

Writing Citizens: Teaching Writing and Performing Citizenship in Lebanon

When I first moved to Lebanon in the fall of 2005, six months after the massive protests of the so-called ‘Beirut Spring’ that led to the withdrawal of Syria, there was a sense of hope among the people, albeit tinged with apprehension. It was often mentioned to me that the events earlier in the year, when people gathered together in Martyrs’ Square in downtown Beirut and called for Lebanese independence and sovereignty, had been exceptional for the fact that so many people from different communities had willingly identified themselves primarily as Lebanese. Was this an original moment of unity for a new Lebanon? Not quite. Even at the time there were counter-protests in another square nearby. And two years later these cracks have forked and opened wide: the governing institutions of the country are divided in two and unable to come to an agreement, and the people are either polarized along the same lines as their leaders, or lost in the middle. In general, people feel disillusioned as public discourse and public space seem to be sites only of perpetually reiterated disagreement and division.

In need of a topic for a writing course, I decided to take up some of these issues by designing a course that focuses on the construction and use of public space in Lebanon, and in particular on the reconstruction of Martyrs’ Square, the public square at the heart of Beirut that figured so prominently in the events of early 2005. As a non-sectarian, central area, the square was on the Green Line between east and west Beirut during the war, and the scene of fierce fighting; its reconstruction may be seen as an attempt give back to the nation a space in which people may encounter one another as citizens, and in so doing, cross religious, gender and class boundaries. In designing the course, I thought public space seemed to have a lot to offer as a site for deterritorialized encounters with, and negotiations of, difference. By contrast, since the course was designed to prepare students for academic and professional writing, public discourse figured as a territorialized space that required adherence to certain disciplinary norms and conventions.

With this apparent difference in mind, it seemed worthwhile to reflect on how the metaphors of text as space and space as text might be read back into each other. How do territorializing elements such as borders, normative categories, and disciplinary conventions enable or disable the production of identities? Does the production of the citizen require the transcendence of such borders, categories, and conventions?

The paper proceeds by examining ways in which certain public texts materialize the citizen in Lebanon. Through my reading of the Constitution and Martyrs' Square as public texts, I argue that recognizing the performative dimensions of these texts enables an understanding of how they function not as open spaces in which representation occurs, but as spaces with disciplinary and normative dimensions that both constrain and enable representation. Rather than viewing the texts as an expression of the abstract citizen, or as open spaces in which citizens may express themselves, I want to examine how these public texts *materialize* citizens, particularly through performative iterations of normative abstractions – an approach that is indebted to Judith Butler's account of the process of materialization in *Bodies that Matter*.

Constitutive Exclusions: The Constitution, the Borders, and the Citizen

In this section I want to argue that the formation of the modern nation-state is dependent on the imbrication of discourse and materiality, but not through a naming process whereby a certain material reality is recognized and named. Following Butler's logic in *Bodies that Matter*, I claim that a modern nation-state such as Lebanon is not formed through such a referential structure – as form imposed on formless matter – but rather it is materialized via exclusions and performative gestures. The first two chapters of the Lebanese Constitution in which the borders are declared and certain people within those borders are granted the rights and responsibilities of citizens will be the focus of my argument.

Lebanon came into being as a modern nation-state with the demise of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. Under the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement, a joint French and British plan to divide up the region, the large Ottoman administrative region of Mt Lebanon and contiguous Ottoman cazas to the north, east and south were put together to form Greater Lebanon. The Constitution, which was ratified in 1926, opens by naming this territory and its borders:

Article 1. - (as modified by the constitutional law of 9 November 1943, article 1) Lebanon is an independent State, unitarian and sovereign. Its frontiers are those which now limit it:

IN THE NORTH: from the mouth of Nahr El Kebir, the line following the course of this river up to its junction with its tributary the Ouade Khaled at the height of Jisr El Kamar.

IN THE EAST: the top line separating the valleys of Ouade Khaled and the Ouade Nahr-El Assi (Orontes) and passing through the villages of Meaysra, Harbaana, Hait, Ebbech, Faissan, at the height of the villages Brifa and Matrebeh. This line follows the northern limit of the caza of Baalbeck, towards the Northeast and Southeast, then the Eastern limits of the cazas of Baalbeck, Bekaa, Hasbaya and Rashaya.

