.

### 3. Research Questions

Several questions have guided this research. As stated above, one of the main/trIGGERING questions that I intend to challenge is the idea of sectarianism as something static and inevitable; as social categories that lead inevitably to conflict and

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² Interview with activist and legal researcher Talal Husseini, head of the *Tayyar al-Mujtama’ al-Madany*
social segregation. From my point of view, civil marriage in Lebanon is a model in which this inescapable sectarianism is subverted and challenged. I see sect and sectarian identities as a structure of power that primarily defines social practices and political discourse in Lebanon. This hegemonic power ensures its position not just through means of coercion, such as the sectarian personal status laws, but through means of consent to the ‘cultural hegemony’ of sectarianism.

This line of questioning illustrates the empirical and theoretical choices of this thesis. I began by enquiring, how does civil marriage in Lebanon emerge? What is the meaning and intention of spouses who choose a civil marriage? As a practice that falls outside the paradigm of sectarianism and its family legal system, does it mean that these couples are resisting the structure of power? Can we ascribe the act to resistance by every civil marriage spouse whose practice does not follow the hegemonic power? That is, does any act that does not reproduce power mean resisting the power, or do some acts of non-reproduction of dominant practices symbolise ‘tactics’ (Certeau, 1990) (practices diverging from power without confronting them)? If we accept the latter, we accept that some acts of political agency may represent resistance, that is, contestation of forms of power, whereas others may represent tactics, that is, practices aimed at navigating the system of power without challenging or intending to transform it. Does it mean that the same act of civil marriage could represent different practices? If so, what is the key point that differentiates the former from the latter?

I recognise consciousness and intent as the distinctive attributes between agents resisting and agents performing tactics. So why is consciousness considered as the core element of resistance? And within the same examination of resistance and its transformative potential, do acts of resistance and, by the same token, acts of civil
marriage, embody social change? In this manner, do all acts of civil marriage embody social change, or only acts of civil marriage that are consciously driven towards the transformation of power (sectarianism)?

The purpose of this thesis is to study the dialectic relationship between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices, as two sides of the same coin. Hence, hegemony of the sect and sectarian identities is maintained first through coercive means, within Gramscian political society or the state, such as the inability to have a legal civil marriage on Lebanese soil according to the sectarian personal status laws. First and foremost, this thesis aims to study how sectarian hegemony is perpetuated within civil society through ‘consensual diffusion’ (see: Gramsci, 2000), and also how, within the same paradigm, sectarian dominance is subverted. Thus, I explored at this point the concept of Gramscian civil society, or sites of resistance where contestation happens.

For example, among my participants, a substantial proportion of civil marriage spouses grew up/currently live/feel attached to Ras Beirut, an area that symbolises a space of plurality, freedom, intellectual as well as Leftist, and secularism. I aim to study Ras Beirut as a site of resistance, where contesting movements tend to emerge and develop. Two questions arise immediately. First, in Ras Beirut political identities are simultaneously produced by the sectarian system of power and by social space, which also produces subjects, discourse and practice. Other systems of power operate within Lebanese society, such as patriarchy, neoliberalism, kinship, to name a few. As Gramsci (1995) described it, the superstructure of power is composed of several structures of power operating in the same context simultaneously. Thus, Lebanese agents may manage to resist one structure of power with their act of civil marriage, such as sectarianism, but are they resisting patriarchy, which is another oppressive system in
Lebanon? By the same token, whereas they may subvert sectarianism by opting for a civil marriage, would they subvert sectarianism also when choosing how to educate, or how to transmit sectarian values to, their children?

Finally, this thesis aims to study alternative political identities that define Lebanese subjects, in order to expand their characterisation beyond their sectarian identities. What kind of political identities emerge within the sites of resistance? Do political identities appear as a result of the sites of resistance or do these alternative/emergent political identities develop as result of the act of civil marriage?

4. Research Argument

The above section presented a line of enquiry that describes the empirical and theoretical process of this thesis. I will now elaborate on the arguments which are the basis of this research exploration. Firstly, I consider sectarianism as a structure of power or hegemony that is able to reproduce its habits through consent. The ‘consensual diffusion’, as Gramsci (2000) described it, happens in the ‘civil society’, which is at the same time the site of contestation. These sites of contestation will be explored thoroughly in this thesis. They are usually characterised by the reproduction of counter-political identities, such as non-sectarian, non-patriarchal, Leftist or secular. Within these sites, acts of resistance such as civil marriage emerge.

Political acts of contestation may be visible and organised, such as traditional social mobilisations, or they may lack strategy, visibility and organisation, such as acts of everyday resistance (see: Haynes and Prakash, 1991, Hollander and Einwohner, 2004,
Johansson and Vinthagen, 2015, Lilja, 2008, Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014, Rubin, 1996, Scott, 1985, Turiel, 2003, Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013). I believe civil marriage is a private act that happens in civil society and that may subvert sectarian norms. Civil marriage acts can be qualified as resistance to the sectarian power as long as the spouses demonstrate consciousness of transforming the sectarian structure. This issue of consciousness is key in this thesis for the analysis of concepts of everyday resistant and social change. This is a prerequisite that identifies certain acts of civil marriage as everyday forms of resistance, rather than tactics (Certeau, 1990), which are acts in which the spouses are merely looking for a way of navigating the sectarian system without intending to change it. In the case of the latter group of civil marriage spouses, ethnographic research proved that they tend to fall within the reproduction of sectarian norms in other contexts, such as the education or transmission of sectarian values to their children.

Their practices subscribe to a quiet form of agency that leads them to not abide by the sectarian dominant system. This form of contestation involves a collectivity of unconnected individuals, that while they all share disagreement and subversion against the hegemonic system, have different motivations and strategies to subvert the system (Bayat, 1997, 2010). This thesis is also driven by a motivation to explain the different stratagems that apply to a framework of contestation and social change, beyond the episodes of visibility and disruption of social upheavals. With this thesis, I study social change within the paradigm of alleged continuation.

Sectarianism is reinforced by other systems of power. Lebanese individuals’ political identities are constituted by an ensemble of systems producing discourse and practices (Cammett and Issar, 2010, Joseph, 2008, Kingston, 2013, Makdisi, 2000b,
Mikdashi, 2014, Salloukh et al., 2015, Weiss, 2010). These systems overlap and create multi-layered powers performing in the same context. Within this context, subjects may contest power in one layer, but they may fall into the trap in another one. Thus, civil marriage spouses may confront patriarchy by challenging patriarchal personal status laws with their civil marriage. However, in other contexts such as in the act of transmitting to their children their father’s sectarian identity, they would be falling into the trap of patriarchy and sectarianism at the same time.

Finally, civil marriage in Lebanon analyses the exercise of agency by Lebanese individuals who have contoured the sectarian system despite the entrenchment of sectarianism in the system of governance, economic relations and control over political mobilisation and subjectification. Using the case of civil marriage, I aim to deconstruct how the sect and the sectarian identities are imposed on the everyday cultural practices of Lebanese subjects. Focusing on the ‘political society’, on the confessional governance system, may elucidate how coercive methods impose the institutionalisation of confessions. On the other hand, a study of ‘civil society’ and the production of everyday sectarianism gives light to how sectarian habits are reproduced in society without coercive means. Following the Gramscian concept of ‘cultural hegemony’, I analyse sectarianism as a form of daily domination, as well as a social practice and epistemological concept operating at a certain time and space (Gramsci, 2000). The latter paradigm is reflected by the social and family ‘pressures’ perceived by participants in order to engage in a religious/sectarian marriage, while confronting their choice for civil marriage.
5. Rationale: Why Do I Write this Thesis?

First, there is currently a gap in the literature on the topic of civil marriage in Lebanon. The issue of civil marriage is a long-standing question on institutional sectarianisation, by means of a confessional system of personal status law. These institutions and laws produce sectarian subjects with limited citizenship (Joseph, 1999, Mikdashi, 2014). Whereas some of the literature has approached this issue from a legal point of view, mainly in Arabic (Azzi, 2007, Traboulsi, 2000), some have studied how sectarianism is institutionalised in light of the absence of a civil personal status law (Azzi, 2007, Baghdadi, 1998, Baydoun, 1999a, El-Cheikh, 2000, El-Zein, 2010, Mikdashi, 2013, Moukheiber, 1998, Traboulsi, 1998b, 2000). The field of social sciences lacks an in-depth and ethnographic analysis on the practices and discourses of Lebanese couples that have chosen civil marriage.

Through ethnographic research on civil marriage this thesis aims to give voice to actions and practices of Lebanese subjects who are contesting the hegemonic system of sectarianism. This has limited presence in the current literature on sectarianism not only in Lebanon, but also in the Middle East, as well as more generally. Recent works on sectarianism in Lebanon have developed an understanding of sectarian identities as dynamically produced. Scholars have deconstructed the idea of the sect as an immutable and inevitable social category (Cammett and Issar, 2010, Kingston, 2013, Makdisi, 2000b, Mikdashi, 2014, Nucho, 2017, Salloukh et al., 2015, Weiss, 2010). However, academic research is still needed to study how, aside from not being primordial and unchangeable, they are permanently contested. There exists a gap in the study of sites of resistance to sectarian identities, as well as alternative political identities that emerge within these sites.
As far as my understanding goes, there are gaps in the literature on Lebanon on politics and society from the paradigm of everyday forms of resistance. Apart from works on the Sri Lankan migrant community (Moukarbel, 2009) and Palestinian refugee population (Salih and Richter-Devroe, 2014) in Lebanon, studies on social change from the concept of quiet forms of resistance are absent. This thesis attempts to contribute to one body of literature, that is, everyday acts of resistance and contribute to the production of knowledge on Lebanon from this paradigm.

The second contribution correspond to the analysis on social change and quiet contestation in Lebanon and the Middle East. This studies are especially relevant in the current literature for two main reasons: First, the Arab uprisings represented first a moment of optimism for political change in the Middle East, followed after couple of years by a pessimistic momentum of violent conflict and fundamentalism in the same countries where hopes of change were waved only several years prior. Within this context it is important to understand that change does not come uniquely from revolutionary, groundbreaking and visible, but it is also a result of daily lived and performed acts of resistance that may not be as visible but may as well trigger social change. Second, Orientalist studies on the Middle East tend to depict the Middle East as a monolithic, static where change is exclusively performed by the will of individual elites and military men. Political transformation from group interests (other than sectarian) are largely overlooked (Bayat, 2010: 3).

This thesis attempts to contribute to a third body of literature, sectarianism and sectarian identities. Mainstream academic studies on sectarianism and the Middle East tend to analyse sectarian identites as a primordial scism and primary source of conflict. Within this literature, sectarianism is used as a unified and homogeneous category of
analysis that is often used to understand political mobilisation from an instrumentalist approach (see: Abdo, 2016). Contrastingly, this thesis analyses how this category is constructed, performed and reified, but also how it is permanently contested and resisted.

In this thesis I identify civil marriage as a site of resistance, where couples civilly married have been able to affiliate, develop and perform alternative political identities. Resistance to the sectarian political structure and social practices is first and foremost fostered within a context where other political identities are practiced. By the same token, these sites where alternative political identities are performed also trigger or favour actions of resistance to the hegemonic powers. To sum up, the practice of civil marriage emerges generally but not exclusively within contexts where couples attempt to perform alternative political identities and social practices away from sectarianism and sectarian identities. At the same time, couples civilly married create a niche favouring the performance and production of different political identities. Thus, civil marriage may not only be the outcome of a performed site of resistance, but also by performing civil marriage a site of resistance may also be produced.

Finally, this thesis aims to analyse the limits of civil marriage as an act embodying social change. As an act that may lack strategy, visibility or organisation, the individual practice of civil marriage does not bring about ground-breaking upheaval or social mobilisation (whereas other movements on civil marriage have tried to do so). Nonetheless, to use a metaphor, such quiet forms of resistance may be ‘cooking’ social transformation on a low-heat flame. In contrast with this, one could also argue that, at the same time, civil marriage abroad serves as a ‘safety valve’ on the low-heat flame.
Indeed, civil marriage in another country functions as a solution for the small percentage of couples that travel abroad to marry under a civil law, without achieving any structural transformation of the sectarian/religious personal status law.

6. Chapters Synopsis

This thesis is structured in eight chapters, of which chapter IV, to a smaller extent, but mainly chapters VI, VII and VIII present, analyse and theorise the main empirical and ethnographic data collected in Lebanon between 2011 and 2017.

Chapter II analyses the methods and critically discusses the quest for knowledge production in Lebanon and the Middle East from a Western academic institution. I present the main procedures followed in the collection of empirical data in the field. I chose to focus in this part on two main points related to my positionality, in the field and on my academic stance. First, my positionality in the field, my personal stake in my research and the multi-layered underpinnings beyond the binary distinction between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, researched or researcher, or outsider or insider. Second, asserting a particular positionality within a certain academic field has not been an easy task for me. My writing did not reveal the academic analyses of a political scientist, and throughout the writing process I have been feeling more comfortable within the writing, style, techniques, theories and analysis of political ethnographers or anthropologists. Without claiming to be one of them, my research subscribes to that of area studies, from which I analyse one particular case study, Lebanon, and particularly civil marriage, which I theorise and examine through an extended period of field
research over more than three years in Beirut, in Mount Lebanon and other instances of travel around the entire country, between 2011 and 2017.

Chapter III includes a review of the theoretical and conceptual framework on which this thesis is grounded, and to which it also professes to contribute. The first body of literature will unfold a theoretical conceptualisation of sectarianism in Lebanon. This thesis is situated diametrically opposed to premises in which sectarianism is defined as biologically inherited, primordial or tribal. I subscribe to the literature that situates sectarianism as a modern political, social and economic dynamic process, rather than an outcome. I believe the social category of the sect has been and is constantly formed and performed within this dynamic process. This section describes the theoretical framework that identifies social practices and political discourse at the origin of the (re)production of sectarian identities as the dominant form of political identities.

Sectarianism will be analysed as a paradigm that produces and reproduces sectarian subjects, but it will be described mainly as a hegemonic system order that actively defines practices and discourse. Sectarianism will be defined as a system of power that structures individual, social and political identities over any other system structuring social and political categories. In this sense, sectarianism is the political, social and cultural hegemon.

The second body of literature to which this thesis subscribes is the concept of hegemony and structure of power. The concept of hegemony draws on theories developed by Gramsci. Within this theory, the concept of civil society plays a key role as the site where contestation happens. I am particularly interested in describing civil marriage, which may happen in the realm of civil society but, beyond this limited concept, I need a theory that describes not only social movements, but also individual,
quiet and short-reaching acts on the communal, familiar or individual level. This event is better described by the concept of *everyday act of resistance* first defined by James Scott (1985) and theorised by other authors after him.

Chapter IV provides a historical review of the practice of civil marriage in Lebanon. It analyses the history of personal status laws that makes the practice of civil marriage illegal. It begins with a review of the colonial origins of the sectarian personal status laws and the religious authorities’ pressures to stop any civil legislation to regulate marriage, child custody or inheritance. The second part examines the current civil marriage law and how the sectarian powers have used the ambiguous institutional hurdle to their benefit. In the third part I examine the struggle for civil marriage and personal status laws since the creation of the independent Lebanese state, focusing on the draft law for optional civil personal status proposed in 1998 and the mobilisation from civil society for civil marriage at that time, as well as the most recent, heated, debate on civil marriage that was triggered by the first civil marriage, of Kholoud Succariyeh and Nidal Darwish, performed on Lebanese soil in 2013.

Chapter V builds on the tactics of repression and control of the system presented in the previous chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to critically analyse the empirical data collected on the case study of civil marriage. It examines (sectarian) social order in Lebanon: how this system is (re)produced and reified, while at the same time it is negotiated, contested and resisted by Lebanese subjects with their acts of civil marriage. The chapter concentrates on the definition of the practice of civil marriage as an act of everyday resistance, as a personal choice, and as a non-collective form of contestation and subversion against the sectarian structure of power.
The focus of chapter V is on the stories of Lebanese couples that married in civil ceremonies in Lebanon or abroad, and how their practice represented challenge and contestation to the social, political and legal order in Lebanon where religious marriages are the only legal option to have a (heterosexual) family. I define civil marriage as an act of political agency and everyday resistance, described by the majority of the couples as a ‘personal choice’. This concept is expressed through an analysis of their practices: their motivations and to what extent one can assess recognition of their agency; the structures of power that they are contesting; the degree to which one can gauge the intention or consciousness in their actions, as well as the feeling of belonging or identity with an emergent group of subversive, civil married couples. I also critically assess, at every level, to what extent the couples managed to subvert hegemonic sectarianism, or if, on the contrary, they ended up reproducing sectarianism in other contexts or discourses. Similarly, I evaluate the extent to which the system of power imposed on the participants is limited exclusively to sectarian constraints or if, contrary to that, they are reinforced by other oppressing systems such as patriarchy, socio-economic class or geography.

Chapters VI and VII examine how the different discourses, practices and framings have produced, reproduced, enabled, contested and redefined political identities in Lebanon. Chapter VI is exclusively devoted to sectarianism, to reflect the predominance of this form of political identity in Lebanon. In this chapter I try to differentiate the action of civil marriage as anti-sectarian and piety. The stories of feelings of belonging and religious beliefs among my participants greatly contribute to their choice of a civil wedding. In the second part of this chapter I try to delineate a sect-spatial paradigm in which the sect operates in a certain socio-spatial context, and how these contexts reinforce and replicate each other, although, like any system of
power described in this thesis, this is always contested. Finally, in the last part of this chapter I reflect on how the couples deal with their sectarian identities when it comes to transmitting them to their children, as a way of examining the reproduction/ultimate contestation of sectarianism.

Being aware that I might be promoting the reification of the sectarian category in Lebanon with the position sectarianism occupies in my research, this thesis also includes analysis of other social categories and political identities that inform political and social mobilisations. Therefore, chapter VII argues for the multiplicity of political identities beyond the over-studied sectarian identities. I contend throughout the thesis that sectarianism upholds the capacity of constraining subjectification and political mobilisation within the social boundaries of sects and sectarian identities. However, other structures of power overlap and reinforce the sectarian order, although some may produce contradicting social norms.

This chapter analyses civil marriage as an act of contestation beyond sectarian norms, but within the overlapping structures that create an ensemble of power and social norms. I analyse here the (re)production and performance of alternative political identities that have emerged within the liminalities of the social boundaries in Lebanon. Lebanese people mobilise and subvert these boundaries and the powers that reify them. Civil marriage represents one of these acts of resistance and contestation. Within this site of liminality where civil marriage takes place, alternative political behaviours and identities have emerged, such as Leftist, secular, feminist or anti-kinship Lebanese. These are the object of study of this chapter.

The concluding chapter VIII evaluates the discourses, practices and framings of sectarianism (power), everyday forms of resistance and social change (civil marriage)
and the production and redefinition of political identities within the ‘civil’ subject (civil marriage couples). It is my intention to offer a framework of analysis of sectarianism as a daily constructed practice, and how its daily contestation produces different Lebanese female and male subjectivities.
CHAPTER II: Methodology

Figure 2: "What the community really share is... Beirut garbage"

In the picture: 70th anniversary advertising of the Lebanese Army reading: “The shared collector/community”. On the right in front, garbage piling in 2015 summer. Photo taken July 26, 2015 in Beirut, Ashrafieh. Photograph by the author. Own source

In 2015 I was living in Beirut as part my PhD field research. Personally and academically I have always been interested in political change and social mobilisations. I have been active in several social movements, mainly driven by leftist ideologies and social justice demands. Back in my home country, Spain, I took a very active role in the ‘Indignados’ movement in 2011, and I have also been politically active in other countries I have lived in: the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, as well as Lebanon.

In July 2015 garbage started to pile up in the streets of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, as a result of the inability of the political/sectarian leaders to come to an agreement on how to find a solution to the closure of the Naameh landfill: namely how to divide their benefits and loses from the public contract for garbage collection. After weeks of rotting garbage accumulating everywhere, without exception, in the capital during the hottest months of the summer, an online group called ‘Tole’at ri7atkon’ (‘You Stink’,
along with other civil society groups, organised a protest in Riad al-Solh Square in Beirut city centre. The protesters were heavily repressed by the Lebanese security forces, which triggered further assembling during the following weeks. The gatherings had had no precedent in Beirut since the ‘Intifada of Independence’ after Hariri’s assassination in 2005. The protesters’ initial plea for environmental and sustainable solutions for the collection of garbage turned very soon into anti-status quo and anti-sectarian demands.

For me, months of rotten piles of putrid garbage accumulating in the streets, were worthwhile so as to see Lebanese people and, especially the youth, finally outraged and mobilising against the system and mobilising. People who were usually apathetic joining the rallies; there were numerous gatherings rallying on demands related to demand social justice, environmental sustainability, anti-corruption and, most importantly, anti-sectarianism. It was inspiring to be part of these protests, and seeing their tactics and strategies of the groups developing, and the demands against the corrupted sectarian system. I took part in the protests along with my friends. I shared with some people during the protests some of the prior knowledge on how to avoid teargas, non-violent techniques for physical occupation, and tactical grouping to avoid the security forces’ repression.

On September 1st a group of activists took over the office of the Minister of Environment, Nohad Machnouk, and asked him to resign. Chants of ‘Erhal, erhall’, replicated the demands made in other Arab countries in 2011 to Ben-Ali, Mubarak, Adbullah Saleh and Assad. Several thousands of people joined them and the sit-in gathered several thousands of people in front of office, adjacent to Martyr’s square. The situation got tense when the hundred of people inside the office were not allowed
to exit; nor there was anyone allowed to enter to provide them with food or water. The protest had some outbursts of violent incidents and with groups of people more prone to clash with the police forces. Rumours spread among the activists that some people (paid by the zu’ama) had infiltrated the movement to provoke the violent reaction from the police forces. Activists were carefully monitoring the groups which clashed violently against the policemen. The situation was very tense, with peaks in which policemen and protesters collided forcefully. A group of protesters had been throwing garbage and plastic bottles of water into the public government buildings managing that managed garbage collection in the city, and some activists had thrown garbage bags at the doorstep of politicians. The demonstration got out-of-hand when a number of protesters threw garbage to the security forces. At its height we saw some of the protesters throwing stones at the security forces. I, my friends and other activists were tried actively to stop them and calm down the situation. At one point of the confrontation I saw a protester with a very big stone that he intended to throw towards the police line, but it could easily have fallen onto another protesters’ head. I ran towards that person and tried to stop him. In doing so, I lost my group. I found myself confronting that man in the midst of what could have turned to a very unpleasant situation, which it fortunately did not. My friends came looking for me and they said: “You know the Spanish embassy won’t be able to do anything to get you out from a Lebanese prison, right?”

I found, in this situation and on many other occasions pondering about the line between my political ethnography and my activism, if there was to be a line. Did political ethnography justify confrontation of this violent man? What was the ethnographer supposed to do? What about the activist? What was my position, as a Spanish researcher on that protest? Will the Spanish embassy take me out from
prison, while my friends with a Lebanese passport would have to use their *wasta*, if they have it at all?

I had, of course, a personal stake on that movement, due to my political inclinations on political mobilisation and revolutionary leftist ideology, and my personal convictions against the pervasive sectarian system. I also felt as if they were my own struggle. But was I going beyond the ‘participative’ role while I was partake of the movement? Beyond the universality of the environmental cause (as well as my belief on internationalism and solidarity), what was the role of a European/coloniser researcher to influence and be partaken of an intrinsically Lebanese ‘revolution’? Was I representing an Orientalist/Western patronising attitude by trying to mould some of the actions? In contradiction, joining protests in the rest of Western countries I had resided did not trigger any of these moral contradictions. Finally, this was not just an altruistic contribution. My interest on this cycle of protests also included personal academic profit, as my thesis deals with political and social change and the series of protests added compelling first-hand material for the study of social movements in Lebanon.

I have attempted to reflect with this episode on my positionality, the inevitable reciprocity between my political ideology (how I see the world) and my academic interests, as well as my personal stake in the country where I conduct my research, where I have been going back and forth for more than six years and where some of my friends that I consider family live in.

What was the impact of my participant observation on the intrinsic progress of the mobilisation and the actions of the protesters? What should be my role in researching
social change – should I be a mere witness or should I interfere to promote political transformation? What was my role as a non-Lebanese and European/coloniser to intervene in their actions knowing that my passport would give me a way out from any eventual chaos the garbage crisis could trigger? When I shared these concerns with one of my friends (with a non-academic background on anthropological concepts such as ‘positionality’, ‘self/other’, ‘participant observation’ or even ‘Orientalism’) he argued that as a resident of Lebanon affected by the inefficiencies of the Lebanese political and corrupted system, I had the right to protest. We should not trust the very muddled system to determine who should be Lebanese or not (in referring to the controversial legal system for Lebanese citizenship).

This chapter will firstly present a brief overview of my personal motivations - why I engaged in research with this particular country and used it as a case study. Subsequently, The research methods used in this thesis, are akin to a means of transport and windows from which to observe the research participants, space and time. The last two sections reflect on the main issues encountered during the process of conducting field research and the writing reflection. They will be divided in the third section ‘In the field’, and in the fourth and last one, on questions related to knowledge production.

1. Research Personal Motivation: Where do I come from... where do I go?

I arrived for the first time to Lebanon in 2011. I have since enjoyed the finest hospitality, and support from a network of family and friends. I became very close to a group of friends sympathetic to environmental and artistic activities with hippie tendencies, mostly male, educated, middle and upper class, Beiruti-based and mainly French-speaking. Their families treated me as one of them.

By the time this thesis proposal was refined in September 2015, I had experienced Lebanon from a completely different lens to that portrayed in the media and academic studies. I could live different intersubject relations that were shaped neither by ‘sectarian hatred’, nor complete social and political disaffection. I was inspired by the
creativity of my friends, their aspirations and their daily mechanisms to contour the system. I was aware that this was a particular entourage and it could not be extrapolated to the Lebanese society more generally, but should it be dismissed merely because it does not represent the entire society? Was it not worth studying the daily expressions that contest the system, which contradict traditional accounts on political stalemate, ‘sectarian’ violence and structural impasse? In line with what Certeau described as the study of the ‘quotidien’ or the ‘everydayness’ as a way of studying ‘culture’, “The approach of the culture begins when the ordinary man becomes the narrator, when it is he who defines the (common) place of discourse and (anonymous) space of its development” [emphasis in the original; my translation] (Certeau, 1990: 18).

Thus, and following Certeau’s theoretical approach, the goal of this thesis is to explain the actions and spaces of liminality within the system where political agency and contestation takes place, quietly, as a daily activity. I felt it was my responsibility, and that I owed my friends that have shown me this ‘other Lebanon’, to show with the means within my reach, my academic instruments, a dissimilar vision of Lebanon that complements the extensive work on the Lebanese Civil War, clientelism, corruption and ‘sectarian’ violence. Through this research I intend to show that Lebanese society, just like any other society, is not purely immobile or its individuals merely complacent. I believe social change can happen even in the most entrenched and immobile societies, and furthermore, contestation to power is constant, multi-sided and mutable.
2. Research Design

2.1. Research Methods

At the heart of this thesis is the goal of describing the *practices* of the subjects committing to civil marriage in Lebanon. This exploration will aim to explain the ensemble of meanings, framings and set of actions that describe these practices. Given that I am interested in defining (social, political and cultural) *change* I also understand these practices as a dynamic process. More specifically, I am interested in describing the everyday production/contestation of sectarianism and other political identities and how the Lebanese became political agents in this process. For that matter, I am not interested in merely studying the legal challenges posed by civil marriage and the personal status legal system, but rather what is the *meaning* of the *action* of civil marriage, as well as how the political, sectarian and religious systems manage to constrain the subversive actions of the couples.

2.1.1. Participant Observation

*Figure 4:* ‘You Stink’ protest in Martyrs’ Square, August 29, 2015. Photograph by the author
I have spent a total of 36 months living in Lebanon since 2011. After the initial 18 months before starting my PhD in 2011-12, I have lived there for four months in 2013, six months in 2015, another six months in 2016 and two months in 2017. I have mainly lived in Beirut, except for 2013 when I was mostly living in Mtein, in the Matn area. I have travelled and visited many different areas and villages in the country. I have attended different political events (mainly held in Arabic and English) on wide range of topics including civil marriage, public space, migrant workers’ rights, refugees, women’s issues, LGBTIQ+ rights, anti-sectarianism, communist and socialist meetings, the garbage crisis, Beirut Madinati, etc. I started attending these meetings during the last couple of years, once I became more fluent in Arabic. I also understood the role of a participant observer and stopped being so mindful about my presence in those gatherings. Listening to these meetings and attending these protests gave me incredible insight on the activist scene in Lebanon. I have also attended several weddings in Lebanon, as well as lived through many different occasions of friends and their families’ weddings, marriage and pregnancy, where I could grasp the importance that these events have within a Lebanese family (and arguably in every other family no matter where they live).

The daily experiences and routine that I shared with my Lebanese friends provided me, as explained briefly above, with the intrigue and stimulus to study the actions and strategies they undertake daily to contour and challenge the system. Observing the different strategies, and rationale behind them, from the politically mobilised and activists, along with daily subversive actions was key to analysing the practices embedded in the production and reproduction of the hegemonic political identities, as well as the different forms of resistance to them.
2.1.2. Semi-structured interviews and informal conversations

Participant observation offered great in-depth knowledge and first hand insight to analyse the emergence and practice of political identities in the context of activism and social change. However, in order to capture participants’ perspective and agency, as well as to give voice to the meaning of their practices, semi-structured interviews are a very useful technique (Flick, Kardorff and Steinke, 2004, Kvale, 2007, Maxwell, 2005, Qu John Dumay, 2011, Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Furthermore, both semi-structured interviews and informal conversations were aimed at participants that had a civil marriage, along with family and friends from their entourage, some of whom opposed civil marriage, as well as lawyers, judges, activists, priests, notary, legal researchers, civil servants and politicians.

I conducted 59 semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Interviews were conducted in French, English or Arabic, depending on the interviewee’s language skills. Among them, 41 of had engaged in civil marriage. With the exception of one participant who expressed his wish not to be recorded, the rest of interviews were audio-taped, transcribed into French or English (including translated versions of the interviews in Arabic) and coded with NVivo. The interviews were usually conducted in a place of the participant’s own choice. When it came to meeting people that were professionally engaged on the issue of civil marriage, these meetings were usually at their workplace. In contrast with the professional character of these meetings, encounters with participants who had chosen civil marriage had rather a more intimate character, and usually took place in their homes or at a café of their choice, especially at the first meeting.

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3 See Appendix 1 for an approximate list of the questions.
4 I refer to this below again when tackling the issue of my positionality.
Although every conversation and every interview took many different paths. My questions and interest were informed by the way I have seen, studied and experienced Lebanon. By opening new questions, I was attempting to produce knowledge based upon the experience of my Lebanese friends and peers, as well as my personal quest for setting the focus on practices otherwise neglected by the current production of knowledge on Lebanon.

My questions for the couples usually revolved around seeking knowledge on similar principal topics that can be divided into three main levels of analysis: the first, the individual, including questions related to: the reasons why they opted for civil marriage; self-perceptions with regard to other, religiously married, couples; feelings of belonging to a collectivity/shared identity of civil marriage couples; their activist background, and finally, questions regarding the education and transmission of religious beliefs to their children. The second level of enquiries related to society/family: the reactions from the families or friends; how their marriage is perceived (if different) by their surrounding neighbourhood; if their relationships with them changed; how would they describe their feelings of belonging to their ‘community’ (which I left ambiguous for interpretation by the participants). For intersectarian marriages I was also interested in knowing the perception of the two families and how did the families integrate the new member. On the third and last level, I asked questions related to their perceived political impact of their civil marriage. These questions varied a lot depending on the engagement of the participants and their keenness to engage in political conversations, as not all the couples shared the same political consciousness or interest. On the political level, questions revolved around: how they saw the system being affected by their act of civil marriage, if they saw the absence of civil marriage as a cause or a symptom of the
sectarian system, and if they thought the sectarian system was being challenged by their acts; how they experienced that their ability to get married was being constrained by the sectarian system; how civil or intersectarian marriages could help to change perceptions among the communities. Finally, I would sometimes tackle their identity as Lebanese, wondering if the act of civil marriage reflected higher levels of Lebanese identity, as well as the impact they considered civil marriage could have for the future of Lebanon in the long-run. The answers to the latter questions had, without any doubt, the most pessimistic tone.

I did not follow a strict order for the questions and did not divide all the questions on the three levels proposed. I would jump from one question to another depending on what topics the participants seemed to be willing to discuss during the time that I was afforded to engage in the conversation. Questions on the individual and social/family level were probably the most important in order to draw a picture of their individual practice (act of resistance), and the reactions from their entourage (the structures of power). Questions on the political level also gave me a good sense on how they describe their act with regard to the political system, and by extension, their ‘political agency’. I was able to go back to most of the participants and to discuss again most of the issues, or engage in other topics of conversation.

On the other hand, informal conversations included a wide range of people, topics and profiles. These included the baker in the street where I used to live, with whom I shared very deep conversations about my research and who ended up putting me in touch with her daughter in order to ‘convince her’ to marry only by civil marriage, to a Western-educated friend of one participant who radically opposed her friend’s civil marriage and even referred to the apostasy of her friend for marrying outside of
religious practices. I always brought up the topic of civil marriage when asked what was the purpose of my stay in Lebanon, and as it was a current and controversial topic in Lebanon I regularly had very varied reactions. I could observe through these conversations the perceptions and controversy of people depending on their context and background.

This method provided great knowledge and means for the interpretation of the ‘culture’ surrounding the issue of civil marriage, with the ideal aim of achieving what Geertz (1973) described as ‘thick description’. The latter is composed both by the participant observation and comments and the interpretation of the commentary achieved through the interviews, details, conceptual structures and meanings presented by the participants and further interpreted by the researcher.

2.2. Research Sample

2.2.1. Access

The first access to civil marriage couples was through my network of friends. This network, created since 2011, and probably not by chance, were themselves or had friends or members of their families that had married under civil regulations. Contacts were then collected from them who, probably not by chance either, also had a network of friends and members of their families that chose the same path. As a matter of fact, both parents of the first couple I interviewed, Nadim and Mayda, had a civil marriage as well, in a true example of Lebanese (and Arab) pluralism: Nadim’s parents were non-practising Sunni and Christian Maronite, whereas Mayda’s father was Christian Greek Orthodox and her mother was the daughter of a Druze man and a Sunni Palestinian woman.
Thus, using the technique of ‘snow-ball sampling’ (Atkinson and Flint, 2001) more participants were gathered, including couples, lawyers, judges, activists, and other experts on issues regarding civil marriage. Civil society and online platforms for civil marriage were also a very effective means of accessing contacts to interview. The on-going debate and controversy that surrounds the issue of civil marriage facilitated access to my contacts as well as the willingness of the participants to express their opinions. The vast majority of people contacted had a very positive attitude in regard to my research as a way of giving visibility (especially in the eyes of the ‘Western/British’ public) to their cause and their stories\(^5\). Despite the level of intimacy that the research occasioned, participants were never reticent in answering any of the questions, or sharing their stories. Some of them, probably the most politically active ones, insisted I publically use their names and surnames and encouraged me to publish my research as a way to give visibility and publicity to their cause.

### 2.2.2. Sampling

Exploring alternative channels for sampling, such as the online and civil society platforms, was essential to minimise bias risks, if I were to limit the collection of the sample to the snow-ball sampling technique. As noted elsewhere, collecting data exclusively through this technique might imply certain risks of bias or an unrepresentative sample, given that access to interviewees is dependent on existing networks with a potentially limited variance (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981), which is especially compelling in deeply divided societies, as Lebanon (Cammett, 2006).

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\(^5\) See the following video/debate to grasp the relevance of the topic of civil marriage on Lebanese politics and society: “Ūridu Ān Ātazawja madaniîan... leh mamnw’a?” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkUbriq5qRI
The sample of my participants (couples) is composed as followed:

**Age:**

- Married during the Civil War: 13.5%
- Married after the Civil War: 86.5%

**Current Residence:**

- Beirut (other parts than Ras Beirut): 35%
- Ras Beirut: 27.5%
- Great Beirut (North and East): 5%
- North of Lebanon (mainly Christian, Keserwan and Qadisha): 5%
- South/Southern Beirut: 10%
- Akkar: 5%
- Emigrated: 12.5%

**Socio-economic class:**

- Upper-middle or Upper class: 59%
- Middle-class: 27%
- Middle-lower/Lower class: 15%

**Education:**

- University studies in private universities or abroad: 62.5%
- University studies at the Lebanese University: 22.5%
- Non-university studies: 10%
- N/D: 5%

**Sectarian affiliation:**

- Christians: 51.7%
  - Maronite: 27.6%
  - Greek Catholic (Melkite): 5.2%
  - Greek Orthodox: 8.6%
  - Protestant: 1.7%
  - Assyrian: 1.7%
  - Not specified Christian sect: 6.9%
- Muslims: 36.2%
  - Sunni: 20.1%
  - Shi’a: 12.1%
  - Not specified Muslim sect: 3.5%
- Druze: 8.6%
- Sectarian affiliation not disclosed: 3.5%

**Same sect couples:**

- Intersectarian civil marriages: 48.3%
- Intrasectarian civil marriages: 48.3%
N/D: 3.4%

Gender:

- Female: 67%
- Male: 33%

Politically-active:

- Active: 64%
- Non-active: 36%

I tried to diversify my sample according to sectarian affiliation, socio-economic class, geography, age and gender. Firstly, reflecting my positionality (and my gender), and probably because ‘marriage’ and family are concepts that tend to fall on the female’s domain, my sample includes more women than men. Secondly, the generational balance is much higher among the couples married after the Civil War than during the war. This is reflexive, first, of the increasing tendency of civil marriages in the post-war period, as it will be analysed in chapter IV, and secondly, and in line with the previous point, it may be a reflection of my positionality, as from my network and circle of friends it was easier to reach participants from my own generation. Also, young civil marriage couples tend to be more visible and advocate of the cause of civil marriage in Lebanon, thus they were more accessible in the civil society networks and willing to be interviewed.

I was probably also trapped in the sectarian lens through which we tend to analyse Lebanese society, while my initial efforts were to balance the representation of sectarian affiliations. It did not take me long to realise that couples belonged to different sects, representing the plurality of Lebanese society, and that it did not require me to control the sample to make it ‘sectarianly even’. The relatively higher proportion of Christian Catholics (including Maronite and Greek Catholic) in the sample
might be elucidated through a simple explanation: the Catholic Church does not divorce, and marriage annulments have proven to be very difficult and costly. This has influenced the decision of Christian Catholic couples to opt for civil marriage in order to avoid the tedious problems, which they have encountered in many cases within their own families.

Unlike my initial worries on the sectarian representation, I realised rapidly that the wider representation challenges I had to face were geography and socio-economic class. Reaching cases of non-Beiruti and lower or middle socio-economic classes was a difficult task. Eventually I gained access to four couples outside the Beirut area and from a lower background on the socio-economic scale, one of them I never had the chance to interview. These cases were the minority, and I examine the reasons and context well throughout this thesis. They were, however, key to reflecting on the intricate complexity of civil marriage on the socio-economic and geography spectrum.

Although covering a wide range of actors and backgrounds, I am aware that my sample might not be representative of Lebanese society. Nonetheless, I believe the sample reflects the main patterns and population of civil marriage in Lebanon, for example, the higher proportion of upper-middle or upper socio-economic classes. I will not enter here into too much detail on the complex explanation for this, but one could trace the explanation to the clientelist distribution of economic opportunities and social welfare on which population in the lower and middle classes are highly dependable. Civil marriage would mean, in many cases, to leave these patron-client networks, which makes the cost-benefit calculations much higher for those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. Similar formulae apply in smaller villages and cities, where dependence on clientelist relations is also tighter than in bigger cities.
Family and social pressures are also greater in the latter, which explains the sample distribution by geography: a higher percentage of participants living in Beirut, and even more, from Ras Beirut; mostly high-educated (and especially in private universities or abroad); as well as a majority of participants being politically active, although this tendency does not include the participants in its entirety.

**2.2.3. Anonymity and Protection**

The essence of civil marriage and the related questions about family, children and immediate entourage includes intimate and confidential topics that participants have shared with me. I have decided to use pseudonyms for all my interviewees, unless they specifically asked their names to be public. In cases where informants have not specifically asked to be public, the principle of anonymity will prevail. I will be using images of participants or public images of civil marriage protests or couples as visual support for this thesis. However, the images might not be referring to the specific case and I will insert them randomly with the aim of preserving the anonymity of the participants. I will also avoid pictures of minors and children where their faces are recognisable.

I received my ethical approval to conduct fieldwork from the Social Sciences and International Studies (SSIS) Ethics Committee. As approved by the Committee, I decided to seek oral consent from my participants, rather than written consent, to avoid suspicion of gaining their signature from the participants.
3. On Doing Fieldwork (in Lebanon and beyond)

3.1. On the Other and the Self: ‘Abu Kees’ (Mr. Plastic Bag)

Matt (pseudonym used to preserve anonymity) is a young researcher/volunteer from the United States. He decided to travel to Lebanon and live and do some volunteer work for some months in the Palestinian camp of Shatila on the outskirts of Beirut. In order to gain a better ‘immersion’ into the culture and everyday life of the Palestinians he decided to rent a room and live in Shatila. Matt is a white, blond and 1.90m tall (taller than average Mediterranean man). He was probably mindful of the stereotypes that ‘Americans’ have abroad and thus he decided to ‘erase’ his ‘Americanness’ by carrying all his things (including laptop, books, wallet, etc.) in a plastic bag, to avoid being identified as the “stereotypical American that always walks around with a backpack”. In the eyes of the inhabitants of the camp, Matt could not hide his ‘Americanness’, and the fact that he was someone from the outside living in their community. What the Shatila inhabitants saw was an American man always carrying a plastic bag and thus named him ‘Abu Kees’ (Mr. Plastic Bag).

Matt, like anyone newly arrived in a community or place, may have built inevitable prejudices about Shatila. His perception does not necessarily imply that he was disregarding the Palestinian community with his judgement, nor does it negate that Matt may have gone to Shatila with the best of intentions and sense of solidarity to help the community in the way he knew/considered he should. Matt (Abu Kees) was trying to integrate into a society that he perceived as ‘different’ from himself, and thus, he considered he had to modify his normal behaviour in order to cross that ‘divide’. By trying to build a ‘Western self’ (one that wears a backpack), he also constructed a ‘Palestinian Other’ (that does not naturally carry a backpack).
According to Lila Abu-Lughod, the assumption of the ‘other’ is one the issues that challenges the production of knowledge and ethnographic research:

What worries ethnographers now is not the history of the creation of the distinction between self and other, but how possibly to communicate across the divide, how to dialogue with the other. That there is an “other,” with the corollary that there is a self which is unproblematically distinct from it, is still assumed. To question that assumption would be to look at the relationship between anthropology, colonialism, and the racism in the construction of the Western self [emphasis added] (Abu-Lughod, 1990a: 24-25).

Following Abu-Lughod, the ethnographer needs to reflect on construction the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in its historical, cultural and political process. Besides, Abu-Lughod, as well as many other anthropologists and ethnographers, would argue that the construction of the self and the other, as well as the positionality of the researcher embodies a whole structure of power relations embedded in language, gender, nationality, economic class, age, space, which cannot be simplified merely on the ‘outfit’. Depending on the context one can be a researcher, a woman/man, a student, an intruder, a legitimate interlocutor or someone contributing to the visibility of their cause, which essentialist-culturalist paradigms fail to grasp. Through the latter paradigms, however, (Western) researchers and practitioners continue to reify the divide between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, instead of deconstructing the historical political, social and economic structures that build our realities that are far from simple dichotomies between ‘us’ and ‘them’ based on ‘culture’. What is more, part of the role of the researcher should be to understand the meaning, context and practices of the communities researched within that complex and situated structure, which cannot be simplified by plastic bag/backpack. By the same token, it overlooks the political agency of the actors by labelling them as static ‘informants’ or ‘insiders’ (while we position ourselves as ‘outsiders’), with knowledge and experience that are not also subject to change and do not require to be situated.
This is not to say that Matt’s actions and engagement may not motivated by political solidarity, but researchers need to be aware that being physically ‘close’ to the subject researched does not exclude them from the structures of power of knowledge production in which their research is embedded. Not only was Matt’s approach Orientalist in his idea that Palestinian people do not carry a backpack and how he perceived Palestinian people, defined as the “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, 1978: 3), but his attitude also reflected the patterns of colonised production of knowledge, one that obliges researchers to abide by certain epistemologies, methodologies and ethical conduct defined by a political field at the Western university of origin. Even well-intentioned research and practices are embedded in a power structure in which the ‘indigenous’ population are mere objects of research and subject to our own preconceived ideas of themselves and the ‘other’.

Furthermore, the supposedly ‘static informant’ or ‘other’ indeed depicted Matt as ‘Abu Kees’ in his failed (and equally unattainable) goal to be as ‘neutral’/non-American as possible, which was easily noticeable to the community. Why would a privileged white foreigner carry a plastic bag? The Palestinians of Shatila were able to cross-cut the division of knowledge by which they should merely be seen and researched by the (external) researchers, without them bringing into play their own ‘other-reflection’.