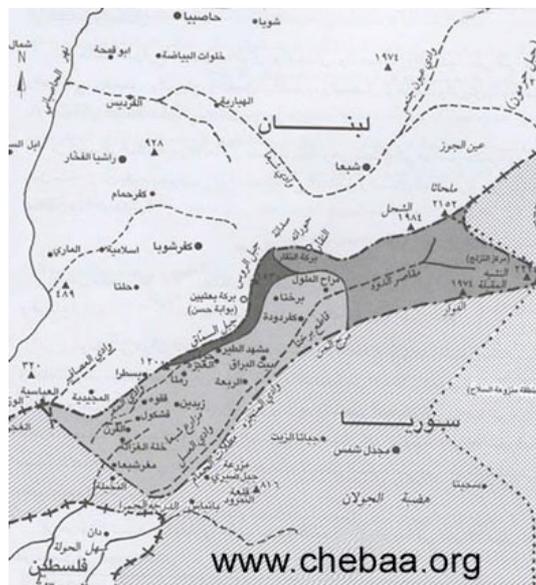
IN THE SOUTH: the present southern limits of the cazas of Tyre and Marjeyoun.

IN THE WEST: the Mediterranean Sea. ('The Lebanese Constitution')

What interests me about these borders is that they raise the question of what formations precede the nation-state in that the borders depend on the imbrication of natural land formations with ancient village communities and the political formations constructed under Ottoman rule. The western border is the sea; the northern border runs along a river; the eastern border runs along a mountain ridge dividing two valleys, through several ridge-top villages, and then follows the borders of the Ottoman cazas all the way round to the south and back to the sea. In this description the line runs its

way swiftly and neatly along and through natural, communal and political formations, ‘following the course of,’ ‘passing through,’ and then ‘following the limits of’. The drawing of borders must take into account – or not take into account, as the case may be – natural borders, existing borders of local communities, and existing political borders.

But the drawing of any border creates anomalies of exclusion and inclusion. The case of the Sheba’a farms in the southeastern corner of Lebanon has recently highlighted the problems of constituting borders, while also pointing to the abjection of those who live in the borderlands. The village of Sheba’a lies within Lebanon, but its residents own farmland that falls within Syria according to the 1923 delineation of the border. Through the 1920s and 1930s some farmers of this land ignored its location on the Syrian side of the officially delineated border by paying taxes within Lebanon and conducting their legal and administrative business in the Lebanese regional centers of Marjayoun and Hasbaya. Successive recommendations to amend the border to account for its anomalous relation to the existing borders of the community of Sheba’a were ignored (Kaufman). Although these people recognized Lebanese authority it seems it did not recognize them. Thus the interpellation of these border farmers as citizens is an interesting case in which they turned to acknowledge the authority of the state but the state paid them little heed. The border between Lebanon and Syria was never properly surveyed or physically demarcated following its original delineation in 1923 (Kaufman)



Sheba'a Farms

Source: www.inbaa.com



A security post overlooking the border area

Source: polosbastards.com



With the withdrawal of Israel from south Lebanon in 2000 the case of Sheba'a farms suddenly came to matter. If the land were Lebanese then the withdrawal would not be complete. Israeli occupation of the Sheba'a farms became a key plank in Hizbullah's self-justification as an armed resistance movement, and political actors of all stripes became interested in the status of the farms.

Bewilderingly the farming community of Sheba'a moved, at least in a discursive sense, from not mattering at all to mattering a lot. But their significance ramifies more on the national and international level than it does on the mundane level of whether they can farm their land or not, or whether they can make political claims. The case of the Sheba'a farms has been represented globally, particularly in explanations of the July 2006 war, yet the plight of the people there is not what matters in these accounts.

I am using this example to suggest that there is a constitutive failure of representation to capture its object that remains unavoidable. Whether it is unrepresented, misrepresented, under-represented or over-represented, the case of the Sheba'a farms eludes the material existence of the farms and the farming community that used to live off them. There seem to be two possible responses to this constitutive failure: the first is to improve the

precision and inclusiveness of the mechanism of representation, amending misrepresentation through greater accuracy, or amending exclusion through greater openness and expansion; the second is to declare a reality that lies beyond the reach of representation. These two approaches are misleading because of their misunderstanding of borders. The first claims to be able to overcome all borders; the second claims to know where the border between discourse and materiality lies. We inhabit bordered territory, the edges of which we cannot know. To know these borders would involve the impossible act of naming what lies outside of discourse. Essentially I will be arguing that there is nothing in the political field beyond the processes of identification, representation and recognition, which means that those processes are not *primarily* descriptive of an extra-discursive reality. Undergirding this is Butler's contention that materiality and language are, for us, always already mutually embedded:

language and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed into one another, i.e., reduced to one another, and yet neither fully ever exceeds the other. Always already implicated in each other, always already exceeding one another, language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different. (*Bodies* 69)

Materializing citizens then is neither a descriptive process of naming what is there, nor a process of ascribing a name to a nameless natural body. In the case of citizenship, evidently language cannot be cast as that which saves materiality from not mattering by making it matter. There is no way of understanding the relationship between materiality and language in terms of total inclusion, or total identification of one with the other. But there is also no way of understanding them outside of each other. Exclusions, for Butler, thereby become constitutive and internal.

Pheng Cheah, in her critique of Butler, suggests that some communities have needs, such as hunger, that fall outside of the problems of identification and representation. Cheah argues against 'identification as a paradigm of oppression,' suggesting that it ignores materiality in its

dependence on particularly modern ideational and national structures (120-21). By reaffirming a nature/culture dichotomy through emphasizing the priority of discourse over materiality, Butler, according to Cheah, fails to adequately address the situation of ‘global neocolonialism where oppression occurs at a physical level’ (121). But in her discussion of hunger Cheah demonstrates the inescapability of discursive processes by using metaphors from the realm of *tekhne*: ‘*tracings* of the digestive tract’ and ‘the *weaving* of the body’ (my emphasis, 120-21). Even hunger has to be made intelligible and takes its place within a global system of distribution and exchange value. This may be a contradiction which Cheah is happy to embrace as she argues for a dynamic, deconstructive understanding of nature and culture, as opposed to Butler’s insistence on constitutive exclusion. However, what Butler’s emphasis on exclusion achieves is deeper understanding of the contingency of the signifier, such that representation is not deemed to be salvation by inclusion, and identification is seen as both oppressive and emancipatory. Cheah, by contrast, seems to hold on to the notion that those who have been marginalized by the colonial and neocolonial subdivisions of the world should somehow be acknowledged *as unintelligible* to resist simply drawing them into the ‘global neocolonial’ grid. She seems to reach, in other words, for a more just and liberating form of (non)representation, whereby things remain in their concrete particularity.

Cheah’s critique of Butler is a significant attempt to understand the situation of people such as the residents of Sheba’a in ways that do not assume that the question was always already political in the sense that it is today. That is, she aims for a historicism that would avoid what she sees as a universal formalism in Butler’s approach. For the residents of Sheba’a, what preceded the demand for identification within ‘the constitutional nation-state form’ (121)? Before the nation-state the people of Sheba’a had the hierarchies of the family and the village, demarcated farmlands, property ownership, taxes, administrative centers, religion, named hillsides and valleys – in other words, all manner of formations within which identities were produced and recognized. The formation of political abstractions from concrete particulars and, in the other direction, the use of political

abstractions to identify those concrete particulars was always already in play, and it is this that Butler wants to emphasize rather than the more historical question pursued by Cheah of the degree of importance of the abstract and the concrete. In defending universality as ‘understood in terms of theoretical formalism’ (Butler et al. 18), she takes her cue from Hegel in insisting on the mutual interdependence of the abstract and the concrete, such that they betray traces of each other: ‘In other words, abstraction cannot remain rigorously abstract without exhibiting something of what it must exclude in order to constitute itself as abstraction’ (19).