The interactions between Matt and the community co-produced the knowledge not only of the Palestinians living in Shatila, but also of Matt’s. Researchers are ‘subjects’ just the same as the Palestinians. Thus, as producers of knowledge (and humour), the Palestinians demonstrated their role beyond their passive position of ‘informants’.
To conclude, the production of knowledge, and not only ethnographically-produced knowledge, is always partial (Clifford, 1986) and inter-subjectively constructed. By means of building on the long debate on the ‘objectivity’ of knowledge in general, and ethnographic knowledge in particular, this thesis builds on the assumption that ‘truth’ and knowledge is always situated way (Haraway, 1988). Beyond dichotomies of ‘self’/’other’, ‘outsider’/’insider’, the researcher should consider how knowledge is constructed as an inter-subjective process, not only during the interview operation, but also in the interpretation and writing-up process. Besides, the researcher is responsible for ‘situating’ how material differences are embedded in a historical, political, economic and social structure recognisable to us as well as the community we are researching with/for. In the next section I will reflect on my positionality as an inter-subjective process of knowledge production.

3.2. The Many-Faced Positionality

3.2.1. My Mediterranean Self... ‘Ente wahdeh menna’

During my fieldwork in Lebanon I profited from two personal features that I considered an advantage when interacting with Lebanese subjects. The first was my physical appearance, embodying the average (imagined) Mediterranean physical features, and therefore representing both Spanish and Lebanese. When travelling around Lebanon I could benefit from the ‘invisibility’ of not having very striking physical features among the Lebanese population, where people would usually assume that I am ‘Beiruti’, probably relating to my ‘cosmopolitan’ outfit and language. In regional parts of Lebanon, it is common to relate to ‘Beirutis’ (as well as foreigners) as
‘ajaneb (foreigners), without distinction. I believe in these parts of Lebanon I would fall under that same category.

Another factor that in my opinion worked as a gate opener and ice-breaker during interviews was my Spanish nationality. Many Lebanese, and Arabs in general, idealise and admire Spain, and particularly Andalucía. As my friend remarked when he came to visit me in Andalucía: “This is like civilised Lebanon. It’s like Lebanon, but people love each other!!” The Arab influence and historical heritage of Al-Andalus evoke reasons for pride in Arab history. My Andalusian origins were thus always celebrated and made my interlocutor on more than one occasion welcome me as ‘wahdeh menna’ (one of us), making reference to my Arab heritage.

In the second place, football has developed as one of the most powerful diplomatic and ‘softpower’ tools. As one of the most popular sports on the planet and in the Arab world, Spanish success in this sport has tuned Arab people as the most adept fans of Barshelona or Real, which has been another object for devotion to the country and a great ice-breaker with anyone no matter which social context. Indeed, well-known Lebanese satirist and social blogger Karl Sharro, on social networks (ironically) referred to the Sunni-Shi’a schism as a smaller social event in comparison with the schism Barça-Madrid provokes in the Arab World. Finally, it is the lack of direct association of Spain as a colonial/imperialist power in the Middle East, even if the pillage, death and destruction of the European imperialism was set off first by the Spanish in the
Americas and even the term ‘colonialism’ itself derives from the Spanish conqueror Colón. In the formation of the Middle East and its modern and contemporary history the Spanish did not play such a role in their invasion, and thus even if being ‘Spanish’ implies a certain category of privilege related to being Western and European, it does not connote ‘coloniser’ as with the French or even the British or the ‘imperialists’, as the Americans are regarded in the region. I could deconstruct this stance first, by comparing the reactions and sympathies that unveiling my nationality would trigger, compared with my French flatmate. Second, it was not difficult for me to identify situations in which I was the ‘coloniser’. When being introduced to Latin American people, and especially certain nationalities where the colonial enterprise provoked great catastrophes, I immediately became apologetic for those crimes and rushed to prove my anti-colonialist ideology.

3.2.2. Language

Lebanon is a country where French and English co-exist, to a greater or lesser degree depending on the context, with Arabic. Private education promoted education in languages other than Arabic, mainly English and French, and certain circles of the elite communicate in the two latter languages. It was very common that when I contacted my participants for the first time (usually by phone) and they heard my ‘arabiya enkasar (broken Arabic), most of them immediately asked me if I preferred to switch to French or English. In that case I would give them the option to choose. The interviews I conducted with the couples included 22 in English, 11 in French and 7 in Arabic. Almost all of them included words, expressions or even entire conversations switching from one language to another. I tried to show flexibility in the language they
chose and confirmed that I could understand the three languages. Fluency in foreign languages was a reflection not only of the socio-economic environment my participants were coming from, but also that only 12.5 per cent of them did not have higher education studies and 62.5 per cent did, from private universities or abroad; that is, they had their degrees taught either in French or in English.

The complementary interviews with lawyers, judges, political activists and members of the civil society, politicians, priests, travel agency staff, etc. included a higher proportion of interviews in Arabic, especially with lawyers, judges and civil society members that chose to speak in Arabic, probably as an option and an ideology. In cases in which the interviews were conducted in Arabic I was not able to develop conceptual ideas as I could do in French or in English, but my participants were always patient and showed gratitude and admiration about the fact that I could speak Arabic. Many reproved that some researchers that had previously interviewed them were not fluent in Arabic. “You are good, I like to speak to you”, responded Rima when I asked to meet with her for a second time to follow up on our first interview. “I don’t mind spending time with you because you speak our own language. Not only you understand us [the society], but you also understand our language... *ma3oul* someone doing research on Lebanon does not speak Arabic??” I am sure many anti-Orientalist advocates would agree with Rima on this.

### 3.2.3. Gender

The power relations embedded in the structure of gender had, without doubt, an impact on my research. Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents I interviewed were women, whereas the majority of complementary interviews I conducted with higher profiles in the rank of power (politicians, lawyers, judges, notary, priests) were men.
The reasons behind the larger proportion of female participants among the couples can be twofold. First, marriage is perceived as something related to family and kin, and therefore falling within the women’s domain. Second, my own gender may have affected the snowball sampling when someone was making a contact available to me, as they instinctively thought about me getting to know women rather than men.

Female scholars and journalists carrying out fieldwork or who are based in the Middle East have shared a similar point of view: being a female (Western) researcher opens both female and male spheres of action. Conversations with women were more intimate, again probably reflecting on my gender. They touched faster on children’s education, family and friend relationships, and they were more able to share and articulate other worries and issues with me. Conversations with men tended to be more politically loaded. This has previously been articulated in Lila Abu-Lughod’s experience (1986/2000: 16): “[b]ecause relations in the women’s world are more informal than in the men’s, I was able to get beyond polite conversations more quickly”.

There was one field in which my female gender had a greater impact, that is the religious realm. Gender, however, has intersected with other identities that also affected my positionality as a researcher. Hence, I had easier access to Christian priests (notably when meeting with a Greek Orthodox priest, married and in favour of civil marriage), than in my contacts with Muslim shuyukh (plural of sheikh). Although reflecting on my gender identity is needed in this aspect, it should not be reduced to the sole explanation and dismiss my Western origins, from a traditionally Catholic country (and with a Christian name). I was more prone to be Christian than Muslim, which made me have more sympathy with the circles of the former religion rather
than the latter. Finally, Muslim people are not blind to the increasing Islamophobic ideas and attitudes spreading in the West, which could hinder a Muslim sheikh to meet with a foreign researcher to discuss civil marriage, when they are very often under the perception of being misunderstood or misjudged.

3.2.4. Class and education

As it was mentioned above, participants’ language skills reflected a high level of education and socio-economic status. Whereas more than 80 per cent of the participants received higher education, 62.5 per cent attended university in private establishments or abroad. The level of political engagement, 64 per cent among all the participants, may also have had an impact on the level of self-reflection and awareness that almost all my participants, without exception, showed during the interviews. I had very deep conversations with my participants on elaborate political and social concepts, reflecting on an acute understanding of the history, politics and economy of the country, including informants that may not have obtained the highest levels of education. Participants were very well-informed and eloquent in how they expressed their beliefs and explained their motivations for civil marriage, which has made my data so rich and informative on so many levels of analysis. In many cases, the purpose of my research may have fostered conversations leading to more politically engaged conversations, while informants may have been moved, in our conversation, to emphasise their activist stances and beliefs given the nature of my research. As a matter of fact, on the few occasions I mentioned terms like ‘resistance’, participants replicated the same term in their responses to describe their motivations to engage in civil marriage.
3.3. The Crisis of Representation/Interpretation

I will focus in this section on some questions relating to the ‘crisis of representation/interpretation’ that arose particularly during the stage of conducting ethnographic research, but that had occupied my theoretical and empirical analysis throughout this thesis. I will simply present these questions and how they impinged upon the methodological choices. These questions will need further analytical and theoretical unravelling in the following chapters.

In this section as well as in this methodological part, by including questions on ‘objectivity’, knowledge production, positionality, questions on ‘self’ and ‘other’; ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’, I try to draw on my understanding on an ethical, moral and politically engaged research and how I ‘interpret’ or ‘represent’ my research case study.

3.3.1. Ascribing meaning and agency

One question that has intrigued me throughout my fieldwork, the writing of this thesis, and will probably continue to be an unresolved concept until the end of my (academic) days, is the question of ascribing meaning to the actions of the subjects researched. With his theoretical concept on *habitus*, Bourdieu cautioned us that not all actions are the result of reflection and awareness from the individual (Bourdieu, 1979: 170). The researcher should be aware of risks of over-interpretation of the meaning and intention of the individual’s actions.

At the centre of my research is the analysis of the practice of civil marriage by Lebanese couples. This practice implied a set of concepts I developed, including
political agency and resistance, as I will expand on the next chapter. What was the meaning of the practice of civil marriage? Did all practices entail the same agency, considering that different actors revealed different forms of consciousness and intentions behind their acts and that they had to oppose different sets of power or social and family pressures? Were they all subverting power including those that did not describe it in this way during the interview? My role as a researcher was precisely that of describing the actions of the subjects researched, but describing their actions despite their own narrative obviously posed ethical, methodological and theoretical questions on my research. This dilemma will make more sense when I analyse epistemological concepts of ‘everyday forms of resistance’ and ‘political agency’ on my interview material in chapter V.

3.3.2. Reifying sectarianism

A second question on the ‘crisis of representation’ was elevating the reification of sectarianism in Lebanon. One of the main motivations for this research was trying to situate sectarianism as a process of ‘differentiation’ that is daily constructed. Sectarianism has mainly been represented in the media as well as in some academic works as a mere ‘outcome’, as a system operating in Lebanon and in other Middle Eastern countries without analytical enquiry into how it is been constructed (and thus could be deconstructed). These studies have taken the premise of sectarianism as an immobile unit from which Lebanese society and politics should be seen. I argue that these kinds of views and analyses have contributed to the reification of sect and sectarian identities in Lebanon.

In contrast to this, I intend with this thesis to analyse sectarianism as historically, politically, socially, economically and culturally produced and equally contested.
Nonetheless, I was still looking at Lebanon through the same lens that I was myself criticising for being omnipresent in all the studies on Lebanon. By focusing on sectarianism, even if from a different angle, was I not also contributing to the omnipresence, over-interpretation and reification of sectarianism as a paradigm in Lebanon?

3.3.3. Writing on, with or for Lebanese civil marriage?

Writing about the ‘other’ poses the challenge on how to locate your subjects and the purpose of your research. My aim was obviously to write on/about civil marriage in Lebanon, but the purpose of an intersubjective and situated knowledge production is to do it also in cooperation/with the research subjects that are at the centre of the research. It is their practices, actions and context that inform the research inquiry. The difficult conditions some couples are facing due to the absence of a civil option for personal status law in Lebanon also set my research on the track of advancing the cause for civil marriage. I am not an ‘outsider’ to the Lebanese activist struggle. I am someone travelling and living in Lebanon with a European passport and in the privileged position of having access to a British academic institution that has data and intellectual material dealing with the political and social configuration of Lebanon. As someone that has used their times and lives to build a research thesis and hopefully get a doctorate degree, I am indebted to them. The least I can do is to commit intellectually, politically, ethically and morally to the way I produce knowledge on their cause (see: Schepers-Hughes, 1995).
4. Knowledge Production: Interpretation, Reification and Colonial Division of
Academic Labour

Edward Said (1978: 3) defined Orientalism as “the corporate institution for dealing
with the Orient... a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority
over the Orient”. The on-going colonialism of power of knowledge from the West in
the Orient and in all corners of the globe determines what kind of research can be
structurally positioned within the current academic institutions, what research will be eligibl
for funding, for a career promotion or to attain publication standards in
‘prestigious’ academic journals. Research and knowledge production is embedded in a
set of historical, political, social and economic relations of power as Foucault
prominently and meticulously elucidated for us (Foucault, 1969, 1976a, 1976b, 1982).
This set of power relations and knowledge production is determined by Western
colonialism and imperialism that rule in the academic realm, in a way that
epistemological paradigms and research methodologies are determined by the
academic institutions (the very same that hold the funding, the academic promotions
and ranking of publications). In the research design process the communities that we
set out to research do not determine the concepts, formulation, epistemological
approach or ethical procedures of the research proposal (Al-Hardan, 2014). The
subject of the research is thus completely misplaced from the centre of the research
and substituted by Western understandings of methodology and epistemology.
The priest of Mtein knew very well in which place he had been positioned by the
Western academic course of knowledge production. As an ‘Oriental’ subject he was
deemed to be the object of research by the Western academic (no matter how
experienced, knowledgeable, ethical or prepared), with the ‘appropriate’ Western epistemological and methodological frameworks to interpret their reality.

5. Conclusion: Towards a Politically-Conscious, Decolonised and Engaged Academia

I am not in a position to provide a definite answer on how to decolonise research and knowledge production, nor do I believe I have presented here any ground-breaking topic or definitive answer on how to conduct ethnographic research in the Middle East. However, as an academic belonging to a Western institution and doing research in a traditionally colonised region I believe that I should commit to the critical understanding of the set of relations of power of knowledge production in which we are embedded and that we represent. The researcher should always be aware of the colonial paradigm that she is producing and reproducing and remind herself that the dialogue with the subjects of research should always be at the centre of the research project. By trying to deconstruct the politics, the motives (personal and professional), the relevance of the research (question) and the benefits for the researched community, the researcher might be approaching, even if slightly, a position in which she is accountable for the research she is developing (see: Al-Hardan, 2014).

Ethnographers, anthropologists or any social scientist carrying out field research need to be aware of the profit and power they enjoy and take from the people in the field. If the profit might not be immediate economic reward, we certainly profit from the social status that it provides us through academic publications or professional positions, as well as the prestige we acquire within university environments (Asad, 1995). Even if our intentions are good, “we cannot rest on the morality of our
intentions [...] We must, especially as activists and anthropologists, hold ourselves accountable by combining constant action and reflection” (Hermez, 2011: 51).

I have tried in this chapter and in the previous introductory chapter to reflect upon my experience of doing fieldwork and writing about civil marriage in Lebanon, bearing in mind the latter points that would make me more accountable for my research: What are my personal motivations and my personal stake in this research? Why is it relevant to study everyday forms of contestation to sectarianism in Lebanon? Why is civil marriage a relevant case study for the contestation of sectarianism and for Lebanon? What are the techniques and challenges that I have encountered while trying to ‘represent’ and ‘interpret’ their practices, their voices and the forces they are opposing?

To conclude, and to emphasise one of the points mentioned in the Introduction, I will quote Certeau (1990: 18) on describing how to approach culture and what I believe should be the study of culture: “The approach to culture begins when the ordinary man becomes the narrator, when he defines the (common) place of discourse and the (anonymous) space of his development” [own translation; emphasis in the original]. It is the purpose of this thesis to place the research subjects at the centre of the research, in order to get as close as possible to making them the narrators.
CHAPTER III: Review of Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: Sectarian Hegemony and Everyday Forms of Resistance

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to present the main theoretical bodies comprising this thesis. As the toolkit necessary to build the intellectual and empirical analysis of civil marriage in Lebanon, this thesis is based mainly on three theoretical concepts: first, sectarianism (as well as other political identities in Lebanon); second, hegemony from a Gramscian perspective; and lastly, the concept of everyday acts of resistance. The first part of this thesis will unfold a theoretical conceptualisation of sectarianism in Lebanon. The concept of sectarianism will be analysed on its many meanings and the realities it signifies. Following Makdisi (2000b), I will trace the construction of sectarian identities
and communities as both a practice and a discourse that can be traced to eighteenth century Mount Lebanon.

Sectarianism will be analysed as a paradigm that produces and reproduces sectarian subjects, but it will mainly be described as a hegemonic system order that actively defines practices and discourse. Sectarianism will be defined as a system of power that structures individual, social and political identities over any other system structuring social and political categories. In this sense, sectarianism is the political, social and cultural *hegemon*.

In the second part, I will define this concept, *hegemony*, using Gramsci as the main referent to describe it. The notion of hegemony is key to understanding how the social person works, not as a passive recipient of power, but as a social agent. Hegemonic structures and institutions are able to produce subjects that, without a means of coercion, are able to reproduce the patterns of power through consent. The notion of consent, consciousness and intention will be a principal concept in this thesis.

Within this theory of hegemony, Gramsci describes *civil society*, which is the site where contestation happens. I am particularly interested in describing civil marriage, which may happen in civil society, but beyond this limited concept I need a theory that describes not only social movements, but also individual, quiet and short-reaching acts on the communal, familiar or individual level. This event is better described by the concept of an *everyday act of resistance*, first defined by James Scott (1985) and theorised by other authors after him.

I will develop these theoretical concepts below in order to set the base for the examination of my empirical and ethnographic research conducted in Lebanon on civil
marriage, which will be defined in chapter V as an act of everyday resistance against the hegemonic system of sectarianism and other structures of power.

1. Conceptualising Sectarianism in Lebanon

This section is devoted to the conceptualisation of sectarianism in Lebanon. Sectarianism will be defined according to the diverse acceptations and social realities it designates. The subsequent sub-section will analyse the historical roots of sectarianism traced back to the Ottoman era and external interference in domestic issues of the local community. From this chronological perspective, I will depict how sectarian identities have developed into a far-reaching and structural paradigm that characterises social practices and political discourse in Lebanon. Rather than a passive outcome, sectarianism is defined here as an active producer and reproducer of the sect and sectarian identities. What is more, the concluding aim of this chapter is describing the sectarian system and power within the Gramscian paradigm of ‘cultural hegemony’, that is, one that delimits and enriches every practice and discourse in Lebanon. This sectarian hegemon is changeable; it is able to (re)produce, perform and renew itself; it is resilient and adapts to new domestic, regional and international conditions; it takes different shapes and forms depending on the context to dominate and subordinate the subject.

1.1. A brief definition of Sectarianism

Part of the difficult endeavour of defining sectarianism is that the same concept connotes different realities. In opposition to work in which sectarianism is conceived
as biologically inherited, primordial or tribal, this thesis is situated on the body of literature that situates sectarianism as a modern political, social and economic dynamic process, rather than an outcome. Sectarianism can refer to the institutionalised confessional system of governance, for example, in which electoral laws divide parliamentary seats based on sectarian quotas, and personal status laws determine citizens based on fifteen different juridical systems (Baydoun, 1999a). Sectarianism is also defined as a political discourse. In that sense, sectarianism occupies a hegemonic position with regard to the history, politics, society, economy, culture and even the past and future of the Lebanese state and is read from the lens and system of ‘truth’ of sectarianism (Mikdashi, 2011). Sectarianism has also been defined as “a way of being in the world that depends upon a set of cultural markers and social practices” [emphasis added] (Weiss, 2010: 13). Sectarianism is not a religious or theological concept, but it is rather a marker or an important means of differentiation in terms of identity and membership of the in-group or the out-group (Joseph, 2008).

The uses and descriptions of sectarianism are in line with the understanding that Ussama Makdisi (2000b) developed of sectarianism as a modern phenomenon that resulted from the 1860 Maronite-Druze conflict mentioned above. With his masterpiece, Makdisi followed the emergence in time and history of sectarianism as a definer for social groups. This thesis will follow his definition of sectarianism as both a practice and a discourse:

a practice that developed out of, and must be understood in the context of, nineteenth-century Ottoman reform. Second, it is a discourse that is scripted as the Other to various competing Ottoman, European, and Lebanese narratives of modernization [...] a discourse – as the set of assumptions and writing that described this changing subjectivity within a narrative of Ottoman, European and Lebanese modernization [emphasis added] (Makdisi, 2000b: 5-6).
Sect and sectarian categories are only immutable in appearance. This thesis intends to contribute to the work of authors that contest the notion of sectarian identities as something primordial and unchanging. It is through the networks, institutions and provision of services that particular understandings have developed and reified notions of sect and sectarian affiliation, as will be examined in this thesis and has previously been examined in other works, most of them involving ethnographic research, to unravel the intricate construction of sectarianism (Abu-Rish, 2014, Cammett, 2014, Deeb and Harb, 2013, Harb, 2007, Joseph, 1975, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2000, 2005, 2008, Kingston, 2013, Makdisi, 2000b, Mikdashi, 2014, Nucho, 2017, Picard, 1994, Rivoal, 2014, Salloukh et al., 2015, Weiss, 2010).

It is between these social and political practices and ideological discourses that sectarianism is constructed. This representation of individuals is the result of a set of historical circumstances that created an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) with political legitimacy in 1860 on Mount Lebanon (Makdisi, 2000b). Besides, I believe that an imagined community such as the sect has been formed in Lebanon through other social and political practices that are not exclusively sectarian, but that have reinforced the lines of differentiation between sectarian identities, that is, geography segregation (Deeb and Harb, 2013), socio-economic classes (‘Amel, 2005 [1980]), patriarchy (Joseph, 1993, 1999, 2000) or others such as infrastructures (Nucho, 2017).

Further, studying the concept of sectarianism is especially crucial at the present crossroads in which conflicts are increasingly following sectarian explanations in the Middle East, from Syria (Phillips, 2015) to Iraq (Haddad, 2011). Approaching sectarianism as a hegemonic social and political order locates it as a product of daily and on-going practices and discourse, mirrored by daily practices and discourses that
resist this hegemonic order. Sectarianism is hence seen as an on-going process, historically made and remade in a given time and space.

1.2. The Roots of Sectarianism: 1858 Mount Lebanon, from Peasant Rebellion to ‘Sectarian’ Violence

Thorough work by historians has traced the mobilisation of religious minorities to their penetration of European powers such as France, Britain or Russia and their interventionist policies in the Ottoman Empire. The work of Saba Mahmood, on religious minorities and freedom in Middle Eastern politics, traces the development of human rights discourses and religious freedom as a strategy of fragmenting the religious groups under the Ottoman Empire. The European powers emerged as the protectors and advocates of these religious minorities, in need of a patron to guarantee their ‘religious freedom’. This modern concept of freedom cannot be detached, as Mahmood (2012a: 419) explains, from “how the national and the international regulation and protection of religious minorities makes specific notions of freedom and unfreedom possible and inimaginable”.

These discourses on human rights and religious freedom were complemented with broader concepts on ‘self-determination’, which were the basis on which the boundaries of ethno-religious groups started operating. Timothy Mitchell highlights the benefits associated with this concept for expansionist and colonialist purposes of European powers, “since no population was ethnically homogeneous, this created the possibility of identifying or shaping groups as ‘minorities’. The imperial powers could then claim the duty to protect them as an endangered fragment of the population” (Mitchell, 2011: 99). This is not to say that European powers operated on non-existent
groups or religions in the Middle East. Religious communities already existed in the Middle East, but they were neither politically salient, nor clustered in geographical boundaries where they could easily claim ‘sovereignty’. Thus, the violence that erupted between 1858-61 in Mount Lebanon was of a local nature and “it is imperative to dispel any illusion that sectarianism is simply or exclusively a native malignancy or a foreign conspiracy. Sectarianism can be narrated only by continually acknowledging and referring to both indigenous and imperial histories, which interacted – both collided and collaborated – to produce a new historical imagination. Sectarianism is a modern story, and for those intimately involved in its unfolding, it is the modern story – a story that has and that continues to define and dominate their lives” [emphasis in the original] (Makdisi, 2000b: 2-3).

Historian Leila Fawaz has also contributed to the study of the social, political and economic transformation of Mount Lebanon in the 19th century, and its definition of being mainly marked by the local transformation triggered by the Egyptian occupation under Muhammad Ali, the European intervention, the Ottoman defeat (Fawaz, 1994), as well as economic profits harvested by the Maronites from the French investment in the silk industry that operated through their networks (Khatter, 2001). Pre-1860 Ottoman society in Mount Lebanon was characterised by “a network of alliances among its leading Druze and Maronite [Christian] families based on a chain of clan loyalties that cut across sectarian lines and took precedence over loyalty to village, district, or church” (Fawaz, 1994: 17).

The Mount Lebanon region was composed of a Christian population, mainly Maronites persecuted during the Byzantine Empire, and Druze who were oppressed by the Fatimidi Dynasty. Life, for the ahali (people), but not the a’yان (nobility), surrounded
the agricultural cycle and cultural practices which were common among the Druze and Maronite ahali (Makdisi, 2000b: 30). This is not to say that religion did not play a role in the lives of the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon. It was simply that categorization of the society was not defined by religion, but by a division between the ahali, the population majority, the peasants, and the a’yan, with alliances that cut across Druze and Maronite divisions. What is more, even if not a predominant practice, interfaith marriages among members of noble families was not unknown in historical Mount Lebanon, a practice that was completely unthinkable between a noble and a peasant, even from the same faith, although it did require the lord’s permission. Trespassing the line between the nobles and the ahali meant cutting the line of ta’ifa, that is the social and family rank, which was the meaning of ta’ifa prior to the mid-nineteenth century, rather than ‘sectarianism’ as it signifies nowadays (Makdisi, 2000b: 35-37).

The uprising led by peasant revolutionary Tanyus Shahin between 1858 and 1861 challenged the politics and monopoly of power and knowledge from the a’yan. The transformation of the ahali into jumhur (the general population) saw them organized into popular committees and claiming political representation. Shahin successfully organized peasant revolts in the region of Kesarwan that succeeded in evicting the Christian lords who were oppressing Christian peasants and seized power through organized popular committees. The initial revolt, with class
struggle connotations, took on a sectarian character when Shahin and his comrades were also invited to ‘liberate’ other peasants in mixed villages in Mount Lebanon, where the peasants were Christians and the Druze were the lords. Beyond interpretations on how a revolutionary struggle tragically turned into sectarian violence, Makdisi (2000a: 207) adds another layer of understanding to this episode. He argues that Shahin’s rebellion ‘belonged to the modern world’ because it reflected the new sectarian society, echoing global ‘discourse of freedom, representation, and equality’, in line with the theories by Mahmood (2012a) and Mitchell (2011), by which discourses on human rights and freedom were extant at the onset of the political salience of religious minorities. “Shahin and his rebels carved out a role for ordinary Maronite Christians in formal politics and anticipated the politics of nationalism. Shahin also deployed a discourse of freedom for Christians that was inherently limiting and exclusionary, for it allowed no space for [...] the Druze and Shi’a inhabitants of Mount Lebanon” (Makdisi, 2000a: 207).

Shahin was defeated in 1861 by a Lebanese notable backed by Ottoman forces, the Maronite Church and the European powers, forcing him to surrender. After 1861 the historical traces of Shahin Tanyus are almost impossible to follow (Makdisi, 2000a). The events of 1860 became known as the Druze-Maronite massacre, with French and Ottoman officials actively constructing an interpretation of the events as ‘inevitable’ sectarian hatred, and triggered governance reforms based on political and spatial understandings of ‘ethnic hatred’ (Makdisi, 2000b). The Ottoman government, alongside France, Britain, Russia, Austria and Prussia drew a new division and political autonomy for Mount Lebanon through the approval of the Règlement Organique and the adoption of the Mustarrafiyya (Fawaz, 1994). The political architecture arranged new ‘sectarian geographies’, as well as social, political and legal divisions of the
individuals according to their sectarian affiliation. This fresh socio-political order "replace[d] a non-sectarian elitist culture with a sectarian one since one's sect defined one's involvement in the public sphere and ability to be appointed to office, to govern, to collect taxes, to punish," even to live and exist as a loyal subject (Makdisi, 2000b: 162). Beirut and its port became a hub in which French investments shifted social and class divisions (Hanssen, 2005).

Besides emerging political discourses on ‘sectarian violence’ and incipient legal and political divisions, Shahin’s revolt should be examined as a rupture and transformation of the peasants from ahali to political subjects. Not just Ottoman and European intervention in the conflict, but popular demands for ‘global’ discourses on freedom, equality and representation concealed exclusionary and constructed religious groups (Makdisi, 2000b). Not only did agency shift from the hands of the nobility, the a’yan, to the ahali, but also elite control over class and social divisions, power and knowledge, was broken and with it a new social contract emerged in which religious minorities became ‘sectarian subjects’.

1.3. Sectarianism under the French Mandate and Today

French Mandate officials, supported by the Lebanese elite, created the legal, political and administrative institutions to constitute the Lebanese confessional system of governance (Thompson, 2000). The emergence of Le Grand Liban (Greater Lebanon) in 1920 under the French mandatory authority represented a plural society deeply divided along overlapping sectarian, ideological, economic, regional, and cultural cleavages. Greater Lebanon included Mount Lebanon with the annexation of mainly Muslim-populated environs in rural areas, which were economically underdeveloped
compared with the Mountain regions, and some of the coastal cities (Zamir, 1985). Albert Hourani describes the new Republic of Lebanon as embodying a national cleavage where different segments of the population subscribed to “different ideas of what Lebanon is and what it should be” and each developed its own “vision of Lebanon” (Hourani, 1991: 7). The ‘opposing’ cultural identities he refers to were Lebanese nationalism on the one hand, which emphasised Lebanese heritage from the Mediterranean and Phoenicia with the Maronites as its main proponents, and Arab nationalism on the other hand, which focused on Arab cultural identity and historicity, and even questioned the grounds of Lebanon as a separate state from Syria. These ‘competing visions’ attempted to be managed through a power-sharing formula reproducing the consociational Mustarraffiyya under the Ottomans, and articulated under the French Mandate through the Règlement Organique and the 1943 National Pact (al-Mithaq al-Watani) (Thompson, 2000). The National Pact was a vague formula to find a compromise among the different visions, that is Arabism and Lebanonism, based on the understanding of sectarian identities as primordial and fixed entities or groups, which led to inevitable outbursts of ethnic hatred or violence. This management of sectarian cleavages contrasted with how other social and political cleavages were envisaged, that is, nationalist visions of Lebanon or the increasing socio-economic disparities blossoming in the newly independent country.

Alongside the political system, al-Mithaq al-Watani, the unwritten agreement between Sunni and Maronite elite in 1943 laid the foundations for the Lebanese confessional state through proportional allocation of power, based on the 1932 census data of demographic representation in which Christian Maronites were the slight majority, followed by Sunni Muslims, Shi’a Muslims and Druze, and eighteen officially recognised sects in total (Picard, 1996). The Lebanese political system was henceforth
based on a proportional democracy, also called consociational democracy (Hanf, 1993: 29) or power-sharing, which proclaimed a system based on proportional governmental representation of the sectarian identity of the population. What the consociational democracy produced instead was the institutionalisation of sectarianism as a mode of mobilisation and subjectification. In Lebanon, consociational democracy derives from the elements of a grand coalition (or elite cartel), mutual veto and proportionate representation (Hudson, 1968). What happened, in fact, is that this confessional-consociational model opened the door for sectarian tensions, as Lebanese history on political violence has demonstrated. According to Paul Brass (1997) the problem of consociationalism is that it operates with the mistaken assumption that cultural differences among ethnic or sectarian groups are ‘objective’ factors. It exaggerates the problems with strong collective identities and their core premise is that “ethnic divisions are more inflammatory than other types” (Brass, 1997: 338).

Lebanon’s confessional system operates not only on the allocation of civil and government positions according to sectarian quotas, but also sectarian subjectification and political mobilisation produced by the legal architecture on personal status matters that recognise Lebanese citizens simply through patrilineal sectarian affiliation (Joseph, 1999). Family matters are ruled from this legal framework that only recognises sectarian citizens, who are ruled in one of the fifteen religious/sectarian courts in which the Lebanese are obliged to register their marriage. Civil marriage is not ruled domestically in Lebanon, and couples not aligning with sectarian beliefs or religious piety are obliged to travel abroad, usually to Cyprus, to get their civil marriage. Civil engagements are immediately registered and Lebanese civil courts

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6 On the debate on confessionalism in Lebanon, among the supporters see: (Messarra, 1983) And among its detractors, see: (Beydoun, 2004, Choueiri, 2007, Jabra and Jabra, 2001)
apply the foreign civil law, where the couple contracted their marriage, in the Lebanese courts for matters of divorce or child custody. Hence, civil laws are currently being applied on Lebanese soil, but only in respect of foreign legislation applied by Lebanese judges. This practice is unjust for Lebanese citizens who cannot afford to travel to a foreign country to get married (and pay the cost of $1,500 on average for a civil wedding in Cyprus). The current praxis of civil marriage produces socio-economic discrimination, and is especially detrimental to non-sectarian, or impious couples, or those from different sectarian affiliations. Besides, it ties Lebanese citizens to a legal architecture that reifies the state’s conception of Lebanese as subjects in terms of their sectarian affiliation, first and foremost, as well as gender and sexual identity (see: Mikdashi, 2014).

Patriarchal citizenship is also an important issue in understanding Lebanese politics and sectarianism. Citizenship in Lebanon is patrilineal and blood-based, thus exclusively inherited from the father, and never transmitted from a Lebanese mother to her child born of a non-Lebanese father. The work of historian Elizabeth Thompson (2000) elucidates how women’s demands for equal rights and citizenship were sacrificed to alliances with religious authorities and patriarchal ruling elites during the negotiations between the French officials and Lebanese elite.

In conclusion, the making and remaking of sect and sectarian identities is a process produced by the legal and administrative Lebanese confessional state institutions, as well as cultural, political, economic and social practices (Weiss, 2010). It is a practice that is constantly negotiated through different customs that, just like civil marriage, contest the authenticity of Lebanese citizens simply on blood-based sectarian affiliation. The increasing number of Lebanese engaging in civil marriage has pushed
judicial courts to apply civil legislation, even if foreign in its origin. What is more, activists and civil society are constantly challenging the contours of the sectarian personal status laws through actions such as the wave of civil engagements signed on Lebanese soil, generated by the first marriage of Kholoud Succarieh and Nidal Darwish in November 2013. A total of sixty civil engagements was signed in Lebanon in the subsequent years, among which only five were registered.

1.4. Sectarianism as a Hegemonic System of Power

Far from treating sectarianism in Lebanon as the end result of the consociational political system, sectarianism should be studied as an active mode of the production of social practices and political discourse within the sectarian categories imposed. Sectarianism is understood in this thesis as a system of power that structures individual, social and political identities over any other system structuring social and political categories. In this sense, sectarianism is the political, social and cultural hegemon. This hegemon is able to (re)produce, perform and renew itself. It is resilient and adapts to new domestic, regional and international conditions; it may change some of its patterns, but in substance it remains the hegemonic system of power. Like any other system of rules, values and practices, it is always subject to contestation and constantly challenged every time it reproduces itself. Moreover, the sectarian system of values is sometimes used as a reductive and disguising term for an ensemble of power of other exclusionary systems such as class, patriarchy, neoliberalism, political familism, patrimonialism or geographical segregation.

Recently published academic publications provide empirical research on sectarianism as a non-essentialist, dynamic and cross-cutting process, which can be traced either
through the study of urban infrastructures and services provided by institutions affiliated to sectarian parties and religious organizations (Nucho, 2017); by the institutional path-dependence of advocacy, environmental and disability networks (Kingston, 2013); by the study of the provision of social welfare services from the political parties (Cammett, 2014), or from an analysis of how the political/sectarian/economic elite has appropriated the state and its sectarian tools to perpetuate and consolidate their power (Salloukh et al., 2015).

The work of these scholars contrasts the increasing academic interest and over-study of Middle East politics through the sectarian lens (see: Abdo, 2016, Nasr, 2007). The former scholars provide a framework for interpretation of sectarianism as a changing paradigm and producer of an ideological, social and economic hegemony. My thesis subscribes to a similar reading of sectarianism and adds a new piece to the puzzle: first, the (re)production of sectarianism will be taken by focusing on civil marriage; second, and most importantly, the purpose of this thesis is to focus not only on how sectarianism is produced and reproduced, but how it is also contested in its everyday processes. The thesis’s main contribution will be to bridge the theories on the hegemonic production of sectarianism with an analysis of how it is resisted quietly and daily; its resilience and its adaptation to changing conditions. The case study that I have chosen to focus on for this purpose is civil marriage, as an everyday practice that contests the sectarian imposition on family matters.

The next section will build on theories first on hegemony, the concept that I will use to describe the sectarian system of power in Lebanon; and second, on the concept of ‘everyday forms of resistance’, the paradigm which will be the case study of civil marriage and how it embodies a form of contestation to the dominant social order.
2. On Theories of Power: Hegemony and Everyday Form of Resistance

This section will describe the theories and concepts that will help us understand the concept of the ‘Sectarian Hegemony’ as described above. Hegemony is understood in Gramscian terms as a superstructure of power, where sectarianism plays a dominant role. I believe the notion of hegemony helps us understand the superstructure of power (where Gramsci situates ideology) and the systems of power that work within it. That is, the Lebanese superstructure of power in which sectarianism plays a preeminent role in defining how a social person is formed, but how this superstructure is also composed of other systems of power that contribute to how the person is formed, such as patriarchy, class, geography or neoliberalism. Furthermore, focusing on sectarianism as a hegemonic superstructure of power will help the study of the transformation of social relations and (re)production of the system of power through daily practices and political discourse. In conclusion, the notion of hegemony understands power in more pervasive and formative terms, that shapes people’s perceptions and experiences in the world they live in.

Power is, however, never immutable and always contested. The form of contestation that I chose in this thesis is not a rupturing and massive social movement, but rather a form of resistance that takes place in the individual, familiar and private sphere; it lacks visibility, coordination or strategy, but nevertheless it happens in a quiet, silent way with everyday acts of contestation and resistance. Given the character of individual subversive action rather than confrontational mobilisation, theories on everyday forms of resistance are particularly suitable to define these practices. In his *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), James Scott opened a new scholarly paradigm of study of

Finally, in the quest for a definition of everyday resistance, the notions of meaning and intention/consciousness emerge as key in the analysis of civil marriage in Lebanon. Lebanese citizens opting for a civil marriage acted to escape the sectarian system and its form of religious marriage. This consolidates their act as political agency, that is, “the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)” (Mahmood, 2005: 8). During my interviews and participant observation with the civil marriage couples I could gather, however, the political agency of these participants did not mean their intention to subvert the sectarian system. I differentiate between, on the one hand, acts of resistance directed at subverting dominant powers and on the other hand, mere political agency or ‘tactics’ (Certeau, 1990) that do not target the system of power but only aim to navigate the system, or at best, subvert the social norms. Through ethnographic research I could examine the same act of civil marriage falling into these two categories depending on the intention of the agent or civil marriage spouse, which gave relevance to this question of intention while defining the act of everyday resistance.
Within this paradigm, I delved into theories on everyday acts of resistance and completed the conceptual examination with the concept of political agency by Saba Mahmood (2005) and tactics by Michel de Certeau (1990). These concepts might not follow the Gramscian paradigm of this thesis for the study of the Sectarian Hegemony, but I believe that incorporating them was necessary at this stage to advance in the conceptualization of everyday acts of resistance.

2.1. Hegemony as a Superstructure of Power: Gramsci

The notion of hegemony is related to the individual’s agency and will. It is about the social person, not as passive recipient or object, but as a social agent. Stable hegemonic institutions are the ones able to organise consent in order to secure a political project. Hegemonic institutions are able to reproduce habits through consent. This *consensual diffusion* applies to the cultural and moral aspects of society, which the hegemonic power complements with its *coercive* functions. Coercion operates as a mere fortifier when there is equilibrium between ethico-political ideas and prevailing socio-economic conditions, when the ‘civil society’ and ‘political society’ are at the same level (Gramsci, 1995: 360).

The concepts of civil and political society are essential to understand Gramscian hegemony. Whereas the ‘political society’ represents the (capitalist) state and its juridico-military repressive apparatus, civil society refers to the institutions that seem to be private and outside state control, where culture and intellectual activity operate, through persuasion or consensus. Critical readings of Gramsci, however, do not isolate one social formation from another, but even if they have different functions and modes of operation, they work on the nature of ‘connectivity’. The neat separation
between the different social realms might be relevant in particular moments of history, while in others the lines of separation might be more blurred. The forms of exerting hegemony in each ‘society’ may also change in history: while domination or coercion is the usual force exerted on the realm of the state or the political society, cultural hegemony, persuasion or consent usually apply in ‘civil society’. Gramsci proposed, however, that the possibility is there for certain kinds of conduct to appear in the opposite realm (Gramsci, 2000: 306-7). As expressed by Gavin Smith in his reader on Gramsci: “because hegemony works precisely by being articulated between the realm of coercion and punishment represented by the state and a broader realm of ‘organisms commonly called private’, we cannot presume to know that coercion is limited to the state or even ‘political society’, nor that persuasion is limited to a non-economic and extra-state realm called ‘civil society’ without knowing quite a bit about the social formation in question” (Smith, 2007: 219). Thus, the ‘normal’ exercise of hegemony is characterised by the combination of consent and force, where the former predominates over the latter.

Despite the transferability of functions, hegemony is conceived as operating mainly in the realm of civil society, where intellectual activity plays a crucial role in establishing contestation to the material conditions imposed by the state through coercion. Civil society, as the private sphere of organisms, is the “market place of ideas, where intellectuals enter as ‘salesmen’ of contending cultures. The intellectuals succeed in creating hegemony to the extent that they extend the world view of the rulers to the rules, and thereby secure the ‘free’ consent of the masses to the law and order of the land” (Bates, 1975: 353). In Gramsci’s view, the ‘culture’ that could be cultivated in the ‘civil society’ realm is also capable of producing self-control, which is the source of effective resistance and political agency. The Italian revolutionary thinker believes that
the role of the intellectual provides the linkages between ideology and experienced practical engagements to produce collective will and direct self-control towards autonomous action (agency) (Smith, 2007: 221). This exercise of ideology provides the basis of social hegemony, in which Gramsci goes beyond Marxist understanding of social-class struggle and the state at the origins of ‘force’. The struggle over hegemony consists of an intersubjective configuration of consciousness in the civil society in order to articulate the struggle over hegemony (Morton, 2007).

The creation of hegemony, according to Gramsci, is marked by “the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructure” (Gramsci, 1971: 181), from the structure where Gramsci situates the economy to the ideological superstructure where he developed the notion of ‘historical bloc’. In this sense, Gramsci incorporates the sphere of knowledge ever-present in every theory on power, developed by Foucault. In the Gramscian system of power, the intellectual need to form the consciousness that is encapsulated in the terrain of the ideology, the superstructure, without however losing appreciation on the material struggle between social-class forces present in the minor structure (Morton, 2007: 95). This complex of structures and superstructures is a result of the difficult composition of the capitalist nation-state and the different struggles that emerged. The historical bloc is the definition that Gramsci uses to define the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of superstructure and structures. The purpose of focusing on the subaltern social classes and their struggle is to provide a ‘positive history’ away from the narrow ‘negative history’ that would provide a focus solely on the unity of the ruling classes and the state (Gramsci, 1971). I will come back to this concept of historical bloc, and that of superstructure and structure, later in chapter V when I analyse sectarian hegemony and counter-hegemony, but in the interest of clarity, one of the reasons I
use the Gramscian notion of structure of power and hegemony is because I find this multi-layered structure an elucidating concept of the complex and intertwined structures of power of the Lebanese society.

Gramsci’s intellectual contribution provides a strategic theory for the constant construction, maintenance and struggle for counter-hegemony when hegemony faces continual resistance. The strategic phase of Gramscian counter-hegemony contrasts the war of manoeuvre, where the (state) power is targeted directly, with a war of position, which involves a struggle on the cultural front in civil society attempting “to penetrate and subvert the mechanism of ideological diffusion” (Gramsci, 1971: 238). Social change, according to Gramsci, involves an underground and clandestine struggle to revert the mechanism of consent, through an intersubjective production of consciousness and agency.

The concept of will is a recurrent concept in Gramsci’s writing. It is where Gramsci ascribes the basis of all political action, which becomes meaningful when the will of the many becomes the collective will. The will of the individual, however, is only meaningful, according to Gramsci, when the collective will of the many becomes the ‘will of a class’. Thus, the will generates power of action only when it is the united, coherent will of a class. This will is developed by critical understanding of the self, awareness of being part of a hegemonic force and the condition of an advanced political consciousness. In the moment that the individual becomes conscious of the hegemonic forces, the individual is already transforming his/her personality. In that sense, knowledge is power, given that the Gramscian definition of power remains attached to that of ideology: in the moment that one becomes conscious of the complex social networks of the superstructure of power, the individual will be...
generating power. The will is the basis of all philosophical actions. “All men are philosophers”, according to Gramsci, or at least have the potential of becoming one when the will drive them towards a “philosophy of praxis”, when the individual is able to criticise the ‘common sense’, that is, “the incoherence set of generally held assumptions and belief common to any society”, and develop the ‘good sense’, which is based on “the philosophy of criticism and the superseding of religion and common sense” (Gramsci, 1971: 323). Hence, for Gramsci will, as well as ideology, is the basis of philosophical actions that allow the individual to be located in the superstructure of hegemony, ideologically-operated.

Thus, Gramscian counter-hegemonic movement may lack an internal logic or social basis, just like the literature focusing on ‘everyday forms of resistance’ or ‘quiet resistance’ has described the contesting practices of unorganised and unconnected collectivity of individuals that lack strategy and visibility. I will expand on this body of literature below, propounding on the Gramscian notions of hegemony that I have described here and that I find explicative of the case study of civil marriage in Lebanon.