This question of what is prior to the abstract identifications and delineations of the Constitution will remain with us as we turn to look at the second chapter of the Constitution. I want to read this chapter as materializing the citizen through performative citation of abstractions such as freedom and equality. As a definition of the Lebanese national, it endows the Lebanese people with equality (Articles 7 and 12), liberty (Articles 8, 9, 10, and 13) and the right to private property (Articles 14 and 15).

CHAPTER 2. - THE LEBANESE NATIONALS, THEIR RIGHTS AND THEIR DUTIES

Article 6. - The Lebanese nationality, the way it is acquired, is retained and forfeited, shall be determined by law.

Article 7. - All the Lebanese are equal before the law. They enjoy equal civil and political rights and are equally subjected to public charges and duties, without any distinction whatever.

Article 8. - Individual liberty is guaranteed and protected. No one can be arrested or detained except in accordance with the provisions of the law. No infringements and no sanctions can be established except by law.

Article 9. - Liberty of conscience is absolute. By rendering homage to the Almighty, the State respects all creeds and guarantees and protects their

free exercise, on condition that they do not interfere with public order. It also guarantees to individuals, whatever their religious allegiance, the respect of their personal status and their religious interests.

Article 10. - Education is free so long as it is not contrary to public order and to good manners and does not touch the dignity of creeds. No derogation shall affect the right of communities to have their schools, subject to the general prescriptions on public education edicted by the State.

Article 11. - (As modified by the constitutional law of 9 November 1943, article 2). Arabic is the official national language. A law shall determine the cases where the French language is to be used.

Article 12. - All Lebanese citizens are equally admitted to all public functions without any other cause for preference except their merit and competence and according to the conditions set by law. A special statute shall govern Civil Servants according to the administrations to which they belong.

Article 13. - Freedom of expression by word or pen, freedom of the press, freedom of holding meetings and freedom of association are equally guaranteed within the framework of the law.

Article 14. - Domicile is unviolable. None can enter it except in cases provided by the law and according to the form it prescribes.

Article 15. - Property is under the protection of the law. None may be deprived of his property except for public utility, in cases established by the law and in return of prior and fair compensation. ('The Lebanese Constitution')

I want to read the Constitution as a performative utterance, following the famous readings by Arendt and Derrida of the Declaration of Independence

(Honig). Under such a reading, the question of what is prior to the Constitution is the key problem: who claims the authority to speak this constitutive utterance? Of course, in the ideal case the answer is the people: the citizens authorize their own constitution, speaking themselves into existence. Constitutions are thus performative utterances that bring about a state of affairs rather than refer to a state of affairs. But as Derrida points out, there remains a demand for authority prior to the constitution, a demand that can never be fulfilled but which must nonetheless be addressed. The US Declaration of Independence addressed this demand through constative gestures toward a pre-existent ground by invoking ‘Nature and Nature’s God.’ In the case of the Lebanese Constitution, however, its performativity does not need to try to find constative ground because it can seek prior authority through being a citation of other national constitutions. It gains its stability and authority through the citation of previous declarations of equality and liberty.

However, even as it cites abstract endowments of the citizen such as equality and liberty it cannot do so in purely abstract terms. This section of the constitution not only performs the hermeneutic work of ascribing the meaning *citizen* to certain people within a certain bounded space, but in doing so it materializes the citizen, regulating bodies and performing exclusions. We can see traces of real bodies and people’s actual material, embodied existence in the mention of arrest and detention, public order, the freedom of association, the inviolability of the citizen’s home, and the right to hold property. To return to Butler’s argument in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, ‘Abstraction is thus contaminated precisely by the concretion from which it seeks to differentiate itself’ (19). So the process of differentiation cannot be excluded. We can see immediately how certain bodies, even though they inhabit the specified territory, are, to use Judith Butler’s pun, bodies that do not matter – bodies that have no meaning, or at least, in this context, do not bear the meaning citizen. The references to the material existence of embodied subjects seem to imply a masculine subject who behaves or misbehaves publicly, who is the head of the house, and who owns property. Women, foreign workers, children and animals are bodies

that do not matter in the same way. Abstract and immaterial though it seems to be, the constitution materializes those bodies differently.

But this is not to claim that there is something wrong with the abstract account of the citizen given in the constitution. Writing a constitution that avoids universalizing abstractions and exhaustively and descriptively performs the inclusion of every particular identity is not the solution. Indeed, such a constitution would inevitably legitimize and reify certain identities and not others in ethically and politically problematic ways, and would of course fix in place certain exclusions. As Butler suggests, descriptivism runs counter to radical democracy as it forecloses identities. By contrast, using terms such as ‘woman’ and in this case ‘freedom,’ ‘equality,’ and ‘citizen’ non-descriptively keeps the category open ‘as a site of permanent political contest’ (222). Abstractions in themselves are not the problem then; indeed, abstractions so long as they can be continually recast through performative reiterations enable a dynamic form of exclusion that is ethically and politically enabling. In a 1998 interview, Butler makes two points about ‘essence’: first, it is opposed to appearance so strictly speaking it is that which never appears; second, it is essential, a precondition, or a ‘that without which’ (Cheah, ‘Future’ 22). Freedom and equality have such status in the Constitution: they depend on the contamination of the abstract by the concrete, or of essence by appearance; and, as preconditions to their own realization, they cannot be named but must be performatively inaugurated. ‘This form of political performativity does not retroactively absolutize its own claim, but recites and restages a set of cultural norms that displace legitimacy from a presumed authority to the mechanism of its renewal’ (Butler et al. 41). The performative operations of the Constitution that materialize the citizen depend on being a reiteration of such normative political categories. As such a reiteration, there is the possibility of those categories becoming, in Butler’s words, ‘more dynamic, more open, and less permanent’ (*Bodies* 189). The paradox of the claim to universality being dependent on constitutive exclusions not only remains but it becomes vital to political contestation (109).

Exclusions such as this, or the production of an ‘outside,’ may be constitutive, but for Butler that does not mean that exclusions become merely ‘sad necessities of signification.’ Instead:

The task is to refigure the outside as a future horizon, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome. But of equal importance is the preservation of the outside, the site where discourse meets its limits, where the opacity of what is not included in any given truth regime of truth acts as a disruptive site of linguistic impropriety and unrepresentability, illuminating the violent and contingent boundaries of that normative regime precisely through the inability of that regime to represent that which might pose a fundamental threat to its continuity. In this sense, radical and inclusive representability is not precisely the goal: to include, to speak as, to bring in every marginal and excluded position within a given discourse is to claim that a singular discourse meets its limits nowhere, that it can and will domesticate all signs of difference. If there is a violence necessary to the language of politics, then the risk of that violation might well be followed by another in which we begin, without ending, without mastering, to own – and yet never fully to own – the exclusions by which we proceed. (*Bodies* 53)

If texts such as the Constitution, which delineate the borders and normative values that constitute the public, operate performatively, then the public cannot be viewed as a self-identical entity that is constituted by a plurality of self-identical communities and individuals. In other words, it cannot be represented. Nor can its constituent parts represent themselves or be represented. If the public cannot be captured by representation, that is not because it is fixed as the unspeakable outside of discourse. It is rather because the public is neither separate from its representation nor reducible to it. Any attempt to represent the public is both dynamic and incomplete. This is significant as we turn to look at public space and material rhetoric because it warns us against imagining public space as open and transparent space in which the public may express itself.

Public Space and Material Rhetoric: Martyrs' Square and the Martyrs' Monument

I want to turn now to Martyrs Square and the monument that sits in the square, and to read them as public texts that materialize the citizen, much like the Constitution, through certain normative procedures of exclusion and performative iteration. I will argue in particular against reading this public space and its monument as though they are sites of constative utterances, or sites in which ready-made identities circulate and encounter one another.

The impossibility of representing the public has two important implications for my exploration of the role of Martyrs' Square in Lebanese public life. First, the problem of representing the body politic is not overcome simply by gathering all its constituent bodies in one place. As Clive Barnett argues, a 'post-foundational understanding of democracy depends on abandoning the normative presumption that the public refers to a self-identical collective subject that could be made present in a space of assembly' (Barnett 188). Second, emphasizing the reiterative processes at play in the production of the public means that public space should not be conceived only in spatial terms, but should also be given a temporal dimension.