### 2.2. Everyday Practices of Resistance

The study of contention and social and political change has very often focused on traditional notions of social movements related to organised, collective, and public political activities. Acts of contention have been defined in parallel with the dynamics of mobilisation and visible rebellions, protests or organised activities that aim at changing large structures of the state or the law (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). In my opinion, the tendency to study social change and challenges to power structures from the dramatic confrontations between the oppressed and the oppressor narrows
the understanding of forms of challenge to the cultural practice and identities in periods of social upheaval. Does this mean that during ‘quiet periods’ the oppressed comply with the social order imposed upon them, which remains utterly unchallenged? By that account, do social uprisings represent a breaking point for the appearance of collective consciousness and confrontations to the dominating system, previously inexistent? This thesis argues that social protests and other organised political movements are only one form of confrontation to the hegemonic order. Techniques of ‘everyday acts of resistance’ are a potential source for social change, even if it “is a social movement with no formal organization, no formal leaders, no manifestoes, no dues, no name, and no banner. By virtue of their institutional invisibility, activities on anything less than a massive scale are, if they are noticed at all, rarely accorded any social significance” (Scott, 1985: 35). Relations of power between the dominated and the dominating are never fixed or uncontested, but rather enduring forms of ‘everyday’ resistance are constantly present in the behaviours, traditions and consciousness of the subordinate (Scott, 1985). Furthermore, I will argue that social upheavals usually build on already present cultural contestation, as the context in which they emerge is far from completely grounded and unchallenged hegemonic powers. Besides, oppressed and minoritarian groups in authoritarian or postwar contexts are trapped in a coercive system where they can rarely afford open, coherent and organised confrontation. This does not mean that individuals are permanently submitting to the dominating power, but they may opt to do it in a rather quiet way. In Lebanon, confronting the system is seen openly as a threat to the difficult equilibrium permanently ruling the country. Surrounded by violent conflicts at their immediate
borders and the constant spill-over of violent confrontations and religious fundamentalism, this adds up to an unaccomplished reconciliation between the Lebanese factions and the traumas of the Civil War. These traumas are present in the heads of Lebanese who relate breaking the system with the downfall into violence and war, as in the recent examples of the cycle of violence and repression that have taken place since the Arab uprisings in 2011. The sectarian leaders have played their part in maintaining the perceptions and fears of the ‘other’ and the segregation between communities. Furthermore, as described above, the sectarian leaders have successfully imposed hegemony in their control not only of politics and the economy, but also of social benefits and the welfare state, and the perpetuation of the clientelist system.

Similar to the ‘war of position’ described above by Gramsci, I will analyse the ‘collective’ will of unorganised individuals that aim at subverting how and why cultural hegemony is imposed. This concept was further described as everyday resistance, quiet resistance or the ‘weapons of ordinary people’ as a mechanism of subversion or resistance that requires “little or no coordination; they make us implicit understandings and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority.” (Scott, 1985: xvi).

While these acts also involve a collectivity of individuals (Gramscian ‘collective will’), one might be tempted to interpret them as movements from the logic of contention. However, can we be talking about a social movement without formal organisation, leaders, coherent action, strategy, defined claims, physical (or virtual) assembling, and without institutional visibility? Bayat (2010: 15) refers to this ordinary resistance as social non-movements, “collective actions of non-collective actors; they
embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leaderships and organizations”.

From 1985, when Scott opened the field for the study of social change and power transformation from the practices of resistance, there has been no shortage of studies in the field, especially from a poststructural perspective. The concept of everyday acts of resistance is first and foremost defined as a practice or an action. Power is not a state nor immutable and it does not represent a state of being or a behaviour, but an action. If power represents an action, the act of contestation against that action cannot but take the form of action as well. Resistance needs to be considered not as opposed to power, but entangled with it, creating and sometimes even reinforcing the structures of power that it tries to oppose. As theorised by Richter-Devroe (2011: 34) in the practice of sumud (resistance, steadfastness) of Palestinian women, “[s]tudies of everyday highlight that resistance is not independent of systems of power, but rather conditioned by them. Systems of power do not determine the form resistance takes, but set the possibilities for distinct types of resistance to emerge”.

Lila Abu-Lughod theorised on the concept of resistance in similar terms to avoid the tendency to “romanticize resistance”, that is, “to read all forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated”. She continues that following the Foucualdian analytics developed in Histoire de la sexualité, “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1976b: 95-6). Abu-Lughod suggests that “we should use the resistance as a diagnostic of power” (1990b: 42). Power sometimes relies on the production of resistance, as power and resistance exist in a constitutive relationship,

Exerting power on subjects opens a range of possibilities with which the latter may respond, from submission to resistance. Hollander and Einwohner (2004) argued against the straight dichotomy, that studies of resistance suppose, between resisters and dominators. According to them, this dichotomy ignores the multiplicity of systems and hierarchies of power, and individuals can simultaneously be powerful and powerless within different systems.

This dichotomy between plain submission and resistance was one of Mitchell’s criticisms of Scott’s (1985) theory on peasants’ everyday acts of resistance (1990). According to the latter, Scott bases his study of power and resistance on the opposing dichotomies of coerced versus free, or material versus ideological, etc. Mitchell contends that the acts of resistance by the peasants in Sedaka, Malaysia, are defined according to a particular and exclusive notion of private consciousness on the individual’s understanding of the reality that informs and shapes his/her behaviour. However, this private consciousness contradicts interpretative understandings of social interactions as embedded in the continuous interpretations of others’ actions, and not in private consciousness. Mitchell asserts that the meaning of these social interactions cannot be detached from the performance and public understanding that the collective individuals’ actions would acquire in the public sphere (Mitchell, 1990).

We have so far expressed three of the features defining everyday forms of resistance, that is, firstly, resistance cannot be understood detached from the power it opposes, and secondly, and also mirroring the definition of power, resistance represents an action or a practice, but never a state of being. The third characteristic subscribes to
the Gramscian definition of hegemony as a superstructure of power, which operates in
the same time and space as other systems of power. A multiplicity of systems of power
is superposed and they operate in a certain context, which also determines the act of
resistance. Sometimes the resister may have different structures of power that
oppress her. She may be able to resist one of the constraining powers, but it is
guaranteed that she will be escaping dominance of the rest of structures of power.

The Bedouin women researched by Abu-Lughod (1990b) resist some form of
domination to the patriarchal system, but support the existing system of power with
several practices. Indeed, “[i]f the systems of power are multiple, then resisting at one
level may catch people up at other levels” (Abu-Lughod, 1990b: 53). What is more,
how should the Bedouin woman resist the forms of domination upon her, in terms of
domination structures of gender, class and tribal/ethnic group? Multi-layered forms of
resistance reflect intersectional channels of power operating in the same society.
Individuals are placed/place themselves in diverse dimensions of the structure of
power which originate on a specific set of identities that overlap with each other.

Actors of resistance may decide to resist one form of ‘power’, yet submit to other
forms of dominance. Even more, the very same actor may decide to avoid a certain
structure of power in one form, but abide by the same system of power in a different
context. The study of this multi-layered political domain benefits from the analysis of
everyday forms of resistance, as much as it represents (everyday) forms of power.
What is more, the intersectional forms of power correspond with forms of identities
that operate in the society contextually and temporally.

Similar to the multi-layered nature of power, resistance is not always pure, but
similarly multi-layered. Individuals or groups may resist a structure of domination
while simultaneously accommodating another form of power or authority. At the same
time, actors might be contouring or challenging a form of imposed power within a
particular social structure, while not actually challenging the validity of the overall
imposed structure. These choices often correspond to the notion of “linked to the web
of relationships in which any individual is embedded” (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004:
549).

2.3. Ascribing Resistance: Meaning, Intention and Consciousness

I have deliberately avoided key issues in the conceptualisation of resistance that have
occupied an important part of the debate on the field of (quiet) resistance. As I argued
above, in the introduction of this section, civil marriage is conceptualised as an act of
everyday resistance according to particular understandings of meaning, consciousness
and intention of the act by the agent or resister. For this reason, I decided to expand
beyond the current literature on everyday acts of resistance and incorporate other
theories that I found useful for my case study. The concepts and theories incorporated
here go beyond the theoretical Gramsci paradigm in which this thesis is framed, but as
I will show below, they give light to these key concepts on the understanding of
practices of resistance.

Hence, I will expand on how the categorisation of resistance describes different types
of acts of civil marriage, some that will be described as acts of resistance and other
that fall under the category of tactics (Certeau, 1990). These issues pertain to the
category of how does someone ‘ascribe resistance to an act’, or what is more, how can
we, as scholars, recognise an act of resistance and differentiate it from another act
that corresponds merely to political agency or the concept of tactics proposed by
Firstly, the same as any other act of social change or social movement, resistance should not be studied in relation to its failure or partial failure. Even if many historical revolutions have failed to bring about the political and social transformation that it initially intended or planned. Should we thus stop referring to it as revolution or political upheaval because it did not achieve the implementation of the leftist revolution it intended? I would argue that outcome or result is independent from the act of resistance itself. So how do we recognise an act of resistance if it consists of acts that happen daily, quietly and in silence, or what is more, how does the scholar ascribe the meaning of ‘resistance’ to an act?

James Scott (1985) described acts of resistance as ‘everyday’ because “they make no headlines” (p. xvii) and because the “low-profile techniques” (p. xvi) they use go unnoticed by the powerful, which helps free the powerless from repression. On the other hand, Rubin (1996: 241) critiques the lack of emphasis on ‘recognition’ as a “minimalist” definition of resistance and argues that the term resistance should be reserved for visible, collective acts that result in social change and not “everyday acts… that chip away at power in almost imperceptible ways.” To this, Scott had already argued that political consciousness is a better indicator of resistance than outcome because there is no guarantee that resistance will achieve the desired effect (1985: 290). In fact, how can the final outcome a posteriori change the nature of the initial act, an act that was intended to oppose, challenge or contour a form of power?

Some authors have argued against the understanding of resistance based on how the agent carries intent to resist while contending that the assessment of intent is difficult, if not impossible (Weitz, 2001). Others have argued that an actor’s intention cannot be central to the definition of resistance because the actor may not be aware or
conscious of her act of resistance or that it implies difficult treatment or cultural perceptions from the scholar, as Hoffman (1999) argued in relation to Western reading on one’s inner self in comparison to non-Western cultures like Japan.

With regard to Hoffman’s (1999) treatment of the concept and its ethnographic interpretation, I believe that the role of the social scientist should be to use the ethnographic research tools adequately in order to attain what Geertz (1963) describes as ‘thick description’. That is, description of the researched culture in a way that the researcher is able to understand the research subject and the self adequately. If we take such a relativist view on the study of resistance not only would the study of resistance not be possible, but any ethnographic or social sciences study would be considered invalid.

I follow Abu-Lughod (1990b: 47) in her description of resistance as a “whole range of human actions, including those which may be socially, ethically or politically indifferent to the goal of opposing hegemonic norms” and even “outside the conditions within such acts acquire their particular meaning.” Thus, the outcome does not determine resistance, but I do believe that political consciousness or intent to challenge, contest, oppose, subvert, change, and ultimately, resist the dominant social order should be a requisite to define resistance.

Political agency is thus the primary condition to the possibility of acting against the structure of power. Political agency is described as “the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)” (Mahmood, 2005: 8). That is, it entails the capacity of the individual for doing so. The act of the agent, however, might not be intended to challenge, subvert or to contest the structure of power. The political agent
may act against or differently from the dominant norms, but it does not mean he/she is intentionally trying to subvert them or resist them or attempting to promote social change. This act might be an act that represents the shortest way to achieving a desired outcome. It might be a selfish, individual or even one-time events. As we are set to analyse power, as Abu-Lughod (1990) suggested, at the same time that we are studying resistance, I do not believe that acts of resistance include acts that are not intended to challenge power.

According to Scott (1985: 38), “[a]cts born of intentions circle back, as it were, to influence consciousness and hence subsequent intentions and acts”, which is why Scott believes that resistance operates in the engineering of consent by the rulers to accept their control in the realm of Gramscian ideology. Leblanc also places political consciousness and intent at the heart of everyday acts of resistance, as she argues:

Accounts of resistance must detail not only resistant acts, but the subjective intent motivating these as well... In this conceptualization of resistance, an attribution of any type requires three distinct moments: a subjective account of oppression (real or imagined), an express desire to counter that oppression, and an action (broadly defined as word, thought, or deed) intended specifically to counter that oppression... It is crucial that the first two conditions hold before any observational account can be deemed resistant. That is, the person engaging in resistant acts must do so consciously and be able to relate that consciousness and intent (Leblanc, 1999: 18).

In her description of political agency of pious women in Egypt, Mahmood (2005: 175) argues against ascribing the meaning of resistance to every act that does not “ineluctably means desire to subvert or resist”. Similarly, one cannot describe a practice as resistance simply by considering the outcome or the subversive effects that the practice might produce. Following Gramsci, I believe power emanates from ideology and thus involves political consciousness. The sectarian hegemonic power in Lebanon represents first and foremost the ability of constraining, promoting or inciting certain social practices, as well as political discourse that falls in the sectarian values
and norms. It has mainly been created not only in the Gramscian ‘political society’ or the realm of repression and the state, but also in the ‘civil society’, the ‘market place of ideas’ where the intellectual struggle to contest hegemony happens and where I situate the current daily struggle of Lebanese individuals to have civil marriage.

The act of everyday resistance, on my opinion, should thus be defined by the political consciousness it should involve, whereas other residual actions that denote confrontation with the current form of domination, without consciousness of the counter-domination practice of the individual’s act, cannot be defined as ‘resistance’ because the individual is not ‘resisting’ the power, but merely avoiding it. These residual actions are better defined in terms of ‘tactics’, which are actions that are used merely to avoid the system, but not to confront it.

Certeau’s division between ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’ operates in the following manner:

On the one hand, “Strategies are actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power (the property of a proper), elaborate theoretical place (systems and totalizing discourses) capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed” (Certeau, 1990: 62). On the other hand, ‘tactics’ are the actions used to navigate within the ‘propers’ (the place of power) and the ‘strategies’, when the “system is too vast to be their own, but too tightly woven to escape from it” (Certeau, 1990: 66).

Certeau’s concept of tactics operates in between the forms of power and sometimes it may develop new forms of hegemonic power. Unlike, everyday forms of resistance, tactics are merely used to navigate the system without necessarily challenging domination or social norms. In cases in which confrontation to power is not intended to contest it but intended to avoid the ‘weight’ of power, this act will be defined as
‘tactics’. When the action implies political consciousness against hegemonic social norms or domination as daily practice, I will refer to this act as ‘everyday practice of resistance’.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a review of theoretical concepts and framework for this research. This thesis is based theoretically on three main theoretical bodies of literature. The first is the concept of sectarianism. Sectarian affiliations are understood in this piece of research not as an outcome, but as political identities that are dynamically produced, reproduced and performed. Sectarian identities and the sect are the result of a daily process of (re)production of modes of sectarian subjectification and mobilisation. Sectarian personal status laws operate over (the absence of) civil marriage in Lebanon with the purpose of reproducing sectarian spouses, family and subjects, which consequently reify sectarian identities in its hegemonic category.

The study of civil status for marriage is also a paradigm for researching counter-hegemonic acts against the dominating political, social and economic system of sectarianism. Sectarianism is seen in this thesis as a system of power that structures individual, social and political identities along its own system of rules, values and practices. In this sense, sectarianism is the political, social and cultural hegemon. This hegemon is able to (re)produce, perform and renew itself. Sectarianism will be analysed as a system that has spread its tentacles through every aspect of social and political life in Lebanon, but as with every system of power, it is daily contested, challenged and eventually, potentially redefined.
The second body of literature aims at explaining this contestation to power. Civil marriage in Lebanon is understood as a practice of resistance that challenges power in a quiet way, in the private sphere of the family and the individual. The act may, unlike forms of social mobilisation, lack visibility, strategy or collective action. However, acts of quiet resistance may trigger and embody social change as well as conscious and intended contestation against the hegemonic structures of power.

Reflecting on theories of everyday acts of resistance, I have highlighted above three features that are essential for the understanding of practices of resistance. That is, first, resistance as an action or practice, not as a state. Second, the study of resistance as something that should be understood as a consequence of power, or even more, a mirror act of power, given that one does not exist without the other. Practices of resistance should be understood as embedded in power. The third characteristic reflects understanding of power and resistance as multi-layered, grounded on Gramscian theories on the structure(s) of power. Hence, several structures of power supersede one another and may operate at the same time and in the same space. The agent may be able to resist one of the oppressive powers, but it may be caught by other structures of power. Similarly, one agent may resist a system of power in a particular time and space, but then submit to it in another time-space context.

Examination of theories of everyday resistance continues through the debate on how one ascribes or defines an empirical act of everyday resistance. Given its intrinsic feature of invisibility and quiet form, recognising an act of resistance requires an act of ascription and interpretation of such an act as challenging certain forms of oppression and domination. I discussed above several conditions that scholars have considered in the conceptualisation of everyday acts of resistance. One of these features is failure to
resist or contest the system. This feature gives prominence to the outcome or end result rather than the nature of the act itself, the reason why I consider that what differentiates an act of quiet resistance from an act of tactics is the conscious intention of the agent to challenge and subvert the hegemonic power. This attribute differentiates an act of civil marriage that pretends to change the sectarian personal status laws, from one that is merely trying to avoid the restrictive system of religious laws on marriage. Whereas I consider the former an act of everyday resistance, the latter practice is defined by Certeau as ‘tactics’. Chapter V will delve into this concept and the characterisation of different acts of civil marriage by diverse couples in order to examine the concept and its theories. That chapter will present empirical data in order to advance the conceptualisation and definition of the concept of everyday act of resistance in contrast to tactics.
CHAPTER IV: Historical Background of Civil Marriage and Sectarian Personal Status Laws in Lebanon

1. History of the Sectarian Personal Status Laws: Colonial Origins and Present
2. The Absence of Civil Marriage Law: the Convenient Ambiguity
3. ‘El-‘Obros Manna Baydeh’: Power and Contestation for Civil Marriage in Lebanon
   3.1. Sha’t al-isha fi sijelat al-nofous (Removing sectarian denominations from the civil registry)
   3.2. ‘The Hole in the Wall’: First Civil weddings in Lebanon
   3.3. The Struggle for a Civil Option

INTRODUCTION

Sectarian citizens are produced and reproduced in a particular legal, social and political context through everyday practice that reifies such a category. As Maya Mikdashi (2014: 284) argues “[t]he sectarian does not precede the advent of the independent Lebanese state and its system of political sectarianism. Rather, he or she is reproduced daily through interactions with the Lebanese state, its bureaucratic and legal appendages and through various technologies an registers of recognition.” To put it in a nutshell, the juridical entity of a sectarian citizen is not prior to the legal recognition of the sect and its application through the personal status laws, but rather it is the daily exercise of the sectarian personal status laws.
that it has operated through, while reifying and reproducing individuals as juridical sectarian entities.

The law produces a sectarian form of being, and this very shape of the sectarian individual constitutes the rules of a political society that daily forms the legal system. With the application of the dual legal system, civil and personal status laws, Lebanese individuals are simultaneously tied to a body of laws that defines them as individual and sectarian citizens. During the French mandate and later during the independent Lebanese state, the legal system of family matters was placed under the control of fifteen different sectarian courts. The sectarianisation of personal status matters and the consequent construction of citizens as juridical sectarian citizens placed the institutional foundations as the sectarian modes of subjectification. A legal civil personal system, in which citizen and sectarian individual are not the same juridical entities, never saw the light in Lebanon. Subsequently, the Lebanese are not allowed to seek marriage except through a body of laws on family matters that does not recognise their legal entity other than as sectarian subjects.

Civil marriage and sectarian laws on personal status are far from proving ‘Lebanese exceptionalism’. With the exclusion of Tunisia, no Arab or Middle Eastern country has legalised civil marriage. Egypt and Israel are notable examples in the Middle East region of the hindrance and struggle of people for civil laws on family matters. Israel only recognises Orthodox Jewish marriages and no Israeli is allowed to marry outside of the Jewish faith community. In the case of Egypt, Mahmood (2012b) has argued that religion-based family law in modern Egypt is an inherited copy of the
Ottoman millet system, reflecting minority-majority politics and demography. When this system was translated to the project of national modernism, sectarian family law divided the citizenry into separate legal communities, exacerbating their differences, even if the principle of minority-majority established during the Ottoman Empire was conceived as a means of resolving differences. As Mahmood refers to sectarian Christian and Muslim relations, “Coptic–Muslim relations no doubt reflects increasing prejudice and sectarianism of Egyptian society, it is also a product of the structural tensions internal to the postcolonial state and the model of religion–state accommodation adopted in the modern period” (Mahmood, 2012b: 60).

This chapter will provide the history of personal status laws that hampers the development of civil marriage laws in Lebanon. It will begin with a review of the colonial origins of the sectarian personal status laws and the religious authorities’ pressures to stop any civil legislation to regulate marriage, child custody or inheritance. The second part will examine the current civil marriage law and how the hegemonic sectarian powers have used the ambiguous institutional hurdle to their benefit. The third part will examine the struggle for civil marriage and personal status laws since the creation of the independent Lebanese state, focusing on the draft law for optional civil personal status proposed in 1998 and the mobilisation from the civil society for civil marriage at that time, as well as the most recent heated debate on civil marriage that was triggered by the first civil marriage, of Kholoud Succariyeh and Nidal Darwish, performed on Lebanese soil in 2013.
1. History of the Sectarian Personal Status Laws: Colonial Origins and Present

The work of historian Elizabeth Thompson (2000) examines the women’s movement in colonial Syria and Lebanon at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1928 the women’s union was trying to unify the efforts of socially-minded mothers. In order to organise and situate them in the broader nationalist struggle, they created the ‘patriotic motherhood’ association and organised conferences and demands for the political and civic rights of women (2000: 143). The patriotic motherhood was hopeful when, in 1936, nationalists finally convinced the French to negotiate independence treaties, as the women’s movement expected to be able to assert, through the independence negotiations, their demands and rights and put civil limits on religious authorities. Quite to the contrary, the women’s movement saw how progressively the nationalists were giving up on women’s demands in order to gain the religious authorities’ support against the French authorities for independence. In particular, the dual legal system “not only drove the nationalists into the arms of religious patriarchs, but also made personal status reform all but impossible for the most well meaning nationalist government” (2000: 148).

Personal status laws were at the base of how religious patriarchs were seeking to extend their reach of power, very much to the detriment of women’s personal status. Opposition to civil legislation on personal status matters united Muslim and Christian patriarchs equally for that purpose. When in April 1928 Emile Eddé proposed that civil courts rule on marriage and divorce cases, Christian patriarchs immediately opposed this and he eventually withdrew this ruling (2000: 150). In 1936 the French decreed communities’ legal autonomy and guaranteed officially
recognised sects the right to issue their own personal status legislation and to manage their own sectarian courts. Decree No. 60 L.R. 1936 also included an article that has later been twisted in many different directions: “Syrians and Lebanese belonging to recognised confessions with personal status are subject to their confessions’ religious laws on matters pertaining to personal status and to the stipulations of civil laws on matters not covered by this [religious] law” (El-Zein, 2010: 2). Articles 5 and 6 also obliged the different sects to submit their system of laws to the state for approval, which was never the case for Muslim sects, as we will later see. Besides, article 17 of this law ruled that Lebanese people following sects not legally recognised shall be subject to civil law (Mansour, Daoud and (EMHRN), 2009: 17).

The French went further on this last point and declared, with the 1938 decree, the right of any citizen to claim their status solely under civil law. For the first time, civil law was declared the default law on personal status matters, rather than Islamic law, as had been the case since the Ottoman era, for matters not explicitly ruled in the religious laws (Thompson, 2000: 150). This was considered a step towards dismantling the dual legal system and huge demonstrations broke out in March 1939, especially among the Muslim community that considered the French ruling an intervention in their religious affairs and also perceived the French decision to be in favour of the Christian community (Thompson, 2000: 152-3). French High Commissioner Gabriel Puaux succumbed to the mass protests and Muslim religious authorities and issued Decree No. 53 L.R. on 30 March 1939, excluding Muslims from the stipulations of Decree No. 60 L.R. The possibility for promulgation of an alternative civil personal status law, optional or compulsory, was also ruled out and
thus Lebanese citizens were forced to abide by sectarian personal status laws (Baydoun, 1999b, Dib, 1975).

On 2 April 1951 the law of the Lebanese independent state stipulated that all sects should submit their personal status laws to the state for ratification. No legislation was submitted for approval, however they were immediately assumed as legal custom by the state. The recognised sects have since been permitted to legislate, administer and enforce their own body of laws on marriage, divorce, custody and property, on their own terms. As a consequence, each individual in Lebanon is subject not only to distinct personal status laws, but also independent bodies that issue laws and manage different judicial courts. While the Lebanese Constitution guarantees personal status and the respect of freedom of religion and conscience, the protection of the collective right of each sect to rule over their community members has prevailed over the individual’s right to chose his/her own religion rather than the patrilineal inherited sectarian affiliation. Explained otherwise, collective rights of sect are guaranteed before the rights of freedom of religion, conscience, equality before the law or equality of civil and political rights for all Lebanese citizens, as it is also stipulated constitutionally (Beck, 2010). Demands on civil personal status laws date from before the independence of the state, when the women’s movement, jurists and other activists had mobilised and organised for this purpose. In 1951, the Beirut Bar Association declared a six-month’s strike demanding civil legislation on family matters. The Tripoli Bar Association also joined the mobilisation, which caused major disruptions in the Lebanese judicial system. The

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7 Lebanese Constitution, art. 9
8 Lebanese Constitution, arts. 7 and 9
strike was not called off until the lawyers received a promise that Parliament would discuss civil personal status law (El-Cheikh, 2000: 148). The issue has, since, always been on the table and has never ceased to arise, intermittently, to this day, with protests, proposals and civil society organisation advocating an optional civil personal status law (Karam, 2005).

By the end of 1951 the Lebanese state issued a new law regulating personal status documents and named the sectarian authorities as one of the parties responsible for registering marriages (Traboulsi, 1998a). This adds another layer to the institutionalisation of Lebanese citizens as sectarian subjects, and even makes them bureaucratically dependent on the religious/sectarian authorities. With the absence of civil personal status law in Lebanon, religious authorities have full control of marital, divorce, custody and inheritance matters. Individuals also lack the choice of opting-out of their sectarian affiliation, as there is not alternative legislation or judicial body to abide by. Not only that, Lebanese who adhere to faiths not within the eighteen officially recognised religions, such as the Baha’is or Buddhists, completely lack personal status rights.

What is more, even if in Lebanon it is officially illegal to convert with the intention of merely subverting the law, the Public Council of the Court of Cassation, which has the jurisdiction over conversion cases, almost never penalises anyone for doing so, with the excuse that courts cannot interfere in the private sphere and assess the individual’s motivation for doing so. The Council argues that such an investigation

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9 The officially recognised religions in Lebanon are the following: Maronite, Melkite, Armenian Catholic, Syriac Catholic, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Nestorian, Protestant, Sunni, Shi’a, Ja’fari, Druze and Jewish (which possess their own personal status laws), and ‘Alawis, Isma’ils and Orthodox Copts that although officially recognised religions, follow the personal status laws of the Ja’fari and Orthodox laws, respectively.
would be a breach of civil liberties (Mikdashi, 2014: 291). This argument does take into account the prospect of attempting to curtail the individual’s civil liberties, including freedom of religion or conscience, by obliging every individual to follow religious/sectarian laws even if it is not in line with her religious beliefs. The right to live without religion or follow secular beliefs is not guaranteed in Lebanon either.

Personal status laws go beyond categorising and producing every citizen as a sectarian citizen. The law also produces different citizens depending on the category of ‘male’ or ‘female’. Men and women have different statuses in divorce, child custody, inheritance or spousal maintenance between each other, which overlaps with the differentiation that the law makes of the male/female citizen according to their ascribed sect. As Mikdashi (2014: 284) explains: “The interstitial nature of personal status and civil laws makes possible one of the main functions of the nation-state: to produce a body of people that, although differentiated by sex and sect, are unified under the overarching category of Lebanese citizenship”.

The institutionalised (re)production of sectarian subjectification through personal status laws overlaps also with the kin system and has consecrated what Suad Joseph (2011) named ‘political familism’ by encouraging intra-sectarian marriages and impeding inter-sectarian marriages. Given that children born outside of marriage are considered illegitimate according to the Lebanese law, and that living in concubinage has social and legal connotations, marriage is a compulsory step that every couple needs to take to normalise their life as a couple. With the current personal status laws, Lebanese citizens face the task not only of ‘finding the one’, but ‘finding the one whose father shares the same sectarian affiliation as yours’.
2. The Absence of Civil Marriage Law: the Convenient Ambiguity

Personal status laws have served the purpose of (re)producing a gendered form of sectarian subjectification in Lebanon. Sectarian laws on personal status matters promote intrasectarian marriages and impede intersectarian marriages. Lebanese citizens have managed so far to shun this institutional hurdle by travelling abroad to wed, following a foreign civil marriage law. Given that article 17 of the 1936 Decree No.60 L.R., still in force in the Lebanese state, stipulates that “personal status matters for Syrians and Lebanese belonging to one of the sects mentioned in Article 14, and following, or those not belonging to one of these sects, shall be subject to civil law” [emphasis added] (UNDP, 2009: 76). The same decree opened the door for a civil option for personal status issues to be legislated in Lebanon, which never happened due to protests and pressures from Christian and Muslim religious patriarchs. However, the decree gives the option to Lebanese citizens to be ruled by civil law on their marital matters, which, in the absence of a domestic Lebanese civil personal status law, was interpreted as giving room for applying any foreign civil law. Civil marriages abroad, under any foreign civil law, are thus registered within the Lebanese state, while Lebanese civil courts are responsible of the application of the foreign civil law for matters related to divorce, child custody or spousal maintenance (with the notable exception of inheritance, where civil law does not apply) (Azzi, 2007).

There are some exceptions to this. First, if the couple also registers their marriage within the religious authorities, the religious marriage and its personal status law prevail on the basis of pre-eminence of the domestic law over the international law
The second exception has its basis on the French Mandate rulings. Following the French attempts in 1938 to settle civil law as the default regulations for Lebanese citizens and the consequent mobilisation by the Muslim community, another Decree, No. 53 L.R., was issued on 30 March 1939 excluding Muslims from the stipulations of Decree No. 60 L.R. In the event that the civil marriage couple is formed by two Muslim-affiliated individuals who are Lebanese or Syrian, even if married through civil law, they inevitably abide by their corresponding sectarian personal status law and in the event of divorce. Their case falls under the authority of the Muslim religious court, even though the couple may have contracted marriage under a foreign civil marriage law (Traboulsi, 2000).

Civil marriage abroad, mainly in neighbouring Cyprus, has become a common practice to avoid this institutional hurdle that impedes two people with different patrilineal sectarian ascription to start a family, and similarly impedes marriage where equal rights between men and women and freedom of conscience or religion are preserved. Once the weddings are performed abroad, registration within the state is a mere bureaucratic formality that never poses any difficulty with the state administration. Further, marriages in Cyprus are very easily supported by the Lebanese embassy in Nicosia that facilitates and provides, within hours, all the necessary paperwork to take back to Lebanon.

Through interviews I conducted with the Lebanese embassy in Nicosia, the Cypriot embassy in Beirut and travel agencies in both countries, one could conclude that civil marriage among Lebanese citizens in foreign countries is, without any doubt, increasing exponentially. When Hayet, one of my participants, entered into a civil
marriage with her husband, both Greek Catholic, in 2005 she declared that it was slightly more difficult back then because the travel agencies’ packages did not exist ten years ago. At the present, almost every Lebanese travel agency that operates abroad includes a package for civil marriage on their website. The Lebanese and Cypriot embassies confirmed that civil weddings among Lebanese have increased in Cyprus during the past years, with the numbers varying between 700 and 800 every year, according to both sources. Nakhal, one of the travel agencies offering packages for civil weddings in Cyprus, Greece and Turkey started offering these packages in 2011. They organised less than 30 weddings in 2011 and 2012, but by the end of the summer of 2015 when I interviewed Emma, the Nakhal staff member in charge of civil weddings, she affirmed that they had so far organised 122 weddings in Cyprus, with five months remaining before the end of the year. Certainly, demands for civil marriage packages are increasing and travel agencies’ offers cannot but correspond to the demand of couples to wed abroad following a civil law. Not only every travel agency I interviewed declared to have jumped into the business only few years ago, but they also affirmed that the demand is steadily increasing, among Lebanese from all sectarian backgrounds and ages.
The complicated legal and institutional hindrance obliges couples that wish to marry under civil law to travel abroad and, essentially, to be able to afford the cost of $1,200 for the shortest trip to Cyprus. In a country where the minimum wage has only recently been increased to $450 per month, the calculated extra cost of a civil wedding in Cyprus of $1,250 could be considered a fortune and hence only affordable to a small minority.

The second hindrance is the fact that Lebanese judges in civil courts are applying foreign civil laws in their court. They are obliged to apply a law that is not intrinsic to their legal system and that has been legislated within a particular code and historical, social and cultural context of which the Lebanese judge is not necessarily aware nor has the tools to interpret. This is further deemed to be an infringement of the national sovereignty of the country, as civil Lebanese courts are forced to apply the foreign laws where the marriage took place (Azzi, 2007, Traboulsi, 2000). Furthermore, even if the civil law applies for marriages conducted abroad on issues of divorce, child custody and spousal maintenance, issues on inheritance remain
perpetually tied to the sectarian personal status laws. Ustaz Ibrahim Traboulsi, lawyer and legal adviser to the Hrawi commission for the draft law on civil personal status laws proposed in 1993, argued during our interview “inheritance… that is a completely different thing… Even for the Hrawi draft law we had to leave it aside not to make a ‘big boom’… They [the religious authorities] would have never accepted interference on inheritance.”

This vision on inheritance was also shared by Rafiq Zakharia, lawyer and activist on civil marriage, and widely echoed by other participants and Lebanese people married in a civil ceremony. “What they [religious and political/sectarian authorities] don’t want is that money and assets starts mixing up between Christians and Muslims… In this country it is all about the money and the power that comes with it. If we had a civil marriage law and people start getting married with different religions and inheriting from other families… That is a really big issue in Lebanon.”

Sectarian laws add inheritance complications. According to Sunni legal custom, if the father does not have male descendants, the father’s brothers or male relatives are entitled to the inheritance. In case he decides to make his daughters the lawful inheritors, conversion is the preferred option. In order to do that Sunni Muslims convert very often to Shi’ism, which law allows equal inheritance between men and women. Besides, even if according to Islam men are allowed to marry ‘women from the Book’ (Christians and Jews), the latter is not allowed to inherit from her husband as long as she is not Muslim, while if the case is the reverse, and the mother is Muslim and the father Christian, the latter and their children (who are following Lebanese patrilineal

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10 Interview with Ibrahim Traboulsi, lawyer, in Hazmieh, 30 August 2016
11 Interview with Rafiq Zakharia, lawyer, in Beirut, 8 August 2016
rules, also ascribed to Christians), are not able to inherit from the Muslim mother. In the absence of a Lebanese civil marriage law, personal status laws have applied for matters of inheritance, independently from the wish of the couples that travelled abroad and married under a civil law (Azzi, 2007).

Proponents of sectarian personal status laws on the Muslim side have argued that optional civil laws would contradict shari’a and would create a legal system to be applied to Muslim citizens that contradicts shari’a, that is, laws that forbid Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men or contradicting female inheritance, among others. Against this argument, however, some claimed that Lebanon is neither an Islamic state where shari’a applies, nor are other laws on alcohol or gambling in line with the principles commanded by the laws of shari’a - they are not only legislated in the Lebanese Parliament and approved by Muslim representatives, but they are equally taxed by the state and the Muslim clerics do not oppose receiving their salaries from the collection of those taxes (Chaaban, 2013).

The absence of civil personal status laws further consecrates the patriarchal structure. Firstly, women are not able to pass on their Lebanese nationality to their children who will be non-Lebanese unless their father holds a Lebanese passport. Secondly, women have nothing to do with the sect their children belong to, as they are immediately registered under their father’s sect. Although each sect develops different legal systems on family matters, they all coincide on rules that discriminate against women, even though the Lebanese constitution guarantees equality of all citizens before the law. Unequal laws on inheritance were mentioned above. Muslim laws allow men to have four wives, while Christian and Druze laws forbid it. Unlike
Muslim and Orthodox sects, the Catholic Church forbids divorce, which forces women to remain in abusive marriages. In terms of alimony, Muslim women are not entitled to receive it, which, once again, coerces women without economic resources into not seeking divorce and remaining in unwanted or abusive marriages. Child custody in Islam is also granted to the father or his family from a certain age or in the case that the mother remarries with another man, which the husband can do without losing custody of the child (HRW, 2015).

Financial motivations are behind the sectarianisation of the personal status system. In fact, sectarian courts generate substantial resources from weddings and receive very generous state funding, compared with other demands on the state budget. According to Prof. Jad Chaaban (2013), who conducted a study on the ‘Economics of Civil Marriage’, the 39,000 annual marriages generate $9 million, which adds to the $6 million that the sectarian court receives from divorce fees and marriage annulments. This adds up to the more than $17 million that are directly allocated to the religious institutions dealing with personal status laws, which equals the amount received by the Ministry of Tourism.

In conclusion, the sectarian personal status system inhibits the practice of civil and intersectarian marriage and therefore erects symbolic and legal barriers for national cohesion. The lack of encouragement for people to unite in marriage within different confessions subscribes to a legal and institutional system that builds inequalities in terms of economy, gender and religious beliefs (or the absence of). As will be examined below, numerous movements and initiatives have struggled for a civil alternative for marriage and the deconfessionalisation of personal status laws. The
hegemonic system formed by the political/sectarian and religious powers has so far stopped attempts to reform a system that currently benefits them. In fact, religious and political/sectarian authorities have mobilised, blocked and condemned any initiative for an optional Lebanese civil marriage law, whereas civil weddings are happening increasingly, almost everyday, among Lebanese couples who come back and register their marriages easily, without any altercation from this very same elite. It seems as if, as long as these marriages keep happening abroad and religious marriages keep being the norms, the hegemonic system does not perceive this practice as threatening to their supremacy or financial power.

3. “Al-‘Obros Manna Baydeh”: Power and Contestation for Civil Marriage in Lebanon

3.1. Shat al-’ishara fi sijelat al-nofous (Removing sectarian denominations from the civil registry)

Article 11 of Decree 60 L.R. states that any citizen who has reached legal age and does not suffer from any mental disability may leave her sectarian affiliation and change her personal status. The National Union of Democratic Youth (NUDY), together with other civil society organisations, conducted a campaign in order to trigger that article and encourage people to remove their sectarian denomination from the civil registry records (shat al-’ishara fi sijelat al-nofous). This was aimed as a further step for the removal of sectarian denominations on Lebanese ID cards (hawwiya), which was a reminder for many Lebanese of the times when the mere proof of their sectarian affiliation could be reason for their lives to be taken when crossing the city through a checkpoint during the Civil War. The objective of the
campaign was to prompt debate at the individual level on the legal and institutional system that ties individuals to the confessional system, and for Lebanese to think of themselves as something more than sectarian citizens. The long-term envisaged goal is to trigger a national referendum for the deconfessionalisation of the state and personal status laws\textsuperscript{12}.

The movement of citizens who applied for the removal of the sectarian affiliation was approved and supported by the Minister of Interior and Municipalities at that time, Ziad Baroud, who is also well-known as a lawyer and human rights advocate. He issued a circular in February 2009 accepting such application and confirming that citizens had the right to keep a blank box in their ‘ekhraji qeid (civil registry documents) where sectarian affiliation is meant to be inscribed. This initiative was, in general, saluted by many activists and advocates as a step forward towards the deconfessionalisation of the state. However, some pointed at its shortcomings. Some activists and civil society members considered it as short-reaching and futile, because it creates controversy on the consequences and the legal state of the citizens removing their sects in a legal system regulated along the eighteen recognised sectarian communities where electoral laws, personal status laws and even positions within the public and civil bodies are allocated proportionally among the eighteen sects. Considering that there is no legal category for the sectless citizens or any optional legal system by which sectless people could abide, that is, a deconfessionalised legal system, what legal system would these sectless people

follow? If civil and public positions are allocated basing on their sectarian proportions, will sectless people be able to occupy civil positions?

The latter issue triggered much controversy and has been used prominently to discourage people from taking this action. Amin and Samira applied for the removal of their sectarian denomination by their ma’mur al-nufus (civil officer) in Akkar. Being ascribed Christian and Muslim respectively, they have to apply to different governmental bodies for this. While for Amin the procedure in the ‘Christian’ ma’mur al-nufus took four months, for Samira it took more than eight months, as I could gather during our interview. When she went to the ma’mur al-nufus, the same staff working in the governmental office used to threaten her by saying that she would never be able to find a job in the public administration and that she would not be able to vote. They resorted to other tactics when they saw that she did not relent, and accused her of wanting to ‘exit the religion’ or stop being Muslim. Her reaction was: “I don’t want any religion, look at what Muslims are doing, look at Daesh, look at Nusra. I don’t want to be Muslim.”¹³ According to Nayla Geagea, lawyer and activist on civil status, there is a misunderstanding among society that religious authorities and sectarian politicians are helping to promote, as well as confusion between the meaning of striking out one’s sect from the civil record and performing one’s religion.

As freedom of belief is guaranteed by the Lebanese constitution, this has nothing to do with belonging to a certain sect, or the public denomination of one’s sect at the Civil Status Registry, and everyone should have the right to remove public mention

¹³ Interview with Samira and Amin, Minyara, Akkar, 28 July 2016
and keep their religious beliefs within the private sphere. Moreover, a citizen can choose to organize his or her personal affairs on the basis of a sectarian law or choose to do the opposite and seek a civil law. The act is thus only the exercising of an already existing right and does not contravene one’s religion\textsuperscript{14}. Samira received fervent accusations regarding her religious beliefs from this civil act, not only in the \textit{ma’mur al-nufus}, but also among the population in Akkar. “They can’t accept I do not want to have a religion”, she argued during the interview. People in the village called her \textit{kafreh} (female version of \textit{kafir}, disbeliever). Their atheist public position and their battle for civil marriage in such a recondite, impoverished and small village in the north of Lebanon put them in the limelight and they feel marginalised in the village.

In many cases the same officers working in the \textit{sajilat al-nufus} (civil registry) reject requests by citizens to remove their religious affiliations. Ziad Baroud intervened on more than one occasion to force the officers to abide by the law, as was the case of Mounia’s husband, who applied for the removal of his sectarian denomination in his district in Mount Lebanon and the officers refused to do so until Baroud interceded\textsuperscript{15}. Even if this initiative was well accepted by some activists and some public opinion as a step towards ‘civic citizenship’, other activists argued that it had severe limitations. Notably, this was a mere circular without strong legal grounding, and most importantly, without a wide enough reach, or intention of modifying the civil registry system completely, with an aim to ‘deconfessionalise’ it. As far as I understood from different interviews with lawyers and legal experts, civil registry is

\textsuperscript{14} Interview with Nayla Geagea, lawyer, Beirut, 5 August 2015
\textsuperscript{15} Interview with Mounia, Dbayeh, 24 June 2016
organised by ‘books’ of the different sectarian affiliations. With the intention of removing their sectarian denomination, citizens triggered an option by which they could remove the mention of their sectarian affiliation next to their name, but they would still be registered within their ‘sect’s book’. The act of removing mention of their confession in the book did not change the civil registry’s organisation through the books of the sectarian groups. They did not unify all the books into one single book of Lebanese citizens, and citizens still register separately according to their patrilineal sectarian affiliation.

Activists and civil status advocates are also very aware of the risks of creating ‘another book’ of sectless people, or what they call ‘creating a 19th sect’. Na’el Kaedby, activist on civil status and lawyer, voiced his concerns about this initiative during our interview: “In the beginning of that movement in 2005 we voiced our concerns and proposed another solution, to ask for the unification of the register. And once you do that, it would make sense to remove the sect. Nothing has changed, it was basically a media coup, which generated some movement and it got us to civil marriages in Lebanon, but we are concerned that something can happen...
I fear that all the names of people that strike their sects will go to a new book, which I totally disagree with... We are not voicing our concerns because we don’t want to sabotage this, and this is some sort of gentlemen’s agreement that we have with Husseini and the Civil Society Movement.”\footnote{Interview with Na’el Kaebdy, Beirut, 5 December 2015}

As Kaedby argued, the initiative may be short-reached and even people that did remove their sects complain nowadays about the application of this initiative. What
is more, I would argue that this campaign was addressed to the small part of the population that can afford to confront the system publically and have the resources to evade the clientelist system for their subsistence. The main role of the political organisations in Lebanon with clear sectarian orientations is to provide Lebanese citizens with services that the state does not provide, that is welfare state provisions, education, health care and even job prospects for themselves and their descendants. Public sector positions are one of the strongest bargaining cards that political organisations play to establish their patron-client relationships (Cammett, 2014, Kingston, 2001). Without a solid alternative on the allocation of public administration positions and personal status legal system, how are individuals without economic resources to engage with this initiative in a manner similar to upper-class individuals who do not depend on patronage to seek a public job or to enjoy basic services?