The significance of this for Lebanon is that it may then be possible to question the idea that liberal humanism, through enlightened mechanisms such as the Constitution and cosmopolitan public spaces, can unite the diverse nation. I do not mean by this to reject national constitutions and the enshrining of certain values in such documents, nor to repudiate the significance of public space in fostering democracy. I do mean to suggest that those instruments should not be seen as producing unity by transcending difference since those instruments materialize bodies – a necessarily differential process. Both the farmers of Sheba'a and the definition of the Lebanese citizen demonstrate that citizenship is not distributed transparently and equally throughout the territory of Lebanon. Equally, public space is not an open, level field where a thousand

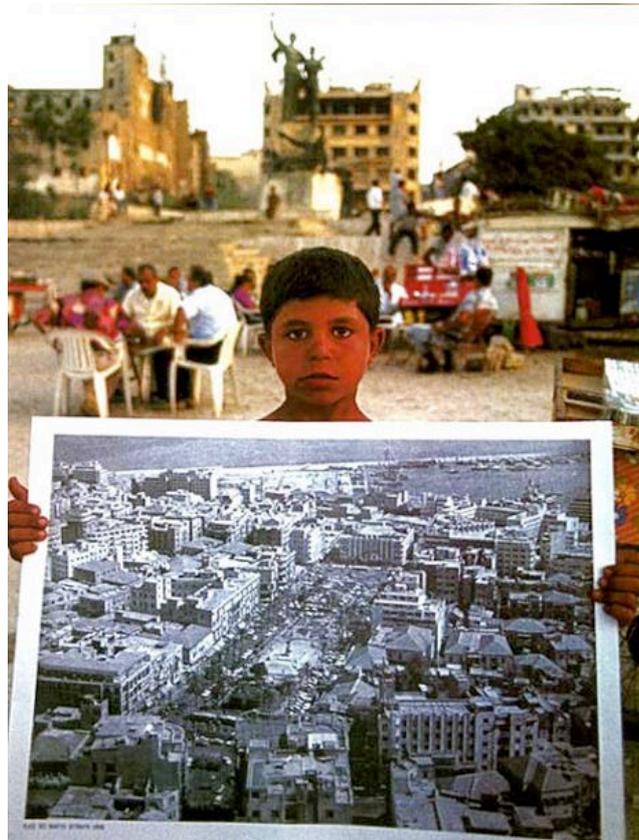
democratic flowers can bloom free of processes of differentiation and exclusion. Indeed, if the process of exclusion is constitutive of identity then it cannot be overcome. The total inclusion implied in the notion of uniting a diverse nation becomes deeply questionable. Under what and whose terms is this unity to be conceived? Incompleteness in the representation of the public becomes then paradoxically constitutive of democracy (*Bodies* 221).

In refusing the idea that pluralism is the dynamic interaction of a set of ready-made identities Butler resists purely spatial metaphors to describe the political field or arena. While she often uses spatial metaphors in conceiving of politics as made up of ‘domains,’ ‘sites,’ and ‘zones’ (114), she rejects spatial metaphors such as *substitution* and *position* that emphasize location (118). She prefers instead spatial metaphors that carry more temporality and movement such as ‘tracing’ and ‘map of future community’ (119), in order to conceive of ‘a dynamic map of power in which identities are constituted, and/or erased, deployed and/or paralyzed’ (117). One can see in this the spatio-temporal dimensions of Derrida’s endless deferring/differing. For Butler, it is important to avoid conceiving of political terrain as space in which identity positions are staked out with the only possibility for the future being the inclusion of yet more identity positions. This is a conception that I also want to resist in the following examination of the square at the center of the Lebanese capital.