3.2. ‘The Hole in the Wall’: First Civil weddings in Lebanon

![Image of protesters with signs]

**Figure 8**: Rally Laique Praide, 2011. Source: AP/Hussein Matta
On 10 November 2012 Kholoud Succariyeh and Nidal Darwish did what many Lebanese have been pleading for since Lebanese leaders were debating with the French authorities on the personal status legislation: they tied the knot on Lebanese soil in front of a notary public that approved their marriage. After removing their sectarian affiliation using Baroud’s circular from their civil registry, the couple used their right to abide by civil laws for “Syrians and Lebanese... not belonging to one of these [aforementioned] sects”, according to what article 17 of Decree 60 L.R. stipulated. According to Talal Husseini, legal researcher and director of Tayyar al-Mujtama’ al-Madani (Movement for Civil Society) who was behind the legal planning and advice for the couple, it would be legal to seek marriage with a ka’teb al-’adel (public notary) given that marriage, in its Muslim conception, is recognised by the Lebanese state as a contract between two people and it can be overseen by a notary public. In the absence of an approved civil marriage law in Lebanon, the law used for this marriage was the French law, given that the Decree was approved under the French mandate.

Succariyeh and Darwish’s civil marriage in Lebanon triggered an predictably heated debate within the higher spheres of politicians and religious authorities. Some prominent politicians showed support for adopting a law, notably Saad al-Hariri, Walid Jumblatt and Michel Aoun (Salloukh et al., 2015), while President Michel Suleiman tweeted about it. Prime Minister Najib Miqati avoided giving an opinion on the issue and leant towards expressing excuses related to the current stalemate in the Lebanon and Syrian crisis’ spill-over and how issues pertaining to the dismantling
of political confessionalism should be dealt with exclusively within higher ranks of the political elite.

Miqati’s tweet above illustrates the politics of power-sharing in Lebanon on various levels of acceptance. On one hand, as Lijphart (1975) himself theorised, decisions on consociational politics are made behind closed doors, lacking transparency, and do not seek to take into account public opinion. Consociational agreements are supposed to be implemented, according to Lijphart, through secrecy and summit diplomacy. On the other hand, Lebanese politics are marked by being constantly on the edge of breakdown, politically, socially and economically. The constant threat of instability or violence, perceived or real, immersed the country in constant stalemate, while any long-term decisions are put on hold until the country goes through a more stable phase, which allegedly the country has never had since the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975, partly due to the situation within the country and the surrounding region.

Reactions from religious authorities came in much stronger and certain terms, especially from the Sunni higher religious orders. While Christian religious
institutions did not show blatant opposition and the Council of Maronite Bishops even declared that religious and civil marriage may coexist, Sunni Mufti Mohammad Rashid Qabbani voiced an energetic opposition, followed by the Higher Islamic Shi’a Council and Hizbullah (Salloukh et al., 2015: 37).

Fatwa issued by Mufti Muhammad Rashid Qabbani and published in Dar al-Fatwa. Translation: Therefore I am issuing a fatwa with the help of God Almighty: “That any of Lebanon’s Muslim politicians in the executive and legislative branch who agree to legislate and execute civil marriage are renegades and are outside the religion of Islam.

The aforementioned fatwa utilises strong language of condemnation and it is mainly addressed to “politicians in the executive and legislative branch who agree to legislate and execute civil marriage”, which indicates that the motivations of the religious authorities are related to the legislation and legalising of civil marriage in Lebanon. The fatwa is not addressed to the act of civil marriage itself, which is allegedly in contradiction of shari’a. While civil marriage is a common practice among Lebanese couples, the religious authorities did not issue any fatwa or any other formal statements against this practice. Apart from ordinary calls in both Christian and Muslim rituals, as participants affirmed that it was common to hear in sermons and prayers, in which clerics very often called couples in civil marriages apostates, the religious authorities have not issued such strong wording against the act or the couples themselves. Similarly, many other laws and rules implemented and legislated by Muslim authorities are against shari’a, say selling alcohol or gambling, without such strong formal opposition from Muslim religious institutions.
If the act of civil marriage is happening abroad and couples register their marriage without any administrative or bureaucratic hindrance within the Lebanese state, without any formal opposition from the religious or political elite, are the religious institutions condoning the simple legalisation of civil marriage rather than the act itself? Does the mere condemnation of the legislation, but not the act, of civil marriage signify some particular interests from the religious authorities behind any eventual legislation allowing civil marriage in Lebanon and the share of power and benefits that they may lose with it - that has nothing to do with the actual religious interpretation of the law?

Marwan Charbel, Minister of Interior and Municipalities at the time of the first civil marriages, initially declared such marriages illegal in the absence of a proper civil law to regulate it. When the Higher Committee for Consultations (al-Hay’a al-Istishariya al-‘Olya) decreed civil marriages to be legal in Lebanon, Minister Charbel signed Succariyeh and Darwish’s marriage papers. The Committee determined that in the absence of a personal status law, couples can select any foreign civil law to apply to their marriage, and it also declared the authority of a public notary to perform civil marriages among couples that have removed their sects from their civil registry. Their son, born about a year later, became the first sectless child within a sectless and civil marriage couple in Lebanon.

Succariyeh and Drawish’s marriage and their struggle for a civil marriage prompted around fifty other couples to marry in front of the notary public in the following couple of years. Joseph Bchara, the notary public that signed the first civil marriage,

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performed most of the civil marriages, around forty in total. The couples came from all spectrums of socio-economic classes and sectarian affiliations, including both intersectarian and intrasectarian couples. Even if not all of them can be considered activists, they all shared consciousness and understanding of the principle of civil marriage, and were educated people, as Bchara declared during our interview. Reactions from activists and civil society members were varied. While they all welcomed putting the debate on the table again, and the attempt to undermine the institutions that reproduce sectarian laws and subjects, part of the activist scene on civil marriage perceived limitations within this initiative. “We continue exporting foreign laws”, was the main issue for lawyer Ibrahim Traboulsi. His preference would be to approve an optional civil personal status law that would settle the legal ambiguity. “I want an intrinsic Lebanese civil law to be applied by the judges in civil courts, and not keep on breaching our national sovereignty by having Lebanese judges applying foreign laws”. Na’el Kaedby, who is part of an association that advocates for civil marriage and has carried out some research on the issue, argued that his group is not only advocating for a national civil marriage law, but also it is against creating a 19th sect that would group the ‘sectless’ or ‘secular’ people by adding another group to a divisive system of social, legal and political categories. “We are for a secular state”, he argued. The initiative of Tayyar al-Mujtama’ al-Madani operates on the legal basis of removing the sect without issuing a new law for the civil registry, which puts these citizens in a blurred legal area in which they neither have a civil status personal law to follow, nor have they exited their sect

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18 Interview with Jopseh Bchara, Beirut, 26 July 2016
19 Interview with Ibrahim Traboulsi, lawyer, in Hazmieh, 30 August 2016
fully, as they are still registered within their ‘sect’ in the civil registry ‘book’. Kaebdy saw this legal initiative for civil marriage as a ‘hole in the wall’. “We understand that they consider this a hole in the wall and they just want to use it, maybe the hole will widen and the wall will crumble. Hopefully it does. I’m just worried that we try sneaking through the hole in the wall and we get stuck.”

Against the legal advice of the Minister of Justice, Nohad Machnouk from the Future Movement refused to recognise any civil marriage performed in Lebanon since he took charge of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities from Charbel in February 2014. This meant that all civil marriages performed in Lebanon registered to that date, a total of six including Succariyeh and Darwish’s, were considered legal, while the rest have been ‘piled’ in the offices of the Ministry of Interior and are still pending being registered within the state. “They seized all the documents from all the couples when they went to register their civil marriages to the ma’mur al-nufus. They had instructions to forward all the papers to the offices of the Ministry of Interior… What they are doing is illegal because these marriages do not need to be signed by the Minister of Interior himself, he doesn’t sign every marriage performed in Lebanon, so what they did is kidnapping all the documents and putting them in the drawer ‘until a solution is found’”, as notary public Joseph Bchara explained.

On 16 January 2015 Minister of Interior Nohad Machnouk finally publically stated his position on the registration of these marriages. He declared that the Ministry of Interior will not register such civil marriages because “there should be a clear law… and Cyprus is not far away…” The position of the Minister of Interior, who also had a

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20 Interview with Na’el Kaebdy, Beirut, 5 December 2015
21 Interview with Jopseh Bchara, Beirut, 26 July 2016
civil marriage, was thus to accept any marriage performed abroad despite the inequalities and absence of rights and guarantees that this encompasses, rather than accepting the legality of this initiative as determined by the Ministry of Justice. The solution to this long-standing issue was eclipsed, once again, by the state duty of “fighting extremism” as Machnouk declared\textsuperscript{22}, before dealing with this issue, and allegedly upholding the right of equality and freedom of conscience guaranteed by the Constitution.

3.3. The Struggle for a Civil Option

The independent state of Lebanon has experienced several attempts to promulgate a civil law for family matters. In 1971 the first draft law was produced and adopted by the Democratic Party (\textit{al-Hizb al-Dimoqrati}). The proposal presented a ‘unified’ civil personal status law and refused to change it into ‘optional’. The Secular Democratic Party (\textit{al-Hizb al-‘Ilmani al-Dimoqrati}) also proposed a unified civil personal status law during the Civil War of 1981 that never reached Parliament, and the initiative was followed later in 1997 by the Syrian Social National Part (SSNP, \textit{al-Hizb al-Suri al-Qawmi al-Ishtiraki}), although it was rejected by most sects (Salloukh \textit{et al.}, 2015: 39).

In 1996 President Elias Hrawi declared his intention of establishing an optional civil personal status legal system as a means of dismantling sectarianism from Lebanese society and erasing political sectarianism from political and institutional life as stipulated at the Ta’if Accords (Hrawi and Menassa, 2002). He formed a committee

\textsuperscript{22} LBCI News – “\textit{Al-Mashnwk yobleghu al- bāb āmām al-zawaj al-madany fy Lubnān}” [Online] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzmHwUHuRA
of legal experts from all sectarian backgrounds to produce a draft law on civil personal status matters. On 16 February 1998 Hrawi announced his draft law, only months before the end of his term.

Inheritance proved to be a highly controversial issue, and the committee decided to put aside decisions on the topic of inheritance and testaments from the law. The issue of marriage of a Muslim woman to a Christian man also triggered controversy for its illegality before the shari‘a, which was finally resolved in the law by not entering in the definition the sectarian affiliations of the parties involved. Other issues do confront directly the laws of shari‘a, like the recognition of the principle of adoption, the prohibition of polygamy and the length of time required to lapse before a divorced woman is allowed to remarry (al-‘idda) (El-Cheikh, 2000: 148-150).

The proposed law does not eliminate religious courts entirely, and in fact keeps sectarian regulations for issues on inheritance, guardianship and custody. This issue was heavily criticised by activists and civil status advocates as a law that fails to accomplish a long-reach reform of developing civil personal status in its entire capacity. On the other side of the picture was the Sunni clerical establishment, headed by the Grand Mufti of Lebanon, Shaykh Muhammad Rashid Qabbani, who was the most categorical in the rejection of the draft law. Among the Shi‘a religious authorities the position was more ambivalent. The head of the Higher Shi‘a Council, Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, maintained that Muslim marriage contract was similar to civil marriage and that Islam had no problem with the latter. He even declared that “civil marriage is a critical issue... it is not negotiable under any circumstances” (El-Cheikh, 2000: 155). These terms changed progressively, until Shi‘a
clerics ended up siding with their Sunni counterparts in categorically rejecting the law. Shi’a speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, from the Amal Party, even criticised opponents of civil marriage for fearing the demise of sectarianism: “The cause of controversy lies in the call to annul sectarianism. The real battle isn’t that of introducing civil marriage law. Civil marriages made abroad are recognised here...

The problem is political sectarianism” (El-Cheikh, 2000: 157).

The battle for the introduction of the optional civil law for personal status matters came to be understood, by its proponents and detractors, as the first step towards the dismantling of the confessional system. Eventually, this led the project to become paralysed in front of the risk of such a radical and structural transformation.

The draft law was approved by two thirds of the Cabinet, as the law stipulates, in order to be sent to Parliament for discussion and final endorsement. The ministerial bloc of Rafiq al-Hariri voted against it and Hariri eventually refused to send it to

Figure 7: A pro-civil marriage protest in Beirut. January 2013. The placard reads “Wedding on hold.” Source: Al- Akhabar
Parliament, contradicting the law, while citing opposition from the country’s Muslim and Christian religious elite (Salloukh et al., 2015).

In conclusion, a civil law on personal status represented a direct threat to the clerics’ autonomy in their relationship with the state and, equally important, with their legitimacy in regulating personal matters among their communities. There were considerable contradictions between the advice given by the Islamic Council of Al-Azhar in Egypt and the Sunni Mufti Qabbani in Lebanon regarding the real extent by which the draft law contradicts the principles of shari’a. Whereas the latter firmly condemned the draft law in its entirety and categorically rejected the law, the former was in favour of the draft, with some reservations on two issues that contradicted Islamic law: adoption and ‘idda (time the wife needs to wait before remarrying). The interests and benefits that the religious establishments receive from the state and the couples marrying and divorcing through their institutions were examined above. The fear of losing this share of influence and power could be at the origins of expressing such categorical rejection, which did not affect the decision and legal and religious examination by the Islamic Council of Al-Azhar, which unlike the Lebanese religious authorities, does not have a stake in the current sectarian personal status legal system and was merely judging the civil draft law in accordance with the principles of Islam.

CONCLUSIONS

On March 31, 2016, a summary affairs judge in Mount Lebanon, Jad Maalouf, issued a ruling on a petition brought against the Lebanese state by two spouses who had a
civil marriage on Lebanese territory before a public notary. Mounia and her husband, with the support of the legal team formed by Nayla Geagea and former Minister of Interior Ziad Baroud, requested that the state be compelled to hand over documentation of their personal status, including their marriage certificate and a copy of the record. While the ruling declared that civil marriage is a right that needs to be guaranteed in Lebanon according to the law, he referred the case claiming that it was not within his competences to settle on the issue. The ruling referenced freedom of religion as enshrined in Article 9 of the Lebanese Constitution, Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.23

Juridical, political and even the religious establishment have shown in Lebanon, in one way or another, understanding of the need for a country like Lebanon to abide by the principle of freedom of conscience promulgated in the Constitution and allow couples to seek other forms of marriage that are not religious or sectarian. Prospects of change become deadlocked in an intricate consociational system in which all sectarian leaders had the right to veto or to block initiatives pleading interference in the religious sphere, as Rafiq Hariri had once done to block the 1998 civil personal status draft law. In a system in which certain groups benefit to such an extent from the current structure, and in which transparency seems to be excluded from the equation of political decisions, the very same elite benefiting from the system also have the power to block any change or transformation without any checks-and-balances.

23 Makhlouf, Youmna “Civil Marriage in Lebanon: Fighting the State from Within its Borders”, Legal Agenda, 6 September 2016
In the face of such a deadlocked decision-making process, activists have sought to challenge the system in different ways and initiate an alternative civil solution to the institutional system and (re)production of sectarian subjects through the personal status legal system. At the same time, people seeking civil status have been travelling abroad to contour the sectarian personal status system. The latter form of challenging the system has been effective as a short-term solution to an entrenched and complicated issue, and has so far enabled some couples to escape from this sectarian conception of marriage and family. This solution also seems to be the lesser of the evils for the sectarian and religious elite, who even though they express their opposition in small events like prayers and masses and condemn spouses who seek civil marriage, have not yet called them apostate, as they have done to politicians that dare to legislate on civil marriage. The issue is yet to analyse to what extent this form of ‘resistance’ in the form of civil marriage towards the current sectarian system represents an evasion of the problem in a way that reifies the sectarian system further, or if, alternatively, civil marriage can be considered as a practice of everyday form of resistance, embodying a transformation or social change. This will be precisely the topic of investigation of the subsequent chapter.
CHAPTER V: Civil Marriage in Lebanon: Resisting or/while Reproducing Sectarian Hegemony?

1. (Re)producing sectarianism: “The Druze Did It”
2. The Personal Choice of Civil Marriage
   2.1. Civil marriage: 'The Practice of Everyday Life'
   2.2. Civil marriage and intimate politics
3. Civil Marriage: Everyday Act of Resistance or Tactics?
4. Multi-layered Power/Resistance: Resisting or/while Reproducing

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine the (re)production and contestation of the social sectarian order in Lebanon. That is, how this system is (re)produced and reified, while at the same time is negotiated, contested and resisted by Lebanese subjects with their acts of civil marriage. Sectarianism represents in Lebanon an encompassing and hegemonic system of power that dominates and determines the lives of Lebanese citizens. It does so through a system of control that goes beyond mere coercive mechanisms, through a system of power that makes every individual (sectarian) subjects. As power and subjectivity is (re)produced everyday in an individual’s life, subverting the modes of subjectification signifies subverting the power.

Power is defined as “historically, politically, socially and economically situated and intersubjectively performed, produced and reproduced and challenged” (Kastrinou,
Power is constantly performed and reinforced, but also negotiated and resisted. Individuals may manage to contest power in certain contexts, but they may get trapped by similar forms of domination in other frameworks and, ultimately, even contribute to reifying forms of power that they otherwise resisted.

Subsequently, this chapter will focus on the definition of the practice of civil marriage within this paradigm of subversion. Unlike the most visible, organised and strategized social movements, civil marriage represents an individual subversion against power that may lack the visibility or organisation of social mobilisation, but it similarly targets social change. As an act of political agency to the hegemonic power, the nature of civil marriage may be, on the one hand, an act that aims at avoiding the power without confronting the system that upholds it, or on the other hand, an act that aims at challenging, confronting and even redefining the structure of power.

Whereas the former will be defined as tactics, the latter will be defined as an act of everyday resistance.

Acts of everyday resistance are classified as personal choice and a non-collective form of contestation and subversion against the sectarian structure of power. This category of political agency includes civil marriage acts that target the structure of domination and power and challenge and redefine modes of subjectification and political mobilisation that fall exclusively on sectarian lines. An intrinsic category of these acts, as I will analyse below, is that the agent or resister demonstrates intent or will to transform the structures of domination. This feature differentiates these practices from other acts of political agency in which the agent’s will is merely to navigate the structure of power, without the intention to subvert or transform the
structure of domination. Thus, whereas the practice of civil marriage always represents agency from the civil marriage couples for not abiding by the sectarian (and other) norms, the same act may mean different things depending on the purpose or intention of the act. Civil marriage spouses that are consciously targeting sectarian domination are resisting the structure of power and their acts embody social change. However, civil marriage spouses that are not intentionally targeting sectarian (and other systemic powers) are just navigating the system. They are confronting the social norms, but their acts do not, in principle, embody social change unless their acts become suddenly multiplied by a thousand-fold.

The first part of this chapter will provide empirical evidence on why civil marriage is considered an act of subversion against the (sectarian) social norms that is, above all, an individual practice and personal choice. It will be described as an action that tries to confront, or otherwise avoid the sectarian rules on marriage. The second section presents a debate on the act of civil marriage representing different forms of political agency depending on the intention (or lack thereof) of the agents. Conscious contestation against the hegemonic system, as it will be argued and explained below, is an essential condition for the act of everyday resistance.

The chapter will conclude with an analysis of resistance as embedded in the very same structure of power that the political agents are trying to contest. Resistance is never pure, and political agents may be simultaneously resisting a structure of power while reproducing another one, or by the same token, they may resist one structure of power in a given context or form, but accommodate to the same structure of domination through another act.
Lara and Ramzi met during their university years in Beirut. Lara’s family is originally from a village in Mount Lebanon, closed to Aley, but she grew up in Ras Beirut. Ramzi and Lara have different sectarian affiliations, Druze and Christian respectively. Whereas for Druze getting married to someone from a different sect/religion would mean immediately being expelled from the community, Ramzi’s family “could not care less about this sort of tradition”24. Lara’s family, however, did not agree when they suggested they wanted to get married. Lara’s family comes from a region in Mount Lebanon where Druze and Christians have co-habited for centuries. Confrontations in this region during the Civil War turned into violent hostilities between the different militias, notably right-wing, mostly Christian Kata’eb (Phalangist Party), and the Palestinian and left-wing factions supported by Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt and his Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975, the two communities turned progressively to sectarianized violence. The region of South Matn surrounding Aley, where Lara’s family comes from, was proportionally inhabited by more Druze than Christian inhabitants, and the militias associated with the PSP took control of the region during most of the Civil War. A significant proportion of Christians inhabiting the region were displaced from their homes.

Lara’s family endured hostilities with the militias of mainly Druze composition, and the complicity of Druze families in their displacement and suffering is still in their communal and family memory (see: Haugbolle, 2012, Larkin, 2012). “My aunt was

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24 Interview with Lara and Ramzi, civilly married, Beirut, 28 July 2016
buried alive, among some other family tragedies, and everything I heard since I was a child is: ‘The Druze did it’, Lara explained during our interview. From the time that rumours arrived in the village that Lara was dating a Druze, and even before they expressed their will to engage, her parents faced comments and phone calls voicing disapproval. Her family opposed the wedding. They could not accept marriage of their daughter to a Druze, a community that was imagined as responsible for the death and suffering of their family members. “Ramzi is only Druze on paper. He ‘has no village’, he has no ties with the Druze community and he and his family don’t even believe. I mean, look at him... he’s not even able to pronounce more than one sentence in Arabic. He’s more Francophone than the French...”

After dating for several years, Ramzi went to Lara’s house and talked with her parents. Her father refused “to give her hand to a Druze”. “What would people in the village think?” He is the father of four girls. Another of his daughters is dating a Muslim man and they are also planning to get married. “As a Christian in this part of this world, he is thinking that if all his daughters get married to Muslim men they will be responsible of bringing more Muslims in this society”. In Lebanon, citizenship and social identities are defined by institutionalised patrilineality as a social, political and legal practice. Children’s social categorisation primarily, and sometimes religion as well, is defined by their father’s lineage. Their inherited sectarian affiliation from their father is immediately registered in the civil registry at the children’s birth, which will define them as sectarian citizens according to Lebanese sectarian family laws, as well as the mode in which she will be considered as a social and political subject.

25 ibid
Within this patriarchal system of lineage, Lara’s father is obviously worried that his family’s identity, and consequently that of his daughters, will be erased. His grandchildren will inherit their father’s surname and middle name; they will be registered in their father’s village as place of origin and location where they will exert their right to vote. As defined by Joseph (1993, 2005), patrilineality is the key legal mechanism through which patriarchy in Lebanon has become inscribed in citizenship rules and practices. The Lebanese state, by institutionalizing patrilineality in the rules and practices of citizenship has codified a given legal status to a central mechanism, which upholds a particular form of patriarchy in this kin-based patriarchal society.

Family law, as it was demonstrated in the previous chapter, is a very problematic system in the Middle East. As Saba Mahmood (2012b: 59) described in the case of Egypt, which can be easily translated to the Lebanese context, “even though it purports to be descriptive, family law enfolds normative claims about cohabitation, marriage, sexuality and social division of labour.” Cohabitation in Lebanon cannot escape the sectarian modes of subjectification and geography segregation, even when it attempts to break these lines of sectarian segregation.

Lara and her family used to live in Ras Beirut, an area that is traditionally characterised by its openness, liberal ideas and intersectarian cohabitation. Lara’s father studied in the former Soviet Union and sympathised with leftist ideas. His father was a priest although he himself is not religious and defied his family’s religious traditions. Probably following his leftist and secular ideas, he decided to move to this area with his family, which is mainly inhabited by a Muslim population.
He is on very good terms with his neighbours, but in the current politics in this part of the region, and especially with the end of the Civil War in Lebanon, Christians feel they had to concede their share of power and they are no longer at the centre of political decisions. “When I told him about the fact that we grew up used to live surrounded by Muslim people he told me: ‘It’s my fault, I should have thought about this when we moved here’... *bas haram*, he loves the sea, he loves living in this area...” explained Lara. “I used to tell him [her dad]: ‘How come you, Soviet Union...’ He believes in a secular state and he used to tell me: ‘Mixing is fine, but not you... I can accept civil marriage when the state becomes secular, but you cannot live in a state like Lebanon being civily married.’”

Lara succumbed to her family and community pressures for almost nine years until she eventually got approval from her family and tied the knot with Ramzi under Cypriot civil law. She and her family are ‘very close to her village’ and her dad has a very important role in the extended family and the village. “I know my mum had to hear a lot of comments in the village and phone calls” Lara mentioned not only social status-related matters, but also political and economic material issues concerning tied relationships between her family and her village. As an architect she also works for her family so she is further dependent economically on her kinship, family and communal political forms of mobilisation. As Suad Joseph explained (2000: 116): “The romantic lure of the kin contract has been grounded in material realities in which kin relationalities have been, for the Lebanese, the core of social

26 ibid
27 ibid
identity, economic stability, political security, and religious affiliation and the first (often last) line of security – emotionally, socially, economically, and politically.”

The kinship architecture in Lebanon is grounded in the patron/client relationship in which every individual is subscribed to access welfare and state services which are not provided to them as mere citizens, but as part of a certain communal group (Cammett, 2014, Kingston, 2013). The Lebanese state mobilises kinship structures for its state-building project, and hence the concept of citizenship was defined ambiguously by the state. While the Lebanese constitution grants individuals rights as such, personal status law regulates important milestones in life, such as birth, marriage and death, which have been allocated to individuals as part of their communal groups, and not as mere citizens or individuals. This complicated structure that designs Lebanese state institutions has created not only power asymmetry of debts and obligations (Kingston, 2001), but also a social and political contract of kin/sect endogamy.

Lara and Ramzi waited for the approval from her family for her marriage and it was not until she turned thirty years old and that “her mum realised that she will not get any younger”, as Lara’s sister Nadine argued, that “they became more scared of her remaining single forever than her getting married to her Druze boyfriend. It’s a huge stigma in Lebanese society. I think also Lara was stubborn enough and she made them realise that she will not relent and eventually my parents had to do it.”

The pressure Lara endured to not to get married to her Druze partner was obviously affected by a coercive system that takes the form of family and social demands.

28 Interview with Nadine, civilly married, Beirut, 26 July 2016
Family laws draw a legal system in which individuals become sectarian and sexually defined citizens. Beyond the legal limits on their personal status to get married, the controlling measures operated through an entire coercive apparatus that limited her capacity to overcome sect endogamy. Her parents did not oppose her civil marriage because they believed in sacred Christian weddings, as according to Lara her family is not pious. Rather, hegemony of intrasectarian marriages is composed of a far-reaching and comprehensive social, political and economic configuration that controls and inflicts individual’s decisions to seek how to get married and form a family. Not only sectarian endogamy conforms to the social system on how individuals get married, but also patriarchal social norms operate in the superstructure of hegemonic powers. In fact, the Lebanese are trapped within a legal system that reifies the family as an essential political unit, subscribed into kinship/sectarian schemes. Besides, this structure operates on the supremacy of male lines over female, where kinship and the patriarchal domination overlap.

Despite these manoeuvres of coercion, Lara challenged and contested sectarian endogamous marriages and the imaginary idea of Druze as a community that has taken her aunt and other family members’ lives. “I fell in love with Ramzi; I didn’t fell in love with his sect”\(^29\), as Lara eloquently described it. Political familism is reinforced by religious institutions and inherited sectarian affiliations of individuals and the electoral voting system divided along a sectarian distribution of districts. The role of the family, as a social and political category in Lebanon plays an important role not only in how individuals feel pressured by their own families to choose between civil and religious marriage, but also on how the implications of civil marriage are

\(^{29}\) Interview with Lara and Ramzi, civilly married, Beirut, 28 July 2016
perceived in the construction of the new family. As argued by Jospeh (2011: 162), “in the absence of state consolidation, familial moralities, idioms, obligations, and entitlements have carried the burden of the work of the state. Even as what constitutes “family” has changed over time, the political relevance of familism (in its many forms) has endured in the past century of attempted and aborted state formation in Lebanon.” These and other social categories and identities in Lebanon will be further analysed in the following chapter.

What is more, the absence of civil marriage law confers the hegemonic control of marriage and familism over the society. The practice of civil marriage represents a way of contouring and contesting the norms of kinship, sect endogamy, patriarchy and ‘political familism’ in Lebanon. The social norms of kin, sect, patriarchy and familism control Lebanese society and set its mechanisms of coercion and control. Lara and Ramzi confronted these social norms and its dominating system through (conscious) resistance, a concept that will be a key object of study below in this chapter.

Another case of coercion in other aspects of social norms leads us to the story of Ghada and Rami. They belong to the same community and sectarian affiliation, Christian Maronites, but they decided to marry following civil laws, notably to oppose social and religious norms. Ghada comes from a pious family and attended a Christian religious school. They initially intended to have a religious ceremony after their civil wedding, but they increasingly became disenchanted with the idea of abiding by religious criteria. As Ghada indicated during our interview, “You also need to take classes with a priest before getting married who teaches you how to live your
marriage life and satisfied your husband in bed and in the house. A person who has never been married nor have sex in his life!"\(^{30}\). Rami declares himself to be an agnostic person and civil marriage was in line with his personal rejection of having to contribute to the enrichment of the Church or any religious institution. As he declared during our interview, “in general I think marriage is unnecessary, I think being together is enough, but this is how the world works, and especially here in Lebanon you need legal recognition of the couple. For me that’s a state action, not a religious action. I don’t think I need to pay the Church for the legal recognition that is owed to me”\(^{31}\).

In the context of their families, however, couples intending to have a civil marriage had to oppose their families’ desire to abide by the accepted social norms. Ghada’s family opposed and her mother refused to attend her civil ceremony in Cyprus. “It created an interesting debate among the family. About what it means to be married, to have a civil or religious wedding”\(^{32}\), highlighted Ghada during our interview.

During this debate, with their families and between the two of them, they also shared their thoughts with their friends. Some friends advised them just to have a religious wedding in order to “avoid the trouble with the families and make them unhappy”. They then attended the religious ceremony of a couple who had previously had a civil wedding in Cyprus. The religious ‘blessing’ was a mere formality to make their families happy. Rami declared: “Our friends told us, just do it to make your families happy. But fuck that... it is the first thing you do for yourself and which will set up your life and family.” Ghada also added: “Getting married was

\(^{30}\) Interview with Ghada and Rami, civil married couple, Beirut, 22 September 2015

\(^{31}\) ibid

\(^{32}\) ibid
the most adult thing I had to do in my life. It was such a big decision, so many papers... It’s the first thing you do as an adult. You better do it the way you want to.”

Anthropologist Suad Joseph (1993) developed the concept of ‘patriarchal connectivity’. According to this concept, in Middle Eastern societies, and arguably in every family-based society, the maturity of a human being is judged on her capacity to meet the wishes of her close peers. That is, individuals do not think of themselves and their desires except through the desires and wishes of their significant others. Ghada and Rami were thus trying to be persuaded to “make their parents happy” by meeting with their social and familial demands. Accomplishing these demands will allegedly make their families happy and consequently themselves as well, because of their ‘connectivity’ with their families. This is what a milestone in their life is expected to be, meeting with their families’ desires and wishes. Reflecting also on the study by Jospeh (1993), Isabelle Rivoal (2014) conducted another anthropological research on ‘intimate politics’ in which she similarly concluded that Lebanese individuals are highly affected by how they will be perceived and judged by their surrounding community, even beyond their close circle. They anticipate what they would like or not like, and build their lives accordingly.

Within this system, Lebanese produce their socially-oriented selves and fall into the system of psychological and social domination. However, this hegemonic dominating structure has not imposed itself without contestation. Counter-hegemonic spaces have emerged through self-reflexive agents: Ghada and Rami, Lara and Ramzi and many other Lebanese individuals that entered into civil marriage, despite the dominant political and social system.
In the case of the Lebanese individuals that opted for civil marriage one could determine that they based their acts and discourse on high levels of self-reflexivity. Compared with other Lebanese individuals, spouses with a civil marriage are less shaped by their environment and are more inclined to form their own norms, tastes, political ideologies or desires. Individuals with high levels of self-reflexivity would prove to be agents with the capacity of recognising the forces of socialisation and show intention to affect the structure with their act (Giddens, 1979). The conscious decision of abiding by a civil law for marriage reflects upon a group of Lebanese individuals with high levels of self-reflexivity, who instead of letting their acts be shaped by their environments, chose a non-traditional, non-sectarian, non-patriarchal and probably secular marriage.

2. The Personal Choice of Civil Marriage

2.1. Civil marriage: ‘The Practice of Everyday Life’

With his masterpiece L’invention du quotidien, translated into English as ‘The Practice of Everyday Life’, Michel de Certeau (1990) aims at putting the ‘everyday life’ and ‘everyday man’ at the centre of culture and scientific language. Certeau (1990: 20) describes his research as taking place in between the dividing line of artificial language, in which specific language is produced, and natural language that is used to describe common activity.

I argue that the practice of civil marriage is situated within this same dividing line, in between the artificial language of personal status laws, confessional politics and material and economic client/patron relationships, and the natural language of love
between two people that wants to start a family together beyond any constraints of confessional legal, political and social system. The practice of civil marriage subscribes to a very complicated context of coercive social and family pressures that the spouses have to confront; challenges with regard to their legal status and specifically the absence to civil laws in their country that allow them to seek marriage on their preferred terms, so they are obliged to travel abroad for that purpose, and finally, challenges on how they relate with other subjects and even the intricate legal and political place they occupy within the state. Beyond the scientific ingredients of these acts, civil marriage can and should be described as the personal choice of two people that simply decide to wed according to this principle and certain laws. It is, after all, the act of the everyday couple to resist and navigate the hegemonic system of coercive sectarian marriage.

The term ‘personal choice’ was reiterated during the interviews with the participants to describe their practice of civil marriage. From activists (secularists, leftists, advocates for gender equality...) to spouses for whom civil marriage substitutes for non-traditional weddings, civil marriage is a practice that groups a wide range of political, social and economic profiles, as well as motivations and convictions. As Mounia, one of the spouses who entered into a civil marriage in Lebanon in 2014, eloquently explained: “You choose your partner and you choose whether you want to get married, and you choose how you want to get married.”33 As a personal choice and practice, however, it confronts or contours the hegemonic form of social, political, legal and economic domination of sectarian, patriarchal and neoliberal marriages.

33 Interview with Mounia, civilly married, Dbayeh, 24 June 2016
Yara is a doctorate candidate in Economic Development at a prestigious university in the UK. She defines her case of civil marriage as a story of her “personal upbringing. The absence of religion... No credit goes to me. Contrary to popular beliefs in Lebanon, I was brought up in a very secular environment.” Yara defines herself as secular, non-sectarian: “I could never say I am Muslim, or Shi’a. I would be lying. I literally feel I don’t have a confession.” She is politically and intellectually active; supports diverse social movements, like Beirut Madinati, and she advocates for gender equality and social rights. When it comes to describing her decision for a civil marriage, however, she detaches the act from its political context. “It’s not to say I don’t want a secular state in Lebanon, that I don’t want to become an activist in terms of equality, it’s just that when you are taking a personal decision, it has nothing to do with the laws of the country. It’s not a battle I am fighting for the whole country. It’s a personal decision and I want to be comfortable with it.”

2.2. Civil marriage and intimate politics

Civil marriage is certainly bound by a set of scientific, artificial and political specificities. It cannot be detached from the political, social and cultural implications that define civil marriage as a form of contestation and the domination structure that it confronts. Whereas Yara’s principles and *habitus* are certainly shaped by her ideology and her secular ideas, the purpose of her action was not primarily informed by her desire to trigger a fight against the system. She aligns with this transformation

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34 Interview with Yara, civilly married, Beirut, 21 June 2016
35 ibid
36 ibid
ideologically, intellectually and in practice, and she is also in favour of her marriage contributing to such political and social transformation, but in this particular case her action is motivated by the necessity to marry a man from a different sectarian affiliation, and her desire that religion does not play a role in her marriage. Yara’s behaviour and positioning is a practical example of Bourdieu’s (1979) concept of *habitus*, which shapes and defines the individual’s political behaviour. Political actions and other forms of life actions influence relationships and expectations of the individual in a certain field. Political and life actions are separated from each other only by a fine line and they equally inform the *habitus* or individual’s political behaviour.

Yara’s action, in the practice of civil marriage, is that of a common Lebanese individual; an everyday, quiet and uncoordinated act not delimited by visible or strategic convictions to mobilise against the sectarian system, even if the spouses may also agree with this goal and even take steps towards the overthrow of the sectarian regimes with other actions. Her act is not intended to be political or part of an activist plan of transforming the political system, but it is unavoidably informed by her political beliefs and actions. Her act cannot but emanate from her convictions for a secular state where neither religion nor sectarian affiliations play a role, and where social rights and women’s equality are respected. She refers, on several occasions during our interviews and talks, to her experiences as an activist and movements for social justice and secularism.

When it came to discussing with her husband about their wedding, her decision was informed by her political convictions and to some extent the idea she has of state
Civil marriage, even if a step in that direction, cannot be defined without its intrinsic character pertaining to the intimacy of politics. That is, the politics that define private life, but also how the acts that happen in intimate life connect with how politics are lived, defined, produced and also challenged. As both an intimate and a political act, civil marriage emerges as a producer of identities and as the result of an ensemble of political identities. Some couples declare to have developed a different approach to society and politics since they underwent a civil marriage, and the act of civil marriage was, for Yara, the result of her very own political selfhood. Further, within this spectrum other forms of political identities and selfhood emerge that are not necessarily sectarian, that may arise parallel with, or entrenched in, or opposing the sectarian selfhood.

The practice of civil marriage is defined as an act of everyday resistance against the imposition of sectarian and religious marriages in Lebanon. Everyday forms of resistance or ‘social non-movements’ were defined by Bayat (2010) as action-oriented, rather than ideology-oriented. Asef Bayat, who is especially interested in defining this form of contestation as opposed to social movements, defines his concept of ‘social non-movement’ (2010) or quiet encroachment (1997) as not emanating or following political ideology as protests or political mobilisations. In similar terms, James Scott (1985: 35) defines such acts as detached from the cause.

\[\text{37 ibid}\]
or the system that they are intentionally challenging. Acts of everyday resistance are “not necessarily directed at the immediate source of appropriation”.

In this sense, it does not mean that the resister is not conscious of the system of domination or that she is not willing to subvert that system, nor that the resister herself does not process an ideology that might be at the origin of her act. Rather, this means that the practice of everyday resistance, the practice of civil marriage, may not be thought of as aimed directly at overthrowing the sectarian regime in Lebanon. It does not mean Yara does not aspire to eroding, fighting or struggling in this and other contexts for a secular state, as she defined it, but through the practice of civil marriage she intended to navigate and subvert the system in her own way and on her own scale.

Sima, whom I met for the first time in the same café in Harma as Yara, also had a civil marriage. During our interview she defined civil marriage as a “civil act... the first act I could do as a citizen, as an adult citizen [note the concept of ‘adult act’ that echoes Ghada and Rami’s perception of marriage as the first decision they had to take independently as adults, to form a family independently from their own]. It’s my choice to be different and not to follow the rules I don’t find... I don’t want the religious norms to be imposed on me. I don’t believe on them. As a Sunni woman, why does my brother have more rights to inherit than I do? Why do I have to have a ‘male’ guardian?”

Everyday forms of resistance have been theorised as an oppositional act, “not a quality of an actor or a state of being, but it involves an active behaviour, whether,

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38 Interview with Sima, civilly married, Beirut, 6 July 2016
cognitive, or physical... an opposition to a form of power” (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004: 538-9). Sima’s action symbolises opposition to the religious authorities, which in this case she relates to the structure of power enforcing gender inequalities. In effect, *shari’a* grants men absolute right to divorce while women only have a conditional right to divorce, as well as the right to discipline their wives, and the obligation of wives to have intercourse with their husbands. The right of custody of the children is also limited for women (also under Christian and Druze laws), as is the spousal maintenance that they receive in the event of divorce. Not only that, Sunni women are only entitled to inherit one third of what their male brother would inherit (Traboulsi, 2000).

Similarly to Yara, Sima thought of her act of civil marriage as an action related and motivated by her political convictions for social rights, secularism and anti-sectarianism. She also declared herself to be an activist, a practice that breathes from her *habitus*: “activist... in the sense of what I believe and live by. I didn’t want to have a wedding. We didn’t have a wedding, so we just went and signed the papers and came back [...] Weddings take too much space in Lebanon... The family could be broke but they would still have a wedding in the fanciest place and I find it indecent. We are in a region at war. When we were getting married there was Nahr al Bared happening [armed clashes that happened in 2007 in the Nahr al Bared Palestinian camp, in the North of Tripoli]”39.

Hence, Sima was not just merely contesting sectarian and religious norms ruling marriage. Sima’s choice for civil marriage was also objecting to the weight of 

39 ibid
tradition as well as the mercantilism of weddings, which force the Lebanese to hold ostentatious weddings in Lebanon. As I heard once, from one of my friends the day before he was attending a relative’s wedding: “The image I have of Lebanese weddings is flowers, argentie colours; every detail matters, nothing seems to be random or improvised…” Weddings in Lebanon, as in every culture, are an important ritual and come with very loaded traditional components. They usually mark an important milestone in someone’s life and the family as a whole. As a wedding planner in Beirut told me, spending “US$55,000 on a wedding is the most reasonable price. Weddings in Lebanon usually hold at least 200 guests... Usually families take massive loans to pay their weddings…” Paradoxically enough, for families that can afford or that set these kind of weddings as their own goal, the cost of a Cypriot wedding, $1,500 that is out of reach for ordinary families, may be on the other hand for some wealthy families a way for avoiding the expenses of a massive wedding.

Sima’s habitus included beliefs on social justice, so her choice for a civil wedding also followed her desire to transgress neoliberal rules in Lebanon. Sima intended to contest the religious and sectarian system that plays a preeminent role in the society and politics of Lebanon, but through her act of resistance, civil marriage, also included antagonism to neoliberalism and the weight of traditions.

Transgressing the mercantilisation of weddings was also in the mind of Ghada and Rami when referring to their choice for a civil wedding, as the latter declared: “They charge you for this priest, if you want an extra you need to pay more... Then for divorce they make an inventory of your belongings...”\textsuperscript{40}. What is more, their habitus

\textsuperscript{40}Interview with Ghada and Rami, civilly married couple, Beirut, 22 September 2015
constituted multi-layered political behaviours against different systems of political power. The first one above concerned capitalisation of marriage, while another political contestation resulted from their habitus: confrontation of the patriarchal system, embedded also in the practice of religious marriages. During the religious ceremony of one of their friends they felt very uncomfortable, “I realised this ceremony does not represent us, so we decided not to have but the civil ceremony and then a family and friends gathering at my grandmother’s house in the mountains.” She continued, “for me is more about that as a woman that talks all the time about feminism I didn’t want to marry under those conditions.” Rami added, “In the religious ceremony they were saying the man is the head of the family. I don’t want get marry in a ceremony where they say that! I’m not Ghada’s owner and she does not need to satisfy me! I don’t think I need to sit there and pretend I didn’t hear; I’m not an idiot. I have principles that I cannot pause for half an hour [the time of the religious ceremony].”

The struggle for civil marriage in Lebanon is not merely a struggle against the sectarian system. It is a struggle for the definition of Lebanon as a state and as an identity; a struggle for Lebanese identities beyond the inherited sectarian affiliations and the fear of the ‘other’ which perpetuates segregation of the communities within the society; a struggle for women’s rights and equality; for secularism and depolitisation of religion; against clientelism, corruption; a struggle against the traditional idea of the wedding, with its familiar and financial implications. It is a struggle for marriage between two people following a personal choice, despite the

\[41 \text{ibid}\]
dominant pattern of relationships dictated by the sectarian rules and social and familiar pressures.

I have attempted, in the first section of this chapter, to define the system of power and domination which Lebanese civil spouses are challenging and confronting. Power is not a state, nor immutable, and it does not represent a state of being or a behaviour, but an action. If power represents an action, the act of contestation against that action cannot but take the form of action as well. The following section is devoted to an analytical debate on the elements defining civil marriage - whether from an ‘everyday act of resistance’ or Certeau’s ‘tactics’.

3. Civil Marriage: Everyday Act of Resistance or Tactics?

The research cases examined so far illustrate a model of individual political agents against social (sectarian) norms in Lebanon. They act within a structure of power that defines them pre-eminently as sectarian subjects, but it is equally embedded and reinforced by a system of religion, tradition, patriarchy, neoliberalism and regionalism. The agents may be contesting one or some of these systems at the same time. These individual agents are aware of the social norms ruling upon them, while they are exerting their agency to intentionally avoid the power. That is, with their political agency (the act of civil marriage), Lebanese agents use their transformative capacity to affect the structure. Agency is defined by Mahmood (2005: 8) and understood in this thesis as “the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)... the humanist desire for autonomy and self-
expression constitute the substrate, the slumbering ember that can spark to flame in the form of an act of resistance when conditions permit.”

This section will delve into the examination of civil marriage as two different kinds of act comprised within the concept of political agency. It will start with an analysis of what makes a subject a resister beyond its quality of agent. Following Mahmood (2005: 8), political agency is defined as a prerequisite for resistance, “the humanist desire for autonomy and self-expression... that can spark to flame in the form of an act of resistance when conditions permit”. As will be discussed below, I differentiate between the capacity of agency to navigate the system of power or subvert social norms, and the will of individuals to negotiate their terms of subversion, that is, their resistance towards oppression.

The second point of discussion in this section will be how resistance or consciousness is attributed to the agents or resisters, without falling into over-ascripting resistance or “romanticizing resistance” (Abu-Lughod, 1990b). Thirdly, it will differentiate between tactics as a form of navigating the system or tactics, and resistance directed to dominating powers, the act of civil marriage falls into different categories depending on the forms the agent or resister is addressing. Fourthly, it will expand on identifying the practice of civil marriage as subversion against power and domination, and thus an everyday act of resistance. The fifth and last point of discussion will address issues relating to civil marriage and social change: is it a form of ‘being social change’ or is it a paradigm for ‘promoting social change’? Is the practice of civil marriage in Lebanon promoting change in the political discourse and social practice of marriage, family and relationships or is it
simply a form of eluding oppression? In other words, and to use a metaphor, if the sectarian system is compared with a pressure cooker, is civil marriage simmering the sectarian system (the pressure cooker) on a low flame until the system (the cooker) explodes, or is civil marriage rather the cooker’s safety valve to let some air out, to avoid explosion, while allowing the small minority that would, if they did not have the option for civil marriage abroad, challenge the sectarian system more vociferously and coordinately and make it stagger, instead of taking individual and uncollective acts of resistance?

I

Lila Abu-Lughod, also one of the leading scholars on resistance and feminist studies in the Middle East, published a work entitled “The romance of resistance”, in which she criticised, including in some of her earlier work, the “tendency to romanticize resistance, to read all forms of resistance as signs of ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated. By reading resistance in this way, we collapse distinctions between forms of resistance and foreclose certain questions about the working of power” (1990b: 42). She further asks a question that has stirred great intellectual deliberation and inquiry into how to define and identify through anthropological methods instances of ‘resistance’, as scholars or as mere observers of the society. Thus, how are we to recognise resistance “without misattributing to them forms of consciousness or politics that are no part of their experience – something like a feminist consciousness of feminist politics?” (Abu-Lughod, 1990b: 47)
The acts of couples joined by civil marriage are probably informed by similar desires of subverting or avoiding certain forms of domination without an intended will to transform that system of power. In his volume on “Arts de faire”, Michel de Certeau (1990) describes how the very arts de faire (the directions for use) create room for playing (jeu) with how laws, practices or representations are used. These uses are subscribed to the paradigm of Gramscian hegemony, which organises the actions and their consumption. However, Certeau (1990: 53-4) argues that the way in which these actions are ‘used’, imposing by means of force or seducing the oppressed to use the laws, practices or representations creates, at the same time that it is producing the paradigm of hegemony, a room for subverting the laws by the very same way that they decide to practice them. That is, the oppressed develop their capacity to subvert the laws from inside and without leaving the hegemonic paradigm. They assimilate them from inside and outside, while they divert the laws from within. This subversion of power without leaving the hegemonic “way of usage” is what Certau defined as ‘tactics’. That is, “a clever usage of time and the chances it presents, as well as the plays it presents on the foundations of power” (Certeau, 1990: 63).

Tactics operate in contrast to ‘strategies’. Strategies are actions that operate within a ‘proper’, which is a similar concept for Certeau as hegemony is for Gramsci. Tactics are characterised by being “absent of a proper” (1990: 60). They operate within the mesh of the system where they expand and become homogeneous. “The system is in a system too vast to be their own, too tightly woven for them to escape from it” (1990: 63). Certeau describes tactics as the ability of the oppressed to navigate the system, without leaving its hegemonic form. This practice represents diversion from
the hegemonic powers, without conscious will or intent to produce alternative ‘strategies’ or change power in order to adapt to the tactics. This is the core difference between tactics and everyday acts of resistance: whereas the agent in the former is diverting from the strategy or power, the latter is intentionally aiming at transforming power.

To sum up, in this conceptual equation I discern between tactics, that is, diverting or navigating the hegemonic powers, and resistance, an act in which the subject necessarily desires to confront, challenge and eventually negotiate the terms in which they are dominated.

II

Echoing Abu-Lughod in her essay on “The Romance of Resistance” (1990b), how can one attribute consciousness or ideas that the agents may not be able to identify or articulate? Some scholars have argued against defining resistance based on intent due to how subjective it is to assess (Weitz, 2001), or because agents may not be aware or conscious or the scholar able to trespass cultural and social perceptions to rightly assess intent or consciousness (Hoffman, 1999).

With regard to these scholars’ presumptions, on the one hand, I believe that grounding our ethnographic research on the assumption that a (Middle Eastern) subject is not able to articulate the norms that rule in their society and politics is Orientalist at its best, or academically pretentious at its worst, and I will not get into this debate. On the other hand, if we assume that the scholar may be wrong in her attribution of consciousness on the agent because of misrepresentations of the
culture or the society that the ethnographer is researching, this would basically nullify any kind of social research or ethnography. Although it is true that in social sciences we are always at risk of misattributing intentions and meanings to the subject’s actions and words, the negation of the scholar’s ability to effectively read any society or culture as a consequence of this risk would signify an insurmountable pitfall for social sciences’ research globally. I believe I address these issues above in chapter II where I set out to discuss research methods in social sciences, ethnography and the Middle East.

In my own experience, consciousness and awareness were never something my participants were lacking. As a matter of fact, they were very eloquent and straightforward in how they described their act of civil marriage, the motivations behind it and why they decided to subvert social and political norms with their act. When I started my interviews with a simple “Why did you decide to go for a civil wedding?” Naser, Professor of Philosophy at a prestigious university, answered as follows:

“I don’t go to church. I’m not religious. At all. My wife isn’t religious at all. Even ideologically I am against the church, as a theocracy, as an institution, so I don’t see why I would play into it and give them that: surrender to their power and let them decide whether I get married or not. More than just ideologically, but the fact that it’s such a corrupted institution, because I don’t want to be part of this, of contributing to their enrichment and their power.”

Whereas Nada’s answer was:

Me and Fouad met in university and we were both in a student political group that promotes civil rights and secularism and equality and social justice. It’s part of our beliefs. Before we got married, we were fighters for civil marriage. We went to the streets, we did the first mock civil wedding in Lebanon two years before we got married. It’s like we were forcing the state to accept it, because it’s so normal to accept it civilly. Instead of doing a demonstration we did a mock wedding in a pub. More of a statement rather than a demonstration. We were thinking about getting married anyways at that time. Few years after when we thought about getting married, it was a normal thing to get married civilly for us, it wasn’t because we are from

42 Interview with Naser, civilly married, Beirut, 16 December 2015
different sects. It was just because it’s a belief... Our friends and family did not even question it. It would have been a shock if we had done a religious wedding!43.

Every single one of the fifty-nine interviews I conducted in Lebanon, including forty-one civil marriage spouses, demonstrated meticulous understanding of civil marriage, including terminology and especially awareness of the system of power they were subverting or confronting, which was not the same for any of the couples. In the case of Naser, for example, he was targeting the religious authorities, their power and the “corrupted institution” of the Church44. Nada, who is a very close friend of Naser, was targeting the state institutions. They tried through visible demonstrations, as well as through the private act of getting married, to force the state to incorporate their act of civil marriage. Both the visible demonstration of a mock civil wedding in a pub, that acquired some relevance and visibility in the newspapers45, and their exercise of engaging in a civil marriage, are informed by their “belief” in social justice, secularism and civil rights. Intent and political consciousness were, indeed, part of their civil marriage as an act of everyday resistance.

Further, even participants that did not identify with civil marriage as an activist cause or did not seek to make a statement against the state or the sectarian/religious authorities, were able to define the act of civil marriage and the social norms they were contravening, even though they were not consciously contesting the hegemonic powers.

43 Interview with Nada and Fouad, civilly married couple, Beirut, 21 June 2016
44 Interview with Naser, civilly married, Beirut, 16 December 2015
Also in the case of Maher, who had a civil wedding simply because he is Sunni Muslim while his wife is Christian and there was not other way for them to get married, is also perfectly able to reflect on the institutional and social norms they are challenging. When I asked him if supporting the activist cause of civil marriage was part of their decision for having a civil ceremony, Maher answered:

Personally not at all, I don’t think it’s a big cause in Lebanon... I don’t think that it’s what is missing in Lebanon [a Lebanese civil marriage law]. There is not an institutional gap to be filled by a civil marriage law. Those that want to do it they do it already and increasingly more. It’s especially Christians that do it. It’s not a dynamic intrinsic of the Lebanese society. Even if civil marriage could work as a bridge it does not, because it’s a dynamic intrinsic from the Christian community before being a national issue.46

Maher’s interview and position was a great contribution to this thesis, even if I could not see it that way at the time I conducted the interview, but only in 2015 when I was starting to define the topic, scope and research questions. Firstly, even if the agents are not politically conscious or they intentionally challenge with their agency the structure of power or domination, this does not mean that they do not identify the social norms that limit their scope of action. Not only civil marriage couples would be able to identify and describe the limits of personal status laws in Lebanon. Every single Lebanese citizen that deals with marriage is aware of the social, political and economic limits of the laws, and they may agree with them or not. At the moment they decide not to abide by the sectarian personal status laws and travel abroad to have a civil wedding under a foreign law, the couple is contouring, avoiding and navigating the sectarian family norms that rule in Lebanese society and politics.

46 Interview with Maher, civil married spouse, Beirut, 16 December 2015
Hence, Maher and his wife exerted their agency against the structure of power. In the first place this structure determines sect endogamy, which they confronted with their intersectarian marriage. In the second place, they also challenged sectarian personal status laws, as their marriage is ruled by a set of civil laws that are not contemplated in the framework of predominant religious marriages in Lebanon. According to Certeau’s (1990) definition of ‘tactics’ above, their civil marriage act represented their will to divert from the proper or system of power. Within this proper, the strategy was sect endogamy and religious marriage, which they tried to divert and avoid, without expressing desire or intention to subvert it. As agents, they challenge the social norms, without challenging the system that upholds them.

To expand on this idea, I will discuss why I believe consciousness and intent are essential to everyday acts of resistance. Haynes and Prakash (1991) have argued against defining resistance according to consciousness and define resistance as “behaviours and cultural practices by subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formations that threaten or unravel the strategies of domination” (p. 3). Haynes and Prakash’s essays demonstrated how even acts that are within legality and legitimacy sometimes serve the purpose of eroding hegemonic projects and ideological assumptions. They add, “innocuous behaviours can have unintended yet profound consequences for the objectives of the dominant or the shape of social order” (p. 3-4).

I believe that what Haynes and Prakash described in their essay is tactics rather than an act of resistance. Tactics, as an act in which the agent exerts her capacity to overcome the weight of the hegemonic norms, may have profound consequences on
the dominant or social order, but it is not the intention of the agent to have such an outcome. In the case of tactics, the agent is merely navigating within the system without confronting it. The outcome of such a political act might, in fact, be exactly the opposite. What if the agent undertakes a well planned and targeted action to reshape and confront the strategies of domination and social order, but he unfortunately does not achieve his desired outcome. Would his act not be considered resistance in that case? Scott resolves that political consciousness is a better indicator of resistance than outcome because there is no guarantee that resistance will achieve the desired effect (1985: 290).

Tactics is the primary condition for the agent not to follow the structure of power and develop alternative ‘usages’ within the structure of power. It involves the indispensable capacity of the individual for doing so. The act itself, however, might not intend to challenge, subvert or to contest the structure of power. The tactics’ agent may not be following the expected proper, but it does not mean he is intentionally trying to subvert or resist it or attempting to promote social change. The act may represent also the simplest way for navigating the structure of power, which does not mean the system of power that perpetuates the norms is being targeted or challenged. It might just be a one-time, punctual or individual event, with which it is very difficult to spark social change.

Besides, actions against the paradigm of domination do not ineluctably mean that "they are motivated by the desire to subvert or resist; neither can we assume that an analysis that focuses on the subversive effects their practices produce adequately captures the meanings of these practices, that is, what these practices "do" within
the discursive context of their enactment" (Mahmood, 2005: 175). The impact of the action, its subversive effects, cannot be used to explain the action itself or the meaning that the actor has intended with that practice.

What is more, this thesis works on the premise that cultural domination and ideological hegemony are at the outset of the perpetuation of the hegemonic social order. According to Butler (1997) even the ‘feminist experience’ cannot be detached from a system in which women are the oppressed because the abject can only be conceived in relation to the hegemonic terms of the discourse. That is, a woman’s body does not precede the social norms in which a women’s body is attached to certain behaviour and boundaries. A woman’s body acquires meaning and limits because of their performance as a "bounded act", while performativity, "consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’” (Butler, 1993: 234).

This very construction of the performer’s will or choice is what makes the structure of norms reified, but also vulnerable and unstable because the performative reiteration may fail or be repappropriated for purposes other than the consolidation of norms. In Butler’s words, "possibility of its undoing is at once the condition of possibility of the structure itself" (1997: 14). It is the subject’s will or choice to subvert the current patterns of subjectification which can stop the construction of performative reiteration of the norms. The survival of the structure of power is thus dependent on the ‘will’ of the subject to follow or reverse the patterns of subjectification.
It is within this argument that will or political consciousness is placed at the heart of actions of resistance. “Accounts of resistance must detail not only resistant acts, but the subjective intent motivating these as well... an action intended specifically to counter that oppression” (Leblanc, 1999: 18). Following Butler, I believe subverting the patterns of subjectification emanates from the will of the subject not to be dominated, to reify or to follow the very social norms that uphold the subjectification paradigm. I believe the will or intent of the subject is at the origin of challenging the structure of power in its most vulnerable part. That is, the reiteration of the social order and norms that conform the structure, which is what makes the power, the power. If the social order is no longer reiterated, it stops being the order, and this would only be achieved if the subjects stopped performing the order.

In fact, the sectarian hegemonic power in Lebanon represents first and foremost the ability of constraining, promoting or inciting certain social practices, as well as political discourse that falls within the sectarian values and norms. They have mainly been created not only in the Gramscian ‘political society’ or the realm of repression and the state, but also in the ‘civil society’, the ‘market place of ideas’ where the intellectual struggle to contest hegemony happens and where the current daily struggle of Lebanese individuals to have civil marriage is situated. In this realm it is necessarily an ideology, or rather political consciousness, that will reunite the collective will necessary for the direct self-control towards autonomous action.
Back to the case of Maher presented above, I will reflect on it to conceptualise the practice of civil marriage. When I hypothesised that everyday acts of resistance also included subjects who were not intentionally contesting the system, could I thus define these subjects as resisters? If some subjects having civil marriage did not express their will to contest the structure of power, could I conceptualise them as resisters? Agents demonstrated their political agency, that is, their “capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)” as defined and discussed by Mahmood (2005: 8) above, but beyond that, only some of them articulated the desire and consciousness to resist the structure of power. Some of them were able to express their intention of subverting the domination of sectarianism, patriarchy, neoliberalism, etc.

Thus, with their act of civil marriage, some Lebanese subjects are navigating the sectarian system that dictates, through the sectarian legal system of personal status, that marriage should be an intrasectarian act in front of a religious authority. For others, on the other hand, the act of civil marriage is a step towards the deconstruction of the sectarian system in Lebanon. Hence, could the act of civil marriage represent different things according to the agent and the meaning of the act itself? In the first place, I argue that meaning and consciousness are definers of the act of everyday resistance. In the second place, I believe that every subject in society is immersed in different dynamics of oppression and liberation, and
therefore it is also possible that different agents are subverting forms of oppression in different ways.

Acts of political agency embody an expression of self-autonomy by the agent to encounter current rules, but this may be social change only if the numbers become majoritarian or at least, a relevant percentage of the population, which is unfourtunatley not the case of civil marriage in Lebanon. According to the last statistics published by the Ministry of Interior in Lebanon, 41,758 marriages took place in Lebanon in 2009. The statistics provided by the Embassy of Lebanon in Nicosia includes 618 civil marriages performed on the neighbouring island, which could probably be complemented by some other civil weddings taking place in Turkey, Greece or other Western countries. Even though the numbers are increasing, as every member of a travel agency staff certified during our interview, we could estimate perhaps more than one thousand weddings in Lebanon per year, say three per cent of Lebanese weddings, could be civil. Even if civil marriage is an increasing and constant practice in Lebanon, which is attracting more and more individuals, one needs to accept that the numbers are still minoritarian. Besides, if civil marriage spouses do not show intention and a will to confront and subvert performances of sectarian subjectification, civil marriage may only be attaining the goal of eroding sectarian subjectification if the practice continues to increase and to be normalised and accepted by the Lebanese community in its majority. But if the individuals do not show political consciousness for contestation of the sectarian

domination, its hegemony will not be subverted. Quiet acts of civil marriage, without collective will of transformation, mobilising public awareness and seeking individual transformation of their daily life through consciousness and intention, are not very likely to embody social change.

In conclusion, I believe that the political agency of civil marriage without consciousness could be social change, but it does not necessarily promote it or lead to it. The act of everyday resistance of a collectivity of individuals, even if unconnected and lacking strategy, coordination and organisation, but who are intentionally seeking to subvert the domination of the hegemonic sectarian system embodies the promotion of social change.

Lila Abu-Lughod (1990b) suggests, that in order to contour the risks of misattributing consciousness to resisters, studying resistance should be used as a “diagnostic of power” (p. 42). Locating resistance should be used to place the changes in social relations of power between the resisters and those who dominate. For that matter, I believe that resisters should be considered as those who reflect on the form that dominates them. Resistance should not reflect an act of ‘navigation’ or ‘avoiding’ the structure of power, but an act in which the resister is negotiating her terms of subversion, where we can diagnose how the power is limiting her ability to subvert.

Let us take the case of Maher and Nada to assess this issue. Maher is sceptical about civil marriage as a form of social change and the ability of social change initiatives in general. Maher is Professor of Economy at a prestigious university in Beirut. During our interview at his office he defined the option of civil marriage oni:
It’s what we call in Economy the ‘exit option’. It makes divorce much easier for Christians, which explains the increase of civil marriages during the last twenty years since the end of the Civil War. They don’t have civil marriage because they believe in women’s equality or because they believe in secularism. There is a personal interest behind it. They want to ensure they have an exit option 48.

Legal and social norms in Lebanon do not guarantee the ‘exit option’, that is, divorce for Christian Catholic marriages. Those couples that go abroad to contract a civil marriage are thus, by the minimum standard, fulfilling their own capacity to achieve their own interests and avoid the established norms. The political agency of civil marriage is thus present if the act is sought merely to guarantee the eventual option of divorce. In his own experience, Maher did not intend to go beyond this capacity of trespassing the norms; he did not think civil marriage was a valid cause for activism not that it had any potential to foster social change.

The experience of Nada, also referred above, gives us a different view and experience on the issue. She defined civil marriage as part of a ‘struggle’ for social justice and civil rights. Nada and Fouad have been active in different movements related to social equality, women’s rights and secularism for many years. They were very active and actually met during their activism in the secular club during their university years at AUB. “The fight continues… Lately we entered politics. We are two of the founders of Beirut Madinati. I was a candidate in the list. These things come together, for a reason.”49 As Nada informed me, the four founding members of Beirut Madinati are maybe not by chance, married by civil ceremony. This, in the first place confirms the narrow link between civil marriage and social and political consciousness, as it shows what movements promoting social justice, such as Beirut Madinati, and civil marriage have in common. In the second place, it also evidences

48 Interview with Maher, civil married spouse, Beirut, 16 December 2015
49 Interview with Nada and Fouad, civilly married couple, Beirut, 21 June 2016
how civil marriage subjects may go beyond their agency of navigating the system and seek to contest, challenge and redefine the structure of power. It is a ‘fight’ as described by Nada, and civil marriage is one of the tools to fight the power.

IV

The practice of civil marriage in Lebanon comprises a group of unconnected individuals united by the same practice. The motivations, backgrounds and profiles of the civil spouses are, however, quite varied and it makes it very difficult to assess that as agents of civil marriage with different *habitus*, consciousness, intentions, goals and meanings on how their actions subscribe to the current structure of power; all their actions may represent a form of contestation and subversion in exactly equal terms. Similarly, within any hegemonic system of power, subjects are contingent to forms of domination and social norms in different ways depending on the position of privilege/discrimination that their social status grants them. For example, civil spouses suffer from different forms of pressure from their family, friends, social environment or even at their work placement depending on their own social, political and economic status. Every Lebanese individual is ‘connected’ and is dependent on their social and economic survival differently, according to their gender, socio-economic status, sectarian affiliation, geographical origins, etc. It is not by coincidence that a considerable proportion of civil spouses come from higher and higher-middle social classes and are currently living in Beirut. It is not by chance, either, that the vast majority of them do not, nor their families, pledge allegiance to political/sectarian parties. And finally, it is probably not a coincidence either that an
important percentage of the spouses, 65% of them, declared themselves to be politically mobilised or to have an activist background.

During our interview Nada acknowledged: “We did it the easy way”\textsuperscript{50}. She referred to how for them it came as an easy option, compared with many other couples who need to struggle with their family and their social communities when they expressed their desire to have a civil marriage. Nada and Fouad come from secular families; they were dating for a long time, with acceptance from both families of having a new member from a different sectarian affiliation, which did not seem to bother them, and most importantly, both Nada and Fouad have economic and social stability guaranteed because of their own status. Their civil marriage did not place them at the margins because their surroundings were accepted and they did not depend for their survival on a structure of power where such a contesting act is the opposite of what it is expected from them. It is for this reason that Nada decided, with other civil spouses, to create a Facebook page in which people could share their experiences and seek support.

[In the Facebook page] People ask what happened to the law, do you recommend any [travel] agencies... There’s a lot of mabrouk and sharing love... For a lot of people it is something. Because for us it came the easy way. I think a lot of couples it was not easy, and it was a lot of fight, a lot to overcome... For them it is a mission, it is a cause and we have to build on this. We did once an exhibition with these pictures mainly of their civil weddings. It was very nice, people got together and it was very nice to show how civil weddings were just as any other wedding and their kids are just as any other kids... For some people in Lebanon civilly married couples are aliens...”

For couples like Rita and Karl, who were one of the couples that had a civil marriage in Lebanon in 2014, but their marriage was never registered by the Ministry of Interior, the struggle has been arduous. They held their civil wedding in Lebanon, as they refused to marry in Cyprus because, both being Druze, they would have to be

\textsuperscript{50} ibid
ruled under shari’a court. They opened a file in court to get their civil marriage registered and they have been waiting since 2014 to get a ruling from court. In the meantime, Rita became pregnant and given that their marriage was not recognised by the Lebanese state, and that children born outside of marriage in Lebanon are considered ghayr shari’a or illegitimate and thus born without social and civil rights for education and social welfare, Rita and Karl travelled to Sweden and sought asylum to grant their child Swedish nationality. In fact, as Rita and Karl’s marriage has not been registered, Rita is not able to pass her Lebanese nationality to her child according to Lebanese law, so their child, being born in Lebanon, would have been born illegitimate and without nationality.

The other option would have been for the couple to go to Cyprus and get married, but they feel as if their fight would have been for nothing, so they decided to abide by their cause. “We didn’t come this far in our struggle just to go to Cyprus and get married”\textsuperscript{51} Amin and Samira were in a similar position to Karl and Rita and Mounia. They had a civil marriage in Lebanon in 2014 and Samira became pregnant some time after, but they could not afford to travel to Cyprus to amend the papers nor to start a new life in Sweden. Their child, Natasha, was born ghayra shari’a and they are still struggling to register their marriage and to grant Natasha her rights. In the small town in Akkar, in the most impoverished area in the North of Lebanon close to the border with Syria, where they live, this was a strong statement. Amin told me he lost his job when it happened and their practice is certainly not very well accepted in the village. During the time I spent with them, Samira complained several times that they do not have friends in the village, probably for their ideas or practices.

\textsuperscript{51} Interview with Rita and Karl, Skype (Sweden), 16 June 2016
The social, economic and political forms of domination are obviously not the same for Samira and Amin as from the position of status of Maher and Nada. Ziad, Professor at AUB, who had a civil wedding in Cyprus in 1997, reflected on that: “People that are well established, like ministers that also had civil marriage, even me... It doesn’t affect our daily life.” Indeed, some politicians that had a civil marriage voted against the draft law for civil personal status when it was discussed in Parliament in 2013 (Salloukh et al., 2015: 36). Those politicians live “outside the system”, as Ziad argued. Even if the political parties and the religious and sectarian circles that they pledge allegiance to are against civil marriage, they control the structures of power and enjoy the privilege of not abiding by the standards that are imposed in the rest of the population. They are able to contour the norms without any cost to pay, as any oppressed Lebanese citizen would do.

V

I will finish this section with some concluding remarks on everyday acts of resistance and their potentiality for promoting/being social change. I believe that action against social norms without political consciousness or will from the agent to redefine the terms in which she is subjected to the hegemonic social order cannot be considered an act of resistance, but an act political agency (Mahmood, 2005).

If power is not at the root of the act of resistance, that is, if targeting the structure of power is not the source of the act, then it cannot be considered an act of resistance. Hence, the act of civil marriage that entails the subject’s will not to fall within the

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52 Interview with Ziad, Beirut, 21 July 2016
sectarian modes of subjectification is deemed an act of everyday resistance. It is an individual act that may lack strategy, visibility or organisation, but to use a metaphor, it is a low-heat social change.

On the other hand, the practice of civil marriage abroad may not be challenging the social order in Lebanon, as sectarian, political and religious authorities in charge of maintaining the sectarian order are not being threatened by this practice, whereas they were all mobilised to stop an alternative civil option for marriage or other family matters when the movement came close to succeeding. In that sense, civil marriage is rather acting as a safety valve, a tangible option for those who can afford to navigate the system of domination without confronting it.

4. Multi-layered Power/Resistance: Resisting or/while Reproducing

Resistance, as reflection of power, is neither pure nor one-sided. The structure of power is intersubjectively performed, (re)produced and challenged, and thus is always unstable, and to a certain degree negotiated, reinforced and resisted (Mitchell, 1990). Relationships between dominator and dominated involve a multiplicity of systems and hierarchies of power, and individuals can simultaneously be powerful and powerless within different systems (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004).

Hence, in this multi-layered structure of power, “individuals or groups may simultaneously support the structures of domination that necessitate resistance in the first place... a single activity may constitute both resistance and accommodation to different aspects of power or authority” (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004: 549). At
the same time, subjects may be challenging their positions as oppressed within a particular social structure, while they may not be challenging the overall structure.

Let us reflect on this with the case of one of my participants. Amal and Sami met and decided to get married, despite some opposition they received from Sami’s family and Amal’s entourage (friends and colleagues) due to their belonging to two different sectarian groups. As Amal repeated several times the fact that she was Sunni-affiliated and he was Christian-affiliated “means nothing to us”.

For us, religion is the same, whether is Muslim, Christian and Jew. There is God, you need to fast, regardless the way you do it, some people pass the entire day without eating or in a different way. We believe you need to be nice with people, god, to not lie, to not steal. So the values are common. Now, whether Christians believe that Jesus is the son, and Muslims does not believe in that, those are details for us53.

Contrary to Sami’s family, which is “less mixed”, meaning more homosectarian, some of Amal’s family members are from different sectarian backgrounds. She declared that her family was completely fine with their marriage from the beginning, and they supported that she marries the person regardless of his sectarian affiliation, and they were supportive of their civil wedding as well. Her brother is also married to a Christian-affiliated woman and her grandmother was Christian. As a matter of fact, her grandparents married in Cyprus and, until her grandfather died, no one in the family knew about their civil marriage and thought that she had converted to Islam in order to get married. When her grandfather died, and because Christian women are not allowed to inherit from their Muslim husbands according to shari’a, she was not entitled to any inheritance. “Of course we gave her the

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53 Interview with Amal, married civilly, Beirut, 26 July 2016
corresponding inheritance, we did it among ourselves, it would have been so unfair for her not to get anything after so many years of loyal marriage...”\textsuperscript{54.}

On the other hand, Amal grew up in an entourage that was more homogeneous regarding her sectarian affiliation, and when she came to announce her civil marriage with someone from a different sect she received a lot of pressure. Her best friend came to her with a Qur’an saying that what she was doing was against her religion. Her manager at that time called her to his office to coerce her into converting her intended spouse into Islam rather than having a civil marriage by saying: “Listen, he’s madly in love with you and why wouldn’t you consider converting him. He would do that for you, he’s in love.” Amal then replied, “I don’t want him to do that. It’s not important for me. I love him the way he is and our values, religion and life are the same, whether he is Christian or Muslim, we have the same values and the same way of thinking.” He then argued that by converting him she would gain more points with God.

The position of power and coerciveness that the manager enjoyed in influencing Amal’s decision is striking, and it reflects on the wide network that operates to maintain the sectarian social order in Lebanon. Not only are individuals dependent on the sectarian structure for their own economic and social survival, but the sectarian tentacles also spread through working environments.

Sami, conversely, did face some minor opposition from his mother and some family members regarding their wedding, but he enjoyed the support of all his close

\textsuperscript{54} ibid
friends, given that, as he explained himself, he grew up in Ras Beirut in a mainly Muslim and also traditionally liberal and “mixed” environment\textsuperscript{55}.

With regard to their children, I asked Amal what kind of education and identity she was transmitting to them. She told me that they were raising them as Christians “because this is the regulation in Lebanon... they follow their father”\textsuperscript{56}. Hence, Sami and Amal contested the social order and sectarian subjectification with their act of civil and intersectarian marriage. Their discourses reveal a conscious self-positioning outside the sectarian modes of affiliation: they decided to marry someone from a different sectarian affiliation, despite mechanisms of coercion from Amal’s manager and best friend. Besides, they demonstrate critical understanding of the religious and cultural plurality in Lebanon. She also criticised the patriarchal and discriminatory inheritance rules of shari’a applied to her grandmother and they confronted the ruling by dividing the inheritance their own way, by allocating to her grandmother her corresponding share.

The hegemonic system of power that civil marriage contests is not only composed of a system of power that (re)produces sectarian identities. Sectarianism plays a preeminent role in Lebanon’s society and politics. I believe the sectarian system of power could be situated within the Gramscian paradigm of ‘superstructure of power’ (where he situated ideology) (Gramsci, 1971). Indeed, sectarianism plays a superior role in how a social subject is produced, but other systems of power complement and contribute to this sectarian social person, reinforcing sectarianism but also attributing different connotations to what a Lebanese (sectarian) social subject is,

\textsuperscript{55} Interview with Karli, married civilly, Beirut, 3 August 2016
\textsuperscript{56} Interview with Amal, married civilly, Beirut, 26 July 2016
such as patriarchy, class, geography or neoliberalism. This system of power is contested unequally in its different layers and forms. Even if civil marriage has the potential to challenge the hegemonic powers in all its structures, the agents’ act might intentionally be contesting sectarianism or the weight of tradition but not patriarchal domination, or vice versa.

Indeed, even if confronting a particular form of power on some levels, Amal and Sami remained trapped in the dominant structure of sectarianism and patriarchy when it came to deciding on the upbringing of their children. To follow the patriarchal Lebanese rules, their children will learn to identify themselves as Christians, inheriting their father’s ascribed affiliation and they will become Christian/sectarian subjects in society.

In conclusion, even self-conscious and self-reflexive individuals that contest sectarianism, patriarchy or other systems of power do it while being embedded in the same structures of power. Confronting one form of power in one context or with one action does not mean that they will confront the same form of power in another context. According to Richter-Devroe (2011: 34), “[s]tudies of everyday highlight that resistance is not independent of systems of power, but rather conditioned by them. Systems of power do not determine the form resistance takes, but set the possibilities for distinct types of resistance to emerge”.

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CONCLUSION

This chapter has established one main difference between tactics, as an act that attempts to divert from domination, and an act of resistance in which the agents are aiming at transforming relations of domination and direct suppression. The first group is navigating the system and look for the path of least resistance to an end: to get married with a person according to alternative social and legal norms that are not those of the country. They also experienced some familiar, social and political pressures and their act embodied a form of subversion. However, the second group desired not only to be free from the social norms, but also they had an intention and will to resist the structure of domination. They had an intention to redefine and to stop performing their oppressed roles. They were consciously targeting social and political change, or in Gramscian terms, they developed their will as critical understanding of the self and awareness of their condition as part of the hegemonic force and thus, political consciousness (Gramsci, 1971).

Maher and his wife exerted their political agency to contour the sectarian personal status laws constraining their ability to get married, due to their divergent sectarian affiliations. Their acts did not involve intention to transform power because they considered the system could not adapt to the social demands of Lebanese citizens. Quite to the contrary, Maher did not consider civil marriage an important cause in Lebanon and his act was far from representing consciousness of the sectarian powers as oppressive and coercive of their freedom. As a form of tactics, they used a possibility that the system itself provided for them to navigate, without attempting to change the form they are subjected to the system of power. Their act does not
represent conscious questioning and intent to challenge and change the terms in which they are dominated by the power, as Nada and Fouad’s practice of civil marriage does. Like Maher and his wife, Nada and Fouad have a similar divergent sectarian ascription. They went abroad to have a civil marriage, but they described their act as intentionally targeting the sectarian system that is embedded in personal status laws and their activist trajectory proves that their civil marriage goes beyond merely contouring the sectarian system. In their case, they were aiming at transforming, resisting and triggering social change on matters related to sectarianism, patriarchy and other systems of power through the civil marriage cause.

In conclusion, the practice of civil marriage is nowadays a form of everyday resistance against the hegemonic structure of power in Lebanon. Resistance, similar to power, is never pure. Individuals exert their acts of resistance while embedded in the same structures of power that they are trying to contest. While in some contexts they may be able to resist one or several structures of power, they may fall into the trap of other contexts, reifying patterns of domination that they have resisted elsewhere. What is more, resisting power does not mean the agent is resisting every form of power. While Amal’s act of civil marriage once represented for her the guarantee of rights for her as a woman, she did not contest the patriarchal form of educating and identifying her children as Christian. Her children were ascribed following patrilineal identity, education and religion, excluding the right of the mother to transmit or determine such values.
CHAPTER VI: ‘This could be an identity’: Civil Marriage and Contestation to Sectarian and/or Spatial Identities in Lebanon

1. Civil Marriage and Sectarianism Beyond Piety
   1.1. Religious authorities: Policing Religious Boundaries and Marriage
   1.2. “You will gain points with God”: On coercion and religious domination

2. The Sectarian Lines and Geographical Segregation
   I. ‘The territorial modalities’: Space according to the (confessional) juridico-political context’
   II. The geopolitics of the sectarian
   III. Sectarian symbolisatons of space

3. Transmitting Sectarianism/Civilism: The Production of Sectarian Children

4. Multi-layered power, multi-layered identities

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter described the ability of the sectarian identities and categories to produce a hegemonic order that dominates the lives of every Lebanese citizen. The sectarian hegemonic system operates through a means of control that goes beyond mere coercive mechanisms, but through a system of power that transforms every individual into sectarian subjects. As power and subjectivity are (re)produced everyday in the individuals’ lives, subverting the modes of subjectification signifies subverting the power.
The current chapter builds on the idea of how sectarianism produces political and social order. Lebanese individuals are classified according to a system of social, legal and political categorisation predominantly by sectarian affiliations. This social categorisation and political order is, however, never immutable or static. Power is always changeable and dependant on the context and time where it operates. In fact, social categorisation of a Lebanese citizen today is not the same as it was before the Civil War, when sectarian affiliations were not as predominant. Modes of subjectification and political mobilisation have been transformed in Lebanon and continue to mutate. As the construction of the sect as a social category results from a dynamic process, the subject may also revert power by ceasing to reproduce the dominant categories.

The previous chapter also defined how Lebanese subjects managed to subvert sectarian power through civil marriage. However, the practice of civil marriage created two different ways of subverting power. The first form is tactics, an act that aims to divert power; to look for the path of least resistance to a particular goal: to marry a person according to alternative social and legal norms that are not those of the country. The couples experienced some familiar, social and political pressures as their act embodied a form of subversion. The second form, however, goes beyond the agents’ desire to free themselves from the social norms: they have intention and will to resist the structure of domination. Their intention to practice civil marriage is inspired by the will to transform their oppressive role and to consciously target social and political change.
The group of people performing the latter form of everyday resistance will be the object of study in this chapter. I will study civil marriage spouses that intentionally target the sectarian system. The contestation of power producing identities is resisted through intention or will to challenge the dominating forms of identity, subjectification and social categorisation. I will aim to analyse, here, this concept of intention, intrinsic to the subversion of sectarian subjectification.

This chapter has another important goal. In his analysis of the Civil War, Marxist thinker Mahdi ‘Amel (1979, 2005 [1980]) used the Gramscian paradigm of superstructure and structure(s) of power, and concluded that Lebanese politics and society are dominated by a hegemonic sectarian superstructure that supersedes the structure of class struggle. The dynamics and events that the Civil War generated, by the end of the 1970s when Mahdi ‘Amel (1979) published his “Research on the Causes of the Civil War” (“Bahtth fi asbab al-harb al-ahliya fi lubnan”), could not be explained without taking into account the emotions and the mobilization of sectarian leaders operating on the salience of identities. Whereas the superstructure of power is, as ‘Amel described, determined by sectarian social and political norms, a group of complementary structures of power operate together with/under the superstructure. This chapter will examine how the superstructure of sectarian power is nourished by another structure of power, the social space, and how the latter reinforces the former while on other occasions they operate in parallel.

The chapter will focus on how identities are (re)produced, negotiated and also redefined. Firstly, it is necessary to define the sect and the sectarian identity as a social category beyond religion and piety. Secondly, the structure of power that
reifies the sect as a social category is inserted and overlaps with other structures of power that may be reinforcing this social category, but they might also have the opposite effect and negate each other. Thus, the construction of space and geographical segregation overlaps, particularly since the end of the Civil War, with the confines of confessional territorial space. Thirdly, this chapter seeks to explore how the sectarian identities are accepted, transmitted or rejected by the civil marriage spouses within their family, to their children and their immediate surroundings.

1. Civil Marriage Beyond Piety

Figure 11: Marwa and Boutros' wedding ceremony. August 17, 2017
1.1. Religious authorities: Policing Religious Boundaries and Marriage

In August 2017 another marriage story made the headlines of Lebanese newspapers. The image of a veiled Muslim woman getting married to a Christian man in a Church invited public comments on social media. Supporters sided with the couple and praised them as a true example of *aysh al-mushtarak* (coexistence)\(^{57}\). Detractors accused the spouses and the clerics of betraying their religion\(^ {58}\). Marwa, the bride, received approval from the Shi‘a religious authorities to marry in the Roman Catholic Church, whose authorities also granted permission for their *katb al-kitab* with a *sheikh*. The couple later travelled to Cyprus for a third wedding ceremony to register their civil marriage and make it official. People criticising the couple or the clerics did not raise their voices against the interreligious nature of the marriage, as civil marriages of pious spouses happen everyday among Lebanese individuals without making daily headlines. Rather, critics were opposed to the couple’s insistence on having Muslim and Christian ceremonies in line with their pious beliefs.

Media and social networks focused, in the first place, on their religiosity, which was mainly a consequence of the visibility of the hijab worn by Marwa. In the second place, comments fixated on the religious legitimacy of both ceremonies, which were sanctioned by the Melkite Catholic Church and the Shi‘a *sayyid*. The latter issued a fatwa disputing double standards on interreligious marriages between Muslim men

\(^{57}\)See comments online: https://www.facebook.com/FajerTV/posts/730377160503107?comment_id=730431660497657&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

\(^{58}\)See tweet online: https://twitter.com/onehayabusa/status/896024997054955520?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=http%3A%2F%2Fstepfeed.com%2Fphotos-of-this-interfaith-lebanese-wedding-went-viral-4261
and women. According to him, there was no reason not to allow a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man if she acted upon her free will, while scriptures stipulated that the condition of being considered Muslim comprised also in belief of the prophets Jesus Christ and Moses, as well as other prophets.

Marwa and Boutros’ wedding ceremonies elucidate different meanings of interreligious/intersectarian/civil marriages and multiple social identities (in this case, pious/sectarian) embedded in this practice. Their case proves that one may have strong attachments with sectarian identity, be pious, and still marry someone in a civil wedding while maintaining one’s social and religious attachments.

Similar to Marwa and Boutros, the civil marriage spouses I had the chance to meet and interview for my research allocated a special place for religion aside from sectarian or other social categorisations, while their civil ceremony had also a distinct place. More than half of the spouses interviewed declared they were pious or believers in God, following their own practice. Despite apostasy or accusations of religious illegitimacy, as in the case of Marwa and Boutros, civil spouses detach their choice for civil marriage from religious practices or piety.

Some civil marriage couples opt for having a religious blessing in Lebanon, separate from their civil ceremony. The main purpose of this blessing is for the couple to enjoy a religious benediction, which follows their religious beliefs or, in some cases, is a result of family and social pressures, as it was in the case of Rima and Sami. Rima and Sami are both Christian-affiliated, Greek Orthodox and Maronite respectively. They decided to have a civil marriage as Sami refused a religious ceremony, declaring himself an atheist and not willing to legitimise their marriage within a religious
institution. Rima, who described herself as a religious person, eventually agreed. Nonetheless, her parents insisted on them having a blessing in Lebanon in order to have a celebration with their family and friends. Sami opposed at the beginning, but they found a compromise by having the civil wedding in Cyprus, and then having a religious blessing in the Church, that would not be registered. Rima explains her religious viewpoint as “being some kind of a believer”. She said that she believes in God; she believes God is the same for all religions and “when I need to have a spiritual conversation with Him I look up and pray” ⁵⁹. In another conversation, Rima told me that she is always uncertain about how to describe herself in prevalent religious terms. She does not follow Christian pious practices, but she believes in God. When Rima and Sami met with several priests to arrange their religious blessing, some refused to perform it, using a recriminatory tone with them for having a civil marriage and asking them questions about their religious principles and beliefs. Rima, outraged by the accusations of the priests, replied: “‘I understand where you’re coming from, but I don’t agree with you. Me getting civilly married doesn’t change the fact that I to some extent believe in God’, adding to the conversation, “I don’t think this priest or the Church has the right to judge my religious beliefs or to tell me how I should believe, get married or love my husband.’” ⁶⁰

Rima insisted that civil marriage did not change her religious beliefs, unlike Lara, her close friend, who also had a civil marriage. Lara described herself as having been pious but turning agnostic after the long process and family pressures she endured

⁵⁹ Interview with Rima, civil married spouse, Beirut, 12 August 2016.
⁶⁰ ibid
because of her civil marriage. Lara described her family as “[Christian] pious and believers. Not cultural, they think religion is just at the personal level. They are not strict, and as to being pious, they accept everyone and they taught us that. I would bring home Muslim friends and I learnt that Mohammed had to be treated equally to Charbel... I always thought that religion needs to make people more open and not more narrow-minded”\(^{61}\).

Separate from faith, religion in Lebanon represents a political and social differentiation process beyond theological consciousness or piety. Joseph (2008: 1) distinguished between ‘religion/religious identity and consciousness’ (as theology/theological consciousness) and ‘sect/sectarianism’ (as social organization, relationships, dynamics/group identity, and consciousness). I argue that sectarianism is about how ‘differences’ are constructed... Differentiation is a process, I suggest, that operates through the everyday—through socialization, through family systems, and through various other aspects of social organization in both systematic and erratic or contradictory ways.

Sectarian differentiation represents a process of identification of the self and the individuals of the community within the assumed social categories of the ‘sect’, which was not the same as the theological consciousness Lara had developed and the values of her religion. Her Christian faith did not, however, define her as a subject or how she interacted with other subjects in society. For Lara, sectarian subjectification was detached from the principles of religious Christianity that she received from her parents, which taught her that every individual should be treated

\(^{61}\) Interview with Lara, civil married spouse, Beirut, 3 August 2016
equally, independently from their religion or the social category to which she belonged. This principle applied not only to religion/sect, but also to social class.

“We grew up in Baabda, a very snobby area”, said Lara. Baabda is a village in Mount Lebanon, which, following the Civil War, became increasingly homogeneous in terms of its inhabitants. Lara referred also to her friendship with the son of the natur (concierge), who was Syrian, Muslim and from a lower socio-economic class. “My parents never had a problem with this, unlike other friends of mine whose parents were always telling them not to play with this one or this other one. We may fall into the trap of describing the parents of Lara’s friends within the subjectification mode of sectarianism that operates hegemonically in Lebanon. However, one should not disregard that, even if sect is more salient as a social category, other segregating lines such socio-economic classes operate in the context of Baabda. The lines of separation between the natur’s son and Lara’s family were not based only on religion, but also on social class.

Gabriel and Lara’s civil marriage was originally motivated by Gabriel’s lack of religious beliefs and attachment. Lara, who comes from a pious family and considers herself a believer, initially wanted to have a religious blessing, but she was happy to make a civil marriage as she considered it in line with her principles, referring, among others, to women’s rights. Lara and Gabriel changed their minds about the religious blessing when they attended the blessing ceremony of one of their friends who had married in Cyprus. The priest conducted the ceremony in a troublesome manner, according to them, denouncing the couple for having a civil wedding.

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62 ibid
Lara told me, the priest received higher orders to cancel the religious blessing for the couple. Her family “has a lot of wasta and they paid a lot of money to the Church to have the blessing”\textsuperscript{63}, so the priest finally accepted, but not without exerting his agency during the ceremony. “The gospel chosen by the priest reads the story of refusing to marry Mary because he thinks that she had an affair because she is pregnant and the angel appears to Joseph to tell him that Mary was pregnant of God... It’s as if the priest was comparing her with a cheater because she had civil marriage!”\textsuperscript{64}

The politics of marriage certainly expose the dynamics of clientelism and corruption within Lebanese society. Religious rulings and any other sort of regulation do not apply in the same form to the political/economic elite in Lebanon as they do to the rest of the population. It is particularly people dependent on the clientelist network for their and their families’ economic survival who are most vulnerable to social and political pressures. As a result, fewer cases of civil marriage happen in areas where socio-economic levels are lower, although this does not mean that the practice of civil marriage is non-existent amongst those in the poor and working classes. Bureaucratic and public positions run through sectarian lines, which are only granted according to means of “wasta” or close proximity to sectarian leaders. Communal welfare associations are also in charge, in the absence of state public services, of the redistribution of welfare services through clientelist/communal lines (Cammett, 2014, Jawad, 2009, Kingston, 2001, 2013, Nucho, 2017).