Martyrs' Square pre-1975

Source: almashriq.hiof.no



Martyrs' Square post-1990

Source: azar.yvod.com



Protest in Martyrs' Square: 14 March 2005

Source: smh.com.au

Martyrs' Square shot to global prominence in early 2005 with the massive anti-Syrian protest that followed the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. The sheer weight of numbers gathered in the square that day put intolerable pressure on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon. Estimates vary between three quarters of a million and a million, but in either case, close to a quarter of the nation was present in the square and its surrounding area. For many Lebanese, a gathering of this size that included so many different confessional groups was a powerful expression of so many long-held hopes for an end to sectarianism and violence. That the protest took place in a public square that was destroyed by the 1975-1990 war – during which Martyrs' Square had marked the Green Line between east and west Beirut made these emotions all the more palpable. It is tempting to see these two squares in terms of a substitution – the square of democratic community replaces the square of sectarian violence – that sets up two mutually opposed possibilities: either public space is a space of unity or it is a space of division. This, I argue, is what happens if we see what happens in public space as an expression of something else that is fully constituted elsewhere, i.e. if we read it metaphorically rather than metonymically. Against this, I want to propose that we see public space as a contact zone that enables both integration and segregation, communication and violence, and further, that it is not a space in which integration and segregation are re-presented, so much as where they are enacted.

Let me give an example by which to consider how the square might be conceived in terms of metaphor and substitution, on the one hand, and in terms of metonymy and association, on the other. Youssef Bazzi, a poet and journalist, gave this description of the March 14 demonstration.

With breathtaking speed, Martyrs Square had reclaimed its forgotten role: a place of meeting, continuity and community. In a single moment it had shrugged off its emptiness and separateness, becoming a place of new symbols in harmony with the symbols of the past and the rebirths of history.
(Bazzi)

Bazzi begins and ends with relatively metonymical terms to describe the square, ‘meeting’ and ‘history.’ In between, however, is the more metaphorical notion of the square as ‘a place of new symbols.’ Two years on, it is easy to see that there is something wrong with this vision as the country is divided and the square has been used and reused to demonstrate those divisions. But it is not enough to dismiss Bazzi’s description for its idealism. Surely we cannot dispense with terms such as meeting, continuity, community and harmony, and the sense of togetherness all of these imply. I want to suggest that the problem with this vision is not the ideals themselves so much as the place they are given within a representational structure in which the square seems able to take on these new meanings so easily. In Bazzi’s account, it can forget itself, it can be reclaimed, it can shrug off previous incarnations, it can become a pure site for new symbols, it can be perpetually reborn anew. This seems to be a strange way to refer to a space over which so many layers of history have been written. Ideals can be metaphorically represented by the square in a way that seems to involve little contact with the material existence of the square. The square seems to slip from one role to another without being itself affected, without carrying any residue with it, or perhaps more aptly, without carrying any scars. Rather than imagining that the square can be made to represent in some pure way a pre-existing communal or public reality, it would be more productive to see the square as the site for performative gestures that actually bring the community or the public into existence; and further, to see it as a site that bears the inscriptions of previous public activity, from political protest, to commerce, leisure, and violence. In this view, the square is always a space constituted by borders and exclusions; it is always a space in which encounters make people vulnerable. These are the constitutive conditions of it as a space of democratic contestation.



Martyrs' Statue

Source: almashriq.hiof.no

Martyrs' Square was named for the political activists who were executed by the Ottomans during World War I for seeking support from the French to resist Ottoman rule. They were publicly hanged in the square in 1915 and 1916. The first monument to commemorate their martyrdom was a white marble sculpture of two women, one Muslim and the other Christian, facing each other and reaching out to hold one another's hands. Although they were highly abstracted figures, they needed to bear obvious sectarian markings in order to represent the transcendence of sectarian division,