\textsuperscript{63} ibid
\textsuperscript{64} ibid
As was analysed in the chapter above, certain sectors of the population are dependent on their communities for the provision of public services, which makes them less likely to contest or challenge the sectarian/clientelist network. Civil marriage might be putting at risk a family’s economic and social well-being. Someone coming from a middle or higher socio-economic class might have the capacity to survive without the means provided by the economic/clientelest system. Similar to her friend, Lara was able to use her “wasta” and to use different resources in order to contour the system. Other sectors of the population feel alienated when social and family pressures push them to the margins of social norms.

When Lara and Gabriel decided to have just the civil wedding without a religious ceremony, their families showed their disagreement, especially amongst Lara’s kin. Due to their marriage, her mother was marginalised from her family and some of Lara’s uncles (but not aunts) cut ties with Lara’s close family. Lara explained how this decision raised some questions on what it is to be a Christian in Lebanese society, and especially the role of the Christian Church. She argued that the reactions she received from society and her uncles did not correspond with the Christian principles she had learnt as a child. She started seeing contradictions in the Church’s economic and political role in society.

Civil marriage changed my perception of the society because I started to see things that I had ignored previously and that suddenly appeared in front of me very clearly... I used to be such a strong believer, and the pressures we received when we decided to do civil marriage showed me the hypocrisy and business mind-set behind the people and the Church... The Catholic Church is the biggest capitalist industry in the world.

How is it possible that just because of having married civilly I became the devil and put aside my religion, despite having always followed the principles of my religion... My cousin had a ‘fake’ religious marriage which they did not register and then they went back to Paris and everyone was happy in my family. Why is this not acceptable for me that I live in Lebanon? Why do they need to apply double-standards to me? Why is it that in France the Church accepts civil marriage and
people continue being believers even if they do civil marriage, but in Lebanon it is considered as apostasy.\textsuperscript{65}

The issue of civil versus religious marriage in Lebanon has grown in hand with the sectarian issue. Politicians and religious authorities have played on their behalf with the ambiguity of the issue, as analysed in chapter IV. Civil marriage taking place in Cyprus or any other foreign country is being accepted to a certain extent by religious and political authorities in the higher ranks of society. Couples belonging to the economic and political elite have had a civil marriage without their political careers being affected (see chapter IV). At the bottom/middle of the socio-economic ladder, however, political and religious leaders managed to dissuade couples from having a civil or intersectarian marriage. In reality, the political debate on civil marriage is only put on the table when there are serious developments in the option of civil marriage. At that moment, religious circles issue public declarations and even declarations of apostasy. Political manoeuvres were implemented to block serious attempts to approve the Boutros draft law for civil personal status matters in 1995, as well as in 2013, when Lebanese couples used the gap in the law to marry in Lebanon with a public notary. When a political solution for civil marriage within Lebanon was proposed, that could curtail their political and economic benefits, the religious authorities took the necessary steps to stop any reforms to the current status quo. For example, the recent fatwa issued by the Grand Mufti Rashid Qabbani declares apostasy on any politicians \textit{legislating on civil marriage}\textsuperscript{66}, but it does not target civil marriages being registered in Lebanon immediately after the couple returns from Cyprus (see chapter IV).

\textsuperscript{65} ibid
\textsuperscript{66} Mufti on Civil Marriage: “The Fatwa is Plain and Clear”, \textit{Al Akhbar}, 30 January 2013
Within the faction of the population that depends for their social and economic survival on the sectarian/clientelist/political leaders, the latter have deployed a wide array of mechanisms to persuade Lebanese individuals to abide by sectarian norms. Whether through clerics who refuse to give benediction to civil marriage couples, or through the clientelist networks that set aside those contesting the sectarian norms of their economic and social welfare networks, social sectarian powers (re)produce within the society wearing different masks. As Lara eloquently expressed during our many conversations, her choice for civil marriage had social and political meanings that her family members attributed to religious norms, whereas Lara insisted that those were not the values that she learnt from her family and in her Christian school. Sectarian norms were at the origins of her family’s criticism of their civil marriage. By the same token, Lara’s parents attempted to transmit religious (Christian) principles to their children, pleading for everyone to be treated equally. These principles are in contradiction with classist, sectarian or racist normative relations.

1.2. “You will gain points with God”: On coercion and religious domination

The story of Amal, Muslim Sunni, and Sami, Christian Greek Orthodox, who chose a civil marriage, also elucidates how means of coercion and persuasion are alternated to influence their decision.

I feel I belong, whether they accept it or not. For some people I am no longer a Muslim because I already broke the law and got married… But for me, whether I was raised Muslim or Christian or whatever, I follow a certain religion. Even if they think it’s my
own creation. I go back to God, to the pillar, to the values, that’s my religion. It didn’t change either with the civil marriage 67.

Amal described a feeling of belonging (sectarian) that overlapped, firstly, with her religious belief, and secondly with how people would perceive or accept her marriage according to Muslim law - or not. On the one hand, Amal considers that her religious beliefs were not in contradiction with the orthodoxy of the religious authorities. Her belief in God, or even more her culture, is defined by this religion. On the other hand, as a Sunni who married a Christian in a civil ceremony, she is transgressing Islamic laws that do not allow a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man (while Muslim men are allowed to marry non-Muslim women).

Sami and Amal married despite the many social and religious pressures, especially on Amal’s side. The pressures did not come from her family, as Amal argued that her family includes different sectarian affiliations; her grandmother was Christian, and both her brother and aunt are married to people belonging to the Christian sect.

Growing up in an environment including people from different sects is a recurrent circumstance that facilitates the acceptance of intersectarian marriages. Indeed, this was a very recurrent topic among my interviewees; many highlighted their families as being exposed to, and accepting of other intersectarian couples, and family members that are not perceived as external or ‘the other’.

Unlike the positive opinions of her family, Amal’s social surrounding was not very open to the idea of the civil/intersectarian marriage. Her friend gave her a copy of the Qur’an to convince Amal that it was against her religion to marry someone that was not Muslim. As I referred in the previous chapter, Amal and Sami were working...

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67 Interview with Sami, civil married spouse, Beirut, 26 July 2016
together when they met, and when they announced their marriage to their work colleagues, Amal’s manager tried to convince her against having civil marriage, but to persuade instead Sami to convert to Islam:

... He’s madly in love with you and why wouldn’t you consider converting him. He would do that for you, he’s in love. I [Amal] said that I don’t want him to do that. It’s not important for me. I love him the way he is and our values, religion and life are the same, whether he is Christian or Muslim, we have the same values and the same way of thinking. And then he [manager] said but you will gain more points with God [by onverting him].

The leverage and position of power enjoyed by Amal’s manager, higher in the line of rank, mould his words not only as persuasion/recommendation but rather an act that begets coerciveness. Amal’s manager was one individual within the “consensual diffusion” that tried to ensure that every person is reproducing hegemonic practices. By the means of acts, persuasiveness, recommendations, constraints, inducements and limitations, individuals consensually agree to the hegemon without any need of coercion. According to Gramsci, stable hegemonic institutions are the ones able to organise consent in order to secure a political project. Hegemonic institutions are able to reproduce habits through consent. This consensual diffusion applies to the cultural and moral aspects of society, which the hegemonic power complements with its coercive functions. Coercion operates as a mere fortifier when there is equilibrium between ethico-political ideas and prevailing socio-economic conditions, when the ‘civil society’ and ‘political society’ are at the same level (Gramsci, 1995: 360).

Amal’s manager tried to persuade Amal to abide by a system that he believed truthful, according to his paradigm of how a Muslim person should mould her

68 Ibid
actions. The production of sectarian subjectivities emanates from this very system that make actions and practices as ‘true’. According to this framework, relationships and marriages are only ‘true’ if composed of a heterosexual couple from the same sectarian group. These true modes of action are supported, enacted and simply brought into being by a structure of power that is totalising and horizontal, and manages subjectivities, individuals, environments: it sets bodies, time and space in certain ways that are believed to be ‘true’ (Mitchell, 2006).

On the other hand, Amal and Sami’s modes of action were informed by more complex systems of truth that worked beyond their identification according to their ascribed sectarian categorisation. The couple felt, beyond their differences on religion and sect, that they share similar values, ways of thinking and even ways of interpreting religion, away from the binary distinctions between Christianity and Islam.

Sami’s social and family environment was exactly the opposite of Amal’s. On the one hand, his family belongs almost exclusively to the same Christian sect, and his mother and cousin expressed some reservations about him marrying a Muslim woman. The concerns were not minor, according to Sami, especially from his mum, who is also a practising Christian, but she eventually met with Amal and did not show opposition to their civil wedding. On the other hand, unlike concerns from his monosectarian family, Sami’s social multisectarian entourage was very supportive of the idea. Sami grew up in Ras Beirut, an area mostly inhabited by Muslims, particularly since the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975 and the increasing sectarian segregating trend in the country. In contrast to his family, his environment has
traditionally included friends, and also previous girlfriends, with a different sectarian affiliation to his own. Being a Christian in Ras Beirut meant that he was very exposed to Muslim people, as opposed to the rest of his family members that lived in East Beirut and barely got to know Muslim people.

The next section will be devoted to the study of sectarianism and its intersections with space, not only as a vessel where identities operate, but as defining and creating identities themselves.

2. The Sectarian Lines and Geographical Segregation

Understanding the production of power and hegemony requires an analysis of the interrelationship in which social space is not simply a context or background in which the individual and the social operates. Social space is co-imbricated in the processes and practices in which events and activities take place. In the words of Henri Lefèbvre, “(social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced [...]. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object” (2010 [1974]: 73).

In this section, I will build upon concepts of spatial/sectarian segregation. As producers of political identities, space and sectarianism operate in the same society simultaneously. Whereas sometimes spatial segregation reinforces socialisation within in-group members, space works as a separate structure of power, which is embedded in the superstructure of power that is sectarianism in Lebanon.

In her study of space and religion, Danièle Hervieu-Légier (2002) identifies three registers to which literature on religion in Western societies commonly subscribes. The first register is that of the “territorial modalities of the communalization of religion: in other words, the study of the relations that each religious community maintains with the space in which it has become established” (p. 99), that is, the conditions established for a given community by the juridico-political context. The second register is the geopolitics of the religious, which comprises the analysis of the “intercommunity conflicts and relationships, the identification of forms of resistance, compromise and cohabitation… and restructuring of the balance of power between religious groups and traditions, and the phenomena of exile, emigration, refuge and dispersal into diaspora” (p. 99). The third register is that of religious symbolizations of space and is summoned by “how the religious imagination, with its dual components of memory and utopia, understands places” (p. 100).

I will twist Hervieu-Légier’s three registers just slightly to describe sectarian identities and space rather than the theological concept of religion. In the first register, the ‘territorial modalities of the communalization of religion’, I will map out the geographical segregation by confessions during and as a consequence of the Lebanese Civil War, from 1975 onwards. The second register, encompassing the
'geopolitics of religion’, outlines geographical sectarian segregation and the construction of sectarian subjectivities embedded in the production of sectarian spaces. The third and last register, the ‘religious symbolisations of space’, will describe how individuals have developed different understandings of places, and sometimes enhanced them to build contesting and alternatives spaces.

I. ‘The territorial modalities’: Space according to the (confessional) juridico-political context’

The study of space in postwar Lebanon has special implications. Estimates on the Civil War in Lebanon suggest that more than half — possibly two-thirds - of the population have experienced some form of dislocation or uprootedness from their homes or communities since the outbreak of the war in 1975. The territorialisation and confessionalisation of identities was driven by massive population shifts. The dislocation of certain groups was accompanied by the reintegration of other people demarcating homogeneous and self-contained spaces. This followed mainly confessional origins, but also affected socio-economic classes. The socio-demographic study carried out by Salim Nasr (1993) in the aftermath of the war shows the homogenisation and sectarian redistribution throughout the war. According to this, almost half of villages and towns before the war included more than one sect: the geography changed quite drastically in 1989. As two main examples, while Christians represented in 1975 55% of the southern part of Mount Lebanon (Aley, Shout and Upper Matn), in 1989 they would barely make 5%. On the
other side of the picture, while the eastern suburbs of Beirut had a Christian population of 40%, only 5% lived there by the end of the hostilities (Nasr, 1993: 69).

My friend Rami grew up in Mount Lebanon, in North Matn, in a specific area that is almost entirely inhabited by Christians. During the Civil War the Kata’eb (Phalangist party) took control of the area and the narratives and political discourse of the war. Rami, who grew up and never left Lebanon during the Civil War, within a family that was not particularly political nor closely affiliated with a particular sectarian/political party, saw a mosque for the first time when he was eighteen, during a trip abroad in Turkey.

Geographical and communal segregation triggered by the Civil War was not only a context drawing the physical division of Lebanon, but it was also at the source of how detached Lebanese felt from each other. The justification of violence against the ‘other’ hence became legitimised, while sectarianism was normalised and reproduced in the everyday life of the Lebanese. Khalaf continues, “[t]he war did not only destroy common spaces. It also encouraged the formation of separate, exclusive and self-sufficient spaces” (2006: 114).

Figure 12: Map of Cadastral Districts of Beirut. Source: AUB website
II. The geopolitics of the sectarian

The space analysed in this section is the greater area of Beirut in Figure 2. The case of Amal and Sami illuminates this sectarian segregation of Lebanese geography. Whereas Amal grew up within a family from different sectarian backgrounds, who were receptive of their intersectarian/civil marriage, her friends and social circle, mainly homogeneous in sectarian terms, tried to persuade her against marrying someone from a different sect. Sami, however, experienced some opposition from his family members, who belong exclusively to the Christian sects, whereas his entourage and especially friends were very supportive of their marriage. Sami’s friends, and friends of the couple, live and come from similar environments, secular and leaning rather towards leftist political ideas and belonging to activist circles. Some of them have also entered into a civil marriage and they grew up in/feel closely attached to Ras Beirut, a district in the Western part of the capital (see Figure 2). Considered before the outbreak of the Civil War as a place of tolerance and pluralism, Ras Beirut became a cultural and intellectual sanctuary. It was also a centre for leftist ideologies and secular beliefs in the Middle East during the 1960s and 1970s. The home of AUB, this area largely attracted literate and educated people from a middle class background (Nagel, 2002: 719). “It was by virtue of its openness that Ras Beirut evolved into such a ‘melting pot’ of diverse religious, ethnic and ideological groups that was able to engender sentiments of trust, mutual respect and deference to pluralistic lifestyles” (Khalaf, 2001: 291).

Maria B. Abunnasr (2013: 238), who conducted her PhD thesis on Ras Beirut’s claimed exceptionalism and memory, concludes: “It is difficult to gauge the accuracy
of the pre-war narratives of coexistence in Ras Beirut because, on the one hand, the rise of post-war sectarianism tends to cast the pre-war era in comparatively nonsectarian terms. On the other hand, these narratives of coexistence bestow upon the past the wishful thinking, or the wishful memory, of the present.” After the war, the area lost much of its pluralistic character, as the population became more homogeneous in terms of its sectarian and ideological composition. However, Ras Beirut, and particularly Hamra, still keeps some of its essence - more than anywhere else in the capital (Abunnasr, 2013: 258). In fact, Ras Beirut has emerged as a common ground among my participants with a civil marriage. A significant number of them grew up or currently live in the neighbourhood, and more importantly, they define Ras Beirut or Hamra as an important marker of their identity. According to them, their identities have been shaped by this neighbourhood, which has informed their perceptions towards other communities and their secular ideologies. Contrary to more homogeneous neighbourhoods, Ras Beirut has emerged, whether as a result of an utopic exceptionalism as Abunnasr (2013) claims, or in fact as a paradigm for sectarian counter-hegemonic and contestation of the confessional political mobilisation and subjectification.

Sami explained how growing up in an area of Beirut with people from different confessions affected the way he identifies and relates as a social subject. Sami and his family spent most of the Civil War in Kuwait and they came back at the end of the war, in 1987, and moved to Ras Beirut, “the Muslim area”⁶⁹, as he defined it. He described his surroundings in Kuwait as very mixed, in the expatriate circle he grew up in, including many different Arab and international nationalities and different

⁶⁹ Interview with Sami, civil married spouse, Beirut, 3 August 2016
religions and sectarian affiliations. The sectarianized behaviour that he encountered in Lebanon when they moved back took him by shock. “When I came here I was shocked because people were trying to find out what my religion was. Not that it meant anything to me, so why are they asking?”

Sami grew up detached from sectarian categorisation in Lebanon. He also revealed that his family was not affiliated to any political party in Lebanon but they were on good terms with everyone, as well as a PLO leader living in their same building. As a consequence, he did not follow the sectarian modes of political mobilisation and he felt disaffected, while needing to align with this social sectarian domination.

We were living in West Beirut, which was the Muslim area. My big part of our family was in East Beirut, so I used to move around a lot between the two areas, which was not very common. A Christian, living around Muslims... Many people would talk about the other side... In East Beirut they were asking us how do you live with the Muslims? So I never belonged with any of them. I was looking at them, these are my family, and the other people are just people like us; they do the same things. It's not like people are living in a jungle... So I never belonged to that sect or that religion. On a personal level, it’s a cultural thing more than a religious thing. I looked at my relationships with girls and 4 out of 5 were Muslims. Because I was brought up in an area which is culturally more dominated by the Muslims, while very open and acceptant I felt it was closer to my life style, the way we think, same culture. There is definitely a different culture between East and West Beirut. So I found myself more comfortable with people from West Beirut, predominantly Muslim.

Sami’s extended family, Christian, was living in East Beirut, and would talk about and refer to the Muslims during the Civil War as the ‘other’, a category that also included his friends and surroundings. For him, Muslims were not the ‘other people’, but they were just the same as his family members or the Christians living in East Beirut.

Sami’s personal experience involved exposure and close relationships with both confessional groups confronted during the long violent episodes. This familiarity shaped his mode of action in a way different from the dominant paradigm of
sectarian segregation and fear of the ‘other’. The creation of fear of the ‘other’ during the Civil War was described by the sociologist Samir Khalaf as a necessary neuropsychological response from the Lebanese to overcome their pain and collective suffering. “By distancing themselves, or cutting themselves off from the ‘other’, the brutality of embattled communities became routine” (Khalaf, 2006: 120). Lebanese citizens have in fact managed to distance themselves through physical segregation of geography and space. The intricate relationship between space and sectarian identities could be traced back to the onset of the Civil War, a moment that amplified the sectarianisation of the space in Lebanon. Joseph’s (1983) research on working-class women’s networks shows how, prior to the war, there were many active intersectarian social networks, particularly among women. Beyond the destruction of common and public places, the war also triggered a process of segregation and homogenisation of Lebanese territory alongside sectarian affiliations. “Massive population shifts, particularly since they are accompanied by the reintegration of displaced groups into more homogeneous, self-contained and exclusive spaces, have also reinforced communal solidarity” (Khalaf, 2006: 114).

The segregation of Lebanon’s social space follows pre-eminently homogenising trends, separating territories and spaces on sectarian terms. However, the territorialisation of Lebanon does not exclusively follow confessional divisions, as social borders in Lebanon also emanate from other social and political categorisations. Political partisan mobilisation has marked and delimited territories, most notably in Beirut, but also neighbourhoods in Beirut that are associated with certain socio-economic classes. Lara Deeb (2006) conducted her ethnographic
research on *al-Dahiyya*, a word that simply means ‘suburbs’ in Arabic, but that in the imaginary of the Lebanese and alike connotes the impoverished and Hizbullah-controlled ‘Shi’a ghetto’. *Dahiyya* meant not only Shi’a, but at the same time it signalled the belonging of the inhabitants to the Party of God and low socio-economic class. In fact, such categorisation, as Lara Deeb explained, did not come exclusively from people of other confessions. Such stereotypical associations of the Southern neighbourhood of Beirut with poverty, illegal construction and Hizbullah were not solely made by non-Shi’a, but “if anything, wealthy Shi’is who did not live in *al-Dahiyya* responded the most stridently [when bringing up the place where she conducted her research]” (Deeb, 2006: 45).

Strolling around the city of Beirut is marked by the ‘invisible’ confines of neighbourhoods and partisans’ bastions. The different signs of political parties, colours, slogans and political personalities’ faces and postures draw the confines of control and influence of certain political parties. For most of my fieldwork I used to live at the crossroads of several neighbourhoods with different sectarian demographics, social classes and political affiliation in Beirut. On the Eastern side of my house, at the centre of Sassine square, the higher point of Ashrafieh, was one of the traditional bastions of Kata’eb/Christian Maronite. This spot in the central Sassine square had long been a place of veneration for the Kata’eb leader, Bashir Gemayyel, assassinated during the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982.\(^{71}\) Figures 3, 4 and 5 show pictures of the same spot in Sassine square, at different times during the

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past decade, in which the picture of the assassinated leader of Kata’eb appears with different slogans making direct reference to their political view as champions of the Lebanese Republic, showing a picture of Bashir Gemmayyel with the Lebanese flag in the background. The pictures are also accompanied with a gigantic flag of Lebanon that stands in the middle of the square. One of the pictures carries the message of “We are the Lebanese resistance”, highlighting their advocacy of Lebanonism and the Lebanese republic, but also contesting the role of Hizbullah as the party of ‘resistance’. Kata’eb and other Christian/right wing militias also mobilised young men during the war under rallying cries of ‘Christian resistance’ or ‘Lebanese resistance’, referring to the Palestinian and other pan-Arab armed militias present in the country (see: Salibi, 1976, Traboulsi, 2007).
Figures 12, 14, 15 (From left to right and from top to bottom): Pictures of the same building in the centre of Sassine Square, Ashrafieh. Unknown sources.

Figure 13: On the left, Amine, current Kata’eb leader and brother of Bashir, on the right hand side. Under the picture “You remained, and today you are victorious”

Figure 14: Bashir Gemmayel with a Lebanese flag on the background. “The most important is that the system remains Lebanese”

Figure 15: Bashir on a Lebanese flag background: “We are the Lebanese resistance”
If, instead of walking East, I decided to make the fifteen minute walk from my house to the West, I would cross the ‘Green Line’ and arrive in Ras al Nabaa’ (in the central district of Mazraa’, Figure 2) and Basta on the way to the sea and the city centre (central district of Bachoura, Figure 2). The sounds of mosques become palpable around this neighbourhood, while coloured flags of Amal (green), Hizbullah (yellow) and pictures of martyrs, Imams, Hizbullah’s Secretary General Hassan Nasarallah or the speaker of Parliament from the Amal party are the most common images on the streets of Basta. After the recently recognised political and military support of Hizbullah for the Syrian regime, pictures of Bashar al-Assad and flags of the Syrian regime are also commonly found in these streets (see figure 6).

Houses on each of the ‘sides’, Eastern and Western, do not differ architecturally by their location or neighbourhood. The outsider would not recognise that he is crossing that historical line if not for the subtle political land markers that different political parties place strategically to indicate who ‘controls’ the area. As Larkin (2010: 434) explains, “[t]he physical walls and boundaries have vanished but they have been replaced with subtler signs and codes, flags, graffiti, banners, and symbols that continue to impact how Lebanese youth perceive themselves, distinguish others, and inhabit their spatial surroundings”.

Buildings made of concrete with green-coloured shutters on their windows and coloured canvas on their balconies are the most repeated motifs among popular neighbourhoods, indistinctively on both sides of the Green Line. Occupants of these houses usually come from the working or middle classes, whereas rich classes tend to live on the top floors of high-rise ‘modern’ buildings. During the last decade tower
blocks have mushroomed in Beirut, especially in the most central and upper-class
neighbourhoods (Meier, 2013: 388) Thus, architectural contrast between different
neighbourhoods is apparent mainly on socio-economic income, not on confession
(see Figure 11).

Figure 16 (top): Photo taken between Basta and Zouk al-Blat, Beirut. In the picture, Hizbullah flags to left (yellow) and the picture of his Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah. The flag of the Syrian regime on the left/centre of the picture and Amal’s flag on the right (Green).
Figure 17 (middle): Photo taken in the intersection between Basta and Zog al-Blat (Bchoura). Hizbollah flag in yellow and image of a Hizbollah’s martyr (unknown)
Figure 18 (down): Photo taken in Ras al-Nabaa’
Figure 19 (top left): Green Line during the Civil War, 1982. Unknown source.
Figure 20 (top right): Green Line as it looks today. Unknown source
Figure 21 (down left): The residential and commercial tower Sama Beirut rises over one of the city's old mansions. Source: Next City
Space has become the place where social class, political ideology and sectarian identities are produced. The construction of a sectarian sense of belonging has overlapped in most cases with the sense and connectivity that Lebanese people profess, not only to their family, but also to their social/geographic region (on the concept of ‘connectivity’, see: Joseph, 1993). Similarly, sectarian political parties have generally mobilised their ‘co-sectarian’ population, with the help of homogenised social space in a sectarian way, as described above. However, the Lebanese may hold “a sense of belonging and identity to a neighbourhood and an intimate familiarity with one part of the greater Beirut area streets that was linked to a sense of belonging and identity that did not always map neatly onto sectarian identities” (Nucho, 2017: 25).

That was the case of Dina, who is affiliated with the state as a Greek Orthodox, and grew up in Ras Beirut. Dina is also a participant of my research, and had a civil marriage in Cyprus. She echoes the feelings of Sami, described above, who was also Christian-affiliated and came to live in Ras Beirut when he was a young teenager and has lived in the area since. Unlike Sami, Dina and her family never left Lebanon during the war, living in Ras Beirut for the entire period of the Civil War, and ever since:

I’m not religious at all. I’m a Christian who was brought up in Ras Beirut and my parents always lived here as well. We are used to this community. We lived in here throughout the Civil War that had all sorts of sects and neighbours. We always had good relationships. We went to school here at IC [International College, one of the main secular schools in Ras Beirut]. I studied at AUB and we’re very much used to this. Unlike people that lived in remote areas or more secluded. You’re not afraid of the other, basically [emphasis added]72.

72 Interview with Dina, civil married spouse, Beirut, 4 July 2016
Shared spaces of mixed sectarian backgrounds influenced Dina’s approach to subjectification. She refers to the segregation of geographical spaces based on sectarian affiliations as defining sectarian modes of ‘fear of the other’. This verbalisation of fearing the ‘other’ is common among Lebanese people and it could be read from Dina’s, as well as Sami’s, statement on interaction with people from other sectarian backgrounds. As mentioned above, this ‘fear of the other’ was reinforced by the sectarianisation not only through social relations, but also through the production of social space. The latter became increasingly segregated into sectarian categories resulting in what Khalaf describes as “balkanized Lebanon’s social geography”:

This compulsion to huddle in compact, homogeneous enclosures further “balkanized” Lebanon’s social geography. There is a curious and painful irony here. Despite the many differences that divide the Lebanese, they are all in a sense homogenized by fear, grief, and trauma (Khalaf, 2002: 247).

Dina also argues that she is used to this ‘community’, but she does not specify whether she refers to the ‘Muslim’ community or ‘Ras Beirut’. On another occasion, I asked her how would she describe her attachment to her ‘community’. She spoke of Ras Beirut as her “own community” and the community she feels she belongs to.

For Rima the experience was completely the opposite. Rima grew up abroad in different countries in the West, immersed in contexts where social categories were not pre-eminently determined by ‘sect’ and where subjectification was not predominantly fixed by sectarian identities. Her family went back to Lebanon when she was a teenager, when the war was over, and settled in Keserwan, a district by the sea in the North of Beirut. Known as the heartland of the Maronites, for most of the war this area fell under the control of the Lebanese Forces, a conglomerate of
right-wing mostly Christian militias, mainly composed of the Kata’eb party and under the control of the Gemmayyels, until the assassination of Bashir in 1982. This area, that had traditionally been a stronghold of Christian Maronites, became increasingly homogeneous in its sectarian composition and experiences during the war. In the elections of 2009, 98% of the registered voters were Christian Maronites (IFES, 2009). Political mobilisation and subjectification followed the sectarian paradigm, almost uncontestably. Rima, who grew up in different surroundings, felt completely alienated from what she defined as the ‘community’ of Keserwan:

I feel that for me when I was growing up abroad and I was put in that community in Keserwan I felt so removed. I felt I couldn’t feel close to anyone and I felt as I was a completely different background73.

Later in our conversation I asked Rima about her definition of her ‘community’, referring both to her current rapport with Keserwan, where she continues to live, and to her disengagement with the area where she grew up.

Now I feel I belong to the community. Our families are ok with the civil wedding and neighbours and people from the community may have had some reservations, but the fact that we are now living there and that we are building a family following their rules and their culture I think is enough for them. [Replying to my question of how would she define the ‘community’] I feel that the community is a way of life. I don’t know if I can attach this to religion or the values taught by the religion to the people living in the community... At the end of the day, I think religion plays a big role in teaching values that are similar to everyone74.

Rima’s experience and perception was shaped by predominant and unitary ‘sectarian categories’ to which she had to adapt during her teens. ‘Religious’ as Rima referred to, or rather the ‘sectarian’ lifestyle played a very important role on her modes of subjectification and interaction as a subject of the society. Unlike Ras Beirut, the hegemonic production of social practices in Keserwan generally follows

73 Interview with Rima, civil married spouse, Beirut, 12 August 2016.
74 ibid
unitary categorisation of sectarian identity (and particularly Christian Maronite categorisation).

Geographic communal segregation is produced by other forms of power that are not purely sectarian, like neoliberalism. The war physically destroyed virtually all forms of common and public spaces in the country. These spaces later became a market and were increasingly appropriated by the mercantilist economic elite. The adoption of neoliberal policies by the Lebanese state, as in other developing countries (Gates, 1998: 80), triggered, like any other paradigm, the elimination of plural and public spaces where the Lebanese could interact beyond sectarian or socio-economic differences. This has been especially emphasised in the reconstruction of Beirut Central District, the medieval bourj or the old souks that used to represent a cross-sectarian popular area. The urban planning of the old souks was coordinated under a controversial legal expropriation of all the land in the ancient city centre and its conversion into a commercial and privately-owned city zone (see: Nagel, 2002).

The story of Mansour gives some light to this issue. Mansour was planning on marrying his girlfriend, whom he met in the mountainous region of the Chouf, where he worked and lived, even though he did not come from there. He is Greek Catholic and his girlfriend is Druze, a community well-known for being very strict on in-marriage only (see: Kastrinou, 2016). When he asked for her hand, her family refused. Despite expected arguments about Mansour not being Druze, confessional contentions or the restriction of Druze laws on in-marriages, these were not the only contentions of the girlfriend’s family to refuse the wedding. Her family comes
from the mountainous area of the Shouf where Druze and Christians have long lived together, and her family said they would accept a Christian man that comes from the same region. Christians and Druze have always, historically, lived together in the Chouf, so they would accept a Christian from the Chouf, but they would not accept someone from another region, whose origins or family they did not know.

In conclusion, spatial identities mostly overlap with sectarian identities, but space, as a system of power, produces social and political identities.

III. Sectarian symbolisations of space

Sections above have described how spatial segregation is produced within the hegemonic paradigm of space and confession. However, the aim of this thesis is to study the dialectical relationship of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices and political discourses. After describing how spatial production is hegemonically performed, this subsection will study how, within this hegemonic/counter-hegemonic dialogue, identities are negotiated.

Social movements promoted by the civil association *Tole’at ri7atkon* (You Stink) that started in August 2015, and organized protests in the streets of Beirut for several months, also awoke the consciousness of Lebanese citizens and activists to public space. Since then, civil initiatives have grown stronger, but they also operate on a long-standing tradition of civil mobilisations in Lebanon (Abi Yaghi and Catusse, 2011, Catusse and Karam, 2008, Karam, 2006, 2009). An increasing number of civil initiatives are currently targeting the privatisation and appropriation of public spaces by private corporations. These kinds of civil society initiative are gaining visibility and
do not cease in their efforts to denounce and ask for acts of appropriation and 
reclamation of public spaces, like Beirut’s seashore that has been illegally seized by 
private properties, with the inaction of politicians. Under the slogan, “Hayda al-
bahar Ilna” (This sea is mine), an activist/performance group called Dictaphone 
performed and exposed the illegality of the projects on the Beirut seashore and 
claimed public ownership of the sea by the citizen, without paying abusive and illegal 
fees to the resorts for public access to the sea.\footnote{Dictaphone Group- This is mine: http://www.dictaphonegroup.com/work/the-sea-is-mine/}
Figure 22 and 23: “Reclaim the right to the Sea”, civil movement August 29, 2015

Figure 22 (Top): Activist trespassing the fence in Raouché, Beirut, as part of the civil protest to reclaim the right to public use of the beach in Lebanon.

Figure 23 (Bottom): “Hayda al-bahar llna” (This is our sea).
Source: Civil Movement ‘Reclaim the right to the sea’
Several weeks after the first crowded and successful protest held by Tole’at rīṭatkon, another protest was called, in September 2015, to occupy the marina of Zaytouna Bay, which is a highly exclusive and elitist resort owned partially by the controversial project of Solidere. The activist group also moved to the Raouche Rocks, a popular part of the corniche where Lebanese citizens from the area used to walk by the sea and which for years had been fenced off to the public under the current project of another private resort. For several years a group of activists known as The Civil Campaign to Protect Dalieh have been trying to stop the private project in Raouche and open the space to the public. One successful story occurred recently, as a result of the coordinated actions of several organisations that managed to stop the construction of a tourist resort in Ramlet al-Bayda, one of the last areas of public beach access in Beirut. Two civil associations, Legal Agenda and Green Line, presented an appeal to the Majlis As-shoura Al-dawla (Supreme Judicial Court), which concluded with the invalidation of the construction permit to build on Ramlat al-Bayda.

Another successful civil action was the reopening of one of the largest parks and pine forest, Horsh Beirut, which had remained accessible only for non-Lebanese citizens during the past twenty-four years. It was not until efforts were coordinated by the NGO Nahnoo that this Orientalist practice was reversed and Lebanese citizens can now enjoy access to this green public space, which is located in a very sensitive and key location: between the mostly Christian-inhabited district of Ain al-

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76 “Qarār lišūrā aldawla biḥamāaya alramlat albayđa’: īshārat Āmal līswan alĀmlāk al’āma w alhaq bilby’a”, Legal Agenda, 22 February 2017
77 “La justice annule le permis de construire d’un projet balnéaire à Ramlet el-Baïda”, L’Orient Le Jour, 23 février 2017
Remmaneh, the predominantly Sunni neighbourhoods of Ras al Nabaa and Tariq al-Jadidah and the southern suburbs of al-Dahiyya, mostly populated by Shi’a ascribed citizens78.

Aside from coordinated initiatives from civil society for public use of space, artists and individuals alike are reinventing and reappropriating spaces for their own use. Beirut’s street arts scene is flourishing unprecedently and is engaging the public into new ways of reclaiming public space and new forms of using the space. Graffiti arts appeared in the streets of Beirut during the Civil War, but it was not until the mid-2000s that an exceptional number of graffiti appeared (Sinno, 2017: 73), initiated by some artists that fused with Arabic calligraphy and pay tribute to Lebanese legends, such as Fairuz, Sabah or Khalil Gibran (Figures 12, 13, 14). Yazan Halwani, and the identical twin brothers Mohammed and Omar Kabbani that form Ashekman and Ali Rafei, are the main artists currently occupying the graffiti scene in Beirut and have even reached international recognition.

The artists share the civil society and activist discourse of reclaiming ownership by society of the public spaces and transforming them into symbols that they feel identified with. “Al-shari‘ ilna” (the street is ours) is a slogan used by Ashekman to echo this discourse, mobilisation and resistance for reclaiming public ownership and use of the space. Yazan Halwani found his motivation to expose new faces on the walls of Beirut in the omnipresence of pictures of politicians and religious people, flags and symbols portrayed by the political parties, to delimit the ‘sectarian’/political faction’s territory: “All our role models are politicians so I wanted

to replace them with people that are more positive and influential. If we use them as role models instead, maybe the country will go forward”, declared the artist during an interview⁷⁹. Halwani used the face of Ali Abdallah for one of his graffiti, a well-known homeless person who used to walk around AUB’s Bliss Street and who died of cold (Figure 14).

In summary, “Beirut’s street artists have tasked themselves with reimagining the streets as a space for creating community-centered artwork and engendering civic engagement, thus reclaiming them from the hands of warring political factions that monopolized them during the Lebanese Civil War” (Sinno, 2017: 71-2)

Graffiti by this group of artists hold social, cultural and political meaning for Lebanon. I have undoubtedly seen an increase of graffiti in greater Beirut and elsewhere in the country since I arrived the first time in 2011. Some graffiti hold stronger social and political messages (see Figures 15 and 16) and the number of political remarks against the political elite and the government, which has long been a topic on street arts’ slogans, has succinctly and increasingly occupied the walls of Beirut since the garbage crisis and the mobilisations by Tole’at ri7atkon. The movement for the fall of the regime is a long-standing one, referring very often to the confessional system, as in the Laïque Pride in 2011 or Take Back the Parliament in 2013 (Abi Yaghi and Catusse, 2014, Abi Yaghi, Catusse and Younes, 2017).

⁷⁹Nadya Sioufi, Artistic vision on Beirut’s streets [Online]
Figure 24 (top): Ali Abdallah, homeless man that died of cold in 2013 in AUB’s surrounding. Graffiti by Yazan Halwani.

Figure 25 (right): Lebanese singer Fairuz. Gemmayzeh, Beirut. Graffiti by Yazan Halwani.

Figure 26 (down): 100,000LL Lebanese note with the face of Lebanese writer Khalil Gibran. Sodecco, Beirut. Graffiti by Yazan Halwani.

Photographs by the author
Figure 15 (top): Lebanese Singer Sabah. Graffiti by the Kabbani brothers, Ashkeman. Ashrafieh, Beirut.

Figure 16 (left): Graffiti that may date of 2016/17 in Saint Nicolas stairs, Gemmayzeh, Beirut.

Figure 17 (down): Graffiti “The rich feed the poor” by Said F. Mahmoud & Karim Tamerji. Verdun, Beirut.

Photographs by the author
Just by coincidence during the days that I am writing this chapter, Yazan Halwani finished his graffiti at the Noueiri building, situated on the Green Line, destroyed during the Civil War. The graffiti depicts a young couple from the well-known film about West Beirut directed by Ziad Doueiri. The young couple from the movie is Tarek Noueiri and May, Muslim and Christian respectively, who live in West Beirut and experience the outburst of civil strife during the beginning of the Civil War - and they fall in love. As Yazan Halwani highlights in his post about the graffiti, “27 years after the end of the Civil War, with the absence of civil marriage Tarek and May would not be able to get married if their story had continued.” The graffiti portrays a very well-known movie on the Civil War, for Lebanese in the symbolic Green Line, in a building that has been rebuilt among buildings that still remain destroyed since the end of the Civil War. It highlights how this couple, that seemed to be trapped in the civil strife, would be the victim of a failed post-war settlement where, twenty-seven years after the violence is over, they could still not get married in Lebanon because of the absence of civil marriage law, as Halwani points out. “In the way I imagine”, Halwani notes.

Graffitists and Lebanese individuals are trying to subvert the post-war unsettlement and sectarian conflict, while aiming to create an imaginary where space, social relations and the political spectrum are shaped by a different structure from confessional and clientelist party politics. Civil marriage is for many a reality, and for other Lebanese, part of the imaginary that ties national reconciliation with the legal possibility of having intersectarian marriage. Sectarian strife may not finish with providing the legal option to Lebanese individuals, but the relevance that the issue of civil marriage has attained in the imaginary of the Lebanese, as well as the power
of mobilisation and individual resistance for a civil option for marriage, represents by itself a significant counter-hegemonic act.

Figure 27: “Immeuble Noueiri”, Beirut Green Line, 2017.
The mural is painted on a building previously destroyed by the Civil War located on Beirut’s Greenline – the former frontline of the Civil War splitting Beirut into the Christian East and the Muslim West. Part of Beirut’s public cultural memory, the mural depicts Tarek Noueiri (Muslim boy) and May (Christian girl, whose family took refuge in West Beirut) sharing cotton candy; from Ziad Doueiri’s classic West Beirut movie. The mural is a reminder of Lebanon’s post-war settlement: a political system built on sectarianism and business interest that blocks true national cohesion. The persistence of the current political class in fueling sectarian grievances and obstructing the rule of law reflects in the ever-growing government debt, absence of basic services and limited civil rights. Case in point, 27 years after the end of the Civil War, with the absence of civil marriage Tarek and May would not be able to get married if their story had continued (...in the way I imagine).

Source: Facebook (Yaza Halwani, the artist)
In conclusion, sectarian space has been contested by civil movements for the redefinition of the public space, while claiming public property, and has been equally reshaped, redesigned and redefined by artists’ graffiti that are introducing different faces.

Political agency and resistance towards the cultural hegemonic discourse of space and symbolism of the social space was also reflected in some interviews I conducted with civil marriage spouses. Not only did these spouses contest the weight of tradition and sectarian marriages, but they might, parallel to that, contest the construction of sectarian/segregated space. When I asked Yara how she would define her attachment her community she referred to ‘Hamra’ as a spatial/symbolised community, as well as promoting the political values of Humanism, but she did not speak of a sectarian category.

I could never say I am Muslim, or Shi’a. I will be lying. I literally feel I don’t have a confession. I identify with Humanism. I think I belong to Hamra. If I would ever work for a development project in Lebanon it would be Hamra. This is where I have been brought up in. I don’t feel as an outcast in Hamra.80

3. The Production of (Non-)Sectarian Children: “This Could Be an Identity”

Manal and Hicham and their families were an exemplary case of religion, sectarian and Arab plurality in the image of the plurality of the Lebanese nation. Hicham and Manal had a civil wedding, just as their parents did. Both families represent plural sectarian backgrounds as well as religious (or non-religious) beliefs. Hicham’s parents are non-practising Sunni (mother) and Christian Maronite (father), whereas Manal’s father was Christian Greek Orthodox and her mother was the daughter of a

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80 Interview with Yara, civil married spouse, Beirut, 21 June 2016
Druze man and a Sunni Palestinian woman. Manal declared herself to be a religious person, but not sectarian. When I asked Manal and Hicham if they felt different from people that had a religious wedding, Manal replied: “We don’t think that religion determines what people are. Our parents come from very different origins and it doesn’t make them different people”\textsuperscript{81}.

Their civil wedding is concurrent with Manal’s religious beliefs and piety “in her own way”. Manal and her mum described at home a context of religious piety, in which they would all go to Church on Sundays and hold Christian beliefs. Manal also described an environment of pluralism of religions and identities in her surroundings, as her family on her mum’s side were mainly Druze.

My parents encouraged me to develop my own religion, taking what I wanted from every religion, from the reference... My parents always taught me to always look for the reference, and not simply believe whatever they tell me. For me the reference is the Holy Books [emphasis added]\textsuperscript{82}.

During my meeting with Manal’s mother, Nadya, she also mentioned the relevance that Manal’s father held to the ‘reference’ and the insistence he paid to the Holy books that he always kept home, the Bible and the Qur’an.

My husband was a very open-minded person and he had the Qur’an even before he knew me. One day, Manal came back from school and she said that someone told her that Muslim don’t treat women well. Her father asked her, how do you know if it’s true or not... what your friends are saying? You go to the right reference, the Qur’an. He sat with her with the Qur’an and read the passages where the issue of the woman was mentioned and he explained it to her. This is the way we were brought up and the way we brought up our kids. Keep your mind open and look for the right reference\textsuperscript{83} [emphasis added].

In one of our conversations I asked them if they thought the fact of coming from different sectarian backgrounds, and especially the mixed sectarian composition of their close family, helped their relationship. Their answers were emphatic. Hicham

\textsuperscript{81} Interview with Manal and Hicham, civil married couples, Beirut, 17 September 2015
\textsuperscript{82} ibid
\textsuperscript{83} Interview with Nadya civil married spouse, Beirut, 22 September 2015
argued that “the fact that we grew up in mixed families made us compatible”, to which Manal added: “Of course the fact of coming from mixed backgrounds helped us. I have friends that come from completely homogeneous backgrounds who would never even consider being with someone from another confession. We grew up in different countries each one of us [during the Civil War; Hicham grew up in France and Manal in Abu Dhabi], in different environments and very mixed. We tolerate variety given that we have always lived within that”\textsuperscript{84}.

The issue of growing up within a family and an entourage where the individuals are exposed to different identities and confessions was a reiterated issue among my civil marriage interlocutors. This was the case for Hicham and Manal and their parents, as well as Amal, whose grandparents were Christian and Muslim and had some family members from different confessions, and Sami, who argued that being raised among people from a different religion made him see the sectarian lines more blurred than people used to make them during the war and post-war.

For us religions are the same, whether is Muslim, Christian or Jew. There is God, you need to fast, regardless the way you do it; some people pass the entire day without eating, or in a different way. We believe you need to be nice with people, God, to not lie, to not steal. So the values are common. Now, whether Christians believe that Jesus is the son, and Muslims don’t believe in that, those are details for us... This is the way we are trying to raise our kids. Letting them know they are Christians, because they follow the father, this is the regulation in Lebanon. They have to understand this. We give them the values and beliefs that we have. Yet, if you ask me did we baptise our kids, I would say yes. Not out of belief, but out of respect for his mother. For me whether they are baptised or not it’s the same for me. So why not to do it if it would please her? And for him it’s the same\textsuperscript{85}.

Sami and Amal contested the hegemonic understanding of religion and even subjectification. Their discourses reveal conscious self-positioning outside the

\textsuperscript{84} From field notes, October 2015
\textsuperscript{85} Interview with Amal, civil married spouse, Beirut, 26 July 2016
sectarian modes of affiliation: they decided to marry someone from a different sectarian affiliation and show critical understanding of the religious and cultural plurality in Lebanon. Even if confronting this form of power at some levels, they remain trapped in the dominant structure of sectarianism, as well as patriarchy, when it comes to deciding on the upbringing of their children. To follow the patriarchal Lebanese rules, their children will learn to identify themselves as Christians, inheriting their father’s ascribed affiliation and they will become Christian subjects in society.

Similar to Sami, Rima also grew up abroad in an environment where sectarian subjectification had little meaning. When her family moved back to Lebanon in a mostly-Christian area, Keserwan, she could not relate to the modes of socialisation of the other children there. Because she felt alienated and detached from that community, Rima believes that the way of avoiding this for her children is to transmit and educate her children into the sectarian mode of subjectification in order to make their integration to the society easier:

I feel that if we are living in this area and I put them in a school here in Beirut for example, that’s laïque, they would also feel this detachment... The way I think about it it’s that there is a certain lifestyle... I want to make sure that my kids get a good education and at the same time recognise their values. And I think the only way these values are taught if it’s attached to some sort of religious education. I know that there a lot of laïque school in Lebanon that don’t teach religion, but I want them to have some pillars. At least let them know this is the community they are growing up in.

Rima felt detached from her community and she feels that the fact of lacking a religious/sectarian education made her alienated from society. She did not understand the norms of socialisation and she felt that not following the paradigm of sectarianism caused this. Although she identifies the sectarian domination in society

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86 Interview with Rima, civil married spouse, Beirut, 12 August 2016
and decided to confront it in her marriage, she decided to reproduce the sectarian hegemony through the education of her children. According to her reasoning, if they did not follow the sectarian subjectification, it would be impossible for them to socialise and integrate in a society dominated by this form of identification. Even if Rima confronted sectarianism on one level, the multi-layered configuration of this form of power caught her at another level, in which she reproduces, reinforces and even seems to kindly comply to the sectarian domination. As Abu-Lughod expressed “[i]f the systems of power are multiple, then resisting at one level may catch people up at other levels” (1990b: 53).

In this way, resistance evidences the presence of that form of power and it reflects the juxtaposition of the different structures of power that rule in one society. On the one hand, the structures of powers that are constructed reflect different forms and identities. Beyond the ubiquitous sectarianism, the patriarchy, other political ideologies, socio-economic class, generations, space and geographical segregation, or kinship and familism compose the different layers of Lebanese society and they are necessary to entirely understand the structure of power. As we can see, sectarianism is almost unavoidable when talking about Lebanese society, but this chapter will help us bring some light to this paradigm of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes.

On the other hand, it is important to note that power is plural and “[t]he relationships between dominants and subalterns are always negotiated continually in different contexts and international settings” (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2015: 112). The different contexts in which the social and individual sectarian came into the
picture detached both Amal and Sami, and Rima to contest with their practice a sectarian system that they have resisted a priori with their marriage. They expressly rejected to not submit their civil marriage to the intrasectarian marriage or religious control, but when it came to the identification to be transmitted to their children they got caught in the hegemonic paradigm of communalism.

At the end of our interview, Sami also mentioned something that reflects the difficulties of resisting the hegemonic system. While resistance might operate effectively in some of the forms the hegemon takes, in others forms the ‘resisters’ might fall in the trap and reproduce its dominance. Amal’s family, who are Sunni-ascribed, defy certain aspects of their religion that are imposed on them, but they choose not to follow. As Sami explained, “they drink alcohol, eat pork; they practice also their own way, they are very anti-sectarian in the way they live”\textsuperscript{87}, and most notably, they did not oppose their daughter’s wedding with a Christian man. Although they defy many aspects that they find non-coherent from the Sunni establishment, they complied with another direction that follows the discriminatory patriarchal rules: Amal is to inherit only one third, while his brother will inherit the remaining two thirds (who is, for that matter also married to a Christian woman).

Amal’s parents developed their act of resistance in some layers of the systems of power, whereas they were eventually caught in other forms of oppression.

The story of Dina represents the opposite side of the picture. Dina is also a friend of Amal and Sami and similarly to Sami, she grew up and identifies with Ras Beirut. During a meeting I had with Amal I enquired how their friends have taken it, and she

\textsuperscript{87} Interview with Sami, civil married spouse, Beirut, 3 August 2016
gave Dina as an example: “Sami’s friends are like Dina, very open-minded. They are the ones that accepted our civil marriage best. Some of them have civil marriage as well”\textsuperscript{88}. Dina describes herself as an activist on social justice issues, works for civil society and is part of several social movements. Dina is the mother of two children and when I asked her about the implications that their civil marriage may have on their children she referred to the story below, with this picture:

\textsuperscript{88} Interview with Amal, civil married spouse, Beirut 26 July 2016
My youngest boy (8 years old) is very curious. We explained to him that because we are from different religions we couldn’t marry in Lebanon, so we went to Cyprus and because they also attend Church weddings and they try to fit this in... But they took it well. I took them to one demonstration on civil marriage for them to get sensitive, that it’s not applicable here in Lebanon and that people like us want to be able to marry here. After a while my son (at the age of 7) was at school and he had to write a sentence in Arabic with the word (ya7tof: to scream). After a week his teacher calls me and shows me something. She showed me his notebook with the sentence written: “Ya7tof al-nas: ‘As-shab yuridu an yatazaouaj min din mukhtalif!!” (The people wants to marry (with people) from a different religion” [The sentence on the title of this section]. The teacher asks him what do you mean by this? And he answered my mum and my dad couldn’t get married here so they had to travel to get married and people want to get married with people from different religions. I could see that what I explained to him got stuck in his head. I was very proud of him. The teacher was smiling, she was happy as well.

I think this have [has] a lot of positive implications. I’m very happy to bring them up this way. To tell you honestly it’s also very much a challenge and every time what my father told, that it’s hard in this country, because everything is politicised. And some people even ask me, a mother of my son’s friend that maybe it’s hard to the kids, because we always tell them that we come from different religions and we celebrate both festivities with the extended family. She told me that children sometimes need to have an identity. I explained to her that this could be an identity. My daughter also told me that at school the children were asking, especially now in Ramadan, who’s fasting, who’s not, where are you from... Even children talk about this. It’s very much rooted on them. And I think it’s getting worse now. I told her she’s mixed, she’s both. And she said I’m happy that I’m both because I can celebrate everything. She took it as a positive thing. I don’t think I’m challenging my kids; I think they’re fine. I had a friend at school from a
mix marriage. She always came to Palm’s Sundays to Church and celebrated Muslim rituals and I don’t think it affected her at all.\footnote{Interview with Dina, civil married spouse, Beirut, 4 July 2016}

Identity, for Dina, was not merely bound to sectarian modes of subjectification. Her resistance to the imposition of religious marriage as a Lebanese citizen was also completed with a consistent challenge to the hegemony of sectarianism imposed into the education of her children. It is powerful acts like Dina’s and her husband that stops the transmission and the continuous reproduction of the sectarian hegemonic powers in Lebanon.

Sima is also a friend of Dina, she is an another resident attached to Ras Beirut, where she lives and feels comfortable due to its ‘mixed’ character and plurality, sectarian, religious and culturally, as she defined it. “I enjoy the fact that this region of the world has so many different cultures, religions and identities. I like the fact that we are diverse, but above all we should all be citizens and be ruled by the same law.”

Sima grew up in another mixed area in Lebanon, in Mina, Tripoli. Sima is a landscape architect and professor of Architecture in a well-respected university in Beirut. She is also an activist in some of the movements described in the chapter on space, such as The Civil Campaign to Protect Dalieh, so in our conversations she made constant reference to issues of space and identities, as well as the privatisation of the space.

When we were kids there was this sport club in Mina, Zahra. It was a sport and social club. It was just shut down by one of the big money people. As a club they still exist, but they don’t have a physical space anymore...

Beirut is now definitely a more polarised place, with less social spaces for meeting. With more idiots with beards... I can assure it was a different place when we were growing, and it’s not nostalgia. I’m looking at it through the urban structure of the city, how it used

\footnote{From field notes}
to be shaped and the services that you have. You remove these services, you remove these areas and then you have a city with just poor people and religion.\footnote{From field notes/interview with Sima, civil married spouse, Beirut, 6 July 2016}

During our first meeting, I asked her about her motivations for having a civil marriage, to which she replied: “Completely activist; not Facebook activist, but the true activism”. In our many conversations she told me about the times in which she was growing up at the core of a Pan-Arabist, socialist and secular family. She praised the times in which leftist and secular ideas were widespread and influenced political ideologies. Sima was trying to subvert the sectarian state with her practice of civil marriage. At the same time, Sima was exercising her ability to confront the weight of traditional and neoliberal weddings.

When it came to the issue of the family and her children, I asked her what kind of religious values or identity they chose to perform or transmit to them. She told me:

Maybe we are doing this wrong, but we are raising them in a completely neutral manner... My daughter asked me the other day what is Ramadan. We do have a Christmas tree. We never referred to God in terms of good or bad. Moralities are independent from religion.\footnote{ibid} That’s what I like about this part of the world, these blurred areas exist... Making them understand that both are theirs, they could celebrate Fitr, they could celebrate Easter, and they are comfortable of going from one to the other. The thing is that we are a bubble, me and my friends and my husband... My extended family are more religious, they are more grounded on doing things the traditional way. They don’t cast us out. I hope it will become more and more a trend [civil marriage], but I am also aware that all the areas in the world where this was happening they are tending to disappear. I was born in Yugoslavia before it became Serbia and Croatia. My parents used to tell me how it happened and it’s very similar to what happened here.

Sima described civil marriage and their entourage where they perform this kind of counter-hegemonic narrative as a ‘bubble’. The fact that the ‘majority’ or the dominant powers are reproducing sectarianism through its many different channels of control does not negate the fact that these ‘bubbles’ also exist. Not all the couples
remained entrenched in the same levels of power; some of them managed to challenge and redefine them. In contrast with Amal, Sima described the way they were raising their children as plural and said they were enjoying the different identities and cultures in which their children were growing up, no matter if it came from their father’s or mother’s family.

This is not to say that the bubble is the only reason why counter-hegemonic practices emerge. Counter-hegemonic practices may be the source of the bubble, and other sites of resistance or bubbles may also appear.

4. Multi-layered power, multi-layered identities

In conclusion, an ensemble of institutional, economic, clientelist and ideological practices are the source of power and hegemonic sectarianism. The latter is produced by a group of individuals that consents to the power, in cases where coercion is not needed. The origins of its institutionalisation can be traced to its historical practice and root, but beyond the historical explanation of political communalism, one should look at how the sectarian system has spread its tentacles and shapes the life of the Lebanese. The sectarian system has served as a paradigm where the overlapping sectarian and economic elites have been able to perpetuate the paradigm of privilege over the oppressed. The sectarian elite and the country’s commercial-financial oligarchy “manipulated sectarianism to uphold class”, as Suad Joseph (1983: 11) explained.

In contradiction to this, ‘civil’ practices and acts of citizenship, public appropriation or social movements have become a form of contestation to the assigned and long-
established identities and social categories in Lebanon. Activists and multiple individuals involved in these practices both in an individual and on a collective basis are constantly challenging the confines of sectarianism as the single definer of political identities. These civil forms of mobilisation and contestation have shaped new political identities, which at the same time are creating new paradigms of citizenship and organisation. From the visible mobilisation of ‘You Stink’ to the everyday acts of resistance of civil marriages, some Lebanese have become social actors against sectarian modes of interaction and institutionalisation. The contingent political identities shaping social actors have contested the socio-political hegemony of sectarianism, creating the paradigm of ‘civil’ contestation.

However, even anti-sectarian movements in Lebanon are embedded in the same hegemonic structure that they contest: the discourses developed by these anti-sectarian individuals reveal a conscious self-positioning outside the sectarian modes of affiliation, whereas they remain trapped in the dominant structure of sectarianism, as well as patriarchy and neoliberalism. Far from intending to impose academically the paradigm of sectarianism, I tried to explore in this chapter the dynamics of cultural hegemony and power in the event of mobilisations and resistance. The narrative of this chapter subscribes to a dialectic relationship between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices as embedded in the same paradigm. Rather than designing a dichotomy between the two practices, I tried to draw upon the different layers of power and resistance that emerge in every society. I believe that the study of civil resistance and mobilisation helps our understanding of power asymmetries of sectarianism; not as a fixed political category, but as a
paradigm that is constantly challenged and reformed, in a triangular interdependence with emerging political identities and mobilisation.

To conclude, activists and a multiplicity of individuals are currently resisting with their individual and collective practices, which is creating different modes of political identities beyond the confessional categories. Beyond current sectarian political identities as mere units that define politics in Lebanon, I believe political identities should be studied as embedded in the political hegemony of sectarianism. The role they play in this context is as the main definer of politics, but one should not dismiss the fact that, despite their dominance, they are not the only factor of the processes of political mobilisation or subjectification. In effect, the hybridity of these processes blurs the lines and layers of the identities playing in a society. Social actors are no more than the result of this multiplicity of identities and how these identities become ‘salient’ depending on the different social and political contexts. This issue will be further analysed on the following chapter analysing emerging identities.

CONCLUSION

This chapter subscribes to the paradigm that has been developed throughout this thesis: The structure of power is constructed through a dynamic process that (re)produces dominant social norms, which in the case of Lebanon is superseded mainly by the sectarian superstructure. This superstructure is neither exclusive nor unitary, and it is also reinforced and sometimes precluded by other power structures, such as social space, as explained here.
The structure is (re)produced, performed, reified and reinforced intersubjectively through dynamic social, political, cultural and economic norms. At the same time, it is also intersubjectively contested, challenged, and eventually redefined, as this chapter attempted to show and analyse.

It is the subject’s will or choice to subvert the current patterns of subjectification that can stop the performative reiteration of norms. The survival of the structure of power is thus dependent on the ‘will’ of the subject to follow or reverse the patterns of subjectification. To summarise, even if certain social norms dominate Lebanese individuals, the subject may develop the will or choice to subvert the structure.

This chapter analyses the stories of Sami and Amal, as well as Rima and many other individuals in Lebanon who are inevitably caught up within the sectarian boundaries while trying to build their antisectarian consciousness. Sami, Amal and Rima had civil marriages and align in their discourse and practices in some ways within antisectarian realities. However, when it came to transmit (non)sectarian identities and education to their children, they fell in with the sectarian sociabilities and benchmarks, by giving their children religious/sectarian education in order to be able to ‘fit’ into society, as Rima expressed; or to educate their children as Christian to follow the “rule in Lebanon” and follow their father’s sectarian affiliation, as Amal explained during her interview. In fact, antisectarian consciousness and self-positioning by Lebanese individuals is similarly embedded on the same hegemonic system these Lebanese subjects are trying to contest. Contestation, in Lebanon as well as in any other society, is never pure, but always linked to and influenced by dominant sectarian affiliations, ideology and patronage networks.
In conclusion, we cannot exhaust our understanding of politics in Lebanon by describing power as principally manifested in a confessional system of patronage relationships. Identities, subjectification and social mobilisation are not only the result of a structure of vertical power, but a circular negotiation of multi-layered powers. Sectarianism has often been interpreted in Lebanon as a fixed, one-sided, and static form of hegemony. What this chapter shows is, in the first place, that the sectarian paradigm may seem the ever-present form of domination, but even if this is the case, it has grown hand-in-hand with other power structures. In the second place, this chapter identifies how the dialectic of domination/subversion has created islands of multi-layered power and identities, and how identities of the ‘civil’ (marriage) emerge in this island while civil marriage couples use these islands to exert their political agency.
CHAPTER VII: “We live in a bubble”: Civil Marriage and Emergent Political Identities in Contemporary Lebanon

1. Mobilising the Family: institutions, practice and political discourse
   1.1. “Being together is not enough”: Marriage under the authority of the state
   1.2. Kinship and its material reality
2. “I don’t want to be a Shi’a woman”: Asserting gender equality and women’ selfhood
   2.1. “If I allow my daughters to marry Muslim men, I will be responsible for having more Muslims in this society”
   2.2. Masculinised legal citizenship and the reproduction of the patriarchal society

INTRODUCTION

The first time I was asked if I was Sunni or Shi’a –because in Ras Beirut you are most likely to be Muslim - I didn’t know what those meant. And I was 11 years old. I came back home and asked my parents am I Sunni or am I ‘shw’ay’ (communist)?

Yara was born and raised in a very secular environment. “My parents used to be communist”, she told me during one of our many conversations. She defined her entire family as secular communists from the South of Lebanon. However, in the post-war Lebanon in which Yara grew up being secular or non-sectarian was challenged predominantly by constant practices and discourses framing individuals

93 Yara, civil married spouse, interviewed in Beirut, 21/06/2016.
in the sectarian categories. Yara grew up in an environment in which *shw’ay* (communist) was much more commonly used in her daily entourage than the overly repeated Shi’a in post-war Lebanon. However, Yara at some point in the early stages had to encounter a political discourse that would shape her relationship and eventually her marriage and intimate relationships. I will reflect on Yara’s story more extensively later in this chapter.

Yara’s childhood is a story of the ‘bubble(s)’ where emergent and diverse political identities are performed. On the one hand the counter-hegemonic mode of sectarian production which formed Yara’s identity and social categorisation was not determined by her sectarian affiliation within her family entourage. On the other hand, it elucidates the production of non-identity based modes of political mobilisation. Leftist or secular movements have the ability of transgressing the sectarian social boundaries, as will be examined below.

Sectarianism occupies a central role in the production of political identities in Lebanon. Even if hegemonic, the production of political identities is always negotiated. Certain individuals have intentionally contoured or contested the sectarian system of power, and thus transmitted to children born in these bubbles a different perception of the social categories in which they should be located.

Sectarianism, as a mode of political power and social organisation, emerges alongside many different sets of political identities that should not be dismissed and that will be the object of study in this chapter. These political identities reinforce the sectarian structure; they take its clothes, or sometimes they contest its hegemonic position as a producer of power and the subject. Marxist intellectual Mahdi ’Amel
(1979) defines sectarianism as a superstructure that supersedes any other power structure, including class. This superstructure should be understood as it is: as ever-present and hegemonically imposed. As such, it is also constantly contested and complemented by other forms of power.

This chapter will examine, in the first place, how despite assertions on the sectarian paradigm as an all-encompassing form of domination, this system of power has grown hand-in-hand with other power structures, like kinship, regionalism, patriarchy, socio-economic class, neoliberalism, clientelism or other political ideologies. In the second place, this chapter identifies how the dialectic of domination-subversion has created islands of multi-layered powers and identities to which individuals align, reinforce or contest depending on its form and context.

Attempting to describe some of the political identities mentioned above as defined and experienced by my civil marriage participants, this chapter will begin by examining civil marriage and its resisting/reinforcing social boundaries. The political identities and power structures tackled are kinship and political familism; patriarchy; secular and the Lebanese Left, and the Lebanese ‘citizenship’ or national identity.

Stories expressed by my participant Lebanese civil marriage spouses shed light on a complex construction of social categories beyond the imaginary social boundaries described by the sectarian identities in Lebanon. Their experiences, perceptions and practices describe a range of acts of political agency, resistance and contestation to the hegemonic sectarian political and social boundaries. The current chapter aims to examine social boundaries/liminalities produced in Lebanese society. It will build on the analysis of sectarian identities and social space discussed in the previous
chapter, and focus particularly on the political identities that emerge and are negotiated within these social boundaries, where sectarian identities play the delimiting and dominating role.

This chapter will examine political identities not as an outcome, but rather how these identities are experienced, perceived, performed and mobilised by a hybrid process of overlapping social categories that draw, and sometimes blur, different social boundaries. Social actors are not merely driven by these social and political identities, they are at the same time the producers of the narrative that creates the identities and are constantly drawing or challenging the social boundaries in which this narrative is performed.

The latter was elucidated by the stories of Sami and Amal, as well as Mona and many other individuals in Lebanon who are inevitably caught up within the sectarian boundaries while trying to build their antisectarian consciousness. Sami, Amal and Mona had civil marriages and align their discourse and practices in some ways within antisectarian realities. However, when it came to transmit (non)sectarian identities and education to their children, they fell into the sectarian sociabilities and benchmarks, by giving their children religious/sectarian education in order to enable them to ‘fit’ into the society, as Mona expressed; or to educate their children as Christian to follow the “rule in Lebanon” and follow their father’s sectarian affiliation, as Amal explained during her interview. In fact, antisectarian consciousness and self-positioning by Lebanese individuals is similarly embedded in the same hegemonic system these Lebanese subjects are trying to contest. Contestation, in Lebanon as well as in any other society, is never pure, but always
linked and influenced by dominant sectarian affiliations, ideology and patronage networks.

This chapter will follow the narrative that I have tried to subscribe to the complete thesis, that is, the dialectical relationship of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices and political discourses, and the identities that are negotiated and emerge within this dialogue.

1. Mobilising the Family: institutions, practice and political discourse

1.1. “Being together is not enough”: Marriage under the authority of the state

“In general I think marriage is unnecessary. I think being together is enough, but that’s how the world works, and especially in this region; you need legal recognition for the couple.”94 Beyond contestation of enforced religious/sectarian marriage in Lebanon, Rami expressed disagreement with the fact that in the world, and especially in the Middle East, a heterosexual couple needs legal recognition through marriage in order to be considered as a legal family entity. The concept of family through legal recognition of the couple is a constraining system in itself, which restrains the extramarital life of couples in Lebanon.

As Jacqueline Stevens (1999) has argued, the concept of ‘legal marriage’ is one of the most important tools for the state to exert its authority and to prove its sovereignty.

“As much as legal marriage does not exist without being authorized by the state, one

94 Interview with Rami, civil married spouse, Beirut, 22 September 2015
of the principal means that the state can use to prove its existence – to announce its sovereignty and its hold on the populace - is its authority over marriage” (p. 129).

The Lebanese state has retained its authority over marriage in a very particular form: religious/sectarian marriage. Sami Hermez (2015) referred to “the fantasy of the state” as not simply how people imagined the state, but how, when Lebanese people refer to the vulnerability of their state, they are actually ’aiming’ for a stronger, more accountable and more bureaucratic sort of Weberian concept of the state (p. 511).

There is little agreement on the definition of the Lebanese state in the literature or even in the popular conception. Generally defined in academia with terms such as ‘absent’, ‘weak’ or ‘failed’ and reiterated popular claims of “ma fi dawleh” or “weinhi al-dawleh”, the Lebanese state is present (or (n)ever present, to echo Hermez’s (2015) paper) in how it exerts its authority over the imposition of firstly, compulsory marriage in order to legally normalise the life of a (heterosexual) couple and to have legitimate children; and secondly, limiting the legal status that this marriage may take, that is, religious/sectarian marriage.

It’s much easier to say this is my husband than this is my boyfriend... Not in Beirut that much, but in other regions... Maybe it was a bit the case with Ghassan’s mother. She felt relieved when we got married. She is Palestinian-Jordanian and as a Christian living in Lebanon... the family in Jordan is very conservative, very religious, and she was always afraid of explaining who I was. They saw me hundred times and she always had hard times explaining that I’m the girlfriend. When we got married, for her it was easier to introduce me as “the wife”, but then she had the problem of explaining we had the civil marriage. For them is out of the question, why would people do civil marriage. In Jordan it’s not even possible. I think she never answers if I’m from the same religion or not, if I’m Christian or not.95

Life outside marriage is legally not an option in Lebanon, as Maysa expressed during our interview, while it is practically a challenge to the imposed conception of family

95 Interview with Maysa, civil married spouse, Beirut, 11 December 2015
and wider society structure. Certain neighbourhoods in Beirut offer a wider degree of acceptance, but in most parts of the country extramarital relationships are not an option. To Maysa’s mother-in-law neither extramarital relationships nor civil marriage were options that fitted into the conservative parameters of family structure in the Middle East. Marriage, as the basis of a legal family, occupies an important role in Lebanon. Weddings must be from ‘the right match’: the right religion, social class and origin, and ideally with an “\( \text{ibn/bint 'ayla} \)” (son or daughter of family), that is, from an “\( 'ayla murataba \)” or “\( 'ayla mniha \)” (good family) (Rivoal, 2014). Customary Arab Muslim marriage preferences have followed endogamy from the patrilineal kin, while the often-cited ‘ideal’ marriage has been considered to be the children of brothers. Although rarely exercised in Lebanon, the father’s brother’s son traditionally has the right of first refusal in marrying his paternal uncle’s daughter (Joseph, 1999: 304).

Pre-marital and extra-marital relationships are a common practice in Lebanon and public displays of affection are quite common in the metropolitan area of Beirut, although the pressure to avoid pre-marital intercourse is very high among Christian and Muslim women. Most importantly, children born outside of recognised marriages are considered illegitimate and registered officially as “\( \text{ghayr shar'y} \)” (non-legitimate). Such was the case of Rawad and Samira, who had a civil marriage in Lebanon in 2013. Their marriage was, however, not recognised by the newly appointed Minister of Interior, Nohad Machnouk, and therefore their child was registered as “\( \text{ghayr shar'y} \)” . According to several articles in the Lebanese law, illegitimate children are not entitled to free education or public healthcare, and they face severe restrictions on work and residence permits and inheritance rights.
(Mansour and Abou Aad, 2012). Rawad reflected during the interview on the status of his daughter in their personal situation:

You can apply for an identity card, but in the akhraj al-`aid [official identity papers] it is written “tafoul ghayr shar’y” I don’t have a problem with that. This entire society from my point of view is ghayr shar’yeh. So I don’t think it’s up to this society to tell me if my daughter is shar’yeh or not… But her mother was: “Haram, poor kid, we need to recognise her, for her, her entire life being ghayr shar’yeh with her friends, and in school…” Tofoul ghayr shar’y in this society is a very big word. Here they call it “ibn haram”96.

Extra-marital cohabitation is not easy in Lebanon for other reasons. An unmarried woman and man couple might be charged with prostitution, and face criminal charges, which affects women more than men. Paradoxically, prostitution is nominally legal in Lebanon when it is regulated and happens in licensed brothels or ‘super night clubs’. Constant fear of accusations of prostitution is spread among Lebanese youth, especially among women living extramaritally. Social pressures come also from the very same neighbours that stigmatise a man and a woman living together, even if simply sharing a flat, and very often landlords refuse to rent apartments to unmarried couples. Although usually limited to urban areas and particularly Beirut, cohabitation among unmarried couples is an increasing trend among the younger generation (Zaatari, 2005: 156). Cohabitation was for many of my informants the first challenge that they undertook as a couple, and for many it was the first step before they decided to engage in civil marriage.

We were living together before and we were living together after… One day we decided to do it and we went with Sami [to Cyprus where they had civil marriage], our flatmate, we had history together… Our family was upset because we didn’t tell them before, but considering that we were perceived by both our families as trouble-makers they were even happy that… I settled with a decent guy… I think my family was happy when we did it. Getting married is something that you need to do in Lebanon if you want to have

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96 Amin, civil married in Lebanon, Minyara, Akkar, 28 July 2016
life together, kids... Concubinage is just too difficult, and civil marriage was the easiest option.97

The Lebanese kinship and family power structure has created an ideal concept of marriage and family on the top of a ladder of a system of ranked priorities. The system of power in place in Lebanese society holds graded privileges between extramarital relationships and civil marriage. In the dilemma of Sima’s family, caught in between these two options, unmarried cohabitation was the least preferred option, and therefore civil marriage did not seem that bad an option.

Marriage and family in Lebanon are the basis of social organisation and the political institutions defining individuals’ identities and affiliation, principally in sectarian terms, but also socio-economic class, cultural and regional belonging. Furthermore, family is the basis of economic activity and it provides for the support and security of every individual in Lebanon (Barakat, 1993: 38). Family constitutes the basic unit of society in Lebanon subscribed by the essential patterns of socialisation, and is further set down in the Lebanese constitution and laws. Not without contradictions, the Lebanese constitution institutionalises kinship at the centre of politics and society, while identifying the family, and not the individual, as the main legal and social unit (Joseph, 1999).

In contrast with this, the Lebanese ‘Merchant Republic’ sets its base on economic liberalism and individualist principles, making repeated claims on the rights of ‘individuals’. For instance, the Lebanese Constitution in its preamble establishes: "F) The economic system is free and ensures private initiative and the right of private

97 Sima, civilly married spouse, Beirut, 6 July 2016
property” (Gates, 1998). This contrasts with other regulations and articles in the Constitution that establish kinship and family as a focal point of society and politics. The ‘kin contract’ in Lebanon, as examined by Joseph (2005) refers to “formal and informal understandings that membership in families precedes membership in the state, and that families legitimately can claim prior loyalty of their members (male and female) over and above the state’s claims to loyalty”.

Joseph’s study of kinship brings light to the construction of the Lebanese state founded on kin-based patriarchy (1993, 1999, 2000, 2005, 2011). Not only the Lebanese law recognises the rights of male elders in relation to younger and female members of the family, but also men and elders are in general legitimate political and social actors, as empowered kinsmen and kin elders. Kin-based patriarchy in Lebanon, which operates through the “kin contract” “disciplines both men and women into commitments to each other, commitments that precede and pre-empt commitments to the state” (Joseph, 2011: 159). Kin membership is mobilised in Lebanon in matters related to state services’ provision and rule of law, and deference of responsibilities on these matters by the state has elevated family and kinship to the level of legitimate political actors at the state level. The strength and legitimacy of the family “as an ideology and as practical relations is linked to the widespread lack of faith and trust in the state to deliver protection or critical services” (Joseph, 2011: 159). This rapport has grounded the ‘kin contract’ with the patron/client relationship in which individuals need to activate their membership to a communal group to access welfare state services (Cammett, 2014, Kingston, 2013).

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98 Lebanese Constitution, promulgated May 23, 1926.
1.2. Kinship and its material reality

Chapter V referred to the story of Lara and Ramzi. Lara and Ramzi succumbed to family and social pressures for almost nine years until she eventually got approval from her family and tied the knot with Ramzi under the Cypriot civil law. As she explained to me, she and her family are ‘very close to her village’, even if she and Ramzi were born and grew up in Beirut. Lara’s father is a legitimate kinsman and therefore legitimate social and political actor in the village. “I know my mum had to hear a lot of comments in the village and phone calls”99. Lara is affiliated as a Christian Lebanese individual and her family origins are attached to a village in the region of South Matn surrounding Aley. Lara’s family endured hostilities with the militias of mainly Druze composition during the Civil War, and they hold Druze families responsible for their displacement and their suffering. Ramzi, whose origins are not attached to this region, is ascribed as Druze and therefore part of the community that Lara’s family and social network see as the culprit of their displacement and torment.

During our conversations, Lara mentioned social status-related matters, as well as political and economic material issues tied to relationships between her family and her village. As an architect she also works for her family so she is further dependent economically on her kinship, family and communal political forms of mobilisation. As Suad Joseph explained (2000: 116): “The romantic lure of the kin contract has been grounded in material realities in which kin relationalities have been, for the Lebanese, the core of social identity, economic stability, political security, and

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99 Interview with Lara and Ramzi, civil married couple, Beirut, 28 July 2016
religious affiliation and the first (often last) line of security – emotionally, socially, economically, and politically.”

The kinship architecture in Lebanon is grounded in the limited provision of welfare and state services by the Lebanese state (Cammett, 2014, Kingston, 2013). Clientelism arises in this equation at the core of direct or indirect connections that tie patrons with their subjugated clients. Jopseph (1999) argued that in the absence of an individual affiliation with the state, the Lebanese state needed to mobilise kinship structures for its state-building project.

Furthermore, as religious authorities operate through the concept of kinship and family, the latter have been elevated to the level of the sacred (Joseph, 2011). The Lebanese legal and judicial system, and most especially the sectarian personal status law, reinforces rights and responsibilities based on kinship. The kin contract operates on the basis of a myth of constitutive communities and imagined biological ‘blood’. Members of the group are recruited on the basis of these imaginary ‘natural’ ties that create kin groups. In Lebanon, the national ‘civic myth’ has been replaced by a myth of extended kinship. The Lebanese nation is in fact composed of multiple, large, ‘natural’ groupings based on biological relatedness, inherited through male genealogies (Joseph, 2000, 2005). Not only are kin groups established as culturally accepted actors, but they also constitute legitimate actors in relation with the state. The institutionalisation of rights on the kin line has also served the purposes of the political project of the state. Joseph (2011) suggested that the relationship between state and citizen from the point of view of the family or political familism is the “deployment of family institutions, ideologies, idioms (idiomatic kinship), practices,
and relationships by citizens to activate their needs and demands in relation to the state or polity and by the state or state actors to mobilize practical and moral grounds for governance based on a ‘civic myth of kinship’ (Joseph, 2005) and a public discourse that privileges family” (Joseph, 2011: 151-2).

The degree of dependence on kinship and the extended network that this provides is more evident in families and milieus from the lower socio-economic strata. In these environments families are usually very heavily dependent on the patron to receive basic state services, like education, health care or even jobs (see: Cammett, 2014). Lower socio-economic backgrounds obviously provide less incentives for getting out of the circles where the basic services are claimed, usually controlled by religious/sectarian/clientelist organisations. Likewise, confronting the will of the family with marriage choice means to confront the first, and for many the last, source of economic sustainability in Lebanon. Connectivity among the family and the community in rural areas is also stronger than in urban areas, where families might be spread spatially. By the same token, it does not come as a surprise that civil marriages happen less frequently within these circles, and most of the couples I interviewed belong to middle and middle-high socio-economic backgrounds, usually from the Beirut metropolitan area. Many of the couples I interviewed spoke fluent English and/or French and held university degrees. Women were usually employed and both partners occupied highly qualified positions. Nonetheless, although predominant, this was not an exclusive profile. Some couples with limited economic income also developed their political agency and opted for civil marriage. These couples had a strong activist conviction with regard to secularism, the fall of the
sectarian regime and civil marriage. Maysa was very vocal on this during our interview:

It so hard to do it, so hard to escape, so hard to convince people... In these communities it would be either the sheikh or the priest that would give you the money to educate your children. If you want to open a shop, or anything, it is related to the church or the mosque. Even the political parties are religious in Lebanon. It is not logical for someone that cannot afford its own living to do it, to do this revolution [civil marriage]. But for the middle class it’s easier, because you don’t live next to the family, in the same house or in the same building. It is easier to escape the people who are opposed ... I lived until I was 17 in a village in Hammana [in Matn, Mount Lebanon]. It’s a mixed village, but the Christians and the Druze live together. I witnessed some Druze guys marrying a Christian girl but it is very, very difficult and rare. Most of them convert. Civil marriage is completely out of the question there...¹⁰⁰

As explored in the Methodology chapter II, two social categories have connected most of my civil marriage participants. Despite predominant classifications of Lebanese society on the categories of the sect, civil marriage could be examined through other social and political factors. Thus, when I set up my ethnographic research I put a lot of my initial efforts into balancing the representation of sectarian affiliations in my sample, probably as I was trapped in the sectarian lens through which we tend to analyse Lebanese society. I soon realised that my participants belong to indistinctive sects, representing the plurality of Lebanese society, or that at least it was not that important to control my sample to make it ‘sectarianly even’. The relatively higher proportion of Christian Catholics (including Maronite and Greek Catholic) in the sample has a fairly simple explanation: the Catholic Church does not, in principle, regulate divorce and marriage annulments have proven to be very difficult and costly. This has influenced the decision of Christian Catholic couples to opt for civil marriage in order to avoid the tedious problems, which in many cases they have lived through in their own families.

¹⁰⁰ Maysa, civil married spouse, Beirut, 11 December 2015
Other social, economic and political factors were, however, more relevant to explain the population with civil marriages in Lebanon. Individuals from upper-middle or upper socio-economic classes are, for example, overrepresented in my sample and in the overall population of Lebanese civil marriage spouses. Geographical and regional considerations were also necessary to explain why a higher proportion of couples currently live in Beirut, rather than in smaller villages and cities, as Maysa expressed above. Dependence on clientelist relations is a valid explanation for both social factors: Patron-client relationships are stronger in smaller villages than in bigger cities, and family and social pressures are also greater in the former. A considerably higher percentage of my participants live in Beirut, and an even a larger proportion comes from Ras Beirut. As explored in the previous chapter, Ras Beirut has emerged as an (imaginary) counter-hegemonic space for its pluralistic, secular/leftist, intellectual and cosmopolitan character. Individuals from this area have shown a strong sense of belonging and attachment to the area, as well as perceptions and feelings of ‘Ras Beiruti’ identity. Discourses of non-sectarianism are also commonly ascribed to this area, which might explain that almost one third of civil marriage informants are from this area (27.5 per cent, see chapter II for further information). Civil marriage spouses are also highly educated, in particular at private universities or abroad (see chapter II for most accurate description of the sample).

The population of the lower and middle classes are highly dependent on the clientelist distribution of economic opportunities and social welfare. Civil marriage would mean, in many cases, to leave these patron-client networks, which would make the cost-benefit calculations much higher for those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. Civil marriage emerged in Lebanon as a practice contesting kinship
and the kin contract that determines marriage not only on sectarian/religious terms, but according to the family fit and kin networks.

In conclusion, the kin contract has worked through formal and informal understandings that membership in families precedes membership in the state, and that families legitimately can claim prior loyalty to their members over and above the state’s claims to loyalty. However, the kinship architecture did not challenge the modern project of the state in Lebanon, and the state has mobilised kinship as the main provider of social and welfare services that traditionally fell under the scope of the state. The instauration of *laissez-faire* as a model of an open economy in Lebanon operated through clientelist structures. The country’s economy is dominated by trade, the banking sector and other service-oriented sectors. The urban social structure is far from creating working-class alliances even in the cities. Quite to the contrary, the social structure promoted an industrial bourgeoisie of *zu’ama* among the clientelist networks (Joseph, 1983, Salloukh *et al.*, 2015: 3). Khalaf (Gaspard, 2004) argues that the fragmentation of society along tribal, ethnic and sectarian lines, and primarily according to kinship, was a consequence of the development of political and economic corporativism. State-building on the grounds of the corporativist project served the purposes of primordial ties as productive mechanisms of modernisation.

In line with Khalaf’s argument, Joseph (1977) argues that even if the concept of ‘family’ and what it constitutes, has changed over time, the political relevance of familism (in its many forms) has endured in the past century and managed to maintain its weight despite attempts of state formation in Lebanon. Besides, political
familism has been reinforced by the religious institutions and imposition of religious/sectarian marriages by the Lebanese legal, political and social system. The absence of civil marriage law confers the hegemonic control of marriage and familism over society. The Lebanese feel trapped under a legal system that reifies the family as an essential political unit, subscribed into kinship/sectarian schema. Not only that, this structure operates on the supremacy of male lines over female, where kinship and the patriarchal domination overlap. The hegemonic sectarian system is sometimes embedded and intertwined with other structures of power, as it has been argued repeatedly in this thesis. The next section will examine the patriarchal system, another ever-present system of domination in Lebanon.

2. “I don’t want to be a Shi’a woman”: Asserting gender equality and women’ selfhood

2.1. “If I allow my daughters to marry Muslim men, I will be responsible for having more Muslims in this society”

Lara’s family opposed her marriage with her boyfriend who, according to their standards, was not ‘the right match’ due to his sectarian affiliation. During nine years of being together and trying to convince her family, Ramzi continued being the wrong match. When Lara turned thirty, their standards changed. ‘The right match’ was no longer assessed primarily by Ramzi’s sectarian affiliation, but on the fact that Lara, as a woman, could not remain single in her thirties. At that point her family agreed. Patriarchal rules superseded the sectarian rules and altered the preferences and priorities.
Lebanese society, just like any other society, integrates a structure of multi-layered power that produces spheres of influence. This power structure defines how practices of power do not emerge “outside the world itself a separate realm of intentions, ideology, or meaning” (Mitchell, 1990: 573). Practices of power appear immersed in a certain historical, political, social and economic paradigm that defines how subjects perform, produce, reproduce and contest the practices of power. What is more, within this interconnected paradigm, identities are also defined and redefined as a result of a dialogue between the forms of intersubjective domination and contestation (Mitchell, 1990).

During my ethnographic research I met with Lara’s sister, Nadine, who also had a civil marriage in Cyprus. I had met Nadine in my previous job and we had many conversations about her marriage and her sister’s. Nadine told me about her father’s opposition to both her marriage and that of her sister. “For my dad my marriage with a Sunni man was hard enough, but when he knew about Lara and Ramzi… that was too much for him.”

Nadine, Lara and her other two sisters grew up in Ras Beirut, although her family is originally from a small town in the Matn South close to Aley. Her father was, especially during the war, ideologically communist and undertook his university studies in the former Soviet Union. Nadine then asked him why was he against her civil marriage, given that he has always praised leftists and secular ideas and been against the sectarian system in Lebanon.

...he told me: Mixing is fine, but not you. I told him: How come you? Soviet Union... His answer is, I can accept it, when the system becomes secular. He accepts civil marriage as a concept. He is not religious. My grandfather was a priest, but my father never goes to church. His position is more for a political position, of Christians as a minority in this

101 Recorded interview with Nadine, civil married spouse, Beirut, 26 July 2016
part of the world. He only has four daughters, he doesn’t have a son, so his main worry is, until now, the kids. What will the kids be? If I allow my daughters to marry Muslim men, I will be responsible for having more Muslims in this society. So he accepts the civil wedding, when the state will adopt it, because you will do the civil marriage but everything else will be religious: your kids, how they are registered.102

The political ideology Nadine’s father was, in principle, in favour of was a secular state and civil marriage “as a concept”, but he was well aware that civil marriage would place her daughter on the margins of the system of power. He would accept her intersectarian and civil marriage when the system becomes secular, that is, when Nadine is simply following the predominant form of marriage, but until then he is aware that his daughter’s act challenges the system dominated by sectarian norms.

Dina’s parents took a similar approach to Nadine’s father. Dina also grew up in Ras Beirut during the Civil War and she reflected on her parents’ good relations with their neighbours no matter what their sectarian affiliation. Dina pondered on a conversation she had with her father even before she thought about marrying Bassel, her husband. “My father always told me that if I wanted to marry someone from a different religion, we are fine because it’s after all about the person, but it would be easier for you if you go and live outside Lebanon because of the pressure here.”103

Nadine and Dina consciously contest and challenge daily the political and social sectarian system in Lebanon, and their acts of civil marriage are only an example of this. They grew up in Ras Beirut, a paradigm of social ‘integration’, even if imaginary, as reflected in chapter VI. They also live, interact with and married people from a different sectarian background and raise (or intent to) their children accordingly.

102 ibid
103 Interview with Dina, civil married spouse, Beirut, 4 July 2016
Their acts of resistance do not simply confront the paradigm of sectarian domination, but they also embody their capacity of summoning influences of socio-spatial segregation, patriarchy and the kin contract described above.

As with any other women in Lebanon, Nadine experienced her gendered selfhood. Her father spoke as a ‘Christian father’, fearing exclusion in a mostly Muslim region, and father of four daughters. He showed his concerns for his descendants, mainly as the father of four daughters and not four sons. In this manner, his grandchildren’s identities will be determined by the husbands of his daughters, which is, at the same, time inherited from their fathers. Patrilineality has been translated into a legal mechanism through which citizenship is merely determined by males’ lines. If Nadine’s father’s four daughters get married to Muslim-ascribed men, he feared he would only have Muslim-ascribed grandchildren. Some Christians in the Middle East share widespread feelings of discrimination and exclusion in the region, and they would see it as an offence to partake in breeding more Muslim-ascribed children instead of contributing to the long-standing demographic competition of increasing the Christian population in Lebanon and in the wider region. The social construction of imagined bloodlines and social categories are not only a consequence of perceived fear of the other and a group identity, but also the extension of patriarchy as a ruling element for the categorisation of individuals. Patrilineality is a mechanism that upholds patriarchy within the sectarian society in which males are privileged over females. According to Joseph’s (2000) model, patrilineality strengthens patriarchy together with kin/sect endogamy through customary marriages.
Patriarchal society is, according to Moghadam’s (Moghadam, 2004: 141) definition, “a precapitalist social formation that has historically existed in varying forms in Europe and Asia in which property, residence, and descent proceed through the male line. In classic patriarchy, the senior man has authority over everyone else in the family, including younger men, and women are subject to distinct forms of control and subordination”. Kandiyoti (1985) described the reproduction of this classic concept of patriarchy through the concept of extended household and kinship analysed above, in her analysis of the peasantry and agrarian societies. According to her study, the subordination of women in the kinship-ordered or agrarian societies she describes is linked to the reproduction of the kin group, together with the sexual distribution of labour. Within this distribution, childbearing becomes the central labour activity of women. In the patriarchal context, “a woman’s product – be they children or rugs – are not considered her property but those of the patriarchal family and especially the male kind” (Moghadam, 2004: 141).

2.2. Masculinised legal citizenship and the reproduction of the patriarchal society

Patriarchy developed into a system of masculinised identities and selfhood in Lebanon. Children constitute part of their father’s kin while developing their identity and relation with the state following this line. Women, on the other hand, have been assigned the role of “children-bearers” with no input into their children’s definition of identity or citizenship. Women only become full selves when being part of a family, while they perform as mere community assets for the procreation of more
members of the sectarian group and their demographic competition. This masculinisation of citizenship has empowered women and men differently, to the point where women are not allowed to transmit the Lebanese nationality to their children. A new-born child can only become Lebanese if her/his father is Lebanese. Without male descendants, Nadine’s father felt he had transmitted his sectarian affiliation to his daughters, which would be futile unless they wed with another Christian-ascribed male.

State policy, including the legal system, constitutes a critical factor for the persistence and reproduction of patriarchy. Children inherit their surname from their father and they also carry their father’s first name as their middle name. Women commonly keep their father’s surname, even after marriage, which reinforces the influence of their father’s lineage on them and bolsters the power of ‘blood’. Children also legally inherit their sectarian affiliation from their father’s, which is registered in the civil register immediately after birth. This practice, defined by Joseph (1993: 452-3) as patrilineality, “is the key legal mechanism through which patriarchy in Lebanon has become inscribed in citizenship rules and practices. The Lebanese state, by institutionalizing patrilineality in the rules and practices of citizenship, has codified given legal status to, a central mechanism which upholds a particular form of patriarchy in this kin-based patriarchal society”.