paradoxically enshrining sectarianism in the process of trying to overcome it. When the sculpture was replaced in the early 1950s, a set of four figures in more realistic poses and with more realistic features was put in its place (Khalaf 191). The Italian sculptor who received the commission went to great pains to represent the Lebanese body politic in the bodies of the four figures by photographing people from all over Lebanon and by using live models. In this respect, the statue is more realist than symbolic, and more metonymical than metaphorical. But the statue is not consistently and thoroughly realist. The two fallen figures, both men, are more realistic in their pose and their dress than the two standing figures, though without any sectarian markings. They appear to represent the martyrs, suffering and appealing to be heard. The two standing figures seem to symbolize a more abstract set of ideas to do with the classical citizen: freedom, equality, wisdom, truth, and hope. There is a distinct classicism in the form of their bodies. The standing male is almost entirely naked, wearing only a small loin-cloth. He is muscular. He is evidently the citizen whose body can defend the nation. But he is an abstracted, universalized citizen rather than a depiction of one of the martyrs executed by the Ottomans in 1915 and 1916. The woman is also classically depicted. She wears a long, loose-fitting dress with a flowing shawl and holds a torch aloft in her right hand. Strongly reinforcing this lack of realism, the woman is much taller than the man. She is not a real woman. She is a goddess-figure. Maternal perhaps, but far too young to actually be the mother of the man beside her. Unlike the man alongside her, she is a symbol not a citizen. She is a metaphor and he is a synecdoche. Her body materializes immaterial concepts such as freedom, equality, justice, wisdom; his body materializes other bodies, the people, the citizens of the nation.

But the Martyrs' Square statue, which was designed to represent a non-sectarian citizen, suffered from over-exposure to sectarian violence. Throughout the 1975-1990 war the statue stood motionless in the center of the square as everything around it was gradually destroyed. The bodies of the four figures were ripped through with bullets, and the standing man lost his left arm. When the statue was eventually removed from the square for

restoration, a decision was taken to keep these wounds as a testament to the war. Now the archetypal citizen is severely wounded. The woman holding the torch aloft is also riddled with bullet holes. The meaning of the statue has shifted as a result of its exposure to the war. It no longer asserts a unified Lebanese citizenry, free and hopeful, with quite the same confidence. Yet for that very reason it has become all the more relevant.

Elizabeth Kassab, writing of the experience of living in Beirut during the war, tells of the burden carried by a body that is under perpetual threat of violence:

The body suddenly becomes a fragile and cumbersome load, its integrity constantly threatened. [...] In Beirut one develops particular body images. The frequent sight of mutilated bodies and the permanent fear for one's physical security give rise to images of one's own mutilated body or of those of loved ones. (Kassab)

The wounded bodies of the martyrs keep these images in circulation. What is more, the wounds place these figures more firmly in a metonymical rather than metaphorical relation to the public. The citizen does not merely exemplify a set of classically defined virtues; the citizen is also in potentially dangerous contact with others. The wounded citizen on the monument suggests that the square is precariously poised between being a site on which citizens encounter one another peacefully to constitute the democratic republic or a site on which they encounter one another violently. To be a citizen is to become vulnerable; indeed, both democracy and violence come about through a mutual vulnerability.

In *Precarious Life*, Butler argues that our public exposure to each other involves a dispossession of the self at the hands of normative aspirations. This makes for a kind of normativity that serves as a pre-condition of a politically useful vulnerability, rather than merely an oppressive formation that must be escaped or dismantled. This normativity dispossesses us of our self-identifications, opening us up to 'the world of others.'

But is there another normative aspiration that we must also seek to articulate and defend? Is there a way in which the place of the body, and the way in which it disposes us outside ourselves or sets us beside ourselves, opens up another kind of normative aspiration within the field of politics? The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension. Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, it bears their imprint, is formed within the crucible of social life; only later, and with some uncertainty, do I lay claim to my body as my own, if, in fact, I ever do. (*Precarious Life* 26)

This dispossession is crucial to acknowledging one's own contingency and 'the contingency of the political signifier' (*Bodies* 222). However, this contingency does not imply that identities, citizens, and nations can simply be rewritten. It is not a contingency that is mastered by the subject. To return to the writing course that I mentioned in the introduction, using writing as a metaphor for thinking about public space should lead not only towards rewriting space and the identities that inhabit that space, but also towards recognizing that writing requires exclusions and constraints and that any rewriting is constituted by such exclusions and constraints, so it cannot aim to eliminate them. Using public space as a metaphor for writing, meanwhile, enables the recognition of the performative dimensions of writing. Writing should not be seen as an expression of some pre-conceived identity or state of affairs, but as the inauguration of that identity or state of affairs through the reiteration of certain publicly constituted norms. Public space and public discourse are not then stages on which identities are expressed or asserted; they are rather spaces in which communicative activity brings identities into vulnerable, negotiated existence.

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