The absence of a civil code regulating family matters in Lebanon institutionalised a separate system of fifteen personal status laws for the country’s different recognised religious communities, including twelve Christian, four Muslim, the Druze, and Jewish confessions. In practice this is translated into different legal codes that apply
at essential life milestones, such as birth, marriage, divorce, or custody of children, which is different for Lebanese citizens depending on their inherited confession. Despite arguments from advocates of the confessional solution for managing and preserving religious pluralism in Lebanon, the multiplicity of sectarian personal status laws translated in practice into a system of unequal rights to Lebanese citizens. Most importantly, the current framework of the personal status law systematically discriminates against women. Across all confessions and different laws, women face legal and judicial obstacles to terminate unhappy or abusive marriages; limitations to their pecuniary rights; and severe limitations to keep custody of their children. Women avoiding divorce for fear of losing their children is a recurrent trope in Lebanon, and men’s parents and siblings are legally entitled to have custody of children on the father’s death. Human Rights Watch (2015) conducted a study of 447 recent legal judgments issued by the religious courts, which describes these and many other discriminatory situations for women caused by the religious personal status laws. The quasi complete absence of female judges at all confessions, except for the Armenian Orthodox and Evangelical sects, along with qualified judges knowledgeable of human rights obligations, also impacts on the vulnerability of women to a discriminatory application of personal status laws.

Patriarchal rules inform the system imposed, and influence power in Lebanon. A system of power that is, as usual, contested and resisted daily. Civil marriage is one everyday practice for contesting the mechanisms of patriarchal domination. Civil marriage laws enhance equality between men and women in an equal manner for all citizens in Lebanon regardless of their sectarian affiliation. Women represent an important proportion of my informants that have conducted civil marriage, who
repeated gender questions at the forefront of their decision to abide by a civil law on marriage. Mona argued that one of the reasons for opting for civil marriage was enhancing her condition as a Lebanese citizen, a Lebanese woman, rather than her sectarian affiliation. “I don’t want to be a Shi’ā woman, even if in this country Shi’ā woman have rights, their own rights; but because I want a direct relationship between me and the state.”104

In fact, even though civil marriage is a practice aimed at subverting the sectarian personal status laws, Lebanese civil married couples remain trapped in the sectarian and patriarchal laws in a wide range of matters. As analysed in chapter IV, debates for civil laws regulating inheritance, for example, were highly inflammatory. Beyond the sectarian character of laws on inheritance gender inequalities are conspicuous.

Even if I did civil marriage abroad I will be obeying the local law. I didn’t change my surname; I kept mine. I didn’t agree with that. The only way to against the sectarian system is to write your will. Inheritance [local] laws are impossible to contour. These are some ways to contour the sectarian system... For example on my passport they write my husband’s name, but in my husband’s they don’t write mine. But this is not only related to religion, this is related to the gender domination. It is always the man.105

Citizenship equality for women has been one of the most important constraints of the state policy on kinship and religion/sect. Through the mobilisation of kinship and sect to assert individual’s selfhood and citizenship, the state has reified a system of patriarchal extended kinship that privileges masculine blood in state citizenship rules. Maya Mikdashi (2014) defines the state’s attribution of citizenship as restricted further, beyond the concepts of gender and sect, and bases the legal architecture of Lebanese citizenship on two main principles, sex and personal status. By analysing

104 Interview with Mona, civil married spouse, Beirut, 27 June 2016
105 Interview with Maysa, civil married spouse, Beirut, 11 December 2015
the practices of judges on cases of trans-citizens who correct their sex in government registers or in court, and citizens who remove mention of their sectarian affiliation on the civil registries, Mikdahsi sees evidence of judges constructing a social world in which a citizen’s sex can correct their gender, or asserting one’s personal status is the only way to access their full civil rights. In a court case analysed, a Lebanese individual needs to rely on the social world in order to assert evidence of her gender and win the court case that would allow her to self-assert her sex. A religious conversion case, however, follows a different procedure as “the Public Council at the Court of Cassation, which has jurisdiction over such cases, arguing that courts cannot investigate the intent behind an act of religious conversion” (Mikdashi, 2014: 291). Similar to a citizen’s correction of sex, a citizen that has removed her personal status on the civil registries would need a certificate of belonging from a clergymen to assert her belonging to a sectarian group and claim rights relating to her personal status law. Again, asserting personal status requires proof of recognition from the social world, while religious conversion acts remain something private. As she notes, “how society at large reads another citizen’s gender is paramount to determining one’s sex, just as, currently, citizens who have removed their personal status must be read as belonging to particular sects in order to access their full civil rights” (Mikdashi, 2014: 291).

2.3. Multi-layered powers: Embedded and metamorphosing patriarchy

“People don’t think we don’t have kids and we’ve been married three years because we had civil marriage. They think they don’t have kids because his wife is weird and
wants to study and has ambitions.” Beyond perceptions from the society of their marriage being different for its ‘asectarian’ character, Yara believed that the society would primordially perceive their marriage as different for not following the usual patriarchal rules, through which women are not supposed to be ambitious and follow their career, but rather reproduce and become ‘children-bearers’. Patriarchal rules are sometimes embedded in or reinforce the sectarian system, but sometimes it operates with other sets of rules and values.

The case of Lara and Ramzi reveals the many layers entrenched in Lara’s family decision process; first refusing, and eventually accepting it as the least bad option. While her family refused Ramzi in their family on account of her Druze-inherited affiliation, patriarchal rules gained greater leverage and influence when Lara turned thirty. “When my parents realised that Lara was already thirty and she was still refusing categorically to meet other guys and she threatened my parents that if they did not let her marry him they were just going to live together without getting married nor having children or that she was just going to be single forever my parents acquiesced. They did not trust her at the beginning, but after years repeating it and after she turned thirty it became more serious. At that point they agreed.”

The story of Amal and Sami speaks of the intricacy of multi-layered forms of power and resistance. Sami and Amal, affiliated Christian and Muslim respectively, were very vocal in their actions and the way they confronted the sectarian understanding of marriage, an imposition that they experienced in a multiplicity of ways as shown

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106 Conversation with Nadine, Lara’s sister. From fieldnotes
in previous chapters. For them, religion and the values of the plurality of religions in Lebanon were similar. Amal also advocated civil marriage as a way of empowering women in a country that discriminates against women systematically, as she expressed in various occasions. However, when it came to transmitting an identity to their children, Amal was caught up in the patrilineal subjectification of their children, without attempting to contest that male inherited affiliation dismissed her rights to transmit her citizenship, membership and identity in an equal manner to her husband.

For us religions are the same, whether is Muslim, Christian and Jew... We believe you need to be nice with people, God, to not lie, to not steal. So the values are common. Now, whether Christians believe that Jesus is the son, and Muslims don’t believe in that, those are details for us... This is the way we are trying to raise our kids. Letting them know they are Christians, because they follow the father, this is the regulation in Lebanon. They have to understand this.\(^{107}\)

Resistance, as well as power, embodies a multi-layered structure of power ruling in one society. Given that the powers are multiple, resisting a form of domination may catch the resisting actor on another level (Abu-Lughod, 1990b). Notwithstanding, forms of power and resistance are embedded in the system and agency, which determines the possibilities for different types of authority and resistance. Amal, who declared herself to be opposed to the patriarchal and sectarian system imposed in Lebanon, in some ways confronted its rules, but was caught up in the patrilineal and sectarian reproduction of identities with regard to the education of her children.

Not all the couples remained entrenched in the same levels of power, and some of them managed to challenge and redefine them. In contrast with Amal, Sima described the way they were raising their children as plural and they were enjoying

\(^{107}\) Amal, civil married spouse, Beirut, 26 July 2016
the different identities and cultures in which their children were growing up, no matter if it came from their father’s or mother’s family. As Sima described it, they live in a ‘bubble’, and in this bubble they are transmitting to their children the need to celebrate aspects of society and culture that are part of the different religions celebrated in Lebanese society. For Sima, the blurred lines exist where different political identities and systems of power overlap and one can chose which one they decide to abide by or resist. In this ‘bubble’, Sima, her family, friends and other individuals have challenged, contested, resisted and eventually, re-defined emergent political identities.

Maybe we are doing this wrong, but we are raising them in a completely neutral manner... My daughter asked me the other day what is Ramadan. We do have a Christmas tree. We never referred to God in terms of good or bad. Moralities are independent from religion. That’s what I like about this part of the world; these blurred areas exist... Making them understand that both are theirs, they could celebrate 'aid el-Fitr; they could celebrate Easter, and they are comfortable of going from one to the other. The thing is that we are a bubble, my friends, my husband and me...108

For Hayet, avoiding falling into hegemonic discourses of sectarianism, patriarchy and even racism during the education of her children goes along with important challenges. She described this as a conscious attitude that has many implications at the personal level and in everyday life. “It’s the way I talk to my kids, how I teach my kids... We never talk about sects at home, ever.... We never talk in a sectarian way. We never talk about race. It’s very challenging. When they see poor people on the street I never highlight that these are Syrians, I don’t want them to grow up thinking that...”109

108 Sima, civil married spouse, Beirut, 06 July 2016
109 Hayet, civil married spouse, Beirut, 5 August 2016
From Hayet’s perspective, challenging sectarianism, racism and socio-economic inequalities was also embodied in her practice and choice for civil marriage. However, her condition of “Middle Eastern female, a Lebanese female” was the first reason Hayet articulated when I enquired her about the reasons for her civil marriage, as Hayet and her husband are both from the same Christian minority, Greek Catholic. “As a Middle Eastern female, a Lebanese female... there was no way I could have ever conceived getting married religiously... The main idea is that religious authorities are very patriarchal.... There is a lot of discrimination for women... There is no way I would have religious marriage anywhere, including in Lebanon. My husband was fully supportive.”

During our interview, Hayet, who demonstrated great interest and knowledge on human rights and social issues, related the struggle for the feminist agenda with other agendas, like struggles against sectarianism, racism and social justice. Practising civil marriage was part of this struggle, in her own perception.

To conclude, patriarchal rules, as any set of rules representing a system of power, are sometimes embedded in other systems of privilege and sometimes even hidden behind them. On the other hand, targeting one of the systems may also be rooted in the contestation of other forms of domination.

As Naser noted: “It’s like the refusal of women giving the nationalitiy to their kids. All these excuses they give you, that they don’t want to give women the right of passing the nationality to their kids because Palestinian men would start benefiting from that... It’s not about the Palestinian; it’s about the patriarchy.”

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110 ibid
Palestinian men is not by any means a restricted one, but it is an argument that I heard quite extensively in many sectors and contexts of Lebanese society. The Palestinian conflict has been a long-standing issue in Lebanon that is entrenched in many aspects of social life. Trying to mutate the issue of female citizens’ rights to being full Lebanese nationals into an inherited problem of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, exemplifies how difficult it is to reinterpret an issue that is inherently patriarchal into other social conflicts.


Secularism is another political identity that has emerged and is reproduced in the ‘margins’ or in the ‘bubble’ of civil marriage and other counter-hegemonic and non-sectarian practices. As Maya Mikdashi (2013: 291) concluded in her thesis:

> Secularism is not (only) an epistemic and an embodied position, it is also increasingly an attribute that says something about who you are and who you want to be. It is an identity. It is an attribute that can make the difference between a democratically elected Islamist state or government, with all the affective registers such a determination calls on, and a secular military coup. Secularism is a way of distinguishing modern, enlightened and progressive citizens from their traditional, backwards, oppressive and oppressed brothers and sisters. Through practices of secularism, the state also articulates and adjudicates its sovereignty, its regulation of public good, and its determination of ideal male and female citizenship.

Sima used and (re)produced this political identity within her ‘bubble’ represented in a discourse that included values of pluralism and “all religions, including Judaism, which used to be part of this culture and I feel sorry is no longer [the case]”\textsuperscript{111}. Vindicating pluralism and acceptance for all the religions represented in Lebanon has been the goal of many that advocate coexistence and cohabitation as a paradigm to

\textsuperscript{111} Sima, civil married spouse, Beirut, 06 July 2016
build a shared society, especially relevant in post-war Lebanon. Pluralism (*ta’addud*) and the pluralist agenda emerged as diametrically opposed to the sectarian agenda (*ta’ifyya*). Leftist political agendas have also adopted pluralist claims, which have become entangled within the secularist agenda as well as political reform away from political confessionalism.

[Sima’s children will learn about] “all the religions... more as a cultural heritage than as something they should believe in... They will learn about evolution, and Sciences, but they will also learn that their grandparents believe in this [religion] and that they should respect what other people believe. I don’t want them to fight a war... We believe in this but their *teta* and *jeddo* belief in God and the prophet Muhammad... They shouldn’t mock what people believe. It’s the same zone of *tolerance*.”

Sima used terms like ‘pluralism’, (religion as) ‘culture’ and ‘tolerance’ to describe her beliefs and values that are part of the bubble she intends to transmit to her children. At the same time she emphasised the religions and values that are part of the country as well as their families, who are pious and whose beliefs should be respected. “It’s the same zone of tolerance”, argued Sima. Tolerance is, according to Maya Mikdashi (2013), a central concept of the culture of secularism.

Secularism, as an intrinsic component of leftism in Lebanon, has emerged and has been maintained in every national pact and all constitutional rearrangements. Civil mobilisations in favour of secularising and deconfessionalising the system have always accompanied consociational pacts in Lebanese history, in 1860, 1920, 1943 and 1989 (Karam, 2006). Secularism has, in Lebanon, developed a conceptual ideology that surrounds the desectarianisation and influence of religious authorities in the subjectification and political mobilisation of the Lebanese. As Jakobsen and Pallegrini (2008) argue, secularism has evolved from the enlightened universal

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Sima’s...
concept of secularism, to be a traditional and local understanding in the non-Western parts of the world within their own social and political boundaries. In Lebanon, those particularities have obviously been related to the sectarian composition of its population and political institutions. One of Talal Asad’s main arguments on ‘Formations of the secular’ (2003) is about the refusal of the ‘universality’ of the religious and the secular. Asad illuminates how seemingly universal and unitary concepts of the religious and the secular are the fragments of a more complex, fragile, and changing tradition to which they once belonged, while arguing for a tradition-based and moral argument to describe the secular and the religious (sectarian, in the Lebanese context).

Secularism in Lebanon is part of the same historical process as sectarianism. Social and political practices have created the hegemonic structure of sectarianism that produces and reproduces itself over and again. Parallel to this, contestation, protests and challenges to the process of sectarianisation have created a sustained momentum of liminality (Haugbolle, 2013), of the ‘bubble’. This allows for different practices and processes to emerge and possibilities for social change and transformation of the social boundaries.

Through comparison of the attributes associated with secularism, with sectarianism, we can learn, as Asad (2003) argues, “how people live the secular... how they vindicate the essential freedom and responsibility of the sovereign in opposition to the constraints of that self by religious [in Lebanon: sectarian] discourses.” That is, in order to describe the Lebanese secular, which is based on the moral, social and political history of Lebanese sectarianism, one needs to understand how Lebanese
individuals perceive their lives are constrained by the sectarian and how they vindicate and struggle to assert their agency.

Being secular in Lebanon can be translated in different ways at the personal level. For me it’s the way I talk to my kids; how I teach my kids. My kids are 9 and almost 5. We never talked about sects at home; ever. My daughter just did her first communion. Because it’s the trend, and fine… when she’s old she will decide. But we never talk in a sectarian way, with anyone; we never talk about race. It’s very challenging.  

“Being secular” for Hayet represented the rejection of sectarian as well as racist discourses. It represented daily contestation on social discourses that negate the perceived constraining form of sectarian discourses and practice. Her daughter did her first communion, what she described as a ‘trend’, but not something that would come as a conscious religious belief, which “she will decide when she’s older”. Hayet insisted that their vindication was symbolised by social and individual values of never using the word sect or ‘talking sectarian’ or even racist to embody the ‘secular’.

Hayet and her husband are both Greek Catholic, but even if she did not have any constraint on having a religious marriage in Lebanon, they travelled to Cyprus to have a civil wedding. During this conversation I asked her about her ‘faith’ (if any), or her perception of religion. Unlike her social and family acts that for her were ‘secular’ or absent of sectarianism, she did not use the term secular in this conversation. She defined herself as “definitely not an atheist”, but rather a “non-religious believer”.

Her issues with her ascribed religion are related to the institution of the Catholic Church. “For me religion is a very personal thing… I disapprove almost everything they say. From contraceptives… until now the Church is officially homophobic, still very patriarchal… they need a lot of reform before reaching equality between men

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113 Hayet, civil married spouse, Beirut, 5 August 2016
and women. So I’m not a fan of the institution itself at all. It’s like any big institution; they want to dominate, to control.”

According to Saba Mahmood (2003: 16) who has widely studied secularism and Islamic piety, “[s]ecularism has often been understood in two primary ways: as the separation of religion from issues of the state, and as the increasing differentiation of society into discrete spheres (economic, legal, educational, familial, and so on).” Hayet’s secularism reflected the second form. As a personal thing, she disagreed with the interferences of the Catholic Church in the discrete spheres of sexuality and promoting social inequalities, such as structural patriarchy, which for her should not be ruled by such an institution attempting to “dominate and control”.

In this regard, Hayet’s secularist stance reflected on what Mahdi ‘Amel (2005: 47) conceptualised as resistance to the hegemonic sectarian structure which, according to him, supersedes but also embodies at the same time the class struggle contained in the former structure of hegemonic (sectarian) power. In his analysis of the Civil War, Marxist thinker Mahdi ‘Amel (1979, 2005 [1980]) used the Gramscian paradigm of superstructure and structure(s) of power and concluded that Lebanese politics and society are dominated by a hegemonic sectarian superstructure that supersedes the structure of class struggle. Prior to the late 1960s, rampant socio-economic inequalities in Lebanon articulated a political leftist ideology targeting the Lebanese state’s economy of laissez-faire. The development of the Civil War drew a different social and political picture some years after the outbreak of the civil strife that made ‘Amel (1979) reconsider the analytical frameworks of political economy and Marxism.

\[114\] ibid
He recognised that the evolution of the events during the Civil War could not be explained without recourse to the way sectarian identification shaped political subjectivities.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the Leftist agenda has been primarily characterised by anti-sectarianism, and as an extension of that, by the secular identity and ideology (1979). The particularities of secularism (‘almaniya) as a political identity in Lebanon holds sectarianism (ta’ifiya) as a core concept; and so does the Left. “It is – has become - the ‘other’ against which the selves of leftists are consistently set” (Haugbolle, 2013). Thus, Lebanese individuals aligning with the Left have resisted sectarian subjectification and transgressed and subverted the sectarian social boundaries, be it social space or be it symbolic group membership affiliations. Some managed to subvert and even deconstruct these boundaries, as the story of Yara below reflects, who grew up in a ‘secular environment’ in Ras Beirut and at the age of eleven did not know what the meaning of the word ‘Shi’a’ was. However, she knew (and had probably heard repeatedly at home within the Leftist parents and entourage she experienced), the word ‘shuw’ay’ (communist).

No credit goes to me, and I say this all the time. Contrary to popular beliefs in Lebanon, I was brought up in a very secular environment. My parents are very, very secular and [it] goes back to my grandfather, who was very secular as well. My parents were both communist. My dad was in the communist party. Religion never played a role in our lives growing up, but we never anti-religion. The way they formulated it, it’s related to history; and the way you need to learn about it it’s that it’s something related to our history and all religions are the same.

The first time I was asked if I was Sunni or Shi’a -because in Ras Beirut you are most likely to be Muslim- I didn’t know what those meant. And I was 11 years old. I came back home and asked my parents am I Sunni or am I ’shw’ay’ (communist)? (introduced at the beginning of the chapter) 115

115 Yara, civil married spouse, Beirut, 21 June 2016
Yara defines her choice for civil marriage as a decision informed and in line with her “personal upbringing” and “the absence of religion”. She added, “I knew since I was a child that the person with whom I am going to marry has nothing to do with religion.” Yara defines herself as secular, non-sectarian: “I could never say I am Muslim, or Shi’a. I would be lying. I literally feel I don’t have a confession.” Yara’s political identification was, rather, defined by the symbolic categorisation of physical-space dimensions. As analysed in chapter VI, neighbourhoods and areas in Beirut, as well as in the rest of Lebanon, are spatially and socially marked in terms of sectarian belongings/political parties, as well as subverting forms of graffiti and other artistic pieces. Cross-sectarian, secular, non-sectarian discourses or Leftists may “transgress these spaces by subverting the representation or by attempting to ignore the ‘invisible’ boundaries between Sunni, Shi’i and Druze neighbourhoods” (Haugbolle, 2013).

Yara’s political behaviour represents this secular-Leftist discourse and practice. Yara grew up in Ras Beirut and perceives her identity in line with the pluralistic and secular character that allegedly defines this area. “I literally feel I don’t have a confession. I identify with Humanism. I think I belong to Hamra. If I would ever work for a development project in Lebanon it would be Hamra. This is where I have been brought up in. I don’t feel an outcast in Hamra.”

Sune Haugbolle (2013: 429) argues that secularism in Lebanon engenders liminality. He uses the “term liminality and nor marginality, because unlike many other accounts of the Left I do not view their position as excluded from wider society and

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116 ibid
117 ibid
influence, but rather as a position between fixed places and hierarchies, which opens up for possibilities of cultural change.” This liminality is what Sima and Dina named a ‘bubble’, that is, the social context and space in which they could develop their political behaviour and identity beyond the social boundaries of sectarianism. Within this liminality, acts of everyday resistance are located, such as civil marriage.

This liminality is similar to what Sima has as her ‘bubble’, her entourage where they perform counter-hegemonic narratives and practices. The fact that the ‘majority’ or the dominant powers are reproducing sectarianism through its many different channels of control does not negate the fact that these ‘bubbles’ also exist. Not all the couples remained entrenched in the same levels of power, some of them managed to challenge and redefine them. In contrast with Amal, Sima described the way they were raising their children as plural and enjoying the different identities and cultures in which their children were growing up, no matter if it came from their father’s or mother’s family.

As Sima described it, they live in a ‘bubble’, and in this bubble they are transmitting to their children the need to celebrate aspects of society and culture that are part of the different religions observed in Lebanese society. For Sima, blurred lines exist in which different political identities and systems of power overlap and one can chose which one to abide by or resist. In this ‘bubble’, Sima, her family, friends and other individuals have challenged, contested, resisted and eventually, re-defined emergent political identities. This is not to say that the bubble is the only reason why counter-hegemonic practices emerge. Counter-hegemonic practices may be the source of the bubble, and other sites of resistance or bubbles may also appear.
CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued for the multiplicity of political identities that emerge and are performed in Lebanon. I have argued across this thesis in favour of advancing the study of sectarianism within the paradigm of hegemony, which constrains Lebanese subjectification and political mobilisation within the social boundaries of the sect. Using the Gramscian concept of superstructure and structure(s) of power, I have placed sectarianism at the level of the superstructure, as an umbrella that sets the symbolic and social boundaries in Lebanon. However, other structures operate within the same system of power. The lines between the superstructure and the structure are sometimes clouded. As we saw in chapter VI, the hegemonic structure of sectarianism and that of social space produce overlapping political identities and practices, but sometimes they may produce contradicting social norms.

Activists and a multiplicity of individuals are currently resisting with their individual and collective practices, which is creating different modes of political identity beyond the confessional categories. Beyond current sectarian political identities as mere units that define politics in Lebanon, I believe political identities should be studied as embedded in the political hegemony of sectarianism. The role they play in this context is the main definer of politics, but one should not dismiss that, despite their dominance, they are not the only factor of the processes of political mobilisation or subjectification. In effect, the hybridity of these processes blurs the lines and layers of the identities playing in a society. Social actors are no more than the result of this multiplicity of identities and how these identities become ‘salient’ depends on the different social and political contexts.
In the process of sectarianisation certain social boundaries are produced. Although (re)produced and reified in some ways, they are constantly resisted and challenged. Lebanese people mobilise and subvert these boundaries and the powers that reify them, through acts of everyday resistance, such as civil marriage. The latter have emerged within certain sites of resistance where possibilities for social change also appear. Within these liminalities or sites of resistance, and through the process of contestation of sectarian political identities, Lebanese agents perform alternative (non-sectarian) political identities. There, emergent political behaviours and identities have emerged, such as the Leftist, secular, feminist or anti-kinship Lebanese individual, analysed in this chapter.
CHAPTER VIII: Conclusions

In this thesis I have researched, interviewed and analysed civil marriage in contemporary Lebanon. I tried to investigate what are the social and political implications of the (increasing) number of couples opting for civil marriage abroad, as well as in Lebanon. One of the main goals of focusing on civil marriage was to counter the narrow, mainstream, hegemonic epistemological conceptualisation of Lebanon as a country where sectarian conflict and violence are the only social realities worth researching. Instead, I attempted to stress the heterogeneity, hybridity and ambiguity of sectarianism in Lebanon. I have focused on different sites of resistance to sectarianism where the practice of civil marriage emerges, together with other practices and political identities that contest hegemonic reproduction of sectarianism.

The second goal of this thesis was to counter readings on social change exclusively on social upheavals and other visible and ground-breaking mobilisations. Social change, I tried to explain, may happen as a result of less visible, strategized and coherent movements. Civil marriage has served as a case to study different forms in which actors exert their political agency to avoid social norms. This act of political agency was not the same in all cases; it depends on the intention or will of the agent to contest, challenge and subvert the structure of power dominating its acts. When the agent consciously subverted power (sectarian power in the case of civil marriage), I defined this act as everyday resistance; when agency did not involve consciousness (Scott, 1985), the actor was performing tactics (Certeau, 1990).
1. Everyday Non-Sectarianism

When I began this research, I was influenced by my will to describe daily practices that contest mainstream hegemonic concepts on Lebanon and sectarianism. By the beginning of my PhD I had lived in Lebanon for almost two years and I could experience, live and sense other political and social realities that, in my opinion, were neither sufficiently present nor researched in the literature. The problem of sectarianism in Lebanon, as I see it at the moment, is that it has become not only the natural (re)produced social categorisation, but it has also become the hegemonic epistemological concept through which every social and political act is interpreted. By means of this thesis, I intended to contribute to the literature on social and political acts that do not follow sectarian interpretations.

The first lesson on sectarianism emerging in this research is that other systems of power help to reinforce sectarian powers, which are not necessarily sectarian. One example is postwar spatial segregation, which has advanced the current physical sectarian segregation of Lebanese individuals. First, neoliberal policies have occupied and privatised traditional public places where different parts of the population used to gather, be it from different socio-economic classes or sectarian affiliations (Hanssen and Genberg, 2002, Humphreys, 2015, Nagel, 2002). Second, the postwar geographical reality can be described by the territorialisation and confessionalisation of identities driven by massive population shifts. Dislocation of certain groups was accompanied by the reintegration of other people demarcating homogeneous and self-contained spaces. This followed mainly confessional origins, but also socio-economic classes (Nasr, 1993).
The second example I will mention here is the patriarchal system. Religious/sectarian conflict cannot be understood without necessary sexual and gendered dimensions. Even though this intertwining of religion and sexuality applies indistinctively to the West as well as non-West, in societies like Lebanon it takes a particular form in the institutionalization of the religion/sectarian-based personal status law. Any attempt to reform family laws and introduce civil marriage regulations has been interpreted by the religious communities as a violation of their collective right to religious liberty and of their sovereignty over a domain in which they are understood to have jurisdiction. Through sectarian family laws, categorization of citizens goes beyond sectarian identities. The law also produces different citizens depending on the category of ‘male’ or ‘female’. Men and women have a different status on divorce, child custody, inheritance or spousal maintenance between them, which overlaps with the differentiation that the law makes of the male/female citizen according to their ascribed sect. To quote Maya Mikdashi (2014: 284): “The interstitial nature of personal status and civil laws makes possible one of the main functions of the nation-state: to produce a body of people that, although differentiated by sex and sect, are unified under the overarching category of Lebanese citizenship”.

On this point, I follow Marxist intellectual Mahdi ‘Amel (1979) on his definition of sectarianism as a superstructure that supersedes any other power structure, including class. Within this superstructure, there are embedded other structures of power, such as patriarchy, space, neoliberalism, etc.
2. Civil Marriage: Tactics or Resistance?

The beginning of this thesis was also influenced by a will to analyse civil marriage in its potentiality for triggering social change. I chose to study civil marriage probably because I was enchanted by what has elsewhere been criticised as ‘romance’ or ‘monopoly’ of the perspective of resistance in Anthropological studies (Abu-Lughod, 1990b, Brown, 1996). My thoughts on civil marriage and everyday acts of resistance departed from the idea that acts of resistance, whatever their nature, number, outcome or intent could challenge the structure of power. I initially thought everyday acts of resistance represented a ‘low-heat flame’ cooking the social transformation that needs to burst out sooner or later. To quote James Scott (1985: 35): “Multiplied by many thousandfold it may at the end make utter shambles of the policies of the powerful”.

However, once I began my field research I could realise that different acts of civil marriage meant different things. What for some couples with a civil marriage means simply differing the sectarian norms for marriage, for others civil marriage was in line with their political behaviour and activist rationale to contest against sectarian laws and power. One of the things I have gathered, through the examination of accounts from participants who engaged in civil marriage, is that the former group had more probabilities for falling in the trap of sectarianism when it came to challenging sectarian domination on other contexts. For example, when it came to transmitting values and identities to their children, this group tended to reproduce sectarian discourses and practices when choosing education, school, religious upbringing or simply ascribing their children’s sectarian affiliation (which was also
patriarchal). This group was performing ‘tactics’ or subversion of power without leaving the hegemonic “way of usage” (Certeau, 1990: 63). That is, it represents a practice of diversion from hegemonic powers, without conscious will or intent to produce alternative ‘strategies’ or structure of power.

On the other hand, the latter group of civil marriage participants exhibit political consciousness for transforming power. By their various accounts, they identified sectarianism as an oppressing system which they intended to subvert with their civil marriage. They conceived their acts not as a collective mobilisation, but rather as a “personal choice”. Assertions like “it was in lines with my beliefs” and “we were targeting the sectarian system” were often repeated by participants for whom their actions were embedded in this conscious and intentional act of subversion. Further, these civil spouses demonstrated intersectional subversion not only to sectarianism, but also to other oppressing systems such as patriarchy, traditional ties of kinship or social class. Similarly, they did not exclusively contest sectarian hegemony when it came to their choice of marriage. Dina, Sima, Nada, Hayet, as well as many others refused to educate their children with their patrilineal sectarian identity. Their political behaviour or habitus (Bourdieu, 1979) was intentionally anti-patriarchal and non-sectarian.

I developed a particular understanding and epistemological conceptualisation of everyday acts of resistance thorough analysis of the ethnographic accounts of participants who had chosen a civil marriage. If such everyday acts (the first group, ‘tactics’) could be social change, even if multiplied by a considerable amount as Scott (1985) suggested, they could not be considered resistance. These acts could show
discontent among certain sectors of society and it could even trigger a movement for civil marriage in Lebanon. However, this movement can only be but intended. Their acts did not embody the intersectionality, consciousness and will that is required of an act of everyday resistance that embodies social change. In siding with authors that consider intention to be at the core of an act of everyday resistance (Leblanc, 1999, Scott, 1985), I believe that the group who consciously chose civil marriage embody and perform social change.

In conclusion, this thesis aims to analyse the limits of civil marriage as an act embodying social change. As an individual act that may lack strategy, visibility or organisation, civil marriage does not bring about a ground-breaking upheaval or social mobilisation. However, to use a metaphor, such quiet forms of resistance may be ‘cooking’ the social transformation on a low-heat flame. In contrast with this, one could also argue that civil marriage abroad at the same time serves as a ‘safety valve’ to the low-heat flame. Indeed, civil marriage abroad functions as a solution for the small percentage of couples that travel abroad to marry under a civil law, without achieving a structural transformation of the sectarian/religious personal status law.

3. The Quest for Civil Marriage in Lebanon

‘People should vote’… I told them I’d love to go voting, but I’d lie to vote for someone that represents me, right? And who represents me in this country? I am personally for civil marriage. Tell me one [politician] for civil marriage… I personally have no clue. In my opinion, civil marriage is the solution for this country. Because if we marry with each other, we may even understand each other; or may even, even love each other. As I see it, with civil marriage, my son, my daughter and whoever else they will get to say ‘I’m Lebanese’, not ‘I’m Shi’a; I’m Sunni; I’m Catholic; I’m Maronite’… They will say: ‘My dad is Druze, my mum is Maronite; my grandma is Shi’a; my grandpa Rum Catholic…’ Whatever... the important thing is to mix...

Rayess Bek, Lebanese rap musician. ‘Intikhabat’ [own translation from Arabic]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBg_NmlVX-A
The quest for civil marriage has been part of the political and social reality of Lebanon since before the independence of the state of Lebanon. Demands on civil personal status laws date from before the independence of the state, when the women’s movement, jurists and other activists mobilised and organised themselves for this purpose. In 1951, the Beirut Bar Association declared a six-months’ strike to demand civil legislation on family matters. The Tripoli Bar Association also joined the mobilisation, which caused major disruptions in the Lebanese judicial system. The strike was not called off until the lawyers received a promise that Parliament would discuss civil personal status law (El-Cheikh, 2000: 148). The issue has, ever since, been on the table and has never ceased to arise intermittently, up to this day, with protests, proposals and civil society organisation advocating that an optional civil personal status law (Karam, 2005).

Civil marriage is for many a reality, and for other Lebanese, part of this imaginary that ties national reconciliation with the legal possibility of having intersectarian marriage, as Rayess Bek voiced with his rap song above. For many in Lebanon, reconciliation and ta’ddud (pluralism) go hand-in-hand with civil marriage as an imaginary option that would not only make intersectarian marriages legal, but also erase the habits of Lebanese couples that perform intrasectarian marriages and daily reproduce sectarianism. Ironically, the country where most Lebanese travel to get a civil marriage, Cyprus, is still a divided and sectarian country where interethnic and interreligious marriages are almost nonexistent at the moment (Amussen, n/d).

Sectarian strife may not finish with providing the legal option to Lebanese individuals, but one cannot miss that it is increasingly becoming more a part of the
imaginary of the Lebanese *ta’ddud* and reconciliation. Among non-sectarian and civil society advocates, civil marriage is among the most repeated causes they are mobilising and struggling for. Further, as mentioned in chapter IV of this thesis, the number of civil marriages abroad is increasing, as the research found through the agencies organising civil ceremonies in Cyprus. We still need to see what will be the prospective scenario when the number of civil marriages continues to increase, becoming more and more normalised in the society, while activists continue to struggle for this plea.

To conclude, the issue of civil marriage has attained considerable relevance in the imaginary of the Lebanese. This, together with the power of mobilisation and individual resistance for a civil option for marriage, represents by itself a significant counter-hegemonic act.

**4. Sites of Resistance**

During our interview, I asked Sima, a civil spouse, about the kind of education, religious values or identities the couple was transmitting to their children. Sima replied: “Maybe we are doing this wrong, but we are raising them in a completely neutral manner... Making them understand that both are theirs, they could celebrate ‘*a‘id el-Ftir*; they could celebrate Easter, and they are comfortable of going from one to the other. The thing is that we are a *bubble*, my friends, my husband and me...”

[emphasis added]”

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118 Sima, civil married spouse, Beirut, 06 July 2016
Dina had a discussion about a similar topic with the mother of her child’s friend:

“She told me that children sometimes need to have an identity... I explained to her that this could be an identity” [civil marriage]”\textsuperscript{119}.

What Sima understood as her ‘bubble’ is her entourage, where they perform counter-hegemonic narratives and practices. The counter-hegemonic practices in this bubble could even become the rule. As Nada said: “Given that we have been activists for the cause of civil marriage for a really long time, if we would have decided to have a religious wedding that would have shocked our friends and family, not the opposite”\textsuperscript{120}. In fact, the efficiency by which domination is diffused does not negate the emergence of these ‘bubbles’.

This ‘bubble’, as Sima referred to, is the site where alternative aspects and form of religion and social interaction may take form and would be accepted. Where political identities and systems of power overlap, the ‘blurred lines’ delimit a certain site for resistance and political agency. Within this ‘bubble’ individuals resist hegemonic forms of political identities and eventually they redefine and develop alternative forms of political identities. Sima and other individuals use this bubble to raise children that did not reproduce hegemonic forms of political identity. Their children experienced and lived alternative identities other than sectarian and consequently develop alternative political identities in line with the ‘politics of civil marriage’.

Sune Haugbolle (2013: 429) describes secularism in Lebanon as engendered and engendering liminality. He uses the “term liminality and nor marginality, because unlike many other accounts of the Left I do not view their position as excluded from

\textsuperscript{119} Dina, civil married spouse, Beirut, 4 July 2016
\textsuperscript{120} Nada and Fouad, civilly married couple, Beirut, 21 June 2016
wider society and influence, but rather as a position between fixed places and hierarchies, which opens up for possibilities of cultural change.” This liminality is what Sima and Dina named a ‘bubble’, that is, the social context and space in which they could develop their political behaviour and identity beyond the social boundaries of sectarianism. Within this liminality, acts of everyday resistance are located, such as civil marriage.

On another occasion, Dina referred to her father’s advice when she decided to have an intersectarian and civil marriage: “He is a very secular person... but he told me. ‘It will be easier for you if you go live abroad from Lebanon. It won’t be easier for you in here’”. In fact, in another context, away from Lebanon, where sectarianism does not dominate subjectification and socialisation, Dina did not need to create the ‘bubble’.

In some other countries agents do not need to form their own site of resistance or ‘bubble’ to the sectarian hegemonic power (although by the same token other oppressive structures exist in every country, even if they are not sectarian).

In conclusion, there are certain sites in which conditions favour the emergence of resistance. One of these sites in Lebanon, for example, is the social space context of Ras Beirut. As it was explained in chapter VI, Ras Beirut represents for many in Lebanon a space of tolerance, pluralism and intellectual sanctuary. A very relevant number of my participants grew up/feel closely attached to Ras Beirut, among whom are Dina and Sima. In Leftist or activist circles, as Nada explained, civil marriage is also practised and accepted. This is not to say that the ‘bubble’ is the only reason why counter-hegemonic practices emerge. Counter-hegemonic practices may happen in many different contexts and circumstances, as we could see in the
isolated case of Amin and Samira in the remote village in Northern Akkar. Practices of resistance may be the source of the ‘bubble’, but other sites of resistance may also appear.

5. Multi-layered powers; multi-layered identities

Resistance, as a reflection of power, is neither pure nor one-sided. Relationships between dominator and dominated involve a multiplicity of systems and hierarchies of power, and individuals can simultaneously be powerful and powerless within different systems (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). Hence, in this multi-layered structure of power, “individuals or groups may simultaneously support the structures of domination that necessitate resistance in the first place... a single activity may constitute both resistance and accommodation to different aspects of power or authority” (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004: 549). At the same time, subjects may be challenging their positions as oppressed within a particular social structure, while they may not be challenging the overall structure.

I have described in this thesis how within the Gramscian paradigm of ‘superstructure of power’ (Gramsci, 1971), sectarianism plays a predominant role in how a social subject is produced. It is situated at the level of the superstructure, whereas other systems of power complement and contribute to sectarianism. It reinforces it, but also attributes different connotations as to what a Lebanese (sectarian) social structure is, such as patriarchy, class, geography or neoliberalism. This system of power is contested unequally in its different layers and forms. Even if civil marriage has the potential to challenge the hegemonic powers in all its structures, the actors
might intentionally be contesting the sectarianism, or the weight of tradition, but not patriarchal domination, or vice versa.

As reflected in this thesis, Amal and Sami had an intersectarian/civil marriage thus subverting the sectarian norms. The couple remained trapped in the dominant structure of sectarianism and patriarchy when it came to deciding on the upbringing of their children. To follow the patriarchal Lebanese rules, their children learnt to identify themselves as Christians, inheriting their father’s ascribed affiliation, and they will become Christian/sectarian subjects in the society.

In conclusion, even self-conscious and self-reflexive individuals that contest sectarianism, patriarchy or other systems of power do it while embedded in the same structures of power. Confronting one form of power in one context or with one action does not mean that they will confront the same form of power in another context. According to Richter-Devroe (2011: 34), “[s]tudies of everyday highlight that resistance is not independent of systems of power, but rather conditioned by them. Systems of power do not determine the form resistance takes, but set the possibilities for distinct types of resistance to emerge.”

**Open Questions and Further Research**

This thesis opens questions about political identities and sectarianism more generally not only in Lebanon, but further in the Middle East. Before this thesis is being submitted, the sectarianized civil strife in Syria, Yemen and Iraq opens questions on how sectarianism is produced, but how it can also be contested not only by the average Middle Eastern citizen, but also how the scholar needs to delve
with her research into how we interpret a social category as natural and how one can deconstruct it. Current scholarship is contributing to the later interpretation of primordial sectarianism, which this thesis tries to challenge.

Civil marriage is one form or site where resistance to sectarian power is articulated. I have researched in this thesis how this practice of everyday resistance may bring social change to an oppressing form of power. Similar paradigms of daily, quiet, but significant contestation to sectarianism happen everywhere and everyday in Lebanon. These are social realities that are worth studying to complement the literature on Lebanon and the Middle East more generally.

Secular (and non-sectarian) citizens have struggled for civil marriage not only in Lebanon or in the Middle East, but also in Western contexts like Spain in which there were cases of couples crossing to the border to British territory of Gibraltar or France to get a civil marriage which was forbidden in Spanish territory until the proclamation of the democratic constitution in 1978. Comparative studies on the struggle for civil marriage in different authoritarian or non-authoritarian countries may also enrich this topic of research. What is more, countries like Israel do not allow its citizen to wed but through Jewish ritual. Israeli citizens that do not want to abide to the imposed religious norms of marriage do also travel to Cyprus and even though Israel and Lebanon are countries currently ‘at war’, their citizens share venues, travel agencies and sometimes even airport transfers to pursue the same goal: to avoid their domestic norms on religious marriage and obtain civil marriage.

Finally, the study of other acts of everyday resistance and/or tactics may delve into the notion of intention or consciousness of the individuals to contest hegemonic
systems of power. In fact, as I ask in this thesis: Is consciousness of subverting the system of power a fundamental requisite for a political act to represent social change? Do conscious agents contest other system of power intersectionally? By the same token, do these subjects that challenge a given system of power intentionally contest other oppressing powers when they are confronted with them?
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APPENDIX 1

Semi-structured interview: Questions for couples civilly married

1. INDIVIDUAL LEVEL: the couple

Background: Socio-economic / education level / religion

Family lived abroad or stayed in Lebanon during the war?

Mixed background of parents/grandparents? Mixed school/neighborhood?

When did they marry?

1.1. Why did you decide to marry through civil ceremony? Did you also do any kind of religious ceremony?

1.2. What were your main considerations while thinking about it? (Legal, family, community, activist cause)

1.3. Do you feel your civil status have implications for your relationship with your family/community/friends?

1.4. Do you feel different that people that married through religious ceremony?

1.5. Do you feel having a civil ceremony affected your faith (if any)? Did it change since you get married?

1.6. Would you have married through religious marriage if it would have been possible for you?

1.7. How would you describe your feeling of belonging with your community (sectarian group)?

1.8. Do you have children? Do you consider there are implications for them the terms in which you contracted marriage?

1.9. Are you considering/did you already baptised/religious inscription of your children?

1.10. Did you consider getting married in Lebanon?

1.11. Did you ever consider removing your sect from al-amen al-3am?

1.12. Did you join any other activist cause?

1.13. Do you feel part of a particular collectivity/shared identity with other people that did CM?

2. COMMUNITY/SOCIETY LEVEL
2.1. How did you family reacted to this? Friends, members of your community?
2.2. Do you think your marriage is perceived differently by the society/your community?
2.3. How would you define your feelings of belonging to your community? Do you feel very attached to it?
2.4. What is your present relationship with your family/community/friends? Did it change since you take the decision of marrying civilly?
2.5. How would you define the relationship or perceptions between your two communities?
2.6. Do you feel less attached to your community because of the civil marriage?
2.7. Do you think your image regarding the other community has changed since you met? Did the perceptions of your family or surroundings change?
2.8. Do you consider that your individual case had an impact on your community/the collective level?
2.9. Can you see any pattern within your community (i.e. marriages +/- different community/origins/age/socio-economic background)? Do you think this has changed with time?
2.10. Do you think CM is increasing in the society?

3. **POLITICAL LEVEL**
3.1. Can you see your case affecting the political system and in which form? (institutions, laws, religious authority)
3.2. Why do you think its not or their interest to approve a civil marriage law?
3.3. How do you see your marriage fitting the political and social realm in Lebanon?
3.4. Do you think civil marriage in Lebanon could change or challenge the sectarian structure of the society?
3.5. Do you consider that more civil marriage/intermarriage would help different communities to change each other’s perceptions?
3.6. Do you feel that the system leaves you enough space to people of different sects or even to interact with them? What relation do you think this have with the sectarian system?
3.7. How do you feel the sectarian system constrained your relationship/your ability of being together?
3.8. Do you consider the absence of civil marriage in Lebanon is a symptom of the sectarian system or one of their causes?
3.9. How do you see civil marriage affecting the future of Lebanon? As state, as a nation, its sectarian structure, the Lebanese identities?

3.10. What would be your definition of a Lebanese identity/nationality or the Lebanese identities/your Lebanese identity?